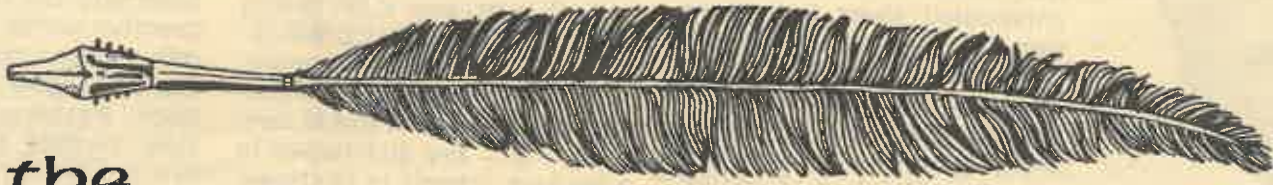


SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY



the
apprentice WRITER



Shawn Fultz
West Snyder High School
Alton Philips

\$2



Gary Fincke
Project Director
and Editor

"Maybe the world doesn't need another literary magazine..."

After dismissing that thought, Gary Fincke launched THE APPRENTICE WRITER, a periodical published by Susquehanna University and the Ottaway Newspapers that now draws

more than 4,000 submissions a year from some of the best high school writers in nine states.

This sixth annual issue of THE APPRENTICE WRITER is again filled with what may be the finest array of sophisticated short fiction, essays, poetry, and photography in the Mid-Atlantic by high school students, Fincke says. Fincke himself is an award-winning poet and fiction writer who teaches English, coaches tennis, and directs Susquehanna's Center for Tutorial Services.

"The pieces we publish range from excellent to extraordinary," Fincke says. "What strikes me is those students who have a 'voice.' They're very sophisticated and often highly original in what they have to say."

Submissions arrive regularly from high school students in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Del-

aware, Virginia, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. Many students who have published in earlier issues have entered outstanding undergraduate writing programs.

Each year, over 11,000 copies of THE APPRENTICE WRITER — printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper THE DAILY ITEM in Sunbury, PA — are distributed to 3,700 high schools in 10 states, demonstrating the newspaper chain's commitment to strong writing and literacy.

This winter, Fincke plans to continue using Susquehanna writing students to help review submissions. Likewise he has created an editorial internship for advanced students in the writing emphasis. That's just one of many opportunities for student writers at Susquehanna. Each year, students write and publish THE CRUSADER weekly newspaper,

THE LANTHORN yearbook, and FOCUS, an annual literary magazine. Visiting writers appear regularly at Susquehanna, among them Russell Banks, Sharon Olds, David Bradley, and William Matthews. Students also have been selected to present their creative works at national undergraduate conferences and the University's annual Lindback Performing Scholars' Day. Writing and journalism are offered as minors in the academic program; internships are available.

Submissions for the 1989 edition of THE APPRENTICE WRITER are due March 15, 1989. Acceptances will be announced by April 30, 1989. Send to: THE APPRENTICE WRITER, Dr. Gary Fincke, Project Director, Susquehanna University 17870, (717) 372-4164.

Jane Daly
Director of Public Relations
Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE WRITER
Number 6, 1988

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Gingerbread

barely twenty
she is making gingerbread by the radio,
exercises tiny authorities
over nutmeg, ginger,
cloves, allspice
in measured amounts
slipping beneath the songs
sprouting from her plastic music box
she rubs cloves softly over her fingers

this is me, she thinks,
this dark and cold and distant
as lions beneath unstarred forests
unopened roses and African flowers
the drowning heavy smell of driftwood,
of cloves,
is me.

as grain by grain the brown stuff falls
from her batter-heavy fingers
she looks down, but no reflections flicker here
yes, this is me, she thinks again
and stirs the gingerbread once more.

Jenifer Braun
Elizabeth, NJ
Mrs. Marcus

Shooting Skeet

The shotgun splits
open like a dead branch.

A Winchester twelve-gauge,
smooth-bore, specks of powder

in the chamber. My fingertip shivers
at the coldness of hammer. So does the shell.

Exhaling, the barrel breathes fumes
of cherry-bomb, bottle-rocket.

And while the instructor murmurs distantly
like a man smothered in the basement closet,

the shell, a red firecracker,
cowers in hand.

Now I feed it to the shotgun's upturned
mouth. Arms snapping gun straight,

I restore the wholeness, the length
and heaviness stocked at shoulder.

If only someone down there in the valley
would chase the clay saucers, and catch them,

soaring from the mountain when I say
Pull.

Erik Goldner
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Ms. Peggy Pfeiffer

Pattern

In her house
her parents positions are etched on the floor.
Body maps
like the black footprints that teach you how to dance.
In her house
her mother broils steak in the kitchen.
The radio talkshow rattles in synch
to her father's breaths.
Everyday he falls asleep on the floor,
his shape underlined by dark globes.
Everyday her mother will open the paper,
crisp black and white under the light.

In her house
There is rhythm, there is
the digital clock so green
There is some bitter truth
which she follows each day.
Everyday, she will walk home
knowing the full moon will always rise in the East
and the sun, like a fat dream, will always
dip low in the West.

In her house
days are forever flakes
in her cupped hands.
Everyday, in her house, she follows
this neverending chain.
this infinite pattern
which is etched in darkly
across her floor.

Alissa Quart
New York, NY
St. Ann's School
Martin Skoble

Back in New York

I catch a cab at LaGuardia and
The driver says "Suicide's up.
Ya just got back, am I right?
Ya oughta know. People dying like flies.
Suicide's up, but
The Mets are doing fine."
And he chucks his cigarette out the window,
A comet-tail of embers sreaking the glass.
A gassy airport wind blows his thin hair
Across his scalp, straw on hot cement.
He laughs. "I saw on the news last night.
Guy wanted to jump the Twin Towers.
He almost made it, too. Cops nailed the sucker."
We are on the bridge now, crossing over,
And I stare at the skystacks
And imagine a soul atop each one,
Wanting, ready to jump like a diver
And come up drowning on the pavement.

Michael Newirth
Port Washington, NY
Paul D. Schreiber High School
Carol Nesbit

Figured it out that I'd been wasting all my time
 And time was eating at my soul
 Now I find comfort only somewhere in my mind
 Free to persue another goal
 Walk walk away, keep on walking away . . .
 --HUSKER DU

I will always remember the day my father called me from across the country to tell me that my mother had died. It was the first week back in class after the December recess, and January winds were rising off the bay to buffet San Francisco. Even the customarily tranquil Berkeley campus suffered from the sharp, chilly air; not happy to be back in school, we struggled, bound up in moth-eaten heavy coats, against the hilly and now windy campus. The dormitory towers seemed even more depressing and sterile than usual, the Plexiglass windows rattling hollowly in their frames, the elevators wheezing. I was glumly sorting through a large pile of academic debris on my desk when an athletic-looking blonde boy whom I did not know told me that there was a phone call for me. It was my father. His voice seemed to whipsaw in and out during our conversation, as if to reveal the many lonely miles between him and me. He told me that my mother, his ex-wife for five years, had died that morning of "heart trauma." He was unable to explain exactly what this was, but he was certain of one thing: she had not suffered. He made this point three times, clearly wishing to drive it home. After I hung up, I took out my pen and jotted the date and time of the call down on the leg of my jeans. I have washed them many times since then, of course, but I can still read the inscription: SAT 1-6 6:44 PM. Even now I don't know why I did that.

I was remembering that dark communication with my father some four months later, when I called him from LaGuardia to find that he would not be able to pick me up. Once again, work had interfered. "Just take a taxi, Arthur," he advised me. I was standing in a pay-phone kiosk that was one of dozens in the terminal. He was speaking to me on the cellular phone he keeps in his car. Again his voice was wavering, ephemeral, although this time distance had nothing to do with it.

"Dad, I--I've got twelve dollars in my pocket right now," I said. "No way will that get me into New York. It probably wouldn't get me into Queens."

"Twelve dollars. That's very good, Arthur. I'm glad to see you're always prepared. All right, listen--take a cab to my apartment building. Have the doorman pay the meter. I'll call the concierge. Do you have a key?"

"Yeah," I said. Actually I wasn't sure.

"Well, then just drop your stuff off when you get in. You know, I probably won't be home until about ten. We'll get some dinner then, okay? Okay, Arthur?"

"Yeah, sure."

"I don't know--you might want to go downtown, get a drink or something. Although Lord knows you won't be able to get far with twelve dollars. Well, look, I'll see you at ten, okay?"

"Yeah, right. Bye, Dad."

The doorman of my father's building probably made more money than the average New York City high school teacher. He regarded me with a cold eye--he was wearing a modified tuxedo, a torn t-shirt and sweats. After I proved to him via my driver's license that I was really my father's son, he paid the driver and helped me with my luggage.

I did not bother turning on the lights in my father's apartment, preferring instead to root around in the semidarkness. It was spacious, airy, and done in light colors; few hard edges or reflecting surfaces were seen. I couldn't imagine what the place would rent for. I knew that my father was doing well; he is a little-known but extremely successful criminal lawyer. Most of his clients drive Mercedes-Benzes, speak on cellular phones, and live in cushy West Side apartments, just as he does. If there is

any irony in all this, it has been lost on him. If nothing else, he has always been a generous man; as part of the settlement, he gave my mother the house outright, and every bill that has come from Berkeley has been addressed to him.

Among the new additions to his apartment were a state-of-the-art video system and a closet full of exercise equipment. Aside from a small collection of pornographic cassettes, which I had no interest in, he had nothing worth watching. Instead, I picked up a book with the intriguing title of *Self-Control, Self-Help, and the Zen of Fitness*. I settled into a puffy chair and began to read.

My father woke me up by turning on every light in the room at once. I squinted up at him in the sudden brightness; a big man, conservatively dressed and barbered, his face tanned and lined. I got to my feet, awkwardly. "Hi, Dad," I said. We embraced close, the way we used to do when I had been a little kid. Like a piano striking a bad chord, it occurred to me that the last time we had been physical like that had been at Mom's funeral.

We drove home the next day. Even though it was a Saturday, he spent most of the trip talking on his cellular phone. Besides the one in the car, he also carried one in his briefcase. It had always spooked me; it seemed eccentric and rather morbid that my father wanted always to be able to be reached. While he drove and talked business, I allowed my muscles to uncoil into the soft leather upholstery, listened to Chopin on my father's latest toy--a compact disc player--and idly observed the change in landscape from Brooklyn and Queens blue-collar to Long Island suburbia.

I now owned the house I had grown up in. It was really the only thing of value my mother had owned, and she had willed it to me. I had no qualms about selling it; indeed, the idea had been mine, not my father's. He seemed to understand why I thought the idea of a eighteen-year-old boy owning a suburban family home to be rather preposterous. He was, however, curious about why I wanted to spend the summer there first. I told him I thought it would be a private, idyllic setting for me to work on my music. On the other hand, he was right in pointing out that Port Washington was not exactly a mecca of culture, and it would be rather inconvenient for me to take a forty minute train ride into New York whenever I wanted to go out. Ultimately, though, my reasons for wanting to live in the old house were not easily explained or understood.

I touched the envelope in my jacket pocket. It contained five checks for five hundred dollars apiece. My father had agreed to lend me living money for the summer. This arrangement was fine with me.

My house looked neat, cared-for, and un-lived-in. It was strange, but I felt no real connection, emotionally or otherwise, with it. It was just a building in which I had spent a great deal of time; that was all. Still, I was pleased to be there. "Who's been taking care of the place?" I asked as we stood in the driveway. I found myself examining it with a cold, clinical eye that was alien to me. It was a small brick Colonial built around the turn of the century, pleasant looking but nothing out of the ordinary.

My father lit a cigarette. "I contracted with a landscaper to cut the grass and just, you know, keep things looking good."

"Yeah. You know, Dad, you're the only person I know who would 'contract' with a landscaper."

He laughed tiredly. "Yeah, Arthur, are you sure this is what you want?"

"Yeah, I am."

"I don't know. I personally think you'd be happier if we got you a place in the city--"

"Yeah, I know, but I want to try this out, okay?"

He shrugged. "I'd like to have the place sold by September. I listed the house with Walsh Realty, so somebody will be coming by sooner or later, I guess."

I nodded. He sighed. As we moved my stuff in, it began to

(Continued on Page 5)

rain, heavy drops like mercury falling from a dark, thickening sky.

My father had a dinner appointment, so he left me alone in the house. After he had left, I walked around aimlessly, observing once again how clean and un-lived-in everything looked. It looked like a stage set. My father had been there before me, apparently; certain items had been moved or taken. When my mother and I had lived here, the place had always been cluttered. My mother had been a legal secretary, and had always brought piles of work home with her; I had just been messy. Now, I could see the change even as I stood in the kitchen. The white counter was spotless. The coffeemaker and the Cuisinart sat against one wall with their cords neatly coiled around them. The knives hung straight down along their magnetized runners. It was as if the tangible part of my mother's personality had been erased. It gave me a feeling of extreme discomfort. I left the kitchen quickly.

The living room was as dark and as silent as it always had been; the only change was that the three large frames which had held collages of pictures were gone from the wall. Family pictures. I assumed my father had taken them, although I certainly had not seen them in his apartment. Probably they were in a closet somewhere, buried under old issues of Playboy or a moldy bag of golf clubs. I felt a cold rise of anger toward my father which subsided just as suddenly in a wave of shame and guilt. I shuddered.

My own confused feelings notwithstanding, I thought that the large, gloomy room would be a perfect workspace; I could, I thought, move the uncomfortable, overstuffed furnishings out and set up my amplifiers, my mixing board, and my guitar and keyboards in their stead.

My room was as it had been when I had been home last: barren. An empty desk, mostly empty bookshelves, a mostly empty closet, and a bare mattress on the floor. It was undecorated except for a framed poster advertising a "rock and roll show" with Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bobby Gill, and the Tonettes. Most of my other possessions were either in storage in Berkeley or in one of the two duffel bags at my feet. After a minute, I decided that I rather liked my room this way. It could have been anybody's room.

I saved my mother's room for last. I knew instinctively that my father had not been in here, just as I had been unable to cross its threshold on the cold day in January when we buried my mother. Numb, I turned on the light.

The first thing I noticed was the book on the nighttable--Texas, by James Michener. I had given it to her for Christmas, having first purchased it for five dollars during Moe's Bookstore's Hardcover Closeout. She had read up to page 213--her place was marked by a red thread. I opened it to the inside front cover and read the inscription, which I had hurriedly penned on Christmas Eve: MERRY CHRISTMAS MOM--GOOD LUCK WITH THIS ONE! I LOVE YOU--ARTHUR. I placed the book back down on her nighttable.

An old-fashioned bowl of dried flowers sat on a doily on her dresser. The airless room was suffused with their scent. Next to this was her datebook. I didn't want to see it, but I noticed that it was opened to January 6. It was like a prop in some ghastly movie.

I opened a drawer at random. Slips and bras, neatly folded, next to a jewelry box. Not much jewelry except for a few trinkets; instead, I found a bundle of papers and photographs. I took off the cracked, dried out rubber band and shuffled through them. Letters I had written from camp seven, eight years ago, addressed to "Mom and Dad." Old report cards. A pile of medical papers with my mother's name on them--I did not examine these for fear of finding some evidence of her mortality which she might have overlooked when there was still time. And many photographs. Some were very old--sepia snapshots of faraway or dead relatives I had never known. There was one of my mother as a young girl--I would not have known it was she had I not

turned it over and seen her name written in an old-fashioned round script. My father's high school graduation picture--he was fatter than I, and had thin, straight hair. A picture of my mother and father, young, squinting and smiling on a public beach. At least a dozen pictures of me at various stages of my childhood. Finally, a family picture, by a professional photographer, taken when I was perhaps eleven years old. My father and I wore suits. My mother, dressed in a plain white linen dress, was beautiful. We stood together, against a neutral grey backdrop. This picture used to hang, framed, in the living room. My mother had taken it down shortly after the divorce, and I had never seen it again until now. I was alone; my only family was the one in this photograph, and they were history. I put everything else back, and left my mother's room as it was. But I took the picture of my family.

That night, after the rain had stopped, I went for a drive in my car. It had actually been my mother's car for many years, a rust-choked '75 Duster. She had given it to me for my seventeenth birthday with a slight, sad smile; it wasn't much, but I knew she could barely afford even the Ford Escort she had leased. In spite of the fact that my car had been garaged for six months, it still ran. I found myself sweating coldly from the moment I heard it turn over. Sitting in the dusty interior, the *deja vu* was almost palpable.

I drove downtown to Angelo's Pizza. It had not changed; same photo-collages of regular customers, their mouths smeared with tomato sauce; same lacrosse trophies, polished to a greasy shine; same video games creating an annoying cacophony of electronics. Instead of Angelo (retired to Florida, so I had heard) behind the counter, however, there was a dark-complexioned kid who looked to be about fifteen. "Help ya?" he asked.

"I'd like a pizza with, uh, sausage and pepperoni and uh, extra cheese. And put some zeppole in with that, okay?"

"Sure." He was barely paying attention; I could see his lips moving in synch with the heavy metal song playing on the radio. I realized uncomfortably that he looked extremely familiar, that he was somebody I should be able to place. "That to go?"

"Yeah," I said. "Hey, what's your name?"

He looked at me coldly. "John."

I shrugged. "You sell beer?"

"Deli down the street does."

"Back in a minute," I said. I walked down to the Port Deli. To no great surprise--it was, after all, the season for summer jobs--another young man was working behind the counter at the Port Deli. Here, a rather fat boy with blonde, curly hair who looked younger than he actually was was morosely swabbing the counter down with a filthy rag. I recognized him immediately. "Rich!"

He looked up. "Arthur! Hey, what's up, man? I haven't seen you since December, at least." We shook hands over the counter.

"Yeah, I've been pretty busy out in California," I said. "Things are cool out there. I just never made it back before now."

"Yeah." Rich smiled. Then the smile faded, and he said, "Hey, man, I heard about your mom. I'm really sorry."

"Yeah, so am I. But thanks, Rich."

"Yeah." The smile reappeared. "So you're back in town now. Oh, hey, want a beer?"

"Sure." He took two cans of Budweiser out from under the counter. His was already open, I noticed. "Thanks. What you own this place or something?"

He laughed. "No, but the guy who does is having his jollies right about now with the girl who's supposed to be working nights. But hey, he pays me double and I just sort of take over at night, so I figure live and let live, right?"

"Yeah." I drank my beer and smiled over old memories. I had had a long love affair with beer for much of my high school career, and now that I thought about it, so had Rich. I had happy

memories of late nights at Rich's house, watching old movies and drinking his father's brew.

"So what are you doing now?" asked Rich.

"I'm living back at my old house. Just hanging out, playing guitar, that sort of thing. I need a rest, y'know? It's been a rough year."

"Yeah, right." He crimped his empty can and fished another out from behind the counter. He popped it and drank deeply. He certainly hadn't changed. "So, you going back out to California this fall?"

"Yeah. It's a great place. Uh, are you still at Hofstra?"

"Um, no," Rich said slowly. "I couldn't hack it there. But I'll be going to Nassau Community in the fall. Maybe I'll transfer back, I don't know."

"Uh-huh."

"Hey, your parents are--uh, I mean were-- split up, right?"

"Yeah. My Dad lives in New York."

"What, you're in the house alone?"

"Yeah, I am."

"Hey, great! So, we going to party or what?"

"Oh, I don't know, man. You know, I just got back, haven't even unpacked my stuff yet."

"Yeah." He sipped his beer slowly. "Well, hey, you got the place, we got the beer, you know?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know--you want to party, we could get some more stuff besides beer, right? Dan has some shit--some pot, maybe some other shit, you know?" He giggled.

"Yeah, sure," I lied.

Rich suddenly seemed to frown over the idea. "Or maybe not. Maybe we could just get together, drink some beer, pop a movie in the VCR, right?"

"Yeah, sure, man. Whatever you want."

"I don't know." He sipped his beer, his brow creased, thinking. He looked at me suddenly, a little coolly. "Berkeley, man. Shit, that must be great."

"Yeah, it's okay."

"Man, you always were the smart one. Out of all the guys I hung out with, you were the only one who didn't have their head shut off 'cept when it was time to scoop on a girl or lie enough to get some money or sneak a beer out of a store. I don't know, man--I guess I always sort of liked that about you."

I forced myself to laugh. "Come on. You're jerkin' yourself off. Get real, Rich."

"Yeah, maybe. Well, look, do you want anything?"

"Uh, yeah, a six of Michelob."

"The beer's behind you, Arthur."

"Right." I got the beer and put it on the counter. "You got a bag?"

"Yeah. That'll be four bucks."

"Sure." I paid him and took the package.

"Anyway, take it easy, Arthur."

"Yeah, you too, man. Look--give me a call tomorrow, okay?"

"I'm busy tomorrow, guy. Sorry."

"All right, well just give me a call, okay, Rich?"

"Yeah, sure. G'night, Arthur."

"Night, Rich." I left the store. I looked back once at the door, but he was again scrubbing the counter, oblivious to my presence.

I walked back up Main Street to Angelo's. It was still rather early, barely ten P.M., and there was still a steady flow of traffic in town. Kids, mostly, wealthy ones in customized Jeep Cherokees and Datsuns, listening to a constant flow of British synth-pop; and not-so-wealthy ones, driving rusted-out Fords and Plymouths and cranking the ugly power throb of such favorites as Led Zeppelin, Van Halen, and newer contenders such as Iron Maiden and Metallica. Young kids, cruising endlessly in the mellow summer heat. It was something that had seemed important to me, too, once; now, it seemed as foreign and as trivial as the solemn ceremonies of some faroff-religious cult.

My pizza was ready, sitting on the counter in a white box made shiny by grease. The boy, John, was obliviously snapping a piece of gum and listening to the radio. "That's ten-fifty," he said without looking up.

I fumbled for my wallet, staring hard at him. I seemed to remember meeting him at his home. Perhaps I had known his sister. That seemed possible. I handed him the money and said, "How's your sister, John?"

He looked at me coldly. "Split."

"What?" I asked.

"She split, man. Know what I mean?"

"No. I don't."

John shrugged and made an absurd little fluttering motion with his hands. "Pizza's getting cold, man."

I sighed. "Yeah." I picked up the pizza and balanced it awkwardly, holding also the hot little bag containing my zeppole. I started to go, then turned back. "Look, if you see her, say hello, okay? From Arthur."

He smiled, his eyes and teeth obscenely shiny under the hard incandescent lights. "Sure."

I left, feeling strange and uncomfortable.

After purchasing my dinner, I was left with two dollars in my wallet, so a visit to the bank seemed in order. There was one other person using the cash machines, a rather pretty dark girl wearing a long skirt and a tie-dye blouse. I forgot about her for a bad moment when I realized after I had inserted my card that I could not remember my code word. Then it came to me: MOO-LAH. I deposited one of my father's checks, intending to withdraw the entire amount in cash. The girl at the other machine turned to me. "Arthur!" she said.

I turned to her. I recognized her immediately. She had been, more or less, a friend of mine. "Candice! Hi!" I said.

She embraced me. "I haven't seen you in so long! How is Berkeley?"

"It's great, really great--"

"Yeah, I got your letter, it was very nice," she said, smiling, perhaps recalling as I did now that she had not written me back.

"Yeah, well, I really did enjoy hearing from you, Candice."

She smiled. She had a sweet, utterly forgivable smile. For as far back as I could remember, she would dispatch foes, usually males she had in some way jilted, with that smile. "Oh, Arthur," she said. "So what are you doing now?"

"Oh, not much. I really just got back. I'm living up in my old house now. You know my mother died in January."

"Oh God, no, I didn't know. That's terrible. I'm so sorry." She seemed extremely earnest and sympathetic.

"Yeah," I said. "Thanks. So what are you doing now?"

"I'm working at the health food store," she said. "It's really great--I've become really committed to, you know, health. We burn incense all day, drink ginseng soda and listen to the Dead. I could, like, live there."

"Yeah, right," I said. "Sounds terrific."

"It is."

"So what's going on tonight?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I thought I'd go home, take a shower, have dinner, and then maybe go play in a playground or something."

"Sounds fun."

"What will you be doing?"

"Well, I thought I'd go home, have dinner, play around a little bit with my guitar or something. Take it easy."

"Well, you should give me a call."

"Yeah," I said. "Wait a sec." I took the printout from the cash machine and scribbled my number on it. "Give me a call after you shower," I said. "Maybe we could get together, get a drink. I'd like to talk with you."

She smiled deeply into my eyes. "I'd really love that," she said, taking my phone number. We parted company at the bank.

I drove home. The house was dark, silent. I could not count the number of times I had played this scene in the last few years of high school—my mother asleep, I would creep in like an embarrassed burglar, treading lightly, leaving the lights off. Now, of course, there was no reason to be quiet or subtle. I was coming home to no one.

I brought my supper into the living room. I then went upstairs and lugged the television down. I watched the 11 o'clock news as I ate. Although I checked all three networks, there was no good news to be found. Apparently, even at eleven P.M., people still have a yen to hear evidence of their own mortalities. I turned the TV off when I was finished. I have no such needs.

After dinner, I dragged the furniture off to the four corners of the room. It felt strange, almost sacrilegious, to be rudely shoving chairs and endtables around in the one room which my mother had taken meticulous care of, dusting and vacuuming once a week whether or not it had actually been occupied. I began to unpack my equipment: the guitar, the synthesizer, the effects, the mixers, the two amplifiers, the four-track recorder, and various other items. This stuff was first-rate; most of it had been gifts from my father for various birthdays and Christmases. It had lain dormant for too long; now I wanted to work with it, to make it come alive again in my hands. I wired and powered up the entire system. I took a blank staved notebook out of my bag, opened it to the first page, and wrote in bold letters at the top a title that had been jumping around in my head since I had arrived in New York: SURFACES. I sat down cross-legged, wrapped my hands around my black Fender Strat, and waited.

An hour later I was back in my mother's room.

In one hand I held the photograph of my family. I had left it in the kitchen when I had gone out. I looked at it again. I realized, ashamed and embarrassed, that it was pretty much the only picture I had of my mom.

I looked around. It was still the same, still very much my mother's room. I wanted to recognize that in some tangible way. "Hi, Mom," I said.

Hello, Arthur, she replied.

"I came back, Mom."

I'm glad. Why did you do that?

"I thought it would be okay, Mom. I wanted to--"

Find yourself? Find me?

"Yeah. Maybe."

It's too late, Arthur. You know that.

"Yeah, well, screw that," I whispered hoarsely. Then I began to cry, not bothering to hold the tears or the noise back. The picture fell, forgotten, from my hands. I cried for twenty minutes at least. I cried for myself and for all the things I had lost, forever it seemed. I cried for my mother.

When I was finished I went into the bathroom and washed my face. My mother had used a pink, perfumed soap which she kept in a flowered porcelain dish. I cleaned up and left my mother's room. Then I called my father.

My father was not one for frivolous answering machine messages: "Hello. You have reached 212-883-3125. This machine is not equipped to take messages; however, tonight I can be reached from eight PM to ten PM at 212-365-4082, and from ten PM to one AM at 212-675-4000. Thank you."

It was past one, but I called the latter number anyway. A woman answered. I asked to speak to my father.

There was a brief pause. She said, "Who should I say is calling?"

"Arthur," I said.

My father got on the phone. "Arthur, do you know what time it is?"

I said, "Dad, listen. I want to come back to New York. I'm going to have to stay with you for a few weeks, but then I'll find my own place. Okay?"

He paused. "Uh, yeah, sure, I guess. I won't be able--"

"I'll be driving in myself. Just leave word at the front desk so I don't get hassled when I come in. And don't worry, I won't be in your hair too long."

"Come on, Arthur, you can stay as long as you like. I'm happy to have you. You know that. Tell me, what changed your mind?"

I closed my eyes. "I don't know. I guess I just decided you were right."

"Oh. Well, point for me. Good night, Arthur."

"Good night, Dad." I hung up and went into my room. I got undressed and lay down, exhausted, on the mattress. I shut my eyes. There were things that I still needed to take care of, but they could wait until morning. There were certain things, certain memories that I still wanted to take with me. When I left.

Michael Newirth
Port Washington, NY
Paul D. Schreiber High School
Carol Nesbit

Sabang Beach, Philippines

*Moonlight glows against the ink-dark sky,
Shimmering light reflected on
Black sea depths.
We steal to receding waves and
Our toes taste the tepid water.
Dare. Who goes first?
I venture five steps
But then a shove sends me reeling
Head first. Laughter pierces the silence.
Soon the others join,
Headstands stunted off coral.
When I peer down,
Nothingness,
Except the glow-fish that
Flutter across my thighs.
We emerge from the liquid darkness,
Our figures cast
Black outlines on dewy sand,
Along with other shadows of
Palms and huts.*

Mary Ann Sorra
Lutherville, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Citypanic

In citypanic no one is angry or smiling or bored. Everyone has money and love and cigarettes and time and time again to spare, and my heart beats a step faster when I think of the smell light music sound of the citypanic night. The citypanic lights are on all over and the frenzy pulses out of speakers everywhere. Your larynx speaks of citypanic; your brain is subdued. In citypanic everyone drives and all the lights are green and the middle finger is just another finger for your rhinestone ring. No one stops to think of the suburb or quiet or crickets and everyone must get their shoes in the gutter before they touch the sky.

Debbie Wassertzug
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Mrs. Peggy Pfeiffer

Three

The day was downcast and dismal and we drove to the brick building by the hospital in the little, silver Rabbit and smoked and played the same Bob Marley tape and we took a wrong turn past the hospital. So I pulled over and Kate muttered some comments about how stupid she was to forget how to get there and how late we were for the appointment because in her mind she had 1 p.m. and the time for the appointment, but really the abortion was to be at 12 p.m. and now we were late. So I turned the car around on the busy Post Road and let a tractor trailer pass me and took the left turn up towards the smallish, brick building near the hospital.

When we got there, my foot hurt and I was wearing the shoe a little off it. Kate was walking a little fast up ahead of me and when we got inside she went right in, and I sat and waited in the waiting room and read a couple of magazines. One was Life magazine and one was Elle. I read an article on Glenn Close because we had just seen the movie "Fatal Attraction" and were both really freaked out over it. The nurse in the office knew my name and after I'd been waiting for a while she said that Kate was finished and I could go and see her and maybe help her get dressed soon. And just sit there and talk to her and let the drugs wear off for a while. So I brought in the Elle magazine article on Glenn Close, and after I asked her how she was feeling and after I held her hand and smoothed out the hair on top of her face, I said, "Did you know that Glenn Close is pregnant in real life?"

Kate lay down for a while and stared at the ceiling. She was so thin and frail on that metal bed with the cushion and paper over it. She was wearing one of those paper nightgowns that you find in almost every doctor's office. And there was this machine on the floor and it was ugly and scary looking. It was a big block of metal with four tall and wide glass cups and there was a couple of plugs and a hose. After a couple of minutes the nurse came in and replaced one of the tall and wide glass cups and she moved the machine from the floor below the end of Kate's metal bed to the other side of the room against the wall. Where it sat. Cleaned.

Kate was fluttering in and out of reality because they gave her powerful drugs that they give you when you get an abortion. She was saying how she thought there was something like Acid in the drugs that they gave her because she was tripping and sort of fluttering about. And that while they were performing the abortion--the ceiling was moving, breathing and the plain, white lights were a rainbow array of different colors.

She turned to me as she lay and said, "Look. Look at the lights on the ceiling and tell me what color they are." I sat in the chair next to her metal bed and looked at the lights on the ceiling. They were long, white lights--all in a row like the ones in schools across America, and I looked at her again and I said, "They're white." And she looked back towards the ceiling and said, "Well, I definitely must be tripping because they're all different colors and before they were doing a little Mexican dance."

We sat in silence and she kept lying there and drifting off into a very light sleep. I was reading this book about the woman's body or something. I found it in the waiting room. I was looking up information on the menstrual cycle in the back of the book. Kate still lay there. She turned her head towards me again and said, "While they were doing it to me the doctor kept telling me to talk about something pleasant--Did I tell you this before? Did I tell you what I said?" I closed the book. "No," I said. She smiled, "I told him that Tommy's coming home soon and that he's in Australia hitch-hiking and traveling and I told him how much I love Tom and that I can't wait for him to come back." She turned and looked at the ceiling again. I returned to this book and there were a bunch of pictures of different positions while making love. There were three major ones drawn out, too.

Two nurses kept walking in and out of the room and one was bitchier than the other and she kept saying, "How do you feel, Kate? Do you think you'll be able to get up soon and clean and

get dressed?" Kate nodded and tried to get up and the nurse looked at me and said, "Will you help her, okay?" I nodded and got up. The nurse walked out of the room and I tried to keep Kate from swaying too much as she tried to sit up on the metal bed, but she was very dreary and I said, "Lie back down. Wait."

So she lay back down and I got her a little Dixie cup of water from the bathroom in the hallway, and Kate drank it down and asked for more. And I gave her more and when she lay back down again I sat down in the chair and said, "It's over." She turned to me and nodded her head in a very sleepy way. "It's over," I said. "Are you happy?" And she looked at the ceiling again and then at me and shook her head and said in a really small voice, "No."

So I leaned back in my chair and waited. I waited while she watched the ceiling and while the drugs wore off and soon the nurse came back in with tiny packages of moist and soapy cloths that Kate could use to clean herself. And when that was done, I helped her get dressed and she almost fell three times.

Leaving the little, brick building, the pebbles in the driveway hurt my feet and I stopped to feel them out and Kate was walking very slow, far behind me. And in the car--she slept and then counted the money she had left so we could go and get some ice cream. And the drive was slow and leaving was so much easier than coming. Except leaving, the sky seemed grayer and the bumps on the road felt harder as we drove over them. Again and again.

Ellen Papazian
East Norwalk, Ct
Mrs. Kenderesi



Elissa Sternberg
East Pennsboro High School

Memory

Dad's arms strain
under the weight
of his father's tired frame.
He lifts Granddad from the couch
but even the oak cane
can't help
the older man's crouched legs
and so it starts--
the frail gasping,
slow heaving,
moaning--
as if to struggle
is just too much.
So Granddad sinks back
eyelids closed
hollow chest wheezing, falling, wheezing, falling.
David runs for the oxygen tank
and Jesus! how does this thing work?
Mom tries to make those lungs expand,
that heart pump,
breathe Dad, breathe.
and to me--call the doctor.
but I can't move to speak
so she brushes past me to the phone.
In five minutes--
the sirens
and the green wires
growing out of his sagging nostrils
and the doctor says how lucky
we called so soon
as the paramedics
feed him more tubes
until I can't see where they go anymore
so I reach out to touch good-bye
but they lift him out the door
and up the driveway
as all the alien neighbors
who live somewhere up the street
grimace and frown at Them
and Him
but not my wet, swollen face,
my heaving chest,
my choking for air.

