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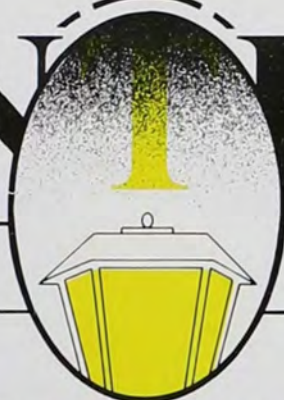
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THE LANTERN

Ursinus College's Literary Magazine

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Thomar Devine--SHE WAS A WOMAN OF DIGNITY	3
Laura Devlin--RETAKE, SCENE 16	4
Elaine Tucker--LAS VEGAS SWEATSHIRT	5
Chris Bowers--PITCHER HILL	6
Sonny Regelman--IN PREPARATION FOR WISDOM (TEETH)	14
Torre Ruth--MOIST SLACKS	15
Marc Peterman--ARTWORK	16
Erin Gorman--MY MOTHER'S PURSE	17
Willie Simpson--IT COMES AND GOES EVERYDAY	18
Ellen Cosgrove--THE SIMPLICITY OF MARRIAGE	19
Richard Stead--THE FIRST PERFORMANCE	21
Annette Rawls--HUNGER	22
Jim Maynard--PUSHKIN'S DREAM	23
Heather Mead--TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19	24
Harley David Rubin--THE POETRY OF BASEBALL	25
Thomar Devine--ARTWORK	26
Craig Faucher--SOME THINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT...	27
Kristen Sabol--MUSICIAN	34
Kraig Bano--OF WHAT BEFELL...	35
Angie Zerbe--PIRANHA	37
Jennifer Vigliano--OCEANS APART	38
Thomar Devine--BROOKLYN CANTOS	40
Rebecca Heyl--PHOTOGRAPH	42
Sonny Regelman--SNOWSHOWER	43
Alexis Smith--THANKFULLY IN AUSTRALIA	44
Carrie Lumi--TOOTHPASTE AND TUNA FISH	48
Cormac McCarthy--LIVING SPACE	49
Chris Shapira--BLUE MONDAY	50
Laura Devlin--AFTERGLOW	54
Jim Kais--A PATH TO CONSIDER	55
Fred Woll--ENDLESS SUMMER	56
Kristen Sabol--ARTWORK	61
Erin Gorman--SANTA CLAUS WORKS...	62
Chris Deussing--SCAREDY-CAT	63
PATRONS	64

THE LANTERN

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EDITORS' NOTE:

This summer's edition of The Lantern features poetry. The staff would like to congratulate Thomar Devine, whose winning poem, "She was a Woman of Dignity," appears on page 3. The staff also congratulates Rebecca Heyl, whose winning photograph appears on the cover. Many thanks to our contest judges, Dr. Joyce Lionarons and Lisa Tremper Barnes, for judging the submissions. Congratulations and best of luck to next year's editor, Erin Gorman, and thanks to all who submitted this semester!

Jen and Carey

JUDGE'S NOTE:

"She was a Woman of Dignity" is a skillful evocation of the quiet strength of old age. It is a compassionate and loving poem that nonetheless avoids sentimentality in its focus on actions rather than emotion and its use of concrete detail. The ambiguity of the final line provides both depth of character and poetic resolution—we may wonder precisely *what* the "glory of it all" means to the old woman, but we do not doubt its existence.

She Was a Woman of Dignity

By Thamar Devine

She was a woman of dignity.
Aged in frame and ways
she sat growing ever blind
to light and change.
Often we would come to visit,
my brother and I, and sitting
amongst the lapis lazuli
and ancient African iron blades
we would sit and listen
to her speak.
Old and proud and strong,
so strong I hear it yet.
She was a woman of dignity.
Many times she would give
me gifts, an old coin,
a set of old books and once
she pinned a medal on my chest
and looked back at me proudly
telling me how it was given to her by
a great General when she was a nurse
in the big war.
In the summer when the winds change
and the ice melts and the seagulls'
song is different,
we would ride our bikes to the shore
to visit and to listen
and to be taken to strange places and
times with her talk.
She would give us money to
buy ice cream for ourselves for
which we would exchange our time to
read to her or to talk and to listen.
One day, when it was late summer
and she had closed her shop and
her driver had not arrived,
we took a short walk to the park
that overlooked the cliffs.
And holding her old frail hand in mine,
we watched the sun set
on the sound.
I looked at her and she had her eyes closed
and facing the setting sun bright on the sails
she said,
"The glory of it, Oh! The glory of it all!"

Retake, Scene 16

By Laura Devlin

It is almost like the setting
of an old horror movie.
She is alone when she hears the noise,
the tiniest whisper,
from the landing above.
Her fingers fumble with the clasp
of her compact, and the bathroom
floor shot becomes her black shoes,
low heels, taking short steps
on a creaking wooden balcony.
She can barely hear the music
from the party somewhere below.

Her colorless features turn in the dim light.
She hesitates below the awaiting steps,
which are laid with a thin carpet
that looks almost like a long tongue,
lolling down from a carnivorous mouth.
But the whisper sounds familiar,
and she slowly starts to climb the stairs.

And the audience squirms in their seats,
sliding feet on the sticky floor,
spilling popcorn. Girls clutch their boyfriends'
hands, moaning and hiding their eyes.

Meanwhile, she has almost finished
her ascent. Background music, mostly organs,
is now wavering softly. Suddenly,
she falters, bringing a hand
to her mouth! But is it fear?
She is stifling a hiccup. (In the movies,
it would never smell like Budweiser.)
A wooden door looms at the top
of the passage. She starts to enter,
but she won't realize it's a bedroom
until she's inside
and the door has slammed behind her,
locking her screaming alone with a
monster--a bogeyman--
or someone much worse.

Las Vegas Sweatshirt

By Elaine Tucker

She's passed me up and down the street,
drifting through taverns and liquor stores,
her stomach hangs from leopard legs,
her Las Vegas sweatshirt is stained,

I've heard her tell her life before,
she talks through the diner's open pane.
Her voice is muffled, then it cracks,
"I knew the stars and starlets when
there were stars and starlets to know."

Trapped in a cloud of her used up air
she strides past the man with the snore,
Madd Dog and urine, cheap cigars.
She spits, "Bogart and I were lovers."

Blown by the wind who'd like me snapped
in two, I glance a thought at her--
She drags her life behind a string,
a wise discarded Samsonite,
and sits there when she's tired.

It's true the world she sees is skewed
with conversations grand to ghosts.
In that, as well, it meets her needs
and keeps the cold from snapping her.

Pitcher Hill

By Chris Bowers

In winter, cold fronts push across the midwest through Montana and the Dakotas, over the Badlands and the northern plains, through the Great Lakes, where they warm and attach with moisture. The air congeals into smokey clouds as the storms push over the Northeast, over New England and upstate New York where south and east of Lake Ontario the snow begins to collect in the cities which grew out of the banks of the Erie Canal: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany. Near the corner of the lake is Onondaga county, with Syracuse at its center, where the wind blows the most, blows the snow past Oswego and into Onondaga Lake and the village of Liverpool on the lake shore. The snow falls all winter through the village, over restaurants and townhouses, over the road which stretches from the village past St. Joseph the Worker church and past the Covered Bridge apartment complex into Taft road. From Taft you can turn left and see the openings of two housing developments--Merril Farms and Kennedy Park; you can see the intersection at the end of the road with a Hess gas station and its green signs and walls; you can see Morgan road and past it finally to Wetzal, where you can see Liverpool High School.

Across the street from the high school is the Pitcher Hill apartment complex, where I am working this summer as an assistant superintendent (janitor). Jason Pattit, a good friend of mine from high school, found this job for me when he heard how hard up for work I was following graduation. Now he is in Rochester working for Kodak as a chemical engineer, while I am still home in Liverpool regularly applying for teaching positions and regularly being turned down.

