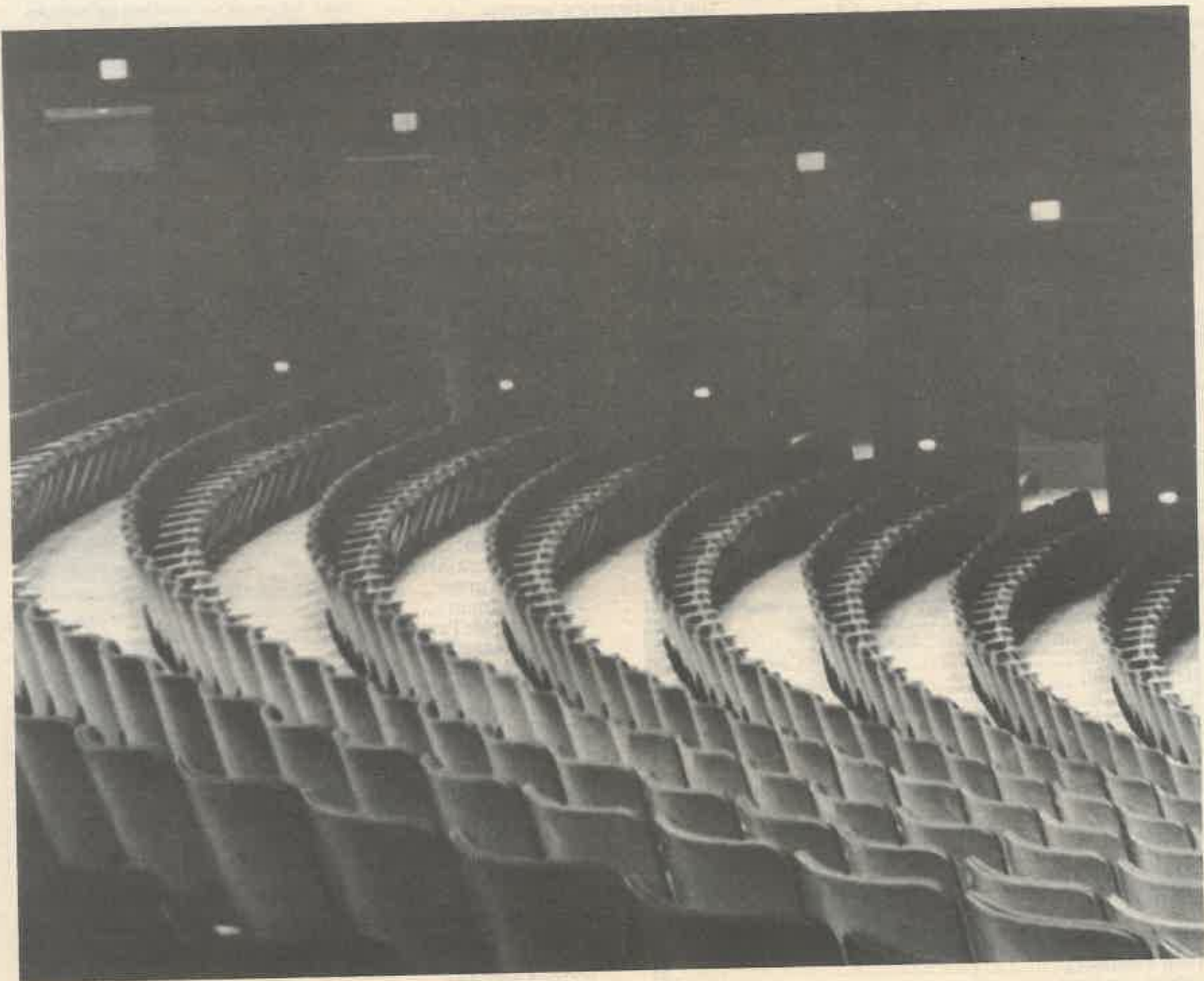


SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY



the
apprentice WRITER



Becky Chalmers
Baltimore, MD
Howard High School
Linda Durey

\$2

Welcome to the eighth issue of **THE APPRENTICE WRITER**, which annually features the best writing, photography, and artwork we receive from secondary school students.

Each year we send nearly 12,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper **THE DAILY ITEM** in Sunbury, PA--to over 3,500 schools in the 10 states from which we receive over 4,500 submissions.

It's been my pleasure to discover hundreds of outstanding student writers through their submissions to **THE APPRENTICE WRITER**, and for the past

three years, I have had an opportunity to work with some of those same writers, as well as dozens more, through Susquehanna's weeklong summer writers' workshops.

The summer workshops, which attract students in fiction, poetry, and journalism, are just one part of the growth of the Writing Program at Susquehanna. The Visiting Writers Series has brought artists such as Sharon Olds, Madison Bell, Tobias Wolff, David Bradley, and June Jordan to campus. Advanced workshops in fiction and poetry are available. A student reading series, an ex-

panded literary magazine, independent writing projects, and writing internships have provided interesting options for student writers.

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, essays, photography, and artwork by students in grades 9-12. Send material to Gary Fincke, Writing Program Director, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, (717) 374-4164. The deadline for submitting is March 15, 1991.

We also welcome inquiries about the Summer Writers' Workshops in fiction, poetry, and journalism.

THE APPRENTICE WRITER

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LOGO DESIGN

Carolyn Gienieczko

THE APPRENTICE WRITER is published annually by Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, and Ottaway Newspapers through the cooperation of **THE DAILY ITEM**.

Motherdaughterson

When we carpeted the dining room

my brother was seven

I was eleven

my mother spent days emptying the hutch
wiping, wrapping, packing away
her bridal silver, bridal china

I bridle up inside me

red stomping horses who roll their eyes

when she pours over my brother's life

like she poured over gilt-edged, lily-colored tea-cups

that day they carried carpet through the dining-room door.

All women with sons are like this.

Sons break their mother's hearts as easily as china.

I have seen this, sitting in the car with her

after his team lost, or when he didn't make the team.

She bruises up around the eyes and

I cannot touch her.

Not that I haven't stolen her clothes,

or nagged and whined and been forgiven.

Not that I haven't woken to find the dress laid out for me

smoothed and hemmed and perfect

while every wrinkle absent in the sleeve

reproaches me from her forehead, later

over midnight coffee.

There are many debts and they are all mine.

But, selfish still, I wish I knew

if she pours over me, too, like her china and her sons;

if I could break her heart like he does.

Jen Braun

Elizabeth, NJ

The Oak Knoll School

Harriet Marcus

Queen Bee

She nestles her fat thorax

into the honeycomb,

watching with a thousand,

tile eyes

as they crawl around her.

With wet legs

cloaked in yellow

cotton,

sacs of pollen

ripped

from infant mums,

they knock

their marble bodies together,

bumping against

the static queenly head.

She doesn't blink

but swings her fun house

eyes

from side to side,

slow, like drops of honey

or the swelling of a sting.

Sara Glover

White Hall, MD

Dulaney High School

William Jones

Mirage

Maybe it's the minerals they put in our tap water,

you know,

for our teeth.

Maybe it's those crazy kinds of cereals

I keep trying

but never finish the boxes,

Super Mario Brothers and

Christmas Cap'n Crunch.

I don't know,

but lately when I look at the sky

all I think of are wacky violins

stringing along in the orangey sunlight

and wonderful breezes

shimmering breezes

that remind me of nowhere around here.

All I can smell is

watery cactii,

and the sun seeps through

the clean laundry on the line in the back.

And when I close my eyes

this peace stretches for miles around me

across the deserts in New Mexico

where it's warm and dry

and floods in through my fingers,

into my bones.

It slowly stirs my head

and all I can do is breathe

and breathe.

Candice Hwa

Potomac, MD

Winston Churchill High School

Peggy Pfeiffer

With David

Silence is a wave,

a deep and rocky blue

behind every word:

a wave about to fall.

First, there are the solid, bony things:

wooden knobs on doors and desks,

in all the colors of wheat.

There are fingers, and wrists,

and ballpoint pens. Touchables.

Then come quick-passing, soft things,

like words--leaf, bed, tomorrow,

Coco Pop jingles, eternity, you.

There are kisses, looks.

All these slip like syrup through

cracks in time.

And beyond that is silence, a water too cold to sip.

We would dance forever,

turn on toes to keep it away--

or cling and huddle like sailors

thrust into water by a burning ship:

biting lips, weaving fingers

as if flesh could keep it out.

Jen Braun

Elizabeth, NJ

The Oak Knoll School

Harriet Marcus

Meet My Maker

All is not lost; th' unconquerable will
 And study of revenge, immortal hate
 And courage never to submit or yield
 And what else is not to be overcome?
 - Milton, Paradise Lost

I wait at the bus stop with six of my neighbors and my brother. The bus stop is at the end of our dead end street, Springwood Drive. There is a small rock and a telephone pole at the corner of the intersection of our street and the main road. Some of us gather around the rock and the others lean on the pole. Both of these places offer a good view of the road from which the bus comes. We all want to get in line first; it's a little game we play. This is the last stop before the school and few seats are left on the bus.

We throw pebbles from the side of the road at the green street sign jutting out of the side of the telephone pole. I keep looking down the road for the slightest yellow showing through a dense patch of trees. Nothing. I edge toward the line of backpacks anyway. Someone, Jason, turns around and makes a dash for the line, for his backpack. I am closer and I dart toward mine. I sweep it up and move to the beginning of the line. Sure enough, there is the yellow school bus rumbling up toward us. I get pushed a little, from the others jostling for position. The girls, however, take their time, pick up their bags, and walk to the front of the line anyway. None of us do anything. Some of us try to protest, others make sarcastic remarks, but the girls just ignore our whining.

The bus creaks to a stop in front of us and begins to flash its lights. The door opens and we step up into the bus. I put my hands on the seat backs beside me and look at the seats. As usual, most are taken up. I have to sit with someone I don't know. I sit with a girl, but she just looks out the window. Everyone else sits down and the bus rumbles forward again. I hear giggling behind me. Then screams. I turn around. Someone has thrown a dead mouse at my brother. He picks it up and tosses it back to where it came from, two popular boys, big, with rock hard faces. I hear more squeals. My brother ignores them. I try to look ahead.

"Chink," says someone to me. I imagine my brother explaining that a chink is a crack in the wall but I just sit there and pretend not to hear. The person resumes his talk, as if I were not there. Just what I want. I curl up in my seat and try to become smaller. I want to look out the window but the girl is there.

The bus finally reaches our school. We all file out and go play in the playground before the starting bell rings.

Gym class. This week we are playing floor hockey. All of us are wearing corduroys or jeans. The school lets us play in our school clothes. We do our warm-ups. We line up into four different lines and spread out. We do our jumping jacks, pushups, situps, and stretches. We run in place for a minute. The gym teacher, Mr. Freeman, asks the class for volunteers for captains and he chooses two of the raised hands. One boy and one girl. No one is surprised by the choice of captains. Steve and Tracy--popular, athletic, and everything else you would expect in a nice town like this. They will pick teams now. No one is surprised by their choices either. One by one, the teams are chosen. Jocks, girls, and then the geeks. I, not unexpectedly, am chosen third to last. It is one-on-one hockey, no goalies, two minutes for each person and everyone gets to play. The two teams line up against opposite walls of the tiny gym. There are two goals, one red and one blue, against the two empty walls. There are two plastic hockey sticks in the center of the gym. Mr. Freeman holds an orange puck made out of plastic. Everyone looks at the other team to see who they are matched up with. They move around and point at a friend across the room, making faces.

Two by two the students face off at the center of the gym. Mr. Freeman drops the puck and the two kids chase it around the gym, their teams cheering loudly. Occasionally someone scores, but most of the time, the two players slap blades and

send the puck into the air and they have to run it down again. But here's Todd. He plays hockey. He handles the stick, the puck, and the other player with ease. One, two, five goals and his time is up. Now the other team is winning by something like eleven to six. It's my turn. The captain tells me to just do my best. Yeah, I've played a little hockey. Here's my opponent, Scott. He was chosen fourth by the other team. Mr. Freeman drops the puck and I slap it away. We chase after it. Scott is a bit slow. I take the puck and shoot. Goal. Mr. Freeman drops the puck again and I take the puck again, handling it the way I was taught in the Youth Hockey League. Shoot. Goal. Whenever Scott gets the puck I just slap it away from him and I score. My two minutes are over and I sit down against the wall. Some of the jocks come over to me and congratulate me. For what? They tell me I scored seven goals. I tell them to shut up. I don't believe them--I think they are making fun of me. They laugh and point at the plastic flipcards that show the score. They start talking to me, asking if I really didn't know I scored seven points. I didn't really think about it. "Who's counting?" I say.

Gym class is over. Mr. Freeman goes into his little closet to put away the equipment. He comes out with a piece of paper. MVP. The jocks crowd around the gym teacher while others file out. Todd is our MVP. Mr. Freeman says that five goals is simply outstanding. My captain says "What about Kenji?" Mr. Freeman, with his military haircut and blank countenance, says "Kenji?" I just walk out and go to my next class.

One of my fifth grade teachers is Mr. Hiller. He is the vice principal and everyone thinks he's a kook, a real nut. His hands are gnarly and warty. His face has a certain graveness and his eyes look wide open and huge, magnified by his dark-framed glasses. His appearance is that of a madman, one who rambles yet stresses organization, is brilliant yet stupid at the same time, eccentric yet dead serious, and totally unaware of his paradoxical self. Dumbkoff. That's what Einstein's teachers called him, he says. He says something in Chinese. That means "cooperation" he says. He looks at me and says "you have to watch those Orientals." He admires Orientals, it seems. He thinks they are ideal students. There's more to them than Westerners understand. Chinese or Japanese can't pronounce F's. Tofu. Fuji. I don't know what he is talking about.

The bell rings and it is 10:30 in the morning. Recess. All the kids rush out of the school building and into the playground. Sometimes I play tag or touch football, but most of the time I just wander around by myself. I stand by the curb, hands in my pockets, near one of those four square courts painted on the pavement. Suddenly, someone bumps into me. I turn around and see a girl turn around and say to me "Watch where you're going."

I move away silently, only to walk into a group of three boys. The tallest of them pushes up the sides of his eyes with his index fingers and jeers, "Chinese!" The shortest takes his fingers and pulls the side of his eyes down. "Japanese!" The last one pulls one eye down and the other up and says, "Mixed!" They sing it like a song, and the trio then makes almond slivers out of their eyes and they walk away, saying something about "yellow." I stare after them, but then the bell rings. I slip my hands deeper into my pockets and shuffle my feet as I go back into the school.

We are having another debate says Mr. Hiller one day. Last week, some boys argued against another group of girls about the role of women in society. This time the debate is on astrology versus astronomy. He turns to me and points his finger and says that he wants me to get a group together and argue the side of astronomy. He assigns another girl to take the other side of astrology.

After class, at lunch, and at lunch recess, I ask classmates if they want to debate on my side. One by one they refuse. They were in the last debate or they didn't have time. I am alone and abandoned to do my own work, my own research. For a week I do this, and the day before I find that the girl who has been assigned the astrology side has done no work. Mr. Hiller says

(Continued on page 5)

that he will debate me, one on one. He has prepared nothing, but he sits down in his swiveling padded chair. We face each other; he is in his chair, and I in my standard plastic chair, in the middle of the classroom. Teacher and student. The students all sit on one side of the room. I had amassed a wealth of evidence against astrology. It was unfounded and irrational, hardly a science and vaguely similar to astronomy. But the teacher had set the question and the rules. Slowly, as the debate goes on, my ideas become twisted and warped. Mr. Hiller hammers away at me and my argument dissipates into "I don't think that is possible." After our closing arguments, Mr. Hiller asks the class who won, and all but one sides with astrology. I sit down and realize that I could not have outargued or outreasoned my teacher. I am just the student.

In math class we are making string art. The teacher shows us how to make curves out of straight lines. We make our own design on paper and then transfer this to a board. We tap nails into the board and tie string from one nail to another. My design looks like an origami balloon balancing atop a pointed pedestal. I draw my points on the board and put the nails in their place. I take some colored thread. I put green, blue, orange, and purple on first. But then, on top, I put the red, yellow, black, and white threads. After I tie the last piece of yellow string, I hold the board up and look at it. The colored lines look like wires that hold up tall bridges, but these wires wrap around and hold each other up to form a slightly oblong sphere. The teacher comes up and asks what it is called. I think a little and say, "Globe of Light," because that's what it looks like.

The teacher tells me to show my piece to Mr. Hiller. I walk down the fluorescent light of the corridor to the last room in the hallway. I knock lightly on the door and walk in slowly. The class looks up and Mr. Hiller asks what I want. I say that my math teacher told me to show this to you. He asks why. I repeat myself, saying that my math teacher sent me here. He says no--that's not the reason. He asks why again and I think and say that I don't know. He says to me a bit disappointedly, "Because you're proud of it."

Five years later. I pull back my fist, the red flush of anger dissipates into the cool air, but I still feel the blood rushing through my head. A friend pulls up my seven year old brother from the ground. My brother. He is crying, cowering. I sit down on the moist earth. My friend, he looks down on me--he can't believe this. He tells me I am the perfect student. He tells me that he expected more. He asks why--"How could you do this to your own brother?"--and then he lifts the little victim and carries him away. He doesn't understand. He nods his head. I understand, now. I see my friend walking away with my brother in his arms, comforting him. I ask myself, "Who is that in his arms? Who is the victim?" I ask myself "Shall a man be more pure than his maker?"

I hope to meet my maker brow to brow and find my own the higher.

Wilson Lee
No. Andover, MA
E.G. Ward

Cary

I kneel on the bed behind her. My knees go sinking into the mattress. With a brittle blue comb, I straighten the last, wet inches of her hair. Her hair falls to her waist. When she lets it dry in the air, it erupts into springs and ringlets all over her head.

I curl some strands around my ring finger. They are icy cool; she has left the windows open. The whole blue of the sky washes over the room in a wave. I dig the comb into the tangled mass that lies over her shoulders, pull down. One long wet ribbon at a time comes smooth and tame. Quietly the comb plucks them up,

teases them, and lays them down. My hand is covered with a lace of fine, wet lines.

I suppose I do love Cary. She is reading a red-jacketed novel in the light of a June Saturday. It is quiet. There is the slap of pages turning, wet locks falling, the wind on the walls.

Slap. I lean one wrist on her shoulder. Combing Cary's hair is tiring, all the tiny muscles between my wrist and my elbow resist it. I am being so careful, slow.

There. I pull the comb down from the crown of her head until it slips easily through the silky fringe ends.

I let the comb fall to the sheets. My head droops. Cary smells like water, soap.

I gather her hair in my hands. It's heavy, wet like this, smooth and lined like worn wood. I scoop it into a liquid pile and rest it gently on her left shoulder, marshalling maverick strands into its amber river with my fingers.

Cary is wearing only boxer shorts and an old school blouse. The towel from her shower is a puddle on the floor. I rest both wrists on her shoulders. Bone on bone, a solid feeling.

The wind picks at the curtains, comes brusquely into the room. On my damp hands and arms it is cold. I shiver and then my eyes feel all dry. I can't stop shivering, a shiver that curdles everything inside me. Sometimes I wish I could put my hands around Cary's neck and lay my head on her shoulder; a little girl on a piggy-back ride.

"Done?" she asks, turning toward me. She grins, and her hair tumbles down off her shoulder, into her lap. I have always loved playing with Cary's hair. That is silly, now.

"Yep."

Cary lifts herself into the room, bracing the flats of her hands against the bed and untangling her tan legs. She is getting ready to go out with Mark Delbarton. They are going dancing in Springfield. Cary unbuttons her shirt, tossing it onto the bed as she walks into the closet.

I lean back against the wall, legs folded under me on the bed.

A voice calls from the closet. "Red or, um, periwinkle flowers?"

"Red," I call back. There's the shushing of cloth on cloth, and the twanging of coat hangers pushed together. Footsteps.

I was going to stay at Cary's house tonight, probably. We were just talking over the kitchen table when Mark called. Cary had told me I could stay anyway, but I am only staying to help her get ready. You don't tell a boy you can't come out on Saturday night because you have a friend over, watching you uncertainly over a glass of Tab that is mostly ice. I never would.

Cary walks back into the room. She wears a red sweater, a short black skirt.

"Toss me those."

I sling a limp pair of stockings at her across the room. They fall a little short and she bends quickly to get them. Not annoyed. We are rarely annoyed with each other anymore.

Once, though, Cary's dog died. She would always talk about it, weeks after it was buried. One day at lunch, when she wasn't there, I started to complain how sick I was of hearing about Patsy. And then I started in on how she always talks about Mark Delbarton, too. Looking at the tacky silver threading the linoleum lunch table, I saw the fine bones of her wrist, skin tanned the color of toast. I was eating with people who didn't like her very much. It was so easy to go on.

You can find something wrong with anybody if you try.

The next day she wouldn't talk to me. I don't know who told her, or what they said.

That Friday I walked into the girls' bathroom and she was sitting on one of the sinks, her legs in blue tights swinging over the tile floor.

"Hi, Cary," I said, so she would see I was there. She looked at me, and she looked so stupid, like she did when we found Patsy, bloody and icy, in the street.

She sort of gulped at the air. The skin around her eyes was shaded, grey like pencil lead.

"Meg," she began, "why did you say it? To them. Meg, I'm so sorry, please, just tell me...."

She might have said more than that. But, when she started to talk, I started to cry. I never cry. But then I just choked as I tried to breathe. My hair fell in my face and I clamped both hands over my mouth to keep the sound in. I was shaking.

Cary jumped down off the sink and grabbed my doubled over form by the shoulder. "Stop it!" she yelled, shaking me hard, her nails in my skin. "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" The echo cracked on the tile walls.

And then she hugged me, her scrawny arms so tight they hurt. I hugged her back. I remember the wool of her sweater scraping across my face. We must have looked like we were fighting, the mean strangle-hold fighting of street kids, but no one saw us. I still have small, shiny marks on my skin where her nails were, making us even.

Ever since then we don't get annoyed with each other.

I don't know why I did that, especially to Cary. She is almost a year younger than me, and shy.

When she was thirteen, she was remarkably skinny; she looked like one of the pictures of immigrant children in my freshman history text: hair pale as light, big eyes, arms and legs borrowed from a stick figure.

St. Mary's was school for everybody then, from kindergarten kids dragged in distractedly by their big-bosomed mothers, to boys in the senior class who already had their own families. Eighth grade girls still played hop-scotch in the parking lot before school, and after lunch, and Cary would wait her turn at the end of the line, her uniform tights sagging about her ankles, rubbing her asphalt marker between her palms. She was no match for the girls who could get through treezies twice before going butterfingers.

One bright, cold day the scuffed white toes of saddle shoes were dancing with an especially loud and flagrant grace over the chalked gameboards, and Cary was trying to play. I was leaning on the lot fence, and I heard the bigger girls objecting.

"We're playing here, okay? Can't you wait?"

"Can't I play with you?"

"Look, kid, just get lost."

"Get a life, chickie."

"But I always play here." That was true. After school, Cary would play against herself in the empty parking lot until it was almost dark. She didn't like being alone in the apartment, and her mother wasn't home until nine, she told me later over an ice cream soda.

"Oh, excuse us for using your board."

"Get outta here, kiddo."

These weren't dainty girls, either; they had long hands with broad palms, and nobody at school was ever too hesitant to use their hands.

I heard the rough noise of shoes scraped on pavement as I leaned against the fence with my biology book a few feet away. Then a tall, dark girl with a streak of purple hair over one ear shoved Cary so hard that she fell into my arms. I sank into the fence and my books and papers slopped to the ground. Cary's cheek was red and scratched where someone had slapped her. She was light to hold.

"You okay?" I asked. I took her hands off my shoulders and set her back on her own skinny legs.

She nodded.

"What's your name?"

"Cary Hanlon."

She kept her head tucked down, tried to pull her uniform blouse sleeve down over her fist. The creases of her fingers were red from cold. It was late October.

She was not pretty, even in the cellophane-fairy way fake blondes are. That was why I offered:

"My name's Meg. Meg Kelly."

She only looked at me.

"Sure you're okay?"

The fine skin around her eyes pleated into a frown. She didn't understand my questioning.

The bell rang. Students in all sizes began drifting towards St. Mary's gum-colored doors. Lunch was over. Cary ran to pick up her threadbare blue knapsack.

"Cary," I called, watching her heave the bag over one tiny shoulder. "Do you want to go to Parmel's for a soda after school? I'll buy you the soda."

She stared at me. I watched her; raised my eyebrows; grinned. Slowly she nodded, and grinned back at me. Then she ran towards one of the doors, the pleats of her green and blue plaid flipped by the wind.

The tabletops at Parmel's were warm and wet and soapy. The corners of the windows were dark with dust, and the plastic booths and cake covers were stale, yellowing in the air. Over the counter, the same signs advertising the same prices have always hung, even the ninety-cent hot dog notice written on a paper plate and held up over the stove with a wooden clothespin.

Cary and I sat in a booth by the window. On the other side of the glass, Broad Street hurried on under a half-hearted rain, and Cary told me her story, chewing pensively on a straw.

She had been born in Kamasca, Delaware, in a small house with green bathroom tiles. That was all she remembered of the house before they moved to an apartment in Baltimore, where her parents split up. Her father had gone south to his parents in Virginia. She and her mother came to New Jersey. Her mom was a night nurse at the General. Their apartment on Y Street was dark and echoing when Cary got home from school each day to make her own dinner because her mother wouldn't be home for hours yet.

At night, Cary said, she would watch the headlights of passing cars come in the window and ripple across her bedroom wall, and listen sometimes to the keening of sirens or the heaving of the volunteer fireman's alarm. She didn't sleep much. She hated St. Mary's.

I watched Cary in the gray light of Parmel's; her nose was red and she crumpled the paper that had been around her straw to a rolled-up pebble while she spoke.

The waitress who had brought us the sodas walked by.

"Anything else, hon?" she asked. "For you or the little one?" She smiled a broad, lazy, watermelon-colored smile, first at me, then Cary.

"Nothing, thanks," I said, sliding my legs along the bench to get up.

"Come on, Little One." I said.

Cary's pale-lipped smile widened as she swung out of the booth and followed me out the door.

I had enough friends in high school, but none was like Cary. Every morning she told me what she had thought the night before, what she had done. If I were sitting on the asphalt studying, she would squat next to me, her pinched face bright, and chatter. When I started wearing bright red shoes in sophomore year, so did Cary. Sometimes she came home with me, to play checkers, or watch TV. I met Mrs. Hanlon, and on Cary's fourteenth birthday, I convinced her to let Cary have a pet. We went to the ASPCA, and Cary picked a ragged, peanut-butter color mutt out of a litter of three in a wire cage. She called it Patsy, after an old teddybear.

Then in her sophomore year at St. Mary's, Cary grew beautiful. She is still thin, skinny, but her face stopped looking like some fleshless, under-sea thing. Her hair went dark, becoming the color of honey, or tiger-eye. She grew her nails long, and we would spend hours painting them, decorating them with tiny, nailpolish flowers. We would make fun of the names of each color: Dewpetal. Midnight Mauve. Love-that-red. She told me

that when she first met Mark Delbarton, she kept her hands behind her back the entire time she spoke to him, because her nails that day were Precious Plum, with tiny cat faces of Magnolia and Pearlglow decorating them.

I remember she told me that on one night she spent at our house, with the streetlight coming in the open window and but-tering her nose and lips and forehead and all the knuckle ridges on her hands. She still told me everything she saw, and thought. It was shortly after that night, though, that I sat at lunch and told a quiet, bitter group of girls less beautiful than my Little One all of her secret faults.

Cary has been seeing Mark a year now. She went to his senior prom; a picture of them that night is stuck in the frame of her mirror. She wore a blue dress, and her nails were a plain, perfect red. No more cats and flowers. Right below it is a photo of Cary and me with Patsy at Great Adventure.

She leans down over her dresser, searching for herself in her mirror. Sometimes I wonder what she sees.

The setting sun throws planks of mango light up on the walls, the bed, the sheets a faded pattern of Bugs Bunny characters.

I sit on the bed, watching Cary dab at her face with various reds: blush, lipstick, eyeshadow. Her fingers are long and expert. She wipes them on a tissue, and runs them through her hair, tossing it back from her forehead. It falls back, though, wheaten wings of it curtaining her eyes.

"Wait. Here," I say.

I push myself off the bed and walk to her. I pull two combs out of my hair and it falls in my face. The combs are silver, with a mosaic of white shell pieces crowning it. They were my mother's.

I brush my hair off my face and pick up a thick lock of Cary's. I twist it in my fingers and fasten it behind her ear with the comb. I pull another handful away from the other side of her face and hold it there. The shell combs gleam in the sunset light.

"There you go," I say, fingering her bangs a little. She watches me in the mirror.

The doorbell buzzes twice, sharply.

"It's Mark," Mrs. Hanlon calls up.

"Thanks so much, Meggy." Cary jumps up, pulls a denim jacket off the knob of her door and settles it on her shoulders. "I'm so sorry about all this. Promise you'll call tomorrow? Sure you won't stay and wait for me?"