Marianne W. Park
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

The Colon

i hate the colon but he loves it
i can't help but hate it
it reminds me of ant droppings
it reminds me of Reagan's cancer
but he loves correct punctuation
and i'm showing a great lack of it
prepared for his cardiac
arrest
he'll surely freak out

Francine Weiss
Ruxton, MD
McDonogh School
Robert Jarboe

The Woman Next Door

page 9

I
Her sunlit breath feeds
the indoor plants
pot-bound on the white sill
of the bay window.
She thinks oxygen is green,
but I tell her it's gold,
and we're both wrong.

II
It is a lie to say we can
feed on nothing,
but for the woman next door
the earth wraps the petals,
the climbing hibiscus,
the morning glory,
her life around a trellis
climbing to the sun,
and I feel the green
shade my face,
and I love her more today.

Julie Buchness
Catonsville, MD
Catonsville High School
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

Hershey

Words are no match
for the jaws that snap shut.
The dog is dangerous,

the neighbors carry mace.
We take no chances.
We know what happened

to the Schwartz's boy.
He was riding his bike
when Hershey--

jumped and gulped
and ate him up right.
The children say

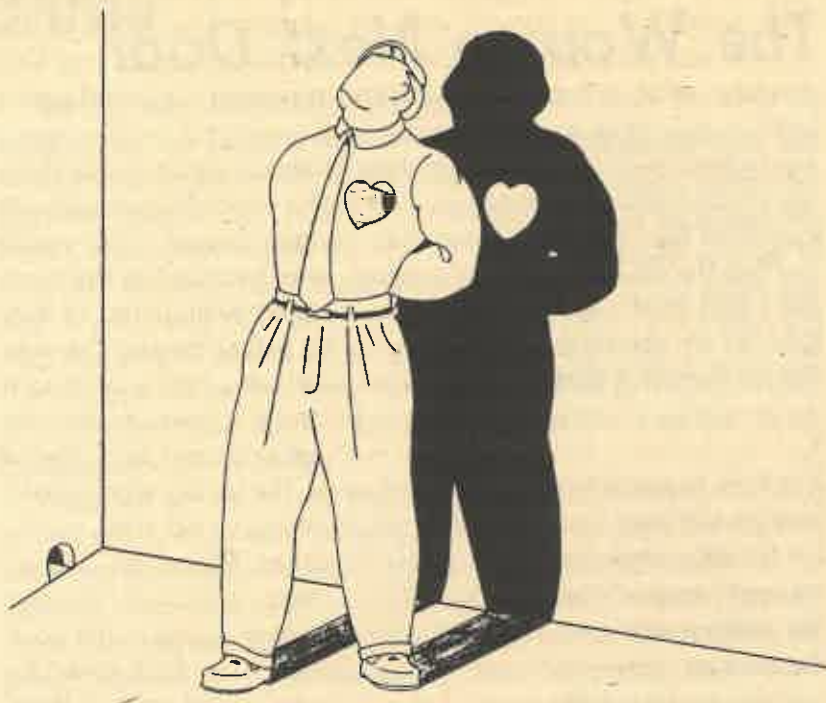
he used the shoelaces as floss.
It is false,
yet no boy or girl

will ever cross
that old dog.
If only

Hershey would
be true to his name
--not bitter but sweet.

And we neighbors
would rejoice,
and need not crouch at his feet.

Adam Steinberg
Silver Spring, MD
Springbrook High School
Mrs. Nancy Abeshouse



No Heart

Jon Nail
Highland View Academy
Elaine Grove

Fragile Summer

It was hot--really hot. The kind of heat felt on a first date when the couple is secretly debating about holding hands. The heat someone feels when he has the flu, right before the chill of fever sets in. A heat synonymous with worry and tension and loss.

The branches of a nearby shrub moved slightly, as if nudged gently from behind with thick air. It was a breeze which surrounded and then slowly closed in on its victim. It reminded Andrea of that slice of Key Lime pie she'd had in Florida on vacation which had left a subtle, cloying taste in her mouth for hours.

Almost every last breath had been squeezed out of Andrea's summer. She panicked with thoughts of the structured months ahead. Summer always ended too soon. Andrea slowly walked around her backyard, feeling the dewy grass beneath her feet. A cool chill went up her legs, back, and to the tips of her fingers. She shivered and stepped on one of the many popsicle sticks strewn about the lawn like Jack Straws. Picking a few off the ground, she noticed they were still sticky and tinted slightly from the colorful, frozen treats. Andrea assumed they'd been left in her yard by the children next door. That afternoon her neighbors had had about twelve kids over for an end-of-the-summer picnic. "They could've at least picked up after themselves," she thought.

Andrea sat in a ridged deck chair, the kind that leaves Tic-Tac-Toe patterns on a person's thighs. The light of the afternoon was slowly dimming, casting weak shadows from the criss-cross of the trellis on Andrea's legs. She rehearsed the glorious times of the previous months in her mind, wanting them to come alive all over again.

Andrea's sixteenth birthday--and Jason, with his boyish body and strong, intelligent face. Jason had called her on the morning of her birthday. The summer had still been fresh and new, and Andrea had been hoping he'd call. She'd spent all afternoon curling her hair, and brushing it into soft waves. Carefully, she'd put on pale blue eyeshadow and added a touch of pink to her cheeks.

When Jason had arrived to pick her up, a feeling of excitement stemmed throughout her body, like right before saying the opening lines in a school play.

Jason and Andrea had spent the whole evening learning about

one another, asking the standard questions, and laughing at their mutual dating inexperience. And when he'd kissed her that night for the first time, awkward though it was, she knew something was beginning--something she'd never known before.

Andrea and Jason went out often that summer but slowly the tension dissipated. The electric newness had faded to something merely comfortable. That thought scared her. She had a sick feeling in her stomach--almost like death, in a way. Andrea wanted to preserve all of those special feelings forever. If only there was a contraption, something like a jar, to capture those memories and sights and emotions. She'd close the lid so tightly, keeping them inside until they were really needed. Then the lid would come off and all of the brilliance of the moment would flood her senses, fresh and new.

Once, Andrea had asked Jason what memory he'd like to preserve forever. He'd said the feeling he'd had when he was maybe seven years old and had gone to a lake with his family. He and his brother had spent hours that evening catching fireflies. Jason had remembered his mother forcing him to let them go.

"Why?" he'd asked innocently.

"Something as beautiful as a firefly shouldn't be captured. Its life is so short and fragile to begin with."

Andrea looked up at her reflection in the window in front of her. Her features were dark and hollow, almost brown. She remembered a young girl, going on her first date, curling her hair, making-up her face in luminous pastels. Why did that girl seem so unfamiliar?

A playful scream echoed throughout her neighbor's yard. Two children, about six or seven years old, raced each other to the swingset. Each swung higher and higher, trying to reach the branches of a tree but barely missing them. They grew quiet soon and just enjoyed the sensations of the wind in their hair, the smells of a nearby cookout, and their loss of breath as each chair continued to swing back and forth.

Andrea stood up and ran into her backyard, looking for the pale, yellow flickering. The lightning bugs surrounded her, flying into the sky far above, and then returning to the ground and back again. The miniature lights were spread across the sky like dozens of constellations, or the flakes of the first snowfall. Andrea reached up into the night and brought one down in her hands. Its flashing peeked from between her fingers. She opened her hands and watched as the tiny bug, only a baby, crawled across her outstretched palm. Then, with a last flick of its wings, it flew off into the darkness.

Susan Brown
Alexandria, VA
West Potomac High School
Mrs. Annelle Johnson

Fading Beaches

*It will make sense
when we've lost ours,
when we're bent over
humming like radiators.*

*I draw my knees
in, drink something cold.
Let's go to the beach
bury each other in sand
and live with castles
at our feet.*

*Turn over, try
to find a warm
spot in the mattress.*

*Wouldn't mind the wind.
Let's leave with the windchimes.*

*Abandon this bed.
Here, we're eroding
like two broken
hourglasses.*

*Come to the beach with
me. We'll tame the
gulls with seaweed
as we sing through hallowed
shells, our feet
anchored in sand.*

Rosemarie Klein
Long Beach, NY
Mrs. Pickus

It was Sunday again, and Bennett knew it. But still, he lay quietly underneath the covers, his eyes shut and his breath perfectly even. Even when he heard the early morning sounds his family made as they dressed for church, he continued to feign sleep. He began sweating under the thick, wool blanket, but he didn't care; he forced himself to ignore the discomfort. "I'm not going, I'm not going," he thought to himself over and over, burying his head in the feather pillow. He wouldn't go there again; the place scared him. He had nightmares about it, and he had had one last night. The Devil had been chasing him. Bennett winced at the thought of the nightmare, and buried his face even deeper into the pillow. He heard the muffled voices of his parents downstairs and his sister Grace's chattering. He knew they were getting ready for breakfast, and that soon they would notice he was missing from the table. "I hope they forget about me," Bennett thought desperately.

Minutes passed, and Bennett could not hear a sound coming from the kitchen. Had they left already? He hoped so. What time was it? He wanted to look at his Sesame Street alarm clock, but didn't dare move out of the covers. "Please leave!" he commanded mentally. "Go to church without me!" Suddenly, he heard the door open, and he felt his heart jump. They hadn't left! He heard muffled footsteps toward his bed. It was his mother; he could tell by the way she shuffled her feet.

"Bennett?" His mother's voice was soft, but always so plaintive, so whining. "Bennett, dear..." She moved closer to him, and shook him gently. Bennett did not move, only kept his breathing even and his eyes shut. She shook him again, this time more forcefully. Still, Bennett did not respond.

"Bennett!"

Then there was the sound of heavier, more authoritative footsteps.

"What's wrong with the boy?" his father demanded, looking at the five-year old with disapproval. His wife sighed apologetically.

"He's sleeping."

"The boy's always sleeping! He knows well enough that I don't tolerate laziness! Wake him up! We're going to be late for the sermon." Bennett shuddered under the covers. His mother peeled the covers off him and shook him again. This time Bennett groaned.

"Bennett, dear.... Come now, wake up. You have to get dressed for church." His mother sat him up. Bennett had no choice but to give up his charade. He rubbed his eyes and squinted at her, hoping he was being convincing. His mother smiled at him.

"My, you slept well, didn't you!" she crooned. Bennett groaned.

"Mommy, I don't feel good." He placed his hand over his stomach to convince her. His mother looked concerned, and Bennett rejoiced.

"Mommy . . . I don't think I could go to church today." This brought a more worried look to his mother's face. His father, however, ignored him.

"Ben, now get dressed quickly while I warm up the car. Don't take too long, all right?" And with that, his father left the room. Bennett knew he couldn't get out of it now. His mother was undressing him, changing him to his Sunday clothes. Bennett wanted to cry. "I won't go, I won't go!" he insisted in his mind, as he felt the cold, stiff cotton shirt against his skin. But he only stood there as his mother dressed him in his prim, uncomfortable blue suit and tie. His face was wiped, his hair combed. He let himself be led to the family Cadillac, while his thoughts were only of protest. Inside the car, he felt himself become sick, truly sick. They were taking him to church!

The car ride was long, but not long enough for Bennett. Before he knew it, they were parked outside the gray, stern old building. The car door was opened for him, and he automatically

stepped out. Even though he was holding his mother's hand as they walked in, he moved with trepidation. The inside of the church was dark and forbidding. A colorful Christmas tree was already set up in a corner, put there to remind the worshippers that it was time to rejoice. But to Bennett the multi-colored lights seemed to give off a strange, ominous gleam in the dark. He shuddered and squeezed his mother's hand. Faraway voices could be heard coming from the upstairs chapel. Thin voices carried the haunting tune of a hymn, which echoed in the corridors and enveloped the small boy. Bennett whimpered to himself. He was being dragged upstairs, his father leading the way. The voices were getting closer. To Bennett, his family seemed to be drawn by the voices, moving mechanically towards the chapel. His father opened the heavy wooden door and held it while the family quietly entered the darkness. The voices were unbearably loud, and Bennett placed his hands over his ears.

"What's wrong with you, Ben?" asked Grace, as she arranged her skirt. Bennett dropped his hands, ashamed. The chapel was crowded, and Bennett's family sat in a pew in the back. Bennett sat between his mother and father. They both joined the singers and sang the hymn. Bennett looked up at both of them, disturbed by the rapture on their faces. Then the man wearing black appeared at the front, and everyone stopped singing. Bennett knew the man with the black clothes and white collar was a powerful man, because he could make people start singing and stop singing whenever he wanted. People did what he said. Even his father obeyed him. The man in black said something loudly, and people bowed their heads and mumbled to themselves. Bennett bowed his head, too. The man in black was talking to God. Was he God's friend? Bennett wondered. That would explain his tremendous power over people. Then the man in black said "Amen," and people lifted their heads and said "AMEN." Bennett felt scared. What did AMEN mean? He heard that word every Sunday, and he was tired of wondering what it meant. Bennett turned left towards his mother.

"Mommy, what's an Amen?" he asked too loudly, tugging at her sleeve. Bennett's mother placed her finger on her lips.

"Quiet, Bennett. We're in church."

"But, Mommy.... What's--"

Before Bennett could finish his question, his father had picked him up.

"What do you think you're doing?" Bennett's father whispered furiously. "This is church!" His father had a crushing grip on his shoulders, and Bennett struggled not to cry from the pain. Why did his father look so mad? What had he done wrong? Bennett's father placed him on the seat next to him, on the right. Then he turned to the frightened boy, an angry look on his face.

"What's wrong with you, boy?" his father demanded in a whisper. "What's so important that can't wait until after church?" Bennett stared at his father, not knowing whether to ask him or not.

"Tell me, boy!" His father's face was only an inch away from his own. Bennett gulped. The voice of the man in black echoed in the chapel, making it hard for Bennett to think.

"I asked Mommy what an Amen was." There, he had said it. He had told his father, and he hadn't cried or anything. He felt a certain pride in that. Bennett looked at his father, and was alarmed when he saw the look of disgust on his face. Bennett's pride shriveled up. He had done something wrong again! His father turned towards his mother and whispered something to her. Bennett's mother glanced at him and whispered back. Then his father turned to look at him.

"Your mother tells me you're five years old! How is it you don't know such a simple thing like that?" his father demanded. Bennett remained silent, not knowing what to do. He felt like crying.

"God knows everything. He knows when you walk with the Devil!" the man in black shouted. "So beware, for God is watch-

ing you!" The man in black was mad at him, too! Bennett felt sick.

"Are you stupid, boy?" his father whispered mockingly. "Don't you know what Amen means?"

"God is watching, God is watching!" the man in black announced passionately. "You cannot hide from Him!" Bennett's face twisted, and he could feel himself beginning to cry.

"You've been going to church for how many years now, and you don't know a simple thing like that?"

"He knows when you've been with the Devil! He sees you with the Devil! And you will be punished for it!" Bennett could not hold it any longer. He opened his mouth widely and let out an unearthly wail. Uncontrollable spasms of sobs followed, making Bennett's small body shake.

Bennett looked up, and saw that people were staring at him. The man had stopped screaming, and Bennett could not hear a sound, only his own sniffing. He did not dare look at his father. Why didn't he say anything? Why was it so quiet suddenly? Bennett kept his head down, trying to suppress the hiccups. He could hear Grace mumbling "I'm so embarrassed" over and over. Bennett squeezed his eyes shut.

"Is something wrong here?" Bennett heard, all of a sudden. He looked up, and was shocked to find the man in black standing next to their pew, an impatient look on his face. Bennett's father spoke to the man humbly.

"I'm terribly sorry. You see my boy--"

"Ah, it was the little boy who made that horrible noise?" The man in black leaned over the pew to look at Bennett. Bennett did not look up. His father continued to apologize.

"I'm so terribly terribly sorry, I--"

"Why don't you take the little one outside?" the man in black suggested, obviously eager to do some screaming again.

"Well, he's already five, and--"

"I really do think you should take him outside. Maybe he's not old enough yet to come to church. I cannot have him crying every Sunday while I give my sermon, that's certain."

"Yes, I see your po--"

"Good. Take him outside now." With that, the man in black left them and headed towards the front of the chapel to speak more on the Devil. Bennett had stayed still when the man had come, but he had heard every word. Bennett tried not to smile. His father picked him up roughly and stood up. Then he let Bennett stand on the floor. Bennett's father placed his huge hand on the back of Bennett's head and steered him towards the stairs, down the stairs, through the corridors. Bennett walked as fast as he could, and tried to control himself from running. He felt happy! Even the eerie Christmas tree looked almost pretty to Bennett now. He smiled at it. Bennett's father opened the door to the outside, and Bennett scurried out. His father led him towards the car. Bennett wanted to laugh. His father was taking him home!

"Get in." His father had opened the car door for him. Bennett quickly obeyed. Bennett closed the car door and sat on the seat with great pleasure. His father started the car and backed out of the parking lot. This time, the ride was much too long for Bennett. His father would spank him later; he knew that. But Bennett didn't care. As long as he did not have to go to church, he would be happy.

"Get out." His father remained in the car, but Bennett ran out and hurried towards the house. The door had been left unlocked, so Bennett walked right in, throwing his blue jacket on the floor as he did so. He heard his father drive away to church again. Bennett ran to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He took the jar of peanut butter and ran upstairs to his room, and threw himself on his bed. Bennett stuck his fingers in the peanut butter and felt the glop. Then he pulled his hand out and began licking the peanut butter off it. It tasted good. Bennett then lay down, and felt suddenly sleepy. As he dozed off, he smiled and whispered:

"Amen."

Jeong-Hye Choi
Tenafly, NJ
Tenafly High School
Ms. Margaret Boyle

The Colors Game

*The colors call,
as the lights go out
and the nurses
melt white
into the bright desk.
I fumble with sheets that twist
gripping
with ghost-like arms.*

*The wheeled tower
drips
my doctor's
poison and my dad's money
into me.*

*My hands brush against the metal
and the cold
shivers
through my body.
the Black room behind me
thunders
in emptiness.*

*Blue and red lines
travel the hall leading me away, past rooms
dark with
unheard
sleepless whines.*

*The colors are simple
but together, they tangle
people need color maps
to unravel the colors and find their way.
I pick one to follow--Blue
like the sea
I once swam in.*

*The Blue sings
me the day
of endless waves when
each wave has a partner
right behind
both racing
to the sand
'till the elevator shaft, long and swallowing
grabs
up the Blue
to another floor
the colors game
ends.*

*Tomorrow I will become
my mother's bald headed angel
drowning in chemo.*

Alicia Gray
Dedham, MA
Noble and Greenough School



Dic Dic

Chris Albert
Kiskiminetas Springs School
James Nagle

Scade's Hoosac

Somewhere on earth.
(Someplace dry with
a hot wind and sage
brush.) Before the
age of thinking
things. Someone
parked his vehicle
here. A message
came through on the
telex (that all the
work was good and
we'd continue a
couple days.) All
the abstract tapes-
tries were laid
down, and every
beast had found a
place. The only
thing left was
teaching the amoeba
to crawl and giving
the west wind his
cue. Bury the last
enigma. Then home.

Ronald Wayne Sala
Gilbertsville, PA
Raymond Fulmer

Small Woman

In the city
before
brown brick
apartments
a little
old
woman
a
chocolate raisin
rinses
soap
from her grey
bundle of
hair
bud of
cotton
sudsy white
water
flows from
a silver
pail into the
street sewer

As she makes
her way
down the street
to market
every parking meter
she touches
for support
suddenly becomes
silver as
bath water.

Behind two brown
grocery bags
she walks the
sidewalk
(an ant
crossing
a breezeway)
she is
a ghost
passing
the people
noticed as
a warm breath
on cold cheeks
and they
disappear
the further
she moves away.

Climbing stone
steps to her
apartments she dis-
appears into
open doorway like
God into
a church.

Glenn Formica
Brookline, NH
Hollis Area High School
Elizabeth Kirschner

The dry New Mexican sun seemed to frown down at me through the window of my family's station wagon as we drove down the dusty lane to my grandmother's house. Like my mother and father, the sun also disapproved of my attitude and the way in which I was eating my grapes by impaling them on the tips of my fingers then sucking them off with a pop. I turned away from the sun's glare toward my mother, sitting in the front seat.

"Mom," I whined.

"Yes, Honey."

"If Grandma tries to pinch my cheeks or kiss me or anything, I'm gonna reach up and pull her dentures out. Cross my heart and hope to die, I will."

"Honey, Grandma doesn't wear dentures. She still has her real teeth because she's always brushed her teeth twice a day."

"Then I'll pull her hair out and take away her cane and she'll fall flat as a pancake on the floor," I exclaimed, kicking the front seat and snatching viciously at the air.

"Honey, where in the world do you get such silly ideas? Grandma doesn't use a cane. I'm sure you'll like Grandma when you meet her."

"I hate Grandma. Suzie Johnson says Grandmas always kiss you and make you put your napkin in your lap and make you eat eggs for breakfast."

We pulled into a gravel driveway next to a white house that wasn't white anymore, and parked the car in the shade of a short fat tree that my mother called a cottonwood. A stale manure smell drifted into the car when my parents opened their doors. Since an old lady with a cane and dentures was nowhere to be seen, I opened my door and stepped out onto the hot gravel driveway.

A blonde lady came out to greet us. She had blue eyes and was wearing a pink jogging suit. My mother ran up to the lady and hugged her. Suspecting that I might be forced to show the same affection, I turned and ran to the cottonwood tree. The branches were too high for me to reach, so I stretched my arms around the trunk and held tight, shouting, "I'm going to stay right here until we go home."

My mother was shocked at this display, but I was even more shocked when the blonde lady said, "All right, I'll be out with your dinner at 6:30."

I watched incredulously as my parents turned and walked into the white house without me, but I was determined to avoid my grandmother.

After a while, I decided it would be safe to let go of the tree, so I sat down beside it and proceeded to peel off the bark.

"Look what I got," a voice said, and I turned around, startled, to see a boy covered in mud from his neck down. He held out two tan hands cupped together and grinned down at me with crooked teeth.

"What?" I asked, attempting to conceal my curiosity by staring in the other direction.

"Look, stupid," he shouted, shoving his hands in front of my face.

"A frog," I exclaimed and reached out to touch it, but he pulled it away.

"Ding dong, you're wrong. Don't you know anything? It's a toad, not a frog."

"Oh," I muttered.

He sat down in front of me and put the frog down on the brown grass between us. "Frogs are green. Toads are brown," he remarked, as if he were a professor of biology.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"Kermit. Gosh, I still can't believe you're so stupid. You must be a real idiot."

"Hey," I said, "I thought Kermit was a frog's name."

He rolled backwards, laughing loudly. When he finally recov-

ered, he said, "Don't you know anything? I can name him anything I want."

"How do you know Kermit's a boy? You called him, 'him'."

"Well . . . you sure are dumb. Cause . . . he's brown. Only a boy would be brown. Girls would probably be pink or something."

"I thought ya said all toads is brown," I retorted.

"I didn't mean all toads, stupid. Just some. Why are you askin' so many questions anyway?"

"I dunno," I said. "What's your name?"

"My name's Joey. I'm your cousin, stupid. Why else would I be talking to a dummy like you?" I shrugged and stared in the other direction. "Now are you gonna go inside or do I have to force ya?" he threatened, his hands on his hips.

"I'm stayin' out here until we leave."

"Oh, yeah," Joey boasted, "ya see that metal thing over there?" He pointed to a long rusty bar with an 'M' on the end.

"Yeah."

"That's what they use to brand cattle. They get'm real hot. Then ssss, they stick it on the calf's butt and the thing goes sky high. That's what I'm gonna do to you." He held the brand out to my stomach.

I stepped back from the brand. "Okay, okay, I'll go in, but I better not have to kiss anyone, especially Grandma"

Joey dropped the brand in triumph. He grabbed my pony tail. "Come on then, stupid," he ordered and dragged me by my hair away from the tree, across the hot gravel driveway, up the stairs, and through the screen door.

Graciously, he released my hair once we were inside. The house was dark and cluttered with National Geographics, books of crossword puzzles, and little porcelain figurines. A crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling with a monarch butterfly mobile dangling precariously from one side of it. A table was partially set with a lace tablecloth and Muppet Movie glasses filled with yellowish milk. The blonde lady was crouched over a white board propped up on a desk in the corner, and she turned around, startled, when the door slammed behind us. "Well, well, Abby," she said, looking down at me over the top of her half glasses, "you've changed your mind and decided to come inside after all."

"What 'cha drawin'?" Joey asked.

"I'm painting a clown dancing with a ballerina." She pushed her glasses back up and bent over again to paint.

Joey led me out of the room and down the hall into a room with a sofa and a television. "Ya like Superman?" he asked.

"I guess. Hey, where's my Grandma?"

"You're even stupider than I thought. She's out in the living room painting. We just saw her. Remember?"

"She's my grandma? How come she doesn't have a cane and why didn't she try and kiss me?"

"Boy, are you an idiot," Joey exclaimed, turning on the television. "Superman grew up on a farm, ya know. Just like me. I dressed up like Superman last year for Halloween. Everyone was real scared of me, especially after I killed that frog with my bare armpit."

"You what?" I gasped.

"I killed a frog with my bare armpit. The stupid thing probably died of the smell."

"That's gross. Didn't you get in trouble?"

"Are you kidding? My mom never even found out."

"Your mom never found out what?" a lady asked, standing in the doorway. She was short and fat, like the cottonwood tree.

"Nothin', Mom," Joey muttered.

"It better be nothing, young man. It's time for dinner." We stood up from the couch and she put her fat, sun-spotted hands on the back of our necks. She pushed us all the way out to the dinner table, where five others, including my parents, waited.

"This is your Uncle Bob," the fat lady said, gesturing toward the man beside me.

(Continued on Page 15)

"Hi, Abby, pleased to meet you," Uncle Bob said, extending his long, boney hand out to shake mine. He smiled genuinely, revealing a row of sand-colored teeth. His eyes, large and blue, reflected my face.

"Grandma, do I get to say grace today?" Joey asked, climbing into the chair on his knees.

"You may," the blonde lady said with a respectful nod.

Joey grabbed one of my hands and Uncle Bob took the other. I tried to struggle free, but my efforts were in vain.

"God is great. God is good, and we thank him for this food. Amen. Dig in," Joey recited. Afterward, to my relief, Joey and Uncle Bob let go of my hands.

Joey reached across the table and grabbed a plate filled with fried chicken. "Mmmm mmmm, fried chicken," he exclaimed, helping himself to three large drumsticks. I also took three drumsticks, then passed the plate to Uncle Bob. He didn't take any chicken, and I was shocked that an adult would deliberately leave out such an important part of his meal.

"Hey, Uncle Bob," I said, "you should eat some of that chicken, or else your meal won't be square."

Uncle Bob chuckled. "That's because I'm a vegetarian. Vegetarians don't eat meat."

"Oh," I muttered.

The carrots were gradually making their way around the table. I hated carrots, and I certainly wasn't going to eat any. I formulated an ingenious plot in my head for the sole purpose of avoiding the carrots, so that when Joey finally passed them to me, I was ready with an answer. "No thanks," I said. "I'm a meatitarian. I only eat meat and cookies and candy and ice cream."

"Baloney," Joey exclaimed and dumped the remainder of the carrots onto my plate.

"Hey, that's not fair. I'll get you back. You'll see," I informed him. I immediately knew what to do.

"Ya know what Joey did last Halloween, Uncle Bob?"

"Shut up, Abby. You're such a tattletale," Joey broke in, kicking me under the table.

"He killed a frog," I exclaimed, "with his armpit."

Uncle Bob's face turned the color of a dead frog's belly. "Joey, you had no reason to kill an innocent frog. How would you like it if a frog killed you?"

Joey stared at his carrots and muttered, "Sorry." I kicked him under the table. He kicked me back, and for the next hour, while the adults chatted, we kicked each other under the table. Joey told me he wouldn't talk to me for the rest of the time I was visiting. I was glad. I hated Joey.

Immediately after dinner, Mom took me back to a room to go to bed. She left me there in my yellow pajamas with the threat that if I left, I would be forced to wear my frilly pink Big Bird nightgown. I decided to stay in the room.

There were photographs hanging all over the walls. I didn't know most of the people in the pictures, but I examined them anyway. The black and white ones were my favorites, especially the ones of the lady in the white dress and the three boys on the back of a horse. My mom's picture was there too. Her hair was puffy and shaped like a beach ball. I glanced above her picture, and, to my horror, beheld the notorious bathtub picture of myself. I was terrified that Joey might see the picture, so I determined to destroy it.

Climbing on a wicker rocking chair, I reached up and snatched the picture off the wall. It was a fairly small picture. I doubted that anyone would notice its loss, especially the blonde lady. She didn't seem to notice much.

Now I was faced with the dilemma of what to do with the picture. After finding that it was too large to be shoved out through the hole in the window screen, I decided to burn it with the matches I had collected from the hotel. I considered myself

an expert at lighting matches because my parents had allowed me to light the candles on my last two birthday cakes.

It only took me four attempts before I was able to light one of the matches. I held it up to the back of the frame, but it only burned a small hole through the cardboard. I tried again and was successful. A bright orange flame emerged from the picture. I watched proudly as the flames consumed the cardboard and shriveled the photograph. My triumph was forgotten, however, when I heard the resounding of a smoke alarm.

Mom and Dad were so proud of my speedy evacuation, especially since I remembered to close the door and shut the windows. Everyone had congregated outside the house except for Uncle Bob and Dad, who were investigating inside. My mother stood with the blonde lady, staring at the house and looking for signs of smoke. Joey's parents had gone down the road to speak to old Mr. Floyd about his broken fence. Joey announced heroically that he was going to Floyd's house next door to get his parents. He began to walk toward the road and I followed him.

We passed the cottonwood tree before he noticed me. "Go away, Abby," he insisted, quickening his pace. "I'm in a hurry. This is an emergency."

"No, it isn't," I said, hurrying to catch up. "It's not a big fire at all. My Dad can probably put it out all by himself."

He turned around and looked at me for the first time since dinner. "How do you know?"

I giggled and began to run down the road ahead of him, shouting, "I'm not telling."

He ran after me and caught my legs so that I fell. "You better tell," he ordered, pushing my face into the dust and gravel. "How do you know?"

"I set it myself with the matches I got from the hotel," I bragged. "I've been lighting matches ever since I was a little kid."

"That was stupid," Joey stated in his best grown-up voice. "You know what's gonna happen now don't you?"

"What?"

"The whole entire house is gonna burn up, and you're gonna be in big trouble."

"Oh."

"The best thing to do now is to run away, but don't worry 'cause I'll be your guide."

"But it was just a little . . ."

"You have got to be the most stupidest, most . . . Little fires turn into big fires. By now that fire has probably burned up a whole ten rooms."

"Where are we gonna go?" I asked.

"I figure we can head south. Up yonder," he said, casually lifting his hand toward some hills in the distance. "We can probably make it to Mexico in a few days. If it were just me, I could probably make it by morning, but you're a girl, so it'll take time. Just be patient. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Come this way," he commanded, holding the barbed wire apart for me to pass through. I carefully ducked through the fence into the pasture. Joey, protesting my assistance, caught himself on the wire, but freed himself easily by ferociously lunging away from the fence, tearing his shirt in the process.

"What will Grandma say when she finds out I burned her house down?" I asked, after we'd walked halfway across the field.

"Probly nothin'. She's used to kids wreckin' her junk. Like last summer when my brother, Darren, ran her car into the corral, and the other day when I used her oil paints to turn her reading glasses into sun glasses. She didn't even say anything. She never does."

"Does she ever talk to kids?"

"Only when she has to. Kids don't talk to her much, either."

It was getting dark by the time we went through the fourth

barbed wire fence. Joey decided it was time for me to rest, so we sat down on a plank suspended across the irrigation ditch. I could see the house clearly across the fields. There were lights in the windows, and a car was coming out of the driveway. It didn't look like the house was burning at all. I turned to Joey with my concern. "Joey."

"Yeah."

"The house doesn't look like it's burning."

"Yeah, well it takes a long time."

I was satisfied with his more experienced opinion because I'd never actually seen a house burn down, and I certainly didn't want him to detect my ignorance.

Joey began to relate his favorite episode of Superman to me, but I wasn't listening. I was watching the car driving down the dusty road. Someone began to call our names. Joey pretended not to hear, but I knew he had heard because he paused in the middle of his sentence to look back at the house.

After Joey had finished his story, we sat staring at the lights of the car driving along the road and listening to our names being called. Joey frowned. "Ya know what?" he asked, standing up.

"What?"

"If we stay out here much longer, we're gonna get attacked by rattlesnakes, and the only way to get away from them is to climb a tree, and there aren't any trees out here, stupid. This was a stupid idea." He looked at me with an accusing face.

"Sorry," I murmured even though I knew it was his stupid idea.

"You should be," he said. "I guess we better go home. I'd rather see you get a spanking than get eaten by rattlesnakes."

We began to walk toward the road. I could tell Joey was disappointed that our plan hadn't worked, but I think he was also glad because he ran with me towards the lights of the car when we finally reached the road.

I explained everything that had happened to Uncle Bob while he was driving us home because I knew I would get a spanking no matter what. The funny thing was, though, that after I'd told Uncle Bob the story, he decided that Joey was the one that needed to be spanked. He told my parents he thought that I had learned my lesson.

When we returned to the house, I was elated to find that it hadn't burned up, after all. I ran outside to tell Joey the good news. He had just gotten it from his parents and was sitting beside the cottonwood tree, crying. When I told him that my dad had been able to put out the fire before it did any damage, he simply replied, "I know," in his usual derogatory tone.

I thought about his remark for a while. Then I put my hands on my hips, the way Joey had before, and exclaimed, "No, you don't, stupid."

Rebecca Latimer

Vienna, VA

James Madison High School

Mrs. Bernis von zur Muehlen

Making Meatloaf

*Compacted red-brown chuck,
two cups Italian bread crumbs, and
three dollops brick-red tomato paste
combine to form an ominous mound.*

Clean warm hands

slowly

sink

into the coldness,

immersed to the wrists.

Lisa Keating

Cockeysville, MD

Dulaney High School

William Jones

Family

Last August I went to my mother's family reunion in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Potluck supper, 50 people gathered in fly swatting, miserable heat . . . and all with sentimental and glad spirits. Of all the faces, the eldest were the most familiar. They were my great aunts and uncles--brothers and sisters of my grandmother, Velma, who died before I was born. They were the ones who had raised my mother, Shirley, in this red dirt land. Mother had turned her back on the South and had come to live in New York independently, but she also ran to escape her frustration at not being able to conform to the conservative way of life here. I had been here before, but as a little girl. At seventeen, I had distinct ideas of who I was and where I was going. I was determined to be the symbol of my mother's success.

"Katie, darlin, kiss your Cecil!" My mother's southern accent confused me--she never used it at home . . . I leaned over to peck the cheek of the ancient one before me. He smelled warm and sweet. I searched his watery eyes for some knowledge of me, but he did not seem to see me at all. Abruptly, he was surrounded by his children who helped him to a chair by the fan, and propped him up, lifelike, with a glass of lemonade in his hand.

