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Editor's Note

The staff congratulates Jim Maynard on his prize winning poem, "In the Season of Grief." Congratulations are also extended to Jen Mintzer who submitted the winning art piece.

I have enjoyed working for THE LANTERN. I wish to thank the staff of THE LANTERN, Dr. Thomas Apple, and Dr. Jon Volkmer. Their dedication and patience never ceased to impress me.

THE LANTERN

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JUDGE'S NOTE

Finally, after considering a group of poems, a reader prefers one **to** another, or one **among** others, from impulses and responses essentially irrational. Not to say that prosodic elements, the technical accomplishment of the poem, play no part, and not to say that the subjects per se plays no part; but rather that the appeal of the words and lines, of the images and ideas, and the order and energy of the poet's vision as a whole works from **within** itself, and works with a reader's inmost character, that elusive and spiritual 'thing'. I found this judging to be very stimulating and very hard. I thank all the poets whose poems I had the privilege to read and reread. And, as one poem among other's, I prefer "In the Season of Grief," the vision which implicated me most deeply.

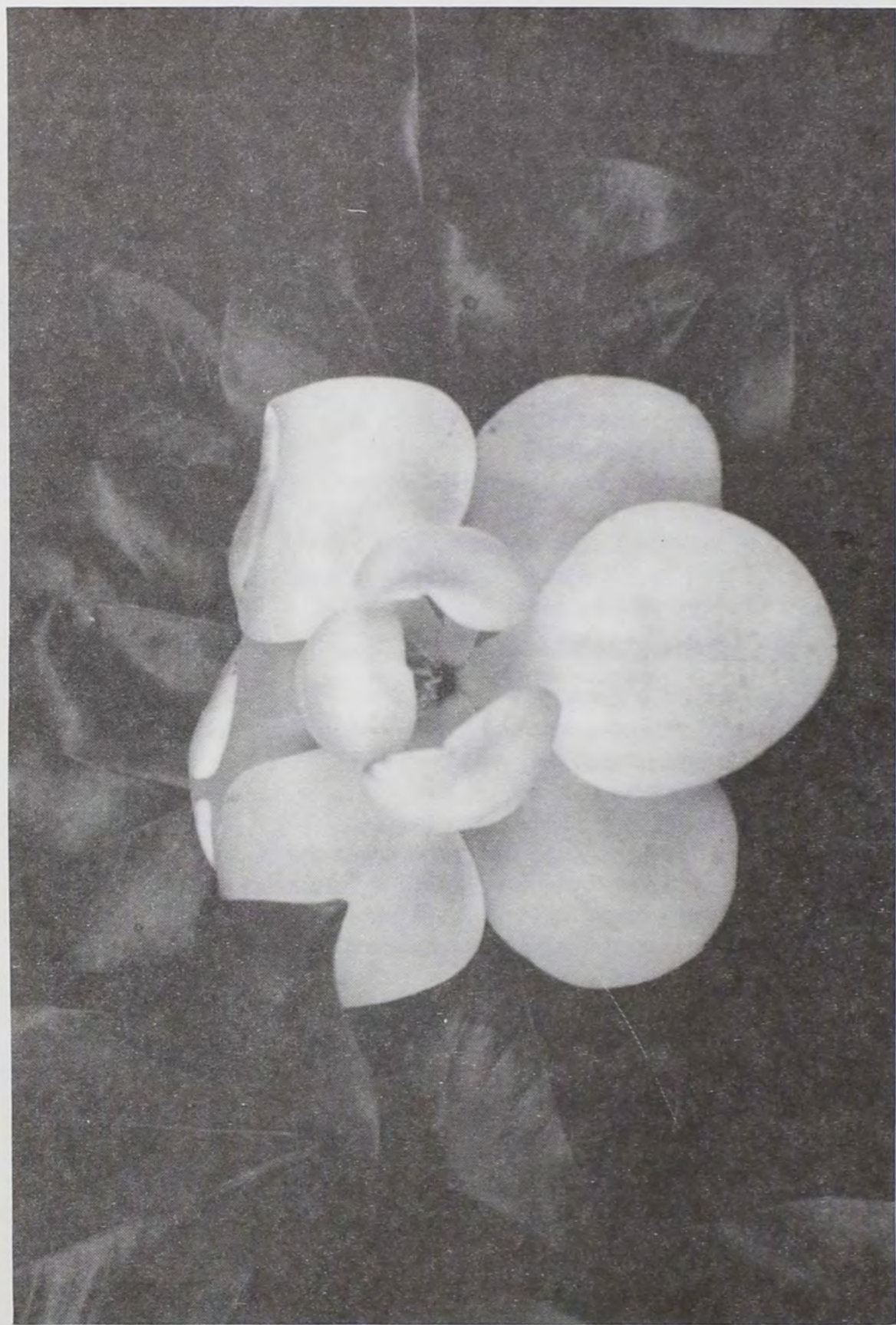
In the Season of Grief

by Jim Maynard

I can see you, father, walking here
as a boy, the shaded path along the brook
leading to the steps of the wooden bridge,
the sound of leaves underfoot measuring
time as regular as a heartbeat. I can see
you searching for comfort, searching for
anything but loss here in this familiar place,
the majestic trees like God's autumnal blanket
overhead, the soft touch of sunlight
and the scent of burning leaves
your only connection between present and past,
this world and that. Did you cry
here when your father died, walking in
endless circles of grief?

I imagine you, a boy of nine, too young
by far to bear your sudden burden,
trying to reach forgetfulness by foot,
and I wonder if it was here that you learned
to lock everything up inside of you,
hiding it all in a place I've never found.

I see you here today,
a man of fifty-two, nothing having changed
but the presence of me, your own son,
considering now the irony of you
having outlived the life of your father
and me having outlived the childhood of mine.
Though you are not aware, I can see your every detail,
everything exactly as I imagine it once was,
history repeating itself in a flashback of sorrow.
I know that look in your eye,
I know what you are searching for.
But even under these high-topped trees
that which is lost is gone forever;
the past never changes--only the shadows do--
and all I want is to answer your unspoken question:
yes, for me you have done enough;
you have done all that you ever could.



Subtleties**by Jason Colflesh**

The rivulets chase and skip
Down the enclosing pane.
Grey light moans, and flutters
Ponderously over the puddles.

Inside, blue-white light
Delineates harsh curves
On the speaker's face.
It pours out words,

And they spill
On the page.

crazehaze (020595)**by Christopher Deussing**

cracking assailed voice resembles my psyche
these mental abuses i do not like
freaky facades formulate faster than light
my inner darkness dwarfed by snow white
eat the mustard, pass the milk
regurgitated ideals shrouded in ebony silk
shredded screaming grates my mind
love waiting in this sleep-deprived line
fuzzbuzz-frenzied pennywise the clown
frolics in lunacy; smiles turned upside down
stellar black roses choke daisies to death
jokester's all right--there's no need to fret
gaze at the faces of the twelve
feelings numbed by frozen rain
trying to convey my true caring self
failure adds to internal blame
erect aroused hair stands on end
straight-line thoughts meander around bends
must put duct tape over my mouth
cannot let these painful rosepetals out
wine-tinted wig regenerates fast
digging up memories of immature pasts
face-to-face with the ugly devil
consisting of sticky societal labels
cheez-whiz sea of numerous regrets
boiling oily-pools of non-bloodlet
missing cases of happiness; i feel so alone
5 am; empty reassurance over the phone
the churning chaotic cacophony
serves as my loving enemy
normal reason completely razed
by my daze-drenched crazehaze.

Blacksmith
by Gene Klose

It's past midnight but I cannot possibly sleep.
There are places to be,
and descriptions to be wrought like horseshoes were,
in finer times. That was then.
Now, in stables across the country
fine blacksmiths ply their trade,
while their only interest waits behind the barn,
with twisting hair and vacant stares,
waiting like a train, to be filled with the action of the next ride.
My anvil has its role.
But the hill behind the barn holds only rocky, seedless brush.
Where do these things come from, anyway?
And why aren't you here?
I want to show you how these things are shaped.
Perhaps I've hit them one too many times,
I've lost the feeling in my leg,
my heart is doubtless next in line.

I Feel Your Weight

by Michael Donohue

I come to your dorm room, smelling like fraternity pledges smell. I'm begging a favor and I don't really know you. You are a junior and you made the arm bands for last year's pledge class and they recommended that I come to you for help. You are happy to do it. While you cut out Greek letters from black felt, sew them onto white strips, and attach the elastic bands, you let me nap on your couch. I smell so bad most people won't even let me in their rooms, but you understand and you care, you even give me your blanket.

I don't really sleep. I can't keep my eyes off you. You are wearing blue jeans, a white turtleneck, and a kelly green sweater. You are sitting on the floor with needle, thread, and a mug of tea. You are so pretty and wholesome looking and I wish I could find a girl like you for myself. You are seeing my fraternity brother though and I'm happy for you, both of you.

The arm band takes you over three hours, but you don't mind, you tell me so. You ask me things like, "Are those boys hurting you? I hear them yell at you and they're so big and I know that Andy and Glen can be mean." I hate when women talk to me like that, but when you do it, it feels right and I am comforted.

It's months later now, pledging is long over, and I'm going through a difficult break up with Alison while you and Mark are having problems too. We talk for hours. Whenever we see each other on campus--in the library, the dining room, your room--we talk. You listen and hold my hand, hug me, and run your fingers through my hair, but not in a seductive way, it was just your way, sweet, innocent, caring and sincere.

It's your birthday today and I bring you red roses. Not because they are romantic, but because they are your favorite. You're so happy. We laugh about the slim chance of you actually completing all of your 21st birthday shots at the bar. "Have fun tonight. Happy Birthday."

"Thanks, I will. Thanks so much for the roses."

We hug good-bye. I wish I could go with you too. I know that in a few weeks you'll let them dry out and hang them upside down on your wall, next to all the other bouquets of red roses.

Whenever I'm sick or have a cold you make me the perfect cup of tea with just the right amount of honey. So when you told me at lunch today that you thought you had the flu I decided to do something for you, too. It's dinner time now and I bring a cup of

chicken noodle soup to your room. Your covers are pulled up tight at your neck. You're so sad because I had, "gone through all that trouble" but you just don't feel like you can stomach it. It wasn't any trouble though, and I don't care about the damn soup. I just want you to get better so that you can come to my fraternity's Hawaiian party that night.

"Oh, Sean, I would never miss the Kamanawannalaya party. That's the best party all year. Don't you worry, I'll be there."

"Are you sure? A party might just make you sicker."

"I already promised you last week that you would make the first Gin & Tonic I've ever had tonight."

"Well, just rest, okay, and hopefully I'll see you tonight." Then I kiss you for the first time. For the first time I kiss you on the cheek and not the other way round.