"Go on," I say.

She smiles, glittering, and disappears around the doorjamb. I hear her pumps on the linoleum in the front room, then the lion mumbling of Mark's voice. Then a shutting door.

Going home from Cary's apartment, I cross through St. Mary's lot. It is St. Rocco's feast day, and there is a fair here every year to mark the occasion. The whole lot is covered with people and harshly colored ride-wagons. The ferris wheel is lit, although it is not dark. You can see the faces of people in the seats: their mouths are wide Ohhs, their arms sprout wildly from their containers. You can tell how fast they fly by the rhythm of their whoops and screams. Tube necklaces of neon make green and purple stars on the still-blue sky. I lean against a cotton candy vendor's cart, breathing the hot sugar scent.

I watch a woman standing in front of the ferris wheel. Her eyes follow one certain child. As the wheel lifts the child higher than the woman's head, she raises her hand as though to touch the girl. She steps a few feet towards the wheel, then halts. I watch her hand hang uncertainly in the air, like a bruise on the denim sky.

Jen Braun
Elizabeth, NJ
The Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Birthpiece

I found a packet
of old, old photos
yesterday, hospital shots
of me

in a metal bed, sleeping
for a first, sweet time. One
was of my mother, smiling limply
under the hovering TV, the vase
of benign roses. Another
captured my father, crowned
with slightly fuller, darker hair--
draped with a thin, blue robe,
he held me like an instrument.

They say we can remember
our birth, that everyone
turns his head a certain way
whenever he tries to recall
that first, cold light,
the lifting, lifting
through that strange dimension up,
out into the sharp, clean air,
up to the faces with no mouths,
just eyes, eyes, and light.

Andrew Gerle
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School

Preacher Man

Hey Preacher Man!
Too tall for your
secondhand pants,
pamphlets in hand,
god fearing and
Oh, so fine--
Come and be mine.

Hey bible boy!
Tell me why,
If the lord is my
shepherd, I want
you Preacher,
under my skin.
Don't be afraid to sin.
Everyone needs a little taste of the flesh.

Preacher Man, I want you so--
And as long as you put your shirt
back on backwards,
No one will know.
God will forgive
you, babe,
He's not as stiff as you think.
So come on and drink
my passion down,
you won't choke--
And after...a smoke?

Anna Friedman
Swampscott, MA
Swampscott High School
Donald Babcock



Julie Sparks
Cockeysville, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

From the Kitchen Window

The snow fell heavy and thick today,
smoothing out the textures
and outlining the black tree limbs
with crisp, aseptic whiteness.

It is my grandmother's eightieth birthday.
There isn't any snow in Florida,
or so she pointed out when we spoke--
my mother had me call
to wish her well.

The line was fuzzy, and faint,
and I clutched the cold receiver with guilty reluctance
as we exchanged the same words
in the same tone
as last month, as the month before.

"School is fine."
A squirrel perched in the tree
outside the kitchen window, twitching his tail
across his back for warmth.
"No, not really. Same old stuff."
He gripped a nut in doll-sized paws,
seeming to savor it.
"It's not too cold--still in the thirties or so."
I tapped gently on the window,
and startled, he scampered down,
holding the nut delicately between his teeth.
"I love you, too. Happy Birthday."

The spot vacated by the squirrel
is swept clean of snow
but it is already piling up again,
thick,
and heavy.

Jessica Bloom
Lexington, MA
Lexington High School
Paul Steele

Untitled

as i took the communion wafer
i realized that the woman
behind me was crying

the man in front of me said
she's dying.
and i understood
that she had given up
on the hope that life
could console death

and as the thin flesh
dissolved in my mouth
she stepped out of line
returned to her pew

as if to say that for
today she would not
allow another life
inside of her

Ruth Jennison
Melrose, NY
Emma Willard School
Mrs. Carroll

Evening

what did she do
at the first cycle
did she scream rage at God
was she scared of herself
did she slink down
inside the river
submerging herself in the cool eddies
washing in the water rush
forbidding the flow
now bowing to any darkness
not even her own
did she stop herself up with leaves
afraid they would get lost
inside of her
and hide from him
did she think,
anything but him
or did she keen in a bloody crouch
while her muscles shook
until the insides
of her legs were red
did she sleep in a
small shivering heap
on the nearest mountain
without looking down
and wait
when did she come down
was she a hysterical bitch
was she hysterical
what happened the first time
when she found out it was
up to her
when she found out that
all of it was up to her

Melissa Levine
Bethesda, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Peggy Pfeiffer

Demons, Real or Imagined

Fourteen. Floating. The lifejacket is wrapped around my waist and over my shoulders. I look like a bright yellow bobber, waiting for the first nibble. Splash. Dan throws the waterskis out of the boat towards where I'm bobbing, legs dangling in the water. They glide towards me, tips pointed at my chest. They take their time (c'mon, dammit, get here), letting my thoughts race around in my head. Shadows move around beneath the water nipping at my ribs. The skis reach me, clumsy boards that refuse to take my feet. I start to kick (they won't fit, oh Jesus, oh Jesus) at them in an attempt to drive my feet into the bindings. No (okay, okay, relax, deep breath, deep breath) good. I fumble with the skis some more, bobbing up and down, a perfect target.

"You okay?" shouts Dan.

No answer. No (any second, any second) time.

The bindings grab. My feet are in place, toes pointed upward, my knuckles gripping the bar.

(let's go, let's go, let's go)

"Are you ready?"

"Yes! Yes, goddammit! Let's go!"

The engine revs and I'm out of the water. I keep my balance better than when I walk, although I've never waterskied before. I'm skidding around the bay, moving faster than most fish. At least, the big ones. I hope. Falling down is not an option.

"Hey, Alex, it's my turn. Let go of the rope."

"What!?"

"Let go of the rope."

"No!"

"What!?"

Fear is irrational. It has no rules, no limitations, no guidelines by which it is governed. People have many different fears. They can be intangible, vague. Fear of aging. Fear of death. Fear of relationships. They can also be quite tangible and quite personal. The fear of a particular person--a school bully--or group. There are childhood fears. Adult fears. Common fears. Bizarre fears. These fears, with all their distinctions, with all their differences, have a certain "commonality." They all dictate. They shape how a person reacts, or will react, to certain situations. Fear is a paralyzer, a blinder. It can freeze one--just like the doe stunned by the oncoming headlights--making rational thought or correct judgment impossible.

Fear, though, is also a motivator. It spurs us on to achieve impossible goals. Man's basic drive, his instinct for survival, is nothing more than the fear of death, the fear of the unknown. The survival of man in instances of extreme jeopardy--the survival of the shipwrecked members of the *Endurance* and the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*--attests to his greatest fear. Man struggles to survive, either by fleeing or standing his ground. It also motivates for success or failure. The fear of failure motivates one to try as hard as possible or not to try at all, to try and pass off the non-attempt as a "I could have done it but I didn't want to." There is no failure when there is no attempt for success.

Fear is always with us, from birth to death. A baby separated from its mother--put in a crib or handed to another to hold--cries. It's afraid. That is instinctive, the confusion of first separation. The child has not learned the difference between being alone and being uncared for. Slowly, he learns to adapt. The darkness around the crib is not what scares the child, but rather it is the closing of the door, the goodnight kiss of the mother or father, which does. And, eventually, the goodbye, the separation, becomes less scary. The child settles into his own universe, himself at the center. He cannot be harmed, otherwise the center would collapse. He has no reason to be fearful because he is not aware of the evil that exists. He is innocent.

There are moments, though, moments of doubt. The child is the center, yet he is not alone. Parents are his rock, his foundation, his affirmation. They guide him and take care of him. The love bonds, unconditionally, parent and child. The doubt comes at different moments. Two a.m., pitch black, and a closet door half open. "Mom? Dad? I'm scared." He searches them out, in his late-night fear, not only as protection but almost as a fear

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firmation of himself. He realizes, just for a moment, that there is something out there, something dark and evil waiting to be discovered. His parents, together, just by lying in bed with him at night, wipe the brief suspicion of darkness from his mind. They are perfect, infallible, impervious to demons, real or imagined. They are whom he cries to after being beaten and spit on in a fight at school.

What happens when the rock splits? When the foundation is torn apart from inside? What does the child feel, where does he go, whom does he go to, when he needs reaffirmation? What did I feel, what did I do, when I needed reaffirmation? When my rock split open and released a brew of demons so vile their stench burned my skin? What did I feel? I can tell you my experience. I can tell you what I've learned about fear. My rock broke apart when I was six. Too soon, it was way too soon for me. I still believed in them; I still thought they were my foundation. And then I went through...

Saturday morning. I'm sitting upside down in the easy chair in the TV room. I'm watching cartoons. It's very hot and I've taken off my T-shirt. Despite the fact that I'm only wearing my shorts, I'm sweating profusely. The TV room is narrow and fairly short, the easy chair at the opposite end perpendicular to a couch. My mother is sitting on the couch, reading, with my shirt a few inches away from her feet. She's taken no notice of it.

My father walks in. He's wearing a dark suit and a red tie. His face is flushed, most likely from the heat.

"Pick up your T-shirt, son."

"Stay where you are, Alex. You don't have to pick it up."

My mother spoke these words from behind her book. She did not acknowledge my father's presence. She just acknowledged his words in her denial of them.

"I said pick it up."

"Don't."

I'm confused. I've never seen this before. I feel uncomfortable sitting upside down, the air is too close in the room, too tense. I right myself and, as I do this, my parents lock eyes. My father walks over to where my mother is sitting and grabs the shirt. My mother, before my father can straighten up, catches the shirt in her fist. They pull and the collar begins to rip. My mother lets go. My father storms out.

"Bitch."

A mutter, the word crawls from my father's mouth into my heart. I look at my mother. Her lips are pressed tight, her eyes burning into the wall across from her. She stands up quickly, catching up to my father on his way to the stairs. I follow her, stopping in the middle of the living room. My father has the shirt in his hand. He's starting on the first step.

Mom reaches and snags the shirt in her left hand. My father, not letting go, is whirled around quickly. He doesn't lose his balance. He lets go of the shirt, reaching instead for my mother's hair. His hand finds purchase. My mother yells--dropping the shirt, which floats down a few feet in front of me--and reaches for my father's tie. She twists it in both hands, making my father's face turn darker red. My father is gripping firmly to my mother's hair. Stalemate.

I'm still watching. I've moved over and picked up the shirt, which hangs limp at my side. I continue to stare, the red tie burning into my mind. I'm looking with wide eyes, staring down the dark, damp tunnel before me. Staring at the watery blur in front of me, a ripped T-shirt my only companion.

My innocence was stolen that day. Stolen by a red tie and a white T-shirt. My parents were not infallible. I began to look at actions, to hear words, differently. Suspicion entered my mind and with it came fear. The dark had new meaning, anywhere. I could no longer trust people. Any hand offered was denied. I feared contact, emotional and physical. I always looked for ulterior motives. And I always looked for consequences.

I was afraid of abandonment. I had just been cut adrift, set out to wander alone. My parents--just by their actions--had told me that there was something deeper going on, that something

dark and vile was crawling around behind my back. I was afraid that it was my fault, that I had done something to create this incredible friction between my parents. There was one obvious solution. Get rid of me. I withdrew. I became an observer, watching and waiting, always looking for the right place to hide. If I was not noticed, I would not be discarded. I would not be abandoned.

This happened suddenly. I started on a plan of hanging on at the age of six. I no longer, I believed, had support to fall back on. My parents were no longer my parents, but rather people I depended on for food, clothes, and shelter. I had been burned by them. Scarred.

The sense of violence, of pure hatred, in the home, kills spontaneity in the child. It did in me. Appeasement is the most important aspect in the child's life. Lying becomes essential. Both parents expect their version of what is going on in the home to be the one accepted by the child. He becomes two different people, whichever version of himself is more pleasing to each parent. I was quiet and very polite for my father. I was not unpredictable when I was with him. I would do whatever he told me to do. With my mother, I was different. I refused to attempt any goals. I did not try at all to distinguish myself from my peers. It frustrated her and I knew it would. She paid attention to me. That was as close to affection as I wanted to get. These methods guaranteed me attention, but not affection. They were thought out. As long as I appeased my parents, as long as I was what I thought they wanted me to be, they would not leave me.

And this continues. I have an intense fear of being disliked. By anyone. I want to be liked by people who I know hate me, by people who have told me that they hate me. I'm afraid that I will be abandoned, that I will be left helpless.

Sunday afternoon. My brother Jake is down the cellar, working on something. My mother has gone down the cellar to take up the laundry. I'm eating lunch upstairs, peanut butter and jelly as usual. I hear a shout, then another, and then quiet. My mother comes up to the kitchen without the laundry basket. She's crying.

"What's wrong, Ma?"

"Jake hit me," she says, in between tears.

I continue eating my sandwich. My mother leaves the kitchen.

Helpless. It was being completely unable to have any effect on what was going on around me. It was seeing my mother shocked into tears by the punch of my brother and being absolutely unable, being so small and weak, to do anything about it. And I've carried that. For years, I needed to have a grip on every aspect of whatever I was involved in. If I could not see everything that was going on, if I did not know every inch of the project or course or organization, I could be left out. I could be surprised and made to feel like a seven-year-old boy, eating his lunch while his mother cries in front of him.

During this time there were many opportunities for me to feel helpless. In each day there was the potential for confrontation. It could occur at anytime. And there was never a sign, never a warning. Confrontations--between my parents, between my mother and my brothers and sisters--would explode in front of me, leaving me no chance for escape, no place to hide. I learned to hide in plain sight, to bury my emotions, to crawl into myself. I cauterized myself, burning shut my heart. I detached myself from involvement, from my emotions. From touch.

December. I've got pink eye. I'm supposed to leave with my father for the weekend. He's driven all the way up from Hamden--four hours--to Cutchogue. He's standing outside the front door. It's very cold. I'm not packed. I'm sitting on the couch, next to my mom, in my pajamas. My father knocks. I move to stand up, but my mother puts her arm in front of me, a wall knocking me down.

We wait. Five minutes later, my father knocks again. The arm rises in front of me, blocking my path again. I settle into the couch, burrowing a hole in between the cushions. My stomach is uneasy.

"Son?"

Another knock.

"Son?! Alex?!"

Banging now. My mother rises, leaving me in my hole on the couch. I don't try to get up.

"Marion! Marion, goddammit, where are you? Where's Alex?"

My mother reaches the front door, hesitates, and opens the door.

"Marion! Where's my--"

"Alex is sick, Walter."

"Where is--"

"He's sick."

"Goddammit, Marion, I can take care--"

"The court said--"

"Hell with the court!"

"--that when Alex is--"

"Marion, let me see my son!"

"--sick he cannot go with you. He has pink eye."

I cannot see my father's face. I don't want to. My own face is pressed tight to the couch pillow. I don't hear anything more. My mother closes the door. I think my father has left. Mom sits down on the couch. She puts her hand on my shoulder.

"Alex?"

"Go away."

Empty. Empty and passive. I observed, took it all in, and filed it deep in my memory. I severed myself completely. I became terrified of involving myself, of becoming close to anyone. I pulled further and further away each day, deeper into hurt and anger, deeper into fear. I'd been burned, enveloped in a flame that did not belong to me. My flesh was peeling away, so I ignored it. I ignored the pain and became numb.

This fear of connection has been hard for me to overcome. It has been very hard to put aside my fear of relationship, of closeness, of touch. I was suspicious. Accepting friendliness at face value was impossible. I always wondered what was behind the smile, behind the offered hand. I refused to believe that there was only charity and friendship. I always thought there was something darker. It has taken me twelve years to learn to accept and grasp firmly the offered hand and the pain that could possibly come with it. Twelve years of confusing other people by leaving, withdrawing from them without explanation. Twelve years of hurting other people because I was afraid.

Part of my fear of relationship has to do with confrontation. I am terrified of confrontation. Most people don't feel comfortable being involved in a confrontation, but I'm afraid of being near one. I'm afraid of being in the same room, or even the same house, where an argument or confrontation is taking place. I feel somehow that it is my fault, that I'm the cause of the confrontation. It goes back. Sitting burrowed in the couch, standing in the middle of the living room, I was the cause of the argument, of the battle. It was, in essence, completely to blame. That feeling always comes back when someone raises his voice, inviting me or someone else into an argument. That fear crawls into my belly whenever I feel someone else's anger nearby.

I came to fear my father. My mother had custody of me, so I just saw him for a few days a month. He became one-dimensional in my eyes. I was petrified of having to call him for any reason. When the phone rang, I'd pray that he wasn't on the other end. I started to blame him for what had happened. I was angry at him, but most of all afraid. Very afraid.

This fear of my father led me deep into a fear of adult men. It was a paradox. I was deathly afraid of any male in a position of control over me, yet I desperately wanted him to be my father. I was in a constant search for a father figure that I would never find because I was too scared, I felt too threatened to make contact. I tried to make my coaches my father figures. It was my way of solving the paradox. I would do everything my coach said--stand in the way of a soccer ball hurtling towards the goal, dive onto the basketball court leaving skin and blood stick-

ing to the court--begging for approval. And when my coach started recognizing me for my hustle, for the way I threw myself around with complete disregard for my body, the season would be ending. I would obtain his approval, but I was also able to run away at the end of the season, before he got too close, before he became too threatening.

And now, when I'm no longer searching, I feel moments of inadequacy, of terror when I'm dealing with someone that remotely resembles my father. I want to do something, something concrete, tangible and completely impossible. I want to say, "Give me a task. Tell me to sacrifice some part of myself. Please accept me." I cannot and do not feel comfortable around a man who has some sort of responsibility for me. I do not know when to smile, I do not know when to laugh. I'm so afraid that I do not know when to breathe. I am petrified, irrational as it sounds, of incurring the wrath that I think lies in wait.

Grandmother's house. I'm washing dishes with my father--he's washing and I'm drying and putting away. We usually spend weekends here in Orient when my father picks me up. My father is talking to me and I'm making noises in the right places, not really listening. I've dried and put away all the pots, pans, and dishes and I'm working on the silverware. I'm walking in a tight back and forth pattern behind my father. His back is turned to me as he bends over the sink cleaning out the glasses. I'm drying a sharp knife. A thought crosses my mind. I stop moving and face my father's back, taking the dishtowel away from the serrated edge. The knife moves forward and stops.

"Son? Son, are you listening?"

"Oh, uh...yes, Dad."

I put the knife away.

He was the cause of all my anger, of all my fear. Getting rid of my father would end my struggles. I would be free of the twisting in my stomach every time I had to spend a weekend with him. I would be free of the nights, after being dropped off by my father, spent crying in my bed. The nights that my mom had to come in and tell me that everything was all right, that there was nothing to worry about, that it was not my fault. And I would be free of confrontation. Distance and time had made him a stranger, a man who could tell me what to do, but a man whom I really didn't know.

My father became a vehicle. Embodied in him were the causes, the reasons why I could not feel, the reasons why I could not reach out, the reasons for why I was so afraid. His disappearance would be my salvation.

I look back on that moment, at the knife, nine years later, and hate myself for it. I hate myself for what I thought, I hate myself for being so afraid of my father, for being so angry with him. But I think, in a perverse way, that it was natural. I became afraid of him because we didn't have the chance to build memories. All I could remember were the bad times, the violent times between him and Mom. I saw Mom every day. I could fit her into emotions besides anger. As the years went by, I became more secure with my mom. I could argue with her because I became more confident in our relationship, strained as it was at times. I never, never could argue, I could not even disagree in the mildest way, with my father.

I look back often now. Not only to these moments, but to many others. Arguments from the past slip into my thoughts every now and then, images of violence rise up in my mind sometimes. For years, I didn't look for the reasons. I didn't look for why I hated to be touched, I didn't look for why I could never stand up for myself, I didn't look for why I broke into a cold sweat when I was forced to talk to any man that slightly resembled my father. I didn't want to look. I wanted to hide from memories, I wanted to pretend that what had happened around me had had no effect. So, for years, I ran from the truth, blocked it out of my mind.

The time came, though, when I had to step out. I had to become my own person, I had to stop playing games. I had to reconcile my two identities--my father's version, my mother's

version--and make a choice, make a stand. Who was I going to be? Who was I? This decision to find out who I was led me back to the past. I could put my finger on a certain fear--my fear of abandonment--and say, "It started here. It started here with a white T-shirt and a red tie." The moments came tumbling out of the attic I had stored them in, dusty, untouched, but still whole. The moments are clearer now. When I unlocked the door, when I found the cause, I was no longer able to block them out. I could no longer say that this had not happened to me. I live with these moments more now than I used to.

I've reconciled myself to my fear. I know it, I know where it came from. I haven't been able to reconcile myself with my parents. I know that they were not themselves, that they had lost their senses in the suffocation of hate, of love that had turned dark. Yet, I cannot forgive them for burdening me. I cannot forgive them for making me afraid of connection, of relationship, of touch. And so, they are not part of my foundation. I do not expect them to be there when I have to face my demons, real or imagined. My foundation is myself, a person I can control.

Seventeen. Windsurfing. The sail is much too big, but I manage to keep my balance. Most of the time. Every now and then I get dumped--the wind filling the sail that pulls me over--but I manage to scramble back on to the board before something swift and shadowy grabs my leg. It's my first time on a windsurfer; I don't know how to get back to shore. I steadily move away from land--get thrown once (get back on the board, now now now)--not realizing that my father expects me to bring it back in. A powerboat goes by (hang on, hang on, oh jesus) and I get swamped by the wake. The board slides (oh jesus) away on the waves and I'm floating--spitting water--in the bay. I start swimming the wrong way.

"Son! Alex!"

I stop. I get my bearings and start tearing in towards shore.

"Son! My board! Son, get my board!"

The board floats calmly in the middle of the bay. I stop, look at it--my body bobbing up and down--and turn and crash through the waves onto the beach.

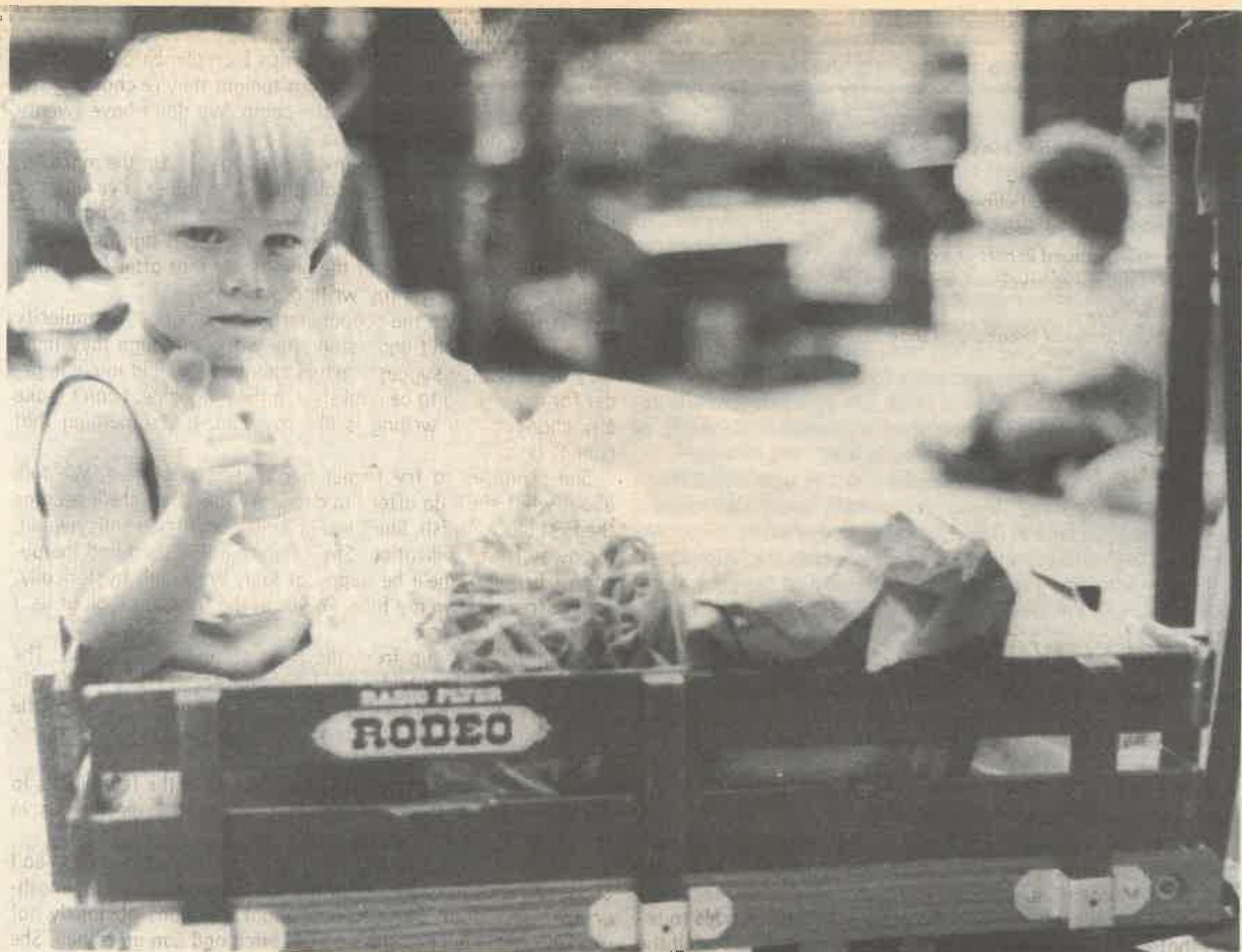
"Get it yourself."

Alexander Champlin

Scatman Flinstone

I always thought
it was the coolest thing
that Fred Flinstone was into scat.
Fred would be up on the bandstand,
of course none of the band members
would be black,
just a bunch of white guys
illustrated in the washed-out colors
of the earlier episodes.
Anyway
Fred would be up on the bandstand
scooby-doobling and be-bopping away,
and I would wonder why Fred was a quarry worker
when he could scat like that.
Why was he slaving away for Mr. Slate
when he could be signed to a major record label
and touring with Mel Torme?

John Donahue
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Peggy Pfeiffer



Becky Chalmers
Baltimore, MD
Howard High School
Linda Durey

Synapse

I know you're up there
like I know
that I have ten fingers
and a belly button
just sitting in my hand
dormant
like a spent volcano

And I remember
the times
when people used to
ask me
what x stands for
and I could tell them that
x stands for...
a number
some number
maybe one?
They don't ask anymore
and I wouldn't be able to tell them
if they did
because you'd refuse to answer

Instead you just
show me pictures of the
before times

and when I reach up
to grab a hopeful piece
you retract
like the grapes from
that guy in Ancient
in Ancient
in Ancient
times

But I know that you're there
absolutely positively
attached
but not hooked up
just kind of sitting there
like a TV with
no plugs
in a room that's
boarded up for good,
condemned.
playing pictures
of numbers
and long words
collecting gray dust

Charles Buckholtz
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Peggy Pfeiffer

Waiting

*It's dangerous cold tonight,
and icicles tick like
clocks beneath the tunnels.
Women pet their watches, reassurance peeled
into fruity, leather sleeves.
And even busses make an effort
to travel along in solid, broadnosed packs,
past sidewalks trapped in nets of ice.
While up along the reservoir in Central Park,
the air is murky,
with hanging bombs of breath, and shot
with shrapnel darkness.*

Holly Kurtz
Bronx, NY
Hunter College High School
Kip Zegers

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Eve 1989

School's out. I'm glad. I hate school. I'm with Opal. I'm glad to be with her. We have plans to go to our favorite club tonight. We haven't been there in a while. I really want to go. I want to have fun. I want to feel good.

I met this guy at a party a few days ago. He was gorgeous. I asked him for a cigarette. He handed one to me already lit. Before I left I kissed him. His lips were so soft.

I asked a friend who goes to the same school as he does to tell him that I was very attracted to him. She did. He said he felt the same way and gave her his phone number to give to me. When I called him, his machine picked up. I left a message and was afraid he'd never call back; he did though. Guys usually don't call me. I have to be the one to contact them.

We had a good conversation. He told me we could get together over the vacation. I haven't been with that many guys that I really wanted to be with.

Opal comes over to my house to borrow something to wear that night. She suggests I call the guy I met. When I do, his mother tells me he's in California for the holiday.

I sit down in front of Opal and don't say anything for a few minutes. Then I start screaming about what happened. Pretty soon we're both screaming. She can empathize.

I don't like to feel sorry for myself. I hate to cry. It had been two months since I'd last cried. I'd been counting.

So we cry together. We cry because we don't have anything. We're poor, but we've tried to make the best of that. Our families are of no help to us; mine has been more of a hurt to me.

But we both try. We don't use drugs, we go to school, we get good grades, but no matter what, nothing happens to really change things.

I admire Opal. She's stronger than I am. We've both been exposed to drugs and alcohol all our lives. My father, whom I haven't seen in two years, is an alcoholic. Opal's never gotten drunk or high once. Sometimes I drink, and usually feel pretty ashamed about it afterwards.