When his children left him, I made my way over to Cecil and took his hand in mine. I could not think what to say to him, so I watched him looking at me. After a few minutes he began to cry silently. Frightened, I got up to kiss him and let him be. As I did, he whispered: "Say goodbye to Shirley for me, will you, Velma?" He thought I was his sister.

I went outside, and I saw my younger sister playing with other young cousins. Velma, my grandmother, who I was told looked like me, was dead. I had never met her, yet she towered over the family along with all the other tombstones. In this place, people were loved according to their ancestors. I was the only one who wanted to be loved for my own, living self.

I spotted mom talking with Cecil's wife, my aunt Frances. I dived toward them. Frances presented mom with a hand-embroidered pillow. Mom gushed about its intricacy. I could only think of how foreign it would look in our modern home. My loneliness increased. Even my mother had a place here. She had deep-rooted empathy for her people. I only represented the part of her that had left this place. For the rest of the afternoon I was quiet, watching all the people from a distance.

Everything changed as the sun went down. The family was sprawled around, talking in groups. My great uncle Russell was telling a story about trading insults with a preacher. I found myself laughing with everyone else. At first, I thought I was just laughing at this jolly ol', stubborn southerner. But, it was funny! I felt close to everyone around me, laughing. For the first time, I was connected with my family.

As I began to recognize my strong roots in Arkansas, I no longer felt obligated to be the symbol of my mother's rebellion. Though I had not been brought up with these people as mother had, I came to understand their values. Just as they loved mom because she was a living reminder of their Velma, they loved me too. They had accepted me all along. It was I who had not accepted myself for what they loved in me. Gradually, at that reunion, I separated myself from my mother's rebellion. At the end of the day, my aunt Emma said to me: "Honey, I am just so glad that you come and see us. It means so much that you are here--never forget us. Always come home in your heart."

I began to think more clearly about who I was, and who I was going to be.

Katharine Alexandra Tomkiewicz

Port Washington, NY 11050

Paul D. Schreiber High School

Blaine Bocarde

Blackout

When all of
These copper snakes
Die for an instant,
The night snaps out
And this washroom world
Goes colorless.

The matchstick
Breathes a glitter
Into darkness,
Catches a pale-edged
Wing to warm it.

Candle, whisper lights for me,
Smooth white seraph
With a face as silent
As sleep.

Ice-soaked slats of flame
Play against the
Night of windows,
Camouflaged in shadow carcasses.

Could you move your
Bleached-bone fingers
Along my brow?
With a star in your breath,
Whisper that this
Dead-snake dream
Will be happy and
Candle-quiet forever.

Lisa Sylvester
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

The Night Stalker

It's happening again. I can feel it. I look up at my alarm clock, and I see that I am right. The hands show "1:00 a.m." It's about that time--the time for night stalking.

I listen carefully. I do not have to wait long. The sound is there now--the sound of a pickup truck slowly moving up the street. Now, the ignition is turned off. I hear the doors slam. "Dummies," I sarcastically think to myself, "Why don't they just make a little more noise and wake up the whole neighborhood?" Maybe it sounds so loud to me because I am expecting it, and I'm keyed-up. Soon I hear the sounds of sneakered feet slyly moving through the leaves outside. Of course, my sister has heard the noise of the truck, too. She is ready. I hear the thud as she hits the ground. Then the feet move off together. So, she has made another bad decision. Will she ever learn?

Why, oh why does she insist on doing this to me every night? Doesn't she know what I'm going through? The fact that my little sister sneaks out of her bedroom late every night really upsets me. "Should I tell Mom and Dad?" I ask myself this question every night. Why do I care anyway? Just because I feel a need to protect her? On the other hand, is it because I want to be first in my parents' eyes by making her look like a bad person? Maybe I am simply jealous because she is out having a

good time while I lie awake in bed, worrying, not able to sleep. I know part of the reason why she does this to me every night. Oh, yes, I know the feeling of the night. Everything is so quiet, so serene. Yet somewhere under all of the peacefulness is danger. One can feel it lurking there--just waiting for some unsuspecting person to stumble upon it and release it. Waiting for all hell to break loose. And the night air . . . there's nothing like it. It's so clean, so fresh, so undisturbed. It makes a person just want to breathe in as much of it as possible. And once it's in you, you feel as though the world belongs to you. You can do anything you want to, because you have the power to make things happen. It makes you want to run and jump and scream and be as passionate as possible. That is what the night is like.

Of course, my sister is enjoying it to the fullest. I can practically see her now. She is crouching in the back of the pickup with the wind streaming through her hair. The driver is racing with the night wind. She is screaming and having her scream torn from her lips. Boys and a six-pack are all waiting for her attention. Everyone is laughing for no reason except that the night air is a natural high, and one must enjoy it before it is gone--wasted. No one can be sad or down or even sleepy, for this is the time for stalking danger; and everyone is at his peak of awareness. Everyone is waiting . . . waiting for the danger to be flung out of the darkness! Anything can happen in the dark night.

Still, here I am--sweating and tossing and turning all through the deep night. I think I can reach a conclusion as to why I feel a need to let my parents in on my sister's doings. It's because I am worried about her. What does she do when I am not around to keep an eye on her actions? Will she give in to the pressure that I know from experience is there? The world and people in it are not always pure and innocent. She is, as I know, the only girl among boys years and years older than she. Experienced boys! They are the kind of people my mother has warned her about or should have. She is around drugs and drug abuse. She's around the things that drugs can do one and the way they can make people behave and think. She is grasping for acceptance, for something to brag to her friends about the next day so they will hold her in awe. She wants something that she is not ready for, yet she can't see that and will do anything, risk anything, to have it. "Why can't she see the light?" I moan. But I know the answer. "It's because the darkness covers the truth," I tell myself.

As I do every night, I realize that I will not be able to sleep again until I hear the truck crawl up the street and my sister fall through her window. "When does she sleep?" I ask myself. However, I realize this will not be like every other night, for I hear footsteps on the stairs. It's a heavy tread, the sound of my father slowly dragging his sleep-laden body up our flight of stairs. He knows something is up. My parents aren't as naive as my sister expects them to be. I listen to the floor boards as they give way and creak as Dad wearily carries himself down the hallway. My door is slowly opened. I can imagine the black air of my room mixing with the even blacker air of the sleeping house. I turn over as if in my sleep to make sure that my father sees that I am still in bed. He is satisfied and slowly eases my door shut. But now he is heading for my sister's room. I guess my problem is solved. I no longer have to worry about telling my parents about my sister's actions for they will find out first hand. Her night stalking is over. I hear her door creak open. Dad gasps. The light is flicked on. "Damn!" echoes throughout the house. Then more silent cursing as my father realizes what time it is and tries unsuccessfully to keep his emotions under control. My sister's bedsprings groan as the weight of my father is lowered upon them to await her return. "It's gonna be a long night," I think to myself.

Gerry Reed
Wheaton, MD
Albert Einstein High School
Linda Robinson



Charles Gross
Edmund Burke School

The Amateur Photographer

I was walking through Boston on that gray autumn day, looking for good shots. I needed an unusual scene, something powerful and distinctive. I stopped two priests and asked if I could take their picture; they agreed readily. I knelt down and took a picture of the two priests, all in black. The angle from which I took the shot made the men seem unnaturally tall; they took up the entire length of the frame. The elongated figures were set against the backdrop of a shiny glass skyscraper. I took the shot and, rising from my knees, hurriedly thanked the men who were now reduced to normal proportions.

I had just spotted two punks across the street and was in a rush not to let these prospective subjects escape. After I asked permission to take their pictures, the one with the purple hair turned to me and asked belligerently, "Why? Do you think we're some kind of freaks or something?" I silently stood and stared at the silver skull earring his friend was sporting in his left lobe. Expecting a punch in the gut, I tentatively raised my camera. My view finder framed two grinning punks, arm in arm, standing under a sign which said, "Uncle Sam wants you!" The picture could have been amusing but it lacked power.

I continued walking until I realized I had left the busy downtown streets which had been lined with stores and were full of activity. I now found myself in the business district. Dusk was approaching and few people were on the streets. I was losing hope for a great shot.

I turned down an empty side street that was lined by buildings that ran the length of the block in an unbroken monotony of concrete. It was in the graying twilight of that November day, on this side street, that I spotted the Indian, sitting alone, cross-legged in the style of his native American ancestors, his back against the stark wall.

Something in those large liquid brown eyes attracted me to him. They seemed to take the whole world in and then throw it right back out again. The soft sloping line of his shoulders sharply contrasted with the hardness of the concrete and the

sharp lines of the corner. His long, thick, black hair was disheveled and knotted, but softly framed the hard lines of his face. His slumping posture made his body seem almost formless. His hands lay limply on his knees. His outfit, soiled and frayed as it was, could still be recognized as a suit. A white man, in his immaculate new business suit, hurried down the street without recognizing the living irony that sat against the wall.

I approached the man and asked him if I could take his picture. He made a slight motion of his head that I took for assent. I raised my camera and began to focus. Perfection. The entire frame was dominated by concrete: a monolithic wall, met by the stark line of the cement sidewalk. The Indian was sitting alone and in the distance could be seen the outline of the white man's back as he was turning the corner and receding into the cement.

I snapped the picture. Alienation. Isolation. In an instant I had captured the essence of these intangible concepts and put them in a tangible form. Excitement continued to build within me, an excitement over the power of photography as art, an excitement for my own developing capabilities, and an excitement about the people who were my subjects. I thanked the man sincerely. He made no acknowledgement, so I began to walk away.

I had only gone a short distance when I heard running footsteps and what sounded like a scuffle. I turned around and saw three kids surrounding the Indian. They were young white boys, thin and covered in denim. The tallest had a crew cut and seemed to be the leader of the three. The other two looked unkempt and surprisingly street-worn for ten-or-twelve-year olds. Two of the boys were beating him--one using a piece of a brick which was leaving red gashes in the brown soft skin--while the third, the leader, was attempting to go through his pockets. In that first moment, I thought that they had knocked the Indian unconscious. When I looked closer I saw that his eyes were still open. He was completely conscious, just unresponsive to the abuses of the children.

I ran towards him, screaming at those beasts. They were very young and my wild anger was enough to scare them away. I reached the Indian, pulling his shoulders up off the rough cement. I strained to raise his collapsed frame. I hadn't realized what a large and strong man he really was. I began screaming at him with the same wild intensity I had just used on the three children. I angrily shook his limp body, yelling straight into those placid eyes. "Why did you let them do that to you? Why didn't you fight back, or run away, or call for help, or SOMETHING?" Blood was trickling down his left cheek.

All in the same moment, I was filled with rage, pity, frustration, and disgust; I thought I was going to be sick from the tangle of emotion in my stomach.

In a soft low voice I heard the Indian utter, "Why?" This ridiculous response made my anger well up again.

"Because . . . because they took your money, they were hurting you, they could have killed you."

"It doesn't matter," was the soft, slow response.

"Of course it matters!" I screamed. "Doesn't your life mean anything to you, to your friends, to your family? . . . You have a life--it SHOULD matter!"

My emotional outburst slowed, checked by those soft eyes. I finally ceased my ridiculous babbling and just stood and stared at him. I had been wrong. Those eyes were not placid, not at all. What they expressed was a complete lack of hope, a total resignation. I was frightened. I was looking at a man who had no desire to live and had no faith in the human race.

I walked to the corner and called an ambulance. I looked down at the Indian for the last time. He just sat there and looked up at me with those damn brown eyes. After the siren went wailing off into the darkness, I got onto the bus that would take me back to safety.

James F. Rorer
Port Jefferson, NY
Phillips Exeter Academy
David R. Weber

Her whole family was sitting at the dinner table, arguing. Their mealtime fights had become almost as monotonous as the meal itself. Today was Thursday, so they were eating turkey and peas and mashed potatoes. She hated peas. Chris, her younger brother, was telling his parents he could wear black every day if he wanted to. When he yelled, he got little red spots on his cheeks. He was yelling now. Her mother and father vehemently disagreed with Chris. They had little red spots on their cheeks, too. She was trying to remember what she had done with the silver ring Brett had given her, so she was ignoring the conversation. Brett had given her two rings, actually, and she still had the one with the big flowers on it. The other one, the mock wedding band, was gone, though. She glared briefly at her father, then went back to watching the gravy form tributaries down the sides of her potatoes.

When they lived at the beach, sometimes she and Chris just wouldn't come home for the dinner ritual. "We were showing some tourists the sights," they'd say, or "We couldn't find any of our stuff on the beach because these bozos buried it." Their parents never believed the stories, but at least the fights were shorter. They were always sent to bed without dinner. She guessed the family fought so much because she and Chris weren't ideal children. The pastels Mom wanted and the punks she got were too different.

Cruel laughter (it must be Dad's, she thought) made her jump, and gravy sloshed over to drown a pea. "Friends?!" he spat at Christopher. "You, my son, know a bunch of misfits. I wouldn't want to be associated with them. You do, however, misfit in." He snorted again. She wondered how parents could be so savage. Chris looked like he was going to burst into tears or slug his father. Instead, he did nothing. He didn't want to get hit, so he smiled wanly. They'd learned to do that long ago (before the beach, even).

She remembered the only time Chris had tried to fight back. It was a rainy day last March. Dad called Chris an embarrassment to the family; Chris called Dad a few choice words. Dad hit Chris, Chris hit Dad, and she took Chris to the hospital. "He fell down the stairs," she said to the doctor. She always said that. The doctor set Chris's collarbone and taped his nose and knew all along that Chris hadn't fallen down the stairs.

Her dad had finally shut up and her gravy lake was tranquil again. The whereabouts of her ring still puzzled her. It should have been in her jewelry box with her other, bigger ring. She couldn't wear that one now, either. It wouldn't look right alone. Maybe Chris took her ring. He didn't like Brett and thought the ring was ugly. Peas were so disgusting. She wondered if her parents would let her leave the table without eating them. Probably not. She started sailing them across the gravy lake and wished she could go to a place where there weren't any stairs.

After dinner, she retreated to the sanctuary of her room. It had started raining after dinner, and now the water on her windows distorted the light coming in from the streetlamp. She loved her room, which was odd, because her room was pink. She hated pink. One whole wall was bookshelves her father had built when they moved in. She figured he built them because they would improve the market value of the house by 1.6 percent. Each shelf had a classification: dictionaries and SAT prep books were on the bottom; her kiddie books were on the top. Winnie the Pooh, The Secret Garden, and The Chronicles of Narnia sat there, getting dusty. She still read The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe when she was in a melancholy mood.

She realized her ring wasn't among the Nancy Drew and Agatha Christie books on the third shelf, so she went back to searching. Crawling out from under her desk (the ring wasn't there, either), she smacked her head. She cursed and flopped down on her back, feet still under the desk. She was face-to-face with the Damned's poster for Phantasmagoria. She had gotten in trouble for stapling posters to the ceiling. Her dad was

The oil painting was her favorite part of the room besides the books. It hung above her bedside table, a portrait of a boy and a girl laughing together. The painting reminded her of Chris, even though Chris had dark hair and the boy in the portrait had straw-colored hair. Chris didn't laugh much anymore, but it still reminded her of him.

She was still staring at the ceiling when Chris came into her room without knocking. He never knocked, and it annoyed her, but she was too bored to yell at him. His torn-up black Converse high-tops reeked, but he wouldn't do anything about it, even if she told him to, so she didn't bother. He was probably afraid the Anarchy sign on the side would disappear if it touched water. Thunder grumbled outside, and Chris asked, sarcastically, if she was dreaming about Brett again. Brett was the only thing they fought about. She was about to comment when she was interrupted by their father yelling, "Christopher, get down here NOW!!"

Chris ran downstairs, and she followed to see what would happen. Her father was pouring brandy into his coffee when Chris burst into the kitchen. Their father loved coffee. On Sunday mornings, he'd drink it at the kitchen table, wearing only his underwear. She preferred to stay out of the kitchen then. In a cold voice, he asked Chris if he had done the dishes. "No, Sir," Chris sighed. When Chris brushed past her on his way up the stairs, she wondered how he would explain this bruise to his friends.

She felt sorry for Chris, having a father like they had. She felt sorry for herself, too, but not as much. Instead of having a father to play baseball with, Chris had a father who used him as a punching bag. Before she and Brett started going out, she had played tennis with Chris every Saturday, but now she spent Saturdays with Brett and didn't have time. She always thought that Chris had become a non-conformist just to get back at his father. Their father was an over-aged yuppie who wanted nothing more than to drive his Audi to and from suburbia every day. Their father's office life was probably glamorous--she didn't know--but she couldn't understand why he wanted to come home. She decided he must like the feeling of pride when he pulled into the circular driveway in front of the house. He didn't seem to notice that their house was like every third house on the street.

As she climbed the stairs, two-by-two, she heard Chris turn his stereo on, too loud. He's asking for trouble, she thought, walking into her darkened room. A few minutes later, she heard her father's fist on Chris's door, quick, staccato raps that didn't go with the beat of the music. Their dad was yelling "Open this door!" Every time he'd say it, Chris would turn up the music a little bit louder. He was trying to drown out his father's voice, but she could still hear it.

Their father was really angry now. She knew that Chris knew better than to antagonize their father, especially this late, after he'd had too much brandy. She was shaking when she heard the music stop, lyrics still hanging in the air. Chris's door opened, buzzing on the too-thick pile carpet, and she heard Chris telling his father to get away from him. Her father laughed, the same laugh as always, cynical and demeaning. She heard Chris's stereo crash against the wall after a comment about trashy music. She heard Chris crash against the wall after a comment about trashy children. She heard thunder crash outside and Chris crash inside, and she wanted it to stop.

It did stop, a few minutes later. She waited until she heard her father's drunken snore before she went into Chris's room. The stereo was in a corner, covered by a shredded poster. Shards of albums stuck jagged in the carpet, and Chris was on his bed. She didn't know, at first, if he was conscious or not, but she finally saw a blue eye blink from under folds of bruised skin.

She and Chris made it down the stairs and out of the house

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without being heard. Putting Chris in the back seat of the Audi, she covered him with her down comforter. The engine caught on the second try, and she drove the Audi out of the driveway and down the street. She had to drive slowly because of the rain and because Chris winced when they went over bumps.

Twenty minutes later, she pulled up to Brett's house. Chris was asleep in the back seat, so she left him there while she ran around to the back of the house, grabbing a handful of stones on the way. One by one, she tossed them up against Brett's window. After she had almost run out of pebbles, the light flashed twice, and she nodded to herself and walked around to the front of the house. A few minutes later, Brett walked out, with his dog leading the way. She waited for Brett to light his cigarette and watched the smoke swirl around his nostrils.

"It's after midnight," Brett said. "Normal people are asleep at this hour." She didn't bother to ask him why he was awake, if all normal people were asleep. He'd only give her the obvious answer. "So . . . why are you here?"

"Dad beat up Chris again. He's in the car."

"Oh." Brett sounded concerned now, not grumpy like before. He walked to the car, with Mikki, his dog, following him. When Brett opened the car door, Mikki jumped in and started chewing on Chris's shoes. Chris didn't even notice.

She and Brett tried to carry Chris up to Brett's room, but they ended up mostly dragging him. Chris didn't seem to mind, except for a mumbled "ouch" when the screen door slammed on his ankle.

While Chris slept, she and Brett had a humorous discussion about marriage. She promised she wouldn't work all day, fix frozen dinners, or go to bed at eight o'clock, like her mother. Brett laughed at that. He promised he wouldn't hit the kids. She didn't have to say "like my father."

Since they were on the subject of kids, they decided to name theirs. Brett rejected Zachary and Alexander for the boys' names. "They sound like kings," he said. They finally decided on Ashleigh Shannon and Christopher Jarrett.

"Those are good, solid, upperclass names," she said.

"Only if you spell Ashleigh with an ei."

She was dreaming about a coffee-stained tablecloth when an angry shove on her shoulder awakened her. "Why'd you bring me here?" Chris hissed. She bit her lip, not understanding why Chris disliked Brett so much. She looked at Chris's outline in the semi-darkness and asked him just exactly where she should have taken him. "You could've left me at home," Chris said. She stared at him with surprise, raising her eyebrows, even though he couldn't really see her.

"Leave you at home," she repeated. "Now there's an intelligent idea. Did you want Dad to beat you up again this morning because you broke your stereo? Right, Chris."

Their dad had a rather warped sense of logic. The damage he did while fighting with them became their fault when he saw it again twelve hours later. Brett woke up while Chris was telling her he could handle his father without her help. She looked hurt and told Chris he needed someone to take care of him, whether he liked it or not. Brett nodded in agreement, but Chris ignored him.

"You're not my mother," Chris said. He sounded like his father.

After Chris had stalked out of Brett's house and to the car, Brett told her that everything would be okay. She didn't believe him, and he probably didn't believe himself. She slouched down in the driver's seat and watched the screen door close on Brett's back. The Audi rolled down the hill a bit after she released the parking brake and before the engine caught. Chris gave her a look that criticized her driving ability, then turned his head to stare at the oncoming headlights. They didn't talk on the way home.

There weren't any lights on in the house when they got home. Good, she thought, nobody even knew we were gone. Chris jumped out of the car before it stopped and tapped his foot im-

patiently while she unlocked the door. He wouldn't look at her, but she could tell he was still angry by the way he pursed his lips.

She stood in the kitchen and watched the sun come up behind the neighbors' houses. The clock on the coffeepot said 6:03. How nice. Home in time to get ready for school, she thought. Spooning coffee into a mug that said "Have you hugged your kid today?" she wondered if the microwave would heat the water faster than the stove. She decided it would.

She climbed the stairs, one-by-one this time so she wouldn't spill the coffee. Chris wasn't in his room when she pushed the door open. She put the mug on his dresser where his stereo used to be, and was on her way out when Chris appeared in front of her. His towel-dried hair stuck out around his head like a crown. "There's some coffee on your dresser," she said. "I thought it might help you wake up." He nodded and pushed past her. "Aren't you even going to thank me for the coffee?" she asked. He didn't answer. "Fine. Fine, Chris. I pamper you and try to make you feel loved, and take you to Brett's to get away from Dad. I even make you coffee, and you can't even bring yourself to speak to me."

Chris pulled out a drawer to find a clean T-shirt. "If you weren't such a martyr, you wouldn't have to worry about me," Chris said. "Besides, the only reason you wanted to go to Brett's was so you could see him." He pushed the drawer in violently. Coffee splashed over the side of the cup and formed a puddle on the dresser.

"You're wrong, Chris," she said. "I don't do things just for myself." Chris mopped up the coffee with his shirt. The shirt was black, so the stain wouldn't show.

She watched Chris not watching her. "You're just like Dad," she said, and walked out the door, the smell of coffee following her down the hall.

Heather Kay Hertz
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Mrs. Bernis von zur Muehlen

Rose-Colored Glasses: An Oil Painting

*I saw beauty in a damp blotch of pollution
in the McDonald's parking lot yesterday.
I grinned at the deflated rainbow
And laughed my way into the trees,
Draping the gray business-heads below me
with iridescent magenta.
I saw peoples' ashen faces
Sparkle turquoise and happy
in the bright morning gold,
The orange and green-swirled soul
of the dour old lady on the corner
Reveal itself brightly on her hat;
And the people rallied to work
Or walked on their hands, as they
have been longing to do.
I drifted back down and set my feet
on the greasy asphalt,
Wondering if any of the gray faces
Had noticed their brief, glorious transformations.*

Simone Parrish
Chevy Chase, MD
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
Marilyn Alberts

Hopper

Poems are not enough.
Every time she looks at her hands
she imagines brushes, she imagines oils,
she imagines tempera.
She wants to paint a man and a woman
as they held each other on a porch.
Her words can make sense of space
but Edward Hopper could make
space into a hat, into a house,
into linen drapes.
Hopper's man and woman
could've been anything on the American summer
evening he caught them in half-embrace,
tense and hollow in the post-war grey light.
She could write with her hands
but it wouldn't be the same.
That man and that woman
were all in moody colors, in gaunt brushstrokes.
On her paper, they wouldn't have been
real to the taste.
On her paper,
you couldn't have even touched them.

Alissa Quart
New York, NY
St. Ann's School
Martin Skoble

Machine Age Chauvinist

It's getting so
a man can't even
hear the grass
grow,
Or the squash
of an ant under
a woman's shoe.

It's no wonder,
listen to
them,
Clicking and
Snapping.
Quite machine like,
those piston heels.
Wires,
Cogs,
Connecting wheels.

Shhhhhhhh,
hear the
asphalt fall upon
the fields?
Listen
to them,
Clicking and
Snapping.
All quite machine
like.

Donald Troy Fillman
Red Hill, PA
Upper Perkiomen High School
David McCaig

No One Picks You Up When You Fall

It was a Sunday afternoon in the middle of winter. The smoke from our cigarettes blended in with the mist from our breath and dissipated against the overcast sky. Mike's face was pale behind his curled black bangs. His eyes were brown, but you could barely see them. When he exhaled, the smoke looked like it might form a halo around his head. It would have been a contrast to his spiked leather jacket, with a Misfits (a band) skeleton pulling out its eyeball painted on the back. John was next to him, buddying up. He had a hook nose and a zit on his forehead. He wore a long, black overcoat and white, high-top basketball shoes. I was in my combat boots, ripped-up jeans, a T-shirt, and field jacket. Pete didn't have a jacket. He was shivering, looking at his brand-new boots, and gritting his teeth. We stood at the end of the line to get into the Hung Jury Pub. A hard core band was playing that day.

Hard core was a kind of punk. It was fast, loud, and completely opposite to the immoral sermon that people thought it was. A lot of the words were against drinking, taking drugs, and one-night stands. According to D.C. hard core, those were the things business men did. Authority, conformity, and lack of ideas were the primary evils. The shows, where all the punks gathered to listen to the bands, were the center of the hard core scene. Everyone was supposed to get along well. The scene was supposed to be a unified counter-culture.

The line was full of punks who had come with their own circles of friends—guys with mohawks, leather jackets, and thick-soled boots called Doc Martins. The skin-heads in front of them wore Doc Martins, too, and jeans with suspenders that went over their white turtlenecks. Most of them had short military jackets, and none had hair. None of them was in the military, either. The skaters and their girlfriends were at the front of the line. They were all lanky, with bright clothes. Some of them carried their skateboards.

"Look at the Skate Betty," John said, nodding his head towards a pretty, skinny skater girl. Skate Betty was a term for a skater girl—or slut, depending on how you felt about skaters.

I looked at her. "So?"

"She's hot, man."

I looked at her again, shrugged and turned to Mike. "So what's up with you?" I asked.

He put his hands in his pockets and, tilting his head to one side, blew his bangs out of his face. "Nothing worth talking about."

"Is that good?" I asked.

"Probably."

Mike and I were friends. Pete and John were just two guys I hung out with.

The line started moving down the alley towards the door. Everyone was saying, "All right, let's go, come on." The skin-heads were jeering the Betty. They didn't think she was hot.

Inside it was warmer. It wasn't dark, but it was just as dim as it was outside, under the overcast sky. Mirrors lined the wall behind the stage and behind the bar, which sold beer, coke, and cigarettes. The main floor was tiled white, but at some point during a show someone usually spilled water on it. The water and dirt combined to form a layer of slippery silt. To the left of the entrance, there was a little section of booths with red seats, wooden tables, and black plastic ashtrays. The whole place was just a little bit bigger than a small high school gymnasium.

The four of us leaned up against the bar. Mike and I smoked, and I looked at the stage and the people. A few guys were closer to speed metal than punk. Speed metal was satanic music. All of the guys wore black clothes and jewelry that had something to do with the devil. One had a dangling earring made of an upside-down cross with a snake wrapped around it. All the others

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seemed to look up to him. On the back of his jacket a patch said, "Slayer." Slayer was a satanic group. They sang about Auschwitz. A long time ago punks thought that was stupid, but at this show they liked it. I couldn't understand how they could say there was no God but there was a devil. I thought both were myths. "That's stupid," I said to John.

"No, that's cool--check out his earring."

"It's stupid," I said.

"You're stupid."

"It's a stupid thing to argue about," Mike said.

John and I smiled at each other.

The opening band was setting up. They all had long hair, just like Slayer-Man. People gathered close to the stage. The skin-heads stood back. They were the elite, tough-guys of the scene. The skaters avoided them.

"Hello?" A voice came through the amplifiers. "Check . . . one . . . two . . ."

Someone from the audience shouted, "Shut up and play."

The singer shouted back some obscenities--a typical exchange.

The guitarist hit a chord--low, distorted, and grating--and let it fade. Then the drummer hit the snare four times, the singer screamed "go," and the music started.

Everyone crowded in front of the stage, but there was no pit. The pit was a circle of people who would bang into each other, moving basically counter-clockwise in synch with the music. Other people stood in a ring around the pit to keep it from hurting anyone. If someone fell, everyone was supposed to help him up and re-join the slam-dancing. Since there was no pit, that meant no one really liked the opening band. At the end of the set, the singer said, "Stick around, G.I.'s up next." Government Issue, the headlining band, was pretty popular.

During intermission, I sat down with Pete in one of the corner booths. Mike smoked and talked to the opening band as they packed up their equipment. John was talking to the Skate Betty. Her boyfriend stood by, probably afraid he was going to have to fight.

"What do you think of that girl John's after?" Pete asked.

"She's stupid if she falls for his lies," I said.

"You don't like him?" Pete asked. He was a newcomer to our little circle.

"He's okay. He lies a lot. Mostly to girls."

"Well, he gets what he wants."

"Not in the long run. He talks big, but he gets himself into a lot of trouble."

"With who?"

I felt like saying "me," but I didn't. That would have been stupid. We got along pretty well most of the time. "A lot of people. He's pretty cool, though." I felt bad about talking behind his back.

I lit another cigarette. John had his arm around the Betty. They were making fun of her boyfriend. Mike sat down next to me and said, "Guess what I got."

"What?"

He opened his jacket and showed me a little plastic bag of marijuana in his inside pocket.

I shrugged.

"I'm not trying to piss you off man," he said. "I know you don't smoke it. I'm just sharing my new pride and joy with you."

"Doesn't bother me. I just don't do it."

"That's more for me."

We both laughed. Pete looked confused. He didn't understand.

"Who'd you get it from?" I asked.

"One of the dudes from the opening band," Mike said.

I hated druggies, but Mike was an exception because he was my friend. I knew it was bad to have exceptions, but I couldn't help it because I liked Mike too much. Besides, he had always smoked dope, even before he got into hard core. It wasn't a social thing for him.

Pete watched John, who was kissing the Skate Betty. Her now

ex-boyfriend was with another skater. It was silly and depressing at the same time.

I lit a new cigarette. So did Mike. Pete asked to bum one. G.I. hurried to set up. Slayer-Man was working on another beer. I wondered why the club sold them to him; he was obviously under age.

I finished my cigarette and lit a new one, but I was starting to hate the smell of sweat, smoke, leather, and beer all around us. I started to say, "This is annoying," as I turned to Mike, but he would have asked what I was talking about. I only said, "Thi--"

"Check." A new voice came through the amplifiers. "One . . . two . . ." The bass player hit some notes. We moved towards the stage and stood with the people who were forming the circle that would be the pit. Slayer-Man, drinking a beer, was right in front of the stage. The singer stared at him with distaste. The band members appeared to be the most normal people in the place. That made them weird. It was always that way at the shows.

"The opening band sucked," I said to Mike.

"Badly," he answered, nodding.

The music started, and a pit formed instantly. The skin-heads were the first ones in, and then came Mike and I. We banged around. A lot of other people came in, but it didn't hurt to bang into them. As I swung around with the crowd, I saw the skaters and the metal-heads keeping their distances. John was still making out with the Skate Betty. Slayer-Man was still in front, away from his friends, trying to avoid getting knocked over.

The first song stopped, but the pit didn't. That's D.C. hard core, I thought, feeling better. Faces flew by, but I knew they were the ones standing still. Another song started, just as fast.

I had smoked too much. Exhausted, I came out of the pit and stood along the edge. Most of the others did, too. New people went in. Slayer-Man was swinging his whole upper body forwards and backwards, but out of synch with the beat. "Look at Slayer-Man," Mike laughed.

I laughed too. I stood just outside the pit to help keep it in place, and I noticed that people were punching each other as they danced. I thought maybe they were just friends playing around until one of them, a skin-head, pushed a skater down and kicked him in the face. I jumped back in the pit to see what was going on, but everyone stopped slamming when the skin-head picked up the skater and punched him. He was the Skate Betty's ex-boyfriend. She was up on the stage, laughing.

The pit started back up, and the band had never stopped. The skater fell down when the skin-head bumped him again. No one bothered to pick him up. As I went by, I pulled the almost trampled skater up and pushed him out of the pit to where he would be okay. The crowd pushed him back in, to where he would get hurt.

Slayer-Man tried to slam for a second. As I swung by him, he pushed his way out of the pit. I waited until the song was over to walk to the edge, where I could talk to Mike.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

"Don't know," he said.

"Any ideas?"

"Well, I know the skater didn't do anything." Mike saw that I was getting angry and cut me off. "Don't worry about it."

"They'll shut down the show."

"No, they won't. No one cares about one skater."

"I know, but they shouldn't be hassling him."

Mike shrugged.

The metal-heads were in the pit then. They didn't know how to slam-dance, and they messed up everything. The pit wasn't going in a circle anymore; it was just leaning back and forth, like a crowd of people walking left, then right, and swinging their fists with no rhythm. The pit, while never organized, was supposed to flow in one direction. "That's a weird pit," I said.

"It always ends up that way," Mike said.

"It's the metal-heads."

"I know."

"They're stupid."

He shrugged.

Someone fell down in the pit. No one helped him up. I thought about going in to get him, but he was in the middle, and I didn't think I could reach him. I tried to see who it was, figuring it was the skater. I saw him for a second, and it was John, trying to get out. He couldn't.

"That's John," I said.

Mike just stood there.

I pushed my way into the crowd, almost falling on top of John. I grabbed his arm, pulled him up, and pushed him out of the pit, hard. I wasn't sure if I was angry at him or just in general.

Slayer-Man swung around next to me, his hand hitting the side of my face. I pushed him. He gave me a thumbs-up. I looked back angrily, thinking, what? Do you think that's cool? He swung around again, and my eyes focused on his stupid looking, dangling earring. I grabbed it and pulled. It came out easily and quickly. First I could see the tear in his earlobe; then his whole ear was covered in blood. He screamed, reaching for his ear. He didn't know I had done it, and since I had dropped the earring, he couldn't have proved it anyway. The song was over. He left the pit and headed for the bathroom. Last time I see you at a show, I thought, as I eased out of the dissipating pit.

No one seemed to notice Slayer-Man. It made me happy to think no one cared about him, but it bothered me in a way.

"That's it. Goodbye," the singer said through the amplifiers, and everyone filed out as the band packed up.