My life here is simple; I paint, mow lawns, wash carpets and empty the trash. For the past two and a half weeks, including today, I have been painting the front lobbies of a few buildings in the eastern end of the complex. To protect myself from fumes and from complaints, the super has opened the windows of the lobby I am working in, and he has also brought in three or four fans to aid with ventilation. Some days this can create quite a beautiful feeling, the air swelling into a current which flutters the dropcloths in short, even waves. When the painting is finished, I will have to wash the carpets of several long hallways which lack windows, so I am savoring my piece of wind and sunshine while I can.

My parents live four miles from these apartments, an hour walk. It is a walk I completed in the past when I had missed the bus after track practice, or when it was Saturday and there were no buses running. I would start by turning left onto Wetzal Road

moving away from Route 57, walking all the way down Wetzal, past the white church at the corner of Morgan road, past the YMCA and Clay Central Park until Wetzal leads into Buckley Road. From Buckley I would turn onto Bear and walk straight one and a half miles to the suburban neighborhood where I grew up, an extensive gathering of houses built in the late sixties and early seventies upon four different designs and five different colors.

This is where I learned how to ride a bicycle, how to drive a car and, accidentally, how to crash a car. Here I have watched fireworks and gone trick-or-treating. I have built snowmen and massive snowforts. Upon these roads I have played kickball, soccer, baseball and touch football. It is here that I ran with Jason Pattit during four years of track practice and contemplated religion, life and death. I fell in love here. There was this girl when I was seventeen, I dated her best friend and wrote her a collection of long, unsent love letters. I can still remember some of them. I wrote, in complete seriousness, "My bedroom stinks with the dead air of my hopeless passion, emanating from an emotion thrust upon me by cruel nature, an emotion I neither asked for nor desired. Our conversation today during study hall still lives inside of me, the way you clenched your fist, smiled nervously and ran your fingers through your hair. I do not kid myself when I think of you, I do not imagine us together. The futility of my situation, from a social point of view, keeps me from doing so. I do not believe you will ever come to prefer my company to that of Mike Broker or Mike Ward, but this emotion is something I can no longer deny."

Your past is really anything which you choose to remember it being, and thus is always weaving, shifting, and unweaving itself. Being older and coming back to the neighborhood where I grew up has left me with an almost unlimited amount of freedom to recreate the person I once was. I have been here so long that the person who I now remember as myself is far too dramatic, far too fast a runner and romantic a writer to have really been me. The same theory could hold true for my neighborhood, only I find myself changing less. Children play the same games, teenagers drive to school in the same cars, parents arrive home from the same jobs. Any question about whether or not my memory is consistent with what happened is not relevant. This is the way I remember it, and this is the way it will remain.

One semester of art and music, or a full year of both are required for graduation from high school in New York State. When I was a freshman I managed my half year of art by acing computer graphics, and during the fall semester of my sophomore year I aced introduction to music theory.

The music class was held in an out-of-the-way hall on the far side of the auditorium where the walls were clothed in student

drawn murals and the smell of clay and fresh perms held fast to the air. Double doors occupied the near and far ends of the hall, opening to the school and the largest of the student parking lots. Through these doors students entered and exited the building each morning, bringing the weather inside with them and painting the tiled floor thick with grass, dirt and melted snow.

I once walked along that hallway with a chair in hand next to Chris Scarafile, thirty minutes before opening night of the school's annual all-Spanish musical. Our junior year we both claimed bit roles in the production of *Batman*, and we walked along the hall clad in zoot suits and strangely colored eyeliner. When we reached the double doors at the end of the hall, we stood on our chairs and looked through a window above the doors which offered a clear view into the auditorium lobby, so we could see for how large a crowd we would be performing.

The Spanish musical was student written, cast and funded, and for this reason Chris and I were both sure we could acquire major roles during our senior year. In play practice we developed hundreds of schemes, we came up with plays which needed only two actors and lots of special effects. Two of our favorite ideas were *Predator* and the *Terminator*; for both, Chris said he knew how to blow up the stage during the final scene, the only problem being that everyone in the first ten rows of the audience would more than likely die.

Now that I have been working here for over two months, I know the schedules under which some of the tenants run. A couple of people have brought themselves to talk to me, one an elderly woman named Betty who lives in the building I am currently painting. She takes two walks every day, one after breakfast and one after dinner. "To work off the fat," she says, though she hardly has any fat. Betty has been single for over twenty years and lives off Social Security and a mild government pension from a job I have yet to inquire about. Yesterday she asked if it would be okay if she helped me paint, and I said it would be fine with me, although I could not speak for the super. She started anyway and we painted together for over an hour, freely laughing and enjoying ourselves during a pause in our now mutually persistent loneliness.

Jason has found me another job, this time at Kodak as a systems analyst or something. I don't know exactly what the position is, but I do know that it is an improvement on my current economic situation. He says all I have to do is send in a resume within two or three weeks and I am virtually guaranteed of employment. And don't worry about understanding the job either, he says, because they prefer training people with no experience so they can mold them anyway they wish.

The year I took music I had a late lunch, and I ate with Paul

Billings. He had a class in the art wing the next period as well, advanced painting or something, so we walked to class together. As we walked we would continue one of our ridiculous arguments from the morning bus, or play one of the many games we learned you could play as you walked through school. Paul was a fantastic artist. I still have drawings of his hanging on the walls of my bedroom and resting neatly folded inside envelopes and boxes in my closets. There was a time when we drew cartoons for the school newspaper together; I made the captions and he created the scenes. We went to all of the newspaper meetings and then left early so the halls would be clear and we could slide our bookbags across the floor, measuring whose slide was the furthest by the number of tiles it crossed.

The other people we ate lunch with that year jostled Paul to draw things for them, idyllic landscapes or encounters invoked by obscure song lyrics. He drew unflattering caricatures of the people instead, so they smashed tator tots in his notebook when he wasn't looking. This of course led to a small-scale food war which left multiple counts of smashed food in everyone's notebook, and the occasional tossed doughnut or slice of pepperoni flying through the air.

Of the five of us who ate lunch together that year, none of us ended up good friends. We made plans to eat lunch together over the summer, or to mail each other letters with slices of pepperoni smashed within them. We watched and mocked the cafeteria staff as they picked up anything which fell on the floor, or made us pick it up, and we laughed especially at the nickels and pennies they retrieved. Once someone brought in some superglue, poured it over the top of a nickel and placed it on the floor. When one of the janitors tried to pick it up he almost fell over, and after a few more tries he had to find a paint remover to scrape it off.

There was a friend of mine Paul used to kid me about, I think her name was Kate Clark. He sincerely believed I was obsessed with her, and he also claimed she looked like my mother. Whenever we were around her he would whisper, "Oedipus, Oedipus, Oedipus," and laugh. She just shrugged.

I did like her, though. We were in two of the same classes together, and two other classes which were the same but we took during different periods. We worked out a system of cheating for these classes, with me helping her in pre-calculus and she helping me in college American history. She was short and stocky. She had thick knotty brown hair which she ran her fingers through when she was nervous.

Tonight I plan on taking a walk, a ritual I started back when I began painting. It helps me rid myself of the headache that the paint fumes are generous enough to offer me, and it also gives me

something to look forward to (besides a life in Rochester). Don't get me wrong, I find the painting quite enjoyable. There are times when I fall into a zen-like trance of up and down, down and up, imagining myself being invited to some national house painting competition and winning the one hundred thousand dollar first prize. However, tenants have started to sneer at me for reasons I do not understand, and the super sneers at me for reasons he explains all too well. I find myself looking at the clock every ten minutes and mumbling obscene rejections of any society which complains about how bad its educational system is, yet still employs teachers as janitors.

One evening last week, inspired by Betty's example, I took a walk through Bayberry, the housing development behind Pitcher Hill. I passed a group of high school students who were on the cross-country team. There were four of them, and although there was no writing or logo on their t-shirts which distinguished them as such, from their shoes, their strides, and their pack running, I knew they must be runners. I ran two years of cross-country myself in order to prepare for the track season, and I was the second or third worst runner on the team. Jason and I were the only sprinters who chose to put themselves through such torture, four hundred miles in the summer, running camps, and four to eight miles a day during school. Since everyone else on the team was a long distance runner by trade, our only competition became each other and last place. Over two seasons I defeated him fourteen races to twelve.