Opal's never caused any problems for her mother. She gets nineties in school, but her mother never gives her any credit. She favors her sister over her.

My mother makes me feel like I don't exist. Her line is that since she's suffered longer than I have, I don't have any right to complain. My problems don't matter.

Opal has a headache from crying. I give her some aspirin. She goes home to take a nap.

At night we leave to go to the club. We used to know this guy

named Arthur. Sometimes we'd go to clubs with him, but he turned out to be just using us. We don't see him much anymore.

We take the train. We have comps (complimentary passes), but when we get there, we find out tonight they're charging ten dollars per person, even with the comp. We don't have twenty dollars. We don't have ten. We have to go home.

On the train I tell her that in case I'm not alive in the morning, I want her to have my tape collection. She smiles. I've told her this before. I continue though; I say things I haven't told her before. I tell her I'm sick of fighting. I've been fighting since I was a little girl. I'm tired of the pain. I say that after I'm gone I want her to try to get my writing published.

First to take it to the school literary magazine. The majority of people there don't understand my work, although they think they do, and they suggest certain changes I should make in order for my writing to be published in the magazine. I can't make any changes. My writing is like my soul. It's something that cannot be sold.

She promises to try to get my writing published. We talk about what she'll do after I'm dead. We joke that she'll become the first black Amish. She'll live in Amish country, Pennsylvania, far away from civilization. She'll rejoice in the Lord and the purity of her life. She'll be happy at last. We laugh hysterically. Tears stream down my face. People in the train car look at us. I don't care. I feel free.

When we come up from the train station it's snowing. The piles of garbage outside the housing projects are hidden in white. Opal comments on how many times when she was a little girl that she tried to make a snowman on the sidewalk, but there was never enough snow.

We part in front of her building and I walk the few blocks to my house alone. I think how perfect it would be to die like this, in the snow, the night before Thanksgiving.

I reach my house. I can't find my keys. The bell is broken so I shout and kick the door. After around fifteen minutes my mother opens the door. She snickers about my plans obviously not working out. I tell her she's an old bitch and can go to hell. She looks stunned.

My brother's lying down on the couch. He's visiting from the state run boys' home he was placed in for delinquent behavior.

My mother tells him to go to his room. He's on tranquilizers so he doesn't protest.

I cry hysterically. I yell at my mother that I've never been really happy. I don't know what good is; I've never felt it.

She doesn't understand abstract statements like these. She doesn't understand me. She usually doesn't try, but she is now because she can see I'm really in pain. She wants to help but she doesn't know how. She ends up saying things that hurt me even more.

I think of the long line of people whom I cared for, and who didn't reciprocate: boyfriends, friends, my father. I think of Opal. Whatever happens I'm glad I met her. I think of my writing. It's so important to me that it will probably destroy me.

My mother goes to sleep. I hold a container of my brother's tranquilizers in my hand. This is Nothing, I think. This is the terrible Nothing I'd always feared I'd come to. I'm empty, completely empty. Please God--I wish I believed in God, at least that would be something.

I put down the tranquilizers and pick up a bottle of champagne my mother was saving for Thanksgiving dinner. I open it and pour one glass after another.

Thanksgiving 1989

I wake up at the kitchen table. My head is pounding. "I'm alive," I repeat again, and again, trying to make myself believe it.

Rosanna Vosper
Brooklyn, NY
Midwood High School
Sharon Lustbader

Faith

Liz squatted on the hardwood floor and held her toes. A coolness surrounded her exposed lower back and arms as she watched her sister pack red plastic crates. Tension grew as the room became emptier. Within the past week they had done the usual daily things together: dined out, watched movies, and shopped. Susan's infrequent visits home offered a break in monotony, yet left little to be anticipated during the day's immediately following her departure.

Liz plowed through a deep cardboard box filled with books. Her bangs had fallen onto her face, covering her eyes. "Wait a minute, this is mine," she said, rising with a paperback copy of Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs*. While she flipped through the pages and read the back flap, their father appeared in the doorway. "What does he want," Liz muttered.

"Is either one of you coming with me to church today?" he asked, his eyes moving rapidly from one daughter to the other.

Liz tossed the book onto the bed and walked over to the shelf, her back facing the rest of the room.

"Why don't you ask Mom to go," Susan said, speaking for the both of them. She was always the more outspoken one, interjecting for a reticent Liz.

"You too?" he asked, turning to face Liz. The metal trim on his wire-rimmed glasses reflected the slices of sunlight streaming through vertical blinds.

Liz carefully scraped off the chipped paint on the shelf with her thumbnail. Seconds later, she heard her father complaining to his wife: "What kind of example are you setting? If you don't go, then neither will they."

"It's the same old Sunday routine," sighed Susan.

Liz nodded in agreement. She continued to help her sister pack a crate with records until she found among them Adam Ant's first album. "Oh my God, this is old," she said. "When'd we buy this?"

"Sixth or seventh grade? Can't remember. Probably during our parochial years when we started getting into progressive music."

Liz laughed out loud at their recollected youth. They had played their minor role in rebellion by shoplifting 7-inch records from the local music store, hiding them in their canvas backpacks after school. Liz rarely reminisced about her four years at Saint Thomas More, but sometimes a word, a phrase, or something physical induced repressed images of the school or the cathedral. Her first week at the new institution foreboded a future, now past.

She was late to class, and running was prohibited in the halls. Walking rapidly, yet inhibited by this regulation, she felt the pressed pleats of her uniform flap lightly against her knees. Her cable knit kneehighs slipped closer to her ankles. Sister Mary, principal of the school, stood stiffly crossing her arms as she monitored the hall.

"Good morning," Sister said.

Preoccupied with her tardiness, Liz smiled and nodded.

"You mean, 'Good morning, Sister,'" she repeated.

"Um...yeah, good morning," Liz responded.

"Good morning, Sister," Sister said a third time.

Exasperated, Liz dropped her backpack and said finally, "Good morning, Sister," mocking the tone of authority.

"You wouldn't want a detention, now would you?"

"No, Sister."

"Get to class before I give you a tardy."

Liz picked up her bag, but before she could continue, the woman interrupted her actions.

"Say, 'Thank you, Sister.'"

Liz turned. "Thank you, Sister."

Susan was almost finished with her packing. "I can't believe my spring break is over. At this time tomorrow, I'll be sitting in a classroom taking notes."

"So will I," Liz said, "but at least you get to go away. A return to freedom."

"Not necessarily."

"I know, I know."

Liz looked around the room and eyed the Ouija board propped up against the stereo. She pulled the board out of the box, and running her fingers across the carved alphabet, noticed a small maroon velvet bag. Inside was a crystal, the size and shape of a ping-pong ball, and a stand made of polished ebony.

"This is beautiful. Is it just for decoration?"

"Divination," Susan said. "Hindus use a cup of treacle or a pool of ink to foretell the Unknown." Crystal gazing, Liz thought. The only visions she saw were those of polyester navy blue uniforms and wooden crucifixes.

Sitting back in the leather chair, she peeled off her hangnail; it stung and bled. Whenever she was nervous, a minor physical pain kept her in focus. The yellow walls looked jaundiced. The window, covered with beige blinds and outlined with green curtains, was like a slice of moldy bread. The rest of the school was coated with mismatched peachy browns, hospital mints, and Pepto Bismol pinks. The decor clung to an oppressive cheerfulness, vainly attempting to calm apprehensive children at a new school. Liz looked at the name plate lying on the desk:

SISTER MARY TERESA

She heard the shoes beating down the hall and thought, "It's her." The black leather lace-ups were like men's shoes with a thick, three-inch heel.

Entering the office with an armful of folders and tossing them onto her desk, Sister flashed the top row of her dentures at the indifferent visitor. "Well, don't you look nice today," she said.

A pattern of typewriter taps emanated from an adjoining room. Liz strained her eyes to see through the plastic window of the door that reminded her of shower doors: externally distorted to obscure the inside.

Having stood up brusquely, Sister moved to one of the French windows. She glanced down at the road. "Elizabeth. Saint Elizabeth. Are you familiar with St. Elizabeth?" Her face was taut.

"No, Sister, I'm not."

"You're not what?"

"I'm not familiar with St. Elizabeth," she replied.

"Speak in complete sentences."

"Yes, Sister," Liz said, her pride abraded again.

"Elizabeth, this is the second time this month that I have given you detention. Last month it was for chewing gum, and this time it's for wearing make-up. Now I know that you know what you did was wrong, Elizabeth, therefore, I know that you feel you deserve a detention. I think it's a fair punishment."

"Yes, Sister." Liz clenched her teeth so that the muscles on both sides of her jaw pulsated; it was a habit learned from her father. His words, "There's no excuse for failure," echoed in her head.

Sister Mary's voice cut into her thoughts again. "All right, Elizabeth. You can go back to class now. Remember to go to the library at 3:30, Tuesday afternoon."

"Yes, Sister," she said, anxious to return to class. Holding the cold doorknob, she longed for the security of home.

Sister Mary lifted a can of writing utensils and smacked it down on the desk. "Just a minute. Come back here," she said, her eyes round with shock under black, pointed glasses.

Liz rolled her eyes before turning to face her.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" Sister demanded.

Christ, what now? Liz thought.

"You are forgetting to say something to me, Elizabeth," she said, pointing. Her fingernail formed a sharp, flat edge.

Liz remembered what she had forgotten and forced out the words: "Thank you, Sister."

Liz's mother stood in the doorway and argued with Susan. "Why do you have to upset your father your last day here?"

"Give me a break, Mom," she said, brushing past her.

Liz didn't know why her father asked them to go to church every Sunday when he knew no one wanted to go. He set himself up to be disappointed. Liz thought that he probably felt guilty about something, and converting a family member would be his

compensation, his good deed. It was the perfect penance.

"Liz, don't just lie there doing nothing. What's your excuse this time? Another history paper? More homework?"

"Yeah, what's your excuse, Mom?"

"What?"

"Forget it."

That night, Liz ate dinner alone in the den, listening to a record and reading. The family had not eaten together in over a year with the exception of Thanksgiving. Her meal tonight--Chef Boyardee's Beefaroni and a can of soda--did not compare with the plates of sliced turkey, stuffing, and cranberries. She didn't complain though.

Lights beaming down the cul-de-sac were followed by the opening of the garage door. Minutes later, her father appeared from the elongated shadows of the hallway.

"Liz, how can you concentrate on three things at once? Turn off the stereo."

Liz pushed the power button and continued reading.

It is possible that underneath the holy fable and disguise of Jesus' life there lies concealed one of the most painful cases of the martyrdom of knowledge about love: the martyrdom of the most innocent and desirous heart, never sated by any human love; demanding love, to be loved and nothing else, with hardness, with insanity, with terrible eruptions against--

"Liz, where's your mother?"
--those who denied him love; the story of a poor fellow, unsated and insatiable in love, who had to invent hell in order to send to it those who did not want to love him.

"Dammit, Elizabeth, where's your mother?"

"I don't know."

"What are you reading?" he asked after a short pause.

Liz held up Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil.

"Who's it translated by?" he said, his eyebrows lowering. He sat down next to her on the couch.

"Walter Kaufmann. It's really--"

"Elizabeth, I want you to go to church with your mother and me next Sunday," he interrupted, resuming his stern demeanor.

"Dad, I don't think that--"

"Liz, my family has always practiced Catholicism or some other form of Christianity."

Who says there's validity in antiquity? she thought.

"Liz, next Sunday is Easter."

She responded by lowering her eyes to the carpet and realized that she was probably acting like a selfish brat. Two hours for her dad seemed harmless enough.

As he turned to walk upstairs, he said, "The noble soul has reverence for itself. Who said that?"

"I don't know, Dad."

"Aristotle. Remember that."

Late that evening, she lay on the hardwood floor in her bedroom. A Chinese lantern hung above her: a dim 60 watt bulb held inside a cage of tissue paper. She thought of Uranus or Pluto. Searching into the darkness beneath her bed, she remembered the childhood nightmares of alligators living amongst the lint and storage boxes. Now, she saw only a brown cardboard box labeled ART. The plastic covers of watercolors reflected the dispassion she felt for her mediocre talent. Given to her by her parents for her fifteenth birthday, the paints had never been used, had created nothing. Dried pellets of condensed color lay in rows across a white tray, each watercolor wafer resembling a dyed aspirin. She wanted to drop the tablets into glasses of water and watch them dissolve like aqua, magenta, and violet antacids.

She remembered the church picnic her father took her to when she was eight years old. By mid-afternoon, members of the rectory had announced a drawing contest for different age groups. Three winners would be selected from each. The participants were to scatter throughout the park and create a picture in two hours with a box of crayons and a sheet of manila paper. As the other contestants congregated around the playground

and prepared to draw jungle gyms, Liz decided to color a scene of the lake and the rocks surrounding it. Her father, emerging from the crowd of parents, asked her excitedly what she planned to draw.

"I thought maybe the lake or something."

"Liz, don't limit yourself. Draw something different. When the judges see that you drew something no one else has, then you'll win. Come on," he said, clutching her hand as she grabbed her box of eight crayons. Without arguing and believing that her father was probably right, she followed him into the woods. After 30 minutes neither one of them was satisfied with what they had found.

"Dad, I hardly have any time left to draw something," she said, feeling like crying.

"I know; we'll find something soon." Lowering his head to estimate the ground, he said smiling, "Draw this path."

This path? Liz thought, her eyes moving up and down a narrow strip of dirt and dead grass.

"Okay," she said, drained of all competitive excitement.

Sitting on a patch of moss, her father held out each crayon for her. "Really focus on the path," he said.

Liz rolled her eyes as he watched her hands. She drew too long S-shapes with the brown crayon and tiny gray and green lines for grass. She felt hopeful again that maybe she'd win, maybe first place. Her art teacher told her never to leave any space on the paper untouched, so Liz began coloring in long horizontal strokes across the sheet. When a faint bell rang, signaling her time was up, she hadn't finished her drawing but was confident she'd win at least one of the prizes.

Walking back to the fairgrounds, she saw middle-aged men hovering over barbecues or playing badminton. Separated from the women and children, they looked like a team of well-dressed golfers. Running over to the picnic table, she placed her drawing before the judges. After 15 minutes, a young nun, probably a novice, appeared behind a podium on the make-shift stage holding three plaques. Everyone gathered around as she announced the winner of third place: A girl of six years, wearing two French braids, ran up onto the stage and held up her drawing. Liz shook her head disapprovingly at the red and orange stick figures.

A second name was called--more stick figures. Liz knew the first place plaque was hers.

"And the best drawing in the six to ten age group goes to Robert Neubert." When the young artist held up his drawing, Liz gave him credit for putting clothes on his family of sticks and placing a yellow sun in the empty background.

A telephone rang four times, then stopped. Liz walked through the narrow hallway and into her parents' room. "Who was that on the phone?" she asked. Beside the bed knelt her father, praying.

She slammed the door and returned to her room. Later, her father came in, a leather-bound Bible in his right hand. "Your friend John called."

"Thanks," Liz said flatly. Facing him, she saw the Book. The precious scriptures. She decided to use the downstairs phone and to call John now.

He turned to leave but not before placing the Bible on her desk.

"Dad, what is this? I don't need it."

"Yes, you do need it. Go to sleep. We're going to Mass in the morning."

"I'm not going," she said, knowing that she had already agreed to.

"Would you stop going against me for once?"

"This is different. God, it's pointless."

"Liz, if you continue to waste time questioning, you're going to lose so much. Read all you want, read everything you can, fine, but you're not going to find any answers."

"Of course the answers won't be written out for me, but I'll gain some kind of knowledge," she said.

"What knowledge are you looking for?"

"A faith...in something." Liz realized that all her schooling and rearing had given her nothing but a spiritual void.

"Everyone wants truths; they want to dispel the doubts they have. But if you dwell on this, you're going to be miserable. Christianity is there, and it's a beautiful religion--"

"I'm sure it is."

"--it's so simple."

"It's not simple," Liz said. "There are inconsistencies and hypocrisies. Nuns, priests, and religion teachers can't even answer the questions of honest children."

"Liz, if you keep on analyzing and questioning everything, you're never going to be satisfied."

"Dad, you're the one who has always told me to be different. 'Don't limit yourself, Liz' or 'Don't do what everyone else is doing, Liz.' You've always encouraged me to be creative--remember those art contests you submitted my work to? Always encouraging, except with the things that mean the most to me." Her father turned away and looked out the window, searching for something in the night's darkness. "Maybe I have no direction, maybe I am aimless; I don't know."

He sat on the edge of her bed. "I have been inconsistent, too, haven't I? Please don't ignore the things I've told you, however contradictory they may seem, I mean, I apologize, even though I mean everything I've told you."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, and when he turned towards the door, Liz said, "Dad, I've already made a promise to you. I'll go tomorrow."

He nodded and left, taking his Bible.

It was Easter Sunday. Liz saw her father watching her as she dipped her fingers into the silver bowl of lukewarm holy water. He knows I'm only acting, she thought.

Walking into the cathedral, she had marveled at the stained glass windows and mosaic walls. The colored tiles, forming pictures of cracked saints and prophets, looked like pieces of broken lollipops. An ornate picture of Jesus, His arms outstretched and His melancholy eyes tilted downward, had been painted inside a dome above the altar. At the feet of a Holy Mary statue, a bed of candles cast a heated glow across the Virgin's smooth bare toes. The sculptor had made her eyes distant and ethereal. Liz felt an emerging surge of spirituality in response to the artistry alone. This emotion was nebulous and vanished when she closed her eyes. The architecture itself could convert at least a few non-believers; maybe this was the artist's intention, Liz thought. Imagine a person with a deep faith, connecting with the splendor of this church--how beautiful religion is for these people.

She leaned back and watched the warm smoke of incense fade before reaching the ceiling. "You shouldn't limit yourself," her dad had said. Just then, he whispered in her ear, "Are you going to receive the Communion?"

According to Catholic law, one's soul was to be in the purest state in order to receive the Eucharist, the Body of Christ. By their definition, her soul was not. Liz looked up at her father and shook her head, "No."

She expected him to retort with a "Yes you are"; instead, he stood up, received the bread, and returned to the pew. Reluctant to interrupt his prayer, she leaned over to him and whispered, "I'm going to wait outside." He opened his eyes and nodded, placing his chin on his folded hands.

After mass, her father brought the car to the edge of the curb. Opening the door and settling herself in the blue leather seat, Liz recognized Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. The afternoon sun illuminated the silver hairs around her father's temples and made the wrinkles surrounding his eyes appear more distinct, almost carved. "You look like a sage," Liz said. He laughed and nodded, holding the steering wheel lightly in his hands. Through the rearview mirror, the gold, blue, and stone images of the church blurred and then faded.

Angie Lee
Oakton, Va

James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

*Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) pp. 219-220.

Forced Loyalty

Cold, gray, perfectly square tiles stared up at me as sullenly as I watched them. I had equally as much to say about my predicament as they did. Before me, in the cleared space at the front of the cafeteria, which was temporarily serving as a stage, the monstrous form of a stupidly grinning, huge woman put equal pressure on us both. We all listened as Pastor Ellam, a boundlessly energetic and nervous man, droned his passionate speech on Education Through the Lord's Kind Blessing to an end. There was applause and shouted murmurs of praisethelordhallelujah from the billions of parents seated in the cafeteria. The Pastor eyed the huge woman, and she suddenly lunged towards me. I shut my eyes and flinched, a reflex conditioned from slaps and shoves, and tape pushed on my face to keep me silent. But she was only pushing me towards the podium. I was relieved and surprised at how gently and showily she performed this.

The podium I was to speak at, however, was much too tall and the bookrest edge on top whacked my forehead. I wimpered and saw red and black and heard laughing. Why were they laughing? The huge woman, giggling and cluck-clucking, handed me a tissue. What for, I wondered. The colors and laughter went away. I felt confused and exposed, as seven-year-olds do because no one ever takes them seriously. I glanced up at The Pastor, who nodded gravely. I knew what I'd been trained to say, and he wanted me to know the consequences of not saying it. In the front row stared all my silent, stiff classmates, watching and waiting for whatever I, the representative of our forced loyalty to the school, would say. One of them had red lines below and above her mouth where, as a consequence from talking to me, the huge woman had stuck a slab of masking tape which had then had to be removed in preparation for our audience. I remembered my words I'd been told to say: "Welcome to a special night for all of us (breath) we hope you enjoy (breath) this chance to worship with us as WE LOVE AND LEARN WITH KINDNESS TOGETHER THE WAYS OF THE LORD." The words jumped out in my head, and my conscience wouldn't let my mouth open. I glanced at the huge woman, stupidly, sweetly grinning and The Pastor, his beady eyes begging me to give a good lie and making my bottom remember paddle whacks he'd given me a week before.

I looked down at my friend who touched her red lines, winced, and began to tear. It was a LIE. These were not the ways of My Lord, and no amount of paddling, yelling, or punishment would make me say those lies. The entire cafeteria heard me whisper, "I'm sorry," and saw me urinate with fright as I ran out of the room. The square gray tiles followed me underfoot into the bathroom. I banged and slumped into a metal cubicle, soggy and miserable. The parents were giggling, cueing the teachers to join in with nervous relief. They all thought, what a charming case of stage fright that sweet child had. Even apologizing to us at the height of her embarrassment. It wasn't stage fright; it was my first battle with principles. And I'd been apologizing to the tiles.

Sara Beth Breveleri
Farmington, CT
Miss Porter's School
Marcia Hall



Heather Hoppmann
Mt. Pleasant, S.C.
Stuart Hall High School
Ame Nielsen

Mother

crooked back
too young to carry your burden
but she tells me her war tales anyway
and the loneliness
forever the loneliness
the only child
I am the lonely child
and she listens to how much
of a sacrifice her mother makes
as a part of that lazy generation
who never know pain or labor
purple mountain majesties
you are an American
no part of my womb
yet she comes down,
hard
every time
and passes the rice which
never passes my lips
monsoons, she says,
you've never seen a monsoon
it tears homes
and like the rain
of a thousand crickets
it comes down on you
much harder than I
would come down on you
my mother: the gentle breeze

Tina Lee
Ordell, NJ
River Dell Regional High School
Joyce Garvin

when?

everybody hates us
everyone hates the Americans,
and I can't blame them

yesterday, we shook the world around
yesterday, we turned the planet on its axis
yesterday, we invaded Panama, attacking their troops and
murdering their people
yesterday, we put a million-dollar price on Noriega's head

Manuel Noriega is hiding

Manuel Noriega is running

all despise Noriega

all despise America

Noriega is a tyrant, he wants what he wants when he wants who he
wants

Noriega is a tyrant and all despise him

Noriega has been killing

Noriega has been poisoning his own brothers in silence,

like the Secret Police,

like Ivan the Terrible

Noriega has been murdering his own brethren

but they know

his own brothers know...

yesterday, Noriega was voted out of office in Panama

yesterday, Noriega was voted out of office

and it was difficult yielding his opposition such power

oh, it was so difficult for America to yield his opposition such
power

you see, we supported that opposition

yes, we supported that opposition

and the people of Panama are shaking their heads; they can't
decide which power to despise more--

America is Noriega

Noriega mirrors America;

there have never been so many tyrants in this world!!!

streetwalkers stormed the brick buildings of the Armed Services

yesterday, American citizens marched against what America was
becoming

they were saying that America was turning on itself

they were saying that America was attempting suicide

with its blind gaze on the red-white-and-blue,

with its staunch stance of black-garb-on-green,

with its polished missiles and garrulous computers,

America is committing suicide

because America is becoming Manuel Noriega

because America is donning Noriega's black jacket

oh, when will America stop following such bloodied footsoles!?

oh, when will America stop following Noriega!?

oh, when will America stop!?

when?

Katharina

East Brunswick, NJ

East Brunswick High School

Steven Michaud

The Purple Survival Song

I've survived
 to this crowded room
 thru my mother's neurotic need for me
 and my father's pain
 --he can't come near me
 it hurts too much
 I pick up the photograph
 with two pale blank Asian faces
 like the empty, porcelain face
 of my mother's favorite toy
 and sneeze as the gray layer
 clears away from the purple picture
 --purple because
 all shadows are actually purple.
 The little lavender flowers
 decorate my mother's hair
 and her wedding dress
 looks a light violet
 in the dark
 I close my eyes and
 see purple
 I remember expensive
 grape juices
 my mom
 bought at Great Adventure
 my tongue sticky and purple
 and my lips blue
 like my mother's lips
 in her wedding picture
 (Lips like we had drowned
 blood like we hadn't breathed
 eyes like we hadn't lived.)
 I look up to see
 the photographed couple
 yellowed and wrinkled
 silently watching T.V.
 and pinch
 a dried up flower bud
 so that
 it crumbles apart.

Tina Lee
 Oradell, NJ
 River Dell Regional High School
 Joyce Garvin

Hunger Pains

grey meat
 on
 white bread
 on
 a brown tray,
 potato strips fester in a greasy paper sleeve.
 You ordered a salad,
 and told me humans weren't meant
 to eat meat,
 something about
 teeth
 and stomach acid.
 I ate everything anyway, and
 you told me I reeked of murder.

Brooks Headley
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Sue Ellen Winter

Sealed

the night is salty
 as soft pretzels
 and wet
 and everything is closed.

outside of Dayton's chicken stand
 there is a patch of ice and
 rusted nails
 where gulls should slide like suntan lotion
 off the backs of morning cyclists.

there should be something

besides January wind
 across my obscene, white face
 and dawn

over waves that skip
 like blue-cold children
 praying for snow
 and making rain
 with shy, naked splashes

out of water.

Laura Stallard
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Sue Ellen Winter

Father Egg

Porous and white,
 we dipped their heads
 into blue vinegar

and dyed our box-nails, too--
 both bitten and
 jaggedly shaped,
 they looked like televisions
 featuring Cousteau documentaries--

blue.

We ate fat pretzels
 and watched "Love Boat"
 because it was always Saturday night,

and I was always home with you
 then
 unhatched

and blue--
 we housed them in
 yellow foam nests
 'til morning

when you took snapshots
 of me
 eating jelly beans

and the sun was a hard-boiled yolk.

Laura Stallard
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Sue Ellen Winter

American Dreamers

The whole thing centers around Chen and his wife Woozie. They're Oriental, but you're supposed to get that from the names. I don't know what kind of Oriental they are, but if I decide somewhere in the middle I'll drop a hint: "Chen! Come quick! Our phone bill is disastrous! Who made all those calls to Korea last month?" And if it's subtle enough, you'll know without knowing how you know.

Woozie is a real Korean name. I know because I had a friend who had a mother whose name was Woozie, and she was and still is Korean, and you're supposed to get these things from your personal experiences. The thing about Chen and Woozie is that they take in this guy, Carlo. I don't know if I'll put any symbolism in that. Carlo is the Italian Carl, and Karl Marx was a great Russian. It's kind of a tradition that the bums and the clowns are the clever ones, and they always fool the supposedly smart people, but Carlo isn't too keen. Really, between the three of them there isn't much to go on.

I'll tell you right now, though, I think you're going to like Woozie. She may not have a clue, but it doesn't matter. She and Chen have a new suburban house, but they don't have any kids to get it lived in, so Woozie does her best: She takes her time breaking in the white walls, sitting for long periods of time in each room and talking aloud. Chen comes home at six, and they sit in the kitchen for dinner. Woozie's really good at duck, especially if it's an Oriental thing, and I know there must be other Oriental dishes I could name, but I'll have to do research. I hope the story still rings true. That was a big problem that happened when I wrote about the Civil War. It didn't ring true.

Today there's this guy hanging around the front yard, which isn't too likely because Chen and Woozie live in the suburbs. Okay, Chen and Woozie live in the city. They have this new row house that's in an in-between neighborhood. It isn't a bad neighborhood, because the guy that's hanging around isn't drunk and dirty. Anyway, today there's a guy sort of milling around the sidewalk in front of Woozie and Chen's house.

"Could you let me use your bathroom?" The guy has knocked on the door and Woozie has answered. Maybe someone else wouldn't have answered. The man has dark lines but he isn't so bad, not to Woozie because she's clueless but not to anyone else either.

"It's to the left." That line would be ironic if I used the Karl Marx symbolism thing.

"Thank you." Woozie sits in a love seat and listens to the man go to the bathroom. The man comes out. Maybe some description would be good here, especially since Woozie would be looking at him right now. He's tall, but he doesn't look tall because he has a large way about him, larger than tall. You could say he's big. His hair is black and thin and greased against his head, and he shaved two days ago but he didn't shave yesterday. "Thank you." That was for the bathroom.

"Can I get you anything?" Woozie means it.

The guy says, "I don't want to make any trouble for you."

"Well, you aren't." And Woozie's right. If you couldn't tell already, she's bored. We have on our hands a bored Korean Woozie.

"My name is Carlo. I need a place to sleep."

"Hello, Carlo."

"I hate to ask you. It's an imposition."

"Well, it isn't. We have an extra bedroom. Chen comes home at six, and we're having () for dinner." (I'll get that later.)

"I'd like to join you."