Outside it was darker and colder. The skin-heads were banging the skater's head into the wall just across the alley from the entrance to the club. I walked by the violence and continued up the alley until I was out on the sidewalk. John slouched in front of me with one arm around the Skate Betty and the other raising a beer can to his lips. I looked at it and then at the zit on his forehead. "I thought you were straight," I said.

"Only sometimes," he said.

His drunken girlfriend giggled.

I put my hands in my pockets and stared at the skin-heads with the screaming skater. "That show sucked."

"No way, man," John said.

I got angry fast. "What do you mean? You almost died, man." I pushed him hard. His beer spilled on his pants, and the Betty fell down. She struggled to her hands and knees, then dropped down flat, giggling stupidly again.

Mike and Pete were coming in our direction. The skin-heads were laughing. The skater was screaming.

"What's your problem?" John asked.

"What's yours, man?" I pushed him again. "I had to save your ass, and you think that was cool?"

"What's the problem?" Mike was next to me. He lit two cigarettes and gave me one.

"He's being obnoxious," John said, pointing at me.

"The scene's dead," I said. "Even in the pit no one picks you up when you fall. There's no unity anymore."

Mike put his hands in his pockets. "No unity?" he asked. "Maybe, but no one but you cares."

I looked at Mike and then off up the street at Slayer-Man walking away with his metal-head friends. He held some wadded tissues to his ear.

"And besides," Mike said, "who's pushing who?"

John had gone up the street with the Skate Betty. They were kissing. The skin-heads were gone. The skater lay on the ground. Everyone just walked past him, as I had. I looked at Mike. "Sorry," I said.

He slapped my shoulder. "Just do your own thing, man," he said, "your own thing."

I glanced at the skater, then back to Mike. He shrugged, and I went over to the skater. He tried to get up, bleeding from his nose and a cut in his forehead. "Come on," I said, reaching down and taking hold of his arm. He pushed me off.

"I can get up by myself," he mumbled, and staggered up the alley. I followed him as far as the sidewalk and watched him stumble off in the direction of the metro station.

Mike put his hand on my shoulder and said lightly, "There's unity for you." I turned to face him. "Come on," he said; "let's go."

We pulled John away from the Skate Betty and walked to the car.

Sam Ruddick

Vienna, Va

James Madison High School

Mrs. Bernis von zur Muehlen

Death on TV

There is sex on TV for the voyeur inside all of us. There is violence on TV for the aggressor inside all of us. There is laughter on TV for the child inside all of us. And then there is death.

Picture this familiar scene: cops and robbers are in a shoot-out in a deserted parking lot, running and dodging behind cars, popping up every once in a while to send a bullet on its hopeful trajectory towards an enemy's person. Let us say that one of our heroes (a cop, of course) lucks upon an accurate shot and hits a bad guy in the chest. Said bad guy collapses to the ground with a brief grunt, a momentary expression of discomfort; eyes close and gun falls from hand. One, two, three. It takes less than a half-second for the camera to lose interest in this process before it moves on to the rest of the ensuing battle. The good guys win and the actors go home.

But wait, stop! They never told us what the unfortunate bad guy's name was! Do we care? We don't even know if he has a family or a wife and kids. Does he have friends? Is there not anyone who will pause and mourn for this poor extra with a plastic packet of ketchup burst all over his washable shirt from the costume department? No one will mourn. He isn't real. He isn't even listed in the credits.

I resent being assaulted and anesthetized on a regular basis by death stripped of drama on TV. There are no tears shed when an anonymous bad guy is killed in a big-production shoot-out. Are we allowed to see his loved-ones and the crippling loss they suffer after the funeral? No, we are set up to accept his death with an almost clinical distance, a numb coldness. We have come to believe that his death is not only insignificant, but routine.

I have become so that I don't blink when I see someone on TV get hit by a bullet. Because I know the consequences. If they are heroes, they will grit their teeth valiantly, go to the hospital, and heal glamorously. If they are villains, they will die an instant death unworthy of watching for more than half a beat of the soundtrack. We must ritualistically swallow the cartoon notion that death is impermanent, that somehow you die and you just go to the next cameo appearance on another network. This is, in a word, obscene. How many people in the world do you know who aren't worthy of being listed in someone's credits?

This week, one of my best friends died in a violent car accident. He was not driving. The driver slid off the road and into a lake where all of the passengers in the car drowned unceremoniously. The rage, the frustration, the pain, and the loss have devoured a hole in me. It is spreading and gnawing on my heart with the slow realization that I cannot change channels. Grief has no commercial interruptions.

Miami Vice never prepared me for this.

Chad Clark

Rockville, MD

Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School

Ms. Marilyn Alberts



John Branson
Middletown High School North
Claire Doyle

Music Drops

*We sat on a tree branch, rough,
and watched red ants climb over dead flowers.
I smiled at him, who laughed back,
a quiet laugh. We were waiting for the rain.
Drops fell. We watched them through the
green lace over our heads. "Run!" we shouted,
darting out into the downpour. The rain,
drops falling close but like petals, coated us
with dancing, washed us until we stopped, skidded,
fell back and rolled wet down the mud hill.*

*We lay back, staring up at the cloudy sky,
music in the moistness, waltzes and two-steps,
floating around and throughout. I looked at him;
a smile died on my lips.
We walked home, coated in mud, clothed in grins,
and parted at my door, waving in the quiet
complacency of knowing it would always be
the same: summer, music, magic. I opened
the screen and called out to the darkened rooms.
The rain followed me in, and smoothed away the silence.*

Emily Stubbs
Summit, NJ

The Untold Story

*In every car window, I am a flattened
piece of paper, my face an unwritten
poem. They tell me I'm not made
of paper but I don't believe them.
In every car window, I am a story untold.
I am a future of pretty words
and dark minutes. I'd even play guitar
if my hands were bigger.
But they're small, made of paper.
Fragile enough to feed
a city of cannibals.*

Alissa Quart
New York, NY
St. Ann's School
Martin Skoble

Sandy

I cleared a rectangular-shaped space of window with my sleeve so that I could look out. The picture window was fogged up. It wasn't because it was cold outside, but that my mother's endless cooking had laid a thin mist on the window.

"I wish they'd hurry!" My words clouded my view again. "S—A—N—D—Y." I spelled the name as my index finger traced the letters in the steam. The block letters were big and close to the top of the window. Under Sandy, my other siblings followed in order of age. I wrote Samantha in my most elaborate handwriting. It was proper that she came directly after Sandy; they were always together. Next I listed Christy, Cindy, and Carol—all sharing one huge C. The males of my family followed: John, Herb, and Jim. Laura, in small letters, was nearest the sill. Droplets of water streaked down the window connecting them all—Laura was illegible. I erased my family's names with my sweater sleeve, except Sandy's. The letters were stretched out, but still legible. "I'll try, I'll really try today," I mumbled to myself.

"Laura, come help me with the turkey," my mother called from the kitchen. I watched the edges of the window cloud with steam again. My father sat in his chair and clicked from one Christmas parade to another. I followed the smells to the kitchen.

The turkey lay in its metallic pan. Its skin was the color of the desk tops at school—that yellow-orangish color—but with no graffiti. Its skin felt like the desk tops, too—cold. But it was a little clammy than the desks. Only I could find something on Christmas break to remind me of school.

"Hold this flap up so that I can stuff it," Mom instructed, a wooden spoon ready to dive.

"Mom, do you think the girls will like their gifts? From me, I mean."

"Of course they will! One, because you made them; two, because they're from you!"

"I wish I had had more money. I wanted to buy you that book and then there were my friends. . ."

"I know, dear. They know that you've quit work since you've made the play. They'll love the plants. There! I think ole Tom Turkey's ready for the oven!"

"Hey, Jo!" a voice called from the other room. I knew it was Herb's—he always called Mom by her name. Mom automatically poured him a cup of coffee—black, and I put Tom in for two o'clock. I didn't see why we had to name our food; I felt as if I was cooking an old family friend.

As I ran out of the kitchen, I was confronted by a walking stack of gifts. "Grab the top box, Laura!" shouted a voice from behind the packages. I did, revealing the curly-haired head of my brother Herb. He usually looked like Mom's side of the family. She's part American Indian, so half of my brothers and sisters had black, straight hair, while the rest of us were fair. Herb had obviously gotten a perm. "The top one's for you," he said; the rest of the gifts tumbled onto the dining room table.

"Hi, ya'll!" Samantha and her husband walked in. "Oh, Herbie!" she screamed in her fake country accent. She was the only one who could get away with calling Herb—"Herbie." Except Sandy. She could get away with anything.

"Jeez, Jo, tell me Carol isn't coming today. I can't stand her preaching, and why the hell did she have four kids!" Herb said.

"Yes, she's coming. I can't exclude her. She's a part of this family, too," Mom said as she handed Herb a package wrapped in traditional red and green paper. Its tag said it was from: "Mom, Dad, and Laura," but Mom had bought him the sweater.

Carol arrived next. Having sung at church that morning, she was still in her special Christmas dress. Her four boys looked identical to their father in their tiny, three-piece suits. I knew before the day was over that she would be furious with Herb and Jim for their language, and appalled by what she called my "dwindling relationship with God." Mom always said Carol was

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"purely good"; Dad called her "angelic." I guess she made us all feel a little guilty for not being as "purely good" as she was. Most families have a black sheep of the family--someone who doesn't fit in because of their wildness; we had a white sheep.

Cindy and her family arrived next, just as Christy and her family did. Christy was in a new, shiny wheelchair. She had a crippling disease, but Sandy said it was just her nerves. I wish Sandy had been there the fifteen minutes it took to get the metal chair up the stairs and into the house.

Jim and his family arrived soon after. If he hadn't been 6'4" and skinny, you would have thought he was St. Nick himself. He had on the fake beard and felt hat, and carried a large red sack. He was missing the red Santa suit and the extra pounds, but he made up for it with Christmas spirit. His daughter Katie, wearing a tiny felt hat, was on his back. Jim's wife and son were hidden behind him, but we all knew they were there. Adam's cries made his attendance known. He always cried at family gatherings. I said it was because our family was scary. Everyone else said it was because he didn't see well. For a while, we thought he was going to be blind. Except Sandy. She said that we were all exaggerating, that he could see okay.

Sandy, arriving next with her children, burst through the door. Her son Scott, who's a year older than I, had brought his girlfriend . . . again. She seemed to show up at all the family gatherings, and she annoyed me more with each visit. Mark didn't come. It was the first Christmas in my life that he hadn't been there. I really liked him, too, and never understood why he married Sandy. He was one of the few people who would take the time to talk to me. I guess divorce creeps into every family.

"Here, Mom. I brought you that 'Birth Order' book I heard about on Oprah. It explains why the oldest in the family is more knowledgeable, the middle children are insecure, and why the youngest is usually spoiled," Sandy said. I really appreciated her analysis of my character. I didn't ask to be born last.

My nephew Scott and his girlfriend were asked to sit at the table. I realized that it would have been impossible for all of us to have sat at the table, but Scott was only one year older than I, and he had always sat with the adults. Maybe I made too much out of it, but I never got to eat with my brothers and sisters, yet my nephew did.

Mom used what she called the "good" china. There were too many for us all to use the good plates, so the kitchen crew got to use the day to day dishes. They allowed "us kids" to get our food first--so we could get out of the way. Scott and his girlfriend were already seated at the table. I tried to hide the crack in my plate with my stuffing--unsuccessfully. The crack went from one edge all the way to the other.

"Stop playing with your food," Scott ordered me. I hated it when he acted like he was twenty years older than I. I just glared at him and threw the spoon back in the heaped hill of stuffing.

I walked into the kitchen. Carol's four identically-clad boys stared at me from the other side of the picnic table Sandy had set up for us. They had napkins neatly tucked in their collars. I took the seat next to David and closest to the door. That was intentional. I could hear the conversation in the dining room. As I strained to hear what Scott was saying, I watched intently while my nephews tore their napkins from their tiny collars and hurled them at each other.

"Yeah, our record is 4 and 0. I'm the first string quarterback," I heard Scott say from the other room. From the silence I could tell everyone was interested. Herb, Jim, Mom, Carol, and, of course, Sandy, had gone to his last game. Mom had come to my last play. I wondered who would come to the play I was doing now. Probably Mom.

Glancing across the kitchen to the refrigerator, I saw one of my many plants overturned on the top. Some dirt had mixed with water and had streaked down the side. Another was on the stove top--its leaves wilted and droopy. I had worked hard on the presents; first, buying the pots and fertilized dirt. Then snip-

ping Mom's plants to let them grow in water before planting them. I finally tied red bows around the pots, and attached name tags. I had given Sandy the best one.

They had all thanked me for the gifts, but I noticed that a few looked at me strangely.

"Laura! You've hardly eaten anything," Mom snapped at me. Christmas dinner with the Ellis family was over.

"Well, if you're not going to eat, you can at least help us do the dishes," Sandy said, throwing me a dish towel.

There was a lot of busy conversation, but I wasn't paying attention. I was drying the dishes Carol was handing me. I held up the glass John usually drinks out of at Christmas. The light shining on the wet glass made everything fuzzy to my eyes. John hadn't come to dinner and I missed him. Sandy had used the glass today. My still unfocused eyes watched the glass slip from my hands.

The broken pointed edges looked like the peaks of mountains. The floor tiles were magnified through the shards and the tiles looked kaleidoscopic.

"Well, don't you think you should clean it up?" Sandy asked sarcastically.

"Yes," I answered her. She was always the one to tell the rest of us what to do. I guessed it was something that came with being the oldest. Perhaps it has been written in a "Birth Order" book.

"Well?" she made quick glances from the pile of glass to me, motioning wildly with her hands. To my surprise, I didn't move. She stated her question again with the sharp movements of her body.

I went over to the pantry and brought out a small broom and dust pan. I kneeled to the floor to make sure all of the glass was picked up. Sandy had once again started the conversation.

"Anyhow, I heard that you can lose twenty pounds in a week by eating celery with every meal . . ." she started, but I didn't hear the rest of what she said. My glass was now reunited in a dust pan, soon to join with the peels of Christmas fruit in the trash can. "And I heard that carrots are just as good . . ." she continued. I wished that she would stop watching Phil Donahue so much; sometimes I thought she was his personal secretary.

"Laura, aren't you going to put away your broom?" Sandy sneered. It leaned against the wall, its handle camouflaged by the same color paint. "I mean, you are finished with it, or are you planning to break something else?" she asked rhetorically, as she smiled to my sisters. They laughed nervously. I felt like Cinderella. At that moment, I wanted to pretend Sandy was my evil stepsister. I even contemplated telling her to hop on her own broomstick and fly away from me. But the words "You witch!" were batted down by my tonsils before they escaped, and I put the broom into the pantry.

I leaned in the kitchen doorway. The chipped paint in the door frame revealed the first coat from twenty years ago.

"Laura, why don't you go play with Carol's boys. We're not talking about anything that would interest you," Sandy said. No, probably not. But I highly doubted Carol's six-year old son would be a more suitable conversationalist. I turned my head to see two smiles that should have been in Colgate commercials.

I followed the boys out of the kitchen. "Go play," I ordered, placing a shiny quarter in each small palm.

Hoping to find some "real" conversation, I made my way to the living room where my male relatives sat. As I walked by the dining room table, I grabbed a handful of Hershey's kisses from a Santa-shaped dish. They looked like bells, wrapped in seasonal red, green, and silver foil.

My dad sat in his chair, smiling. He does that once a year--at Christmas. I plopped down between my brother-in-law and David. That's one thing that always bothered me, I was too young to talk with my sisters, but he could talk to the men and he was younger than I.

"Yeah, yeah. They got the first down. If that official says they didn't, he's full of it. They should rip off his stripes," Dad yelled,

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his dentures making their annual appearance.

David opened his mouth to comment, but Mom burst in.

"Well, we have apple pie and pumpkin pie with your choice of vanilla or strawberry ice cream. I'm taking orders!" she said, raising a fist of spoons.

Yells of strawberry and vanilla surrounded me. What a wacky family, why couldn't they have had a normal flavor of ice cream, like chocolate for instance? That was what I wanted. Was I the only one in the whole family who liked chocolate? Maybe I was adopted.

"Laura, what kind of pie and ice cream do you want?" Mom asked.

"Mmmm, apple pie and, uh, chocolate ice cream," I said. I said it very clearly and loudly, too—just so everyone would hear it.

"Well, we only have vanilla and strawberry. Which do you want?" She handed the spoons to Sandy.

"I want chocolate."

"Didn't you hear my mother? She said we only have vanilla and strawberry," Sandy said. I hated it when she called Mom "her mother"; after all, the woman had nine children.

"Well, I'd like chocolate, too. C'mom Laura, we'll pick up some now," Jim said. He's the only one I really liked. He was going to take me to get chocolate ice cream when he couldn't even eat it. He was allergic to milk.

My plants were scattered around the kitchen. Sandy pulled her coat from the back of a flowered plastic chair. "Help Mother clean up, Laura. Don't let her work too hard just because you're lazy," she said, tossing the empty chocolate ice cream carton in the trash can.

"Yes, Sandy."

Sandy always said there was no reason for sappy sentimentality, but I saw her hug Herb and Samantha good-bye. I watched them all leave from the kitchen.

I lined up the plants on the gravy-stained counter. Had anyone taken their present? Some of the leaves had been broken off. One had had a cigarette butt extinguished in its dirt. One plant was missing. Anxious to see who had remembered, I read the name tags. I knew Jim had taken his. "Christy, Carol, Herb, Samantha . . ." I read out loud, "Cindy, Jim." John had not come, so there wasn't a plant for him. Sandy's was missing.

I ran out on the front porch to try to catch her. I watched her car pull away from the curb. An airplane flew overhead, drowning out Sandy's car. I knew the plane was bringing someone home for Christmas.

Kimberly Farley
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Mrs. Bernis von zur Muehlen

Soldiers

*The old man down the lane
waits and watches,
sitting on his screechy rocking chair.
Like a colonel out of his tank,
he sits with his heavy oak cane
the way he used to hold his rifle,
strong yet gentle,
waiting for the cold, dark air,
scanning the area
for the enemy children*

*who will soon
come marching,
marching,
marching
home from school.*

Brian Cunningham
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Always Alone

I The Recital

Lynn's long, branch fingers glide across the piano. The piano dreams rattling leaves. Lynn cannot see her classmates squirming on the other side. She is glad. She never wants to leave this ivory world.

II The Bus Ride

Lynn sits in the crowded bus. The kid next to her is stuffing candy bars into his mouth. She looks out the window. The moving fences set the pattern of her breath. Her closing eyes open to the squeaking of the door.

III Midnight

Lynn's tears melt into her pillow. The music from the radio coats the room with a waxy film. Lynn tries to remember the feel of sucking her thumb by biting the tops of her fingernails. She can see herself, unable to reach the top of the water fountain, watching the sixth grader's knees.

She curls up into a little ball and hopes she can fall asleep.

IV The Lunch Room

Lynn stares at the corners of the room. She tears her sandwich into little pieces, then puts them in her mouth. She used to have to do this when she had braces. She forgets that she now has straight teeth. Her friend Arain is talking about the green color of the tuna fish. Lynn has learned the appropriate places to insert the Um's and Ah-ha's. She is glad to have time to think about the sky's leaves.

V The Car Ride

The bumps in the car ride are the closing of the waves. Lynn feels like she is at the beach.

"Is Lynn sleeping?" her mother asks her father.

"I think so."

Bobby, Lynn's brother, starts to read a book.

"Bobby, you're going to ruin your eyes."

"MOM" he whines.

Lynn looks out the window. She is walking on the sides of the road. The sky plays the trees' keyboard.

A blue harmony swims through Lynn's dreams.

VI In a Small Clearing

Lynn and her boyfriend, David, lie in rattling leaves. Lynn's eyes are closed. She is unable to look at David's sharp face. She turns away and examines a purple beetle. She notices that it is missing one of its legs.

"I love you," David whispers.

Lynn is miles away in the bottom of the ocean. She polishes the empty spear within her. She holds her breath, hoping to fill her blue silence.

"I love you, too" she mumbles, kissing the waves of dirty leaves. She knows the ocean is her only love.

VII The Ocean

Lynn walks along the ocean's lips, the water drinking the powdery sand. She has become the ocean. Her thoughts float like seaweed through the water. She can see herself walking on the blue horizon. The ocean is a ripping sky. She is on a bird's wing. A seagull sighing is the morning exhaling. Next to the ocean, the sky is alone.

Joanna Fuhrman
Bronx, NY
Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and the Arts

I get this phone call from Darby around six thirty, maybe a little after, when I'm in the middle of dyeing my hair. He says that something got mixed up somehow and his brother's plane is coming in tonight instead of tomorrow.

"He read the tickets wrong or something," Darby tells me. He's calling from work. He's head manager at a Jazz record store on 3rd street. I hear his earrings scratching against the phone when he talks. Nobody knows he wears five earrings. You can't see them through his hair. Darby's got long, smoke black hair that would be really nice if he did something with it, but he doesn't. I think the only thing he does to his hair is wash it once in a while. It's thick and wiry and so heavy it hangs in clumps around his face and halfway down his back. "You know how he is."

"No, I don't know how he is." I answer. I've never even seen a picture of Colin. I know he exists because there's occasional calls to Colorado on the phone bill and he's coming to Philly to spend Christmas with us. I've never had an official guest stay at our apartment before, so I'm making a big deal out of it. I'm becoming housewifey. I've cleaned up the apartment so much over the past three weeks that it grates on Darby's nerves. We aren't really slob, but neither of us are home enough to keep the place in order. There's always dishes laying around, laundry tossed on the floor, that sort of thing. With all the housework I've been doing lately you'd think our apartment was an illustration from *Better Homes and Gardens*.

"He called right after you left this morning," he continues, clearing his throat. "He told me to pick him up at the airport around seven, but with this Christmas sale going on I won't be out of here till at least ten thirty; think you can run down and pick him up?"

"Can't he take a cab?" I ask, trying to keep the black dye from staining the receiver. "I'm dyeing my hair and they're calling for snow tonight and I'm not driving anyplace to pick up anybody."

"He doesn't know our address," Darby moans. I never write him—I just call him once in a while. From the tone of his voice, I would think I'm his last hope of ever seeing Colin again. "Please tell me you're going to go get him."

I stop for a second and stare at the phone, considering my options. It's one of those things that I really don't feel like doing and I don't absolutely have to do, but I feel uncomfortably obligated into. But it makes sense. Colin's coming here on our invitation and I can't leave the guy stranded in the airport all night.

"I guess I have to pick him up," I grumble. "But I'm doing him a favor, not you. I can't believe you waited till now to call me. What would you have done if I worked late tonight?"

"Send you a telepathic message," he says, laughing a little and obviously not worried that I'm angry. We talked about telepathy the first time we met. I saw him when Sonic Youth played the Chestnut Cabaret. He had a seat at the bar and sipped the same beer all night. On my way home I ran into him at a 7-Eleven. I was in back of him at the counter. He bought two cherry Slurpees, handed one to me and walked out. Different. It isn't the kind of thing that happens to me all the time. He was sitting on his Volkswagon in the parking lot when I came out. I said hi. We got to talking about the show, then all of a sudden he comes out with how he picked up my brainwaves the first minute he saw me that I wanted a cherry Slurpee. I didn't have the heart to tell him all that I'd actually stopped in for was a newspaper. Then he said he liked the little silver ring I wear in my nose. Right then I knew this guy was somebody. So I gave him my phone number and three years later, I'm stuck with him.

Now I panic. "How am I supposed to find him anyway? There'll be ten million people in that airport and I don't even know what Colin looks like." In the back of my mind I can picture myself waling through corridors that stretch on forever and being sucked into the bowels of the airport through an air

vent. The police won't file a missing persons report on me. They'll hear the word airport and will know I'm not coming back.

"Don't worry," Darby assures me, talking with his mouth full, probably pretzels. Whenever I talk to him at work he's eating pretzels. "You can't miss him. He looks exactly like me—exactly. He's flying in on Eastern airlines and I wrote the terminal letter on the cover of the phone book. Now I gotta go. Thanks a lot, OK? I love ya."

I don't say anything. He pauses a second, then says, "OK, I hate you. I'll take us all out for pizza when I get home tonight. See you later."

You owe me more than a pizza, I'm thinking.

I get to the airport almost two hours late. The roads are starting to freeze up and the rush hour traffic barely creeps along. Above the city, it must look like ants crawling through an ant farm. I can't find a parking place. Airport parking lots are created for aluminum Japanese compacts. I drive a Chrysler the size of an ocean liner. I end up having to double park over by the Hilton and hike to the terminal building. It's a long, cold fifteen minutes. My entire body is numb as I shoulder my way toward the Eastern terminals. I reach up to push a few long pieces of hair out of my eyes and find I can barely move my fingers. Where my hair was damp from the shower, there's patches of ice.

I'm relieved to find there's only three people in Eastern Terminal D. They're parked at the far end of the wide windowed room along a row of green plastic molded chairs. I kind of feel like I'm on *The Dating Game*. Contestant One lounges against a tall grey pillar in a charcoal business suit. If he wasn't smoking a cigarette, I would have thought he was posing for a J.C. Penney ad. I realize right away there's something about him I don't like. His hair looks greasy, plastered against his head and he smells like he bathed in Aqua Velva. Contestant Two is an old lady. She is huge. Everything about her, from the bush of frizzy, bluish-white surrounding her head like a cloud to her ankles, which hang like sausages from the hemline of her fake leopard coat, radiates an aura of hugeness. It's kind of disgusting. She's the kind of person who takes up the whole room. Contestant Three is a tall, thin guy with long, blondish dreadlocks, bent over a small yellow paperback. I figure maybe Colin's gone to the bathroom or something.

I glance back at the guy in the suit. He's got this lopsided game show host smile across his face, trying to catch the eye of the huge woman, shaking his head in my direction. The old bag doesn't have to say a word. What she's thinking is printed all over her frown. "What is wrong with people these days?" she's saying to herself, twisting her fat legs around uncomfortably. "Why do they go out of their way to make themselves look awful? I hope she isn't collecting money for anything." I watch both of them, somehow bothered that they're looking at me like they are. I don't look exactly like everybody else, so I'm used to getting funny looks, but these two somehow bother me. It's not like they look any better than I do. The guy chuckles loudly and I decide it's time to check out the rest rooms. I'm walking away when I feel a hand on my shoulder, a huge hand.

I stiffen up, whip around—it's the guy with the dreadlocks, I start to look up at his face and stop at his nose. It's the weirdest nose I've ever seen, all sharp and angled.

"Excuse me," he says softly, towering at least a foot over me. "You've got a ring in your nose." "Yeah, so?" I snap back, almost hostile. I've already got two people on my back and I don't have room for another one.

I don't mean to bother you, but you wouldn't know anyone named Darby Farrel, would you? He speaks quietly with a voice that doesn't match his looks. "My brother's description of his girlfriend fits you perfectly."

"Yeah, that's me." I answer a lot more gently. "You must be Colin. Darby sent me to pick you up—he's working late. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to find you."

"Oh, good. I was starting to worry. I've been here since seven

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and nobody's answering the phone at Darby's place." He shakes his head lightly. "Last time I talked to Darby he told me a lot about your appearance, so I figured I better risk embarrassment or be stuck here all night." While he's talking I take my eyes off his nose to study his face. Darby lied. This guy looks nothing like him. He's solemn and pale, wearing jeans with dirty knees and greyish flannel shirt. He's too thin and his bones stick out everywhere. His hair hangs in countless braids past his shoulders, his cheeks sharp and gaunt. Out of the corner of my eye, I see the guy in the suit pointing at us, and this time it makes me mad.

"Welcome to Philly, Colin," I smile and put my arms over his bony shoulders to hug him. It takes him a little off guard, but he hugs me back, his elbow length dreadlocks brushing my face. Now the guy in the suit and the huge woman are straightfaced, obviously fearing we're married or something. They pretend we're not in front of them, embracing each other like old friends. Colin puts his hands on my shoulders, all his braids falling forward.

"Staring through my eyeglasses, I realize shuddering, these thoughts were not eternity nor the poverty of our lives," he murmurs, his green-grey eyes searching my face. I have no idea what he's talking about—he's not wearing glasses and he's not shuddering. I look at him funny so he adds "It's Ginsberg," like that's really explaining anything to me. "Whenever I'm in an airport I think of it," he says, smiling, "but actually it's about a bus station."

I have no idea what he's talking about! I act like I'm checking my watch, tapping it lightly before I ask, "What's Ginsberg?"

"Oh, he's a poet. You ever read 'In the Baggage Room at Greyhound'?"

"No."

"Oh! Well, if you ever read it, you'll know what I'm talking about."

No I won't, I'm thinking. He may as well be speaking Latin since he lost me a while back on how he knows who I am and whatever Ginsberg is. "Did you pick up your luggage yet?"

He grabs a sagging red backpack at his feet. He's wearing Converse low tops with no socks. "This is it. I didn't bring much. And my book . . ."

I start heading for the main lobby, walking slowly. Why Darby told me they look alike is over my head. We must make a great match walking out of here, a tall, skinny guy in ragged denim with a headful of braids and a weird nose, me in a leather jacket looking like I do. People are staring, turning to watch us walk past. Colin's talking but I can't hear him above the crowd until he flips the yellow book in my face. "This isn't bad, actually."

"Yeah?" I say, trying to sound interested. "What is it?"

"Zen. A Zen cookbook, Buddha, Food and You." He reads the title slowly, absorbing the words. "It's got all these recipes and prayers and stuff. There's another volume to it—I should buy it so I'll have the set."

"We'll stop in a bookstore on the way home," I say, sarcasm biting in my voice. The Hare Krishnas must have nailed him when he came off the plane. Colin slings his bag over his shoulder and looks like he's bearing a cross. "They're calling for snow tonight—maybe three inches."

Colin doesn't answer me, leafing through his book. The December air rushes up my skirt as we trudge outside into the weather.

We don't say much on the way home. He doesn't even ask me my name. The only question he brings up is if he can play one of his tapes. I nod and he pops a small white cassette into the Chrysler's tape deck. It's classical guitar music—he says it's Al somebody. He sits staring out the window, his dreadlocks swinging softly over his shoulders. Once in a while I glance over at him to see the outline of his face in the light splashing up from the dashboard. Darby lied. This guy looks nothing like him.

We're almost off the freeway when he suddenly sits up

straight. "Hey, there's a bookstore over there. You think you could pull over?"

He's taken me seriously on the cookbook. I almost tell him I'm only joking until I look at him again. He looks the most alive that I've seen him so far, eyes bright and face anxious; I pull into the left lane and almost rearend a yellow Subaru, thinking I'll give him a break. It won't take him long—he'll see they don't have Zen cookbooks and I can haul him back to Darby without an argument. I maneuver the Chrysler boat through a concrete entryway and along the sidewalk in front of two dirty display windows.

"Go ahead," I say, planning to rip the tape out of the tapedeck as soon as he gets out of the car.

"Come with me." His hand tightens on the door handle but he gazes at me hopefully, almost expectantly.

"I'll stay in the car," I answer. "I won't go anywhere, I promise. Go in and see if they have what you want."

"But I want you to come with me," he says, his face softening so his cheeks don't seem so hollow. "You can help me look. Come on." He opens the passenger door and ducks through, then stands on the curb holding the door, not moving. Reluctantly, I cut the engine and climb out.

Bennett's Bookstore and News Agency is printed in blue block letters across the wall over the counter, then there's a little red tinsel and tinfoil 50 pasted underneath it. The store's having its 50th anniversary. There's framed now-and-50-years-ago pictures on each side of the 50; the place looks pretty much the same, just more faded, more dusty. Mr. Bennett's in both pictures and behind the counter, but he looks the same in all three places, maybe just a little more shriveled up. He glares at us, dwarfed behind the counter, wearing glasses that make his eyes the biggest part of his face. Colin says hello to him and we disappear into the maze of books, but I still feel those insect eyes on me, staring at me. I follow Colin's sneakers, suddenly realizing exactly how big he is. His head is higher than most of the bookshelves. His feet are huge.

The cookbooks are all outdated and I can tell just by looking at them they aren't what he's looking for. Colin gets down on his hands and knees to search through them. I can see Mr. Bennett in the gaping convex mirrors above each aisle. He's sulking behind the counter in a ragged green Mr. Rogers sweater, watching us.

"I don't think they have it," Colin says, annoyed. "You see it?"

"No." I hug myself to keep warm. It's so cold in here my teeth are starting to chatter.

"They don't have it," he decides, slowly pulling himself up, staring blankly across the rows of books. "America," he mutters. "Why are your libraries full of tears?" Then he glances over his shoulder at me. "Ginsberg." I watch him wander down the aisle. This Ginsberg guy must be something else.

"Come here—I gotta show you this," he calls from the corner of the store, peering over the religion shelf at me. I walk to the end of the aisle and lean against the dirty whitewashed wall. The poetry shelf is bigger than he is, and it looks like nobody's touched these books for a million years. I watch him, all braids, angles and nose, stretching up at the shelf, his big hands gripping the top. He looks like he's trying to climb up the wall.

"That old guy looked like he was ready to pull a shotgun on us," I say softly. It's too quiet in here and it's making me nervous.

"The blood shall spurt," he murmurs back, almost an answer, "and the dust shall sing like a bird." He yanks a book off the top shelf and wipes it on his jeans. "Christ, we've got enough dust here." He tosses the book over his shoulder, not looking back. "He wrote some pretty gruesome stuff." He almost sounds like Darby, just the way he sort of talks to himself. I watch him, shivering, as he pulls more books off the shelf—Emerson, Whitman, T.S. Eliot—not looking at his choices. He throws them on the floor in a sprawling geometric pile, then turns to me, his greenish eyes dark against his pale face.

"If I bought you these for Christmas, would you promise to read them?" he asks in his quiet voice.

I'm almost afraid he's serious. "Colin, don't even think about it," I protest. "I hate poetry. Do I look like I read that stuff?"

"Whispering ambitions guide us by vanities," he replies sharply, reaching a huge hand to touch my face. "That's Eliot. You should read some of his stuff sometime. You'd get into it."

"I'll go to the library and check out a couple of his books sometime," I answer, jerking my head away. "You'll have to tell me which ones are good."

"No, I'm gonna buy you a book," Colin insists, his braids swinging over his shoulders gently. "I owe you for the ride. You pick out a book and I'll buy it for you for Christmas."

"No, really . . ." I start backing away from him like he's threatening me.

"If you don't choose, I'll choose for you," he warns, his voice too serious for his face. "Let me buy you something. Which one?" He glances toward the pile, then at the counter. "It's getting late."

The height of the bookshelves and Colin standing next to me makes me feel like a hamster in a cage: claustrophobic. All of a sudden this place feels so stifled, so closed in that all I want to do is get out and get home. So I panic. I grab the book closest to my feet and hand it to Colin, not looking to see what it is or who wrote it. I take off toward the cash register, almost tripping over the heels of my boots.