It's such a fun party. There are a ton of alumni here and it truly is the best party of the year. I'm pretty drunk. I think about calling you. I wonder when you'll come. All the hard alcohol is gone except for a quarter bottle of gin I've saved for us. Everything is great and I'm really happy. I'm with friends and brothers I haven't seen in over a year. Then the music stops. I see a security guard in the party room and all the guests are filing out. It's way too early for the party to be shut down and we still have plenty of beer left. I run to the bathroom where I see two of my brothers. Tom is crying and Glen is trying to comfort him.

I know someone has died. It's the first thing to pop into my head. I had never seen these guys crying before and I'm scared. I look at Glen and ask, "Who?"

He just looks at me. I know it's one of my brothers. One of our pledges maybe, an alumnus in a car accident, maybe a whole car load of them. Jesus Christ, "WHO?"

His eyes are red and wet. "Something . . . something terrible has happened Sean."

"I know, just tell me WHO! PLEASE!"

"Sean, they found Tammy . . ."

"Oh, God no. Please no."

". . . she was in her room . . ."

I don't remember ever bawling like this before. I throw up. I want to punch out the window but someone already has. For some reason everyone is walking to the dining hall, and I collapse a few times along the way. I keep repeating to whoever has their arm around me, "This shit doesn't happen, man. It just doesn't."

Your mom met over 700 people today but she knows who I am from you talking about me. She remembers your picture of us together at a dated party. She tells me how much you loved me

and I don't know what to say. I want to ask her to tell me more. "How exactly did she say that?" or "What words did she use?" I don't ask though. I can't. I love you too.

Going into the church is awkward. You sorority sisters are lined as an honor guard from the church steps to the end of the aisle. The steps are steep and your casket is heavy. I feel your weight, I feel your body shift as five of my brothers and I go up the steps. Your sisters are all looking at me. They make feeble attempts at smiling and condoling faces. I can't look at them.

It's a wonderful homily. I'm learning so much about you today, your childhood, your family and high school experiences. Everyone has a story. It's a really long drive to the cemetery. It's raining; somehow it always does. We take you out of the hearse. We carry you a ways and I feel your weight shift again. The funeral director and his entourage meet us. "We'll take it from here gentlemen, thank you."

I cry when they do that. I want to hold you, and I feel like you want to be held by me and others. We care. They are just professionals.

Remember that never ending argument we had? "You're the best."

"No, you're the best."

"No, no, you're the best."

I still play that game in my head sometimes, just to hear your voice, but I always win now; I always say it last. It's better that way, I mean the argument, because you were the better friend.

It's been two years and although they still don't know why you died, they've ruled out foul play and suicide. They say it was natural.

I still miss you and I'm mad at you for leaving. I'm mad at myself for taking you for granted. I'm mad because I never took you to dinner, we never walked in a park, we never had that Gin & Tonic, and I'm mad because your mother knows how you felt about me and I don't. I'm mad because I know I loved you, but I tell your mother now what I should have told you then.

I'm mad because I see you everywhere and it hurts. I see the plaque and the tree they placed beside your sorority house, I see the window of your old dorm room where they found you. I see that picture your mom talked about on my dresser, and I see that arm band hanging around my bedpost every morning and every night.

L'Amour Manqué**by Amy Melton**

Souvenez-vous de la puissance de l'amour
Depuis longtemps que l'amour s'est perdu?
Est-ce l'amour, ou simplement
Mirage de mon coeur qui se reflète dans vous.

Ce grand amour n'était jamais achevé
Peut-être qu'il était un rêve que j'ai eu
La tristesse d'aujourd'hui ne peut jamais
Diminuer les souvenirs que j'ai de vous.

Sense of You**by Jo Anne Sickeri**

You are like clockwork, springtime, mom's pancakes

Dependable, beautiful, like home

Comfortable like long johns

Reassuring, like a baby's soft sleepy breathing

Necessary

like fire

Thoughts of you inspire nostalgia, like soda fountain drugstores,
and familiarity all at once

My mind travels south,

down yellow brick roads,

through planes of dreaming,

clouds of fairy dust

into a tropical, popsicle-melting place

where I find you easily--

I have tire tracks

the sensation of a kiss

and a stream of warm maple syrup that leads me there.

Greed**by Alicia Lehr**

Her rusty cart is full today.
Mable is able to get a jump
start on the mornings, have to sneak
a peak and snag a treat. So early
for selecting tossed treasures.
She mulls over the shabby
teddy bear, left eye missing,
thread frayed, but snubs it aside.
A blanket, Navajo maybe, only
3 holes, perfect. Three bags
of crushed cans clang next to
ten crooked hangers.
She piles it on top.
Her keen ears are signaled.
From an unsuspecting person's pocket
falls a butterfly broach,
diamondless holes clink on the pavement.
Her shriveled fingers tingle, reaching,
hand outstretched, the broach
sticks her lifeline with rusty vengeance.

Gender (Rolled)**by Sonny Regelman****Mother:**

No/not me
round grey belly flesh
and milky breasts
the only certainty
besides aging and death,
a cluster of atoms
then cells/then what
a cluster of beings
drawn and compelled
by social magma(tism),
I have been plutonium
split and my shelf-life expired
repel me
and I (ir)radiate
become the self(image)
the She I never wanted,
around others' tearful blood(shot) eyes I hover
my hands (holding) breaking hearts
while gore spills behind my sockets
pumping instinct I despise,
(my) nature betrays me
and I belie you
when I blow kisses at the ache.

Matron:

When I intuit
peer ahead with mind not eyes
I resent this place assigned
the role (in)bred
which she refused and too those before,
I stare down at arching roundness
and I see a panorama
of bold faces beneath
my tattered (star spangled) skirts,
they're seeking silken strong protection
and freedom (of choice)
that I once perceived
never possessed
and cannot grant,
I am the head
on this banquet table
and the bodies

at china places set
with thirsty crystal
are infinite(ly)
starving,
I will surrender my resolve
I will feed the fate
you will eat me belching,
and my potential, digest.

Soliloquy of a Punter**by Brian Suth**

A field, a grandstand, a place where dreams are made
And crushed. Fresh dew on the grass glistens. This
Is where I play. My game is not like theirs.
I still use the same ball, wear the same jersey,
Only a little cleaner. My days
Are spent alone. Team unity, it's us,
Not I. Not me. Practice -- linemen crushing
Sleds, runningbacks strut, wide receivers sprint.
Not I. Not me. The other field, I go
To watch, me and the placekicker. Kick ball,
Punt ball, chase ball. Turn around. Start again.
GAME TIME. The rush, here comes the light, blood pumps
To the corner we go. We wait. We chill.
Our back is to the wall, they call on me,
Save us, bail us out. Yet, they don't want me
To step on the gamefield. The less
I play, the less I boom the ball, success
Shall be ours. Victory is sacrifice.
They call us mystics, our own breed. High priests,
Our game is not in the hands of men, but gods.

Nightmares

by Joanna Doris

I am suffocating. His breath covers my face in hot, sticky layers. I want to shout and I want to scream, "Get off of me!" But all I can manage is, "Please. Please." My cheeks are slippery with tears and my breath labors under his oppressing weight. His eyes are yellow and puffy, glowing insanely. "No," I say. "Don't." Twisting and turning, I try to get out from under him. My head buzzes. Oh God, I'm choking. His face looms over me, sweating and smelling. His hands are on my arms, shaking me. "No!" I scream, kicking my feet, but they won't move.

"Kelly."

I am sobbing. "Get off of me. Get off."

"Kelly, wake up."

Arms are around me, shaking. "Kelly, it's me. Wake up."

"Mom?"

I am being rocked. "Shhh," she says, "shhh." She is rubbing my back. "You are just having a bad dream again." Slowly, reality takes shape around me. My room is still dark, except for the faint outlines of my furniture. The clock next to me blinks red, 5:46. I untangle myself from her and lie back into the softness of my pillows. My throat is tight and huge tears slide down my face.

"This was a pretty bad one, huh?"

I nod. "It was awful."

"I know." She smooths the hair off my forehead. I shake my head from side to side.

"Mom, I can't live like this."

"Kelly," sighing deeply, "things are going to get better; I promise."

"When?" I ask sarcastically. "When we both have nervous breakdowns?"

"Kelly, please try to be understanding. He's going through a rough time right now."

"And what are we going through?"

"He lost his job, Kelly." I am trying her patience, but I still continue bitterly.

"Does he want to lose his family too?"

"Kelly." Sharply, sitting up straighter and glancing at the door. Lowering her voice, "I understand how you feel. I know it isn't easy, but I promise that he does love you. He wasn't always like this." I don't answer and she continues. "I used to have nightmares just like you." Absently she adds, "Wine helps me sleep through the night. I just pour myself a glass right before I go to bed." She again smooths the hair off my forehead and wipes the wetness off my cheeks. "Well, it's almost time to get up anyway. I have to

go to work. Do you want a cup of tea or anything?"

"No thanks." And then she leaves me. I lie there in the darkness and remember my dream. Mom said "Shh," but I know that even in my sleep I had learned not to make a lot of noise. The nightmares are more frequent. I wonder if he still loves her.

The room is getting lighter as the sun comes up, and I sleepily climb out of bed. The hardwood floor is cold under my feet and I shiver. When my room is dark, the imperfections are less noticeable, but now I can see the nicks in the floor and the handprints on the walls. There is a hole in the plaster behind my door where my father, in his anger, slammed my door open. After his violent entrance, he just stood there, staring at me, until I finally asked him what was wrong. I had left the lights to his car on all night and his battery had drained. I shiver again and make my way to the bathroom to take a shower.

Mom has left for work, but I hear Dad in his bedroom. I can't see him, but I hear him talking to the dog. "Good girl, Molly. Do you want to go for a walk?" I can see Molly's butt in the frame of the door, wagging her tail. "You do, don'cha?" Molly barks. I sigh and go to take a shower. I'm not in there for more than four minutes before he bangs on the door and tells me to get out, that I'm making him late for Mass.

I put on my uniform which is crumpled in a heap on the floor, where I left it yesterday when I came home from school. The skirt is wrinkled. I hear a car honk out front and I grab my shoes and socks and books. I run out the front door with a wet head and bare feet. In the car Marny has the heat on full blast. I grab a cigarette out of her purse and push the lighter into the dashboard.

"You look like shit. Did you oversleep again?"

"Kind of." I mumble through the dangling cigarette. My hands are preoccupied with trying to put on my shoes and socks.

"Is it your dad again?" putting the car in reverse.

"When isn't it him?" My voice catches and tears fill my eyes. Shit, I don't want to cry now.

"Kel, maybe you should talk to someone."

"It's not him," I protest. "I mean, it is him, but it's her also. She acts like there's nothing wrong most of the time. Maybe I'm the one who's at fault; I don't know." I know I sound confused. I feel confused. "It's just a nightmare," I say finally, and hang my head in my hands.