When Chen gets home, Carlo and Woozie are in the living room. It feels a little softer now, a little more like a place to live. I should be subtle--The couch underneath Woozie is comfortable and warm, and Woozie notices that Carlo's tie matches the pattern of the drapes. She makes him stand next to the drapes. When Chen comes home, they're sitting on the couch.

"Hi, Woozie. Who's this?"

"Chen! Come quick! Our phone bill is disastrous! Who made all these long distance calls to Korea last month?"

"Hi, Chen," Carlo says.

"Chen, this is Carlo. He's Italian. I'm setting a place for him at the table."

"Well. Maybe we'll play Rumicube. We can never play it with just us two, but it's a fine game for three, if you're interested, Carlo."

Now these are good people, and dinner is fine. Chen smiles at the meal on their new table in their new home. Carlo smiles at Woozie. Woozie smiles as she excuses herself from the table. She returns with a gallon of ice cream and three spoons.

"Which would you like?" Woozie lays the spoons out on the table. "You're the guest."

Carlo selects a spoon. "Well, it's a shame," he says.

"Hmm?"

"Well, I don't like chocolate. Not in an ice cream. In a cake, well, that's fine, but I don't like it in an ice cream." He takes a spoonful to his large mouth. "I'll eat it," he said, "but I don't like it."

"Tomorrow we'll go the Food Mart and get something else," Woozie says.

After dessert is finished, Woozie takes Carlo to the guest room to show him where to put his things, except he doesn't have any things. It's a pleasant room, soft green and bland, and if a baby happens then Woozie can make a nursery out of it without changing too much. Carlo puts his hat down on the dresser in his room and he's settled in.

"You probably need some things," Woozie says.

Carlo hesitates. "I don't want to inconvenience you."

"Tomorrow," she says.

Chen sticks his head in the doorway. "Are you comfortable?"

"Tomorrow," Carlo says.

Chen looks at Woozie, who nods. "We'll all three go tomorrow."

After breakfast the following morning Chen and Woozie and Carlo head out. Chen isn't a good driver, but he's such a nice-guy, it doesn't really matter. He doesn't drive too fast, but he has trouble giving his passengers a smooth ride. Woozie knows he's supposed to give his passengers a smooth ride but she's forgotten what one is by now, she's been driving with Chen for so long. Carlo isn't paying attention anyway.

Carlo is looking at the city. I won't try to describe the city, because everybody knows what a city looks like. I don't want any really long descriptive paragraphs anyway, because they'll louse things up. I like movement in a story. That's what the problem was with my last story. It lacked movement.

Carlo takes in a lot of sights, even though they're going by quickly because the car is moving. Then Chen pulls into the giant Food Mart, the hub of all Food Marts, the one that has four instead of three brands of garbanzo beans and the one that has live lobsters in a big tank in the back of the store. Woozie looks over and smiles at Chen.

It's a fiesta. Woozie takes charge of the vegetables. Carlo heads for the personal hygiene area. Chen goes to the lobster tank. In twenty minutes, the three have a cart and a half of groceries.

"Chen!" Chen announces when he finds Woozie. "I found him! His name is Chen." Woozie smiles and nods.

"You always manage it," she says to her husband. "And there is a definite resemblance," she adds as she examines the nervous lobster chattering against the sides of Chen's bucket.

With Carlo arrives four boxes of dental floss, a bag of jumbo cosmetic puffs, a fingernail cleaner, a family-sized shampoo and a plastic razor. "Where's the meat counter?" he asks. He locates it while he is dumping his things in the cart and makes a beeline. "I'll have four pounds of ground chuck," he tells the man behind the counter, who isn't a real butcher.

In the check-out line, Carlo unloads the groceries onto the conveyer belt. It's something he has always wanted to do. Woozie hands the stuff to Chen, who hands it to Carlo, who puts it on the belt. It's a great time, and everyone is smiling, everyone

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around them.

Then, with all the groceries paid for and loaded in the car, the three head for the shopping mall.

"We'll be fast," Woozie says, "or the ice cream will melt."

"And we'll take Chen with us," Chen says. The lobster has not stopped chattering.

"I imagine he would like a larger space to move around in," Woozie says, and when they get inside the mall Chen lets the lobster loose in the decorative fountains. He's delighted and confused all at once, and he runs rapidly around the cement floor of the fountains, delighting all bystanders. I don't like that word, bystanders, but I don't know what else to put. Anyway, all the kids around immediately jump into the square wading pool and chase Chen, who must be terrified but appears to be smiling because lobsters have that look about them.

Carlo, meanwhile, has been eyeing the better suits department at the department store. "I'll be back in a minute," he tells his companions, and he returns with a pair of suspenders.

Back at home there is a wonderful feast of a dinner. Woozie sets up the kitchen, and then the three make a buffet of delicacies. I wish there could be music right here. It's a music these three have. They make a buffet of delicacies and they set it on the table and it makes them laugh, how beautiful it is. The three of them just stand around the table and they laugh.

Melissa Levine
Bethesda, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Peggy Pfeiffer

Chocolate Mousse and Cheese Fondue

Brad went down to Georgetown on Saturday night. Some hippie punk was asking for money by an M Street hair salon, so he ignored him. He was going down to spend a night with the others, and particularly with Anne. He had plans, now that she had officially and loudly broken up with Charlie. Crazy Charlie, the one who later killed himself in a car wreck. He'd talked with Charlie about her the day before at school—he always liked to get a feel for his targets before he tried to, you know, get a feel for them—and he'd gotten some hints from him on how to work her. "Feed her chocolate mousse," he'd said, "and she'll be putty in your hands. Chocolate mousse and cheese fondue." So when he caught up with her and her friends as they tried to flirt their way into a bar with no ID, he hung around for a while, and then when she said something about being hungry he dangled a good French restaurant in front of her nose. She went along. He saw Charlie alone at the next table, and looked at him for a moment, but then Charlie gave him a little be-seeing-you wave. Then he knew that Charlie wasn't holding a grudge, so nothing stopped him. He went on and ordered dessert for him and Anne. Chocolate mousse. Bull's-eye. They slept together for the first time about a month later. It really was the first time, she said, and he agreed. So eventually he married her, bought a three-times-too-big house in the outermost suburbs, became a rich and successful advertising executive, had a beautiful daughter named Karen, and came home one night to find that Anne had been electrocuted in the Jacuzzi.

Anne went down to Georgetown on Saturday night. Floyd was asking for money in front of an M Street hardware-store-turned-bagel-boutique, but she ignored him. She kept her distance from him, because he'd almost gotten lucky with her one night. He gave great backrubs. She was going down to be with Suzanne and the others, and also to see if there was anyone interesting out there, because she was now officially on the re-

bound from Charlie. Crazy Charlie, the one who later became a used-car salesman. She'd been as moody and strange as she could to Charlie lately, in the hope that he'd dump her and let them both keep their images, and it had worked. Down in Georgetown, she noticed Brad lying in wait for her and decided he wasn't really that much of a scumbag. Besides, she was hungry. She dropped a few hints, so Brad took her to some supposedly ritzy French place with fake oak panelling and an expensive-sounding menu. He was paying, of course. He kept pushing the chocolate mousse, which was odd because it just didn't do a thing for her. They slept together for the first time the next weekend, almost by accident. It was the backrub that did it—just like in the movies. So eventually she married him, became a rich and successful advertising executive, negotiated deals as smoothly as that first dinner with Brad, had an incredibly talented daughter named Karen, and came home one night to find that Brad had been electrocuted in the Jacuzzi.

Charlie went down to Georgetown on Saturday night. Floyd was asking for money in front of the gold-domed Riggs bank, and he gave him a couple of bucks. He was going down just to see what was going to happen between Brad and Anne. He'd known something was up when Brad started asking him questions the day before in school. He'd fed him some bull about chocolate mousse and cheese fondue. And Anne had had an eye on Brad for a while, even while she was still going with him. When she started trying to get him to dump her, he'd known it was hopeless for him. And she thought she was being subtle. Just as subtle as she was when she got Brad to take her out to dinner that night. Maybe it would work on someone who trusted her. Charlie went to the same restaurant—he didn't feel like letting them out of his sight. So he sat at a nearby table at some expensive French place. The dinner trashed his paycheck for the week. He didn't mind, just so he could keep an eye on her. Then Brad noticed him, looked back at him innocently as if he actually cared. So he made himself give a little casual wave and smile slightly and turn away. He imagined a Panaflex camera pulling slowly back from the scene, revealing him sitting alone, separate from them, ending in a freeze-frame for all eternity. He wanted to say that they deserved each other, that they'd have fun trying to manipulate each other, but it didn't sound right. He had a feeling he'd look back at this night and shudder with embarrassment anyway. So he kept an eye on them until he left for college, dropped out, became a used-car salesman in Rockville, watched as they raised a perfectly Potomac daughter named Karen, and found out one night that Brad and Anne had been electrocuted together in their Jacuzzi.

Floyd went down to Georgetown on Saturday night. It always helped to get a bit more money where he could, and Georgetown was the best place for that. He could get away with it. Brad brushed past, dripping disapproval, probably not even really registering him. Then Anne came by, not looking at him, forearm resting on her pocketbook to keep it shut. God, she was tight. But all it took was chocolate mousse and cheese fondue and a backrub to loosen her up. She wouldn't admit it, though, probably not even to herself. She'd also probably claim she was a virgin until she was a grandmother. "First time"—right. He'd used his formula two or three times, and it always worked until she figured out that he was working from a pattern. Then after she started avoiding him, he'd let Charlie know about it. Charlie hadn't had the brains to know when to use it. When it didn't work the way he'd expected the first time, he gave up. That was Charlie—no retakes allowed, and it didn't count if it didn't fit through a camera viewfinder. When he realized that Charlie, Anne, and Brad were all heading the same way, he knew he had to go just to see the fun. He caught up with them at some faux-expensive French joint and looked in from the outside, trying not to press his nose against the window glass. Brad and Anne were

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 just beginning their desserts. Chocolate mousse. Smart boy. She was eating it up, and gazing deep into those slightly crossed limpid pools he called eyes, and he was eating that up. And Charlie sat alone at his table and played the lonely not-quite-drunk, but then Suzanne came in and Charlie was lost for the evening. Quick recovery. As he turned away and started walking along the curb edge, balancing carefully out of habit, Floyd knew he knew better than to fall into such simple traps. He wouldn't get caught, or cinematic, or in love with his own deviousness. So he left, grew old, hung around M street, and found out one night that Anne and Charlie had been electrocuted together in the Jacuzzi and Brad killed himself in a car wreck.

Karen is going down to Georgetown on Saturday night. She left her tape deck sitting by the Jacuzzi, but she knows her parents aren't stupid enough to leave it there when they go in. She is going down to be with Ellen and the others, and also to see if there is anyone interesting out there, because she is now officially on the rebound from Kevin. Crazy Kevin, the one who will probably grow up to be in politics. She's been as moody and strange as she could to Kevin lately, in the hope that he'd dump her and let them both keep their images, and it had worked. Strange no one had thought of it before.

For some reason, she thinks about getting off the Metro train in Tenleytown. Some aging hippie punk is giving her the eye. He really isn't, but he is sure she thinks so, and that's what matters.

The train breaks down in Van Ness. The resulting traffic mess makes the ten o'clock news.

Jonathan Blum
 Rockville, MD
 Winston Churchill High School
 Peggy Pfeiffer



Becky Chalmers

Blueberry Picking at the Indiana Dunes

*Summer sunburned legs swing out of the car
 at the end of the dusty dirt road.
 Legs glad to be free of beach-baked upholstery
 and the sandy-gritty closeness.*

*A sigh of wind ruffles my hair
 as I stride to the edge of the field.
 The sweet fruity aroma of blueberries tempts me,
 sunstreaked and freckled and smelling of sunscreen.*

*I tread down the sandy soft path, tin bucket in hand,
 to this first row of berry bushes.
 Sparkling glints of silver from other tin buckets peek
 through the dense, green berry-laden bushes.*

*Plump, smoky, purplish-blue berries wait,
 in thick clusters, as the sun beams down.
 The first berry kerplunks,
 four berries for the bucket and two for me.*

*Sweet, tangy juice from sun-warmed berries
 dribbles down my old cotton T-shirt.
 Bucket solid with berries, I return from the field,
 purple juice stained and ripe.
 I am deliciously summerful.*

Kerrily Dahl
 Pittsburgh, PA
 Anne Picone

Motherhood 101

(Okay, ladies, let's begin.)

*It's good for you.
 That's just about enough bathroom talk!
 Hands to yourselves, please--do I look like a referee?
 Don't say I didn't warn you....*

(Super energy, girls. Don't forget to act put-upon.)

*Get your feet off my coffee table.
 If you want trouble, you just keep it up, young lady!
 You're wearing that?
 Clean your room--I can't see the floor.*

(Stay righteous, class. Terrific expression.)

*I had a little chat with your teacher today.
 If all of your friends jumped off a cliff, would you do it
 too?
 Chew with your mouth closed.
 I don't think I like your attitude!*

(That was just beautiful, moms! Good volume, great confidence--keep up the good work!)

You'll understand when you're older.

Sarah Bunting
 Summit, NJ
 Kent Place School
 Jane Cole

Cement

We stood around our creation in sweat and pressing heat, smiling broadly at the Kentucky humidity. I looked up at Miss Carrie's greying two-room home wedged into the side of the mountain, thinking about the Chinet plates and plastic picnic cups saved every day and painstakingly washed in cold well water for future use. Her dog's new puppies, offered to us as gifts, waddled on the big front country porch. We would leave her a remembrance of our visit.

It was kind of tricky. I put my foot down on the small, protruding corner of a cinderblock along the wall and leaned down. Elliot kept his arm around me so I wouldn't fall, and Shannon handed me a big stick.

SVG. I scratched my initials into the cement on the bottom and drew a smiley face. I looked up at my work crew; Don, Ryan and Shannon were standing around the edges of the new septic tank, their wet faces smiling broadly, like frogs just out of a lake.

"That's original," Elliot said, looking at my wet scratches. He proceeded to carve his initials and his girlfriend's into a heart shape. Laughter sprinkled the thick, hot air; we threatened that we were going to tell her about it. He said she would be flattered.

As the junebugs threaded through the mountain grasses, we speculated that maybe in a few hundred or thousand years, after human civilization had passed, aliens would come down and see our initials on the bottom of the septic tank, and wonder who we were, and maybe we would become famous in that alien nation. We smiled, hoping that one of those sudden mountain thunderstorms wouldn't come along and wipe away alien history.

I looked down at our initials, tasting the sweat on my lip. Miss Carrie, 65, wouldn't have to walk two hundred feet to the out-house in the snow anymore.

Sara Glover
White Hall, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Look Away, Baby, Look Away

The first thing you should know about me is, I'm not very dogmatic. Actually, in the words of MASH Colonel Henry Blake, I avoid services religiously. Nonetheless, I was paging through a local religious newspaper the other day, and I found something distressing. It was an ad put out by the paper encouraging new advertisers, and it showed a businessman attired in a suit and tie. Below the picture, the ad proclaimed, "Appearance is everything." The second thing you should know about me is, I'm not very literal. I understood the slogan to be a slightly yuppified version of the old adage "Clothes make the man," an adage which has been known to sell clothes, whether anybody really wanted to buy them or not. The frightening thing was that many subscribers to this newspaper will actually believe that appearance IS everything. The business of America is no longer business, but cosmetics.

Moral bases are shunned, rules of grammar and etiquette ignored, to make things aesthetically pleasing. The third thing you should know about me is, I own a television and a video cassette recorder, and I watch them both, but television to the feeble-minded is an invitation to eradicate the line between fact and fiction. Those who fail to see the difference between the two, or between sage advice and a sound bite, will elevate Lloyd Bentsen to king of the hill for his supposedly spontaneous and polite reminder that J. Danforth Quayle is no J. Fitzgerald Ken-

edy. Today's society worships that which is concise—easy to say, easy to remember. I once read an obituary that described the deceased as "active in slo-pitch baseball, soccer, and the anti-abortion movement." I guess the editor considered pro-lifers athletes. Then there's the Taco Bell commercial which features partygoers packed in a jeep, yelling, "How much? 69 cents. Where at? Taco Bell!" The words "Where at?" are actually flashed on the screen in bold letters. Incorrect grammar, formerly used by people who didn't care about aesthetics, is now a cosmetic tool.

I must pause here to confess that I own, in my house, a bottle of Prop electric pre-shave, a can of Nestle Streaks and Tips gray hair spray—for special occasions—and, yes, even a hairbrush. I have to emphasize that these little items, while they might make me smell a little nicer, even look a little older, are used by me without my feeling as if I have betrayed any moral principles. And, despite what anyone has to say, I intend to keep them. There is a deep difference between using artificial means to enhance one's looks and using unalterable chemical means to create one's looks. I make allowances for a comb that I would not make for liposuction. If liposuction is the miracle that prospective suctionees claim it is, then why do many of them find it hard to stay away from the hospital? Once we begin to change basic elements in our lives, it is difficult to stop. If the snowman we make outside looks awkward in a carrot nose, and is wearing too many buttons, might punching his head off be the next step?

One strange thing about the religion of cosmetics is that it may become fashionable to go back to basics. Television shows such as *The Wonder Years*, *Rosanné*, and *The Cosby Show* are popular because they feature simple domestic problems instead of car chases and aliens. However, a large percentage of these shows' viewers don't lead lives such as those depicted on the shows. Divorce is rampant, multi-child families are becoming less common, and love between family members is hidden, if it is even present in the first place. "Real-life television" for these people has turned into nothing more than another facet of escapism. This is not intended to blame television for the decay of American families, or the closing of the mind to other forms of cultural literacy, but merely to point out that things that are visually appealing will always have their place in everyday life and, more importantly, the dreams of a nation.

Some things which can only boast of aesthetic value to the public are taken for granted. Consider cheerleaders. You're familiar with the stereotype—nice chest, terrific figure, the brains of a hamster. While it can be reasonably stated that this applies to a minority of cheerleaders, the fact is that they never get a chance to display any talents other than the nice chest, the terrific figure, and rhythm. They could be Rhodes scholars and we would never know it. Cheerleaders get their incomes solely by scampering around the field or the court and coaxing the crowds to cheer—which is very lame, once you think about it. People go to a sporting event by choice. Nobody doesn't want to be there. By employing cheerleaders, the team brass seems to be admitting that their team is so lackluster that only busty women can precipitate crowd reaction. Society will be changed for the better, not when the cheerleaders become uglier, but when the fans care enough to talk to the cheerleaders using more than their hands.

Cosmetics are also important in other areas of sports. The Chicago Cubs wear white uniforms while playing at Wrigley Field, but change to dark blue baseball jerseys for road games. Why is it sports teams must have home jerseys and road jerseys instead of just jerseys? Perhaps some of the less cerebral players need the color change as a reminder of where they are playing a particular game. Of course, jerseys change with public opinion. The Vancouver Canucks wore what was universally recognized as the most garishly designed uniform in not only pro hockey but also the free world. They were also not a very strong hockey club. With one unsuccessful Stanley Cup final appearance in seventeen years of existence, the Canucks finally decided to shed their shocking yellow home uniforms in favor of

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conservative white. I've always liked the Canucks; and feel the new white uniforms definitely outclass the old yellows, but I can't help wondering if the Canucks' management felt that something as elementary as a clothing change would turn the team into Stanley Cup quality. I hope that it was last year's tenacious playoff showing that caused the upgrade in uniforms, and that fans won't associate clothes with success, but it's not likely anyone will tell.

Think of the last time you saw an average looking man on a television commercial. Not an average Joe family man, just a plain looking man who could go unnoticed in a crowd. Chances are you don't remember because you've never seen one. It's not that they haven't been there; it's just that when watching television, or any form of entertainment, we don't expect an average looking person to do anything of record. The greatest achievements by underdogs were perhaps really the greatest achievements by the strongest, most deserving of them all. Their appearances led us to write off their chances.

A lot of what I'm saying may not mean much to you. You're probably not the type to lie awake at night wondering if the color change of a uniform or a fast food commercial will destroy the planet. To tell the truth, I'm not that type either. The fourth thing you should know about me is that I'm glad to live in these times. Through the opening of emotions and the willingness to talk about all attitudes, there is more hope for a brighter future. The last thing you should know about me is, I'm not usually this corny and pretentious either. I just thought it would be more cosmetically appropriate.

Hop Wechsler
Bryn Mawr, PA
Lower Merion High School

Diner

*It was always empty, this place,
except for you and me
when we sat at the
hard plastic table
watching the clock that said
10:55 pm
the same as it did every
night when we were here.
Did I ever tell you that
I hated those doughnuts,
always dry--racks
of them, plain
brown-skinned
powdered. I hated the sweet
taste of them, the
feel of dry crumbs in my mouth,
but you always knew that I'd
waste those two quarters that
couldn't be spent on the old
broken jukebox anyway.
Some days when the only sound
was the microwave oven, the
days when we didn't talk,
I'd watch the young
waitresses as they stood with
their arms folded behind the
pale peach counter
and I'd chew the doughnut slowly
and wonder if they were
waiting for us to
go away.*

Leslie Ryang
Williamsville, NY
Williamsville East High School
Mary Richert

In Spanish Class

for Kristen

*They say that I'm supposed to learn
in Spanish class another language
--it's not the one I want, although
conjugations are forgotten
when a cognate is revealed.*

*This morning someone else's death
tugged my elbow into cornered whispers.
I remember only lips and breaths
because I would not see your eyes.*

*Words all mouthed together
like flipped page dictionaries
are strangely all the same
and therefore lost from their identities
and therefore disconnected.*

I can't even say I listened.

(I suppose our tenses failed to agree.)

*There's simply too much else to do
like counting on my fingers
when I don't speak the tongue:*

*One,
Cut it out and stare;*

*Two,
Re-create my phrases
until they make some sense,
and then forget;*

*Three,
A kiss is all you need.*

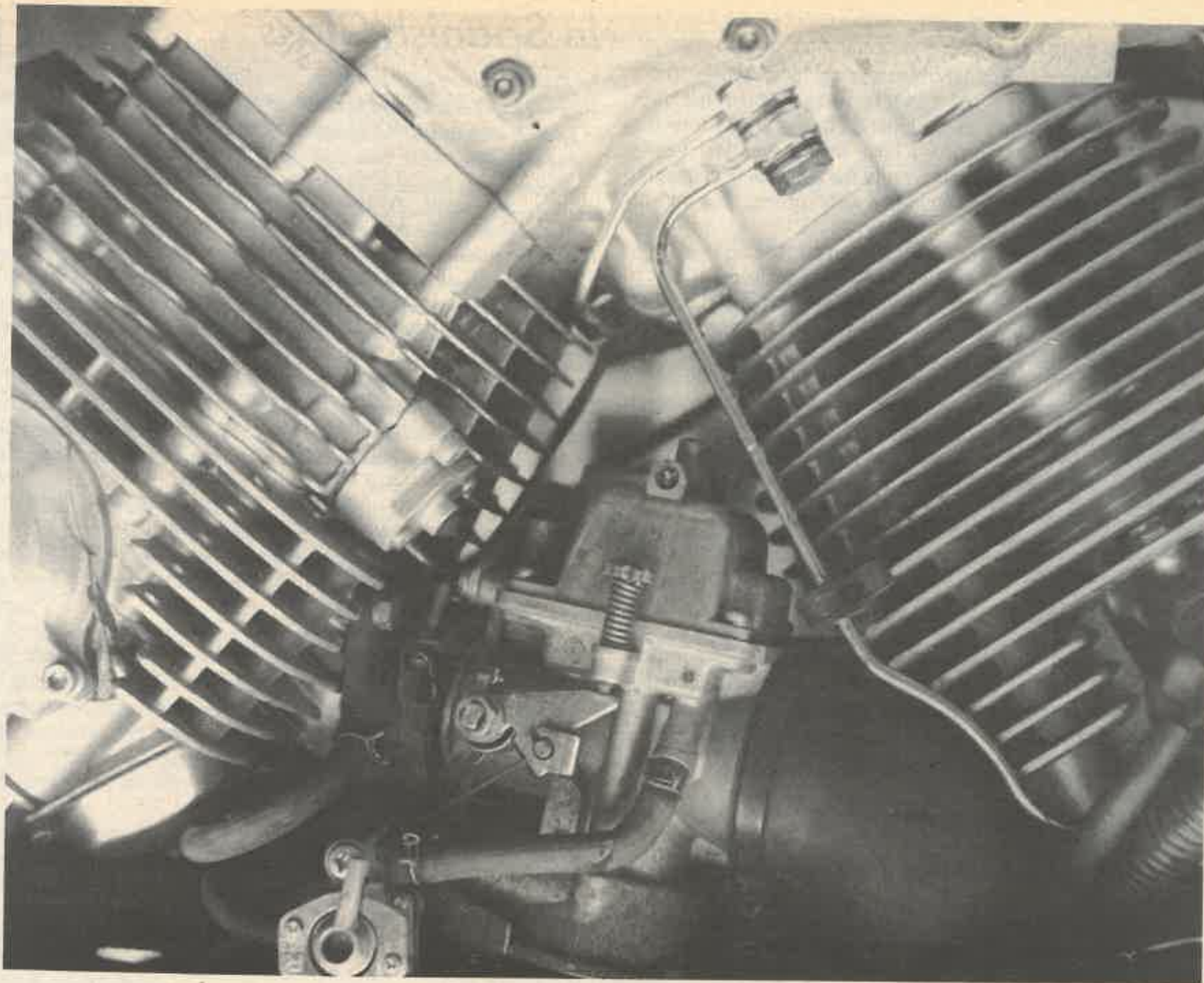
Bryan Powell
Charlottesville, Va
Timothy Strong

Live Bait

*There is this
fish-shaped man who watches
me from just outside
my left eye.
I'm continually straining
to find him,
and some days
I push so hard
I paint him in technicolor.
He jumps out at me
in a
FLASH!
and my eyes are frozen
figure 8 shut.
I reel, spinning.*

*To the left and a
little up,
my cartoon conscience
watches me,
thrilled to the gills.*

Laurel Snyder
Catonsville High School
Baltimore, MD



Becky Chalmers

Migration

This year I will follow the geese
to southern ponds
no more cold nights for me--
huddled
in the stony embrace
of my burrow walls
nibbling old corn.
I will sleep warm and heavy
between soft gray bodies.
I will lean and dream
against the feathered power of a wing.

All night long I will slump
blissfully in the center of the
downy crowd.
(And in that slumbering company I can rest
with both eyes closed--
no fox or weasel dares to stir
the swift beaked wrath!)

And when the strong jewelled necks begin to glint
each morning, as the level sun sends light
across the browning fields,
My tiny eyes
brown and shining as winter ponds
will seek the broadest back
the thickest plumage and the widest span.
In the murmuring, stirring dawn
I will scramble aboard

and crouch in silken luxury.
What great airborne being
will notice so small an imposter as I?

Then, in the frosty air,
what splendid flight we will perform!
One rush, one rustling spread
of speckled wings, open steady lifting beat!
What mouse
has ever seen the world from such a height?
And who can know
how high they go?
I will converse with clouds, and yell a greeting
to the sun.

So spread the word across the meadow ground--
Here's a burrow, dry and fairly deep
with a stock of yellow corn
buried in the farthest end.
The snow will never chase me there again.

Next summer, look for the goose
with glinting eyes like frosty pools.
It will be me.

Kate Ehrenfeld
Highland Park, NJ
Solomon Schechter Day School of Union and Essex
Fran Witherington

Pennies

She picked up pennies from the ground and handed them to her father. One, two, three. As soon as she bent over to pick up another one, her father placed his fist behind his back and opened his palm. The pennies came tumbling to the Earth, with only soft thuds to signify their presence. Though the girl didn't catch on, she soon grew tired of her task and began to walk. Once she had gone a few steps, she noticed that her father lingered behind. Without turning around, she stopped and waited for his footsteps to match her own. The dirt created friction against their soles, causing warmth, clogging tread. The father looked at the girl and noticed that her hair was growing longer as they walked. After a few minutes had passed, her hair was to the ground. The father grabbed it and led her by it. To the ground, he said, to the ground we go. And the ground opened and they fell into it, her hair no longer in his hands, his palms no longer filled with pennies. After some time they stopped falling, but they couldn't climb back up because the father had made a terrible mistake. He had forgotten the one hundred foot length of rope he always carried in his pocket for occasions such as this. So the darkness closed in around them and the father laughed a little, because he knew the predicament they were in. When he turned around to judge the reaction of the girl, his face grew solemn and (perhaps) evangelical. Repentent. The girl had transformed herself into a gigantic penny. He laughed as she rolled over him.

Aimee Strasko
Middlesex, NJ
Ms. LaBue

The Gypsy

A girl with bare feet and dark skin stood on the other side of the tall, interlocking fence at recess. Strands of black hair fell in front of her dark face as she watched the boys playing an angry game of soccer. I stared at her, my eyes absorbing the bright colors in her clothing. She was a Gypsy. Gypsies couldn't go to my school because the principal said they were a bad influence. But I wished I could speak in the tangled Gypsy dialect to this lonely girl who watched our recess. I would have taught her how to play hopscotch and soccer. Instead, I sat by the tall fence that separated us, imagining the place where she lived. Grassy hills, chubby children, and fat chickens disappeared as my friend Maria tagged me and raced away into the dusty playground.