Colin pays for the book with a five dollar bill. I stand by the door, shivering and sweating, staring out at my empty blue Chrysler. My breath makes a fog on the glass. It's starting to snow. I hate driving in snow. I hear the cash register drawer slam shut, then an angry hiss.

"You with the ring in your nose--I don't want you in here again, understand? This is a bookstore, not a freak show. I don't need no lowlifes like you in my store. Don't come back here again or I'll call the cops."

I turn my head over my shoulder, giving Mr. Bennett a disinterested glance. His bald head glows like a halo in the fluorescent light. I find myself wondering about him, if he's married, if he has any children, how old he is.

"Don't worry," I growl, glaring back. "I'm not planning on it, you dried up old bastard."

I stomp outside into the snow, leaving Colin standing there in silence. My boots make funny prints across the sidewalk. The light from the smeared windows spills out over me like watercolor while I try to unlock my car door. My hands won't quit shaking. The door behind me swings open, closes and footsteps shuffle through the snow. Colin's hands rest on my shoulders.

"Hey, you all right?" he asks gently. He can feel me shaking and his hands tighten their grip.

"Yeah," I answer, not looking at him.

I hear the crinkling of a plastic bag, then "I brought your book. It's a good one. Langston Hughes. He's got this one poem that you'd really like--I hope it's in here. It's about being put down."

"Whatever," I say. I can't get the car door open, which adds to my aggravation.

"Do people say stuff like that to you a lot?" he asks, putting his arm around me.

"Sometimes. But when you don't look the same as everybody else, you're just asking for it, you know? I touch my silver nose ring gingerly. "I still like it."

He nods and his dreadlocks swing like a curtain. "I know what you mean."

I look up at him in the light, beginning to understand what Darby meant when he said that he and Colin are alike. They don't necessarily look the same, but Colin standing here with his eyes real soft I can see the Darby in him, and picturing Darby sitting on the curb with a cherry Slurpee and a cigarette telling me about telepathy, I can see the Colin in him. I believe Colin when he says he knows how I feel. He doesn't have to have a

pierced nose to know how I feel.

"On winter nights, to sigh, half frozen," he recites, looking up. The snow falls on his hair and catches on his eyelashes. "In leafless shades to sue for pardon only because this scene's a garden think on our silly situation and curb this rage for imitation." He shakes his head so the dreadlocks fan out around him, almost making him look like some strange incarnation of a saint.

I fumble with the keys and wrestle the door open, the snow like dandruff on my shoulders. "E-I-E-I-O," I say, just to see his smile one more time.

Chris Melcher
Pipersville, PA
Central Bucks East
Mrs. Marie Kane
Mrs. Marylou Streznewski

Shading

*i went searching the other day
trying to find the right red
i was willing to pay if i had to
but i only found brick red, hard and cold
and the rust of decaying Chevrolets
hot flashy pink, like the whores on the corner
thick burgundy that intoxicates and numbs
and the sickly red-rum of blood dried on a hatchet
no one was selling
or giving away
the deep rich ruby i wanted
they wanted to barter
for a hue of my own*

Rosalind Berkowitz
Baltimore, MD
Milford Mill High School
Mrs. Caroline Lapan

Orbits

*Outside: a string of blue stars
on a hedge, a snowman softly glowing
on the lawn.*

*Cold breaks on your skin
like glass as you leave*

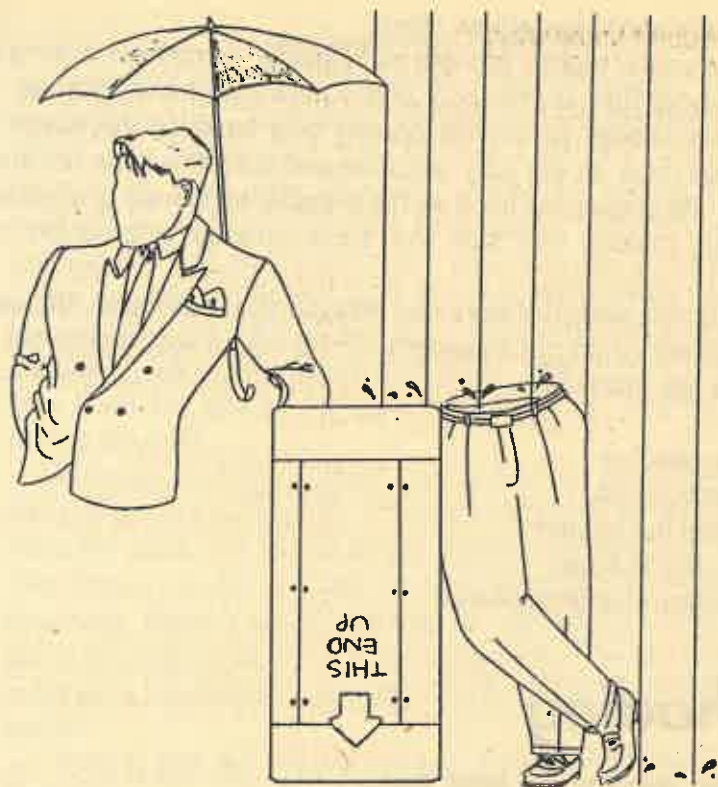
*the year sheathed in white
anesthetized, buried deep beneath*

wet boots.

*Holidays are planets of change
always orbiting back, exuding
the strange singular light
of who you are.*

*And all around, funeral white,
the pieces shedding in ghostly succession
like loose
seconds falling
off the tallest
clock.*

Ian Brand
Long Beach, NY
Mrs. Pickus



Bizarre

Jon Nail
Highland View Academy
Elaine Grove

Reflections on the Vietnam War

*I can still remember
how, when I was three
or four, the kid next door
would push me down
on the lawn and cover us
with a big, pink blanket.*

*This was all, of course,
to protect us from a circling
chicken hawk, which she swore
would swallow us whole.*

But now I know better.

*And I also know that other
children crouched and hid
that day, separated from us
by disinterest in Cronkite
or any other non-cartoon.*

*They hid from bombers,
not chicken hawks (though
no one had taken time to explain
they were bombers and not demons).*

*They didn't yet understand
they were hiding from a war
fought (as all wars are)
on their behalf. Not to mention
that of their children,*

and their children's children.

Ronald Wayne Sala
Gilbertsville, PA.
Raymond Fulmer

The Witch Doll (novelette excerpt)

I last knew my twin fourteen years ago when we went to the Lake Fair on a hunt for the first Barbie doll and the Eagles' first album. Melissa can no longer remember, but I still see the sky brushed with cloud wisps, the squirrels romping across the grass, children limping three-legged races, the ferris wheel, a carousel, cotton-candy mountains, frankfurters, and the heart-dotted shoe lace tying her pony tail. After buying everything except what we wanted and comparing the day's finds, we had lunch on a shady bench. A salt-beaded pretzel warmed my hand. Melissa's tongue rounded the top of a butterscotch scoop and smoothed the sides before it could drip down. I watched her watch the crowd a little distance away, trying to concentrate on its movement so my mind would quiet, but was unable to stop thoughts from nudging it. Lately I had begun ironing thoughts while sleeping. More and more often, they turned toward our parents. Although we had sienna hair and grey eyes like the rest of the family, Melissa and I knew we were adopted. No one told us, but we somehow remembered that the first voice we heard and the first hand that held us was another mother's.

Does my father have a scar like mine over his left brow? I asked the air now. Are people who look alike the same inside? Do half-thoughts, emotions, and sensations combine to form wholes experienced by both? Are they more likely to form friendships than people who do not resemble each other? Does my mother like to suck ice-cubes the way Melissa does? Would she stop me from watching television and calling my friends because I egg-bombed the neighbor's Chevrolet on Halloween? Is my father also fascinated with math because it is a magic he never had to study? I always pictured him running to the call of a page voice to save someone's life like the doctors on General Hospital do, even though I wondered if he was pumping gas off route forty-nine.

Could my parents ever have had the same quarrels or conversations they did when I invented their domestic life in my doll house? Do, or did, they ever love each other? Does that love hold them together now? Do they have any other children? If they do, how could they sign us away before we were even born? Do our thoughts ever cross? Could I have once seen my real parents in a supermarket or train, not sensing them?

My second mother told me she named me Judy because she and her husband first met when dancing to "Hey Jude." What did she want to name me? Or did she rebel whenever we stirred in her? If only I could hug my real mother just once to feel her cheek against mine, smell her perfume, and hear her breathing.

Melissa pressed my arm, startling a half-posed question. I waited for her to crunch the last bite of cone and tell me whatever she was planning to.

"Let's do a clap," she suggested.

"Which one?"

"Miss Lucy's baby." She lifted her hands. I pressed my palms to hers and we chorused, "OOO--Miss Lucy had a baby--she named him Tiny Tim--she put him in the bathtub to see if he could swim--he drank up all the water--he ate up all the soap--he tried to eat the bathtub but it wouldn't fit down his throat--Oh Miss Lucy called the doctor--the doctor called the n-----"

"SSH . . . Judy, do you hear it?" Melissa asked.

"Hear what?"

"That--Listen."

"I don't hear anything except the carnival. What are you talking about?"

"I can't stay here anymore; I have to go somewhere." Melissa leapt up and ran toward the crowd, leaving her shopping bag. A frightened glance over my shoulder revealed no one. I took the bag and ran after her, calling. She gathered speed. I elbowed

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into the bristling throng, muttering excuse-me's while a clown cartwheeled and a popcorn man wheeled his wagon through my path. For a moment, she disappeared. Panic twitched a prayer. "Melissa!" The shout melted in the crowd's monotone. Slow down, slow down, I commanded silently. Don't go too far. Let me catch up to you. I don't want to play this game. You're not playing with me are you?

Melissa reappeared. Pony tail bobbing, she meandered from game table to game table; no longer my sister, only a girl clad in paisley jeans and her favorite shirt, a tee with a menagerie print and a glass brooch called a mood stone which was filled with a chameleon liquid. I was another girl wearing dusty sneakers, a greying rope bracelet, and a candy-cane striped shirt. She wandered from an oak where children sat encircled, their voices rising in an excited babble as they waited for the puppet show to begin. A soda cart was rolled in front of me. Again she ran and vanished into the swelling crowd. I knew the park well, yet was uncertain about where I was because the festival tables distracted my attention from the twisted elm and fifth water fountain, landmarks we designated during bicycle rides. She could have gone anywhere. Elisma, I silently called her by the nick name I gave when my three year old tongue couldn't pronounce her name. Do you hear me? Hear me.

A pony tail waved in answer. My twin was buying a copper bowl. I ran to her. "Why did you--" Astonished, another face peered into mine. The girl's mother offered a suspicious frown and wrapped a protective arm around her child's shoulders. "Sorry," I mumbled, and started to walk away. Then I retraced my steps to ask if they had seen her. Both heads shook no.

Not knowing what to do, I stood in the middle of the crowd, letting it jostle me. Where was I? Wait, weren't we supposed to be meeting Mom and Dad by the gate now? What would they do when we weren't there? Suddenly a frightened loneliness leapt into me. Melissa, Melissa, please answer. Clothes seemed brighter and voices louder. Tomorrow the park would be deserted except for a few Saturday morning joggers racing their dobermans, Nikes thudding the asphalt. String, broken balloons, ticket stubs, and crumbs of hamburger buns would litter the grass. Humming clouds of golden bees would stir the quiet hovering over the rhododendrons. A cool heat prickled my back. People pressed close, then parted as if pushed by a wave.

. . . I was crouching behind a rock, moss wet against my palm. The air hung fragrant with pine sharpened by a freshly fallen rain. Branches scraped an iron-indigo sky and walled the bank of a lake as still and grey as twilight. Finches pocketed the notes in their beaks and the fish didn't dare swim while a boat glided over the water carrying a black robed figure whose face was streaked with red and blue. A wreath of dried roses crowned its hood and it held a black candle. It spoke animal language. Love wrestled hate, thwarting my desire to push the boat down to where a water fall hissed . . .

When I passed the gardener's lodge and the lake, I did not know why I came there or how long I had been walking. My head was swimming the way it does when you jump out of bed half awake. Although I wanted to stop, my legs kept walking until I found a table with the sign Carmody's Antiques taped to it. Melissa stood talking to a saleswoman who hurriedly arranged plastic roses when she sighted me. "M--why did you go--how did--Mom and Dad are going to be--why didn't you wait up?"

"Isn't the dolly pretty?" Reverent longing softened her voice as she reached a timid finger to smooth a doll's curls.

"Yes," I answered.

"There they are!" my father's voice startled us into attention.

"Where were you two?" my mother cried. Relief washed me.

"You were supposed to meet us at four-fifteen!"

"What time is it now?" I asked, bewildered.

"A quarter to six."

The sun gleamed deceptively on my watch. It read four-thirty. "My watch stopped," I said. "I just--almost lost Melissa. She

ran--I don't know why."

"Mommy, look at this doll. Isn't she beautiful?"

I examined the doll closely. Her once white taffeta dress had aged to deep ivory. Seed pearls and ribbons decorated the sleeves; the skirt was flounced. Her gloved hand held a parasol over a bonnet that cupped a face which looked alive. Especially the eyes.

My mother glanced at the price tag. "Too steep," she said.

"Can't you take it out of my allowance or birthday presents?"

"You'd be broke for years, kid," my father apologized.

"Judy, can I borrow some money? Promise I'll pay you back."

"Why do you want this doll so much?"

"Because I can't leave her; she wants to be mine."

"If you want anything, don't ask your sister, ask us," my mother snapped. "And I told you we aren't going to buy this doll because she's over-priced."

"But this doll wants me to stay with her!"

"May I help you?" The saleswoman appeared. Wrinkles branched beneath her foundation, yet her voice had youth's firmness and clarity. My mother smoothed the silk hesitatingly. "I had a doll like this once," she murmured.

"I couldn't help overhearing when you mentioned Miranda was overpriced." Turning to my sister, she promised, "If it brings you a smile, I'll halve it."

My father's brows rose. He examined the doll for the broken limbs and tears, but found none because, as the woman affirmed, it was in perfect condition.

"We'll take her," my mother announced, reached into her purse, and fanned out the dollars toward her. Melissa beamed. The doll's eyes flickered. How to read the secrets in her eyes? Words streamed through my head. Innocence. Wisdom. Coyness. Depth. Mystical.

This is ridiculous, I chided my foreboding. It's only the sun sparkling the glass that makes her eyes look like that.

The gnarled hand took the doll from my father's, patted her dress and cheeks, lay her in the box, and shrouded her in tissue paper. "Take good care of her."

Melissa hugged the box placed in her hands.

"We'll take good care of each other."

My mother thanked her. We walked away with our backs to the whisper.

"Good-bye for now my darling; I wish you well."

That was the beginning.

Evanthia Sikora
Notre Dame Academy
Staten Island, NY

Untitled

*My Grandfather, his eyes pinwheel
and sparkle whenever he reflects upon a more
mobile time (in his life)*

*I turn the ignition
of the family car over and
wheel along the dusty roads . . . that
from the air look like
scars on the furrowed face
of a young boxer's dreams;
who unless he is good enough, to
match fists w/he great Marciano,
will be scarred and punchy before
his books are due at the library . . .
later not sooner.*

Matt Ramsey
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

Circles

"I love you," I said.

There was a long silence, then. My heart beating a little too strongly, I drew my knees to my chest and buried my chin in them, rearranging the phone so that I could still hear—faint fuzzy sounds on the long-distance line from Charlottesville. I wondered if operators could really listen in on peoples' calls.

"I don't think I understand."

I don't think I do, either, I caught myself thinking. I pushed this from my mind hastily, though, as I became angry—the charity, however honest, of my last words drowned in the tacit frustration of all I shouldn't have to tell him—not again. Suddenly I was very tired. I took a deep breath. "I love you," I tried. "There doesn't seem to be anything I can do about that. But I'm not in love with you any more."

(Oh, how long it took me to be able to say that!)

We hung up our phones quietly, with a strange air of finality. My hands were cold. Stop trying to see it his way, I told myself firmly. If you couldn't see things his way so easily, maybe all the pleading you've done in the last year would have done more than go in his right ear and out his left.

The last thing you need is to believe any longer in this relationship. Dead. I reached up to turn out the light, and buried my hands under the pillow.

But that was a long time ago. Today in English we are studying something much less taxing: juxtaposition. I have just decided that less taxing does not necessarily mean more interesting when Blake turns around and rolls his eyes. I smile at him and take it that he is through being a member of our class for the day, but he produces a sheet of paper and begins to write. It doesn't take him long; when he hands me the note it asks only, "are you going riding today?" He is talking about my horse, Springbok. She's a big, young mare with a lot of talent, and while her papers don't belong to me, these past months she's been mine to ride and show. I sigh as I think of the interval training we're beginning today. "Yes," I write back. "Why? Want to come?"

Despite the stale atmosphere provided by the tedious grammar lesson, his eyes sparkle as I slide the note in his direction. Strange eyes, I think offhand. Not blue, green, hazel, nor grey; instead, they are a kaleidoscope of all those colors, and heralded proudly by the boy who has a habit of making the pronoun "I" a lowercase letter. Kathryn tells me he's been through hell, and she should know. "Nooo . . . not this time," the note comes back. "Kathryn and I have to debate. You know, geek practice. Thanks anyway." Its quiet sheepishness makes me smile . . . appropriate, I think, that I should become friends with my best friend's debate partner—though even as I think it, little red lights start to flash in my head, and I remember all last year's stories. Stories that circulated quietly on Mondays and told of the weekend's exploits. Quietly, and somberly; stories that made people, including me, shake my head sadly at the boy sitting and eating soft pretzels at lunchtime. He sat a little bit away from everyone else, and never said a word; back then, his bangs would creep into his eyes and he would leave them there as though he hadn't the energy nor the motivation to toss them back with a simple shake of his head. He traveled with a sadly resigned atmosphere like a brick wall around him, and no one dared try to engage him in a real conversation. We all just left him alone.

My trainer enters the indoor ring without my noticing her. Soon, though, she deserts the wall she's leaning against and catches my attention. "I'm glad I caught you," she says, and I look at her quizzically. "Madera Riding School came to see Spring this morning, and they've agreed to take her tomorrow for a two-week trial. If all goes well, they're going to buy her. You've done a good job." I sit in shock as she turns away and walks toward the barn, looking back only to call in my direction, ". . . don't worry though; they didn't work her too hard this morning. Ride as long as you want."

When I close the wooden gate behind me on my way out, an hour late, I am still in a daze. Somehow . . . congratulations did not seem in order. I did not realize when I began just what would be taken away at the end . . .

As I am driving home it rains, the kind of drizzle that only blurs your vision if you use your windshield wipers on it. So I leave it alone to accumulate, trying to focus past the glass in front of me to get home.

The phone rings and I pick it up. "Hello," a familiar voice says. Time stops. How could I forget? It's Thanksgiving break, and everyone's home from college. I force myself to exhale, and answer. "Hello, Aaron. How are you?"

"I'm fine. Listen, I guess there's a lot of my stuff still at your house. Is it okay if I come get it now?"

After we hang up, I begin to collect his things, which are scattered everywhere. When there's a knock on the door, I know who it is and answer it myself; even so, I'm taken aback when I see him. He walks in, and I lead the way to my room, where I've piled all that remains of him in my home. Instead of picking it up and leaving, he seats himself on my bed and looks at me calmly from across the room. "Come here," he says, "and sit down. I feel like you aren't comfortable with me, and I'm not going to leave until you are."

I can't believe it. How well he makes me sound like the weak one, the one who can't handle this. The final words may have come from me, but I'm not the one who dealt the fatal blows to this relationship! I want to slap him, to scream at him that I hate him for doing this to me. But quietly, my conscience slides in and asks, "Doing what? Being so much of a person despite the change, so important to you, that he resisted?"

I sit down next to him on the bed, and for the first time in two months, I cry.

His friend was standing in the driveway, a little drunk, and I saw him slip and nearly fall on the ice as he approached me. "I know you love him," he was saying, "but you've got to face the fact that you can't impose your morals on other people." He began to slur his words. "It's not right . . . and it's not fair . . ."

I spun around to face him then, screaming through tears. Morals? These aren't my morals—they're society's morals, morals of law . . . they're the morals of the people who own this house! To hell with morals, I want him to stay alive! I sank to the ground then, wishing I had never agreed to come to Aaron's idea of fun while his parents are out of town. Later, though, I saw the sense of what his friend was saying, and I wondered if I should just leave the situation alone: his life to him and mine, to me.

"Well . . ." Kathryn said, "You've got to know that a laissez-faire policy is a decision in itself." It was ambiguous, but I understood her point: It's enabling behavior . . . my attitude, though not condoning his choices, left him free to do whatever he wanted without any resistance from me. On the other hand, by trying to 'save' him, I was embracing all kinds of responsibility not my own. I went to sleep without having made any sense of it.

Sleepily, I picked up the phone at 3 a.m. "You've got to help me," pleaded a barely recognizable voice at the other end of the line. "I can't handle this . . ."

A really, really bad trip. My body reacted before my mind was conscious, pulling on clothes and I asked him where he was, what he was doing. "I'm at home," he whispered, "and I'm scared. I dropped this tab almost twelve hours ago. Still, I can't sleep. You know the poster I have that hangs by the black light?"

. . .

His words drowned out, and I fell back onto my bed. He can't sleep? He's afraid of a poster? And this 3 a.m. call after he ditches me for the night, telling me he doesn't want me around because I only make him feel guilty . . . now, he needs me? Now I'm expected to run to his side?

"No, Aaron." Even to me it sounded foreign.

"I don't understand!" he whined. "I need you. You said you'd

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"always be there when I needed you. . . you said . . ."

"Your mother is upstairs. Tell her your problem. What do you want me to do? Sneak out of my house, walk to yours, sneak in, and reassure you while you cry about some ridiculous hallucination you've brought upon yourself? And this, after you told me you didn't really care if I stayed around any more, because I take your precious extracurricular activity and make you wonder if it could be wrong? Don't you know that getting through tonight with borrowed strength will make it that much less frightening--that much easier to pick up a new tab in the morning and start again?"

His answer shouldn't have surprised me--I'd done it before for him. But when we hung up I was still in my bed, probably just as shaken up as he was, glassy-eyed and scared. I sat there for a long time, ultimately wondering why I couldn't be the girlfriend of the captain of the football team or something.

Aloud, I laughed. If stereotypes were accurate, I wouldn't be here in the first place.

"I think I understand, now . . ." I had begun the letter. "You can't stop; I can't go on. Doubtless, my friend on the phone is wordlessly writing this incident off as one of the two trillion breakups Aaron and I have been through, and, although I meant what I wrote, she is right this time--we will survive this crisis as a couple.

I recognize what I'm doing. Why can't I stop?

"Don't you know the answer? Hello? Is anyone in there?" Like an echo, I hear the question reverbrate but don't realize it is directed at me.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't paying attention."

She looks at me as though she thinks perhaps she needs an iron rod to keep me in line, and goes on.

"I don't understand! You need this?" Ten minutes later, the same teacher is trying not to yell. Blake looks at her, a little angry, a little frightened. He holds his head up righteously, looking her in the eye. "Don't ever let me see you again with Cliff notes in my class!" With that she stalks away to her office, leaving everyone a little dumbfounded. Blake looks at me, and I shrug. Between the two of us, she has had a bad day. Soon, we are both laughing, and we can't stop, and we don't know why.

The shutter on the camera whirrs relentlessly as I shoot the roll of film. Soon, though, I bend over in frustration as I realize something's wrong. I look up as Blake stops the soccer ball with a twist of his foot which, if attempted by me, would leave me spread eagle in the mud. He laughs at the grimace on my face as he walks over, tossing his bangs out of his way. "That's why you have the camera," he says in answer even as he reaches for it. Neglecting to focus, he takes a picture, and while I'm in mid-sentence of reprimand, I remember that the darn thing wouldn't do that a minute ago.

With one swing of my leg, he's seated nicely in the mud.

Kathryn opens the letter from him and laughs as she reads of his most recent escapades. "Good old Aaron," she says. "Always taking the easy way out."

"Ha-ha," I tell her, peering skeptically into the depths of my Coke. In the end I was kind of surprised he even made it to Charlottesville, and college.

She looks up, eyebrows raised, and her smile fades. She raises the letter above our heads, wrist bent, holding it as though it is a piece of laundry fit for a Tide commercial. I laugh and wave the letter off, an action which comes as a mild shock to even me: it doesn't really matter anymore.

What she says about his habits is true, if you consider spending days upon days on Harvard, Yale, and Amherst applications 'the easy way out.' I never understood his motivation, and maybe I never wanted to: to me it was incomprehensible that the same person who was once willing to spend three hours expertly explaining my chemistry homework could find no activity challenging to him besides something potentially life-threatening. He was smart enough to talk himself through the dangers; he was a good rationalizer. Finally, his family caught him--but

he was able to allay their fears with empty promises. He deceived me, he deceived them, and increasingly, he began to deceive himself . . . "I can't say no," he'd tell me, and in the same breath, "it isn't that bad."

In the middle of it, I didn't really know what I was trying to prove. He seemed so perfect . . . but finding someone perfect contingent upon a change is a dangerous thing, and I played that kind of game telling myself I could rescue him when with each day it became more of a lie. But then it was too easy to stay, too difficult to get out.

"Something interesting in there?"

"No . . ." I put the glass down and gesture toward the letter.

"Anything new?"

I don't think I heard her answer, but I guess that's what rhetorical questions are for.

S. Considine Hoyle
Burke, VA
Mrs. Gifford

The Sixth Sense

I've been told it's only fun if you go with something to say. So, I give it a whirl--I haven't prepared anything--but I sit patiently.

"Do you flirt?" I'm asked.

"I don't think so, or not the way most girls flirt."

The pen automatically scribbles something on a piece of paper. Spurts of ink zoom on to the white sheet, though I can't see what is being written. I hope the pen will leak. It's one of those cheap Bic pens where you can see the ink right through the plastic. I hope it gobs out all over his paper and he miraculously forgets what he was writing.

"What do you mean?" he asks the same way he asked me the first question. "What is the way most girls flirt?"

"I don't know, they act stupid. They try to make the guy feel like he's better, smarter, more superior." My original plan to say as little as possible had already failed.

"How do you know you don't act that way?" he says very professionally.

I look around the room at all of his diplomas--from Columbia, Yale, Brown and a diploma from the University of Miami. He's definitely Ivy League material--I wonder about the one from the University of Miami.

"Do you remember any of your dreams?" he stops scribbling and his reflecting glasses are facing me. "Have you been writing them down?"

I have no idea why I am here. His questions sure are clever enough.

"My dreams? Yeah, I recently had this one where I am at my school, but it's not really a school, it's a toy factory. The thing is, all the guidance counselors' offices and all the faculty's offices are in a hotel. Like, you have to take an elevator from the toy factory that leads you into this hotel--where you can go talk to your advisor or whatever."

He nods and smiles. His front tooth is chipped, and I wonder how it happened. He was probably beat up by a gang in fifth grade, who banged his face against a basketball court because he wouldn't give them his lunch money. I bet it's still there in the concrete, the tooth--I mean. He opens his mouth to speak--I want to pull him under. I try to catch him off guard.

"How did you chip your tooth?" I see he isn't a bit flustered. It disappoints me.

"Uh, it's a funny story..."

I'm sorry I ever asked.

"In college, I was on the swim team and we were in the biggest meet of the season. I was excited as ever to beat our rival school. In any event, I had swum the first two laps of the four I was supposed to swim and when I flipped to turn around I hit my tooth on the tile of the pool. Well, the clock didn't stop, no

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siree, so I had to swim the remaining two laps while I was panicking about my tooth. I cut my tongue, it was so sharp. I never found the piece. It's probably still there, in that pool."

"Where did you go to school?" I asked, wondering whether it was Yale, Columbia or Brown.

"University of Miami, and where are you applying?" he grinned, tonguing his chipped tooth, as if I had reminded him it was there.

"I don't know if I'm going to college yet," wondering if anyone had ever found his piece of tooth.

"Well, we still have some unfinished business," he nods and smiles. "Your dream sounds very interesting. I'd like to analyze it, if I may?"

If I may? What an asshole! Of course, he may. What the hell does he think I'm paying him for? No wonder he went to the University of Miami.

"It seems as if you are caught," he's still smiling, "between the adult world and your childhood."

I smile a little, hiding my feelings of shock. I didn't want to give this idiot any satisfaction of knowing that he's given me some insight about myself. After all, I'm paying him to be on my side. I'm discouraged. There's nothing I can do except ask him to go on. So I do, pretending to be apathetic.

"Well," he nods, "I find this the most fascinating, that you seem to put your elders on a great pedestal." He looks straight at my eyes, although I can't see his because of the thickness of his glasses.

"I'd like to have a little more information about your childhood. I think things would make a lot more sense that way."

I'm sure he'd like to know about my childhood. Faggot.

"What role did you play in your family as a child?"

"I don't really know. I wasn't that observant as a five year old." I don't mean to sound condescending, but I can't be nice all of a sudden. He understands. Anyway, it came out better that way.

"What about grammar school? What effect did that have on you?"

"Listen, to be honest, I'm feeling incredibly uncomfortable and if you really want to know about my childhood, I'd like to have a chance to think about it rather than throw you a pile of shit that just comes off the top of my head." I take a long breath. I feel cold and clammy, perhaps nervous, about being so brusque.

He looks up with the same face he's had on for the past forty-five minutes. Then he smiles.

"I can understand that," he says, "and thank you for being so honest. After all, if you can't be honest with yourself, how can you be honest with anyone?"

I want to throw up. I want to throw up the vegetable soup I ate for lunch all over his spotless white carpet. The thought makes me chuckle.

"Why don't we make another appointment and we'll discuss this in detail. Your childhood, I mean, not honesty," he laughs at his whimsical personality and snorts a little. "Is the same time next week okay?"

"That's fine."

"Good, then, I'm happy we've had a chance to talk."

I smile and rise from my chair.

"Please," he stops me, "try to come up with some answers. This isn't going to do you any good if you have nothing to say."

"Okay." I walk out of his office angry. I have no reason to be angry, but I remember that I have nothing to go home to except homework and I wish that I didn't have such a guilty conscience about not doing it. There, that's something I could talk to him about--my guilt complex.

It's an average February afternoon, bitterly cold and incredibly gray. I walk home in my brown boots with no feeling in my toes, because the boots have no insulation. I turn the corner, thinking about my math score on my S.A.T.'s and the amount of English homework I have, when I see a stream of children parading home from their day at school. They walk in clumps; the boys all

wearing brown and gray and the girls in pink, yellow and purple. One by one they pass me, some looking up and some looking away, but each enveloped in their own world, just as I am in mine.

My steps are quicker, because of my eagerness to get home. I pass one girl, who stares at me with a runny nose and her tongue dangling from her mouth. Her eyes are stained with trepidation and I want to hold her hand and tell her she shouldn't be afraid of me. I want so much to tell her how I'd rather be in her place than mine. She continues to stare, clutching her construction paper collage tighter than ever. She looks directly in my eyes, ignoring the branch that smacks her in the cheek as we pass. I want to stop her and tell her not to be afraid. I cross the street so I don't have to make any more children be frightened. It upsets me, because looking in their eyes brings me closer to where they are.

I try to think back to elementary school and recess, and lunchtime, and the square gym with the tiger painted on the wall. I remember playing games when there was no more work to do. I especially remember being teased about my weight, even though I can't quite remember what exact name I was called. I wonder if that is what has made me so self-conscious now, and I feel guilty, thinking that I too might be the reason for someone's low self-esteem.

A horn honks, and I turn around to see my best friend drive by me. She waves and I wonder why she hasn't stopped to give me a ride. I notice my tongue has been hanging out. I wipe my nose with my glove. I start to panic--I have no reason to. Why did she drive by me? Her huge breasts flailed up and down while she pumped her arm and waved at me. I want to go find the little girl who was hit by the branch; I want to become her friend and talk to her about her problems, make her happy, and make her confident. She has passed, however, and so have I.

Jennifer Carchman
Princeton, NJ
Princeton High School
Joan Goodman

The Wall

*we went at night
which made the granite
seem blacker than before,
even though
it still rose and dwindled
like an ocean wave.
my father said he knew a boy
that got killed over there,
but didn't remember the name--
you can't look for them
in the book
without a name.
my mother said
there were lots of boys,
but she had forgotten their names, too.
I tried to read
the poem on the ground,
but it was dark
and words faded
into white paper.*

Laura L. Flippin
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Mrs. Bernis von zur Muehlen



An Endless Race
 Darren Reighard
 Big Spring High School
 Jill Davis

Cartoon Characters

*He was discovered on a driveway.
 Nearby, she said.*

The Hansen's to be exact.

*Victim of a hit
 And run.*

*Felix was our neighbor's cat,
 But he spent most of his time
 Trying to get into
 Our house.*

*Every time we opened the door,
 He'd be there, waiting.
 Waiting to pounce at
 The slightest hint of an opening.
 He'd worm his way through the crevice
 Before we could shut it.
 "Cat Alert!" came the call.
 Mom or Sherry would grab him up
 And out the door he'd go,
 A black and white bundle
 Of disappointment.*

*Felix thought he ruled the neighborhood.
 He was there when we least expected him.
 At night, returning home after a hard day's work,
 We would find him sitting there,
 Atop our garbage bin,
 Surveying his domain.*

*He's buried in our backyard
 Next to Snoopy, our beagle.
 With him in the dirt,
 Is a pillowcase reading:*

"WE LOVE YOU FELIX"

*That's what she told me last night.
 And all I can think about are
 Those cartoon characters out back.*

Our childhood has died.

Howard Stregack
 Silver Spring, MD
 Springbrook High School
 Mrs. Nancy Abeshouse

Shuffle

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His worn beaten high-tops seemed almost to shuffle rather than stride. The slow easy gait contrasted with his quick, darting eyes, brown eyes, that peered from under longish black eyebrows. His hair, too, was long and black. Parted on the side, a few strands hung across his fair-skinned face. Reaching his locker, he worked the combination with one hand. His hands exchanged a few books from his backpack, closed the door with its taped-on comics, music memorabilia, and artwork, and returned to their pockets. His hands, like his body, were thin and light, but strong. He exhaled deeply and looked both ways down the hall. Resignedly, he turned and headed for the stairs that would take him to the bus that would take him home. He reached them, nodding and saying hi to his friends, and began to descend.

"Will!" came a shout from above.

The shuffling feet stopped and their owner turned his head towards the loud scratchy voice. A tan face topped with black curly hair looked down from the landing above. A big white smile spread over Rich's tan face.

"Wait up!" called Rich, and stomped down the stairs after Will. His loafers slapped the stairs as he hurried down, and his large coat slid around with a crisp, crinkling noise. Will turned and started down again as Rich caught up.

"What's up?" asked Rich.

"Not much. Want to do something?" Will was sorry the second the words were out of his mouth. He knew what was coming.

There was a sparkle in Rich's eyes and glee in his voice as the words came out, "Let's play pool!"