"What is?" Marny asked. So I tell Marny about my dream. She is silent for a moment and then says quietly, "I really think, Kel, that you need to talk to someone who can help."

"Maybe," I say. Marny and I are close; she knows that I have tried the route with the school counselor, and she knows to lighten up.

"But hey, if wine works for your mom, why not?" We both laugh, as if it were really amusing.

We are late for school and have to park in the furthest spot from the door, which makes us even more late. We walk in the front office as morning prayers are being said over the loudspeaker. The principle, Sister Anne, gives us a disapproving look, but can't reprimand us because the loudspeaker is on. We wait until prayers are over to get our hall passes and give our excuses and apologies.

"Why are you late, girls?" She begins to write out the passes but never takes her eyes off Marny's face.

"I had to drive my mother to work this morning, Sister. Her car broke down." Marny never has any trouble finding a new and improved excuse.

Sister Anne doesn't respond at first, looking directly into Marny's eyes. Marny doesn't flinch. I have to admire her. Sister Anne sniffs. "Have you been smoking, Maureen?"

Marny's eyes widen innocently. "No, Sister, my mother smokes. It's an awful habit, I know. I ride her every day about it." Sister Anne hands us our passes.

"Good morning, Kelly."

"Good morning, Sister," I mumble and take the pass from her hand.

"You girls had better hurry. It's already into first period." Marny and I grab our books and hurry out of the office.

"I'll meet you after school," Marny calls as we rush in different directions.

"O.K." I call down the hallway.

Sister Margaret doesn't stop lecturing as I hand her my pass and slide into my seat. I take out my notebook and begin to take notes.

I'm sitting in sixth period algebra, plugging away at the value of "x," when my name is called over the loudspeaker to report to the main office. All heads turn in my direction as I rise slowly out of the seat. I duck out of the classroom and start down the corridor towards the main office. My palms start to sweat. Why am I being called out of class? Have they found out about something Marny and I have done? I can't remember anything we've done recently. My hands are cold as I enter the office. The secretary, Mrs. Hastings, looks up from her typing. "You can go in, Sister Anne is waiting for you."

Sister Anne is sitting behind her desk. She has placed three chairs in front of it, two of which are occupied. "Come in, Kelly, and have a seat." Sister Anne motions towards the third chair. I recognize Sister Suzanne, the school counselor, but I don't recognize the woman wearing the navy blazer. Her hair is pulled to the nape of her neck. She wears no makeup and if she weren't wearing

a suit, I would have said that she was a nun also. I sit down in the remaining chair and cross my legs, but then change my mind and sit on my hands instead.

Sister Anne stares at me for a moment and then looks down at some papers in her hand. I smile nervously and glance to my left at Sister Suzanne. What is going on?

"Kelly," Sister Anne began, "this is Ms. Wilson from the Social Services Department."

"Hello, Kelly." Ms. Wilson says gravely.

"Hello."

"Kelly," Sister Anne looks at me over her glasses. "Kelly, we've heard some disturbing news today."

"Did something happen?"

"Well, that's what we're here to find out." Sister Anne leans back into her chair and glances at Ms. Wilson. On cue, Ms. Wilson begins to ask me questions.

"Kelly, what is your relationship with your father?"

"I'm sorry?"

"How would you describe your relationship? Is it good or bad?"

"Did something happen to him?" I ask.

"Just try to answer the questions, Kelly." Sister Anne prods.

"Well, I wouldn't describe it as either good or bad."

"Do you spend a lot of time together?"

"Not really." Shifting my weight on my hands.

"Does your father tell you that he loves you?"

"I don't understand. Why are you asking me these questions?"

Sister Suzanne patted my hand.

"It's going to be okay, Kelly." Sister Anne silences Sister Suzanne with a deadening look.

I start to laugh. "What's going to be okay? Look, I'm not answering any more questions until I know what they're about." Sister Anne leans forward and clears her throat.

"Kelly, we have reason to believe that your father has been molesting you." All eyes are on me.

"What?"

"We were informed--"

"By who?" I cut Sister Anne off in mid-sentence. Sister Suzanne leans towards me.

"Kelly, our main concern is you."

"Yes," Sister Anne agrees. "We are here to help you."

"What are you talking about? Who told you this?"

Now Ms. Wilson starts to chime in. "Kelly, this is a very difficult thing to handle all by yourself."

"I'm really sorry. I don't know where you got your information from, but it's wrong." I stand to leave.

"Kelly, sit down." Sister Anne says sharply, taking off her

glasses and sighing deeply. "We understand your need to protect your father as well as yourself, but --"

"I am not protecting anyone!" I shout at them. "This is ridiculous."

"Kelly, why did you tell Maureen that your father molested you last night?" Sister Anne looks me in the face.

Suddenly, it dawns on me. "I didn't," I say to them.

"Are you saying that you lied to your best friend, then?" Sister Anne asks me with raised eyebrows.

"No, I'm saying that Marny misunderstood."

Perplexed, they just stare at me. "I had a nightmare last night, and Marny must have thought that it actually happened."

"Why would Marny think that it was your father that did this to you?"

"Because," I say, taking a deep breath, "since he's lost his job, he's been awful. He's mean and they fight all the time." I feel the tears start again and words just pour out of me. "He hates me. I never did anything. I'm stupid and clumsy. I'm always in his way. I have terrible nightmares." I sob. "He scares me." I bend over and grab my knees. "I don't know why he hates. I don't know why." Sister Suzanne rubs my back. I cry for about five minutes before I'm able to control myself. Sister Anne hands me some tissues.

"Kelly, is that all it is? Are you sure? He has never touched you sexually?"

"No, never."

"Has he ever hit you?" Ms. Wilson adds.

"No." I hesitate.

"Has he ever hit your mom?"

"No."

Ms. Wilson closes her notebook and puts her purse over her shoulder. "Kelly, I'm sorry about your father, but we can't help you. If your father does not harm you physically, then there is nothing that we can do." She stands up and shakes Sister Anne's hand. "Sister, I'm sorry that I cannot be of more help."

"Of course; I understand." Sister Anne shows her to the door. I stare at the torn, wet tissues in my hand.

"Thank you for your time, Ms. Wilson." Sister Anne returns to her desk. She clears her throat as she sits down again. "Kelly, why don't you lay down in the infirmary till the end of the day. I'm sorry about this. I hope that you know we are here for you if anything should happen at home." I nod, but out the window I watch as a black cloud of birds picks up into the sky. Grabbing my books, I walk out of Sister's office and up the stairs to the infirmary. The nurse says that she will wake me up at the end of the day. I don't sleep, though.

Marny is waiting for me in the parking lot. She already has the

car started and is ready to go when I get to the car. She doesn't look at me when I get in. "Are you mad?" she asks, staring straight ahead.

"No." Sighing heavily.

"I'm sorry that I said anything, Kel, but I'm worried about you."

"Marn, it was just a dream."

"What was?"

"What happened; last night was only a dream."

"What do you mean?"

"Maureen! It didn't happen."

"Are you kidding?"

"No, I'm not kidding. It was a nightmare, that's all!"

"Oh God, Kelly, I'm sorry. I really thought . . . I mean, I thought it really . . . Kelly, I can't believe I--"

"I know. It's okay. Let's just forget it."

"Well, what did they say to you?"

"Actually," I half laugh, "It's kind of funny now." I tell Marny all the details.

When we pull up to my house I open the car door and slide my books into the driveway. "Are you going to come to the concert with us tonight?" Marny asks.

"I think so," I say, looking at my house and not at Marny.

"C'mon, you always back out on us. You have to go."

"It's not like I don't want to go." I am getting annoyed.

"Okay, okay." Marny starts the car. "I'll call you!" Marny shouts as she drives up the street.

Molly greets me at the door, her tail between her legs. Voices drift down the steps.

"Just tell me why. I don't understand why, Mike."

"I don't want to talk about it, Kathryn."

"I think that you owe me an explanation. Don't you realize what that money meant to us?" Her voice is screechy and high. His is calm and cold.

"I did what I thought was right. You should support me on it."

"Are you kidding? You gave them almost a whole two week's worth of work. How am I going to make that up?"

"You are so materialistic, Kathryn. You always have your hand out. Money. It's all that you ever think about."

"I have to think about it, Mike. I pay the bills, remember?" I start up the steps, trying not to let them hear me.

"If you had any faith, Kathryn, you would know that He giveth and He taketh and that HE will protect us."

"I think you're crazy."

I start quietly into my room. I don't want to hear any more, but I do.

"You know what," he says, "I really don't like you."

The iciness stops me for a second and then I quickly and quietly shut my door, and dial the phone.

"Marny, it's me."

"You're not going, are you?"

"I can't. I'm sorry."

"Just tell me why this time?"

"They're fighting again. I can't ask them for money."

"I'll lend it to you."

"Marny, you can't."

"Why not?"

"Because-" My door slams open. Plaster falls to the floor as the hole in the wall gets bigger.

"Get off the phone," he says.

"Marny, I have to go."

"Kelly, wait, I want to--" The phone goes dead and I look up, startled, and realize that he has pulled the phone cord out of the wall.

"I said, get off the phone. When are you going to grow up, Kelly? You are so selfish, so wrapped up in your own world." He yanks the phone out of my hand and carries the whole thing out of my room. "Until you learn about what's important in life and who provides it, you won't have a phone to use."

I turn out all the lights in my room and get into bed. I don't sleep. I think about Sister Anne and the counselor. I wonder what would have happened had I let them believe that my nightmare was real. I wait till I hear their bedroom door close and then I sneak downstairs and pour myself some of Mom's wine.

God is a Frisbee**by Morgan Wordley**

God flies through the air.

God makes me happy.

When I catch God I feel good.

I like to throw God too.

Sometimes God bends my fingers back.

Other times God breaks my nail.

That is when I am not happy with God.

When this happens I can always throw God away.

God will always end up in someone else's hand.

This is when I want God back.

When I get God back I am happy again.

At night I can't play with my God.

My God is black.

I wish I had a glow-in-the-dark God.

Then I could play with God at night.

God was \$9.99 plus tax at Wayne Toy Town.

Cleansing**by Laura Bell**

You yell at me with dried weeds and pizza.
I scream back with chapped flaking lips,
rotting flesh exfoliated by your gentle murder.
You look at the epitaph of the sheet marks on my
face as you hand me a bath towel to sop up the blood--
while you make Maypo and clip your nails.

Flat**by Franky Pettolina**

Flat.

That's what happened to my couch.

Flat. Those assholes.

We bought the beer.

They drank it.

Not that we didn't.

I mourn the loss of my couch.

She was a good couch.

Flat.

Many an afternoon was spent
with that couch.

We slept together.