The afternoon brought the burning Greek sun, and we sat on the seventh floor of the school, folding paper to use as fans. Bored by the teacher's droning voice, I looked out the window as the last kids left the playground. I noticed a few small figures outside the fence. Their clothing swayed with the movement of their thin bodies like the rainbow wind sock I once tied to the tail of a kite. From the window I could see the whole fence protecting the school.

At home I was drawn away from endless long division problems by the compelling notes of a song our maid, Seriya, was singing. Sound echoed off the tiled walls in the bathroom where she was scrubbing. Beautiful, low-pitched words stopped abruptly as she stepped out, bucket in hand. I searched for something to say as I looked into her eyes.

"Is that a Greek song?" I asked her politely.

"Gypsy," she returned sharply, her black eyes angry. Her strong white teeth stood as a barricade against the remaining notes. I returned to the scribbles of work on my desk and found myself repeating the song and wishing I could understand the words.

The fence swayed beneath my feet as Maria grasped the metal and she leaned back toward the ground.

"So why did you want to climb this anyhow?" she asked me, jumping off the fence and into her garden. I searched the fields on the other side. I was looking for the brightly painted cara-

vans and huge tents that held Gypsy life.

"Because I think Gypsies live there," I said, gesturing to the grassy hill beyond the fence. The trees made cool shadows where you could hide from the sun, and I imagined Gypsies picking the thin wild flowers to use in healing brews.

"Gypsies?" The way Maria drew out the word reminded me of Jacob, our gardener, when he finds weeds.

"Yes, Gypsies with ponies, crystal balls, and magical potions. Gypsies wearing red and yellow sashes and long skirts." Laughing, Maria interrupted me.

"Dummy," she said, "Gypsies aren't like that. My mother says Gypsies are dirt."

I gripped the fence, looking beyond it and wishing there were Gypsies there to defend me.

The substitute bus driver, who couldn't speak English, misunderstood a student's poor Greek and turned left off the school lot. On the narrow road there was no room to turn around so the bus jolted over potholes, past dying olive trees until it stopped in a clearing. The dust formed clouds that rolled out from beneath the tires. I saw running children wearing flashing violet and yellow. Scrawny chickens pecked hungrily at a few blades of grass beneath the sparsely covered clothes lines that wove together gray cement houses. The Gypsy girl stepped out from behind one of the huts, and I stared at her until the bus started back for the school, leaving the Gypsy world behind.

At recess, I scanned the fence. Through the barrier I saw the Gypsy girl moving in anticipation of a soccer ball's rolling her way, but it bounced off the metal. Her tanned hands gripped the woven wire above her head as if she would climb up. The red, blue, and purple material in her skirt shone in the sun, and I remembered the haunting song Seriya sang. I blinked my eyes and turned away, trying to rid them of the splotches of color that blurred my sight.

Juliet Mount
Vienna, VA
James Madison High School
Bernis von zur Muehlen

Map

*I was looking at your face,
I was looking at your road map,
Always flaring at the corners,
Lines and circles, lines and circles,
notes for your trip.*

*Forty years on the road. Working out your
directions.*

*I stared at the highways and crossroads around
your eyes.*

*An expressway ran parallel to your brow:
Interstate 180 cut sharp across your jaw
and your cheek bones filled
with resting stops unnoticed.*

*So much time it took for this cross-country
caravan. Circling home now, you've
been stuck in traffic with
your window rolled down,
cursing wildly to the cab in front of you
not even noticing, I had taken the first exit
off.*

Lesley Deewall
Holmdel, NJ
Holmdel High School
Sandy Whitten

My Grandmother

The first time I saw her, she frightened me.

I was five years old at the time. My mother, younger brother, and I were visiting her in California. My father was not there. He was busy working back in New Jersey. I missed him terribly. I thought he belonged there with me, to tuck me into bed at night and read me stories, to give me baths and chase away the monsters from under my bed.

In a way, I was right. My father did belong there in California. But it was not because of me or my brother or mother. It was because of this woman who frightened me. This woman who was his mother, and he, her only son.

They told me she was my grandmother. But I hardly believed them. This was not the grandmother I knew. The one I knew was plump, loud, quick to laugh. She was beautiful when she put her makeup on and sprayed herself with perfume. This woman was not that. She was plain, almost ugly. Her skin, gaunt across her high cheekbones, seemed to be crisscrossed with a thousand wrinkles. I cringed as I kissed her pale cheek. She smelled old, stale, like things unmoved for long periods of time. Her long grey hair was pinned in a bun at the nape of her neck and her teeth were large and came over her lips. I hoped they would not ask me to sit on her lap. She seemed so frail and small, I thought I might crush her.

Nigh-nigh was what I was supposed to call her. It was strange to my tongue. From then on, the word brought about images of the muffled and unknown. It was true I knew almost nothing about her. Even when she came to live with us in our new home in New Jersey, she remained a mere fixture, something I knew was going to be there when I got home from school. The room at the back of the house--the den we called it--was reserved for her. She did nothing to change it. There were no new pictures or porcelain vases or sticks of incense. She simply occupied the room as a guest, quietly made the bed when she woke, yet touched nothing else.

She continually tried to please us all. Soon after she moved in, she cut out patterns from brown grocery bags and knitted sweaters for my brother and me. Following these came several vests and socks. My mother commended them on their durability and warmth. I did not like them. They were brown and rough. Once she made little origami figures out of old magazine pages. They looked like fun to play with, but I was scared I might crush them. To help my mother, she scoured the pots and pans with the same old torn-out magazine pages. My father became furious with her over this. What did she think the paper towels were for? he shouted at her. They were expensive--why did she think we bought them?

She took all of this without a falter. Patiently waving away my father's complaints, she murmured a few words I did not understand. Probably something like, It doesn't matter, or, Those magazine pages are good enough for me.

That was the only emotion my father showed to her. The whole time she lived with us I never saw him gently kiss her cheek or drape a light arm about her shoulders. It was my mother who sat with her and patted her arm when she got poison ivy and a nurse came to examine her. When it was warm, she liked to wander in the woods behind our house. There, she did inexplicable things. I thought she was trying single-handedly to clear the woods away. Once in a while she found a frog or turtle and brought it back to me and my brother. We were not interested. We preferred throwing the frisbee or clambering all over our new swingset. But she continued to wander through the woods and bring us back little things: a blue-jay's feather, a handful of white flowers. Then she got poison ivy and my father did not want her out in the woods anymore.

Suddenly, without a word or explanation, she moved out. For the next month or two she lived in and out of nearby hotels. Sometimes my father would go stay with her. This made me angry. He was my father, wasn't he? I was his only daughter. But this woman was his mother and he was her only son. Perhaps he felt guilty for missing it the first time.

Soon after that, she moved back to California. My brother and I swiftly pushed her to the backs of our minds. By now I was in the fifth grade and becoming interested in boys. My brother was in second grade and learning a strange penmanship called denelium. We pursued our roles of school and play with vigor and rarely thought of the woman we were supposed to call Nigh-nigh.

Around this time, my father would fly out to California every few months. Each time, he would stay no more than two weeks and come back quiet and stoic. My brother and I, of course, asked questions. Why was he going so often, what was he doing? Why couldn't we go along? My mother simply told us our father was visiting Nigh-nigh, and left it at that.

Somehow I knew something was wrong. Once in a while, I would catch my father staring into space, idle. This was a rare thing. Even if there was absolutely nothing to do, he always found something.

After one of his trips, he came back late at night. I was sleeping in my parents' room, after having been scared by some horror movie--*Terror in the Wax Museum* or *The Exorcist*. One of them shut a drawer or switched on a light, and I woke up slightly, enough to hear my father mention something about leg cancer. Nigh-nigh has leg cancer, I thought logically, sleepily, and fell asleep.

Her death came abruptly. My brother and I did not even know of it at the time. Our mother told us, perhaps several weeks after her funeral, late in the spring. We were playing outside, growing restless with boredom. She called us in; she had something to tell us. I thought she had bought something for us and informed my brother of this. He became excited and we raced into the house.

My mother was standing in the laundry room, waiting. On the washer was a picture set in a fine porcelain plate. It was Nigh-nigh. Solemnly, our mother told us to bow to it; our grandmother was dead.

I automatically looked across the kitchen into the family room. My father sat on the sofa watching a ball game. He did not move; his expression did not change. I wondered why he did not turn his head to look at us. Was he crying; was that it? Was he too embarrassed to turn because he had tears in his eyes? I never knew.

Soon afterwards, I began to ask questions about her, as if now that she was gone, it was safe to do so. My mother answered my questions for me, showed my pictures. All of this she did quietly, secretly, when my father was not around. I got the idea it was forbidden to talk of my father's family. He rarely spoke of it. Many a time he would tell me of his childhood, but never did he associate it with his family.

My first question was, Who was my grandfather? Was he dead too? My mother showed me a black and white photograph of a young handsome man. He and Nigh-nigh had had an arranged marriage, she said. Otherwise he would not have married such a plain looking woman. There were pictures of her when she was young also. She did not look much different: her hair was blacker and her skin was less wrinkled, but she still seemed plain. Maybe if she got her teeth fixed, I wondered silently, and parted her hair on the side, maybe then she would have been better-looking.

My grandfather did not really love her, my mother told me. But they had two children anyway to seem normal and happy. I wondered if she had been patient with him, if she had tried her best to please him but never got anything more than a polite thank you. I would have been nicer, I thought, if she had lived. Guilt suddenly racked over me. I should have been nicer.

In 1949, the Communist Revolution came along. She, my father, and aunt fled to the nearby island of Taiwan. My grandfather stayed in China for some reason. He was still there. Now he had a new wife and a thirty year old daughter. That was why all the letters addressed to my father from China went into the drawer, unopened. He was bitter at the father he felt had abandoned him.

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But what-of Nigh-nigh? Why did he act that way around her? Did he love her? I did not ask these questions aloud, afraid I would get yelled at, sent to my room. But still I wondered. Maybe when he looked at his mother he saw someone frail and helpless. Perhaps he was sorry that he had not been able to help her in Taiwan, sorry that she needed a man to take care of her and he was only a boy. Maybe he was sorry that his father had left them and he, as his only son, could not make him stay.

My father could not do anything about that now. Perhaps Nigh-nigh understood the whole time and remained patient and kind. She told him she did not need anything but the clothes on her back and a warm bed to sleep in. But my father had it all now. He could give her anything: hot tasty food, nice clothes, real soft cotton paper towels to wipe, of all things, dirty dishes. But she quietly declined; she had done without before and she could do without now. He grew frustrated and shouted. He could not help her before, but now he could give her anything, and she did not want it.

I still think about her. I continue to wonder if she would have been pretty if her teeth were straightened and her hair cut and permed. I wonder what she was like as a young girl, say, my age. Was she as scared of boys as I am? Was she sweet and shy? I wonder if she loved the man she called her husband, if she knew he did not love her. If she cried into her pillow at night when he did not kiss her goodnight. I wonder of her life at our house, of her patient need to please. Did she accept my brother's and my refusal of her continual gifts simply because she did not expect gratitude? And I wonder if while she stood out in the woods hacking at weeds, fingering harmless snakes and turtles, she wanted me or my brother to come out and join her. If she thought we, as children, would notice her obvious joy and brush away the leaves to wander and look for frogs, to search for the prettiest flowers. To please her.

Angela Tung
Cranbury, NJ
West Windsor-Plainsboro High School
Carolyn Stetson

Mirror Child

*White terri cloth hangs heavy
against the drop-remains
of her evening shower.
Looking through the fog
between her and herself,
she pushes her stomach
out from the robe,
slightly arching to
fatten it more. With one
of the ties wrapped in
her fingers, she lays a
hand on the soft-shell
of cranium pressing
inside. She wipes the
glass of steam and pats
again the mirror child
inside her belly,
swelled up like a
fresh wound.*

Stephanie Levin
Cockeysville, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Blue Jays Try to Bust Some Ghosts

(Casper Rebels)

Casper,
What were you thinking?

*To try to escape
To break through the boundaries
that boxed you in
To rip the threads
that kept you bound
To leave for me
an uninhabited page,
empty boxes and deflated balloons
A dogear on page five--
the only clue.*

*You are the friendly one,
not the hoodlum
who strikes out
one night a year
to hoo and spook
and trick the treats.*

Casper,
Count your blessings.

*The Blue Jays
let you walk
this time,
but not next.
They will
perch on every tree
and scout for you.
For now,
Just go back to your box
and inflate some
balloons with your words.*

Casper,
What were you thinking?

Karen Sondik
Potomac, MD
Winston Churchill High School
Peggy Pfeiffer

The Pigeons

*those dun teapots
dip their spouts cordially,
bobbing for seed.
They dawdle like tots
or bumper cars, a sea
of shoes. The fat-kneed*

*girl on the seat sculpts her hair
with a scarlet nail, replaces
the compact in her leather
purse like a sugar cube. There!
She sees me through the faces.
We startle the pigeons together.*

Andrew Gerle
Baltimore, MD
Catonsville High School

I Would Buy You the Moon, But Not a Boomerang

"But, Mom..."

"No, you cannot have a boomerang."

"Aw, come on. They're not dangerous. Besides, I know how to use one right. Please?"

"I said no and that is final. Period. End of discussion."

There I stood, frustrated and disappointed, wearing a pout like King James wearing his crown. The sign above me, "Aisle Three: Sporting Goods," cast down a wicked shadow that burned into my mind. One day, I prophesied. One day.

The same thing happened every Saturday morning, as predictable as the sun rising and as regular as the ticks of a clock. Just after ten o'clock, my mother and I would set off to take care of the day's errands. The Giant, a veritable playground of food, remained always the first notch in my mother's belt.

Aisle after aisle, I found the grandest things stocked in the endless shelves that stretched a mile high and a mile long. Froot Loops, pens, S'Mores, tape, Chicken 'N Stars. It was all too much. I gotta have this, I thought. I approached my mother, the box of Strawberry Fruit Roll-Ups conveniently hidden behind me. I hammered out one of my cutest smiles and then I calmly made my pitch.

"Hi, Mom." She didn't even look at me.

"What do you want now?" So much for subtlety.

"Can I have this please?" She looked up from her shopping list only long enough to answer me.

"No."

"Aw, come on Mom."

"No, now put it back."

"I love you, Mom."

"Put it back!"

I dragged my way back to where I picked up the box. There was a gaping hole in the wall of Fruit Roll-Ups. I filled it dutifully and I skulked back to find my mother.

Mom used to say that she never really needed a watch, because I would chime about every ten minutes. I only got to ask for three things this time and not one thing made it into her cart. She bought some tuna fish and she said she bought it specifically for me. Yippee. She made it to the checkout line before I had time to argue. I swear she had managed to set shopping time records because of me. For her, shopping had become a science, an art, if you will. She had pared down every superfluous motion and choreographed her parade through the entire store to knowing how many linoleum tiles she walked on. One time, she spent \$150 on dry goods in under twenty minutes. I had the notion to call Mr. Guinness, but Mom didn't want me using the phone.

After the man tossed the bags in the trunk, we headed for Montgomery Mall. I had a music lesson at Jordan Kitts Piano Store at eleven, and she had to buy a bunch of presents for Aunt Marla's baby shower and Grandma and Grandpa's anniversary. And in that measly half hour that I was cooped up with that psychotic piano teacher, she had managed to buy everything on her list and have time left over to read a hundred pages in the new book she bought at B. Dalton's. When I was released, she had a smile on her face. On a given Saturday morning, she would smile exactly three times. Once, when I went into my piano torture lesson; again when I came out; and last when we finally got home. She was a strange woman, that mother of mine.

The highlight of every Saturday morning, however, came when we left the mall and went to the little shopping strip behind Sears. The pattern was that she went into the knitting store, I went to Best, and we would meet one-half hour later at Vince & Dominick's Pizza for lunch. Not a bad setup, if you think about it.

The automatic doors slid open and the pure sight of everything excited me. I loved Best. It had everything from jewelry and kitchenware to computers and camping supplies. My favor-

ite was the sporting goods section. There were air guns, fishing rods, soccer balls, tennis rackets, compasses, sleeping bags, and enough other stuff to keep an eight-year-old occupied for life. Around the corner, however, was the one thing that I wanted more than anything else in the world: a boomerang. I don't know how the fascination for boomerangs came about, but I had known for years that I absolutely had to have one.

I dreamt about boomerangs all night long, about being an aborigine in the plains of Australia, hunting for food to feed my family, armed only with an old wooden boomerang. I dreamt about being in the movies as a professional boomeranger. I dreamt about being able to send a boomerang way out into the distance with just a flick of the wrist, then go home, eat lunch, take a nap, come back two hours later just in time to catch the boomerang as it was coming back. I was hooked.

In the section with badminton shuttlecocks and tennis balls, I found the boomerangs. There were four kinds, each having different wood textures, different bending angles, and their own fantastic name. The one I wanted was The Outback Australian Boomerang. It was perfectly shaped, bowed at the top, and it had a reddish tint in the glaze that set it apart from the rest. This was definitely the one.

I ran back to the booth in Vince & Dominick's where my mother was sitting, waiting for our number to be called. I couldn't help myself.

"Mom! I just saw the most incredible thing!"

"Really?" She saw right through me.

"Yeah. Mom, you know, I never ask for anything. But, if you let me have just this one thing, I'll never ask for anything else ever again." I could see that I had her thinking.

"What is it?" she asked, seeming to already know the answer.

"Will you get it for me?" I was stalling.

"Tell me what it is first."

"I love you, Mom."

"WHAT IS IT?" she gritted, growing impatient.

"It's a mmmph-mmmph-ang."

"What?"

"A boomerang."

"I've told you before, I will not buy you a boomerang."

"Ever?"

"Never."

"Even when I'm thirty?"

"Never." I could tell she was serious. I pouted. I never really minded when she didn't buy me anything at the grocery store or the mall. But the boomerang thing really bothered me. I ate my pizza quietly, looking out the window, thinking about how I would ask her next Saturday.

This went on for four years. I eventually stopped asking my mom for the boomerang, even though my desire for it never waned. One day, my friend Larry came over and we decided to go to the mall and look around the stores, maybe buy a record or two. We walked the distance between my house and the mall and started off our spree in the record store. Inevitably, however, we both ended up at Best.

There I was after a one year sabbatical, standing speechless before the boomerangs again. I felt the intense yearning return. I quickly decided to seize the moment. It didn't take much to con Larry into coughing up half the money to buy the old Outback Australian. He heartily agreed. After the cashier rang it up and bagged it, we ran for home.

My first intention was to hide it completely from Mother. But when we entered the door, a new idea came to mind.

"Well, did you get anything good?" she asked innocently.

"I got a BOOMERANG." I held that last word until I could see it sink into her head.

"You did, huh. Well just be careful."

I was stunned. No yelling? No expressions of surprise? What kind of trick is she playing? I ignored her for the time being, and I tore the Outback Australian out of its package. Larry and I ran out the door and headed for the soccer field behind my devel-

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opment. We threw it about three times. It didn't really come back all that well; the instructions said that you needed a strong wind and it was almost calm outside that day. But it was fun anyway, just throwing the boomerang with my own two hands after all of these years. I was just about to throw it for the fourth time when I stopped and turned to Larry.

"I'll bet you that I can throw this boomerang through that soccer goal and have it turn up and come back right here where I can catch it." I gleamed.

"No way," said Larry.

"Wanna bet?"

"I dare you."

"Ok, watch this."

I stood still for about a minute, about five hundred feet from the goal box. I aimed carefully, calculating the wind and the likely trajectory of my weapon. I wound up slowly, like a spring being stretched until it couldn't be stretched any further. I held for as long as I could and then I released. The boomerang glided through the air, spinning so fast it looked like a plate with a hole in the middle. It approached the goal and soared under the crossbar perfectly. I was elated. It immediately turned up and came around for the return. My fingers were crossed. Just then I realized that it was dipping a little too low. I stood helplessly as it went straight for the crossbar. Half the boomerang went over the crossbar and the other half went under.

I walked home, completely stunned, holding a half of the boomerang in each hand. My mom welcomed the sorry sight at the door.

"It just broke," Larry said. My mother beamed and let out an ear-to-ear grin that was brighter than the sun. She spoke in a calm, matter-of-fact voice.

"That should teach you."

I laid the boomerang to rest that night, among all of the other fetishes of my childhood that had long since been forgotten. I said a prayer as the lid came down on the trash can.

I never wanted a boomerang after that. I never regretted buying that one, either, even knowing what would happen. I guess it's the act of getting something rather than keeping it that makes a kid happy. On the other hand, if I ever do get a car, I hope that I don't drive it into a tree on the first day; I know I couldn't stand losing something like that twice.

Marc Jacobs
Bethesda, MD
Ms. Alberts

Lunch, Eighth Grade

I hesitated. There weren't many kids around me. The ones that were there moved steadily over the floor from the doors to the tables, or to the hot-lunch lines. The air wasn't charged, yet, with the normal lunchtime voltage. For some reason, Mr. Jacobs had let us out of Art early. Knowing Jill wouldn't be out of her class for another five or ten minutes, I had wandered the halls for as long as I dared, ducking into a bathroom as I saw the Assistant Principal heading my way. After that, there was no other place to go but the cafeteria. I stood on the scuffed green-and-white linoleum just inside the smaller cafeteria door. I studied my sneakers, bent, and untied the laces, then tied them again; I raised my head and looked at Table One.

Nicole Bingham was already seated, waving her false-nailed hands as she talked to Holly Evans across the smooth orange-

tabletop. Holly's eyes flickered from Nicole's face to the kids walking behind her seat, and then back again. Her eye shadow was bright blue. It sparkled in the fluorescent light from overhead. I was used to coming in and walking past a solid, twitching clump of wiggling popularity here, on the way to my table: The girls at Table One often stared and cackled sweetly; they patted their lacquer-coated hair and the "lunch ladies" let Table One go up to the Snack Bar first. At least this year, the table where I sat every day was Table Two. Last year it had been Three. Jimmy Calhoun was sitting there now, eating a hot dog. Little pieces of the bun were rolling down the front of his sweat-shirt. Overweight, lank-haired Mary Viscot was wiping her glasses a few seats away from him, her wide lips turned slightly down.

A sudden, deep breath filled me with the scents of floor wax, sloppy-joes, and dust. For some reason, a first-day-of-school feeling flooded my veins. I smiled, my mouth opening with quiet glee. I straightened my body and began to move. My smile grew as I noticed the quick, certain way that I was striding toward Table One, and the way I coolly bent to the left to avoid a collision with a lunch tray. I soon stood next to Nicole's seat, looked at her and her friend. Nicole went on talking. I was a shadow by her right arm. I shrugged expressively, and sat. I turned slightly to admire the new perspective I had gained. The big windows that showed the street and the cemetery were farther away now. The stage was closer to me, and so was the snack bar, steaming with the smell of hot pretzels. Nicole turned her blonde head. Her eyes fixed on the wall behind me.

"Somebody's sitting there," she said. She was talking to the wall, or else to the bridge of my nose. I couldn't believe that any self-respecting actress would say that line, in any movie. Siskel and Ebert would ridicule the film, saying its dialogue was howlingly unrealistic and completely absurd. Two thumbs down. Such trash.

"Okay," I said, and moved over a seat. My voice was deliberately amused; didn't she realize how comical she was, her line was? Didn't she realize that the audiences would snort and shake their heads and go to the refreshment stands in the middle? The box office ticket sales would become lower and lower, because of bad word of--

"Somebody's sitting there too." I swallowed and gently bit my bottom lip. Exactly the same tone of voice, exactly. How could she imitate herself so well? I couldn't even remember my next line. I needed a cue.

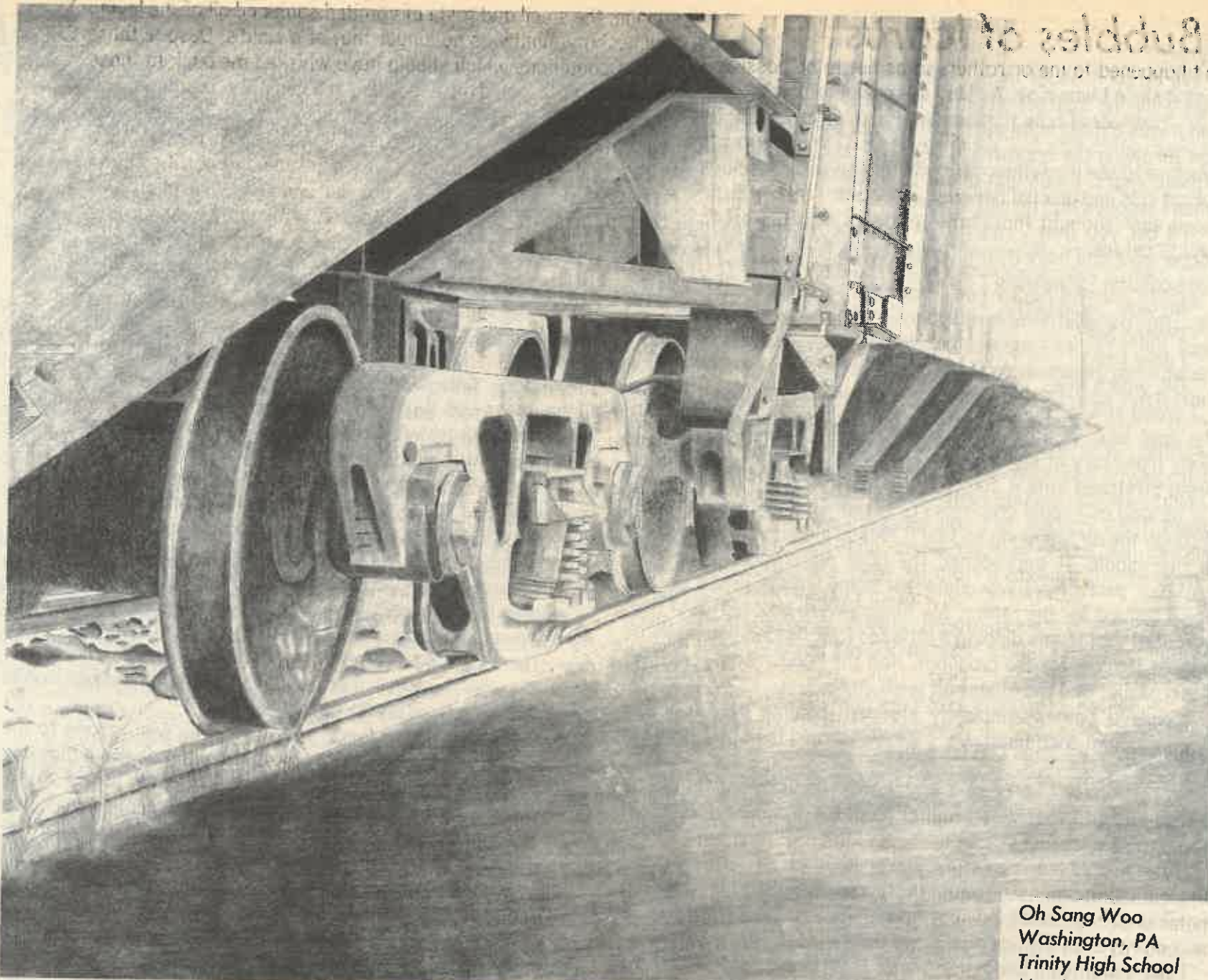
Then I saw Jill walk in, her candy-pink glasses and a grin taking up most of the room on her face. I had been pushed to my feet and was standing still, as if I were playing freeze tag. Nicole, however, hadn't touched me. Her? Touch me? No, there had been a far-removed feeling to her words, as if one of us were a robot. If I tried to poke her arm I'd be blocked by a wafer-thin invisible glass casing. I backed away. I turned and soon was at Jill's side.

"Hi, Jilly!" I said, with a beam.

"That's my name, don't wear it out!"

I breathed a relieved laugh, but as we crossed over to our table, I noticed that I couldn't stop smiling. It was a curvy, stiff smile. I relaxed my cheeks, and the corners of my lips pulled down. I lifted them slightly, and rubbed the back of my neck with a cold hand. As we sat, I looked at the people around me. They walked steadily from tables to snack bar to hot-lunch lines. Their bodies moved ceaselessly. They were filled, from top to bottom, with iron filings. I looked down at my sneakers, and blinked. There were magnets moving under the linoleum floor, one for each person.

Anya Weber
Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Laura Nelson
George Mangan



Oh Sang Woo
Washington, PA
Trinity High School
Mrs. Knight

"My Lover's Quarrel With the World"

-Robert Frost

"Everyone is a fascist."

"Even me, honey?"

"Everyone is a fascist except you and me."

"Darling, what is a fascist?"

My lover looks at me. He always does that when he decides not to discuss the world with me. These conversations never go anywhere; I love the world and he doesn't.

My lover has been a member of Amnesty International since he was fourteen. He is a vegetarian and has been to countless anti-fur marches. I can't remember the last time that I've worn leather shoes in his presence. He is also, needless to say, a socialist.