The joy on Rich's face was matched by the anguish on Will's. Rich was in love with pool; Will was sick of it.

"Come on . . ." Rich pleaded with hands clasped together, "Please? I drove today. And besides, I have a trumpet lesson at five o'clock, so we won't stay long."

"I don't have much money," Will countered.

"I'll pay."

"Rich . . ." said Will looking up at his taller friend.

"Come on. Please, please, please?" begged Rich, holding his hands right in front of Will's face.

"What the hell. O.K." mumbled Will with head dropping.

"Yes!" cried the jubilant Rich with arms upraised. Will followed him to his brown 1977 Comet. As he piled in, Will thought of the upcoming drive--it was bound to be an experience.

Immediately, Rich lived up to Will's expectations. They had to make a U-turn about two hundred yards down the crowded six lane street, but he was still in the right lane. "This," thought Will, "is Rich's problem. Rich doesn't care. He doesn't care enough to think. That's all it takes, you know. Just think: where do I have to be? Probably bothers you, doesn't it, that all these other drivers are in your way." All this went through Will's mind, to the tip of his tongue, and died.

Rich slowed, and when all the other drivers passed, moved to the left lane and waited to make the turn. Rich was happy he was going to play pool, and the inconvenience, along with inconveniencing a few others, wasn't important. It was important to Will. Will played these little annoyances over and over in his mind. Though the rest of the trip was uneventful and Will talked casually with Rich, he was still annoyed when they stepped out of the car in the parking lot near the pool hall.

Will and Rich each contributed a few nickles and dimes to the hungry meter, then hopped the short wall by the alley next to Winner's.

"Looking pretty spiffy there, Will," said Rich. "Haven't seen those high-tops in a while. Not since you and Liz started going out."

"Yeah . . . I guess," he said, and kept on thinking. "I do have a few new sweaters. But that started even before Liz." Rich, he knew, hated Liz.

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Will looked over at Rich. Though not as well dressed as Will, Rich always looked good. Will imagined that somehow Rich looked better in the white shirt and khaki pants than he could. He never looked overdressed, either. Will often felt overdressed at Winner's.

They rounded the corner, opened the door to Winner's, and walked through the showroom with its stacks of pool tables and rows of cues for sale. Back past the small kitchen where you could get sodas and fries, back past the small cluster of arcade games, was the pool hall.

Will was definitely overdressed, as usual. And as usual, the hall was filled with the same groups of people. There was a small group of young white red-neck hicks, a few tables of young Asians who had never bothered to learn English, and the older black men who could be found at Winner's all day, every day. The air was the tiniest bit thick with smoke, as usual. The only things less likely to change than the above were the posters on the walls or the stains in the carpet.

The people bothered Will. They always seemed to watch everyone else, yet they always seemed to get in everyone else's way. They didn't bother Rich, though.

Rich got a set of pool balls from the register. Will followed him to the table and, after setting up the table, they each found suitable cue sticks off the racks on the walls. Will broke.

The next forty-five minutes would've been the same if they had been forty-five hours. Neither pool player was much good. Will would occasionally get hot, but would more often be equally as cold. Rich played on a consistent level, good enough to consistently beat Will. Will played like they were paying by the minute; they were, but Rich didn't. This meant that Will spent lots of time finding new ways not to explode from impatience.

When it was over, they both would've agreed on one thing: they had done a good job wasting an hour. Neither was overjoyed, however. For Will, playing pool always left him frustrated, and glad only that it was over. Rich was happy, though, having won four out of five games.

The sun was setting in the afternoon sky, and in the shadows of the alley, the wind blew hard and cold. Rich made his usual comment on how Will never seemed to wear a jacket or coat as they hurried back to the car. Although Will felt Rich took too much time warming up the car, his mood was higher now that they were on their way home.

Rich backed out of the space, turned left, then right, and stopped at the light for two reasons. One reason was that there was a red light. The other was that the car was stalling.

"Pump the gas, Rich!"

Rich sat, staring at the dashboard. "Oh, shoot! I think we're out of gas!"

"No we're not! Just start the car and pump the gas!" Will looked up to see a green light, and looking back heard the blare of angry drivers honking their horns.

Rich put the car into neutral, rolled through the intersection from a left turn only lane, and turned right into what he thought, at a glance, was a gas station. It wasn't. Will, who had been sitting with his arms crossed, staring straight ahead, turned around to see a police car lose interest in the plight of the brown Comet. He turned to glance at Rich, who was still staring vacantly at his dashboard.

"Start it."

Rich turned toward Will. "We're out of gas."

"No we're not. The car was cold. I could hear the engine stalling. If you'd just rev it up a bit, we'd be fine."

Rich turned the key in the ignition. The car started. Will exhaled deeply while simultaneously Rich frowned and rolled his eyes. Rich again backed the car out, this time reaching the next intersection and turning right.

"Where ya going?"

"There's a gas station right over there."

Will sat in silence as they turned left and left again. Rich pulled up to the pumps and put a few dollars worth of gas in the

car. He got back in and looked at Will.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"You're not saying anything."

"Just thinking," said Will, and turned to stare straight ahead again.

Rich turned back to the wheel and they started for home. Neither spoke for about two minutes till they neared Will's house.

"What are you doing tonight?" asked Will. He didn't care if Rich knew he was unhappy, but he didn't want Rich to think he was very upset.

"I don't know. Probably something with Jeff."

"Give me a call."

"Sure."

Will opened the door and stepped out. "See ya," he said, and closed the door. Will let out a sigh as he watched Rich pull out of his driveway and head down the street. He turned as Rich rounded a corner, out of sight. Will's feet shuffled towards the door.

Seth Winnick
Chevy Chase, MD
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School
Marilyn Alberts

Untitled

*Oak leaves fall on the river,
drawn to stillness by autumn.
Landing on their stomachs,
they swirl in gentle,
sunlit patterns,
a spot of earth
on the black dusk water.*

*Slowly they circle,
overlapping rotations,
rings of motion traced
on the surface.*

*Around and around.
The leaves sweep the water
and I am reminded
of the rope swing
of my childhood.
Scoops in the air
underneath the oak branches,
my swing and young me
would etch on the sky.*

*It was a time for loud silence
and no shoes.*

*The leaves fall on the river
in sweet whispers today.
The autumn melody of night
trickles from the heavens,
surrounding me,
as full as a pillow.
Beside the river
in earth-toned feather-fall
I am warm and safe.*

Susan Kessler
Gaithersburg, MD
Seneca Valley High School
Ms. Summer Hardinge

Each day upon waking he imagines he hears voices. He soon forgets them as his mind turns to other things. Certainly he thinks of them no more after he reaches to turn off the alarm clock with the analog dial and the hands that hang comfortably in his room at night, exuding a soft and whispery green light. As soon as the day is begun, dream things are put away, pushed back to make room for the noisy morning reveille of thoughts: getting dressed and coffee, starting cars and a day's work.

But this, this routine of waking, is perhaps not the entire truth. On days like today, with the sky (most peculiarly, the exact color of wolf pelts) pulling close to his window, he hears. When the snow drifts deep in Spires Park and the salt clings in wispy tendrils to the clapboard exterior of his house, he remembers. He hears the voices echo along a hallway of closed doors, hears them pad along the uncarpeted margins of a room. He looks out the window (the sky having changed now to a burnished pewter roadmap of a faraway planet) and wonders what it is they wish to say. He imagines they talk just to talk, having no point to make, no axis to revolve around. For this, he imagines, is the way of dreams.

He pulls back the quilt and gets into a long navy robe. He looks at the clock. He has fallen out of the frenetic rhythms of summer in a resort town and settled comfortably into the shambling, eclectic gait of winter. He notes that it is late to be getting up, but does not reproach himself for laziness. In winter, time is a cheap commodity, to be thrown about and stacked in large piles like old and scratched records.

His name is George, and he has the look of a man who has missed success by only inches. In looking at him you feel that if one minute detail had been different, he would be a person much changed, wintering in the sun, traveling in the summer. His soul would be black with newsprint, his face glossy with the covers of magazines. But even so, he is still moderately successful. He owns the Tides Tavern, a dinner-dancing-bar place that perhaps isn't on the cutting edge of fashion, but is steadily popular from season to season. The band doesn't play top forty, and from year to year there are the pretty college boys and girls that wait tables. Each year they have the same look about them. White polo shirts, tanned and relaxed, smiling at the private jokes and intrigues that develop among them from year to year, rippling them like the feathery touches of a waking dream.

There is a certain type of people they cater to. These people are at the very end of their salad-days youth. They are one summer and one promotion away from February vacations in Nassau and condos in a better part of town. This is their last summer of small motels and under twenty dollars a bottle wine. They have the easy, monotonous beauty of those who are on their way towards success and haven't quite realized it yet.

He thinks of these things as he dresses, brushes his hair . . . these things and other things. He again calculates the summers he has lived here. Like everyone else, he marks time by summers, because winters don't count: they are like a mirror-ghost, a mere refraction of something real, something alive.

He steps out of his house about two in the afternoon, swathed in a long black wool coat. He looks about at the other houses, the closed and silent storefronts. Perhaps now there is pattern: in the way the telephone lines crisscrossed each other, in the angles of the many wooden doors, in the rippling snowbanks. Maybe even the placement of the trees is cyclic, falling out in ranks, platoons in concentric circles.

East now, down Commerce Street toward the empty wharves. He passes Cradock Apothecary, which has a sun-faded 'Closed' sign in the window, with the barely legible store hours posted beneath it. On the opposite side of the street there is Bailey's Candies, the shade behind the plate glass window pulled all the way down to the sill. During the summer, people inside the store worked away the day just behind that glass. In fact, there was always an extra fan at the corner of the store,

wafting the scent of cooling chocolates out into the crowded street.

Just before the wharves, he turns right into a street barely the width of two cars. On each side of him there are the jumbled and lightless storefronts, empty like clean glass jars. Twenty paces, thirty, fifty. The way widens a bit, and here, rising above the clapboards and saltboxes is the Tides Pub, white and cathedral-like. It is by far the largest building on the street. This is the back entrance, and it is rather plain, devoid of its sprightly awnings and flowerboxes.

There is a muffled metallic jingle as he extracts the keys from his pocket. There are three deadbolts on the solid, heavy door. He unlocks each one and pushes the door open in a silent wooden arc.

All is the same. The wainscoting and the tables are still fashioned of the same darkly finished rock maple. The bar still has a brass runner and a mirror so ornately beveled and scrolled that it is nearly impossible to see a reflection that forms a cohesive whole. The bandstand is mottled with empty stools and music stands. Some of the tables still have various game boards fashioned in their glossy veneers.

Three o'clock. Due time for Bob to be here, to help him replace a moulding that was rotted by water damage. He knows in advance that not much work will be done. They will listen to the Bruins game on the ancient Atwater-Kent radio (whose reception, George swears, improves during the high cycles of a waxing moon) and hoist a few in honor of another day.

He hears the faint whistling noise of the door being opened, hears Bob's voice.

"Hey there, sailor, whatcha doin'?"

"Checking out the lassies, of course," George says, sweeping his hand out along the horizon, inviting him to survey the cavernous and deserted dining room.

"I should have guessed. I knew all along the captain was a ladies' man."

"That's right. Ready to swab the decks?"

"Yup. Got that extra moulding and a router in here," Bill says, rattling his red metal toolbox.

Later, after an hour, after the small job is finished, they sit down to a table in front of the large window. The table has a chess set inlaid in the dark surfaces of the veneer. George retrieves the jade chess pieces from the mantel of the fireplace, then turns them out slowly, putting them in their correct places. He thinks, as he often does, of people who play chess by mail. The idea pleases him, the thought of two chess boards in two houses, their configurations exactly the same, the movements happening slowly like the movements of a fading summer sun into autumn.

The radio murmurs sibilantly behind them, sometimes intersecting with a spat of metallic static. Above the mantel, cut into the stone, there is a tide clock whose muffled tickings are like a metronome, marking out the tiny rhythms and cadences of the day.

"Good game, huh?" Bob says, cocking his head towards the radio.

"Pretty good. Still, it's not the same. There's no more Bobby Orr, and now they play with helmets on."

"Yeah. Remember the time we went to the game?"

"We went to more than one game."

"You know which one I mean."

"Yeah, I do," says George, setting down his glass.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"You're never going to tell me, are you?"

"Why are you so interested?"

"Curiosity's sake. I never knew you to keep quiet so long about something."

"Curiosity killed the cat."

"Satisfaction brought him back. Spill it."

"Hell I will. My life ain't a glass of beer."

(Continued on Page 38)

A spattering of applause emanates from the radio. The sound of skates cutting ice spins out into the room, flat and one-sided.

"It's a long time ago. It doesn't matter anymore."

"You and I know that's a lie."

"So you know I left with her that night. What's the big deal?"

"You never saw her again after that, did you?"

"Romance don't last."

"I don't see you hopping out to find somebody new."

"I'm getting old, Bob."

"White hair don't mean anything! Aw hell . . . I don't feel like arguing. You feel like arguing?"

"I haven't felt like arguing all evening."

"I'm an old fool. Get me another beer."

"Coming right up."

After Bob leaves, he makes his way slowly around the room, checking the bar and the windows, pushing in chairs. It is only now that he thinks of her, tracing with her finger the edge of an empty cocktail glass, her summery dress brushing the border of a white tablecloth. Some seasons she would stay at the Drifter, other seasons at the Ashworth. He can remember her going out to the little souvenir stands and buying a child's plastic pail with the alphabet painted on it. She made a sand castle on the beach, but she forgot the pail. When she went back, it was gone, carried off by a child or the rising tide. Those summers he too went to the souvenir stands, something he rarely did; he bought her a silly straw sun hat with fruit on it. When he gave it to her she laughed, and put it on immediately, even though it didn't match her outfit. When it became ragged she took off the garish fruit bouquet and put it on her dresser.

There are other things he remembers: walking down a crowded Commerce Street with her on his arm, people hailing him from storefronts that are open trying to catch the breeze. Penny arcades and chocolates under glass. Upon turning from Spires Park to walk back down Commerce Street, something unusual happens; all the neon lights flash in unison for a moment and then fall back into their eclectic rhythms. A street performer begins to play his steel drum, drowning out the pitch of a barker selling hot pretzels off a cart.

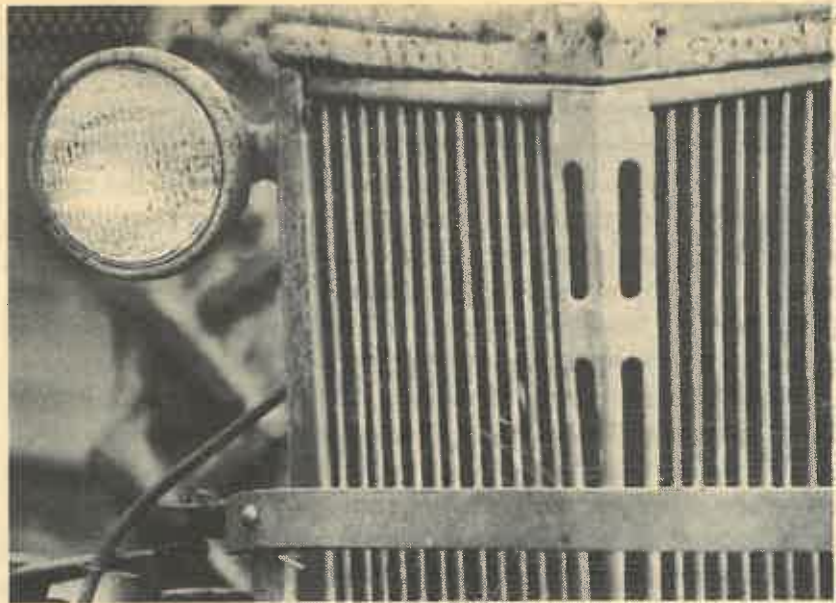
He remembers these things . . . these things and other things as he walks home from his restaurant. When the stiff wind flips his coattails back like a shadowy flag, he recalls what happened at the end of that season, as he put up storm windows and took in awnings and flowerboxes. The tourist summer is over. A postcard arrives from her with some ambiguous message and her signature at the bottom in small, conservative letters. He takes one of the postcards his restaurant gives away for free and writes to her. Almost as an afterthought he turns the card over and looks at the picture of the restaurant. In one of the windows he draws a stick figure, smiling and waving, labeling it 'me' in small letters.

He puts the card in the mailbox the same day he writes it, for the first time reading the little mail pick-up schedule, trying to calculate how many days it will take to get to her.

Sometimes, in the winter, he finds himself wandering in well-lit places. Even now, years later, he goes into the Stationery and reads the insides of Valentine's Day cards even though he doesn't mean to buy one. In the winter, when there is much time to think, he wonders why she never wrote back.

He is home now in his bed. The clock with the softly glowing hands hangs out the time on the hook of the darkness. He is sleepy now and drifting away; the voices of his dreams raise chorus. They tell him that outside the window is the moon, waiting out the night.

Lisa J. Tomlinson
Woburn, MA
Woburn Senior High School
Nancy B. Leverich



John Carlson
Albert Einstein High School

Slipcovers and electric blankets

"I need to have you here."

to have your head

on my lap

telling me

that your sweater stained your socks pink

that the car was spitting out noises again

and sounding like a bee hive

that your speakers are on the blink

and you took them apart and just stared at them

hoping somehow that would cure--

would I take a look?

to have your head

on my lap

telling me

in whispers

of darker fears

daddy's having an affair

he collects shoelaces

only because it's not his job

he's a general engineer

he has general dreams

and children

"NO." I say

as if it matters

"You're no general child."

I need to have you here

feeling safe

in my company

for listening

like we do

is my best comfort--

slipcovers and electric blankets

your blind faith

teaching my night vision

how to climb up

the wooden hill

and

sleep.

Missy Littrell
Gaithersburg, MD
Seneca Valley High School
Ms. Summer Hardinge

There is No Limit to a Ball Peen Hammer

"Okay now class, let's begin by opening our Math Notebooks to the applications of the definitive integra" On my right sits Mr. 800 SAT Math. A veteran of Math League, Calc. Fair, and the North American Algebra-a-thon, there's nothing numerical he can't do. Rumor has it that a Texas Instruments X-1942-B was surgically implanted in his brain. I've spent the last three weeks trying to make out the scars.

"Okay now class, get your projects and get to work." On my left sits Mr. Goodwrench, a Michelangelo of metal shop. Put a torch in his hand or his hand in the forge, and there is nothing he can't do: forge a sword or weld a trailer for his car. Rumor has it that he built his car from a 34 six-pack's worth of empty Michelob cans for extra credit.

And what about me, the poor clod in the middle? I guess you might say that I am sitting on a very pointy, wrought iron fence between the two. Somehow, as if by the whim of Descarte or Newton or Pythagoras (some math god), I have managed to stumble my way over my calculator's keyboard and through Advanced Placement Calculus. In Metal Shop, what was supposed to be my project--a sheet metal toolbox--has managed to become something more reminiscent of an instrument utilized during the Inquisition.

Even though I have decided not to become a rocket scientist or even the mechanic who builds the rocket, my interest in these courses remains undaunted. There are so many differences between them that sometimes I find myself wondering whether or not I am in the same school or if I have been transported to Vulcan's Forge or Solomon's Council.

"Math is such a clean science!" Ms. Limit chirps as she scurries across the room and excitedly erases the blackboard. In her haste she presses down too hard on the eraser and her fingernails, fiber-glassed with Super Glue and tissue scraps to make them extra-long, gouge four neat little trenches in the board as the screech gouges identical trenches in our backs. It's not her fault, though. Math teachers have to stay jacked-up; they must be always ready to jump-start any student, and sometimes an entire class, as soon as they begin to choke or sputter.

"You can't expect to learn anything unless you're willing to get your hands dirty," announces Mr. Peen. No little shop songs, no stories, no frantic footwork; am I still in school? Then the shocker; I glance at Mr. Peen's hands. There, barely discernible under a layer of grease from last period's Auto Shop, is the key difference. All that is left of his fingernails, the half-moons, barely peek out over quickless, calloused stubs: the man has no nails. Working with turpentine and other assorted chemicals, he has sentenced his nails to a much shorter life expectancy than Ms. Limit with her chalk and paper. But that is only a first impression. Twenty minutes later, after sitting around and flipping the pages of my Metalworking text fast enough to make the pictures appear animated, I begin to wonder when Mr. Peen will start teaching. My attention waves over to the arc welder where I can see Mr. Goodwrench enveloped in a curtain of sparks. It hit me. You teach yourself in here! No one leads you by the hand or gives you a kick every time you start to fade; if you want to work, you work; if you don't, you're worth so many blind rivets. And noise! When was the last time a teacher yelled at anybody for not making enough noise? If there is not enough clamor to muffle even a jack-hammer on a tin roof, you are guaranteed to face Mr. Peen's "What are you supposed to be doing?" In fear of just such a confrontation, most of the students are banging, clanging, or slamming something, even if it serves no valuable purpose but to produce noise. Any unsuspecting hall monitor would swear that the 1st Armour Division was plowing through the high school rather than suspect that all the commotion was due to seven men armed only with one 12-ounce hammer apiece.

The students are also so different in each of the classes that

recently the Board of Education sponsored an AFS trip between the two. I was the only one to accept. It's a different world out there; in AP Math, the students are chained to their notebooks; in Metal Shop, wallets are chained to the students. Industrial Arts students leave the course with a mind full of practical knowledge and a completed project under arm. AP Calc. grads? Well, they find themselves asking "Where in the world will I ever use this in real life?" and toting home ten or twelve reams of the world's most expensive kindling. Possibly the greatest cultural difference between the two involves their attitudes toward perfection. For the AP, perfect is a "100%" on a Unit Test or the mystical "5.0 GPA." For the rest of us, perfection occurs every time a hinge slides into place or the screw holes match up. Say you, "Simple minds, simple"? Well, maybe you're right. But I find a certain sense of pride and accomplishment in feeling something works: beauty in its simplicity.

Some of you who may still be prone to instinctively listen to your Guidance Counselor when she says, "Industrial Arts? Now why in the world would you want to do something like that? How about a nice course in Advanced Inorganic Chemistry with Dr. Alkene?" In that case, I guess I didn't succeed in what I was trying to convey and you may all open your physics books to page 74 and read the section entitled "The Absorption Spectra and You." However, to you who are beginning to deviate a little from the yellow-brick road of scholasticism, maybe I did make a difference. Until one has had the opportunity to visit both lands, he cannot experience the feelings of each of these different worlds. AP Calc is grand, a mental brain fry in the best sense of the word. However, to work with one's hands offers another type of fulfillment. And will your future son or daughter ask you to find $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \frac{\sin 2x (\cos x - \sin 3x)}{\sin 2x \cos x}$ for Christmas? Trust me, they would much rather have you build them a rocking horse.

Joseph F. Wajszczuk, Jr.
Madison, NJ
Madison High School
Mr. Joseph Russo

Movers

*I lay translucent
under the pull-up tree.*

*I was here
once.*

Hands yanking up lead bodies

He would do fifteen

I only six.

Bark tattooing my palms with craters.

Black shadow cups.

Across the green sit three movers

Grinning into plastic mugs.

I can feel their eyes screwing into my pelvis.

their hands stray to their crotches.

They lift themselves

wrapped in a regression of boxes

to a truck.

Their muscles stroking the metal dolly.

I watch under the pull-up tree

my hands gloved in dead skin

As the movers

are drooled out of

the aluminum-lipped mouth.

Wendy Roberts
Fayetteville, NY
Fayetteville-Manlius High School
Nan Faraday

Interlude with Sexual Overtone

How many people do you know that go off on a college visit, without their parents, and don't expect to party? Or, if not to party, at least they expect to meet someone interesting. So when Erin and I set off to a big city, to visit a college, we had high expectations. Our trip was long, but when we got there, we checked in and headed out. We walked down the crowded noisy streets, peering in all the bar and shop windows. The window we were looking into when we reached the corner seemed to have a promising view, so we stepped in.

For the people on the inside, the weekend seemed to be getting off to a rolling start. With music blaring and people dancing, we pushed our way to the counter. The room was only hazed with smoke, but one could tell that in a few hours it was going to have reached smog proportions. It could have been a perfect advertisement for complete enjoyment. Everyone was happy. They were all talking and laughing. Even the service didn't appear to be too disjointed with the raucous goings on in their care. They asked for our order and in a sense gave us permission to join their weekend world. As soon as this formality was taken care of, we went to settle in and sit down, but the attractiveness of its popularity was now posing a problem, as there was no place to sit.

After further searching, we did find three small two-person tables that had been pushed together near the front of the restaurant. One of the chairs, at the what was now a six-person table, was occupied. We began to walk toward it anyway. The chair's occupant appeared to be a typical student. He had dark hair that was twisted about on one side of his head as if he had been in the library all day and had spent the last half cradling his cranium so as not to fall asleep. His eyes were not an aggressive blue but when added to his slender nose, they kept your attention away from the way his teeth slightly overlapped. He had a small build, like a wrestler. His feet were fitted with white sneakers which he had propped on the pole that drops from the center of small tables, and his body was pushed back in a relaxed lean. A ripped red back pack was in the seat across from him and a full mug of beer was on the table in front of him. As we approached, he stared straight ahead, cigarette poised in his right hand and eyes unfocused on us. He seemed to be oblivious to our intentions.

Standing directly above him I asked, "Do you mind?" He gave no type of negative response, so we sat down in the two chairs at the opposite end of the table. He looked over, stood up, and began to move all his belongings to the seat beside Erin. During the move he seemed to have come out of his trance and was smiling and motioning to us. He wanted to know if we wanted any cigarettes. We shook our heads as he slid into the seat beside me, putting his hand on my bare knee, exposed by the hole in my jeans. I looked at his face and shook my head negatively. It had no effect. Not only didn't he remove his hand from my knee, but he went on smiling his same silly grin right at me. I had been watching all of his actions and it occurred to me that this man was either retarded or deaf. I hoped, if either, it was the latter. At first I tried to tell myself that my idea was completely ridiculous, but after a few more minutes of watching him stare into people's conversations, my suspicions were reinforced.

I tapped him on the shoulder. He turned, looking directly at me. I took a deep breath, spoke while signing, "Are you deaf?" I expected a complete outburst of laughter, instead, he signed back, "Yes."

Erin had not really been following any of what had been going on until the signing began. Now she was gaping. I began to eat again. He didn't seem very interested in my knowledge of sign. Just as I had lost hope of all further communication, I felt a tap on my knee. I turned. He signed,

"My name is Phil."

I understood. I actually understood a deaf person's signs. I signed back, "My name is Rebecca." It was his turn.

"You want beer?"

I must have giggled. "I too young, eighteen."

Erin asked what was going on as he began to laugh. "I nineteen, fake I.D." Then he put his fingers to his lips and we laughed together.

This seemed to have been a good ice breaker. He signed to me to watch his back pack and disappeared down a flight of stairs which I assumed led to the bathrooms. In the short relief from Phil's presence, Erin was full of questions, mainly to the tune of "What the hell is going on?" I took the opportunity to explain everything that had happened. Phil reappeared just in time to see the end of our conversation. He sat down.

"Are you deaf?" he signed.

"No," I signed and then with some difficulty I went into my story about my sign language classes and my desire to be a teacher. He wasn't very interested.

"Do you live here?" he questioned.

This time I made my answer short. "No, far away."

The next few minutes of our exchange let me know that he was not a student at the college and that he only went to high school. I noticed that he wasn't to graduate until 1989 when he proudly showed me his class ring. He began to look around again. After a few french fries I felt another tap on my knee. I looked over and saw him standing and waving frantically at a man in a brown trench coat standing outside the window where we were seated. The man did not see him and he sat back down.

"That man my teacher. He deaf too."

I nodded. Quite unexpectedly he looked at me again and signed, "I am horny."

I figured that I was misinterpreting him because there are other signs similar to that one-- such as hungry. I just smiled like I understood and turned away.

This time I felt an urgent tap on my knee. I looked again half expecting to see an impatient toddler needing to be taken to the bathroom. Instead I was witness to the most vulgar sexual signs one could ever imagine. Erin let out a slight moan of disgust and asked if she was seeing what she thought she was seeing. I said, "Yes," and she moaned again. He went on signing even more lewdly than before.

After the initial shock of his propositions, I broke in with a definite, "No!" He persisted. I signed, "No!" again. He then pulled a pen out of his denim jacket and grabbed a napkin on which he wrote, "\$45 in a bath tub. I use rubber."

Getting used to this type of thing, I wrote, "You charge?"

He smiled as if he had just made the most enterprising move of the century. I turned to Erin and calmly stated, "He is a prostitute." She started to let out a nervous laugh while he sat there with that perpetual grin on his face. I began to wonder how many people in the place knew what he was and how many of them were wondering what we were doing with him. I looked at him with the most stern face I could manage and signed, "Why?"

"Money," he signed. "500 dollars a week." He still wanted to know if we were out to hire him.

I gave him another, "No," and then tried to explain to him that I had a boyfriend who was away at school and that I loved him very much.

He put another finger to his lips. I suppose being deaf you can also be very secretive. "Why don't you get a job?" I signed.

He looked so wise. He didn't answer my question, but instead gave me a promotion for his profession. "My first time eleven. You be rich too. 400 dollars a time."

"No," was my response. This sign was becoming almost reflex to every motion he made.

He began to get sentimental. "Girls so ugly. Guys hurt so very bad. We go. I pay you. Gentle."

His persistence was aggravating, but we finally reached an agreement that nothing would happen. We sat.

It was my turn to initiate communication. I signed, "Are you losing money because we sit here?"

"Yes."

"Do you want us to leave?"

"Maybe."

We sat.

He tapped my shoulder, temporarily forgetting about my naked knee. "AIDS, I scared. I hate AIDS." He signed, "Hate" again for stress and looked at me for a response.

I just stared at him. This whole afternoon had been nothing like I or Erin had expected. I had expected parties and seas of people sweeping me from place to place, not sitting in a restaurant with a deaf prostitute discussing the relevance of AIDS to his life.

He signed to me again, this time about his family. "I have three children."

I smiled and signed to him that we were going to go. His face sunk a little. He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and fingerspelled, "ADDRESS." I wrote it down and in turn asked him for his by handing him the piece of paper.

As we rose to leave, he extended his hand, which I shook gratefully. He then outstretched both arms to encircle me in a hug. I hugged him. When I straightened up, he was sitting in his chair with his lips puckered. I began to laugh and so did he. He extended his hand again. We smiled and Erin and I walked through the door silently being engulfed by a swarm of people.

Rebecca Smith
Newville, PA
Big Spring High School
Mrs. Jill Davis

When is Ricky Coming Home?

*A ball of yellow hangs
suspended in the blue sky.
The old maple's leaves rustle
beneath the songs of
robins and mockingbirds.
I am
a bundle of energy
fiddling with the ribbon on
my dark dress,
scuffing my patent leathers
in the dirt and
teasing Keith
stiff in his suit.
Then Nana tells me
to behave.
I see the
tearful eyes of
the people gathered here, but
I don't understand
why
they all look so
sad.
The box
is lowered down.
Tiring, I pull on Mommy's skirt
and with my question her sobs
join the songs of the birds.*

Laurel Manthey
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

My father is the largest rock in Central Park. My mother is a pond. She washes against my dad and caresses him with her gentle touch. I sleep near my dad on a bed made of old clothing and even older newspaper. A lot of the time, I sit on top of my dad. This gives me a great view of the park. From there I can see the buildings of the city. They're so faraway and unreal looking--it almost looks like they're part of a movie set.

When I'm not with my parents, I like to spend time with Aunt Sarah. Aunt Sarah is an old lady who sleeps near the carousel. I can remember lots of times when we wandered through the park together. Lately, though, she's been pretty tired, so we haven't gone for many walks.

A few days ago, Sid the Vender gave me two hot dogs. We're pretty good friends and he usually gives me any extra food that he has. I ran to share them with Aunt Sarah. When I found her, she looked really sick. She was sitting on an old green bench huddled under a few layers of clothing. Her brown eyes were closed, and her long gray hair was being pushed into her face by the cold wind. The air smelled like popcorn and the sound of children echoed the churn of the merry-go-round.

"Hi Aunt Sarah," I said breathlessly. She opened her eyes and smiled.

"Oh, Jason, it's you," she said. She began to laugh, her usual content and happy laugh, but it quickly turned into a coughing fit. It looked like her old body would be ripped apart by it. I was really worried.

"Are you o.k. Aunt Sarah?" I asked.

She managed to say, "Oh, yes, I'm fine." But I really didn't believe her.

"Aunt Sarah," I said, "I don't want you to be sick. If anything happens to you, I don't know what I would do."

But she only replied, "Don't worry about me. I just have a cold. I've had more colds in my life than there are trees in this park."

I was still worried, but I wasn't going to say anything more to her about it. Instead I handed her a hot dog and said, "Sorry that I couldn't get any mustard on it for you."

"Oh that's all right," she said, while taking it from me. "Just sit and eat with me--that's all I want."

I couldn't refuse, so I sat down next to her and started to eat.

While eating I thought about how long I had known Aunt Sarah. She found me one morning when I was much younger. I was sleeping with my mom and dad when she stumbled over me.

"Oh my!" she exclaimed. I sat up and stared at her. "Would you imagine that," she said. "A little boy sleeping in the park." I still hadn't said anything. "I wonder how long you've been here?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"Well, what's your name?" she continued.

"I don't know," I answered.

"No name?" she said. "Well I'll take care of that. From now on your name is Jason." I liked the way that sounded, so I just smiled. "Yes, that's better," she said. "Jason, where are your parents?"

"They're right here," I said while pointing to my mom and dad. She just laughed. It was a warm and understanding laugh that made me feel better than I had for a long time. "I like you," I said. "What's your name?"

She continued to laugh for a little more and then said, "You can call me Aunt Sarah."

We were finished with our hot dogs for a while before either of us said anything. Aunt Sarah sat there with her eyes closed, and I just stared at the carousel going around and around. I had been wondering for a while why I didn't know much about Aunt

(Continued from Page 41)

Sarah's past. Finally I said, "Aunt Sarah, how old are you?" She looked up at me. Her eyes were sad.

"Why I'm old enough to be your grandmother," she said.

I continued. "How long have you lived in the park?"

She answered in a faraway voice, "Oh, Jason, I don't know for sure. I feel like I've been here forever." She seemed even sadder--her whole body looked like it was crying.

"Aunt Sarah," I said, "Who was Jason?" She didn't answer. She only stared at the edge of the sky, where the tops of trees were dipped in the glowing red-orange of setting sunshine.

Before I left that night, Aunt Sarah said to me, "Jason, I have a present for you." Aunt Sarah always gave me presents. Most of these were little items that looked nice--like a baseball or a glass egg. Sometimes she would give me something that I really needed--like a pair of shoes or a shirt.

Still, no matter what she gave me, I would always consider it to be priceless and irreplaceable. She reached into her coat pocket and pulled out a subway token. She handed it to me and said, "Why don't you take a ride on the trains tomorrow." It was a wonderful present.