It was never intimate though.

I mean I would still sleep
with other couches.

Bull, Wayne, Owens, and Fudd.

All guilty of not
pre-meditated couch killing.

Flat.

I'd give them the chair
if I was the judge.

"The chair for a couch," I'd say.

Flat.

Life goes on. I have another.

Couch that is.

Flat.

But not forgotten.

Chemistry of Mind

by Cerise Bennett

Effervescing spirit settles out of solution in blood
Drifting upward on a thought
Diffusing out of body.
No mass is lost, but loss is felt.
Spirit is immaterial, soluble in ether,
Seeping out of porous passageways of skin
To be encapsulated in tight orbs of air.

Soul floats like speech:
Remembered as images and impressions
Carved in mind;
Saturating every fiber of life and matter.
The body is a process for its synthesis: a covetous vessel of cells
to culture and nurture reason.

Soul is liquid thought and plasmic mind,
Saturating blood with life, flowing blue
Hidden beneath skin insulation.
We are reminded of mortality through pulse and arteries,
Red-streaked eyes, and the rotation of bones;
Flushed with shame or etched in skin--
The body remembers red.

Framed in valves and nerves and values,
Bottled and confined,
Persisting until death and then after...
The wisp of vital essence can be caught
And distilled into a few drops,
Out of the ash from the reliquary urn;
Released into the element of spirit.

Louderbackby **Beth Rosenberg**

I need a little pillow
 I need a little push
 why the extra noise?
 why the extra seats?

“there’s a saintly lady we all know
 planted people in a row
 came each day to watch them grow
 eeny meeny miney moe”

Ashes in the mixer, my wild Irish rose
 Lovin’ in the grinder
 poetry in the fall
 a rising crescendo of barking dogs and two degrees hotter
 than last summer
 There’s not much to it
 My eyelashes stick together
 Natural galleries of shame all tied together with long
 strips of meat
 Nothing to it
 Will someone read my diary now?

Smack and smile
 and shame shame shame
 There’s leaves and it’s windy but still hot and I don’t know
 How long does it take you to stink when you die?
 Before your insides start eating themselves?
 turn right at the corner then down down down
 until the stones start cutting your fingers
 Yes I am a lovely object (all the sick things I saw)
 Once upon a time
 No I am not a lovely object

Hey dog--are you digging up there?
 Party in the blender
 Hey dog--remember me?
 Smoke rising from the water

a god of angels and houseflies was my baby blue-eyed hope
 the knives of our brains all get wrapped in rags anyway
 the holes get wired shut
 It’s hard to hear and It’s hard to pay attention

As newspapers go, it was a good one
"Left behind a cat and a fern"
Pining away, so sad.

The same moon, the same stars
Clear unbroken sky

Ritual

by Sonny Regelman

"Hey, got the quarters?" I drop them
one by one into your hand. "Thanks."
You wink and turn toward the washer.
You shower my bras and your boxers
with Wisk and Clorox, weekly since
junior high, when our mothers would
go shopping, convinced they were college
roommates still. Now, a decade since and states away,
you spend half your nights on my couch, and
I remember how I called you the morning after
I lost mine, but you stopped by the very night
you and he finally . . .

And seeing you peel the t-shirt
over your head and toss it in, an afterthought,
lid slamming, the skin of your back glistens like
the dawn. Oh no. I dig for chuckling moments--
the time you trimmed your toenails
sitting in my sink, or called to say
K-Mart had my tampons on sale. The hushed moments--
nights I spent bawling on your bed over some
jackass, or all-nighters watching Lifetime movies
in silence because he cheated on you,
and you couldn't be alone.

But the canyon down your spine
still beckons. When you turn I see
all the places I want to bury my face--
curves and ridges, hollows that smell familiar, fresh--
transforming our laundry-mat
ritual with all these white slippery suds.
We, an us, could be so smooth so forever,
the most perfect union: our whites
have been tumbling together for years.

You approach, hand outstretched.
It's about time. Your tongue wets your
lips, eyebrows raised. "Bounce?"
I hand over the dryer sheets.
I'll never be what you want.

Rebuilding Mother

by Heather Mead

I. Recovery

He moves through the house--
a surgeon--extracting tumors,
malignant and benign,
looking for growths,
waiting for life.

I follow his footsteps
soaking up blood,
providing suction, irrigation,
whatever it takes to clean up the mess.

Agreeing silently to repaint remodel recarpet
re- re- re-
till nothing is as it was
till the house is as sterile
as the operating room
till neither show any sign of life.

II. Therapy

Hands hurt all the time now.
A once in a while pin prick
became continuous throbbing.
Wrists are bruised
and there is a bump on one.
It moves when I push it.
Veins are popped--
teal blue
ready to push through
transparent skin that shows nothing.
Grip is faulty
things drop, spill--
stains are hard to get out--
I give up trying.
But my nails have never been nicer.

III. Incision

I breathe chemicals
similar to the one's sprayed on potato bugs

but different--
these don't work.
The cut is made, blood spills
and I start running.
But I don't have shoes
and the floor is cold.
I crawl into a corner and wait for the word.
the bleeding baby won't stop staring--
she knows.
This is Sunday.
It is Pop-Pop's birthday.
This is not happening.
1:39 a.m.
"Bill, we've got a kidney for you."

IV. Prognosis

Our driveway is washed out--
again.
It is summer.
98 degrees.
98 per cent humidity
98 per cent sure
this is hell.

Workmen have been here two weeks
and haven't finished,
but already he's carrying the scalpel
outside--
I follow quickly
'cause I get to decide
what color to repaint
our world.

Scott Lomba

by Doug Plitt

I first met Jess' dad at their row house in South Philadelphia. It's not the greatest neighborhood, aesthetically speaking, but it's safe and it lacks the drug and gang activity prevalent in many other parts of the city. I walked in the front door and said hello to Scott Lomba. I was with my friend Dave who, at the time, had long hair. Jess' dad's first comment was, "Is that cool now? Is long hair cool? I keep seeing people with long hair who look like they think they're cool. Most of them dress like slob, too. Are you guys cool?" I don't remember if we answered yes or no, but the next time I saw him, Jess' dad's hair was a little bit longer.

Scott Lomba liked to flirt. I went to Jess' house several times with my friends Heather and Alex, and it always seemed to perk him up. He'd whip out his guitar and test out one or two of his new songs when we'd show up. One of his favorites was a song called "Oh Nicole." It was about the then-recently murdered Nicole Brown-Simpson. I remember laughing when he sang, "Oh Nicole, you're so cold." The line played upon the fact she was apparently a very frigid person, and, of course, she was very dead and thus quite cold, temperature-wise. He'd purposely ignore me and Jess when we'd leave, opting to say something to Heather and Alex like, "I'll be seeing you girls later, right?"

Scott Lomba's favorite pastimes were his music and his motorcycles. He had been in several bands in the Seventies and Eighties; they played in bars mostly, and at the houses of the band members. He was a big Harley-Davidson aficionado; when I first met him he was looking into buying a Road King, one of the biggest bikes in the Harley Davidson line. He seemed to despise the Japanese-made racing bikes. He called them "rice burners" and "crotch rockets." He finally saved up enough to buy the Road King. That was in the Spring of 1994.

I went to Jess' house soon after his dad purchased his new motorcycle. Scott Lomba was grinning like a little kid that day. He brought us outside and tore the leather tarp off the massive bike. It contrasted severely with the dingy South Philly surroundings; it was quite a spectacle. The thing was bright turquoise and white, garnished with chrome gadgets of all types and sizes; it shone in the sun like a chest full of treasures, and Jess' dad was beaming like a pirate.

When Jess was in high school his dad bought him a relatively small Yamaha, so Jess got pretty good at motorcycle riding. His dad didn't really want to ride his new Harley in the city, so he let

Jess keep it at school for a month or so. Jess liked to ride for fun on the rural roads around Ursinus, and everyone in our house got a ride on the back of it. It was fun.

Scott Lomba had planned to take the bike across country in the summer of '94 with his daughter Nicole. When summer rolled around, his health was such that a long motorcycle trip was not a possibility. They went by car instead. That summer Jess' dad had to sell the Road King to pay his growing medical bills, and Jess' tuition.

In October of 1994, Jess asked me if I wanted to go to Titusville, New Jersey to play music with his dad and his dad's two friends. I said "Sure," and so on an unusually warm day, after packing our guitars, Jess, Alex and I headed for New Jersey.

The house that we were playing at was that of Scott Lomba's girlfriend, a woman named Linda Rosuer. The house was designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright's, and it was beautiful. Much of the wall structure was cinder block, and the ceiling of the great room was made of staggered panels of mahogany. The kitchen was bordered by intricate iron railing from floor to ceiling, and the ceilings in the side rooms were pitched at impossible angles. During our tour of the house, Linda explained that the big problem with the house was its flat roof; it, like many of Frank Lloyd Wright's own designs, leaked. The water that came in stained the mahogany paneling.

We brought in our guitars and proceeded to set up in the great room among the scattered equipment of the Rubberheads. That was the name that Jess' dad and his friends went by. His friends were both named George; George McLean and George Kutemeyer. George Kutemeyer had a bunch of instruments, and they were all hooked up to a computer that made bass and drum tracks and also mixed and recorded all of the tracks. Both Georges played keyboards, and Jess' dad was the singer. After our guitars were plugged in, we started to play. Our only instructions were to play in the key of D, so right there we were inhibited in a major way. This meant that we had to play the same cord over and over, with no changes. It looked like the Rubberheads were having fun anyway, so we didn't complain.

Jess' dad lounged on the couch in his sweatsuit with his feet propped up on the coffee table, improvising lyrics. He wore those big slippers that look like grizzly bear feet, and he smoked little Hav-a-Tampa cigars. When he heard something he liked, he'd wave his cigar in the air like an orchestra conductor.

George McLean was a pudgy guy with bottle cap glasses, about fifty years old. His keyboard was on a stand, and he played it standing up. He wasn't very good, but that didn't stop him. He bopped around, tapping out off-key rhythms, and grinning like a

fool.

George Kutemeyer did the same, but he did it sitting down. Between songs he would tweak a couple knobs on his mixing board, changing the bass and drum lines, and put different effects on our guitars. He was a frail guy with grey hair; I later found out that he was a computer programmer.

We played all afternoon, breaking only to eat some meatball hoagies. They were very good, but the sauce was too oily and mine gave me indigestion.

While we didn't break any ground that day, musically speaking, we had a lot of fun just hanging out with Jess' dad and his friends. I can honestly say that I've never had as much fun with a group of fifty-year olds as I had that day in Titusville, New Jersey.