Each year, my lover goes to South Africa to rally against Apartheid. He has been arrested more than once, and I fear for him each time he boards that airplane. He is leaving for Soweto tomorrow to hopefully catch a glimpse of Nelson Mandela.

I pick at my tofu tempura and take a sip of tea. It is sometimes so difficult to remind my lover of my existence. He once sat for fifteen minutes talking to molecules of hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen and a striped pillow while I was in the bathroom.

My lover is wistfully reading his newspaper, looking for another cause to join. I can picture him saying, "Did you know that the population of Malaysian fruit flies has decreased from 11 billion to 10,999,998,987? Before we can fully grasp the significance of this, our carelessness with the environment will result

in Malaysian fruit fly extinction. Save the fruit flies!"

One day I plan to write an article or personal ad in this newspaper saying something like, "Are you as aware as you pretend to be? There might be something dying out in your environment that you are completely unaware of: YOUR RELATIONSHIP."

Don't misunderstand me. I love my lover, and I especially love him for his selfless dedication to the world. I, too, believe in socialism, never use a Styrofoam anything, and will absolutely utilize a diaper service when the time comes. I am proud to stand next to him at any demonstration, and thrilled when he takes me in his arms when one of his organizations reaches what he considers to be a higher level, but I also believe that one person cannot make the world "allbetter" in one solitary stroke. Sometimes I'd like to tell my lover to stop searching for perfection for our world, and just experience it.

We wash the dishes together in biodegradable soap and sit in the living room, all the while my lover relaying his experience at the Gay Rights march he went to this morning while I had classes. I love the way his brown eyes sparkle as he describes how they blocked up traffic and the way the media, like bees during pollination, scrambled about for "action shots" and hoped for some newsworthy violence. And I wish my parents wouldn't forbid me to join him tomorrow. And I wish I had the authority to forbid him to go. And I wish he would find what he is searching for in Soweto, or in New York, or in Washington, D.C., or wherever. And I wish he would find it in me.

Naomi Schechter
East Northport, NY
Northport High School
Mrs. O'Donnell

The Bubbles of Icarus

It hasn't happened to me or rather, so as not to be passive, hadn't done it since I was nine. As I lay in my wet mattress, cold and soaked, I wondered how this embarrassing childhood habit had suddenly resurfaced after all these years. I tried to recall the night before to see if anything had affected my subconscious to bring about this unexpected bed-wetting. I searched my brain and retraced each thought that came to me as I drifted off to sleep the night before.

It was all so light and happy and I hadn't a clue as to what had caused my bed-wetting. I was only thinking of the silly brown ants bumping into each other as they formed a line across the white bathroom sink and headed for the sweet tooth-paste behind the faucet. I was only thinking of spoofing "My Life as a Dog" (because it made me cry) in making something...something entitled "My Death as a Cat." I was just thinking of owning a toy store and other such childish ideas at a random staccatto beat just like this typewriter now when I drifted off to sleep. Absurd, frivolous and light you see, such was the mood I was in before I drifted off to Never-never-land--light and innocent and nothing dark and deep from my Id or anything of the sort. Then, upon touching this, I realized that my childish frame of mind had whisked me back into my childhood days--habits and all. I made the connection! But surely it can't be just that," I thought. "Besides, I don't subscribe to that bogus Freudian junk." But then, I was overpowered by this intriguing connection and swelling up it came, from the secret depths like a spring although the substance wasn't so pure and virginal. So I kept on dredging.

Just before my light and happy mood, I had been vomiting. I was suffering from chills and convulsions and the utmost attention was given me. My temperature, which was at one point 105 F, was constantly being taken and re-taken. With the glass thermometer under my tongue, my mother nervously hovering about me, and my father gently stroking my febrile brow now and then, I felt like a complete baby. I was being pampered! At long last, I had finally swam upon an island of attention--those islands which formed archipelagos in my youth and which had drifted apart as I grew. They became rareties as I swam in a vast sea of neglect. Those ubiquitous green oases were now sparse and no longer could I indulge and splash about in those sheltered coves and wonderful lagoons and conveniently swim ashore if I suddenly felt sick and tired of the freedom and weightlessness of being a rogue. The novelty of being free and neglected and washed away--instead of being leisurely swept ashore, I was thrashing against the currents as I was now "condemned to be free." The bays and inlets have now grown wider and deeper and mercilessly threatened to drown me...and now, being once again taken care of, I felt secure. I did not mind the stifling sensation of the many blankets I was tucked under at all, and with all the affectionate nursing, my convulsions subsided, fever died and soul soothed so that once again my mind slipped into a happy and wonderfully childish delirium.

My parents, now close at hand, had a very reassuring effect on me. I had missed them terribly during their nineteen days of absence and now, having come back, I clambered onto them--the warm sands of the beach, like an exhausted channel swimmer; cold, wet, panting, disoriented and confusedly crying. This was all too unusual and not me at all. In fact, I had survived their absence in periods of up to a year and enjoyed the neglect which afforded me independence. This time, however, I was beside myself with joy at their coming home. It must be a critical time.

The sensation of a warm sponge bath given me by my mother made me feel like a child and completed the ambience of a sick boy's room. Although everything was present at the time to fool me into feeling like a young, sick child, I felt like an old man dying.

In spite of the physical completeness (the fever, the wet

sponge, the smell and taste of vomited soup and all of the loving touches) my mind was no longer that of a child's. Despite those perfect conditions which should have whisked me back to those gentle years, I could not feel like a child. My mother's wet sponge bath was my last glimpse of childhood, and I felt like an old man, sick with grief and despair. It was La Pieta rather than a Madonna with Child painting. It was stone and petrified cloth instead of a soft cloak of della robia blue. But one thing was constant and ever-present, the Mother. With all the reassurance in the world, I let go of everything and spiralled into a glorious deep sleep.

By the middle of the night, I had awoken from my dreamless and restful sleep, and I opened my eyes to the darkness. It was pitch black and something unusual was happening which bothered me. I suddenly felt a wet warmth and at that moment, I knew only too well from past experiences, what the sensation was and from where it came. I was wetting my bed at age 18! Oh, what a nightmare that this horrid habit should come back now! After all the hardships I went through to rid myself of this habit! Yet, it was too lucid to be a dream and still I let it flow. Creating a puddle, I sank into its warmth and lost all consciousness, even of the darkness around me. Weightless, I was drifting off into the sea and felt unity with it at last. Deeper and deeper I sank like water itself and at ten meters down, I met Icarus who for so long now has been enticing me to join him by sticking his pale leg out of the green waters. "I'll share your sorrow," I said to him and so we did. It wasn't sorrow after all, as I found out, but a glorious ecstasy with which his bubbles so cleverly deceived us all. Those bubbles frothing from his mouth were filled with heady screams and they popped at the surface, gurgling sorrow and pain. "How selfish," I thought, but what actually gurgled out of my mouth was "How wonderful!" and I sank deeper. At thirty meters down, I saw a flash of yellow among the dark green kelp. I swam effortlessly through this thick forest like a ghost and cornered it. It was the Little Prince! "So! You weren't up in the stars at all! You were within all along!" I yelled this out like a scolding, but at this discovery, I didn't know whether to be angry or to be relieved. We had tea in the clearing as colorful fish swam by our noses; we chatted about his rose and my rose and not at all about "matters of consequence." My head was spinning and after saying "adieu," I spiralled deeper until I met Neptune at the depth of fifty meters. He pointed his trident at my chest and barred me from going deeper and said that it was in my best interest that I obeyed. I moved forward to pull his incredibly long and flowing beard for I thought him rude, but as I grasped his beard, the trident was thrust into my body creating three holes where all my air escaped to the surface as my body dove deeper. At seventy-five meters down, I met Dionysus drinking super-vintaged wine from the hull of a sunken Sumerian ship. He welcomed me aboard his rotting ship and we drank the splendid ancient wine. We squealed together in delight and let streams of billions of bubbles out of our mouths and watched them race up to the surface in thin, straight lines. He was so delighted by my company that he begged me to stay. This request of his I might have obliged but something beckoned below and so I sank even more.

I was now at a record one hundred meters and the world champion for unaided, deep sea diving, Enzo Maiorca, was staring at my face. He stayed down for two minutes and eighteen seconds and probably experienced "raptures of the deep." After resurfacing and basking in the fame and glory, he went back down in disappointment and never came back. He was the greatest indeed! A veritable homo-aquaticus! But here I was at the same depth where one should taste the raptures, and nothing happened. Enzo too, like Neptune, warned me in a grave tone not to go any deeper, that this was the limit and even used himself as an example of how I would become if I didn't listen to him. I told him that I wanted to taste the raptures and darted deeper and deeper in a descent that took hours. I finally found

Jacques-Yves Cousteau, and at the sight of his eyes, from which concentric rings radiated and hypnotized me like a fish or squid under Aquaman's spell, I tasted the raptures for the very first time. He shared his mouthpiece with me and I experienced the ultimate narcosis of nitrogen. His presence combined with the ecstasy was too much; I lost all control and sank even deeper to the black depths. It was terribly quiet there; in fact, there was nothing there and this silence repulsed me so that I panicked and shot up to the mirror surface. Up, up and up I went, not heeding Jacques' warning that if I surfaced too quickly, I would get the bends. I left a trail of bubbles as I rose and my blood was boiling. I needed fresh air and I passed out before touching the silvery surface. Blinded by the raw sunlight streaming through my window, I woke up and there I lay in my bed, bent and coughing, suffering the fate of ignorant pearl divers who could no longer live on land.

I had recalled everything now. I had also solved the mystery of the wet bed. I continued to lie in the puddle, overwhelmed by it all and seethingly angry for letting it happen. I gazed at the ceiling and saw a reflection of myself—lying in a wet mattress, bent and twisted from the "bends," sickly, coughing, pale and cadaverous. I was angry and wished I could live in Plato's Republic. I was thinking of all the Adonises of the world and desired to be one. But there I lay, soaking, stagnant and paralyzed, in a hovel of a room and a sickly body. Ah! Life in the Republic would indeed be Utopia! I, the lump of disgusting clay would be molded and everything would be pre-destined and taken care of, even my mark in the world. I've had enough of this blind "freedom." Yes! The Republic! I shall be in one of Plato's athletic academies and be molded into an Adonis. Yes, a veritable Adonis and be surrounded by similar naked beauties and we would live off one another's charms and our vanity would feed our souls. These were my thoughts of salvation! Such weak thoughts come to one's self during a time of dissatisfaction. I held myself in such bitter contempt that I raged against the deities for having dealt me such a cruel hand of cards. Why couldn't I be this or that? Why couldn't I have been of some exotic mixture like the people my age that I see at airports. Oh, what delightful crosses! Spanish-German, Dutch-Japanese, French-Senegalese, and Nigerian-English, all with divine features and big, beautiful and sinewy bodies, while I, a nondescript Malay-Spanish, have not displayed any beauty but am painfully and constantly aware of it flourishing all around me. Wallowing in self-pity, I added tears to my already wet bed.

I remembered where I found the Little Prince in my dream, and rejoicing, I sprang up from my stagnating mattress and out of my soaked pajamas. I saw my naked body in the mirror and like Atlas, carried my world of a mattress upon my shoulders. Step by step, I climbed the stairs, heading for the balcony. There, where the winds, sifting through the barren winter trees, crossed and blasted the back of the house, is where I would find fresh air. I opened the glass door and the cold air shocked my bare body. I was naked like the trees but not so hardy, for they had bark while I, flesh. I propped the mattress on its side to be aired by the breezes and quickly rushed inside, behind the glass door. I looked at the swaying trees, spare but beautiful, naked but dignified and invulnerable, and realized they would soon be green again. I turned my back on them and slid down the cold glass and broke down into a lugubrious sobbing, uncontrollable and tinged with shrieks of laughter. But I was sure that that, too, was just crying masked in laughter like the bubbles of Icarus.

Manuel Mejia
Rockville, MD
Richard Montgomery High School
Debra Wilchek

Walking Through Winter

My mouth is full of words,
But silent and dry. I plunge
Into the snow and crunch those
Sharp white chips of sky
Until the cold controls
My thirst.

How long I've been chewing
On this red pen for blood...
And now my breath appears clear
Before my face, but fades
As quickly as I turn, my words
Fall, invisible through the snow,
But do not disappear.

The beech leaves also don't let go,
The blood on their arrowheads fades
To transparent phantom peach
They point tip down, branch bows
Aim them toward the ground
Where the rest of the forest life
Already fell into graves.

Heather Stoll
West Charlton, NY
Galway Junior-Senior High School
Melanie McDonald

Morning Fall in Wells, N.Y.

The killdeer whistles taps.
The frost-starved blackberry leaves
Are crisply folded neat as nurses caps.

All the path is sterilized in white,
Each brown mud puddle sheeted over
With ice, and sealed tight.

Mountains and their antecedent hills
Heaved up from the river bed
Burn, flushed red by Scarletina chills;

The hard, wind-callused gray skin
Exposed on their balding foreheads.
The color bled by every limb

Clots the stream below
With scabs. So water falls
And travels in convulsing flows.

Sumacs aim red arrow leaves
Like syringes in the quiver
Of resuscitated breath, a frozen breeze.

Cirrus gauze bandages, jet scratches in the sky,
But no heroic measures
Can change the Fate, that summers die.

Heather Stoll
West Charlton, NY
Galway Junior-Senior High School
Melanie McDonald

MS Rain

the ladies at the cleaners
(where i work)
were worried i'd drown
in the laundered rain.

we have different tags
in the back where i stay--
we use purple for wet wash
and yellow for pre-spot.
the pressers are black
and the taggers are white--
and the ladies are nothing at all.

i was ringing up two lined suits
(when the storm hit)
for a woman who wouldn't pay seventeen dollars.
so she took her two suits, two ugly blouses
and her two veiny hands
out into the downpour.

(We laughed at her after she left.)

and i was out front then
watching dresses fly by like
desperate women chasing lost lovers
(hung there until pick-up time).

but the ladies were worried
and they wrapped me in coat bags
to keep me away from the elements.

phallically protected, i stood at the door
waiting for the rain to stop at my feet.

and i whispered to them
"good-bye"
and they nodded their clean
ladyheads.

Laura Stallard
Baltimore, MD
Towson High School
Sue Ellen Winter

Empty Patio

My mother says she can smell the cold
Like she can taste Spring
I question the sanity of her sixth-sense
Today,
As our shoulders give
Bruised under the last of the patio furniture
We carry into the garage
It is summer-stained.
A combination of dew and dusty lawn fertilizer,
Caterpillar larvae and secret sauce from the last barbecue
All that was summer.
My sister,
The director
Atop empty paint cans
Points a thin finger
Toward where she thinks
The last chair should go

Nicole Quartell
Livingston, NJ
Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Spider, Walter Brooks Bradley, Inc., 1985

A web sagged from the rusted lamp,
its intricate lace pattern sewing into itself
over and again.

I watched from a stiff oak bench,
my shoulder blades pressing hard
into the wood.

My eyes tried to focus on the web,
when light cornered and exposed
its invisible threads.

It narrowed down into a single strand,
a brown spider on the end,
riding the draft
into grandfather's casket.

Kathy Cottle
Phoenix, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

The Scratch

paying me
you shell out
counterfeit
bloody bills
gruffly stuff them in my pockets

when what I give you
is free

you lash out
a prickly frog tongue
and pluck
invisible
itching flies
from the once
warm, still air

where we touch often
silently

you bare
needling
wolverine fangs
where I once tasted
naked
honeysuckle lips

I know not why
my love

you scrape my flesh
squeeze my sockets wide
chill and pale
impale
this half of us
on a red and gray axe blade

when it is only
you
who itches

Angie Heffner
Lititz, PA
Warwick High School
Sally Watkins

Interstate

My gloves are angry horses, running with my hands, pulling my arms, stretching them, trying to buck them or lose them on the bend as they gallop around the front seat; but, my fingers are stuck in the saddle straps.

My shoes start at the noise of my gloves and the car, and begin running with them underneath the front seat, stretching my ankles. The horses on my feet run even faster than my gloves, crazed by the rubber shoes glued to their hooves.

My scalp, I notice, is burning. Ultraviolet rays are charring it. My hair was the first of it to go, as the CPC from the hairspray I used this morning had disintegrated a hole in the ozone that has been following me since. The trees outside jeer and spit at me as our car passes them. They shake their branches at me as they shrivel in the sun. A tree union leader leads them, shouting that nature can only work so hard to combat the evils of my wasteful living.

We drive past a grey factory, with grey walls, and a flag on the roof. The flag is smiling; it thanks me for electing the officials that saved its life as the people below it, in the factory pervaded by wall-to-wall clouds of dust, cough their lungs out to the tune of "The National Anthem."

The factory puffs away, one widget per minute, smoking through a tall smokestack, blowing rings back towards the maddening crowds. At regular intervals it coughs and spits out some unemployed workers. The unemployed workers fall onto an assembly line where men with hats shaped like glass and steel architectural masterpieces back in town assemble them with decrepid houses, a severance quarter, and a box load of food stamps. My foreign car notices the wheezing factory's application for cash from a disintegrating social security system, and beams. Other cars all around mine swear and throw flags rolled up like spitballs at it, as their hubcaps fall off.

There's a McDonalds in the lot next to the factory, and its dead cows thank me for buying them. I say, I'm sorry, but they don't care. They've had their fill of fun and food. Where the rain forests once stood, the cows enjoyed three meals a day for five great years. They were just happy to have mused up their share of Earth while they had the chance, they add.

Beyond an interstate sign I can see America. The vast fields of grain that teasingly lift the skirts of tired farmers to reveal a U.S.A. tattoo on their thighs. Fat Congressmen, wearing corporate endorsement patches the way race car drivers do, check out the merchandise and then subsidize wheat belt prostitution. Meanwhile, some pitiful, starving countries filled with needy people, in a display of the impotence of their poverty, leap for crumbs and end up catching an anti-drug gun in the mouth. They try to eat it as food but blow up.

On the dusty horizon, a king of sodomy dances with the queen of the end-all of communicable diseases. Meanwhile the rest of the people wait for the royal dance floor to break off and sail far, far away. Until then, they buy the empirical telecommunications cotton candy in the wonderland that changes everybody into donkeys, and Democrats into "liberal" anarchists. A guy named Webster reflects on himself and is referred to Emmanuel Lewis; he kills himself, and everyone waits for the poets to follow suit.

Wonder Years, TV, Literature, Radio, Sheila, wheat, home, grain, cows, fields, corn. Land, miles and miles of it. Green grass. The sky goes grey. On the hills, there are cows.

"Can you please turn down the radio."

My mind is tired. The sun is setting. It reminds me of the river back home where Sheila and I picnicked. It was nice. We're driving away from her, fifty-five miles an hour, about two hours since we left. On to Great Aunt Sophy's, and I think of too much food, too much coffee, and being tired on a couch with odd, distant cousins tugging at my pants, tapping me on the shoulder, asking me to come see "this thing" eighty times. I'll go with them because I don't want to be a jerk, but I know in my heart I'd rather explode. I'd rather make a phone call and get out of there as fast as I can.

The sun shines from behind the leafless trees, and then the mountains cover it up completely, and a faint yellow hue engulfs the trunks. The mountains rise higher, the trees turn dark blue-grey. The trunks stand dead, hundreds of trees, on the brown wet leaves, and the sun has been replaced by the dingy white sky. The woods look silent; they look cold. The dark, blue-grey and the brown begin to meld until the woods are a trash heap, a big compost. The white of the sky behind it is a nothingness, a blankness. It's not the white of doves and petals, but the white of cold, blank eternity. A final fade out. The trees and hills on it seem to stand between me and a great void in the universe. The guardrail, the trash heap, the blank, yet infinite beyond. I stare at the trees, and my stomach sinks. It's a rock, sinking down, pulling my guts with it. A lump forms in my throat, I think of Sheila and wait.

The hills dip down finally, and I can see for miles. Now, it is me and the white that does not change when I look from the sky to the horizon. It is only getting a bit darker as the sun sets more on the other side of the car. Few rays escape the dome of clouds. All is this void that floats, hovers threateningly over the sprawling fields below. As I search its broad expanse, the inner surface of the hollow ball, I look for the infinite surface on the outside, but my mind just keeps going in circles, until the nothingness fills me with emptiness. I am suddenly a part of the infinite expanse of grey-white sky. I put my head down and wish I were asleep.

Awake again, I see the stars are out. Some wind is coming in the window. It kisses my face playfully and refreshes me, washing over my arms and neck. The clouds have passed. The stars smile at me with memories of things I talked to Sheila about. She picks me up at my aunt's, and we drive to the airport. There we buy a ticket to Florida; we walk to the Florida Keys.

"Once we get to the Florida Keys, we'll get to this island that's ours. I'll blow up an inflatable raft that I bought from an Army Surplus store."

She blows it up and lays it on the beach. The sun shines bright. We lay down on the raft
"and sleep forever."

Florida fills me. I am full of sleep and laying on a raft next to her. Mile markers fly by and I feel myself falling asleep.

Mark Marino
Pittsburgh, PA
Jeffrey Dunn

Crisis Management

"Use same procedure as for a tornado."

-security

Notify the security department
the gypsies are here
in a band of 15
2 metallic blue station wagons
full of hubcaps and baseball banners.
Their jewelry rattling,
reeded hair tied back in scarves,
they scatter like
black stinging ants into the store
dancing as their ancestors did
on greasy apple peels.
Long thumbnails tap the register
as children put
slugs down gumball machines.

Kathy Cottle
Phoenix, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones



Sarah Garman
Newville PA
Big Spring High School
Jill Davis

The Whole Story

The limp body
drops
in the curl
and ease
of after death.
The neck broken,
the plane door slammed,
somebody's father
a heap on the runway.
The hooded faces turn
away from the door--
they must have
fathers, too,
somewhere--
hiding out in shame
in a cracking basement
scarred
with bullets
or dead from a miscellaneous bomb
rolled under a car.
Still they patrol the aisles
like wind-up
toys
charging in frustrated circles
and then stuttering
to a slow-

They rest
'till a quick breath
echoing
across the cabin
sets them off.
Their guns play in their
hands,
Palms leave dark
moist prints.
Their words float
above us
in strange sounds
that hit the air
like a warm body
falling
into ice filled water.
This in the voice of our
deaths.

Alicia Gray
Dedham, MA
Noble and Greenough School
James Carey

Ways to Hold the Baby

Dance with him, ballroom style.
Sway him forth and back
to mommy. His fingers climbing your arms,
feel his feet stretching to meet the floor
and read you the grain of the wood.
1. Suspend him, fly him like a kite
or comic book hero in the crook of your arm.
Know him rough but tight.
Know his ways well enough
to know that he won't fall.
Turn his face from you.
You do not want to see that once again,
he's not smiling.
3. Become a solid passage with him.
Nourish him as only you can.
Embrace him like he must be held.
Let his hands wave free,
they only want to feel what's there,
remember.

4. Float him carefully,
with both arms
Slowly and tentatively shaking,
wish that you had four hands,
two to hold him,
the extra two to pray,

Laurel Snyder
Catonsville High School
Baltimore, MD

Dear Ralph

sometimes I think of you as the
tooth fairy because one night I
awoke to the sound of you shaking
out your pants. I used to imagine
you as some great boxer when you
reminisced about your fighting
days, when you showed me the
puckered marks on your body. little
did I know that you drove a tank through
those days of blood-thirsty bombs--"WoWoWa"
was just another product of
your beer-coated, Mexican tongue. little did
I know that your stale tongue and the
arthritic scents of rubbing alcohol and Ben
Gay would force into me terror and
mistrust. little did I know that the fingers
you could so tenderly and grandfatherly run
through my hair would twist darkly into
places I'd never been touched. but to live,
unforgiving, blemished by the dirt
under your fingernails--that would not
be living

Leelanee Sloan
McAfee, NJ
Vernon Township High School
Donna Spector

Besieged

The rapping at the front door was growing faster and louder. Soon the guy standing outside in the cold drizzle began using the heavy brass knocker and shouting in at us that if we didn't open up he would have to call in the state police. My father, slumped in the blue leather chair by the hearth and staring at the television dejectedly, told me to go see who it was, but "I don't care who it is, I'm not home." He sighed and pushed the power button on the remote control by his side, then put his feet up and stared at the ceiling with bloodshot eyes. He mumbled that someone had neglected to replace an empty toilet paper roll in the upstairs bathroom. He always got in a bad mood when that happened.

I went to the door and looked through the peephole. Visible was that typical peephole image of a comically distorted face in a damp tweed suit, staring straight ahead. There was a bald spot encompassing the top of his head, a head from which scant, drooping, greasy hair wafted amid flurries of white dandruff flakes. I threw aside the deadbolt affixed to the lock, pushed with my foot to open the floor latch, and opened the door a crack. Of course, I still left the chain secured. "Whadayawant?"

"I'd like to speak with the Doctor, please."

My father shouted in at me, "I'm not home!"

"He isn't home. Come back tomorrow."

I made as if to slam the door and heard a strangled "Wait!"

"Yes?" I said, sweetly as can be.

"How about your mother, then. Is she home?"

I shouted up at mom, who was fixing the leaking pipes in the toilet upstairs, and asked if she was home. I heard something heavy drop, probably the ceramic top of the toilet tank, and a chunk of plaster fell from the ceiling. "Okay, I'm coming," she said in that exasperated, weary voice that only mothers are capable of using. Soon I heard her tread on the creaking wooden stairs, and she came into the foyer. Having pathetically good manners, she then proceeded to invite the now dripping guy in. He left puddles on the hardwood floor, and his wet footprints were sunken into the little Yankee rag rug, drawing an annoyed glance from both of us.

Had I let this poor fellow in to begin with, he might have been a bit less blunt and a bit more polite about it, but as it was he just said quickly and without a hint of compassion, "I am here to inform you that we are foreclosing on your house. Please pack up and get out before sunset. Prudential wishes to inform you that--"

My father abruptly stood up, sighing, and walked calmly up to the guy. He forcibly turned the protesting man around and assisted him out the door with the sole of his boot, then slammed it shut and shoved home the deadbolt with a resounding rattle-clang.

"Son, close the windows and lock the downstairs door." I did so in record time, then clambered up the stone steps and up to the second bathroom. The grey drizzle outside was turning into a rain in earnest, and the heavy drops splattered upon the small windows crossed with rusty iron bars. Mother was again busy with the marble toilet. She had arrayed at her feet a collection of medium-gauge lead pipes and washers. I went down the hall to my chambers and sat on the feather bed. The phone rang once, then someone picked it up and silenced it. Just out of sheer curiosity, I picked it up quietly and listened.

"--regret to inform you that American Express has canceled your credit. I'm afraid that you've overdrawn your account by nearly two thousand pounds. If you wish to contest your case, please--"

The line went dead, and I replaced the earpiece on the hook. I stared out the narrow, barred slit in the stone wall, and there were no colors outside. All was ghost-like, seen through grey sheets of mist rising off the cobblestones of the street. The lawn, off to the right, was mostly brown and all frost-covered from the winter chill. Then I did a double take. The neighboring family, dressed in rain gear and carrying a blanket, came across

onto our land and, without a word, spread their blanket on our ground. The three children sat on it, and the mother squatted and started preparing their lunch. They all looked grim and purposeful. The little boy stared up at me frostily with huge eyes, his mouth a hard line. The rest of the family followed suit, the father last. There was a subdued hostility in his face. Soon more people began coming, and the front lawns became a patchwork of blankets. The man from Prudential was there, as well as representatives from MasterCard and American Express. All our neighbors were also present, and people were still coming. They spoke in quiet whispers and, as I watched, a rustling seemed to pass through the mob, and everyone stood up, stony-faced. They made me feel very uneasy. I looked away, shaken.

I heard mother curse.

"Yo mom, like what's wrong, anyways?"

"The like toilet like won't stop flushing," she muttered in reply.

"Dag, mom, no need to be pedantic!"

"Okay, you fix it!" She shoved a wrench at me and left the room, fuming. I looked down at the bewildering collection of ducts, and deciding how to best handle the situation was easy. I jammed the removed piping back into the toilet tank from whence it came and slammed shut the top before it could regurgitate anything on me.

I then followed mother down the stairs, taking them two or three at a time, my footsteps reverberating through the halls. I could hear a muffled, angry gurgling from above. Dad was downstairs, garbed in his blue cloak, looking harrowed.

"Mother, start bringing up the sand bags. Son, go get the guns."

And that was the real start of our troubles. Soon the white canvas bags, all filled with sand, were piled against the stout ironwood door, forming an effective blockade. My sister skipped up from the stock room, an A-1 Garard rifle swinging merrily and a case of grenades clutched under one arm. She put down the grenades long enough to load the rifle and deftly check the firing chamber. "Do I get to use the automatic today?" she asked innocently.

I responded, a bit impatiently I'm afraid, "Come on, you've been hogging it! We're supposed to take turns!"

"Awwwwww! You used it yesterday, and it's not fair! I'm telling mommy."

Mom showed up just about then and settled the issue. "Don't bother to. I'm taking the Mauser today."