I am not really sure how much I expected to achieve running track, or how serious my cracks in Jason's notebooks about running at state, national, and world championships were. When I was a sophomore I made it to sectional finals in the one hundred meter dash, an accomplishment I bested only one other time when I placed second in the four hundred meter dash at the state qualifying meet as a senior.

Practice began with either a speedplay or a pace run, which began along the curb where buses waited for students at the end of school. As we would accelerate, the run flowed past the tennis courts and crack-veined granite playgrounds dutifully serving out their days underneath the sneakers of bored and pungent physical education classes. We ran outside in our blues and our grays, past the art wing and the main entrance, past the lacrosse players clicking and tapping tight rubber balls against the gym. We ran into the bordering athletic fields where the junior varsity soccer teams practiced, where we could see a perfect history of each stride and its length in the snow. We ran past the elementary schools and the woods and the houses, carving the landscape into irregular sections of playgrounds and fields and emptying into the suburban streets rolling in and out and up and down the soft winding

scattering of houses.

The track team formed into its own clique, eating together, going to study hall together, and going to parties and girls' track meets. Jason and I went all of these places with the rest of the team, but we primarily hung out with each other. Our discussions of music, philosophy, statistics, and our futile attempts at poetry did not fit in with the conversations of the others. With them we talked about girls and the prom, but since during the entire span of high school we each had only one serious girlfriend, we lacked much to discuss. That didn't really bother us, though. We greatly preferred fatalistic romances which existed solely in our dreams, poetry and lust for girls we could never have.

During my rebellious senior year I stopped eating lunch with the other runners and escaped the cafeteria with Chris Scarafile, Andy Luter, and their aging cars. We left the school for the restaurants on Route 57, or for Great Northern mall, or for someone's house. Different people came--Julian Marshall, Jackie Hannon, and Valerie Hientz on irregular days. We all crammed into Chris's garbage-lined backseat, screamed whatever he played over the stereo, and hoped that when he quit steering to play air guitar, it would be at a stop light.

Nowadays I eat peanut butter, microwave noodles, and cereal for lunch, as they are the most cost-effective means of avoiding starvation. To treat myself I might eat lunch at one of the restaurants down the road which we used to steal off to, although this is difficult as I do not own a car. I am going to have to buy one eventually, but since my parents have declined to help me that may not be for a while. They cite examples from their past about how working for their first car was some sort of self-defacing positive experience. I can always hear them hinting, "Take the job, take the job Jason offered you," underneath their breath whenever this or any other money-related topic arises. Should I take the job? Should I become a systems analyst? I don't know. Frequently when I picture myself this summer I see a sixty-year-old alcoholic at a bar describing a tackle he made at the goal line late in the fourth quarter during sectional championships his senior year of high school. Or rather, in my case, a sixty-year-old alcoholic at a bar telling stories about which Olympian he defeated in the 100 meter dash final at sectional championships his senior year of high school. I am twenty-two years old, I have a bachelor's degree and temporary secondary level teaching certification in English, and I am a janitor. By all means I should accept the job Jason offered me, by all means I should.

I wonder where my friend Kate lives now. I know that she went to the state university campus at Binghamton to study medicine, but so many people switch out of that major that she

could really be anywhere. I also know she isn't a girl anymore, either, but it is difficult for me to imagine her any other way except how she looked when she was seventeen. That's the special thing about people one loses contact with--they can no longer make mistakes and no longer make changes. Yeah, I like this song too. Early last June it came over the radio while my family was driving through downtown and I started singing and my brothers did too, and soon we were all shouting, shouting in our horrible singing voices. I know we sounded nothing like you did that time you sang at confirmation mass, the sky soft and unwoven and seamless and I can't tell you how surprised I was at your voice. It's not that I was surprised you were such a good singer, its just that uh, well... did you know I wore hightop sneakers to that mass? I couldn't find my shoes; I was looking for them everywhere until I remembered I didn't own any.

I remember too when we were juniors and you sang in the church choir during mass on Christmas Eve. Mike Ward was there and I was unable to talk to you after mass because you fled right toward him. I always knew you had a crush on him; I watched you so much it was easy for me to tell. I was Joseph in the pageant that year and all I had to do was walk up to the altar and light this candle, light just this one candle, but the wick was too small and I couldn't do it. I kept trying through the entire play, standing there trying to light that candle while the ancient story unfolded around me. By the end everyone in the pageant was laughing. I'm sorry I never sent you those letters. I had them all written, hundreds of times each, I just couldn't think of a way to sign them. I probably still have them here someplace if you want to read them, or I could write you some more, something new. I'm a much better poet now, really. Back then I stole bad song lyrics; now I write my own.

I kept most of my dittos and papers from high school, don't ask my why. Right now they are up in a closet in my apartment, piled and boxed. I thought that maybe it would be helpful to keep my notes from the year before or that I might want something to remember all those years by since I never took any pictures. I could always use them as ideas for lesson plans someday. I think my youngest brother, Mark, might find them helpful next year when he starts high school. Maybe he'll have Mr. Sharp for Earth science. Do you remember all of those different types of maps we had to work on for that class? I have been thinking lately about those maps of Syracuse and its surrounding area, the ones with the laminated plastic coatings which we had to find about two hundred different things on. I came into class late the day we started on those, and we weren't allowed to take them home so I ended up having to finish in homeroom the next day. There were some other maps too, more precise ones which only graphed the towns of Clay

and Liverpool. I'd like to have one of those maps, or maybe make one of my own, where I can see the high school and all of the paths around it, and the streets around those paths weaving in all directions between the houses in Bayberry. I want to be able to see Wetzel road lead to Route 57 and all of the restaurants on it, where I can see the Baldwinsville Diner and Great Northern Mall, Route 11, Chesnut Hill middle school, the General Electric factory, the YMCA on Bear Road, Wegman's on Taft, and my housing development spreading behind it. I want to see the road which runs from my house to the red brick apartment complex, to the tennis courts and the park and the enormous hill that runs into the Wegman's parking lot which we always went sledding on during the winter. I want to see inside of the high school and view each classroom at once, each cafeteria and gymnasium, see everything so I can plot which hills and buildings I will stand on when I achieve my permanent teaching certification and sound my accomplishments over the rooftops of Liverpool. I will plot where I will walk with my pen and with my knife and paintbrush, where I will carve my initials into the chair I stood on with Chris Scarafile as we overlooked the gathering crowds for the Spanish musical, into the seat on the bus where I sat with Paul Billings and argued football and politics all those years, the starting line of lane six on the track where I finished last in the one hundred meter dash final at sectional championships. I will carve my initials into the desk you sat at when you laughed out loud at Julian when he asked if you would go to the junior prom with me, and into the floor under the patch of rug in front of the television I laid on when I first realized I loved you. I will carve them into every desk I ever sat in and into the tile of every hallway where I ever walked. I will claw into the white granite walls behind the school where they throw lacrosse balls in the spring, scratch and scramble at my youth there beside so many others who I ran and danced and played with, those who I drank and bled and rotted with, and those with whom I lived.

In Preparation for Wisdom (Teeth)

By Sonny Regelman

At night comes the bloodletting,
welcomed with a prying-open smile.
Violence is comforting like maternal love,
shielded from bruises by a random bubble of
evolutionary dragon scales where I lay my head.
In sneaks the man of anesthetized white,
whose deceptive innocence
shines in his teeth as he hungrily
delves into my first bank account.
He grips and tears
and splits my baby skin
with carefully calculated impulsive indecision.
Mother's approval hits the nerve,
"He's an expert."
And when he finishes, he lays it beside me,
the root of my destruction;
I caress it with affection.
I do not feel rebirth or relief
but laugh wide and honest,
without soreness,
the crooked grin of a young girl
whose tenderness is still evident
in her polished eyes,
and whose integrity prohibits
the acceptance of wisdom.

Moist Slacks

By Torre Ruth

I see a crow through squinted eyes,
A dot upon a green, mowed field.
The windowpane darkens to black.
So alone. You would think I'd mind.
I tend to wonder if I'll fill
the first and freshest graves today.
So new and cold, my cemetery.