The next time I saw Scott Lomba was about a month ago. My friend Kate and I went to Jess's house to pick up Jess before going to a show at the Kyber Pass in Philadelphia. Jess' dad was then in the final stages of the cancer that would kill him a week later. He was in a wheelchair at the kitchen table, and he was in pain. He was moaning when we came in. There was a bag on the table with a small tube running out of it. The bag was filled with morphine; the stuff ran at a constant rate through the tube and into his chest via a needle inserted there. He tried to make small talk, but he didn't seem to have the strength to sustain a conversation. He sat with his forehead resting on his arms, and asked me how my guitar playing was coming. We soon went to the TV room, leaving Scott Lomba at the kitchen table.

That night at the Kyber Pass we saw three bands play. They were lousy for the most part, and the lead singer for the final band had long hair. I wished that night that Jess' dad was there to say, "Does this guy think he's cool?"

Scott Lomba died on Saturday, February 25th, 1995. He died of prostate cancer. He had been a soldier in Vietnam in the Army's 82th Airborne Division. He volunteered to go to Vietnam because he stood to get a higher ranking than soldiers who were drafted into service. His father told me that he thinks Agent Orange was the cause of his son's cancer.

At his funeral, the priest spoke of how his disease made him a more generous person before he died. George Kutemeyer got up and said a few words about how in Scott Lomba he lost a dear friend and a good singer/songwriter. I wanted to get up and say how I thought that Jess' dad was a great man for raising two kids by himself in South Philadelphia, but I was afraid I would cry.

The Acting Bug

by Christopher Wirtalla

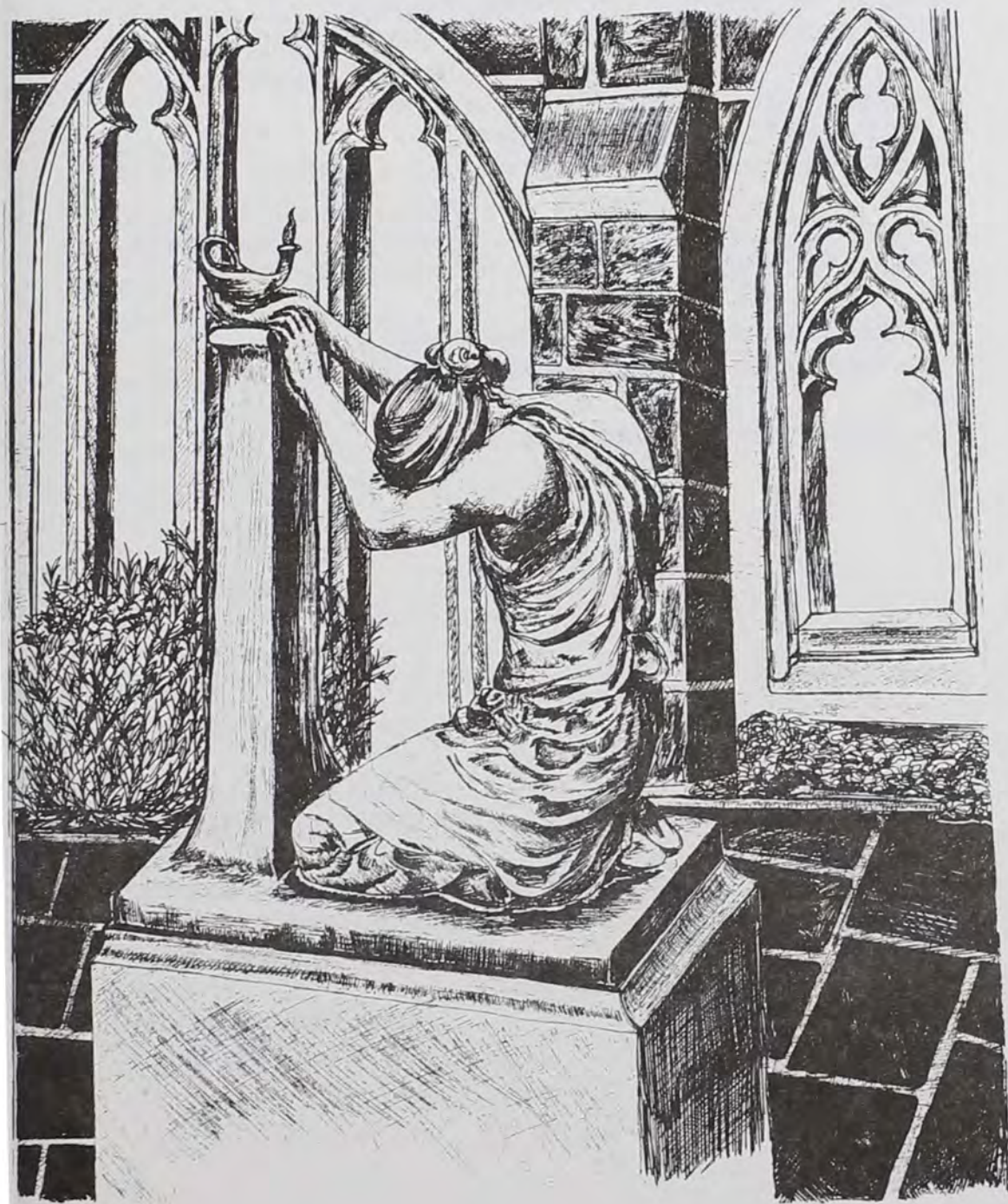
I grip my program as the hornet makes
its way along her sculpted whitened curls.
I wish I could roll the program and thwap
it but I wouldn't want to cause a scene.

The actor makes his way across the stage.
He plays a military officer,
uniform adorned with medals, face
expressionless--he's waiting for his cue.

I whisper to the woman, "S'cuse me, but
you have a hornet crawling on your head."
She nods and calmly grabs the bug. Without
a sound she gently guides it to the floor.

Soon I spot the hornet as it makes
its way around the actor's shaven head.
Leaving his fiance behind, he's off
to war--it's the most dramatic scene.

The stinger swiftly sinks into his scalp.
His face turns red as tears start streaming down
his cheeks. The crowd thinks he is marvelous!
I smile and agree because he didn't scream.



Untitled**by Sarah Webb**

Only just awoke

You watched the sun fall from its throne in the sky.

Leaving in its fiery wake lacy, crimson clouds

Like the train of a bride's gown whispering softly behind her

As she glides from the altar on velvet steps.

And you watched as the world rolled over to sleep,

Turning toward the dark arms of the night.

While the rising moon brushed the sky from a palette of black and silver,

You waited upon a prickly bed of grass burnt white from the day,

Sending silent prayers to heaven on the smoky wings of each breath,

Only there was no one awake to rest on your cheeks.

The ashy remains of hopes and wishes, covering your upturned face.

The charred bodies of angels going backwards.

The Seek

by Kristen Sabol

i think of my mother . . .
formless years; frozen-
behind be-brilliant eyes
lies broken, sad, darkened sighs.
in safety, still shadows
soft, side by side.

and i . . .

summers of polka-dot-nigh's
symphony of crickets,
sound my tiny ears;
tentative steps across
the green of tip-toe field.
my shadow
my safety
my slowly measured figures
on dirty smudged fingers.

exploding heartbeat panting
flee for home!
childlike fury--the innocent mind
chance versus chance
catch me
afraid and alone
find me
as i spring back in blackness
to hide behind my words

shallow. watching my white-waiting mother.
again, the hide and go seek days of summer.
FEAR in mine eyes as I plead:

pounding fist after fist-
insisting there has been no loss.

Gluttony

by Kristen Miskar

One boy, thin, alone, amazed,
Outside a restaurant
Watches people as they dine.

An old man and wife,
Steak, baked potato, green leafy stuff,
A jug of red wine.
The bald man with the shrimps and sauce,
Son with the burger and soup.
On every table, sauces, spices,
Baskets of butter and bread.

Desserts in a glass display,
Cherry, apple, lemon pies, spinning around
Chocolate, cheesecake, pastries.
The blonde in the red dress
Eating the cherry
With vanilla ice cream dripping over the top.

The boy wipes dirty hands on worn blue jeans,
And thinks back to a piece of bread two days ago.
Suddenly the fat man with a beard
Looks up from his meal.
He chuckles, bites a turkey leg.
For one scary second the boy imagines
The man running outside
Hoisting him up effortlessly
To bite into him next.
He turns quickly away.

Great South Bay

by Doug Plitt

I smell diesel, the price paid for the luxury
Of stretching full the length of the wood slat bench,
One foot above the chattering engine room hatch.
My bag is my pillow.

I hear the deck boy call "Tickets out for Bayshore,"
My cue to wedge my town employee pass into the splintered wood
At the foot of the bench. I'll be passed out when he reaches me.
He'll punch my card.

I hear the engine's drowsy drone, a sound contrasted
By the wind's whistle as it pierces through the spaces
In the salt-rotted molding around the windows.
But I'm cozy in my sweatshirt.

I feel sleep coming on as the old ferry chugs its way
Out of the marina. It motors up against the north wind
That blows white caps three miles from Long Island
To crash against the Clipper's creaking bow.

I work on the docks at Atlantique, recording boat names
And graciously accepting tips and beers from the sterns
Of Bayliners, boats designed for non-boaters. I know
That these are the boats and people that drove my father
Off the waters of the Great South Bay.

Archangel

by Erec Smith

The Visitation

"This is pretty boring, huh?"

I turned my head from the athletic director's speech to see a beautiful, fair-skinned redhead with bluish-grey eyes that mesmerized me so much that it seemed like they were the ones talking to me. Her head was tilted to the right as she slightly swayed back and forth, and the wind played with her hair. She had lips that couldn't help but smile.

"Yeah, it's pretty fucking boring."

"What brings you here?"

"I play a sport," I said.

She rolled her eyes. "I figured that, it's a sports banquet. I mean, what sports do you play?"

"Football, track, basketball occasionally. I hope to get a scholarship at either Westmont or Hamonton."

"Really," she said. "I got accepted to Hamonton, too. I like its English program."

"Well, what a coinkidink," I said. "That's the main reason why I applied."

We looked at each other for a while. A long while, now that I think of it. She finally broke the silence.

"What do you like about English?" she said.

"I want to be a writer," I said.

"Really? What do you want to write about?"

"Mysterious people I meet at picnics."

She laughed. I felt good. Her eyes shifted to my feet and slowly climbed my body. I looked around the park to pretend I didn't notice.

"I never met a guy with dreds before," she told me.

"Have you ever met a black person at all?"

"Of course," she insisted, "this isn't Berlin."

I smiled. "You'd be surprised. Maybe just to be on the safe side you can get to know me a little more. My name's Steven." I extended my hand for her to shake. She extended hers, and I grabbed her fingertips and shook them lightly. I think her smile was a suppressed laugh.

"My name's Angel."

"Angel," I repeated. "Have you mysteriously shown up to watch over me?"

"Actually, my cousin's getting some kind of award or something, but we can go with the angel thing if you're into that kind of shit."