"I'd love to," I said. "Thank you Aunt Sarah." She laughed a little bit and said, "Any time Jason, any time." I hugged her and left, already anxious to wake up in the morning.

I remember dreaming that night. It was the same dream that I've had so many times in my life. I know every word, motion, feeling, and sound of it by heart. Worst of all, I know how it ends. Every time I have this dream, I'm powerless to change it. I see the people in the car. I hear them talking about the city they're traveling toward. "Look at the Twin Towers!" says the little boy. "There's the Statue of Liberty!" says the mother. "I'm so glad we went on a vacation this summer," adds the father. I always feel sorry for the littleboy. He sees the cars slow down in front of them--the ocean of red tail-lights, lighting up the roadway. The father turns around to the boy and says, "Did you know that the bridge we're on is called the Manhattan Bridge?" But the little boy justshouts, "DAD LOOK OUT!" and he covers up his face. The moving car plows into the stopped car in front of it. The windshield crackles into a mosaic of blood and glass. The mother and father are dead. The boy survives. Three men in white jackets pick him up and put him in an ambulance. I see his battered body from above, and then I'm looking out of his eyes. The door slams shut and I hear the men tell me, "Everything's going to be all right." I always wake up at that point--shaking, crying and feeling terribly alone.

I woke up early the next morning. The sky was like a big blue lollypop that was slowly being eaten by the sun. I said goodbye to mom and dad, and started to walk to a train station. It had been a while since I had been outside the park. The streets were fairly empty, except for a few cars wooshing by. As I got closer, I heard the rumblings of the trains underground. I was at the Broadway and 72nd Street station. I went through the turnstile and down the stairs where the sign said "Uptown."

The train was shiny and silver both inside and out. It stopped and its doors opened up. I stepped in. I smiled and my reflection on the other side smiled back at me. I tucked some of my brown hair back into the hat on my head. I sat down once the train started to move. There were just a few people in the car. They were all lost in their own little worlds. I settled down into my own little world. I stared out the window and watched the lights blur by.

I rode the trains for most of that day. The hours went by like the tunnel lights. I read a few newspapers and magazines that people left on their seats. I changed trains when it seemed right, or sometimes for no reason at all. I felt like I was the only person not going somewhere. Everyone else was in a hurry to get on or off the train. They all kept looking at their watches to see what time it was.

Eventually I got on a train that headed back toward the city. The map told me that it went over the Manhattan Bridge. Somewhere in the middle of the bridge, the train jerked to a stop. The

sun was setting and the car was filled with orange sunlight. I saw the World Trade Center and the Statue of Liberty. For a moment, everything seemed to stop. The scene was so familiar. Haven't I been here before, I thought. The train started to move again and the feeling passed, leaving me with an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I got back to the park and it was almost dark. I ran to the carousel to find Aunt Sarah. I wanted to tell her all about my day. When I got there, I saw the flashing lights of an ambulance and a police car going around and around. The men lifted a body with long gray hair into a large bag. They weren't in a hurry.

I sit on top of my dad. He is a rock and he tells me to be strong. My mother is a pond and she catches my tears.

Jonathan Hammer
Brooklyn, NY
Midwood High School
Mrs. Elizabeth Kramer
Ms. Sharron Lustbader

What Grandfather Knows

*Holding my Father's
hand, he tells me
what Grandfather
really knows.
Black sky.
Twinkling pin holes,
breathing in and out.
Looking through the moon,
the Great Unknown,
white and pure
as in heaven.
Earth,
a balloon with
God holding the
mouth shut during days, and
Night,
inside the balloon
the Breath,
stars taking in
all they can receive,
the moon's mouth
closed halfway.
I stare at the sky,
believing.*

Sheila Chapman
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

The Pig

*Light no longer dances in its
Raven crystal prisms.
Scatched,
The coal black mirrors stare at me.
Its plush pink skin is
worn to gray patches of time.
Smashed against the cold, hard wall,
it gazes at my slept-on
pillows as if waiting for the
sound of a
sharpened blade.*

Kathryn Mays
Cockeysville, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones



David Wells
Kiskiminetas Springs School
James Nagle

Grandma In The Pink Dress

Grandma you sleep
In the basement
Of my house
Your glass coffin
Filled with your
Old bones covered in
That pink anniversary dress
Your burial dress
The one you danced in
With Grandpa
At the big fiftieth
Every morning I go down
Down! Down! Down! Down!
Stairs to drink my black coffee
And look at you in that coffin
Like a museum piece.

Mother should have buried you
Like Grandpa
Instead she brought you here
And put you among the boxes
The basement stuff
Litter from all those Christmases
I wish you would look at me
Instead of the ceiling
I would bring you upstairs
Stand your coffin upright
By the Grandfather clock
In the living room
And you could look at me
Me! Me! Me! Me!
Every hour as I eat alone
Read and as I live alone.

Glenn Formica
Brookline, NH
Hollis Area High School
Elizabeth Kirschner

DADDY

My Father
the immovable
armature of clay
My Father says,
as he finishes my plate,
that he is winning
a staring contest
with two
Phillip's head screws
in the hook
for the blind.
My Father,
the engineer,
would like to be
sewing seeds in December
and bailing hay in March
or discussing high taxes
with his Rice Krispies
crackling out responses
in a mathematical way,
which I could not.
My Father,
while my mother was out
visiting for a few days,
showed me himself
instead of the paper
and we laughed.
I'm almost sure.

Missy Littrell
Gaithersburg, MD
Seneca Valley High School
Ms. Summer Hardinge

God in the Closet

Laughing, she turns to me
Saying, "Come, meet God."
Glance swiftly through the keyhole
Peer curiously into the darkness
The image of a painted God
In all His glorious splendor.

How can she bear
To keep God so near?
He'll never awake
He's been in a closet
For over forty years.

He has His incense, privacy
Lounging passively in darkness
Does He care
What a concentration camp is?
Or a nuclear weapon?

Real eyes meet painted
I flinch and look away
Afraid of an image
On a shelf
Giggling nervously,
I turn
Quietly shutting the door.

Elissa S. Hohman
Middletown, NY
Mrs. Roebuck

The McConvilles

I squirmed in my black loafers as I stared down at the valuable, careworn scrap of looseleaf paper. On the paper was an illustrious list of thirty-two boys with whom I had gone to grammar school. At the top, center of the page was the word "Candidates." Katie Egan sat on my right, anxiously poking me in the side. "Hey, Mary," she screeched. "Let me see the list!" I groaned. It was officially semiformal date-hunting season. Painfully, I handed the paper to Katie.

Semiformals scare me. I hate calling boys that I do not know and asking them to sacrifice a Friday night to go to an Oak Knoll dance. I hate having a miserable time. Weeks after the dance is over, I despise seeing my date in church and having to scrunch into the lower right hand corner of the pew.

The summer before sophomore year, Katie and I started planning for the Christmas semiformal. One hot August night, we sat on my front porch, designing the list. I put down all of the boys that I had ever loved before. To that very elite group, Katie added all of the geeks, nerds, losers and assorted pariahs she had ever known. These names she gave to me in a gesture of friendship. They were people she would never take; being a considerate person, she thought that I might enjoy their company.

The list was superfluous. We always knew we would end up calling Peter and Tommy McConville. The McConvilles were identical twins. Both had blue eyes, black hair, and Irish freckles. Together, they were the hearthrobs of South Orange. I had had a crush on the twins since second grade. So had Katie Egan, Evelyn Feeley, Dana Wilderotter and my mother. Indubitably, the McConvilles were made of the stuff about which mothers dream. Katie and I, with steely nerve, were willing to incur the wrath of three hundred fuming maternal maniacs, just to invite Peter and Tommy to the semiformal.

We had prearranged the date on which we would call the McConvilles. I was forced to ring first. With sweaty palms and a palpitating heart, I locked myself in the basement, away from prying family ears. I pinched my nose and squeezed my eyes shut. Coming in contact with a dial tone, I pushed the first three numbers, then slammed the phone down. Was I crazy? Had I completely lost my mind? I had, I decided, then pushed the buttons until the operator connected the different worlds of the McConvilles and the Kellehers.

When Peter came to the phone, I launched in. "Uh, hi. Peter? Oh. This is Peter?" I thought it was Mr. McConville. Peter's voice had changed since I last talked to him in third grade. "Well, our school . . . I mean my school is having a semiformal on Friday, December 13, and I was wondering whether or not you'd like to go. With me, that is . . ." At this point, I received an unenthusiastic, "Yeah, I'll go," to which I continued, "You'll really go? Are you sure? . . . You're sure. Are you really sure? You don't have to go if you don't want to go. I know that your mother is making you say yes, isn't she? These dances are really boring. I just wanted to tell you that, and I also wanted to ask you if you remembered when my sister told you that I liked you . . . You don't remember. Well, she did, and all I want to say is that I don't really like you and I'm only calling you because I need a date for this dance. Are you sure you still want to go? . . . Well, okay. Bye."

I have read other versions of the same story, and they all have happy endings. The girl endures a bit of humorous embarrassment, discovers that the boy has had a terrific crush on her for years, and has a wonderful time at the dance. If fairy tales were true, there would be no purpose in writing this story. Instead, welcome to reality a la Mary Kelleher. The dance was a disaster.

On the night of the semiformal, my mother drove. That in itself is always a pleasure. We collected the McConvilles first. When they came into the car, I was very suave and shouted, "So, which one of you is Peter? Hah, Hah!" No laughter came from the back seat. All I heard was a meek "me." I threw the

boutineer back to whoever said "me"; at the same time, a corsage came flying through the air, hit me on the head, and eventually landed neatly on my lap.

Several problems began when the group of four actually arrived at the Oak Knoll semiformal. The McConvilles could dance. Katie and I could not. We had not been at the dance for more than five minutes when Peter grabbed my hand and started twirling around in the middle of the cafeteria floor. I imagined I was Marie Osmond, and tried to sway along with him, but I felt like Lawrence Welk. As we danced, I racked my brain for polite conversation starters. Finally, I hit upon a question that my mother claimed was sure to be a success. I should have known better. Half in jest, I asked, "Have you read any good books lately?" Peter looked down. He sighed. I guess he figured it was going to be a long night too. "Mary, I don't read." Since that question went over so well, I made another witty, charming remark. I asked Peter what his middle name was.

Conversation did not flow. Peter asked me what sort of music I liked. Being a jokester, I told him that I liked Mozart and Bach. Privately, I wondered whether he had gotten that question from his mother. He started to dance alone, and inquired if I had seen him on "Dance Fever." I informed him superciliously that I never watched those shows because I only liked Mozart and Bach. Peter replied that he thought we had already had this conversation. Tom, to cover up an awkward moment, asked Katie if she was smart.

The evening went on as such for four hours. At eleven-thirty, Tommy pointed to the clock and beamed. We all piled into Mr. Egan's blue car, tuned into Bernard Meltzer, and drove off into the bleak horizon.

When we got to the McConville's house, they thanked us; we thanked them. Then Katie ruined our smashing success by saying timidly, "Well, we'll see you in the summer." The twins ran into the house. We did not see them all summer.

Mary Kelleher
South Orange, NJ 07079
Oak Knoll School
Mrs. Marcus

Afterglow

*He walks alone now,
our dog.
He used to wait
at the top of the stairs
But now he walks
dragging the worn blue nylon leash
with the frayed webbing
by the handle.*

*He looks back, occasionally,
and lingers by the street's lamplight
waiting for the familiar leash tug
that never comes.
From my small window
I can see his shadow,
the leash grown to a grotesque noose
dangling.
He comes home then, trudging,
clicking his toenails
across the kitchen floor
to sigh at the sight
of Dad's old jacket.*

Heidi Racine
Wayside, NJ
B. Richards

Approaching the large, picturesque house set between small rows of crab-apple trees, Rachel wonders how the new owners could cover the classic, age-worn white with royal blue and green. She opens the door, and two uniformed men stumble out of the marble-floored hall. She holds the door open for them as they carry out the large antique sofa.

"Thanks a lot," the taller man says. "We almost have everything out. Just some rugs and things. Oh, and that chair, the recliner. Your grandfather's in it. He might be asleep."

"I'm sorry. We'll be out in a minute," she says. She watches the short, fat man wobble down the steps. His body is almost as thick as the sofa. Rachel remembers Nonna saying that her fattest guest would choose that sofa over any other seat.

Pappa sleeps most of the time anymore, but not in his bedroom. He has not slept in his bedroom since Nonna died. Rachel knows it is good to move him out of the apartment. Everything in it is reminiscent of Nonna. The apartment still remains organized and clean. Pappa used only three rooms. The rest are like a museum. The furniture that Nonna placed was never tampered with. After her death, he would not let anyone take her clothes to the Salvation Army or give her baking pans to the local soup kitchen. Her cold cream still has her fingerprints in it, and there are gray hairs left in her brush.

He sleeps in his den, a small room in the corner of the apartment. It is filled with the remnants of Pappa's old business office. He was very serious about his work, but he let his grandchildren come to the office.

Rachel remembers visits to Pappa's on Sunday evenings. He would give each of the three a desk to sit at, as long as they didn't touch anything but the phones. Each child would have his own line to call the others on. Then they would race on the wheeled chairs down the linoleum hallways. Pappa would supervise, and try to get his work done. He was not very just when he dealt with fights between the two sexes. He favored the girls and they knew it. Rachel and her sister would use it to exact vengeance on their brother. Pappa would hit Mike on the behind, but they knew it didn't hurt. Afterwards, he would drive them home in the red and brown station wagon, and they would all fall asleep on the way.

Upstairs she pauses before opening the door of the apartment. When she does and sees the empty room she wishes she hadn't agreed to pick up Pappa. The oriental rug is rolled up on the far wall. The sunlight reflects off the varnished floor. It seems so abandoned.

Rachel remembers Sunday afternoons after dinner, waiting on the rug for Pappa to come and play. He would lie on the rug and pretend to sleep as his numerous grandchildren romped unsuspecting about him. Suddenly, he would turn into a monster and chase the screaming children through the room, roaring like a madman. Nonna would warn him to watch the furniture and keep the children in line. He would catch each one and tickle her until she promised to slow down.

Rachel walks into Pappa's office, stripped now of everything but his long white recliner. The hulking man fills the chair. His face looks disturbed. His gray eyebrows turn inward toward his nose, and he looks cross.

"Pappa, Pop. Wake up. I'm here," she whispers. The old man's eyes open, but they are still glossy. He sits up to see Rachel sitting on the floor beside him. "Hi, Pappa," she continues. "Annie sent me over to pick you up. Are you ready to go?" She is afraid to stay any longer than necessary. She knows that he could get confused and angry. She doesn't know how to explain things to her Pappa anymore. At one time, he was the easiest person to talk to. For the last two years, he has been like a spoiled child.

He holds onto her shoulder and pulls himself up. "Where's your mother?" He stares at Rachel for an answer, but does not recognize her.

"Pappa, I'm Rachel, your granddaughter. Will you come with me over to Annie's? She's making spaghetti with sauce just like Nonna's for your first night at her house." Rachel takes her grandfather's arm. She feels his muscular arm tighten as they start for the door. He pulls his arm away. He doesn't want to be helped.

"Your mother makes the best tomato sauce of any I've ever tasted. She practically lives in our kitchen. Every man would be happy if he had a wife like your mother."

His jacket is draped on the top of a box of National Geographic. He has collected them for years. He has three bookcases full of back issues. They are going to be thrown out. No one wants to keep them anymore. "Pappa, do you remember on Sunday afternoons, when it rained, and I couldn't go out and play, you let me look through your National Geographic? You wouldn't let anyone else, but you always let me, because you said I was the only one who liked them as much as you did.

"What?" he asked. He tries to get the thin jacket over his shoulders.

"Never mind. Are all the lights off? We'll drop the key with the woman downstairs."

"Don't bother with all that. Your mother will be home all afternoon."

"Nonna's dead. Come on, now." She tries to take his hand, but he turns his back to her. His face has an angry expression. She shouldn't have said that.

She remembers sleeping over, when Nonna was alive and not sick. She would make dinner and all three of them would eat in front of the television, watching game shows. When she was afraid of the dark, Pappa would come into the guest bedroom and read her stories. Then when she was sleepy, he would take her head between his massive hands. They would cover her whole head, and he would kiss her on the forehead. He said he would take care of her, and that no stranger would ever hurt her.

Watching the old man walking down the steps now, Rachel knows that he is a stranger, and that she has to protect him. She closes the door of the apartment, and follows her Pappa down the staircase.

Danielle Franco
Scranton, PA
Scranton Preparatory School
Vincent J. Vanston

My Grandmother

"Garrrrrttt? . . . Garrrrrttt?
I hear that voice
it calls me twenty times a day.
"Garrrrrttt? . . . Garrrrrttt?"
That voice,
it smokes 3 packs a day
That voice
that could almost
shatter glass.
it calls me from the 1st floor
when I'm on the 3rd.
That voice never stops
calling me till . . .
I answer.
"Whaaat?!" I cry back down.
"Did you caalll for mmeeee?" she
screams back up.

Garrett H. Fleitas
Haverford, PA
The Agnes Irwin School
Mrs. Ann Miller



Christopher Gadomski
Walkersville High School
James Minick

A Portrait of Strength

I sit alone at a table, facing my lunch. The food does not look appetizing, and my eyes search the school cafeteria for a face that I recognize, a friend to distract me from my meal. I am disappointed in my search.

As my eyes sweep over the large, noisy room, I see Mr. Boggs. Our eyes meet for a moment and then he looks back down at the New York Times that he holds folded over his hands. I feel sure that he has been looking at me from the corner of the room where he leans his tall frame against a water fountain. The thought makes me uneasy. Mr. Boggs is my European History teacher, and to look into his watery, bloodshot eyes is to look at the terrible, unnatural knowledge that he will die. Not at some indefinite point in the future as we all will, but this year. Soon. I can see the knowledge eat away at him like the cancer that feasts on his cells. Looking at him, his deterioration is evident. His face is pale and his hair has receded even farther back on his head. When he walks now, it is with a slight shuffling limp. I watch him for a moment. He stares expressionlessly at his newspaper through the reading glasses perched on his nose.

Why has he been looking at me? It is as if death itself has been staring stealthily across the room at me. The room in which Mr. Boggs stands, a high school cafeteria, strikes me as being life's stronghold. Two hundred zestful teenagers, eating, nourishing their young bodies, burning with a hunger. A hunger for food, a hunger for knowledge, a hunger for life. Mr. Boggs stands as an invader among them. He stands alone in his corner, uneating and unnoticed. He seems to fade into the gray wall behind him. I had been as willing as the rest to ignore him outside of the classroom, to pretend that he doesn't exist. But his eyes . . .

I like Mr. Boggs. He's not the best teacher in the school, and I can sense his insecurities when he gets up in front of the class, but he tries hard. He's only human like the rest of us. He's always friendly to me in the classroom.

I wonder if he really sees the print on the paper before him, news of the world he will soon be leaving. The courage it takes for him to look death in the eye and respond by leisurely reading a newspaper as if he has all the time in the world must be enormous.

Had he really been looking at me, or had it been merely a trick of my imagination? Perhaps it was mere chance that our eyes had met for that brief second. I look back down at my lunch in a way such that I can still see Mr. Boggs out of the corner of my eye. Sure enough, blurrily, I see his head rise up out of the depths of his newspaper. I can feel his eyes on me.

What should I do? How can I satisfy this spectre that hovers

over me? I know that Mr. Boggs was sitting in my place once. He was young and had his whole life ahead of him and now he's standing all alone, dying against a water fountain.

Mr. Boggs, I wish that I could loan you some of my youth, to sustain you. I wish that I could eat for you, so that you could live. I want to demonstrate my own youth to you, my own future, so that you will know that I will live even when you die, and so youth will always triumph over death, even if we die as individuals.

I take my sandwich, raise it to my mouth, and take a bite out of it. I see Mr. Boggs look back down into his paper. Have I satisfied him? Have I silently shattered his isolated pocket of sentience? I don't know.

I chew the sandwich. It is the best I have ever eaten.

David M. Fine
Ithaca, NY
Ithaca High School
Kenneth Pickens

Die Kinders Stiefmutter

*In the forest
cold as the ovens
the witch made something
but it wasn't cookies
bodies burned
in that candy house
until they all stuck together
until she couldn't tell them apart.
The shovels folded dirt over
into something almost natural
except flowers came up
twisted as faces
crooked as time
and we ran looking for the breadcrumbs
but the vultures had swallowed them
or much worse
this time-
the wind*

Faithe Kancz
Imperial PA
Mrs. S. Miller

Branding Iron

*Almost grey, you stumble
through a subway station. With hands
like ruffled paper you search
a pocket, maybe your own, for a memory,
or even half a reminder that yesterday
did happen, that neon sung
last night. Your feet search,
shuffle through newspaper, dirt,
nesting rats.
But you sit down anyway
beneath a burning traffic light.
You warm your hands.
You remember swilling, hovering
over subway grates.
Somehow the traffic light
stays red with your gaze.
You tremble under
that branding iron
as coins are hurled
into your hat.*

Rosemarie Klein
Long Beach, NY
Mrs. Pickus

Decorum, or Steffie's House

On Thanksgivings, and Easters, and Christmases, our family is always uncomfortably split among several hosting relatives, and, in order to avoid spending cramped half hours in half a dozen places, we usually attend the least centrally located party so that the question of our attending any other fetes becomes academic. It works. This year, we are going to Steffie's house, my cousin's house.

My father is in an oddly congenial mood for a holiday. This is because Steffie is on his side of the family, and the feeling of having won some unpitched battle with my mother's relatives disperses his acidic asides about the pointlessness of social events. His magnificent workload is exploded like a handful of sparrows in a gale. He stops by my door, boxing cheerily with his own chin in an attempt to fasten his tie. Without knocking, he peers in; I am putting on my shoes.

"Couldn't you find something a little longer? Your Grandmother's going to be there," he says to me.

I look at my dress. "A mini skirt is the height of decorousness these days," I answer.

"Decorum! Decorum!" He rolls his eyes away from my unsightly misnomer as though it hung in the air between us. He turns away into the hall, sighs, turns back to me. "Decorum is in the eye of the beholder."

This is another small verbal victory to add to the day's tally, and Daddy walks away humming, tie forgotten. In Daddy there is a Napoleonic bloodlust, only partly neutralized by his occasional fits of charm and a cherished sense of civilization.

On the way to Steffie's house, I try to make up for my skirt length by reading Jane Eyre and ostentatiously carrying something by Dickens: the most proper reading I can find at a moment's notice. Daddy is driving, his tie clutching madly to his collar buttons as the car makes wide horseshoes around each corner. Propping my feet up on the hefty Dickens, I let those words that have not yet been smudged out of the Bronte book slide softly over my brain--withered, archaic phrasings, biblical references:

"the reel of silk has run smooth enough thus far--would I had but a fraction of Sampson's strength to break the entanglement like a tow!"

In a few minutes their seductiveness wears thin, and I stare out the window to the gray undulation of highway forest. Why, I silently wonder, does Jane end up a housewife, after all her maverick speeches? Why isn't she stirring up kettles of discontent in the seraglios?

We get to Steffie's house, my aunt and uncle greet us quietly, warmly at the door, and I am reminded that it's really their house, not Steffie's. I try to picture my uncle living there after everyone is gone. I try to imagine him doing something other than unobtrusively sipping a beer, sitting at the corner of the oval table. I don't like failure; I go downstairs to find Steffie.

Steffie's sneakered feet are hanging over the arm of the fake leather sofa in front of the TV. From behind them in the foam rubber depths, a growling voice curls out stealthily, jumping every few minutes to screechingly high notes just barely tuned; Steffie is singing.

"Hi, Steffie!"

A disembodied, half-bleached head rises over the sneakers.

"Oh, it's you. Sit down. Cuz, my life is ending: there is a Ratt Poison concert in King-of-Prussia tonight and the car is dead, dead, dead--do you understand? Look at this body!" She hands me a page--torn out of a groupie magazine--of a platinum-headed, earringed, eyelined, sweating guru--"this body will be here and gone in seventy-two hours and I am going to miss it!!" As I sit, she throws her head back onto the couch violently. Soft butter-colored tendrils fan out around her head, crowning her with a temporary halo. She is wearing jeans and a sweater, my skirt is looking more wrinkled with every minute. I sit precariously in a bean bag chair, holding the skirt's edge down. This

skirt is ridiculous, I think, remembering Daddy: decorum is in the eye of the beholder.

Steffie tells me about her boyfriend, Bob, and about his old girlfriend, another Steffie, with equal venom for each. She shows me her autograph from Danny DeVito--he had come across her by accident when she blew a tire on the way home from New York. He had given her an extra tire and a lecture and an autograph but the encounter hadn't impressed Steffie.

Steffie starts to question me--how is school going? Steffie hates school, but is quite tolerant of those who don't. How's life? I have almost nothing to tell her.

Over dinner, Steffie argues with her mother, yelling and gesticulating wildly. Aunt Marion loses her patience, screams, cries, leaves the room. Steffie rolls her eyes, laughs, and drinks what wine is left in her mother's glass.

Later still, the door buzzes. Steffie flies to answer it, flies back in: it's Bob, would I like to come with them to the Ratt Poison concert? ("Bob has this gorgeous little brother, Jen").

I look at my Dad. He stares back an answer. Sorry, Steffie, next time, 'kay? And Steffie is gone with a small storm of Pennsylvania dust in her wake, as the house becomes unearthly silent.

Soon after, we leave. Once safely in the car, my father turns to me. "You see how important a little decorum is?" as we pull out. I can see skid marks in the dirt driveway, and I wonder who Steffie is meeting now. What party she's attending. Which set of records is she singing to. I look at my skirt and I wonder if that's the problem with both Jane Eyre and me, maybe it's just these stupid skirts....

Jenifer Braun
Elizabeth, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Mrs. Marcus

After Art Class, Lafayette St.

*She is strong and tall,
Like some big black statue
In a dress that's sprouted
A million pale noseays
On the wide plot of cotton.
My paintbox and I
Want to sneak across the street,
Small and white and awkward,
And ask her why she sits
On the steps all day like that.
The rowhouses and the
Exxon station on the corner
Soak up the sun,
Which makes the bricks hot and purple
And as hard faces pass by,
I slide back into the doorway
Of the art school and
Try to be invisible.
As I duck into
My mom's grey Mercury wagon,
I give the strong woman a look,
Turn up the radio,
And put my feet up on the dashboard.*

Lisa Sylvester
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Painted Nails

Deep gold afternoon sunlight cuts through the room in a wedge of swimming dust. It reaches out to Jen, but only gets as far as her back, illuminating her dark hair and arms with a fiery glow. She is sitting on her bed and I am on the floor. My head is tilted up at her as my eyes follow every movement of her body. Her deeply tanned arm rhythmically bobs up and down as she paints the long, square nails of her left hand. The earth-colored paint slides on effortlessly, perfectly—a task I could not imagine mastering in a hundred years.

This is Jen's last remaining vanity since her conversion to naturalism. I haven't seen her use a blowdryer, curling iron, razor, synthetic fabric, Japanese product (in protest of their government's use of endangered sealife-killing drift-nets) or anything manufactured with animal by-products (excluding wool, silk, and milk). I'm glad she still believes in soap and deodorant.

Other than that, as she sits wrapped in her worn terry towel, Jen is as unadulterated as the day she was born. Her green amber eyes look greener yet lashless, and in the sunlight the thick hair on her calves glimmers gold. I find it hard to believe that I once considered Jen glamorous, though I now feel that in this raw state of being, she is more beautiful than ever.

"So how does it feel to be home? The 'Purple-Palace' hasn't changed too much...."

"Eh," she looks at me and grunts with a shrug. With her forearm she pushes a strand of long brown hair out of her face. "It's stayed pretty much the same . . . besides a few missing pictures." We both look around the walls of the violet room, mentally filling in the empty spaces with the old photographs and drawings that once hung there.

Despite these gaps, Jen's room is still a three-dimensional scrapbook. Everything Jen is is hung on these walls, dangled from the ceiling or displayed on her desk, bureau, and in her bookcase. Each piece of this amazing collection has a distinct memory tied to it. These memories are drawn upon daily not only by Jen, but by everyone who steps into that room. A person Jen hasn't seen in ten years could walk into her room and find at least one object connected with them and an experience they both shared. I think this is why whoever enters Jen's rainbow domain instantly feels comfortable.

A delicate mobile dances whimsically above Jen's head, its movement fueled by the central air vent on the ceiling. Its whirling movement in a way reminds me of Jen. She is a whirlwind of perpetual motion, going off in all directions yet always returning to her point of origin. Only she is fueled by a source much more complex than cool air.

"Do you miss life on the East Coast?" I ask as I study the colorful pattern a butterfly light-catcher makes on her broad, strong, Scandinavian face.

"Sort of." The indifference of her reply is disappointing.

"Well, whata ya miss?"

"I can tell you what I don't miss . . . TRAFFIC. No traffic in Colorado. Not many people around either . . . I miss the people, but I don't miss their cars." She is still indifferent, almost arrogant. I am reminded of the familiar days of our childhood. Suddenly I feel very small, my position on the floor adding to this feeling. In her voice I hear the impatient agitation that would come when I would catch her with the wrong question at the wrong time. I could hear myself ask, "Do you think Barbie looks better in the pink cocktail dress or the blue organdy party skirt?" I could hear her answer, "Who cares?" And the feeling I got then is not so far removed from the feeling I get now. I guess some things never change.

Jen and I are cousins though our relationship more or less resembles that of sisters. Both only children, we cling to each other for the comfort that many siblings find in their shared bloodline. In a way, together we have created the large, caring family environment we both yearned for, but could never truly

obtain. Essentially, she is my older sister and I am her younger protege.

We were always a team. Yet it was clear that Jen was the leader. This is not to say that I was completely discounted. As far as intellect and maturity went, we were on an even keel. Jen did not ever dispute this. I was her equal, with the two exceptions of age and experience. These are two obstacles that cannot easily be surpassed in childhood.

My trust in Jen is astounding, yet her reliance on me for moral support and direction always leaves me feeling important though burdened. Jen has an incredible ability to tie her life into knots then ask me how she should best untangle them. She is an emotional mess most of the time. This fact I attribute to the death of her parents when she was still rather young. Besides the obvious trauma it caused, I feel the greatest impact from this tragedy was Jen's never really feeling that she was loved unconditionally. This feeling was harbored as she grew up under the care of her stepmother, whose love Jen would never accept as "real."

Now as we sit and look around Jen's scrapbook of a room, I feel the past and present coming together. I also see that the future we once discussed at length has finally come to fruition. On the wall above Jen's bed hangs her parents' wedding portrait and an enlarged print of Jen and me at my second birthday party. Jen's wearing a huge chubby smile as she joyfully hugs the stuffing from me, who as usual is looking very confused. Below this picture is a photograph taken of Jen the night she graduated from Episcopal Academy. That was one of the most bittersweet nights of my life. It signaled the end of our childhood together and the beginning of the real life we always dreamt of though never thought would ever arrive. I also saw Jen leaving and taking with her my escape from a boring adolescent life in Haddonfield. I'll never forget the rowdy and exciting main line prep school parties, or the beautiful prep school boys. This was all more or less superficial, but the experience of being "in" with an older crowd left a definite imprint on who I am today. Most important of all was the loss I began to feel of her warm sisterly love. This aspect of her parting saddened me the most.

Now she is in front of me once again, putting the finishing stroke of paint on her right hand pinky. As she screws the lid onto the bottle, I feel her look at me. Her exquisite eyes catch the fading sunlight and glow a cat-like amber. These tigress eyes peer at me sheepishly, tenderly. "Can, I'm being a bitch, aren't I?"

"Well . . ." I nod and half smile, "You could say that."

"I'm sorry . . . It's been a killer of a trip home." With this simple apology, all is forgiven. Jen stretches her body down from her perch on the bed and hugs me hard. Our cheek bones press tightly together, but her hands are suspended behind my back . . . careful not to ruin the polish.

Candace Cole
Haddonfield, NJ
Therese M. Willis

11:37 p.m.

*I can feel the rings round my
eyes grow larger, deeper.
My head, stuffed with cotton,
is one with the pillow.
A hand I could swear isn't mine
turns out the light.
I am the darkness.*

Kelly J. O'Brien
Markleton, PA
Rockwood Area High School
Mrs. Dawn Biancotti

Sweeping Out the Kitchen in the Middle of July

there is nothing worse
not hell or death
than sweeping out the kitchen in the middle of July
when the heat rising from the pavement
is as much as that from the stove
and your hands are sweaty
but there is no pool
except that on the floor from the Mop-n-Glo
which you have been standing over for the past hour
waiting for it to evaporate
and your mother is out at the club
with your little brother Brad
who made the mess in the first place
when he poured the Fruit Loops in Muffy's bowl
(MOM SAID HE WAS JUST TRYING TO FEED THE CAT, BUT)
and on the tube, Bo and Hope are swimming naked in the lake
and in the back you can hear the twins
whose mother has let run under the hose
and are now screaming bloody murder because Stacey pushed Lacey
and Lacey fell onto a slug
whose slimy body might have been a refreshing change from the
house
but you'll never know, because you're pushing a broom
even as the strands of hay are rubbing against your legs
you're thinking, I've got to get out of here.

two days later, your mom has jailed you to the house
because of the unusual rash broken out on your leg
you told her it was because of the broom, but she just said
DON'T GET WISE WITH ME YOUNG LADY
AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, CLEAN THE BASEMENT

(great)

Catherine McTamane
Scotch Plains, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Mrs. Marcus

Would have written about trains but felt more strongly about seagulls.

AUGUST FIFTH

Knew the seagull would still be there.

Looked up from the desk. The seagull was still there, roosting on top of the dilapidated bird feeder. It had been sitting there and staring at me for at least an hour.

The seagull regarded me with one beady little eye. Its other eye was fixed upon the other seagulls eating garbage on the beach below, just in case they discovered some choice bit of filth.

In a vain attempt to persuade the bird to go away, gave it the finger.

The seagull did an about-face and deposited a large white Rorschach blotch on the window.

This means war.

AUGUST SIXTH

Honestly, wasn't asking for trouble when I rented the cottage. Thought I knew what I was getting--"two bedrooms, bath,

kitchen, living area, and charming sea view." Apparently, the phrase "charming sea view" is shorthand for "charming sea view, just as long as you ignore the two or three hundred seagulls making love on the beach."

Fine and dandy. I can live with that. Seagulls are pleasant, from a distance.

Unfortunately, there is the feeder. Can only guess at what could have moved the owner to put a bird feeder right in front of, and about two feet away from, the bay window: Illness? Religious mania? Sheer perversity? Actually, it isn't so much a feeder as a perch, a two-by-two piece of plywood nailed on top of a six-foot tall cast-iron pipe.

Have yet to see any bird other than a gull at it.