I hear their words with ringing ears,
approving my own mockery.
Withdrawn in my own rendition,
the garrulousness evades me.
Yet something keeps me down again
and leaves me deaf while you still hear.

I tasted sweat on burning lips,
the kiss to end the time we had.
The sun had dried the sea to salt,
so complete upon your body.
Resembles me now that I'm gone.

I felt the tight constraining weight
like last year's blue jeans here again.
Fall is warmer than I thought, and
I'll need to find another way
to stand the rain when I'm alone.

I know what nothing is so well,
so sure. So very little shit.
My mind is full of wonderment
and strangers' names that I don't know.



My mother's purse

By Erin Gorman

There is Quiet at the bottom of my mother's purse
I could feel it with seven-year-old hands
passed on to me, angels of tapestry
it is now strapless in a dresser drawer.
Seemingly a bag of useless things;
old tissues, a ring from a gumball machine,
pictures of relatives we met once,
supermarket lists of things we would buy
if we had the money.
Smears of her, smells of her--a perfume of flowers
(I never knew the name).
At homecomings I open it to the bottom
crawl into a seven-year-old's eyes and nose
and useless things are soft
like tapestry
like her.

It Comes and Goes Everyday

By Willie Simpson

Two pool breaks a day
Ritalin-filled kids and counselors
baptize in the chlorine. Distant
from the tight vice-grips
of the Lord, whose laws and Book
permeate days and nights at Camp Fernbrook.

Knifing around, I the pagan tear my initials
into the drenched plywood of the lifeguard stand.
While coveting my reflection
in the 3-1/2 inch Swiss Army blade
I slice a crescent moon on
my pointer finger. Looking down,
the laceration smiles at me
as my Saracen blood spreads
like locusts doing a favor.

The Bible-brimming crusaders
hurry me to Pottstown Memorial,
holding my bloodied hand aloft
while begging and pleading the sky
for my repentance.

The memento the small scythe-like blade has
left proves my impiety, but
the stitch that has healed has left instead
the mark of a crucifix on my index.

The crusaders adulate me like
a prophet. "And the mark of
God shall live with you, until
you lose sight of Him,"
they say.

It comes and goes everyday.

The Simplicity of Marriage

By Ellen Cosgrove

It happened during snack time in fifth grade at Skyview Grade School. I was paging through a wedding magazine. I sat at my desk munching on Chips Ahoy cookies. At the age of nine I already had my entire wedding planned. I would get married in our church up the block and my dad would wear a red striped bow tie. My husband and I would go to Vermont for our honeymoon and watch *Gilligan's Island* reruns all day long. The only quality my husband needed to have was huge earlobes like Butch Greener. He sat a desk in front of me in class and I stared at his ears instead of taking notes.

My teacher was Miss Vagalo. She was 40 and wore long wrinkled skirts with tulip prints. She always wore six silver bangle bracelets around her left wrist. The bracelets clanked against the blackboard when she did math problems.

During snack time that day I raised my hand and told Miss Vagalo I had just got a new bridal magazine. She smiled and came over to my desk. We turned the pages, admiring the long-trained dresses and the white satin shoes. Miss Vagalo should buy one of these pretty dresses for her wedding, I thought.

"Miss Vagalo, buy this bridal dress on page fourteen," I said.

"I'm not getting married, dear," Miss Vagalo answered.

"Maybe if you had this dress on page fourteen you would be getting married," I said as crumbs tumbled out of my mouth.

"I don't think so, hon," she said.

"Why not, Miss Vagalo?" I asked. "Get married so I can come and see you in a pretty dress."

"I'm not getting married, dear." Her auburn hair was in a loose bun and strands of hair tumbled down her neck.

"Don't you want to get married?" I asked.

"Just eat your cookies, honey," Miss Vagalo said.

"Everybody as old as you is already married."

"Well, I'm not, dear."

"Doesn't anybody want to marry you?"

Miss Vagalo picked my magazine up off my desk.

"Sometimes people just can't find a special somebody to spend their life with," Miss Vagalo said, rolling the magazine up in her hand. "Sometimes people find themselves at an age when they don't want to be alone anymore and can't do a thing about it. Sometimes people have to resort to explaining themselves to nosy nine-year-olds, Dear!"

Miss Vagalo launched my bridal magazine into the corner, where it nailed the potato plants in the styrofoam cups, spilling water on the floor. She marched out of the classroom, her brace-

lets clanking wildly around her wrist.

She did not come back to class that day. Mr. Tosen, the goateed library man, had to watch us. He helped me mend the torn pages of the magazine with scotch tape and he patted my shoulder a couple of times.

When Miss Vagalo came back to school she smiled at me and picked me to take a message to guidance. I was also lucky enough to be picked as kickball captain at recess. But I was smart enough never to bring those bridal magazines back to class. For the rest of the year, I read Archie comics instead and pretended I was Veronica and Archie loved me.

Last Saturday night, I was at TGI Friday's having dinner with Bobby. I noticed a man alone at the bar who kept looking around with a blank stare, as if trying not to look lonely, or not to care. He had a watch on his wrist and it was clanking against the top of the bar, and suddenly I thought of silver bracelets and Miss Vagalo. I winced, remembering the time I embarrassed her. I wondered what happened to her and hoped she had found companionship. I couldn't help but steal a moment to stare at Bobby. Does it bother me that he calls his mother Bug Eyes and he cheats when he plays Bingo? Is it so bad that he uses long distance at work when he shouldn't? Is it gross when he gets Oreos stuck in his teeth?

Or is it enough that I love the way he bites ice cubes and holds my hand across the table? I looked at the other couples in the restaurant and wondered if everyone keeps scorecards. One point for the part in his hair, minus two for the stuff on his loafers. How do people decide to get married? Is it all close evaluation, or at some point does fear take over, the fear of becoming Miss Vagalo or becoming that man at the bar?

It seems to me that nobody would find themselves lonely if men and women only required each other to have one endearing quality. Miss Vagalo would have loved Mr. Tosen for his goatee. My friend Sally would marry Dan because she likes his flaring nostrils. Buddy would marry Joan for her chapped hands. My mom would have married my dad because she had this fetish with unibrows. As for me, I would have grabbed Butch Greener by his earlobes and we would have been off to Vermont!

The First Performance

By Richard Stead

He sits at the bar, nervously
Circling the rim of a wine glass,
Waiting patiently to make his debut.
As the moment draws near,
He drinks up the last sip of wine,
And proceeds unnoticed to the
Splintered stage of rotted wood
In the smoke-filled room.

The audience, nearly fifty,
Consumed with conversation
With the exception of his mother,
She looks on in veneration
At the unplugging of the juke box.

The crowd quiets, and their
Attention converges on him.
He makes one last check,
Everything in place,
Latches the pearly white 12-string
Onto his chest,
Closes his eyes for the briefest moment
And all at once strums out the chords
Of the longest ballad he knows.

Hunger

By Annette Rawls

I see a pseudo-cowboy on t.v.
Embarrassed, smiling, warbling teary tunes.
A photograph encased in glass and wood
Of awkward lovers unsure of their fate.

The mocking ticking of a second hand
So harsh and coarse against the quiet air
My solitude is frightening and real
The audience applauds my jumbled thoughts.

My mouth sustains the cloying residue
Of tiny candy pastel hearts I bought
Predictions bland, ambiguous in red:
"I'm yours"; "Oh babe"; "Let's kiss"; "You are so cute."

My nose and hands are delicate as bisque
With hairline cracks from chilling winds and snow
I seek relief, apply a soothing salve
Then ponder what to do to heal my soul.

Denial thick, victorious until
I look into his soft chameleon eyes
And feel weakness pulsing through my veins
As he wonders: pizza or Chinese?

Pushkin's Dream

By Jim Maynard

Alone I walk the frozen land,
Entranced by the crunching of snow underfoot.
Ah, winter! the season excites my blood and enlivens my steps.
This night awakens my spirit,
Startling my sense to a heightened awareness--
 The frosted panes of glass,
 The particular smell of snow,
 The infinite glimmer of crystalline stars.
I fear the air may break in this gripping cold,
But I am warmer than I have been all year.
I can feel the universe tonight,
My body transposed into music.
As I sing to myself, I see, twirling in the distance,
A trail of chimney smoke, rising into the unknown.
My gaze follows it upwards, and my thoughts
Ascend into pure poetry.