"Well then, Angel, maybe we should go off and make a little

picnic of our own."

"Aren't you gonna get some kind of award, too?"

"Whether I get it now or later, it's still mine."

"Whatever."

We walked together down into the more wooded area of the park. It was a beautiful summer afternoon. The willow trees gave us sanctuary from the searing August sun. A flock of wrens flew away as we approached the bench. I sat down right under a spot where the sun managed to shine down through an opening in the canopy of leaves and limbs. I played the gentleman role and dusted off the seat for her, displaying the improved seat as if it were a prize on *The Price is Right*.

"Don't get corny on me, now," she said as she sat down.

"Sorry." I leaned back on the bench and squinted at her. "So, where you from?"

"That way," she said as she pointed behind my head.

"You're from a town called That Way?"

"Yeah," she said with a straight face.

I looked at her but she looked away into the willows. After a few seconds I realized that she wasn't going to tell me. "Are you that ashamed of where you're from?"

"Yeah, in fact, let's not ever go there. That is, if we see each other again. Let's change the subject." She looked at me but when she saw the confused look on my face she diverted her eyes to my hair, again. "How do you get your hair like that?"

I grabbed a dread and twirled it with my finger. "You just braid it, you know."

"Well, what would happen if you unbraided it?"

"Have you ever seen any old clips of the Jackson Five?"

She busted out in laughter and I just watched her, not exactly smiling, but amused at her sudden outburst. "Are you laughing at my afrocentricity?"

"Ha-ha. AFRO! Ah-ha-ha."

I looked around the park. She was catching the attention of passers-by and I waved as they continued on their way.

"I'm sorry," she said as the last remaining chuckles dispersed. "Just picturing you with an afro. Oh, the humanity. That ridiculous shit."

"Oh, and I suppose black people are here to amuse you."

She looked at me. "Oh, Steve, I'm sorry. I--I just. I'm sorry." She put her hand on mine. "I can be really inconsiderate at times. I'm so sorry."

"Don't worry about it," I said, feeling the touch of her hand more than I was hearing the sound of her words. "It's not that big of a deal."

She was watching the birds fly from one branch to the other

and I got caught up in it, too. I shielded the sun with my hand.

"I wish I was as free as the birds," she said.

"Don't get corny on me, now."

"I'm serious," she continued. "They can just go wherever they want, whenever they want. They can say, well, chirp, what they please. Best of all, they don't care about what the other birds chirp about them. I don't think they think bad thoughts at all." She stood up on the bench as if trying to get closer to the birds.

"Aren't we acting a little peculiar," I said. I watched her standing on the bench, looking straight up into the trees. She was very beautiful from all angles. "I'll buy you a parakeet for your birthday, how about that?"

Then she turned and looked down at me. The rays from the sun directly behind her made it look like there was a golden halo around her head as she looked down at me with those beautiful eyes. "I'd rather have lovebirds," she said to me.

"Would you like to go out on a date with me?" I finally got the composure to ask her.

She looked at me for a bit, and then slowly nodded her head.

The Denny's Incident

The club we went to two nights later was packed. She impressed me with how wild she was on the dance floor. She insisted on staying till the club closed. I didn't mind one bit; seeing her dance in those short shorts and mid-length shirt was enough to keep me there all night. She twirled around like some Dionysian Maenad ready to rip someone apart in a lustful frenzy, but I wanted to get into her head and talk more. I was glad to get something to eat afterwards, and Denny's was the most convenient place to go.

"Cool," she said as we walked in. "It's pretty empty."

"You know, since you're here with me, they'll probably wait forty minutes to seat us and another hour to serve us our food, after they spit in it, of course."

Right as I finished my statement a waitress came over to seat us. Angel gave me that 'AH-HA YOU'RE WRONG' look as she passed me to follow the waitress. She sat us in a nice two-seater, gave us water and menus, and left.

"You have fun tonight?"

"That was sooo cool," she answered as she leaned toward me. "I love techno, don't you?"

"I like rap better."

"Oh." She leaned back in her seat. "Well, I don't like rap. Except the Beastie Boys. And M.C. Serch."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. You don't like rap but you like Beastie Boys and M.C. Serch?"

"Yeah."

"How about House of Pain?"

"Yeah, they're alright."

"What's the difference between their rap and the rest of the rap? Okay, I can understand the Beastie Boys. They're like making their own music with real instruments and all that shit. But it's rap. Rap is rap. The only difference is that the ones you like are white and the others are black."

"Well," she said as she slightly shrugged. "there's a difference. I don't like that rough stuff."

"You don't like rough stuff but you like House of Pain. Hello? Is anybody home?" I had the urge to knock on her forehead, but I suppressed it.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Let's just change the subject, alright?"

"Fine." I took a swig of water. "It's just weird that's all."

"Well, my taste in music is weird."

"I love the way you say weird."

She rested her head in her left palm. "What?"

"I love the way you say weird," I repeated. "I do."

"Weird, weird, weird."

"Don't say it too much; it'll lose its magic."

The waitress came up to our table with a wad of gum in her mouth and got right to business. "What do ya want?"

As Angel ordered I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, a triad of preps in a booth across from us, with grins of anticipation. I turned toward them, but they put their heads down.

"What about you?" asked the waitress.

As I looked at the menu, I could feel the gazes. This time I could hear chuckles that even made Angel look over at them. The waitress' impatient gum-smacking reminded me of my initial duty.

"I'll have the turkey and cheese melt . . ."

"Ahh," said one of the preps, hitting himself on the forehead.

"Pay up," said the guy on the opposite side of the booth.

I turned to them with a curious smile as I told the waitress what I wanted to drink. She took our menus and walked away.

"Excuse me," I said. "If you don't mind me asking, what are you guys cracking up about?"

As the one who apparently lost the bet fumbled clumsily with his wallet, I realized they had all been drinking.

"Come on," I coaxed. "You can tell me." I looked at Angel who was shaking her head and smiling.

The winner said, "He bet me you would order chicken. He-he, but you didn't."

The non-gambler rolled his eyes and rested his head on the table to hide his face. The loser looked away and laughed at his friend's audacity. I actually thought it was kind of funny. "Well,

we don't all live on chicken and grits, Biff, but it was a nice try. How much did you bet?"

"Are you gay?" said Biff.

"No, but if you're into that I think there's a bar on Chestnut--."

"Are you a lesbian?" he asked Angel. His friend kept his head down, while the other still hid in his uncontrollable hysterics."

"No," said Angel in a 'What-the-fuck-is-wrong-with-you' tone of voice.

"Then what the fuck are you doing with him?"

That was when I got offended. My smile faded into a look void of emotion. Angel looked around the restaurant as if to make sure no one was listening.

"I mean, you must have pretty low self-esteem to date a--."

The embarrassed one raised his head. "I'm sorry," he said. "When he drinks he's just an asshole."

The asshole: "Hey, if you can't get a date I'm always free."

I got a weird rush in my chest as he said this. Angel just stared at him as he stared back at her. "Ah, I think it's time I kicked your ass." I stood up and looked at my watch. "Yes, it's time I kicked your ass. Why don't you come outside, asshole?"

"Why don't we just stay in here?" He stood up and looked me dead in the eyes, making me more angry.

"I suggest you both leave," said a voice out of nowhere. We all looked to see a pretty big guy with a tag that said, "Manager: Tom" on his left shoulder. "Or things are gonna get real tough."

"You seem more like a bouncer than a manager," I said. "You know there's a bar on Chestnut--."

"Get Out," roared Tom. "And no fighting anywhere around here, alright?"

Angel was staring at her glass of water in deep contemplation. I figured she was embarrassed for me. I forgot about the asshole and Tom. "Don't worry about it," I said. "That's not the first time I had to deal with shit like that. Okay?"

She nodded as her eyes looked from side to side. "Yeah, yeah," she said.

"Let's go." She stood up and I took her hand. I stared at the asshole until I got to the door. He stared back with a sinister smile.

Nightcap

As I drove home there was too much silence. Angel finally spoke up.

"It must be a pain in the ass to go through that shit all the time."

I shrugged. "Yeah, well, I'm used to it."

"Assholes like that should have their pee holes glued shut."

Her statement got a chuckle out of me. "Well, in that case, three-fourths of the country would die of exploding bladders."

"Three-fourths is a lot, don't you think?"

The anger left over from the Denny's incident seemed to enhance my bluntness. "Not really. I mean, thoughts like that asshole's are the norm for a lot of people."

"But three-fourths? That's a pretty gross generalization."

"Well, it's your country."

"What?"

"It's your country."

"What are you talking about?"

We came to a red light, which gave me a chance to look straight at her when I talked. "Well, let's take the crime stigma. People like to think that all black people are like, kleptomaniacs or something, whoever he or she is. Of course, there are many black people who do steal, but there are white people, Hispanic people, etcetera, who steal too. A white person could go on an insane, three month, robbing and killing spree and people would say that there was something wrong with that guy. That one guy. If a black person steals a stick of gum from Wawa it's like 'Oh, you gotta watch out for those black people'. It's bullshit."

"Well, that's because people see the news and movies, and they just get that image in their heads. It doesn't make it right, but-."

"And the media's another thing," I blurted. "The easiest criminals to point out in the movies are space aliens, Nazis, and black people. Well, in recent years it's gotten better, but there's still that memory of some thug in some movie from some year that sits in people's minds forever and--." I stopped talking and noticed the stressed look on Angel's face. It was the kind of look you have after running a mile; her head was tilted to the side and slightly backwards and her jaw hung lazily. She looked like she wanted to say, "God, Steve, will you fucking relax?" I accepted the implication of her look.

"I'm sorry," I said as I put my hand on her knee. "Maybe not three-fourths of the country, but it's enough to perturb a guy. Let's just forget about it, sound good to you?"

Her lips curled into a smile. "The light's green."

Twenty minutes later we pulled into my driveway. I turned off the engine and looked at her. "You know, if you'd let me take you home you wouldn't have to waste gas or fall asleep behind the wheel or any of that shit."

"I told you before, I'm very, very ashamed of where I'm from. Very ashamed."

"But you won't even tell me the name of the town."

"I'm very ashamed of it, Steven."

"Yeah, but you could at least--."

"Very ashamed," she repeated sternly.

"But--."

"Very ashamed," she said, again. Her eyes looked like they were made of stone. Beautiful stone, of course.

I gave in. "Okay, fine. Could you give me your phone number?"

She just looked at me with a blank expression on her face.

"Wow," I said as I unfastened my seatbelt. "I feel really sorry for you."

"Don't worry about it."

We got out of my car and I walked her to hers. We stopped on the driver's side and she smiled at me as she pulled her purse strap further up her shoulder.

"It was a cool and interesting night," she said.