Bird shit will not come off the window.

AUGUST SEVENTH

Window is clean now. Had to go into town yesterday and buy some industrial strength ammonia, powerful stuff. Worked like a charm, but ate through the rubber gloves I was using. Need to go into town tomorrow and get something for my hands.

AUGUST EIGHTH

Hands are okay, doctor says tissue can easily be replaced.

Spent afternoon trying to remove bird feeder. The pole must go ten feet into the ground--it won't budge. The plywood platform on top of the pole has proven to be irremovable and indestructible, despite its rotting appearance.

If the thing won't go, then the seagulls will have to.

AUGUST NINTH

Recalled last month's town meeting convened to address the problem of young boys feeding seagulls Alka-Seltzer (with explosive results).

Drive to pharmacist's hampered by seagull shit on windshield.

AUGUST TENTH

Cursed birds.

Oh, they ate the stuff, all right. I concealed each tablet in its own yummy little ball of hamburger meat.

Twenty gulls came to the feeder, and wolfed down the little raw meatballs.

Nothing happened. No explosions. When the gulls were finished, they just took off and flew back down to the beach.

But not before they frosted the window white all over.

AUGUST ELEVENTH

Spent morning cleaning window and car.

The seagulls' counterattack of yesterday calls for tougher tactics.

This afternoon I returned from the drugstore with something a little more potent.

AUGUST TWELFTH

It didn't work. Called the pharmacist afterwards. He said I should have told him that I was planning to use the stuff on seagulls. Apparently, dioxin has been present in their food chain for the past decade.

AUGUST THIRTEENTH

Spent today planning strategy. With the failure of chemical warfare techniques, direct engagement is my only option.

Fortunately, the seagulls suspect nothing.

AUGUST FOURTEENTH

Returned from town this morning with carbon dioxide fire extinguisher. Opened window, took aim, and let go an icy blast at my unsuspecting prey.

You can never tell which way the nozzle is pointing with these fancy fire extinguishers.

AUGUST FIFTEENTH

The enemy retaliated for yesterday's disastrous action, and made a very successful strike on the laundry on the clothesline.

(Continued on Page 50)

Resupply mission to town today--came back with a powerful new weapon that will swing the war my way, plus provisions in case I have to withstand a prolonged siege.

The enemy, thank God, had not yet caught on to my sneak-attack tactics, and I opened the window without alerting him. Checked my equipment carefully, so as to avoid repeating yesterday's accident--it would be very dangerous to not respect the awesome firepower of the Daisy "Pump-n-Gun" BB rifle for ages ten and up. Gave my weapon twenty quick pumps, and aimed carefully

Don't know how many seagulls flew in through the open window. The assault was lightning-fast and precise. Unable to defend my position, due to the uselessness of the "Pump-n-Gun" in close combat, I looked on with horror as my own HQ was saturation bombed.

AUGUST SIXTEENTH

It is over.

Despite all my preparation, technical superiority, and planning, the seagulls have won.

"The Battle of the Living Room Rug" was decisive, it seems. The enemy did allow me a conciliatory minor victory that afternoon, by letting me blow out all the windows with my BB rifle, but it doesn't matter much. The enemy knows that I lack the capital to finance any further military ventures, and must now occupy myself with mopping-up operations.

The seagull stares balefully at me through the window. Filthy, dirty little bird.

Adam Lane
Pittsburgh, PA
Shady Side Academy
Mrs. Sarah Eldridge

On Performing

Route 19, a road that stretches vertically along the eastern coastline from New York to Florida, runs through a small town called Peters Township. It is there, at the one main intersection (appropriately titled Donaldson's Crossroads) that a particular bar and restaurant called Freddie's III is located. And this small Italian restaurant is where I served as a busgirl for about two months.

My friend Lori Jo got me the job, knowing I was in dire financial straits, and I enjoyed the job for a long time. Three or four nights a week I would show up in black pants, a white shirt, white shoes, and my hair neatly pulled back from my face. Promptly, at 5:30 weeknights and 5:00 weekends, I'd be prepared for about three and a half or four hours of being on my feet. Clearing tables, running to the kitchen, and dumping the dirties: trash in one bin, linens in another, dishes in another. Then turn around and pick up four forks, two steak knives, two butter knives, two spoons, two placemats, and two napkins. Back to the table, wipe it off, set it up.

It was monotonous and tiring, but I enjoyed it. I always love to be working on the inside of an operation, knowing what goes on behind the scenes. That's one reason I love the theater, I guess. Not only do actors bring a two-dimensional piece of paper to life, but they perform a deception for the audience to enjoy. They translate and adapt what the playwright wrote, then transfigure themselves into someone else, and finally they pretend that it's a normal way of life . . . for them to exist as a character for several hours a day.

In one play I was in, "Black Comedy" by Peter Schaeffer, I played the role of Clea, a character whom I adored. But, I lied to the audience while I portrayed her (because I'm not really very much like her) and I deceived the audience while things went wrong onstage. I knew that things were going wrong, but the audience believed me and thought everything was going right. I was happy because I was able to watch them enjoy themselves, even when they didn't know what the real story was.

That's just the way work at Freddie's was to me. Most people would never set foot in a restaurant again if they knew half of what goes on behind the scenes. If clean silverware falls on the floor, we'd simply pick it up and put it back at the place settings. We didn't do it to be mean or nasty, it was just a mindless action. At least three times a night we'd run out of forks and steak knives, and when that happened, we'd just pick up the silverware, wipe it off, and use it again. Actually, it was better to do it that way. When people came in to dinner, what should we have said? "You'll have to excuse us, but you can't dine here tonight . . . we're out of silverware." Freddie, the owner of the place, would have not only fired us all, but probably executed us as well. We never re-used it when there was plenty stocked in the black plastic rack, only when we were jam-packed and very rushed.

Then there's coffee. If there's a low amount of decaf and regular and it's needed immediately, the two are simply mixed. The customers will never know the difference, we tell ourselves, and we are right. They do complain, however, when we don't get it to them immediately. Once a few chocolate chips from the triple layer chocolate cake fell into the filter and in with the Folger's crystals. I didn't notice this until after the pot was made and had already been served to people. So, I decided to keep my mouth shut and see if anyone noticed. Of course, they didn't. It just gave me an opportunity to sit back and smile at the audience, the customers of Freddie's III.

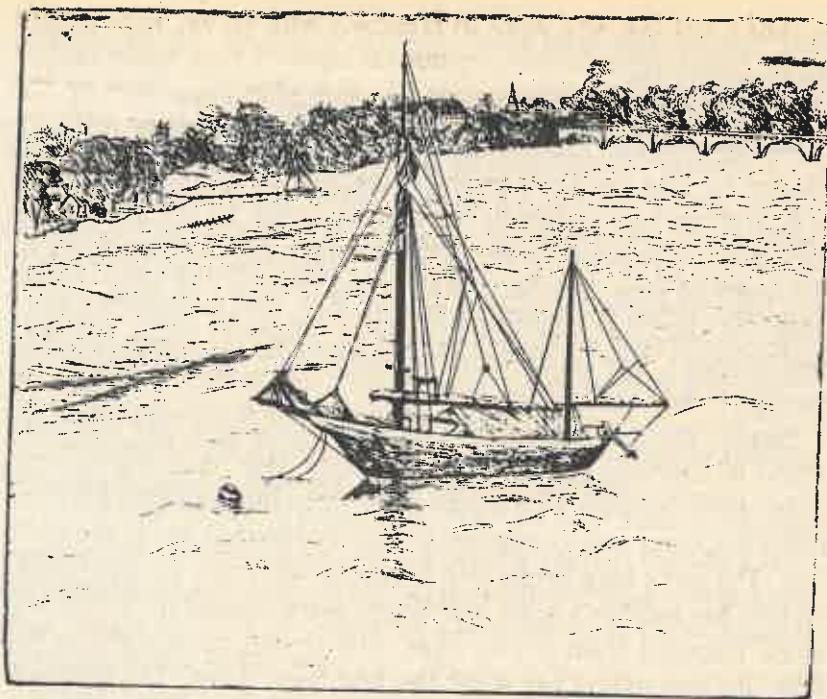
Occasionally, though, the patrons get a chance to smile at me. They hide silverware in their pink linen napkins, which is really a pain because I don't realize it until I've dumped the napkins in their proper bin, and then I have to spend extra time digging after them. Then Arlene, a waitress who appointed herself as being in charge (but who really isn't) yells at me for wasting time. Meanwhile, the people who hid their forks are on their way home, thinking about their table being set up for another couple, and how it isn't being done at the proper speed because I had to hunt for all the silverware.

The customers also leave notes to me on their placemats. The notes are sometimes lewd suggestions or advertisements and phone numbers, but more often they are just the absent-minded jottings of people who are hungry and waiting for food. I've received warnings of the hazards of cigarette smoking (cause clean air, don't dirty your lungs, give up smoking before your lungs . . . give . . . up . . . on . . . YOU!!!!) One man who had had his larynx removed wrote out an entire conversation with his friend on the placemats. Children draw pictures. People try to figure out the exact amount that fifteen percent of their check equals--but they hardly ever leave it. Once a man was brainstorming on what he should write about. He was a journalist, I think. These notes give fascinating insights into various styles of life, and a chance for people to have me as the audience.

Clearing, dumping, counting, setting-up. I'd do it endlessly, for hours at a time, and I've had some of my best thoughts and ideas while doing it. My brain is turned off when I bus the tables, and my body is on autopilot. Suddenly, though, an idea pops into my mind, one too good to ignore. I stop my cycle for a moment, jot down some notes on a placemat, and tuck them away to digest later, when my brain is really working, and I am backstage, without an audience who watches me or one that's being watched by me.

Watching the patrons inspires me. From the motorcycle hogs at the bar to the Brooks Brothers businessmen in the dining room, they excite me as I watch them with insider's eyes. They dance for me occasionally, I smile at them, and they smile back. Other times I am the one who is doing the dancing, and they who get the chance to smile first. When they leave, I go to clear their tables to see if they left me any notes on their placemats.

Heather J. Shirley
McMurray, PA
Sewickley Academy
Jeffrey Schwartz



Severn River

Kathleen Mahoney
Stone Ridge School
Patricia Anderson

Funeral

His eyes strain against the sun's brightness, glaringly beautiful in the early afternoon sky. They strain and squint, attempting to see the procession of funeral cars making its way slowly through the empty street. He stands silent and still, resting himself gently against the faded gray brick wall of the church. The tip of his right foot playfully kicks and twists a thin, frayed piece of the red carpet jutting out rudely from the tightly interlaced weave.

A few dark-clad mourners make their way into the church, pausing to give a faint smile and a shallow "hello." A few stop and talk with his mother, who shifts her weight from foot to foot tensely and rigidly, straining against the uncomfortable high heels. They quickly exchange words, and one by one, he is introduced to the faces varying from middle-aged to ancient. The same questions and greetings are exchanged with each. . . . How are you? Do you remember me? The last time I saw you, you were this big. How much you've grown!

He smiles and nods politely and says all of the right things. The faces are vaguely familiar but he recognizes none of them, and the harmless diplomatic lies flow smoothly from his mouth.

Yes, I remember. How are you? Yes, I know your granddaughter. I think I remember being at your house when I was a baby.

The small crowd around him disperses as the funeral procession begins to make its way up the dull concrete steps. He moves quickly through the stained-glass doors and takes his seat in the third pew from the back, next to his family, and his face twists, trying to look mournful.

The funeral mass runs its long, sad course, and throughout he watches face after face around him shatter. His own face is stern and expressionless and his body is still and erect, except for his dark eyes, which dart nervously around the pews. On his left he hears his father begin to cry softly. His father grew up with the deceased and immigrated to this country with him; he was one of his father's closest friends. His father is strong and proud. He can never remember seeing him cry before.

He walks slowly toward the altar, hoping that his face is as sad as those of the rest. A pang of conscience begins to gnaw; he has no feelings for the dead man, he is not sad, and he feels hardly anything more for the deceased's family. Words churn through his mind . . . psychopath . . . sociopath . . . cold-hearted . . . words he thinks are used to describe people who have no

feeling or compassion for others, and he begins to worry and sweat hotly, wanting desperately to feel something . . . to feel sad . . . wanting not to be a sociopath.

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The procession of mourners makes its way to the church basement after the mass and burial and begins the reception. Lines of old and young place the usual reception foods on their two-dimensional paper plates and converse loudly with each other. He stands with his family and begins again the ritual of meeting the mourners.

This is my son . . . Do you remember me? . . . Sit down, eat . . . He's the baby in the family . . . Such a handsome young man . . . Do you remember when I used to bounce you on my knee?

The polite smiles and smooth lies flow freely from him, like the deft movements of a skilled surgeon in the prime of his career. But the pangs of conscience grow stronger and sharper as each conversation eventually falls upon the deceased. He feels the air become a little harder to breathe, and he finds himself taking a lot of short, sharp gasps of oxygen. The faces which surround him seem to blur together, indistinct and similar. A small blood vessel in the back of his head begins to pound, tom-tomming the base of his skull. He wants to leave. More faces, more names appear before him, all alien and all the same. He sees his father smiling and bringing more people to meet him and he wishes he would stop because it's getting harder to keep smiling and lying and trying to act like he's sad. The pain in his head is almost unbearable, and he can feel his pores sweating freely now. Guilt, remorse, fear, anger . . . all seeming to course turbulently through the arteries in his head. And at the moment he thinks his head will burst, an exasperated breath of words escapes his lips.

I'm sorry . . . I have to go . . . I have a music lesson at 3:30 . . . I'm really sorry, nice to have met you . . . I really have to go . . .

A feeble excuse. A coward's excuse. But an excuse to escape this torture all the same. It is not a lie. It is a valid excuse. But a feeble one.

He does not run from the church, but he moves as quickly as one can by walking. He bursts out into the day, and his confused mind does not notice the distinct change in weather. The drops of rain pelt him harshly as he leans against a weathered steel railing, gasping desperately for breath. After several minutes he regains his composure, pulls his coat over his head, and walks toward his car, not looking back and not attempting to twist his face into a mournful expression.

Anthony DiTommaso
Conway, PA
Freedom Area Senior High School
Patricia M. Ross

Untitled

*Androgyny might be nice.
I think I would like
to be a man and a woman
all at once,
for then I could
snatch you up
with my eyes
and force you into loving me,
and just when you think that
I love you back,
I'd rub ice cubes on your cheeks
and make your stomach feel hollow
forever.*

Susan Kessler
Gaithersburg, MD
Seneca Valley High School
Ms. Summer Hardinge

The Sweet Perfume

She slowly inhaled the sickly sweet smell which pervaded the air. It was everywhere. In the curtains, in the couch, and in the clothes hanging in the closet.

Oh, that closet! What wonderful times she used to have in there when she was a little girl. She'd sway and totter on dainty, brightly-colored shoes and wiggle her toes, giggling as they slowly slipped down the steep slope of the heel to be mashed against the leather casing. She'd run her hands through her mommy's impossibly soft fur coat and pretend that she was a movie star like in the pictures of her mommy's magazines. And maybe, if she was looking just the right mixture of sweetness and wistfulness, her mommy would open the jewelry case. The little wooden box on the dresser would magically become a treasure trove. The shining stones and chains would twinkle and glitter as they slid down her stubby arms still plump with baby-fat. She found out later that they were just bits of tarnished and cracked glass.

The closet was a dark, exciting place. It seemed to hold the mysteries of the world; the dark made dragons and pirate ships all possible with merely a thought, blurring the line between reality and fantasy. Just to imagine all those boxes in their interesting shapes and sizes jumbled in pleasant confusion on the shelves and the carpet! Who knew what treasures she'd find inside! One time she even found a mouse. He had been in a little red box with a shiny bow on top. At the left corner was a tiny hole.

She had petted and played with him for days. He really liked to be stroked on the belly. She'd run her index finger slowly through his silvery-grey fur. She would pretend that she was the mommy and he was the little baby. Sometimes they would have tea with little toy teacups filled with water. And maybe, if they were very lucky, some cookies. Of course she had to break the cookie up in little crumbs for the mouse. He had smaller teeth. It lasted longer that way too. But that all stopped one day. She had looked in the little red box and he wasn't there. In the left corner was the hole she had covered with tape and in the right corner was a new hole. She used to hunt for him in the closet, crawling on her hands and knees. Then the game changed.

"Squeek, squeek. I am a mouse. Please give me some cheese," she would say.

She would burrow her nose in the thick carpet and shadowy fingers would brush against her back as if they were trying to catch her. It often became very dusty. No matter how hard she tried she couldn't help sneezing. Little specks of dust would dance their way up from the carpet and hit her face. She couldn't feel them hitting but imagined that a little thud went off as the dust landed on her face. The ground under the dust would shake a little like a tiny earthquake and then grow still. And maybe little men would come out and explore like on the moon.

But sneezing broke her code. Mouses didn't sneeze. Only people sneezed. Her daddy had sneezed for an entire day last week. Or was it last year? The punishment for breaking the code was to hold her breath forever--or as long as she could. One time she held her breath so long, she thought she had died. She held her breath even when she felt her face become hot and puffy. But when she saw the world start to dissolve into dots and change colors, she forgot about holding her breath. It turned red then it was black, and little dots swirled merrily along. The dots would bob all over the place, dancing on her hands, on the walls and careening into the walls. She wondered if they were related to the specks of dust she'd seen before. Maybe they were just the same except all dressed up like her mommy and daddy were sometimes. She had tried to look closer at them and just as she could see them, they spun around and around then vanished. She had squinted her eyes very hard but they wouldn't come back. Then she had gone back to her mouse game.

"Ouch," she screeched. She had bumped into a wall. Thump! Clunk! went all the boxes as they tumbled to the floor. Then the

door opened. Her head tilted upward to look at the big shadow looming over her.

A waft of the sickly sweet perfume enveloped her.

Her head jerked toward the door and the rings on her narrow fingers bit into her hand as they clenched into fists. She stared in horror as her memories seemed to come to life before her very eyes. The door slowly creaked open. She looked down at the sight of pale, fat fingers creeping around the edge of the door. As the door continued to open, the smell grew stronger and stronger. She could taste the perfume on her lips and on her tongue. It was suffocating her.

Finally, she saw the sight in all its strangeness: her daughter stood in cherubic innocence at the door. Her face, throat, and arms were dripping with a pale liquid onto the bedroom floor, at times dribbling onto a cracked crystal bottle that lay at the girl's feet. The girl's face broke into a mischievous grin as she looked up into her mother's eyes. Her hands were cupped as if to shield some treasure from prying eyes. She smiled indulgently at the little girl and asked her what she had been doing. The little girl motioned toward the closet and then leaned toward her to whisper some wonderful secret. "Look what I found in the closet, mommy!" she said as she slowly stroked the object. And from her fingers dangled the remains of a dead mouse.

Jae Sim
Pittsburgh, PA
Shady Side Academy
Mrs. Sarah Eldridge

Magic Carpets

On Wednesday, Libby and I went with Mommy to her favorite store, the one that has big pieces of material wrapped around cardboard things and pretty fabrics hanging from the wall. We ran past the chairs by the front door to find the twirly stools and the stands in front of them. Mommy knew where we'd be 'cuz we run to the back of the store every time we come.

There are books on the slanted stands that remind me of what painters use to hold up their pictures when they work. Libby and I always have contests to see who can get the best stool, or who can twirl faster, or who can find the prettiest dress in the books. There were only a few seats left, and Libby got one that didn't twirl. She tried all the other ones that nobody was sitting on.

I wondered why old ladies Mommy's age would want to look at those books with only pictures in them. Libby and I know they're only there for when little kids like us come in and don't want to walk around with their Mommies. And the chairs by the front door are for Daddies who don't want to shop. The store sure thinks of everybody.

Libby didn't find a stool that turned, so she came over to me and said, "Let me have your chair."

"Why should I?" I asked. It was one of the nice and thick ones that you had to climb up on.

"'Cuz I'm your big sister, that's why."

"So what? I was here first."

"Well, just let me sit there for a little while, I'll give it back to you. I promise."

"OK." I got down and dragged one of the boring old seats that Libby didn't want over to where she was sitting. She spun around once or twice and I was sorta glad I gave her the chair. It squeaked when it turned and the old ladies were looking at her funny. She looked pretty silly spinning around like that all by herself.

I checked to see what book Libby had, then pulled one over for myself. It's no fun if we both get the same book, 'cuz then we can't compare. Hers had a lady in a long blue gown on the

front cover, but mine had a group of ladies in shorts and tops, so it was OK. We looked at our own books for a few minutes, and then Libby said, "This is the dress I want. And Mommy'll make it for me 'cuz I'm gonna need new clothes for school."

Since she found something, I had to, too, so I said, "Well, Mommy's gonna make me this one," and I pointed to whatever was next to it on the page.

"No, she won't. Not until after she makes mine, anyway. She says that since I'm going to a new school this year and you're not, I get my new dress first. She says she'll make you something too, but only if she has time."

"Well, mine'll be prettier," I said, and I went back to flipping through my book. Libby just stuck out her tongue.

Pretty soon Mommy came over and told us it was time to go, so we sat on the chairs for Daddies in the front of the store until she paid for all her stuff. We tried to make her stay a little longer so we could climb on the brick wall outside, but she dragged us by our hands to the car.

"I got some nice pink material for curtains for your new room, Libby," Mommy said after we were all buckled up. Libby was getting Carl's old room 'cuz Carl was going to some college far, far away and he wouldn't be needing it anymore. I wanted a new room, too, but Mommy and Daddy said that since Libby's older she gets it. Besides, they told me, I'll get our big room all to myself.

Libby and I have fun in that big room. We always play games before we go to sleep. We turn off the lights and talk real quiet so nobody hears us and we make up places to go. Our beds turn into these two big flying carpets and we sail off into the darkness. Least, that's what Libby says. My bed doesn't seem to go anywhere, but Libby's must 'cuz of the stories she tells. I kinda wish she didn't have to get a new room. Now I'll have to make up my own stories.

We got home and Mommy took the material out of the bag. She wanted us to help her set the table, but we were already upstairs playing dolls when she called us. She got Daddy to do it instead.

Two weeks later, school started and Libby had a nice new dress. I had to wear something old, but Mommy said she'd have my dress done in a week. She had a lot of things to do, she said.

Last year Libby and I both went to Robert Morris School, but it only goes up to fourth grade so Libby had to go somewhere else. Her new school's called Alderdice. I like that name better. I wish I could go there, too. I will, but I have to wait two whole years.

I walked down the street to school all by myself the first day. Libby got to go with Daddy in the car, 'cuz her school's far away. When she came home at 3:00, I asked her what her new school was like. All she said was, "I don't have time to tell you about it. I've got lots of stuff to do for tomorrow. When you're in fifth grade, you'll see." She went up to her new room, which was all the way up in the attic, and left me alone downstairs. I had nothing better to do, so I straightened my room until dinner.

After we ate, I asked Libby if she wanted to play Boss/Secretary with me. That's this game she made up where one of us gets Daddy's desk in Mommy and Daddy's room to do her homework, and the other one gets his little nighttable by the bed. Libby's usually the Boss and gets the desk 'cuz she's the one who made up the game, but I don't mind. The nighttable has a phone on it and I can pretend to call people with it. Libby said she didn't feel like playing, though, so I had to do my homework on my bed. All I had was spelling, and when I finished, I went upstairs to see what Libby was doing.

She was sitting at the old white desk by the bed when I came in. I leaned over her shoulder to see what fifth-grade homework looked like, but all she was doing was putting a brown paper cover on a history book.

"Can I help?" I asked her.

"You'll mess it up," she said. "It has to be perfect. I know how to do it right; you don't."

I sat on her bed for a while, but she just sat there covering her book and didn't talk to me so I left.

I went downstairs and watched TV for a while with Mommy and Daddy, and then I went to bed. When I laid down, I thought of where I wanted to go on my magic carpet. The far-off place I'd like to go to the most is Libby's room, I thought. There I could have more fun than anywhere else. I closed my eyes and wished real hard, but still, my bed didn't go.

Mary-Louise Giunta
Scranton, PA
Scranton Preparatory School
Vincent J. Vanston

A Woman Running Her Fingers Through Her Hair

*Her long, sensuous nails are red
Like ripe cranberries growing among
The mute mosses.*

*Her fingers slide,
Awakened by the touch
Of golden hair.*

*She captures the scent
As if it were in a web of snow,
Until her hands move away
Like a distant swimmer.*

Suki Beebe
Hollis, NH
Hollis Area High School
Elizabeth Kirschner

Side Walker

*He came from a block around the corner,
And went on.
Frame draped in corduroy browns,
Topped with a tweed driver's cap,
He'd nod politely to the mongrels who
Violated the hum of neighborhood silence.
Arm slung in a stiff sling, and
Rubber tipped cane slugging the pavement,
His right leg shied slow,
Then swift,
Obvious,
Swinging into the next block of sidewalk.
His eyes pinned down the distance before him,
And his lips pursed and clenched against
The wind or
The stench of car exhaust.
To a pulse he walked--
Mine and his.
Time and again
He'd return to those
Concrete slabs of his life and
I to the davenport window.*

Lenna Parr
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones



Troubled
 Todd Swanson
 Kiskiminetas Springs School
 James Nagle

Crash Course

*It began with a jerk,
 As if waking me from a bad dream.
 But backwards, I'm pulled from reality
 into a nightmare--self made.
 The flashing lights are like dancers--
 slow moving in a strobe-lit room.
 They crowd, question, and threaten.
 I tremble.
 Another jerk.
 My nightmare dance stops.
 I look around.
 All that remains is a corpse--
 twisted metal and shattered glass.
 Oil stains the road.
 Not blood,
 Not mine.*

Diane Anastasio
 Centerport, NY
 Harborfields High school
 Dr. Joyce Lemonedes



John Carlson
 Albert Einstein High School

David

She drove the car into the driveway, noticing that the steering wheel turned easier on the gravel. And she was even going slow. So what, she thought, I've noticed that before. She got out of the car and walked toward the door of the house, thinking how nice it would be if he came to see her as she came home. She thought of what she would say, and wondered if he'd kiss her. She unlocked the door and held it open after she had gone in to let in a dog that she imagined she would have if David wasn't allergic to dogs.

"Come on Wally, get in the kitchen." She reached down and patted at the air where its head would have been. She put down her leather portfolio, leaning it against the wall. It fell to the floor with a slap. She didn't pick it up.

"David? Are you home?" she called up the stairs. David was her son. He was ten, and wandered aimlessly through the house, ghost-like and pale, with big, vacant brown eyes that stared at her blankly when she spoke to him. There was no answer, and she wondered where he was. He never did anything, had no reason to be anyplace but home, and her husband John never let him in his studio. She went back out the door, and walked across the overgrown lawn to an old barn. On the ground level there were two cobwebbed horse stalls. She went up a staircase, noticing that one of the weathered brown stairs had been replaced with a new yellow one. She knocked on the door at the head of the stairs, and was rewarded with a muffled, "Go away, David."

She opened the door, ducking to avoid a hurled paintbrush aimed in her direction.

"Oh, it's you. Hi," John said as he walked over to pick up his paintbrush. He leaned over, picked it up, and straightened, standing in front of her. He kissed her, putting his hand behind her neck.

"How was work?"

"Fine." She smiled, squirming a little because of his direct eye contact. She wasn't used to that yet; she felt naked when he looked at her with his sleepy brown eyes. Her eyes were a light, faded blue.

"How's your painting going? Where's David?" she asked a little nervously.

"OK. I don't know. He should be in the house. He might be playing in the pond across the street." He spoke slowly, as if he were half-asleep, expending as little energy as possible. "What's for dinner?"

"I don't know. Whatever we have. Have you looked in the kitchen lately?"

"Yes. There's Corn Flakes," he offered.

"Is that all?"

"No."

"What else is there?"

"Salt, pepper, and some vanilla extract, I think."

She laughed and sat on the couch, pushing a pizza box onto the floor.

"What'd you have for lunch?" she asked jokingly.

"Pizza," he said, sitting on a stool. He squeezed paint out of a large tube and mixed it on a speckled palette. "What's for dinner?" he asked again.

"Pizza," she said, and smiled.

"Good, I like pizza."

"Good. You order. I'm going to find David," she said, and started back down the stairs, calling up to him, "Remember, no fish!"

She walked back to the house, went into the kitchen, and picked up the phone. She dialed from memory, and stretched the cord to its limit, trying to reach the stereo.

"Hello?" a voice called from inside the phone.

"Hi Ame. Can you hold on a second?" Without waiting for a

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reply, she held the phone at arm's length away, stretching the cord further, and reaching out with the other hand to turn on the stereo. She put the phone back to her ear. "You still there? Had to turn on the radio."

"How are you?" Amy asked.

"Fine. Is David over there?"

"Yes he is. He's in the kitchen, eating a burrito. Don't you ever feed him? He's getting really thin."

"He was sick last week. There's nothing to eat over here anyways. John's supposed to go shopping, but you can't get him away from a painting once he's started. No way. How's Corin?"

"Fine. He's around here somewhere, making a mess."

"That's good. He needs to make a mess sometimes; it's good for him. Listen, can David sleep over there? I have a feeling John wants to be alone tonight. Is that OK?"

"Sure. I guess so." There was a pause.

"You're sure?"

"Sure, but you know, John should spend more time with David. You should too. He's been really quiet lately. You know, sort of drawn inward."

"Yegh, I know. I feel bad, but what can I do?"

She hadn't noticed that John had come in, and she jumped when he came up behind her and put his arms around her waist. He kissed her neck, and leaned his chin on her shoulder.

"Listen, Ame, I gotta go. Buy David a toothbrush if he needs it. I'll get him tomorrow morning. He's going to work with me. Bye." She hung up the phone, and she and John went into the den and sat on the sagging couch. She put her feet up and leaned against him, moving her head side to side, feeling his collarbone with the back of her head. She closed her eyes, and smiled.

Amy Crawford
Moorestown, NJ
Ms. Turnbull

Park Walk-Out

*Along the old cranberry trees
which aren't of course
they sit
pretend to play chess
philosophize
dream
die.*

*But they are casting
fishing the park
with tendrils that climb and wind
among the cranberry trees
which aren't of course
so that it gets harder
to come to the park
each day.*

*I would not be surprised
to wake one raspberry morning
and find the park
and the park people
gone
pulled entire
through a beanstalk rip in the sky
to where we have no place at all
and can no longer go.*

Robin Suleiman
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Mrs. Peggy Pfeiffer

Walk Soft

Dim day, gray and clouds. The leaves didn't resist when the wind took them from the trees. Crunchy grass and withered flowers stood stiff in the cold. The doe stood quiet in the field of dying alfalfa and timothy. She munched on the weeds and looked about. The hawk was in the pines, and blackbirds cut the sky.

"Walk soft," Daddy said, "whispered the little girl. "Be small," he said, "and then they may not see you. I'll be silent, and I'll touch that deer today."

She moved a little, and the plastic bag of raw carrots in her pocket made a loud sound. She froze, thinking the doe would run, even though it was so far away. Being sure to watch it, she carefully took out the bag and set it on the ground. The deer looked at her, then down. She ran toward it, watching. It looked up, she stopped. It looked at her a while, and she ceased to exist for a moment. She looked into doe eyes.

The hawk came down from the sky suddenly to surprise a mouse. It surprised the girl as well. When she looked back, the deer had gone over the hill. She followed and stepped lightly. She kept the brown form in sight as she moved behind a log with ants. There were maggots, too, and then she saw the rodent carcass, bloody from its death by dog or fox. It made her feel dizzy.

When she sat up, the doe was closer and looking the other way, its ears up, ready. The little girl saw a flash of fluorescent orange in the trees ahead, then heard a bang, which left her head feeling dense. The deer sprang towards her and, seeing her, darted to one side and leaped over the log. She watched its tail go, and when it left, she walked out to the middle of the field where the doe had been.

Two hunters saw her, came close. A muscular old man spoke.

"What're you doing out here, missie? You've got to be careful. It's huntin' season, and hunters might not see you, or they might think you was a deer. Tell your mama to dress you in bright clothes, if you've got to be out here. Or at least you could make lots of noise so we know you're out here."

She turned away and started home. Walk soft, her daddy'd said, be small and maybe they won't see you. Don't scare them, he'd said, and maybe they won't run.

Elizabeth Traver
Troy, NY

Untitled

*Picasso's lover,
his dream childwoman
with meaty arms
and generously proportioned fingers
and little dots of fingernails
is not on angular sloping-lines canvas
cavorting with her evil self
She is here
beneath the urgent shouting gulls
with me
And she is not Picasso's lover
She is mine
And she has only one face
And she is tickling me
As I try
To eat my sandwich*

James Wood
Newark, DE
Glasgow High School
Jane McFann



Jennifer Carchman
Princeton High School

August

In the mornings Beth rises early and wanders along the beach, stopping often to collect shells and make designs in the sand. She draws empty circles with her foot, then watches the water wash them away. Sometimes she sits down until the sand and her thoughts discomfort her.

Sometimes she brings a book and reads it, staying in one place for a long time. Sometimes she writes in a tattered red journal. Once she wore her Walkman and sang quiet harmonies. Beth always looks helpless and alone.

At midday you can find her with her friend Karen along the same stretch of beach, this time working at their tans. They play in the water often for hours at a time, splashing and swimming out beyond the waves. Beth seems different now, happier.

Sometimes Beth frowns and speaks one sentence very quietly, and Karen smooths her hair with a gentle hand. Karen

speaks soft words for a while; then the two are silent for another while.

In the afternoon they browse among the shops. Beth looks at postcards, but then remembers something and turns away, only to find herself looking at lovers' greeting cards; she turns away from them also. She watches the young men, until they become uncomfortable--they must look away from her probing eyes.

Sometimes she and Karen buy ice cream and sit on a bench in the center of the square; they complain about their indulgence and then begin to talk about more serious things. Beth speaks evasively, and Karen understands, steering clear of the painful topic. They often remain long after they have licked the last traces of sugar off their fingers.

They eat dinner at the house, usually, with Beth's parents, sister, and sister's boyfriend. All is jolly; people describe funny incidents of the day and laugh at each other's stories. Beth joins in the laughter, but there is a glint of pain in her face. She tells few stories about herself, and when she does, she gets absolute attention from all present.

She and Karen often wash the dishes, clattering happily or toiling in silence. Usually Beth washes and Karen dries, each with special care for each item. They replace the pieces slowly so as not to break anything.

They sleep in the living room on sleeping bags--there is a lack of privacy but an added benefit of a television. They watch late into the night, usually cheap horror films with the sound turned down. Karen often falls asleep early, but Beth sits up until the film ends. She cannot stand to sleep before the movie is over.

Beth has trouble falling asleep; once she cried so hard that Karen woke up and had to sing lullabies to her for an hour. Beth's sobs subdued until they became the light breaths of slumber. Karen sat up for a while longer and then went back to sleep.

Joni Owen
Princeton, NJ
Princeton High School
Maureen Shea

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