Tuesday, October 19

By Heather Mead

The dishes in the sink are piled to the windowsill.
The radio is on, but the house sits empty.
She's in her car, driving away, but not far enough.
Foot to pedal, pedal to floor, tires to pavement.

She drives past fields of alfalfa, corn, and potatoes,
with windows down, stereo blasting out a deep bass
causing the heads of cows to raise and stare.
Faster, faster, not fast enough, never fast enough.

Sometimes, she swears that her car hates her.
It has a mind of its own, it goes where it wants.
There's the cemetery, she should stop, it's been awhile,
since August. No, don't look, don't stop, just drive.

If she just drives eventually she'll get to the edge
and drive off--just keep going--but not to crash,
not to die, just to hang in that moment
between leaving earth and crashing back.

A kind of eternal state of observation
drifting aimlessly, seeing everything, feeling nothing.
It's 4:30, Dad will be home soon, she'd better go.
Dinner should be ready for him, he's had a long day.

Driving back the way she came, she's almost there.
See that house on the right, over there, up on the hill?
Someone lives (lived) there, but she can't remember who.
It might be her, but it's getting so hard to tell.

Poetry of Baseball

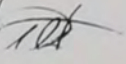
By Harley David Rubin

Tinkers to Evers to Chance
There's Lance and Rance and Vance
There's fathers and sons
The Griffey's and Bonds
There's Dykstra with dirt on his pants.

The pitchers have Clemens and Doc
To scare hitters out of their jock
The hitters have Kruk
Who looks like a truck
He'll make sure to clean their clock.

The ball is white with red stitches
The players wear skin-tight britches
The bats are all wood
Leather mitts always good
Can't wait for those op'ning day pitches.



Before the Bell 

Some Things Are More Important Than Others

By Craig Faucher

Father called today. Good thing Mom wasn't home. She likes to yell at him. Father stopped calling in the evening; I think he knows her work schedule by heart, 'cause he only calls during the day. Soon he will go back to Texas, and Mom won't have to worry. I wonder if they have telephones in Texas. Doubtful. Father doesn't call when he's there, but I get a letter from him a few times a year. Mom doesn't go through my mail, and she can't yell at a letter. On occasion, she picks up the mail on her way home from work and says, "Oh, gee, a letter from your father. It might be nice of you to send him a dollar. You know, to reimburse him for the postage he's spent on you for the last two years."

Then she smiles at me and asks what I want for dinner. Father calls it her "smug look." I think he's got a name for everything she does. He seems to know a lot about Mom. I think it's kinda strange 'cause they were only married for two years.

Father said he'd be here at five-thirty. I told him Mom doesn't get home until six tonight because of "mandatory overtime." He said, "Exactly." I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Never mind." I did, because it didn't really matter what he meant. It just matters that he's gonna bring me to Chuck E. Cheese tonight. One just opened up in Kramer, which isn't too far away. Actually, it opened up four months ago, but with Mom working late, she's always too tired to take me. She tells me, "Why don't you ask your father?" But I think it's kind of rude to call him up and ask for things. So does he. I wonder if all grown-ups use the word "inconvenience" so much.

Five-thirty is just fine with me. There's plenty of stuff on television I can watch until then. *All My Children* is on until three. I kinda hope Father doesn't show up early; I'll have to turn off the TV set before he knocks on the door. He hates it when I watch TV.

"Do you ever turn the friggin' television off? A normal kid would be outside playing!" Then he'd go back downstairs to work. I was never allowed downstairs. I'm "distracting."

* * *

I was watching *Bewitched* when I heard a car pull into the driveway. I had been peeking out the window every five minutes, checking for Father's car, but this time I didn't bother to look. He just bought a really neat new sports car that only gets loud when he goes fast. Mom calls it his mid-life crisis car. I guess she means that it doesn't squeal when the tires are turned and the engine doesn't make a funny gurgling noise when it idles. Mom's car does.

I turned up the volume with the remote so I could hear the TV

over Mom's motor. "Steven, turn the television down, you'll go deaf if you don't blow my speakers first." I did as she asked while she stomped the snow off her boots.

"You're home early," I said.

"I finished my work early, and I rushed home to cook your dinner." She set a brown grocery bag on the kitchen table. "This way I don't have to clean up the colossal mess you make when you try to feed yourself." Mom always calls me messy. I wonder if being colossally messy is better than being just messy.

"You're not watching for your father, are you?" She caught me peeking through the curtains at the road. I could feel my face get hot, and that meant I was blushing. I always blush when I feel nervous and everyone can tell and I try to stop it but I never can. "I talked to your father today. He wanted me to give you a message. Make yourself useful and come help me set the table."

I opened a drawer and grabbed two forks, two knives, and two spoons. I think Mom and Father "had words" today. "You called Father?"

"Actually, no. Your father called me. At work." Mom gets angry when I call her at work, and she LIKES me. "It appears he can't make it tonight. He forgot all about making a movie date with Paula." She pulled two Melmac plates from the cupboard and slammed them down on the counter. Everything she brings home from yard sales she calls Melmac. I tried to impress my teacher one day by using Melmac in a sentence instead of "cheap." She looked at me funny.

"We can't disappoint PAULA, now, can we?" She plopped mashed potatoes on her plate as she said "PAULA." She said "PAULA" again when she dropped the potatoes on my plate too. I don't think Mom likes Paula. Paula has been seeing Father for over a year. She likes his new car. She has a big German shepard dog and it growls at me when Father brings me to visit. I told Father the dog bit me once. He said that it was just a "love nip" and I should stop acting like a baby. But that was weeks ago, and I'm not a baby anymore. I didn't even cry when they took the stitches out.

Dinner was pretty quiet. Mom didn't say much to me, but she did talk to the food on her plate. "It took me a full month of nagging to get him to spend an evening with his son, and he pulls this shit." Mom always mashes her potatoes in the pan, but tonight she kept mashing them in her dish with her fork. I checked to see if they were lumpy, but they weren't. She's a picky eater.

"That's okay, Mom. I wouldn't worry. Some things are just more important than others." I kept eating while Mom stared at me. "Is something wrong, Mom? You're not eating much."

Mom stood up and walked behind my chair. She hugged me

before I could get the peas in my mouth and they spilled all down my lap and onto the floor. I tried to pick them up, but Mom pressed her cheek against mine and I couldn't move. Her cheek was all wet; Mom was crying. Father has said before: "Your mom's going crazy." I love her very much, but maybe Father is right.

* * *

Mom made me go to therapy with her today. She's really big on that stuff, but I don't understand it. He's just a skinny little geek. The whole time I was in his office he kept shifting around in his little chair, getting into strange positions. I hope she doesn't make me go again.

"I just want you to be happy, Steven, and you don't seem happy to me." Mom was turning the ride home into a very long trip. "You never go outside and play with neighborhood kids. There's plenty of them!"

"I don't want to play with kids that live in the trailer park, Ma. They're dirty."

The cars behind us started to honk their horns at Mom. She drives slowly when she gets angry. "Young man, I'd love to know where this attitude came from! We've lived in that trailer park for years. I'd be really insulted if I thought you truly believed what was coming out of your mouth!"

Mom didn't talk during the rest of the drive home. I felt pretty bad. I don't like to hurt Mom's feelings. Father told me I shouldn't play with those "dirty trailer park children," but that's not why we don't play together. I'm not sure they'd like me--why should they? I think it's hard to trust people. I trust my mom. She doesn't lie or break promises or say things that hurt. But I said something to hurt my mom. I don't think I'm a very good person right now.

* * *

Father and Paula got married last week. He called to tell me yesterday. Of course, Mom was at work, and the call was brief. He said he would try to make some time next week to visit. He had to hurry 'cause they had to catch a plane to Florida. They were going to Disneyland for their honeymoon. Oh, yeah, he gave me a message from Paula: "Hi." I think it would be really fun to go to Disneyland. Dad told me more than once he wanted to bring me there. He has a funny memory.