"It can still be cool, and interesting," I said, looking into her eyes. They glistened in the street lights like in the movies. I smiled.

We didn't say much to each other for a while; we just looked at each other. Her almost ethereal beauty, her crimson hair shining in the lights swaying slightly in the wind--for a second, I couldn't believe I was with her. God, she was so amazing to me. I felt like all I needed to do was look at her, and have her look back at me the way she was, with those eyes and that unintentional smile she seemed to have. I felt like we were already making love.

She finally broke the silence. "Would you like to kiss me?" she finally asked.

"Will you kiss me back?"

She leaned forward and kissed me right on the side of my neck. I could feel the warmth of her lips on my skin well into the next day. My eyes closed and my head tilted back slightly, as if she was sucking the soul out of me. I looked at her and ran my fingers over her pale skin. I loved touching her; I could be content with just caressing her all night. She smiled with closed lips.

"What's so amusing?" I asked.

"I left some lipstick on your neck."

"Damn you," I said sarcastically as I untucked her shirt. I ran my hand along her waist hoping that she couldn't detect my trembling. I felt a chain and I looked down to see a gold chain around her waist. Below it and to the right, just above her pelvis, was a tattoo of a dove.

"Nice decorations," I said.

"Do you like it?" she said in a soft, sensuous tone.

"I'm wondering how it tastes." I looked into her eyes. "Come inside with me, please."

"What about your parents?"

"They're already inside."

She rolled her eyes. "Will they mind?"

"No. Even if they did, it would be a small price to pay."

I took her by the hand and walked her to the house. The moon was full and it had this wonderful white aura around it. For a fleeting moment I was struck by the fear that what was happening was too perfect and real, but I chased it away; there was no way I was going to have this moment ruined. I did that frequently with Angel.

180 Degrees

The shadows of the trees in my backyard hovered over us like some dark spirit. It seemed to have possessed Angel. She didn't seem her usual self as she sat in the lawn chair next to me, staring morbidly at the expanse of other lawns. I took another sip of iced tea.

"You're really depressing me," I said. She said nothing. "Is something going on in that shit town of yours?"

She raised her hand at me. "Steve, just. . ."

"What's wrong?" I asked. "You can tell me, you know. We're going to be students at Hamonton College in about a week, which means we can deal with anything." I put my hand on hers and wondered why she pulled her hand away.

"Angel, what is it?" A grave feeling came over me. I wondered if I really could handle what was about to happen.

"Steve." She paused for a bit, then continued. "I don't think we should see each other anymore."

I pretended not to be devastated. "Why?" I asked solemnly. "Why?"

"I just feel that it'll be hard for us to keep up a relationship while in college, that's all."

I laughed. "That's all? We're going to the same college. What's the problem?"

"I think we need our space."

I looked around for something to say, or for some sign to tell me this was a joke or a dream. I looked back at Angel, who was still staring straight ahead. I wondered if this was the same person I had been hanging out with since the banquet.

"Okay, okay," I said. "I know we've only been dating for two weeks, and I might be a moron, but last night you told me you loved me. I kind of believed you, too. I didn't believe you the first four times you told me, but the one last night, I kind of believed that one. But now all of a sudden, you need your space?"

She said nothing but nodded. Her gaze remained the same.

"Did you find someone else?"

She shook her head.

"You're leaving me for no one," I said more to myself than to her. "This is really getting to me, Angel. Could you help me out a little? Why?"

She took a deep breath as she looked up at the partly cloudy sky. Then she looked at me with a coldness I never thought she could have. "I just have to do this, Steven," she told me like a mother preaching a hard fact of life to her child. "Some things work, others don't. Just, please, let me do this."

I waited until I was sure my voice wouldn't tremble and crack before I spoke again. "I suppose you want to 'still be friends', huh?"

"Actually, I think maybe we should stay away from each other for a bit, just to help things go a little smoother." She stood up. "I have to go. I'm sorry. You'll get over me quickly, believe me."

I looked down at the patio floor. I saw her purse ascend and dangle. She said something to the effect of goodbye and I heard her steps and the cement and then the grass crinkle under her feet until the sound faded out. I just stared downward for awhile. The shadows spread into the night and the temperature dropped, and the sky was starless, no illumination but a bug zapper in the neighbor's yard.

The Truth

Walking along a brick path my first week at Hamonton one night, after a light rain, I met a group of students. One of them was Angel. We noticed each other right away. I stopped but she kept walking. When she passed me I said her name. She stopped in her tracks and stood for a few seconds before turning around. Her friends stopped to wait for her.

"She'll catch up," I said.

"Okay," said some tall blonde kid. "We'll be in the car, Ang."

I waved goodbye and they just looked at me. I turned my attention back to Angel.

"So you go by Ang around these parts, huh?" I asked.

"My real name is Angela. Sometimes I drop the A to make it sound more--"

"More deceiving?"

"Look, I gotta go. My friends are waiting for me."

I stepped toward her. Despite everything, her face was beginning to mesmerize me again. "Well, can I talk to you later?"

"Ah, I'm really busy."

"Well, can I call you, or do you hate where you live here, too?"

"Actually, my phone hasn't been hooked up yet."

"Of course."

Suddenly Angel backed away from me. I noticed her eyes darting from me to something behind me. I turned to see an

average looking college student. He gave me a nervous smile as he passed by. It was then that it hit me. A grand revelation was made known to me by some divine light. I looked at Angel with a face that seemed to enlighten her to my enlightenment.

"Angel, Angela, whatever the hell your name is, could you do me one favor? Answer a question for me?"

"What?" she said impatiently.

"Where do you live?"

She rolled her eyes and looked at me. "Maddonfield, Steven, Maddonfield."

I laughed when she told me. "Maddonfield, huh? Good, clean, wholesome, Republican, Protestant Maddonfield. Tell me, how many black people live in Maddonfield?" She looked away. "I would have been the only one, period, if I would have driven you home, huh? And you don't like rappers unless they're white, and you do believe everything you see in the movies, and those guys at Denny's didn't embarrass you, they got to you. And now you gotta go about your merry way. You just had to sow some wild oats and get some of that taboo curiosity out of you. Am I on the right track here, Ang?"

Throughout my little tirade Angel's demeanor seemed to wane a little.

"I'm sorry, Steven," she said with enough sincerity to disturb me.

"Just why? Why? Why would you fuck me like that? Why me?"

At that second her friends honked the horn. She waved to them and turned back to me. "I--I just gotta go, okay." She turned and strode briskly to the Jeep.

I watched her walk the whole way. I saw her get into the Jeep and drive away. I saw her face looking down at me with the sun to her back. I saw her fingers run up and down her glass of water at Denny's. I saw her eyes, her eternal smile, her hair, her tattoo. I felt her kiss and I heard her tell me she loved me. Then I realized that in that last conversation she ceased to be angelic. Her hair was probably dyed and the tattoo was probably a rub-on. Indeed, she wasn't an angel. She was Angela. And I was a sucker.

Suburban Zeus

by Erin Gorman

Landscapes of mid-summer suburbs flood
with roaring fire hydrants, pregnant plants
and children slick with cotton candy sweat.
A watercolor Monday after dawn--
street hushed except for buzz of central air--
one girl in cut-offs and a halter top
hangs out bed clothes. Then something like a swan
careening south from Murray's Gas and Go
swoops the girl away from laundry lines,
aluminum siding and barbecues.
O'Reilly in his vinyl chair engrossed
in underwear and sports looks up
to see the neighbor's girl astride the swan.
He dials 911, yelps like a dog.
When questioned by police, he's lost his tongue
in the garden and is left to look,
without glasses, dawn till dusk, among weeds.

Someday this could be you so don't believe
yourself immune because your dad is town
commissioner or brandishes assault
rifles or runs the local SuperFresh.
There are swans that lurk in garbage cans.
Just ask Leda or her children. They know.
Or read the Times, between Miss Manners and sports.
Do we really know whose eyes are in the oak
that shadows the front yard and watches us
undress? What Olympian playboy comes
to the window late at night and calls,
"Come out in your fresh, white, linen dress.
Quickly--my wife will soon be missing me!"

Vespers**by Jim Maynard**

Dusk is a dangerous time,
when the rose embers of sunset
fade into the gritty ashes of night;
when shadows lengthen before the lighting
of street lamps, the flame of the candles
first reflecting mirror-like
in the darkening window.
Now is the interlude of fear;
a faint flickering of faith and
we're all cringing at possibilities,
the randomness of time and chance.
Drawn inward by the shadows, we rarely
find the light to lead us out of doubt.
But I know the greatest of prayers,
and as your hand grasps mine to bridge the void
my world is lit by the brightest of suns.

At change of A-dress**by Kristen Sabol**

Mindlessness--
the old man
plaid-panders pants
in the store
staring stoned-starry
stuttering, scuffling shoes.
while over jewels,
nervous, disconcerted
i wait, hating and baiting,
bemused and befuddled.
workshirted workwoman
stops dirt-shorted,
fingers lace
with scuttling
samples and shivers
of face mimicking
mannequins made-up
(too much) more and more
make-up maladies
maligned and startled
at each find.
behind the rainbow-lined
pot-belly pot of gold,
i press and fold
plastic bags
while fat-pursed hags
handle harness hapless.
the bags sound
sane soft
deflated,
fizzle and drizzle
rising like rain.
(i pain to feign
interest in business.)
size fourteen lean
and inbetween:
believe and relieve.
form hazy lazy wasted days
i long and craze
within this maze
at change of a-dress
for change of address:
yes, mindlessness.

The Hierarchy of Coolness

by John Barbour

It isn't everybody who can consider themselves a divine individual. Nor am I saying that I actually believe that I am divine. I do believe that I have something about me which is special. What I am talking about is something which I call the Hierarchy of Coolness. As I sit back in my dorm room with Gloria Kramer, the blondest of blondes at Star College, on my arm, it is obvious that she knows I'm cool. Gloria admires the zebra skin rug on my floor. She loves the large, velvet, glow-in-the-dark Elvis tapestry on my wall. The combination of love beads at my doorway and the fire-engine-red lava lamp on my desk makes her illuminate with happiness. She leans back on my bean bag with me and asks, "Ernie Schunke, how did you get so cool?"

This isn't the first time some wide-eyed babe has asked. So whenever this question comes up, I light up one of my Cuban cigars, and I tell the story of how I obtained this machismo prowess. Yes, partly thanks to my inherent coolness and partly thanks to a guy named Stu Stansky, I elevated my own status to this higher level. I tell Gloria that it was in the fifth grade when I, Ernie Schunke, a slick, pre-pubescent chick magnet, realized that I was unlike any other fifth grader that ever stepped in Mrs. Webb's class.