My sister started whining, and I started complaining. Father shouted down from upstairs that we were in a state of siege, and we could just go out and surrender if we didn't feel like cooperating! Wordlessly, I went, got my own A-1, and we manned the gate towers. My mother was in the East Tower, the 9mm machine pistol aimed out the gunning slit. Father paced the West Battlement, his robes flapping in the cold north wind and his hair plastered to his forehead in the rain, looking very heroic indeed. In truth, I knew that he was just still irritated about the toilet paper. He also had a small arsenal ready, including an AR-15 with a starlight night scope, but at the time he was busy surveying the force gathered below.

The entire town stood there across the scum-covered moat, and a mass of standards littered the fields. There was the town militia, with their lion rampant, the hateful American Express with their "Never Leave Home Without It" logo; Gas & Electric's flaming stove flew high and proud, the neighboring houses all assembled under their own petty standards. The man from Prudential, raising his banner with the Great Rock like a holy relic, led them, and sounded a note of challenge on his silver horn. To this my sister, in her usual fashion, replied with a well-aimed grenade. The Prudential man then let blast another note, and a shout arose from the crowd. They all started shoving forward and rallying to the battle cry. MaBell representatives rolled in the cannons. Our guns fairly hummed with desperate fire, and the grenades flew. But it was no use--they were too

many. After a short time my sister ran out of ammunition, and a few minutes later I did, too. We threw the remaining grenades, though we knew it was hopeless. When we had nothing left, we ran down to the great hall, which was floored with flagstones. Our parents were already there. The boom of cannon fire echoed hollowly.

An ever-widening rivulet of water flowed down the north wall from between the stones, and I remembered the toilet. I could hear it flushing continuously, and I visualized the water reaching the top of the basin, overflowing, spilling down the sides...

We crowded to an observation slit, and the rain was pouring down. Diffuse lightning flashed and rumbled. I saw that they had practically crossed the moat. Their black boots splashed in the scummy water, and the makeshift plank bridge they had assembled grew taut as people pulled on the support ropes and anchored them in the moist ground with long, sharp iron stakes. They had a battering ram. The stout door boomed at their first blow. The Prudential man was directing the operation, and he was grinning wickedly despite the fact that the rain had turned his Great Rock banner soggy, and his clothes--doublet, stockings, overcoat, knee lengths--were plastered to his skin. The second blow came, and the door visibly bulged. The third, and it rattled on its hinges. On the fourth, it gave a wooden moan and slowly fell inward, striking the stone floor with a mighty boom.

And there was the Prudential man, stepping across the threshold for the second time that day. The bloated red sun behind him shone out from beneath the clouds, its ray fanning out in a final and glorious display; the cave entrance framed it with a patch of suddenly clear sky so curiously light in color as to be almost white. The man's lank hair dripped dirty water onto the cold stone. "Give it up. You're outlawed." The company assembled behind him snickered. He graced us with his wicked grin once more. "Together, we will foreclose on you; all resistance is useless!"

And the land where the sun was now rising, even as our sun set, was richer by one house: Ours.

Blaise Aguera-Arcas
Catonsville, MD
The Park School
Howard Berkowitz

Family Reunion - Cambridge, Maryland

*Chippy shaved his head when
he was twenty-one;
no one knows just why,
not even Aunt Nellie Mae.
Chippy's a prison guard on
Long Island,
and all of us cousins sit around
at the Elks Club
and listen to him tell
how he walks up
and down
the prison halls,
his heels echoing on the concrete floor,
singing
"I'll Be Home For Christmas"
in his Kenny Rogers voice
to the rapists and murderers and
drug lords.*

Sara Glover
White Hall, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

My Fascinating Scuffed Shoe

"It is cold out," she said, taking a long drag on her cigarette. "You are going to have to wear your wool coat and hat." My mother is speaking to me. She is leaning in a model's pose against the wall staring down at me with her razor sharp blue eyes masked only slightly by the swirls of smoke she is exhaling.

"You're lucky that I'm even taking you with me while I shop..." she sucks at her cigarette like she is nursing from it while I, feeling the tears in my eyes, look down to stare at my scuffed brown shoes too tight around the toes. She continues.

"You are basically nothing but a burden to me. You can't walk fast enough to keep up with me, you get tired easily, and worst of all you inhibit potential male suitors." I have no idea what the last part means, but the first part I understand all too well. The tears are fogging my eyes so that my shoes appear like a huge, brown ink splash on a piece of white paper. With my head still bent down, I wipe my nose on the back of my small cuff. My mother runs over, her black fashionable shoes smacking the ground, and wipes my sleeve off with her handkerchief.

"This is what I mean!" she screeches. "We haven't even left yet and already you're a mess! I can't stand it; maybe you can go live with your father. No, he's too rich!" She is still speaking but my ears no longer hear her. My shoe has come back into focus, and I am studying the little splatters of mud, a perfect match, which are glued to the shoe. These were such a wonderful pair of shoes when my mother first bought them. Shiny and milk chocolate brown. The heels made a jaunty clack when I walked. My father had said I looked just like Fred Astaire. I didn't know who he was, but Dad didn't know that so I just smiled and laughed. My mother told me the shoes had to last. She's made them last for two years.

"Answer me, where is your other mitten? You've lost that too? Goddamn it!" Mother is stuffing me into my coat. Her "good Chanel" perfume is wrapping around me like the string on my hat: tight and choking. The first time I wore my bright, shiny shoes was to Johnny Alabaster's birthday party. Mother had worn her best dress and had smiled and hugged me for the whole time. She didn't mean it and Mrs. Alabaster knew that. But Mrs. Alabaster just patted me on my head and offered Mother a martini.

"I want you to walk behind me silently! Not a word do you hear?" We are leaving our apartment building now. Mother is primed and polished and walking quickly, too quickly for my small legs. As I look at my dust-covered shoes, I remember the summertime in the park when Dad had bought me ice cream and Mother had packed sandwiches. Mother had laughed at Dad's jokes and had tempted him with a cookie until he reached up and grabbed it. He tickled her chin and she laughed. I played with my sailboats in a pond and brushed some dust off the tips of my shoes. I can't remember much else about that day. As I walk on now, I can barely see anything in the tips of my shoes. Age and dust is covering them so much that everything is distorted, even my own face. It is no use anymore.

I look up at my mother walking quickly down the street. I try to study her. Her movement, her coat, her shoes. It is hopeless. Even my shoes are showing nothing. The light has gone out just like when Dad would read to me and then turn out my light. I had a nightlight but I don't anymore. I am alone suddenly. Mom has disappeared. No more perfume or stylish shoes! Suddenly she reappears. We walk on as my shoes become huge brown ink splashes on a cold stone sheet of paper.

Jennifer Warner
New York, NY
St. Hilda's and St. Hugh's School
Dr. Thomas LaFarge
Madeline L'Engle



Peggy Mahoney
Deer Park, NY
Deer Park High School
Tina Lombardo

The Music Box

He plays a gig every Friday night
on the corner of Magruder and Elmore.
The moon is his spotlight,
the rumbling of the subway
his rhythm section.
A dusk-grey overcoat cloaks
sloped shoulders. Laceless,
brown leather boots hide the
callouses on his feet, the wages from
performing on an asphalt stage. The
keys of the ancient horn move with
minds of their own, every song telling
the same story

For years he had played a gig
at Paulie's Nightclub
weekends
1-3 A.M.
Men would come after
spending the day at the
unemployment line, hoping
to "Take the A-Train" with
"The Girl from Ipanema," and
drown their sorrows in a
boilermaker
or a sloe gin fizz.
But they don't visit Paulie's
anymore.

Now he sits on a street corner,
dreaming of the days
when he could play an F Blues
without stopping to rest, or when his
arthritis wouldn't stop him
in the middle of that
Charlie Parker riff in
"Au Privave."
Now he is on a shelf
behind the other artifacts
for which there is no room, a
music box,
winding down for
everyone
to
hear.

Brian Murray
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

The User

The hinges on the swing creaked and groaned as thin legs straightened, then bent, straightened, then bent. He liked the sound; it was familiar. It was comforting.

But as with everything, it wouldn't last long. He spotted her the moment she appeared at the other end of the cluttered patio. Somehow she knew where to look for him. She began walking purposefully in his direction, totally unaware of the appraising glances she received from all the friends and families sitting around in groups on the long patio. Her heels clacked their own rhythm on the concrete, disturbing the comforting creak and groan of his swing chain.

As she came closer, she began to read his face. Her eyes, dark, like his, gave away nothing. Her porcelain features were masked, and he could barely remember they normally broke into smiles of happiness at his every word. He could make her laugh. That thought weighed heavily on his mind as she neared.

The clacking of Carla Cristaldi's pumps ceased. She looked down at him, her lips drawn into a thin line. He stared at those pumps for a few seconds, then drew his gaze up her slender frame to meet those eyes: Mirror image. He could always try. He flashed her his brightest smile.

She sighed deeply, the scrutiny over. He hadn't changed. What was she doing here? She loathed this place, filled with its sick minds and lost souls. He did not belong here. She certainly did not belong here. Defeated, she wearily but gracefully slumped into the lawn chair opposite his swing. She searched his eyes, so like her own, and he felt his heart catch unwillingly in his throat. "Richie, ... How's it going?" she began.

He laughed a hollow awkward laugh that made her shiver in the warm fall air. What a familiar, haunting sound. Flashback to another day, another life, when Richie laughed that way at her because she had just found out. The guilt flooded her again. She quickly erased those images from her mind.

"Well, how's the food?" she tried a different approach.

Spotting his opening, he played off her question with an impression of an accented food critique, and it was truly one of his best voices. She could not hold back her laughter now, and it poured from within her in pretty, heartfelt gales, causing many heads to turn on the somewhat silent and dreary patio. He sat back, smiling self-satisfied, as she wiped away the last of laughter's tears and shook her head.

But then she remembered again. Remembered the pained looks on her parents' faces, remembered the situation at hand. Her eyes grew serious.

"Oh, Richie, how could you?" she began again.

His smile disappeared as quickly as it came. Damn her. She had come to reprimand him. He deserved more than that from her. Hadn't she promised she would never be like them? She was more than just his blood; he trusted her. He had confessed it all to her so long ago. The day they found his stash, that ugly day, he had said he didn't need her or anyone, and he had laughed at her disbelief, but she had broken through his barriers. She always believed in him, stuck up for him. Now she was acting like all the rest. He could handle the folks. The correct responses to all their questions were automatic. Whatever made them happy. But she wasn't stupid. She was a traitor. Never mind, he would sort through her betrayal later. Now he just had to put her off.

"Where are my flowers?" he asked her. "You can't come visit me and not bring me flowers."

Undaunted, she bent over and plucked a single ugly dandelion from the grassy area near her chair. She handed it to him with a slight smile. "I'm sorry, Richie. I wanted to get you flowers...."

There she went again, he thought. Guilty. Like it was all her fault. At that moment, he hated himself more intently than he had the day they'd sent him. He couldn't let her see she'd affected him with her innocent apology. He humbly accepted the yellow flower.

"Hey--I'm glad you didn't. I hate flowers. Except for these.

(Continued on page 39)

These are the absolute best. Their fragrance should be bottled. Their beauty..."

"Richie," she cut him off. He would go on forever, she knew from experience. He could make her laugh. She refused to let him do that to her today. "What was it this time, Richie?"

This time he was not shocked. He could tell she was not scolding him, she was truly curious. She had to know. Her eyes were soft. He wished with all his heart she hadn't asked. She probably already knew anyway.

He toyed with the ugly yellow flower, still clutched in his hand. "Oh, you know. Little of this, little of that. Nothing major. It was that stupid car. It always was a piece of junk, you know? Cop pulled me over for a bad taillight. He ran a check and I guess I'd forgotten to pay a couple of tickets." That should do it, he thought. What does she want from me anyway? If she needed fast facts, she could have checked things out. He almost laughed at the intense look in her eyes.

What does this have to do with it, she wanted to scream. She would scream. She could feel it rising within her. She wanted to stand up in the middle of this ugly, crowded patio and scream at the top of her lungs.

"So, he wants to throw me in jail if I don't pay up," he continued. "Well, I kind of didn't have the money at the time to pay up, and there was no way I was going to jail, so I called Mom and Dad, and told them I needed help. They assumed this was the kind of help. Don't ask me what gave them that idea."

She had to smile at that one.

"So, here I am," he ended his story. He leaned back in the swing and cautiously observed her. She looked good, now that he thought about it. Soft but tough, like a businesswoman. He'd heard she'd just gotten a promotion, and was happy for her, but it wasn't his style to give compliments. How was it she could have done all the things she'd always wanted to do, he wondered. Why hadn't those wonderful things happened to him? He had the feeling an answer lurked somewhere in the back of his mind, but he wasn't going to worry about it today. He forgot his thoughts and concentrated on what she was saying.

"Why didn't you have the money? What happened to your job?" she wanted to know. But it was pointless asking. She knew the answer.

"That crazy chick Yvonne fired me. I missed one lousy day of work, and I had an excuse. The car wasn't running. I've got to get a new car," he said.

That almost killed her. What was he planning to do, steal one? No way she was giving him the money to buy a car. Let him get off his lazy butt and find himself another job, his, what was it, sixth this year? But she knew it would do no good to lecture. He wanted understanding from her. "It's costing them a lot to have you sent up here, I bet," she carefully began.

"They're all right," he replied. Everything was always all right to Richie. Suddenly, she couldn't breathe. She had to get out, to get away from there as quickly as she could. All those people on the patio, and their crazy addictions, with her Richie among them. It wasn't right. It wasn't fair. He was so unlike them. He was special. Richie and his caricatures. Richie in his leather bomber jacket. Richie playing mini-golf. Richie dancing at clubs where all this began. Richie as a boy in Spider Man pajamas with his grossly bucked front teeth. Richie always made her laugh. And then she was crying, sobbing uncontrollably, and he was on his feet, unsure of whether he should comfort her or run like hell. The ugly, wilting flower fell unnoticed to the concrete. She raised her moist dark eyes to his, so similar but bone dry. She searched his soul. He could not move, feet planted to the concrete ground. She needed answers, he knew. He knew, yet he could offer none.

"Oh, God, Richie. I'm so sorry." She was apologizing again, this time for her tears. He couldn't stand to see her suffer so badly. Guilt grabbed him by the throat; it would strangle him. He had to fight it off. He would use her strength, her touch. He grasped her hand.

"I'm going to stop. I swear I am. After this time, I'm through."

"Just watch, okay? You'll see."

He needed the comfort of his own words. She could not be fooled twice. But there, on the patio at Gateway, they held hands and were allowed to truly believe the fantasy for brief moments. They shared a smile that lied by seeming to say everything was going to be all right.

Jenny Hoyman
Rochester, PA
Freedom Area High School
Patricia Ross

Memory

*In the shaded dimness of her living room,
my grandmother held the embroidery hoop
in one hand,
while the other drew the needle
through taut linen,
scarlet thread trailing behind.
With one practiced movement,
she knotted the thread
into a star-shaped flower.
Against the white cloth,
it could have been a poinsettia
dropped into the snow on Christmas Day.*

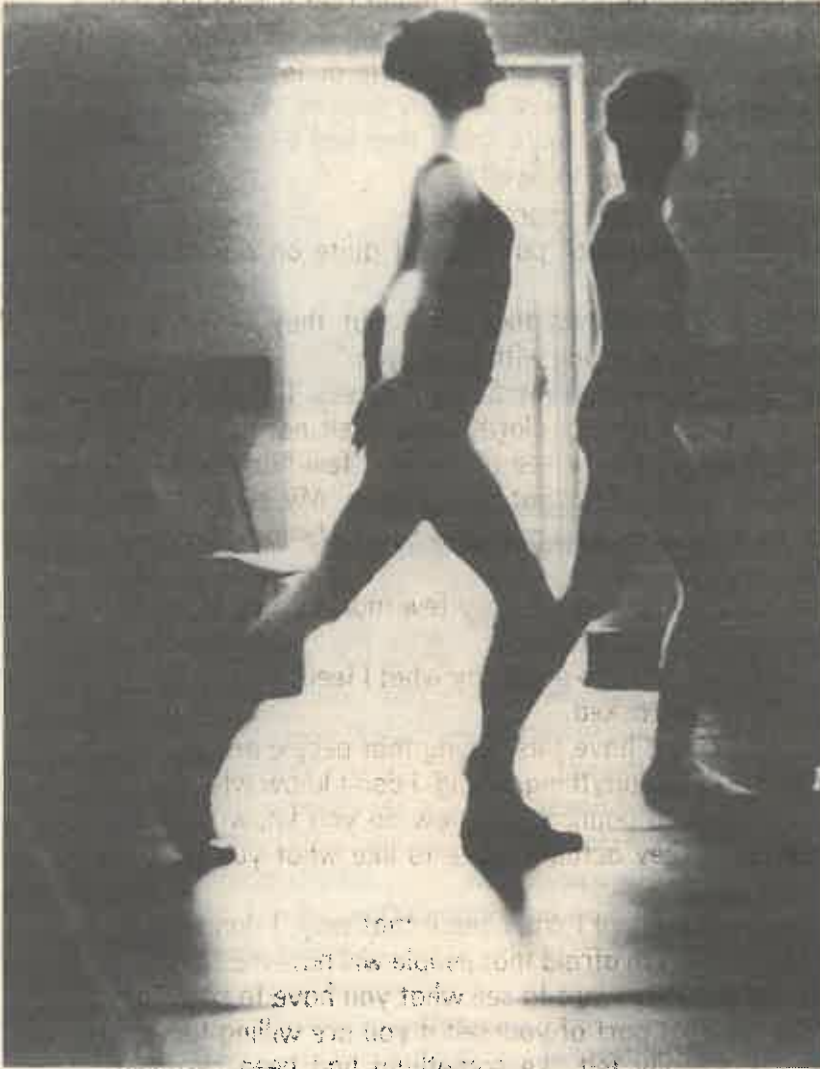
*But this was summer,
and she handed back my embroidery,
my quiet project for a steamy day.
I tried to imitate her deft motions,
but my fingers were too small and impatient.
I knotted the thread,
not into a flower,
into a frustrating tangle.
I was too hot and tired,
and tears were close.
She laughed fondly--
it was nap time, she said.
Nanny told me the story
of the dress she made for her first dance--
long and yellow, its skirt a succession of ruffles.
Falling asleep to the hum of the fan
and the sound of her voice,
I dreamt of gowns
the color of spring sunshine
and red flowers scattered in the snow.*

Susannah Voigt
Point Lookout, NY
Long Beach High School
Ellen Pickus

Untitled

*Most of the class consisted of chairs. They were occupied
by people; young people with the exception of the large one
in front who occupied a bigger chair. She calculated and
lectured about rocks and what our planet was made of.
Her light was dim and she wore black and white, stripes
and dots. Twiddling my toes inside my shoes, trying to
escape, but the leather held them back. The light from the
holes teased them as they dreamt of the light outside the
shoe.*

C. Todd Ransick
Potomac, MD
Dr. Galvin



Becky Chalmers
Baltimore, MD
Howard High School
Linda Durey

My Elbows Ache

My elbows ache and I am sure there are tiny red circles on my face from where my fingers have been pressing. I stand up straight. Mrs. Anderson says we're not supposed to lean on the counter anyway. I rub my eyes and cover my mouth as I yawn. I roll my shoulders in circles and shake out my neck. My fingers are rattling on the countertop.

The aspirin behind me looks messy, so I straighten the boxes. Advil, Bayer, Tylenol, Z Brand, all in alphabetical order on the top shelf. I look beneath them to the cough medicines. They have been selling well lately, though no one I know is sick. Probably just people preparing for the winter cold season, I think. On the wall by the account cards is a white plastic phone. I pick up the receiver on the 4050 line, but there is no dial tone. I click the receiver back into its nook. I notice the base of the phone is cracked and someone has colored in the numbers 4, 6, 8, 9 and the zero in blue ink. I pick up a pen from the container on the shelf and trace the outline of the buttons. Behind me a bell rings, and I turn to see who has entered the store. To my right, I can see Sharon's mop of yellow hair moving back and forth as she counts boxes of eyeshadows. A large streak of blue blocks my view of her. A flannel work shirt, I realize, adjusting my eyes to the tall black man approaching me.

"May I help you?" I ask. He reaches into the pockets of his corduroy work pants and throws a dollar onto the countertop. "Camel unfiltered. Box," he says. I bend to the low shelf behind me, where the cigarettes are kept: ABC cigarette, Advantage, Camels, Dunhills. "Softpack only," I say, and toss the package onto the counter. Standing up, I grab the dollar, and hold out my hand. "One twenty-five," I say. The man mumbles something about it being too expensive to smoke, and drops a quarter onto the counter. I close my open palm, and pick up the coin with my

left hand. I punch "41" into the register, my employee number, then 323 for cigarettes/tobacco, then 125 price, and 125 amt.tndrd. The drawer springs open with a ring and I drop the money into it. I push it closed with my hipbone as I rip the receipt from the top of the machine. As I hand it to the man, it slips from my fingers and falls out of sight. I expect him to pick it up, but he is gone. The door rings again, and I look to it. I can't see the door itself, but the safety glass panel above it is visible over the top of the card display. "eganortaP ruoY roF-uoY knahT," it says. The door rings again as it shuts.

I lean forward over the counter and look for the receipt. I can see the small white square of paper on the orange rug beside a piece of lint and a brown stain. I reach for it. My legs rise slightly from the ground as my fingers grasp it. The bell rings again. I look up from my hunched position to the cosmetics department. I can see Sharon clearly now. She coughs twice and nods slowly, our sign for an old customer. Two brown shoes are in front of me now, with white stockings reaching just to the base of a blue dress. The fabric is coarse and looks like polyester. The feet pass me as I straighten up.

"May I help you?" I ask, but she walks by me. She taps on the high counter to the right of me. I can see Marianne behind the tall brass pharmacy symbol, Rx. She looks up. Her face is a mass of lines for a moment, as she squints to see the woman. She lowers her heavy red glasses onto her face as she walks to the woman. The woman is still tapping. Marianne says something quietly to her, and the woman thrusts a tiny rectangular piece of paper into her hand. Her pink legs turn from the counter, and she walks away. Marianne types into her computer, filling the prescription. The woman fingers a box of Kleenex in the SALE display, then saunters past. She is only a browser. She flips through the rack of toothbrushes, then disappears down the bandage aisle.

I am lost for a moment. When I shake my head, I realize I have been staring at the cards on the shelf opposite me. There is a large card shaped like a flounder. It reads, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY BROTHER!" across it, but the bottom of the card is hidden by the next row. The woman coughs to my right. She is leaning on the counter, "Excuse me. Excuse me," she is saying.

"Oh, I'm sorry. May I help you?" I ask. She nods her head toward Marianne's booth and says, "Is it ready yet?" I tell her I'll check. Marianne stares at me when I ask her. "I said it was on the counter before, Karen," she mutters. She shakes her head. I look back to the counter and see the bottle of pills waiting behind the Russell Stover rack. I pick them up as I walk back to the register. "Will that be all, Ma'am?" I ask. The woman piles on the counter a box of Muppet Tissues, a container of K-Y jelly, and Clairol #43, Dusty Blonde. I look at the box, then at the woman. Her hair is gray and she is wearing a look of contempt. "Cash?" I ask. She does not respond. I type 43 into the register, then 163, then 199, 163, 450, 163, 799, TOTAL. The tiny red panel of light reads "13.48" "Senior discount," she says. I point to the sign behind me that reads, "SENIOR CITIZEN 10% DISCOUNT WEDNESDAYS." "I didn't tax you," I say. She hands me a ten dollar bill and a five. I ring it through, then hand her a dollar, two quarters and two pennies. I toss her receipt into a bag, then put her items in. "Thank you," I say, as she turns to leave.

In my hand there is still a scrap of paper. It reads, "personal item" three times, with numbers on the lines with each of them. The total is \$13.48. I look for the other receipt and realize I gave the woman the cigarette man's copy.

I roll my fingers into my hand, crumpling the paper. It flies to the garbage can behind me.

I arch my back, then lean forward onto the counter.

My elbows ache, and I am sure that there are tiny red circles on my face from where my fingers have been pressing.

Catherine McTamaney
Scotch Plains, NJ
The Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Poem for My Father

My father was born in a springtime
before the war: April, 1932. His childhood
crackled with newsreels and
promises. He
lived at first in a small town upstate. But
he was really a Bronx boy: nickel
subway fares and afternoon
movies. His junior high school saluted
Harry Truman in that
black and white
postwar glory.

At fifteen, in long pants and unsure, he
longed to date girls who wore bright red
lipstick and their hair
parted on one side, like Veronica Lake. He
spent nights listening to Perry Como, sure
that all the stars would favor him in his
travesties among the heavens.

A little older, he fought with his parents,
cut class and smoked Lucky Strikes. He drifted through
longings: writing, drawing, taking out girls
who lived in Brighton Beach
with their mothers.

In 1953 he was drafted, sent
to Japan as a clerk in the Korean
War. There he drank Japanese beer, wrote
long letters to his sister and learned one
phrase in Japanese "Keeswai tacheen e cara
desu."

"Keeswai tacheen e cara desu." It
is a very windy day," he now translates to
my sister and I. And at night we whisper
his words, a love mantra,
as we beg for bedtime
stories. And his voice
warms us and lulls us,
keeps us safe
from the chilly foreign dark.

Liz Michaelson
Bayside, NY
LaGuardia High School of Music
and the Performing Arts
Thomas Fergelson

Life On The Train

Our train slowly came to a stop. The doors opened, and we went inside and found two adjacent seats. We sat comfortably in the soundless car for a short period until the train sluggishly started to slide down the track. As soon as it really started moving, Alexandra and I began to talk as we simultaneously stared up at the advertisements on the wall. I can't remember what we discussed at first--probably something about the weather or how we felt after the long day. We both had our eyes on the same ad. It was a black and white picture of a man lying on a table in a mortuary, and there was a slogan about drugs printed underneath. We kept looking at the picture, hypnotized. There was something disturbing me about it. As my eyes fo-

ocused and refocused on the image, I found that it was blurred. The layers of ink used in the printing were not matched up.

"Is something wrong about that picture, or is it my eyes?" Alexandra asked me.

"No, I see it too."

"It seems like it's out of focus--"

"It's not, it's just printed improperly."

"Yes, as if the stages of paint aren't quite on top of each other."

"One immediately follows the other, but they never quite touch. There's nothing wrong with your eyes."

I was glad to be wearing my contact lenses. I could see the things around me in perfect clarity, and I felt normal. When I have nothing helping me to see properly, I feel handicapped. I thought about when I first got my glasses. My eyesight has gotten worse since then. I wondered if I could become blind if it continued.

I remembered being on the train a few months ago. I recalled the conversation we had clearly.

"Sometimes I'm afraid to do or say what I feel."

"Why?" Alexandra asked.

"I'm not sure. I just have this feeling that people are waiting, ready to pounce if I do anything wrong. I don't know why."

"Who is waiting to pounce, and how do you know they will anyway? What if they actually were to like what you have to say?"

"That makes sense, but I don't see it that way. I don't think I could take that risk. I'm afraid that people will hate me."

"That is not so! They want to see what you have to say! They can only see the best part of yourself if you are willing to show it to them." I actually felt like something had been resolved, even though I had already known everything beforehand. It just seemed more real than if I had only thought about it.

We just sat still as the motion of the train rocked us. The rhythm of the train on the tracks was massive, like a heartbeat, or like powerful ocean waves.

"I like to take pictures," I started. "Yesterday I spent the whole afternoon in the darkroom."

"I've never developed pictures before. Is it boring?"

"No. I really like it in the darkroom. It's very calming. You're isolated, and all you hear is the sound of the moving water and you're in the darkness alone. It's like a womb. It's like a rebirth."

We looked at each other, and I felt a smile inside, but I held it. We did not talk. Neither of us felt like talking, neither of us felt we had to. We were still. Every so often I would look over at Alexandra. Sometimes she would look at me. It was not offensive. I did not mind it if she looked at me, and I did not feel ashamed to look at her. Sometimes we would look at each other at the same time, but not for very long. It was as if we were having a silent conversation.

I listened to the sound of the moving train again. I felt the thundering of it throughout my body. It did not seem to be machine-made. I let it surround me and overtake me. I breathed with the beat of the striking of the metal tracks; the pulsation lulled me.

The rhythm gradually slowed, and the train came to a full stop. I stood up and turned to say goodbye. I smiled at Alexandra, a big smile, and she smiled, too. The doors opened, and I left the car. Alexandra and I did not get off at the same stop. I wished we did. The train began to slide off again, and I looked at Alexandra through the hazy window of the car. She did not look back, although I waited for her to. The train was no longer there, so I made my way to the stairs. As I ascended, I tried to cover my eyes from the brightness of the daylight outside.