Mom came home from work with her friend Nadine. They like to sit at the table and talk about people and smoke cigarettes and drink a lot of coffee. I couldn't wait to tell my mom my news, but I don't bother Mom before she puts the coffee on. This is when Nadine likes to pat my head and pinch my cheeks and ask, "How was school today? Your mom tells me you're getting excellent grades. My God, you're getting big! You're HOW old now?" She's a pretty nice lady, but I don't think she's too smart. I tell her every week how old I am, but she always asks again the next week.

Mom sat down with her coffee. "Be a good boy and watch some TV so Nadine and I can visit."

"But guess what, Mom! Father and Paula got married last week and they had a great big wedding! It was at the church and lots of people were there."

Mom set her elbow on the table and spilled her coffee. She just let it run off the table and on to her pretty new skirt. And she calls me messy! Ha!

I ran into the living room to watch TV like Mom said. *The A-Team* was on at eight o'clock so I put on channel four. They were doing a commercial.

"Steven, come out here, will you?"

"Sure, Ma."

"So your father married Paula last week, and they just told you now?"

"Yup! He called today."

"Well!" Nadine said. "When I married George, his son was invited to the wedding. In fact, he was the ring bearer."

"Steven--" Mom wasn't listening, but Nadine kept on talking anyway.

"I mean really, he said himself that they had a big wedding at the church! It's not like they had a private ceremony and eloped."

Mom started tousling my hair. "He didn't call ahead of time to ask you to be there?"

"Poor Steven. I keep telling you the boy needs a father to spend time with and..."

"Christ Nadine, will you shut up and drink your goddamned coffee!"

Nadine's face turned all red. I bet it felt really hot like mine does sometimes. She was done talking.

"Honey, do you feel sad that you weren't there?"

"Not really. Should I?"

Nadine was staring at Mom, and Mom was staring at me. She didn't answer my question. I felt a little funny. *The A-Team* should be back from commercial. Mom smiled and patted me on the bottom. "Go get ready for bed, Steven. You can watch the rest of your show after you brush your teeth." I brushed my teeth as fast as I could so I could find out who was going to get blown up next. It was the bad guy with the sports car.

* * *

Father leaves for Texas tomorrow. He and Paula have plans to buy a house there, because Father says, "My pad is too small for a classy woman like Paula." We were on the road that takes me to school every day, but Father didn't know that. He was on the way to the vet's office with Paula's dog, and since the office is near my home, Father thought he'd stop by and bring me along for the ride.

I was glad after we dropped off the dog. He likes to hang his head out the window, so Father makes me sit in the back of his car. It's really small and I have no place to put my legs.

On the way home, I asked Father why I didn't get to go to his wedding. Mom really seemed like she wanted to know, maybe I could give her an answer. We pulled into my driveway and Father said, "It wouldn't be very appropriate. Paula and I are starting a new life together. If you were there, you would act as a reminder of the old life I had with your mom. It didn't have anything to do with you." Dad gave me ten dollars. "Buy yourself something fun, and don't tell your mother. She'll make you get underwear or school supplies."

I said thanks and opened the door. Wow! I can buy Transformers AND that Quiet Riot tape all the cool kids have at school.

"Wait a minute, Stevie boy. On second thought, tell your mom I gave you the ten bucks. Maybe she won't bug me so much about the child support." He drove off.

Mom was ironing in the den when I came in the house. "By the way, Mom, I wasn't invited to Father's wedding because I'm a reminder of his past marriage. Dad gave me ten bucks! Neat-o!" I ran into my room to put my money in a safe place until Mom could take me to the mall.

* * *

Paula and Father seem very happy living in Texas. It's been three years since they moved down there, and he came up to visit for the first time since he left. I spent the whole weekend with him and Paula and their new baby boy, Donald. The baby is cute, but I didn't have very much fun. Father yelled at me for watching too much television, but there was really nothing else to do. I told him that I made the soccer team and I showed him some of the drawings I made in art class. That was when he told me what my problem is. "Steven, do you know what your problem is? You've become quite a self-centered young man. Everything is 'I this' or 'I that' or 'look what I did.' It's not polite to ramble on about yourself. You should wait until people ask you first."

Well, you know for the rest of my visit with Father I was careful what I said to him. I didn't have much fun, though. Planning what to say isn't very easy.

* * *

I love living in Vermont because they let you get your license when you turn fifteen. After working over the past two summers, I saved up enough money to buy a car. Last month I bought a blue Chevette from the used-car guy down the street. My friends who let me drive them to school everyday complain about how messy it is. "Man, you must live out of your car. I just sat on a cheeseburger and almost broke my tailbone!" I guess it is fair to say I live out

of my car. When I'm not at school, I'm at work. When I'm not at work, I'm visiting someone. Mom doesn't see me much.

Father has been up here for the last couple of months. There's been a death in the family and there are some things he needs to take care of. Father's dad passed away.

Now that I have a car, it is my responsibility to arrange meetings with my father. On my birthday and major holidays I am rather obligated to see him. Otherwise, it seems there's always something more important to do. Just last weekend this got me into trouble. I was with Father when Paula called from Texas. She informed Father that Donald's birthday had come and gone, but they never got a birthday card from me. Not even a phone call. I've met the snot-nosed little brat once in my life, and I'm supposed to remember his birthday? He's only my half-brother.

"You can be such a selfish bastard, Steven! Donald was really hurt. It's his birthday for Christ's sake! Sometimes I'm not sure if you want to be part of this family. I don't see you putting forth much effort." He told me I should go home and consider this. I just wanted to go home. "Give me a call when you decide you're serious about this family."

I decided Father had a point. My desire to participate fully in the family wasn't worth the hassle.

* * *

My high school graduation was quickly approaching. In the back of my head I wondered if Father would come up from Texas to watch. It didn't make a difference either way, but he might consider it a polite gesture. I was filling out graduation invites on the day a letter arrived from the Lone Star State. The neat handwriting meant Paula sent Father's reason for not showing up. I scanned over the "unfortunately your father will not be able..." blah blah blah. "In the hospital for chemotherapy..." blah blah blah. "It might be appropriate for me to plan a visit in the near future..." blah blah blah.

Father is rather sick. Mom asks me on a steady basis if I'd "like to talk about it." I tell her I'm fine. The past two nights I tried to cry before I hit the hay. I couldn't. Sleep doesn't come easily, but I have a lot on my mind with graduation only days away. Common sense and the sympathy I receive every day tell me I should be filled with grief. But it simply is not there. This bothers me when I think too much about it, and I don't feel like a very good person.

* * *

I can't say that no good has come out of this. The senior class is going to Cancun after graduation, and I didn't think I'd have the money to go. But the plane ticket to Texas that Mom bought me

was easily exchanged for one to Mexico. There was even a small refund. This will come in handy when I want to buy souvenir t-shirts and shot glasses from Cancun. I know I should probably be at Father's funeral, but hey, you only graduate from high school once. Some things are just more important than others.

Musician

By Kristen Sabol

he twists turns torso,
contorted away--
willowing wallowing
in the wailing candlelight--
shadows striking flames
on finger 'n face,
hides like shame--
the strings awake
tempting his tempo,
wilt sound breaks
merging through
surging sweat,
shudders blue--
crowds' feet stomp
stepping straight
eyes flame open glaze:
one with one
the passions go
head thrown back
awed helpless
mmmmhbbhmmmmmm
let it go . . .
mmmmmbhhmmmmmm
yeah,
i know.

Of what befell our good knight when he sallied into the suite

By Kraig Bano

I bite the cap
off the Natural Light.
A gray dew covers the beer's amber skin
like the plate-mail
of the noblest knight.
A dozen or so of the armored brew and I'm

the lord of the island Ursinia,
the infamous knight-errant,
Don Cerveza de la Reimert.
Scanning the vast courtyard, I search
for my lady-love, beauteous
Dona Dullsensea de la Quad.