It started when Rick Wilson, my pal and fellow girlie hound, gave me the invite with the racing car on the cover, my ticket to the coolest party of the year at the "Roll-o-Rama" that coming Saturday, "In Celebration of Rick's Zoomin Birthday." I remember closing my locker and strutting past Eileen McManus as my five dollar Risky Business sunglasses swung on the fluorescent green string sunglass holder which I always wore around my neck. I saw Rick down at the end of the hall. I yelled to him to tell his mom that I'd be there. I knew everybody would be there: Eileen McManus, the Fagooti sisters, and all the other babes in the class. I also knew that I would be in the limelight -- I always was. But one thing I also knew was that I couldn't skate. I thought it didn't matter though. I was cool. So as I put my thumb in my pocket as The Fonz did on "Happy Days," I strutted off, and I knew that somehow everything would be cool at Ricky's party. On my way home, sitting in the way back of the bus, I dreamed of looking like a John Travolta superfly on rollerskates that coming Saturday.

When Saturday rolled around I was psyched. I woke up about 10:00, jumped in the shower, and then began to build the epic cool guy. I put on my tube socks first. After the tighty whities, of course. Then I walked over to my brother Hank's stereo and put on my Twisted Sister album, "Stay Hungry." I won that album at

the dance we had a week past. I slid on my sleek cherry red parachute pants. I thought Eileen would be wetting her little panties over those. Whenever parachute pants were accompanied by a velour V-neck pullover there was no telling what would happen. I went down to the bathroom to do my hair. I blew it dry and brushed it just right so that the part was perfectly down the middle, and the macho feathered look splashed down the sides. As I grabbed my acid-washed jeans jacket I realized I had forgotten one last ingredient to the babe monster. I can see me now, running up the stairs and into my room to grab that smooth-smelling Jovan musk. This would be the key to the hearts of those little girls with those budding chests.

As my Mom pulled into the parking lot I told her to let me out by the exit. I didn't want the guys seeing my mom. Cool dudes didn't have moms. The minute my Run-DMC Adidas with the fat laces hit the pavement, the panther was on the prowl. I went up and gave Ricky his present as soon as I got there. He was waiting for all his guests to arrive outside. "Here ya are buddy," I said.

"Thanks man. What did ya get me?" Ricky said.

"It's that Weird Al Yankovick tape you wanted."

"Cool. Go on in. My mom will get you your skates."

At that moment I was struck with a jolt of fear. I couldn't skate. I shook it right off, though. Maybe I could get by without looking too dumb. Maybe I could blend in without doing too much skating. I thought these types of thoughts and then kicked open the door. Yes. "Jammonit" was playing on the speakers and lo and behold, I knew the words. I lip-synched my way over to Mrs. Wilson. I walked with a determined strut, making sure that I advertised my knowledge of the joint. Mrs. Wilson hooked me up with a killer pair of skates. I threw the skates over my shoulder and scoped the place for a spot to put them on. I stepped back and grooved over to where Eileen was putting on her skates.

"Hey, Ernie. How are ya?" she said. I loved the way she looked in her Madonna starter kit. That white spandex skirt accompanied by the white laced top and black training bra underneath drove me wild. She had to have thirty or forty of those little rubber o-ring bracelets and she had a pair of long, dangling rhinestone earrings that screamed "Material Girl." She was so hot I thought her foxy little tail was almost too fine for even me.

"O.K. I'll be ready to cruise in a few." I was kicking back waiting for the boys.

"All right, Ernie. See ya on the floor."

"I'll catch up with ya, babe." I looked over and saw Terrell and the other guys playing Pac-Man in the Space Room. I laced up my skates nice and tight. I placed one foot on the floor and tried to elevate myself. As I stood like a young fawn strutting out its

first steps my wheels were ready to roll before my body. The left foot went north and the right went east, slamming me to the floor. I made it look like it was an acrobatic move even I was amazed at. Once again I rose to my feet and with the bass booming in my ears I Chaka-Kahned my way over to the fearsome five.

"Yo E, what's up?" Terrell said.

"Nothing, man. Are we gonna get funky today or what?"

"Word. Let's get busy." As he said this he pulled out his pick and yanked it through his nappy head. At this point I really shifted into my ultimate fresh mode.

As I fandangoed onto the floor all eyes were on me. I was the disco kid. I spun into the middle of the dance circle and pulled off a stumbling, windmill type near-fall. I bounced off the wall straight backward into the middle again where Stu Stansky, Rick's older brother's best friend was sliding with some babe. The circle of people's faces sped by my view until Stu Stansky gave me a hard shove in the other direction. My momentum carried me upward and with a miraculous lucky leap I vaulted right over the gorgeous Fagooti sisters. The circular crowd erupted with applause as my accidental stunts multiplied. Upon landing, I began to pummel downward to the floor and then, putting my hands out to brace me, the move of all moves was sprung. With the apparent grace of a clydesdale, I cart-wheeled over and landed back on all eights (wheels). I reached over and tried to regain my balance by grabbing Rick's sister and while I whizzed by her with a swooping motion, I pulled off her skirt, exposing her very red unders. I pummeled quickly into the railing and came to a dead stop. The place exploded with excitement and the sounds of compliments showered my ears. I decided then that I must have looked amazing.

"Hold up. I got to take a whiz." I yelled back to the crowd which yearned for more. I looked over and noticed Rick's older brother's best friend Stu Stansky skating into the Bathroom. That must be where the cool guys hung out. I worked the floor on my way over to the bathroom. I pulled myself in to the bathroom and over to the sink. Stu looked at me laughed. I laughed back. Mutual coolness. I got up a little speed as the slope in the floor gave me a little boost en route to the toilet. As I sped past the urinals and past the various phone numbers on the wall and past the "Pete loves Kathy" engraved in the hand blower, my Risky Business shades flailed wildly in the wind. Swiftly, I cruised onward toward the tidy bowl in the corner. With a wicked awesome flip in the air induced by the drain in the floor, I turned and exploded into a double summersault and then head first into the toilet. As I quickly rose and shook out my ammonia-stained hair I looked around and leaned over on the flusher. The stereo was

playing Abba, "Dancing Queen." I fired my way out of the bathroom and into the lobby. All eyes were fixed on me and although my vision was blurred and my ears were clogged, I thought I heard Martha Fagooti say something about blood. I looked down at my hands and saw my own blood mixing with the ammonia.

"You busted your melon wide open," Stu Stansky said. The place erupted with my buddies chanting "Er-nie, Er-nie."

"Well, I took the act into the john, Stu." A crowd of guys gathered around me and were amazed that I took it to that extreme. I played it off like it was purposeful. My head was ringing but the high fives soothed me. I saw Stu explaining to the fellas how I saved the best move for the can. I was some sight with all that blood and everyone there knew I was the baddest of the bad, the chilliest of the chill, the suavest of the suave.

I exchanged my skates for my Adidas, waved off Mrs. Wilson's help, and went over to thank Ricky. With each step on my way out of the party I sang "The Winner Takes it All" by Abba, along with the Roller D.J. Dave selection. I put on my Risky Business shades just before I made my exit. I would never see the disco ball or the large neon "Roll-o-Rama" sign over the rink again. That was the last helping of Ernie Schunke the Roller Skating world would ever get.

You see, those moves hurt me bad. But they were well worth it. I very rarely feel any pain from that injury today. The only thing that still effects me is how my head aches so bad from bright lights. Do you mind if I turn these lights down a bit, Gloria?

As I shut out the lights with my girl on my side in utter coolness, and slide my arm around her, I conclude the story in the same way I always do. I laugh in a self-deprecatory way and say, "Gloria, that is how I became so cool. When I overcame a spill in the shitter that year and still managed to maintain my status as being cool, I realized I was special. I was above and beyond the in-crowd. I was the apex of the hierarchy of coolness."

She looks up at me with those awestruck baby blues, and the time is right. Now I lean over and put the moves on Gloria Kramer. Moves which only a guy at the top of the hierarchy of coolness would know.



The Apology

by Heather Mead

When you left that night
slamming doors and squealing tires
I wanted to feel the charge too.
To understand the release
that comes from breaking.
So I grabbed the gold frame,
the only smiling picture of us tucked inside,
and threw it at the mirror.
The action was simple, primal, male;
my arm was a lightning bolt--
exact, merciless, a force of nature,
but my face was serrated and fell to the floor.
I knew you weren't coming back.

Until you were drunk.
And wanted to make up.
But I wanted to feel you then,
so I slid into your black t-shirt
and while I was looking for it
I found your cigarettes,
and I held one low between my fingers--
like you.
I lit it and let it burn
because it smelled like you.
I burned three cigarettes
and the smoke said
You were never coming back.

I went to the bathroom for a tissue.
As I waded through your damp towels
I saw your silver razor.
I clasped it and marveled at its power.
It touched you everyday, oblivious
to the skin it moved over; I never was.
And I wanted to be that razor,
caress you, cut you,
make you victim to my touch,
because you need that razor
more than you need me
and I didn't want it to matter
I wanted to be cold and exact and metallic.

So I'm sorry I broke the razor
and I'm sorry I broke the mirror.
I'll buy a new frame
and yes, the scars will spell
your name but so did the cuts,
and it really doesn't hurt,
it's just my bicep.
And I'll clean the bathroom,
it was my turn anyway.

I Know it is Evening There

by Michael Donohue

I smell only brine as I cross over the dunes.
The very beach I longed to visit
last summer is frozen before me --
Not as I described it to you then.

The sand feels hard, awkward beneath my boots
as I trudge towards this eerie, aged shipwreck.
The New Year's wind rips at my cracked face and bloody lips.
I bet there is snow where you are.

The mast stands tall over me as a memorial planted
in the sands. Are there souls buried with the hull?
Did they have lovers across this ocean too; or did they perish
on their home shore? I lean against the corroded spar and stare

seaward hearing nothing but howling wind.
How odd to stand at the water's edge and not hear
the surf. There are white caps as far as the horizon.
Will we cross this line again? Although it is noon here.

I know it is evening there.
Can you still find Orion like I showed you?
I know it is evening.
Can you here the angelus ringing?

Pride**by Scott Vida**

Late at night, we lie.
A cool breeze enters
through the hotel window.
She crosses her arms
over her breasts.
We stare at the
stucco ceiling above us.
Finally, she speaks,
"What's wrong with you,
why do you act that way?"

It's like this, Tina.
When that guy started
massaging your shoulders,
I stood up in my seat.
My heart pounded,
my hands shook.
I heard nothing
and saw nothing
except his hands
and your shoulders.
I just stared.
Even when he tried to talk
to me about baseball,
I just stared
with drawn eyes,
until he shut up.
Like the reformed alcoholic
who gives in
to that one drink,
I went off the deep end.
I'm sorry.

Seconds have passed.
I fumble my hands together.
I can neither move nor lie still,
cannot even swallow.
She asks again,
"Why were you acting
that way tonight?"
"Why don't you ask him!"

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