Jennifer Azapian

New York, NY

The Chapin School

Jane L. Rinden

Sleeping Giants

"The sleeping Giants have awakened! 6.8"

-Poster at Candlestick Park

San Francisco is not on fire.
The city government is operating
From offices at 1003 Turk Street
And does not expect utilities
Or services to resume for
At least 72 hours.
On Bluxome Street red taillights
Burrow into a concrete hill
Beneath a thicket of steel girders.
Landfill earth folds sidewalks
Like paper napkins
As gas-fed flames burst
In the blackout sky
By the waterfront
And Ghiradelli Square warps
At the corners, its dark wrapper
Curling embers. Firelight flashes
Out an apartment window in
Peoria, Illinois from a television
That is two hours fast.
On screen a lone cop cries
To milling crowds, "Prepare yourself!
Store water in the bathtub!"

David Reeder
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Casting Shadows

It was that kind of evening when it wasn't particularly warm. The wind tickled your skin, and when the sun hit you just right, you felt like you were glowing. The sun was setting behind the hill that separated Aiken Township from the rest of the city, and from the top, the skeleton silhouette of the high-voltage tower anchored its firm legs into the ground like a god. Its crossing beams cast a long line of shadowy arms down the tree-covered hill, the old park, and across the rows of trailer homes along Corry Run, until it finally rested its blackened fingers upon Todd's feet. I was sitting with Todd on my front porch that evening, tracing the shadow up and down the hill with my eyes. The radio had mentioned thunderstorms for the night, so we decided to visit the tower one last time before the mudslides began.

Todd and I left the porch and began walking Corry Run. We wore no shoes, and the asphalt was sometimes hot and sometimes cool depending on where the shades were. We walked up the center of the road. The only cars around were the ones parked in the distance that caught the setting sun and cast its rays in every direction. As we neared the park, we balanced ourselves along the cobblestone wall, saving our feet from the sharp gravel that began where the pavement ended. Todd and I entered the park and wandered aimlessly through the overgrown grass and around the old rides. Of the swings, only the center one looked as if it could still support a child. The other two were broken where the seat met the chain, and hung like puppets, squeaking in the breeze. We past the rotting picnic benches, and arrived at the cyclone fence that tried to maintain the park's boundaries. It used to hold a sign that no one listened to:

NO TRESPASSING BEYOND THIS POINT
Prop. of Aiken Township

Todd tore it down one night and used it to build a fire at the top of the hill. All signs have a purpose. "NO TRESPASSING BEYOND THIS POINT Prop. of Aiken Township" helped keep Todd warm as he slept beneath the tower.

As we passed through a hole in the fence and began walking the steep trail, Todd and I discussed fragments of his life since he'd moved to Aiken. He moved in with his grandmother, two trailers away from mine, after his mother and father died. They were attending a party at a friend's apartment when an electrical fire was started by someone's television a few floors below. Todd's mother and father, among others, were killed when the fire escape collapsed. The last time Todd saw his parents was in the morning newspaper, that carried an array of photos of the accident. That was seven years ago. He's been living with his grandmother ever since.

I remember the first time I met Todd. His grandmother had forced him to come over and get acquainted. He was wearing this goofy orange baseball cap and had his shoes untied and on the wrong feet. We sat on my front porch and played with some of my favorite T.V. action figures until he took my Superman and ran it over with his bike. I refused to speak to him after that, but in September, we both entered fourth grade, and began spending time together.

For the last six years, Todd has been visiting the high-voltage tower almost religiously. He hates to stay inside the trailer. I've only been in Todd's trailer once. His grandmother was on the couch watching "The 700 Club" and holding her rosary. The hi-fi was playing some corny gospel music, the kind sold on those annoying cable T.V. commercials that play parts of the songs, and scroll the titles in yellow across the screen. I can always find Todd under the tower when "The 700 Club" is on, watching the electricity flow through the wires that fuel the televisions of Aiken Township.

By this time, Todd and I had reached the summit. We were met by a rush of noise from the traffic below. Our entire world was spread out before us. The towns, rivers, train tracks, freeways, and the city on the horizon, all contained people with their own life, their own problems, and their own means of escape. As we walked along the hill and sat under the tower, the brisk wind swept away every anxiety, and let them fall on the people below. You felt so insignificant, small, worthless, and so happy on the hill. After moments of silence, Todd and I began to talk about the past again.

We both loved music. We would buy a new album and listen to it constantly for an entire month, until we could hear every drum beat, every lyric, and every guitar line echo in our heads. We wouldn't touch it until a month later, when we listened to it for the last time. Then, the music didn't matter, it was just the feelings from the month before that accompanied it. We would see every place, and rethink every thought from a month ago as we listened to the songs for the last time. We would then take the album to the top of the hill, and toss it off the cliff to the freeway below. They never got far, but their thoughts and feelings that made our past were away for good, and we could live our lives easier without them.

We talked more of our childhood, and the times we spent in Todd's backyard. We talked about the apple battles in the summer, and how we got too big to climb the old trees, and how we had to chop them down. As we grew too big for the apple trees, the entire world was growing too big for us, and it was always a pleasant feeling to know you could take refuge under the tower. We continued to talk as the horizon darkened and the sky began to rumble. Todd and I laid on our backs and felt the rain soak our clothes and hair. We gazed at the lightning streaking above us, and felt at ease as we took shelter under the high-voltage tower.

Chris Crawford
Pittsburgh, PA
Central Catholic High School
Jeffrey Dunn

Cape Cod

From the floor of my bedroom
I look up and my window has the sky in it:
top tree branches posed like statue's arms
blue sky laced with white:
another summer.

Every year there are smooth, salty rocks
and taffy in the towns,
and dry sand on the boardwalk.
Docks of wood gone soft and mossy,
and darkness under the waves.

Every year I need one day in the womby water,
to see kelp peppering that olive light,
to taste the foam and to know
that somebody cried the ocean.

I like to know the waves come in all night,
quietly, without me.

Jen Braun
Elizabeth, NJ
The Oak Knoll School
Harriet Marcus

Even God Was Baffled

After the 100m dash of the world's
fastest human, Ben Johnson.

Out before the pack
He was gone.
To be proclaimed the fastest man ever,
And he was.
Perfect synchronicity...
The starting gun and the starter.
Jaws dropped, breaths held
All over the stadium.
The raised finger signalling the resumption of breathing.
The entire world shook their heads (in disbelief?)
Even for the old writer who had seen Jesse Owens go.
Man running as fast as a horse!
Far above, in the bright blue sky, this was noticed,
For even God was baffled
By his own creation.

Mir Rahman
Bethesda, MD

Religion 5.27.89

The blood in my veins is a baptism
the water content in my sweat is a baptism
the sun: ultraviolet burning my skin tissue is a baptism
the wind on my face is a baptism
every streetlight shining is a baptism
every touch is a revival of faith
every name is a christening

Noah Sussman
Bethesda, MD
Walt Whitman High School

Cussin'

Uncle Charlie used all them words,
"Damn" and mehbe a "Hell no,"
Like when he got caught
Drinkin' on a Sunday or
Auntie saw him flirtin',
So I said 'em.
All the kids down at the school yard said 'em.
Like Meat Humphrey--
Only boy who could smoke a whole
Lucky Strike an' blow the smoke
From his nose b'sides.

One time Papa came ta my room oneday
Cuz I called 'sis a "slug."
He asked if I wanted a whoppin', but
I said, "Hell no!"
And the whoppin' began.

Now I slip to the front closet, and
Whisper "Damn" or mehbe a
"Hell no," an' breathe in the
Mildew an' must. An' the
Ang'r sticks to the mud on the
Cover boots an' flees up them coatsleeves
For somebody else ta wear.

Lenna Parr
Timonium, MD
Dulaney High School
William Jones

Mind Games

267. That's how many polka dots were on my shirt. That's what I did, count polka dots and trace patterns on the greyish carpet of my room. Or I just sat there and stared at my walls while concentrating on The Cure's music. I love The Cure. Theirs is the kind of music you have to play loudly but can't sing along with. Most people I know don't like them, though. People think they're too weird. But a lot of people think of me as strange, too.

My Mom opened the door to my room softly. "Hey, are you O.K.?" I just nodded. I couldn't bring myself to speak. I think I had forgotten how. "Are you hungry yet? You haven't eaten all day." I shook my head no. She shrugged hopelessly and left.

It must be nice to have a zombie for a daughter. I haven't talked or left my room for two days, except to go to the bathroom, of course. I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life this way either.

I knew my Mom was worried about me. I had won the award for being the most popular topic of conversation in my house. Yet the fact that I had a problem was never mentioned. No one dared. All they did was analyze my behavior and talk about worthless solutions. They didn't ask me for an answer, though. If they did, they would have realized that all I wanted was to be left alone. And to be thin.

Everyone in my family had a tendency to be overweight. The thing is, I was always the skinny one. But in the past two years, I had seemed to gain all the weight my once chubby older sister lost. Her skin cleared up, too, and the frizzy mop that used to be her hair had transformed into this amazing crown of fiery red ringlets. We used to be such good friends. Now I'm too embarrassed to be seen with her. People will look at her and then at me. I'm afraid they'll compare us, call me a fat, ugly pig, and then walk away disgusted.

My Mom is always on my case about never going out, too. I just don't like to hang out with my friends anymore. She says

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it's unhealthy to be such a loner. I suppose she wants me to become a phony social butterfly like she is. Gee, I can join the country club and promise people that we'll "do lunch" soon. No thank you! I'd rather sit home and stare at the walls.

I got up from my seat on the floor and walked over to the full length mirror by the dresser. I saw this obese girl with scraggly hair and squinty eyes stare back at me. "You make me sick!" I whispered to her. Although the scale read my weight as twenty pounds less than it was two weeks ago, the girl in the mirror looked thirty pounds heavier. I guess 450 calories a day is still too much. From now on it's 300.

I knew the calorie count for just about anything edible. An apple, for instance, has about 65 calories. Plain, air-popped popcorn has 30-50 calories per cup depending on how tightly you pack it. I stopped eating meat and dairy products a long time ago. At first, I only cut out red meat but then decided chicken and fish are too fattening also. Dairy products are loaded with fat and calories, even skim milk. I don't drink anything, anything except water--ten glasses a day. My diet consists mainly of fruits, vegetables, popcorn, and an occasional slice of light bread. I don't even remember what ice cream tastes like.

I take a multi-vitamin everyday. I definitely do not take any laxatives or make myself vomit. That could be really harmful. People who do that are obsessed with their weight.

People like that make me sick. At school, I hear girls who are so skinny complaining about how fat they are. What would they do if they had my body? In the last three months I've lost forty-four pounds. I'm 5'4" and weigh eighty-six pounds, but my body still looks like a lump of cellulite and jello. I have a lot more weight to lose.

I always wear big, baggy clothes to cover up my obesity. I guess it doesn't work, because people always stare at me with this horrified expression on their faces like I'm some sort of freak or something. When that happens I won't eat at all for maybe, two days or so. It doesn't happen often though, since I never go out. It's a good thing school doesn't start for another month and a half.

Last night Mom decided I had to go see a psychiatrist. Great, now I'm mental, too! I don't see what her problem is. It's pretty obvious that I'm not crazy. Or am I? It's not like I go around murdering people when there's a full moon out! I don't know anymore. I can't be sure of anything. I often find myself longing for the days when life consisted of sleeping, playing silly games like Duck, Duck, Goose!, and being able to eat anything you desired without giving the slightest thought to the calorie count. The perfect life was just that. Nothing more, nothing less.

Mom has also been bugging me about going to church. I'm not the religious type. I go on holidays, but that's about it. Mom says the Lord can help me. Help me with what? How? What does she want from me? Sometimes I feel like I'm just going to break! Does she think that I'm some kind of anti-Christ? Maybe I'm a satan worshipper! She can be so ridiculous! Why can't she just be like Dad and leave me alone? Although lately he's been a bit annoying, too. He asks these really stupid questions like, "Are you happy?" Well Dad, if you tell me what happy is, I'll be glad to answer you.

I went to the psychiatrist yesterday. He wants to keep seeing me. I also had to go see a regular doctor. He diagnosed me as anorexic. I'm not sure what that is exactly, and I didn't care enough to ask. But Mom said she had had enough of my diets and no, she wouldn't leave me alone. "From now on, I'm in charge," she had said. For some reason I didn't mind so much.

The psychiatrist kept asking what my thoughts and feelings were lately. He was pretty cool and easy to talk to. I was angry at Mom for bringing me to see a shrink, though. But I'm not so much anymore. He said I'm not crazy, just confused. I was relieved to hear someone say that.

So I'm sitting here again, tracing patterns on the fluffy, grey carpet while Robert Smith's familiar voice blares in the background. As I look up, the mirror seems to beckon me. I walk in front of it as if some strange magnetic force has drawn me

there. I can't bring myself to look. I'm afraid of that obese girl. But I have to look. My eyes finally meet those of a frail looking girl. The fat girl has disappeared. She has been replaced by this girl who has a sadness in her eyes that is way beyond her years. They seem tortured as they scream, "What have you done?" This weak little girl is much scarier than the fat one. Her body is shaking as the tears slowly roll down her ghostly cheeks. I shiver as I realize that the girl trapped in the mirror is me, as I've never seen myself before.

I have got to free that girl.

Patricia Zafiriadis
New City, NY
Janet Goodson

Untitled

My family has peculiar customs, especially at Christmas time. Instead of dressing up for a church service on Christmas eve, we dress up for a traditional smorgasbord at Grandpa's house. It was great fun when I was younger; now it has become a habit which I still enjoy. I can picture this year's smorgasbord; seldom does it change. A long wooden table, draped in a white tablecloth, covered with hot plates on which Swedish meatballs are piled high in a pyramid; silver platters decorated with an assortment of sandwich meats and cheeses; a brown wicker basket cradling a bright red cloth napkin and the wasa bread, rye bread and several types of crisp Swedish crackers; a small crystal dish in which an abundance of olives, both black and green, are packed together; a beautiful floral china hot dish in which Korve, a Swedish sausage meat delicacy, lies coiled, and several crystal bowls where herring swim in a delectable herb-/cream sauce. At the end of the table, Grandpa always stands overlooking his masterpiece with the overworked nubby fingers of one hand clamped around his whiskey shot glass while his other hand rests on his hearty Santa Claus stomach.

Grandpa is always proud of his annual feast. His crystal blue eyes light up while his ears twitch backwards when he sees his grandchildren march into his house with their eyes scanning eagerly across the dining room in search of the Swedish buffet table. He does not seem so old when this happens; his salt and pepper hair fades solely to pepper. Standing with his arms crossed lounging on his protruding belly, he nods his head up and down, up and down, satisfied by the reaction to his creation. Eyes twitching, still nodding, he mutters "Yaaap, Yaaap, Yaaap....," his struggling Swedish accent fighting against years spent in America.

Before we indulge in Grandpa's creation, we flock downstairs to watch a traditional pool game between Grandpa and each of his daughter's husbands. Uncle Bob and my father struggle each year to improve their game, yet it is impossible to win, for Grandpa is the champ year after year. With a shot of whiskey in one hand and a long pool stick in the other, Grandpa is ready to tackle any obstacle put upon him by his contestors. Smoke dances through the air, centering up towards the hanging dim green glass lamp above the pool table. Aunt June and Grandma light one cigarette after another, flooding the air with a thick, heavy circling layer of smoke, while my mother starts to clench the inside corner of her mouth nervously. All of us kids are lined up on one side of the pool table, standing tense and watching silently.

A shot of whiskey, a short pause, then grandpa gets ready to make his move. After a quick aim, he slides his stick swiftly between his fore and middle fingers and hits the ball solidly. Almost as if it were programmed, the ball sails across the pool table and accomplishes its purpose. He makes pool seem so easy, so carefree to play. After a couple more shots of whiskey and carefully planned strategies, he inevitably wins the game. Once again, Grandpa is our hero.

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Laughing heartily, eyes twitching as well as limbs, he slowly and consciously walks up the stairs, step by step, ready to feast on his traditional meal. His family follows slowly behind him. The adults look solemnly down at their feet, feeling an emotional swirl of shame and guilt; the children, eyes open wide and smiles from ear to ear, press and push up against each other, eager to indulge in their annual feast.

Each year is the same routine at Grandpa's house, yet each year Grandpa changes little by little, stubbornness grows greater, pride shines brighter, hair grows whiter, eyes grow clearer as his belly protrudes farther. Grandpa drinks more and more, twitches more and more, mutters the same words over and over, misses more and more of his pool shots, and shallowly laughs it off. After the traditional pool game, I now follow my Grandpa up the stairs, looking solemnly down at my feet, for I too have grown--wiser and wiser.

Tanya Lundborg
Woodbridge, Ct
The Ethel Walker School
John Groff

Madeleine

I was in first grade back then. She came in the middle of the third quarter. I remember, because we were all sitting on the floor making Arbor Day posters when she walked in with our principal. Mrs. Schwanburg introduced her to us--"Class, this is Madeleine,"--and, of course, she had to sit next to me.

She had the palest face, and her hair was almost white. She wasn't that small, but she had these huge eyes, too big for her body. I didn't talk to her for the first couple of weeks; nobody did, except for Brian. He would go up to her everyday, and ask her, "Why are you so weird?" That was during recess, and all of us would giggle as we ran past her.

Later on, we all started asking her questions: "How come you don't know how to laugh?" and "Why don't you like to play?" Madeline told us that she did laugh, and that she just couldn't run around, but she could play. "Why can't you run?" we demanded, and she told us it was because the doctor told her not to. We called her a liar, and then Brian pushed her, but not that hard. He didn't get in trouble, either, because Madeleine didn't tell on him.

Our teacher couldn't understand why nobody ever played with Madeleine. "Madeleine, why don't you go jump rope with the rest of the class?" And when she came over, we would all run away. "Class, that's not polite!" our teacher would yell. Then we would laugh and smirk, and run across the smooth blacktop to play on the monkey bars.

Madeleine never cried or anything when we acted the way we did. Sometimes she looked like she wanted to say something, but we never let her. I would give her a grimace, and then she'd turn away, which was fine with me. I hated sitting next to her.

One day, right before breaktime, Mrs. Schwanburg came in. She didn't even say "hello" to us, but walked right on past to talk to our teacher. We had to sit and wait in our desks, and that was when I noticed that Madeleine was gone. I think everyone else noticed, too, because we hadn't asked her our questions yet--we played that game everyday. After Mrs. Schwanburg left, our teacher walked to where I was sitting and pulled Madeleine's desk away. That was when I noticed that she was crying. Brian made a big deal out of Madeleine, and he told us that she had gotten scared and left. And we all believed him.

Priscilla Yap
McLean, VA
Thomas Jefferson High School
Jane Gullickson

White Arm

Clenched sleep
my broken pinky throbs
from rain and a tight
grip on the pillow.
Purple night,
too rich for sleep.
The fire horn calls
volunteers. I want
to run barefoot
through wet streets
to find the flames.
White arm
draped palm up
across my back,
he sleeps loosely-
doesn't sense my skin,
breathes towards
the ceiling.
Shadows of straight
blinds curve across
his face;
imagine
his eyes behind
white lids.

Jessica Graham
Port Washington, NY
Paul D. Schreiber High School
Carol Nesbit

white house at night

here people sleep on park benches
shivering their plastic shrouds
the night is cold and eaten
i can see my breath

in front of the white house
where the bureaucrats live
(and spawn domestic hates)
sleep the final product

and my stomach wrenches
in a plastic bag with them
and i want to go home
but that seems impossible now

there are concrete pillars
surrounding the white house
so trucks with explosives
can't kill the president

it's a starry night
(i can see my breath)
they're tossing restlessly
on the other side

Todd Polenberg
Poughkeepsie, NY
Roy C. Ketcham High School
Robert Adam

front of a h some strange industrial force was built

The Mystique of a Coffee Shop

It is 10 AM on a Tuesday when I leave my house
 A slick light grey rain blankets the city
 My eyes are tired looking and my hair is wild
 I put on a semi-fancy dress and some bright red lipstick
 And buy the morning paper
 Then meet my black-turtleneck'd friend
 And go to Hiram's with the blinking Christmas lights in the alcove
 That glitter in the drizzle
 (The vinyl booths in the back are my favorites)
 Dreary fogged-up windows and greasy tables
 The air is a little humid and stuffy
 But plastic plants won't wilt
 And I don't mind
 A waitress is crying in the kitchen
 And yelling to the chef about something
 We sip slowly Cappuccino with a spoon
 I prop my head up in my palm
 We discuss e.e.cummings and Shakespeare
 And I laugh demurely at his choice of Barry Manilow
 From the 25 cent jukebox that is usually broken
 Maybe he will ask me to dance
 I don't think so because Shirley is mopping the floor.

Mara E. Trager
 Brooklyn, NY
 Midwood High School
 Sharon Lustbader

Mother, Not Seen, Everywhere

I found mother in the carpet today.
 One of her hairpins
 punctured my foot.
 She was in the bathroom cabinet, too,
 When I reached for a band-aid
 and knocked over her iron pills.
 I had come to help clean up her life.
 Father wanted nothing left,
 Nothing of the 53 years lingering
 between the ticks of his pocketwatch,
 or burrowed in the dry wall
 after his hammer plucked the nail
 that held their picture.
 Mother would not
 scrub out of the floors,
 but with lots of vacuuming
 her size 5's
 could eventually fade
 from the shag in the family room.
 I found mother in the carpet today,
 but her face was not seen,
 everywhere.

Kathy Cottle
 Phoenix, MD
 Dulaney High School
 William Jones

Wind Chimes

I say I hate you your fingers knot
 into a fist and you leave a bruise on my arm
 I break free from the peach
 tiles of the kitchen and run outside it is cold -- ice and
 there is no moon round the side of the house
 running
 but I do not hear your feet catch the ground behind me
 I see the porch ahead and six feet up
 The wind chime pipes banging together
 my feet hurry to below the porch the cement pillar is
 rough against my
 knees blood marks my ascent among the
 cinder blocks heave myself up and
 over the short wall and I collapse on the cold floor
 I reject the hard surface
 and stand
 I can see the horizon from
 here
 the front door opens and is
 slammed feel the vibrations in my chest
 The wind chime pipes bang together frantically
 run over to the sliding glass door
 the cat inside sees me and cries
 I hear your boots
 clap down the front steps my
 grasp on the door handle tightens
 and I pull the cat is rubbing on the glass
 back and forth
 the glass door locked
 and wind chimes silent
 no more footsteps
 look over the porch wall
 a silhouette cut by one of the house
 flood lights
 Your fist is clenched

Amanda Ferguson
 Timonium, MD
 Dulaney High School
 William Jones

Sullen Madness

and I stopped in the doorway
 the room was filled with steam
 and the water still pelted her copper pots
 I can remember
 she was curled up with her head on her knees
 sitting on the kitchen floor.
 her entire body trembling
 and she wiped tears from her cheeks
 I didn't even hear my father leave
 I just stood there with my shoulder against the doorway
 Staring...
 as she began to disappear into the steam
 I can remember she was curled up
 sitting on the kitchen floor
 attacking that tiny gold band
 I had just noticed had been on her finger
 since the day I was born.

Erika Wilson
 Silver Spring, MD

Super Place

Walk down
cracked sidewalk
to Super Place's
Quality Groceries
with working air-
conditioning turned
up high
Cool yourself off in the
frozen
meat section all
packed with shiny
rectangles of that red
beef. Lean,
Extra lean
and cold cold
iced air
to breathe all around.
Stay awhile and rest here
because Super Place has the
best air in all of
Massachusetts and plenty of
it for everyone.

Leslie Ryang
Williamsville, NY
Williamsville East High School
Mary Richert

Curry Breath

A House,
my Father's,
Stands
Stoutly against Monsoon rains.
Against Deluge of daughter tears.

"Tradition, tradition."
Curry Breath demands.
His House, His Father's House
And Land.
Remain He, and after Him,
His soul, His Son,

His decided acceptance.

She curses her father's idolatry
softly under the shuffle of monsoon
rains, guarded behind the stones of
her father's house and land.

Sonia Sharma
Staten Island, NY
Notre Dame Academy High School
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Blue Fish Cove

My tired eyes squinted at the glare of the morning sun reflecting off the pavement. As I shuffled my feet along the side of the road, I felt the warmth of the sand sifting through my sandals. My purple backpack, containing lunch and a few scrap papers, hung limply over my shoulders. Under my long blond hair I felt the sticky warmth of perspiration forming on my neck.

"It's going to be a hot one," the radio in the kitchen had blared as I had stepped out the door of our cool, air-conditioned house.

Billy had left earlier than I had that morning. As usual, he had

hopped on his shiny blue dirt-bike and rushed up the road, turning the corner to the bus stop. I, on the other hand, preferred to walk. I enjoyed listening to the sounds of the birds and creatures within the thick brush that lined the sides of the road. I always hoped to some day catch a glimpse of a killer snake or giant land turtle.

I turned the corner and the worn blue letters that read "BLUE FISH COVE" came into focus. For four years this old, weathered sign had marked my bus stop. Each year it had become more and more difficult to read.

Approaching the sign, I noticed that Amy and Jackie had already placed their books down and were off giggling together a short distance away. I hated that giggling. I hated everything about them actually. Their over-exaggerated make-up, their perfectly permed hair, their dainty little flowered purses, but most of all, the giggling.

Glancing around, I saw that Billy, Johnny, and the other older boys had begun to set up some old beer and soda cans on a stump for their usual game of target practice. Over to one side stood Stephen, wearing a dirty, ripped T-shirt, and staring with admiration. Stephen lived in an old, broken down house at the end of one of the smaller side streets. The house itself was surrounded by overgrown bushes and an old wire fence, of which the gate rarely remained open. The house appeared odd among the new housing developments that had taken over the area. Yet, what separated Stephen even more from the rest of us was the fact that he never talked. His deep, brown eyes that surveyed everything like a scanner, were his voice. They shone when he was happy and squinted when he was mad. I noticed that today, as he stood watching the boys practice picking off the cans with perfect accuracy, his eyes gleamed.

"Okay, who wants to play?" Billy's voice rang out with authority. All the boys gathered around.

"Can I play?" I begged in a half-way excited tone, knowing the answer I was to receive.

"No way. You're a stupid girl!" my brother screamed back at me. Amy and Jackie giggled. I threw my head around and glared evilly at them. One of these days I'm gonna sock them both right in the mouth, I thought as I sat down to watch the game.

"Hey, we need one more person to make it even," Johnny said as he turned and grinned evilly at the group. "Hey Stephen, wanta play?" Stephen's eyes lit up and he nodded slightly.

"Well, come on."

With a quick movement Stephen brushed his brown curly hair from his face and walked over to the boys. The bottoms of his old bluejeans dragged in the dirt.

"Here's the rules," Johnny began to explain in a clear serious voice. "Each person gets one chance to hit one of the five cans with a rock. The first one to miss is the loser. Okay? Billy, you go first."

Billy picked up a rock and with an air of confidence stepped up to the line and assumed his ready position. Closing one eye to aim, he shot the rock into the air like a bullet. With a clang one of the cans flipped from its position on the stump. Billy smiled, then moved quickly to set up the cans for the next person. One by one the boys stepped up to the line, and one by one the cans flipped. Then it was Stephen's turn.

A tenseness gripped his face as he stooped to pick up a rock. Worry appeared in his eyes. He did not know to aim like the others. Sucking in his breath, he launched the rock at the cans. Nothing moved. His eyes fell to the ground. He had missed. Everyone was silent. Johnny grinned.

"You lose." Everyone turned to look at Johnny. "Now pay up." Stephen raised his head. A look of question appeared on his face.

"That's right, pay up. Didn't I mention that at the beginning? Whoever loses has to pay everyone else a quarter."

"Now wait a minute..." I stood up from where I sat. Johnny's cheating has always annoyed me.

"Shut up Katie. If the little creep wants to defend himself he

can say so himself." He turned to Stephen. "Can't you?"

Stephen did not move. His arms hung at his sides. Fear began to build within his eyes.

"So are you going to pay up or do I have to shake it out of you?" John taunted with a fake tone of impatience. Jackie and Amy giggled at the remark. I jumped around and stared fiercely at them.

"I, I got no money." The shaky, unfamiliar voice caught everyone by surprise. All eyes fell on Stephen's weak, harmless form.

"Oh, so you can talk after all," Johnny said, stepping forward and shoving Stephen at the shoulder.

"Hey, come on. Let's just leave the freak alone," Billy's voice broke in. Johnny ignored him. He clenched his fists. I watched in horror as Johnny, with a swift uppercut, nailed Stephen squarely in the stomach. Stephen's thin body deflated as he toppled backward to the ground. He squeezed his eyes closed to prevent any tears.

"Bus!" a voice called out. From the distance came a faint humming sound.

"Get up. The bus is coming," Johnny commanded as he grasped Stephen's arm and yanked him to his feet. Stephen's body swayed for a moment until he regained his balance. His eyes remained fixed to the ground. Bending to pick up our books, the rest of us formed a straight line next to the sign. The humming of the engine grew louder as the yellow vehicle approached and halted before us. Quickly the door slid open and one by one we stepped up and took our seats. The door squeaked shut and the bus jerked into gear. Through the back window, I watched as the blue letters grew fainter and fainter in the distance. I sighed.

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