In a square, decrepit cave she is surrounded
by goatherds and monstrous beings,
a prisoner of my foe, the cruel enchanter.
They perform an evil ceremony,
chanting and dancing about, spraying
her with their toxic malt potions. I must save her.

Protect me, my sturdy Banana Republican armor.
Hold tight, trusty ribbons of my Cleveland Indians helmet.
Strike true, mighty lance, my own clenched fist
Go before me, my pungent beer-breath shield.
Carry me, my trusty Chuck Taylors on my charge
to the ghastly cave.

Blocked at the entrance by the enchanter's guard,
a gruesome giant, I pray to my Lady Dullsensea
for strength. I move to attack the vile creature,
only to be pummeled by fists that rotate
like the arms of a mighty windmill.
I charge again, only to receive an equal beating.

Sprawled along the floor of the damp,
stench-filled cave, I spot my Indians helmet
in a stagnant pool of beer.
My mighty lance lays open, fingers spread wide.
Dear brother Sancho lifts me from my prone position,
leaning me on a cold, slimy wall.

"Why?" he ponders aloud.

"It's my duty to free the Lady Dullsensea de la Quad
from her evil captors," I gasp.

With a shake of his head,

he tends my wounds and gives me a magical healing elixir.

I bite the cap off the Natural Light.

Piranha

By Angie Zerbe

In the sweat of August
my father, smelling sickly sweet,
would let us stay up late
to fill our wide eyes
with visions of bloody deaths (or so we thought).

Huddled under whirring fans
around the old black and white Zenith
(with a pack of matches behind the dial)
our eyes stretched wide
against the tactless violence.

Two teens swimming late at night
in the fenced black pool
labeled "Do Not Enter--
Government Testing Area"
screaming with feigned terror. We giggled.

When the popcorn bowl lay empty
and the lightning bugs ceased dancing,
we fought off sleep,
ignored mother's pleas for bedtime
and sucked images of bloodthirsty fish.

And later, tucked under cool sheets,
our teeth peppermint fresh
the moon lulled us into restless sleep
where we dreamt of vampire amphibians
and foolish teenagers being eaten alive.

Oceans Apart

By Jennifer Vigliano

"So I guess this means we're gonna start seeing other people, huh?" John's fingers tap the steering wheel in a nervous staccato as he speaks. The traffic on the network of roads at the airport is heavy.

Laura turns away from the steam-streaked car window. She looks at her boyfriend in the driver's seat. Slowly she says, "What did you say?"

He groans. "Don't do this Laura. You know what I mean. You'll be at school in another country for a whole year. That's a long time. We can just see other people for fun--we'll still be together when you come back. It won't mean anything." Under the guise of looking for an opening in traffic, John leans forward over the wheel and cranes his neck over his shoulder; he avoids looking at the girl next to him.

"Don't **we** mean anything to you? We've been going out for almost two years... I can't believe you're saying this to me now. Don't you love me?" Laura shakes a little as she speaks, but fights back the tears she can already taste in the back of her throat. Her eyes burn with the effort and a warm saltiness fills the spaces behind her nose.

"Of course I love you, you know that. It's just well, I thought you'd be cool about this. It's no big deal -- I swear it!"

Like a silent storm gathering force, Laura digs her nails into the velvety red seat cushion beneath her. She looks straight ahead as she gathers her things. A jean jacket, a jam-packed nylon backpack, some wrinkled magazines, and a few small bags form a jumbled pile in her lap.

Parting from the stream of cars, John pulls over to the curb outside the international flight terminal. With his foot on the brake and his eyes fastened on some point beyond the windshield, he says, "Look, I'm sorry, all right? Don't leave like this." He turns and reaches through the silence to touch her, but she is already halfway out the door.

The backpack falls into an oily puddle and an angry breeze gives one of the magazines flight. Laura's tears finally burst free and roll down her face as she yanks the backpack out of the puddle and lets the magazine go. She slams the car door shut and disappears into the terminal. She has forgotten one of the small bags.

"Damn it!" John screams. He jumps out of the car to follow her, but by the time he gets to the curb she is out of sight and he is double-parked. Already approached by airport security, he slams the car door shut and drives away in a screech of rubber on asphalt.

Inside the airport, Laura sees her mother standing by the baggage clerk. She wipes her eyes and calls to her. Her mother runs over and tells Laura that she has been there for awhile and has already checked in her luggage. She asks where John is. She tells Laura to go to the ticket counter and then to meet her in the coffee shop; Laura's brothers are already there waiting for them. She tells Laura not to be nervous.

Without speaking, Laura does as she is told. She sorts through her things at the ticket counter.

"Can I help you, Miss?" The woman behind the counter looks bored.

"I... I can't seem to find my ticket," Laura says. She claws through the pile she has now dropped on the floor.

"Well, you can't get on the plane without it."

In her mind, Laura retraces her steps, but hardly needs to. She realizes that the bag she has left in John's car is the one containing her ticket and passport. She turns her back to the counter and, leaning against it, slides down slowly until she becomes a sad island on the scarlet carpet. She closes her eyes and cries.

"I guess you need this, huh?" Her eyes fly open and she sees John in front of her, holding her slim blue carry-all. He holds his hand out and she takes it, allowing herself to be pulled to her feet. He hands her the bag.

"Thanks," she says.

"No problem," he says. "Can we talk?"

"No," she says. She turns back to the bored ticket lady and hands over her ticket and passport.

He stands there awhile, then walks away. She follows him with her eyes. When the ticket lady hands Laura her boarding pass, she goes to meet her family in the coffee shop.

Brooklyn Cantos

By Thomar Devine

"Freiheit erwacht in jeder Brust,
Wir protestieren all mit Lust."

Behind dusty windows
overlooking dwarf apple trees
over the hedges that separate
Italy from the limestone
bridges that carry the cars to Queens,
empty fireplaces stand with no chimneys.
Quartered to worn rugs, old toy dogs
and snake plants.
In the back, a garden. Holding tomatoes.
Brick wall disturbed by a lone stained glass
window, bathroom window.

We left from Italy
my mother and sisters
on the deck of the boat
she sat pregnant, we had to sit
on the deck because we were too seasick
to go under. The waves were huge, one day
it was calm and we saw whales off to the side.
When we came to this house we had nothing
but orange crates to sit on, my
poor girl died and then your mother's
parents died and she came to live with us.
Uncle started a wine business.

Turbine generators, large boilers sheathed in asbestos.
Ice on ships, wooden cases of Cutty Sark,
lead soldiers stand on red basement
floors to be lost in time and space.
Silver trunks stand out back to hold eternal
mysteries to this day even I can't answer.
And in the midst of it all, an orb in the garden.
Buses go to the boulevard and back
delivering its contents to all.
African Violets grow on the windowsill
and a small black statue of Daphnae kneels
on a wrought iron shelf.

I left home at thirteen to
join the Coast Guard, stationed up in the
North Sea in winter, saw boys get their
feet frozen off. Once a ship got torpedoed,
some sailors got trapped below decks and

couldn't get out. The ship was burning and they tried to get out the portholes but they all got stuck at the hips. The ship was ringed with guys screaming because they were being burned alive below the waists. Me and another guy took a boat and went around the ship shooting these guys to put them out of their misery.

I got a job with the phone company.

Across to the left the moon rises over the church and the bell on high rings to have its sound lost among the traffic. Still it rings to the ears who hear the sound and measures what losses the narrow streets still keep. Freedom rings in every beat.



snowshower

By Sonny Regelman

the iridescent
freefall of ice crystals
in neat vertical rows
reminiscent of summer's golden corn crops
turned on end
beams of descending beauty from the
dismal grey sky

he shakes the flakes
from his hair
most have transformed
into damp oblivion
among the highlights they call
strawberry
he throws down his gloves
splat
and blinks
to send the droplets falling from
his eyelashes

I feel myself smiling
to meet his frown
who could smile
on such a foul day
he wants to know
but I'm just happy to see him
like the ice crystals
when they finally settle to
the ground and become
reunited with the accumulated inches.

Thankfully in Australia

By Alexis Smith

One of my greatest fears when traveling is losing my wallet. The American Express commercial creates a pang in my stomach every time I see the couple pause in front of the Eiffel Tower and exchange anxious looks.

Once it happened to me. Unlike the American Express couple, I wasn't posed in front of the Eiffel Tower. Rather, I was on my hands and knees groping through the Australian mud puddles of a youth-hostel parking lot. My tears mixed with the driving rain, soaking my face and t-shirt. My swollen eyes and splotchy face proved this was no commercial.

It began with a sparkling blue Perth day. Spring had arrived after one of the longest winters ever, and the morning windsurfers danced on the Swan River. After tying our backpacks onto the roof of our rental car, we set out on our four-day trip from Perth to the coastal town of Margaret River. We were five American exchange students drinking in the overdue spring air that swirled into our windows.

The map showed a simple route to our destination. From Perth, which lies on the coast of Western Australia, Route 1 would take us inland for about seventy miles and then curve gently southwest to Margaret River. The five hour trip would take us through various terrains before we would return again to the coast.

After driving through Huntingdale and Gosnells, two suburbs of Perth, we eventually reached Route 1 and began our cruise down the flat highway. When the remnants of Perth were behind us, the land was rarely interrupted by buildings. The terrain was made up of flat, cattle-grazing fields with an occasional archaic Tinglewood tree interrupting the desolation. Bordering the arid outback, the vegetation was scruffy and coarse. The cattle raised their phlegmatic heads as our dusty car buzzed by.

We continued for two hours before stopping for lunch in Pemberton--a few modest houses, a little grocery store, and a bakery with a sign above it reading, "Homemade Meatpies." The meatpie is to the Australian what the McDonald's hamburger is to the American. This staple of the Australian diet could best be summed up as a hearty beef stew inside a miniature pie shell. They can be bought at any town's BP (British Petrol) gas station in a little plastic microwave bag, or from a vendor at almost any sporting event. Homemade meatpies, though, were something special. Lured by the smell of these baking meatpies, we pulled into the parking lot and piled out for lunch.

Inside the bakery we ordered a few meatpies and a loaf of the Italian bread just being removed from the oven. One of my friends,

Rebecca, being a vegetarian, ordered a toasted cheese sandwich with alfalfa sprouts. Besides meatpies, the Australians are also big on toasted sandwiches with lots of vegetables, including beets and shredded carrots.

We stood outside in the strong Australian sun, eating our Aussie lunch. I walked slowly across the dusty road to the general store to browse the artistic display of wildflowers on its front sidewalk. An arrangement of yellow, red and green fruits and vegetables stood behind the clusters of flowers.

Reluctant to end our pause in Pemberton, we finally waved goodbye to the friendly Australian woman behind the glass windows of the bakery and pulled out of the little town.

From Pemberton, our route took us gradually southwest. We drove into the Avon Valley, and the landscape transformed from barren farm lands to the green and rugged Stirling Ranges. Sheep clustered together along the barbed wire fences and the lambs nervously scrambled as we passed.

The scenery changed again as we entered the giant Karri forests, just outside Margaret River. The lofty pillars of the Karri trees created streams of light beaming through to the forest floor. We pulled over and stepped out of the car to take a closer look. Inside this forest, the scenery was speckled with delicate and exquisite wildflowers, the most striking being the white lily, reaching elegantly out of the lush floor of the Karri forest. Along the road were wildflower bushes with tiny white and red flowers, called Geraldton wax, on which Australian parrots frequently feed. Western Australian has approximately 7,000 named species of wildflowers, and in this forest we happened upon a fine display.

After continuing through the forests for another half an hour, we soon reached the wine regions. We were only thirty minutes from the coastline now, and the Karri forests were replaced with rolling hills blanketed with vineyards. Scheduled into our informal itinerary were stops at a few of the local wineries. We pulled up to the entrance of the first winery on our path and jumped out to take a snapshot of the sign reading, "Moss Brothers Rock Vineyard." As we drove through the entrance, a group of loud geese honked their greetings.

Inside the Moss Brothers wine cellar, a woman in a cream silk shirt and suede skirt stood behind the mahogany counter. On the counter stood a row of about twelve bottles of Moss Brothers wine, varying in color from dark red to pale rose with a few light green bottles scattered in between. The cellar was dimly lit, quiet and cool.

We were like a herd of cattle rumbling into the Devon Horse Show. Inexperienced with the fine art of wine tasting, we gulped down the wine samples. Our shorts, t-shirts and sneakers almost

glowed with whiteness against our tanned skins. We were not a subtle group in this sophisticated environment.

Yet, this first wine tasting experience was a success. Knowing we would probably never see this woman again, we ignorantly asked her what exactly we should be tasting in these wines. She explained that some of the red wines carry a distinctive "woody" flavor while the white wine, Rhine Rieseling, offers a definite "olive" flavor. "Round," "sweet," "dry," and "full" were a few of the more obvious characteristics, and I tried to remember all the terms so I could sound more intelligent at the next wineries.

We left the first winery as more experienced wine tasters and with one bottle of Moss Brothers wine. As we started out again, hills of climbing vines lay on both sides of the road, with some budding orchards scattered in. We would not reach another town before Margaret River, so we kept our eyes peeled for more winery signs. It wasn't hard to spot them, as they were generally the only driveways sprouting off of Route 1. We ventured into the Amberly Estate, Evans and Tate, and Sandalford Wines, all of which offered us samples of their wines, and were pleased to hear us discuss the woody, sweet, and olive characteristics of their wines.

The Leeuwin Estate was my personal favorite. The entire inside consisted of dark polished woods and high windows. The bright sunlight poured into the windows onto giant hanging ferns. The man behind the counter fit in perfectly with the polished setting and greeted us as we entered. We bought five bottles of wine at Leeuwin, partly because we liked the wines. Their Rhine Rieseling seemed to be the best I had tasted, but to be honest, my tastebuds were becoming less receptive of the different flavors.

At the last winery we hit the jackpot. The sign at the entrance of "Cape Clairvault Wines" gave its hours as 9:00 to 6:30. Although it was 6:35, we ventured down the gravel driveway, and entered the rustic barn with hundreds of wine barrels lining the walls just as the woman was about to close for the evening. She clearly wanted to get rid of the remaining wines before she closed up, because she fed us sample after sample of the wines. After half an hour, we exhausted her leftover supply and walked away with smiles, rosy cheeks, and a few more bottles of wine.

With the wineries closed, we headed straight for the Youth Hostel at Margaret River. The drive was not far, and it was fortunate that we arrived just before the approaching thunderstorm because our backpacks were still on the roof. We pulled them off quickly and carried them, along with our day's loot, into the hostel. Soon after, as I was unpacking, I realized that my wallet must still be in the car. I grabbed my raincoat and ran out in the cascade of Australian rain. I began by looking calmly on the seats and in the

trunk. Not yet seeing it anywhere, I began frantically searching under the seats, through the glove box, and again in the trunk. I came up with nothing and stood alone in the pouring rain, imagining my wallet floating in a puddle somewhere between Perth and Margaret River. My nightmare had come true. This had been one of my few worries as I was studying abroad, and somehow it had finally happened. After calling each winery we stopped at with no positive results, I realized nothing could be done until morning. I agreed to forget about it and go out with my friends to the pub.

I didn't forget about it at the pub. In fact, I debated asking for the car keys as soon as I opened the pub door. The crowd inside the bar was rough and dirty. I didn't feel like making conversation with them, and I didn't like the way they stared at us when we entered. I ordered a Red Back and stood alone sipping my beer. My friends were talking with some of the surfers by the pool table, while I tried not to make eye contact with any of the characters around me.

As I was taking another sip of my beer, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around to see a very hairy face staring at me, its smile filled with broken teeth. Oh God, I thought, I knew I shouldn't have been standing by myself.

He started speaking to me in a thick Australian accent.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said. I raised my eyebrows and waited for him to continue.

"I was driving down Route 1 this afternoon on my motorcycle, and just outside the Cape Chairvault winery I found a white purse with flowers on it." As I stared at this man's face, I saw his wrinkles as friendly smile lines rather than rough weathering. He continued, "I opened the wallet and found a license with a picture that looks like it could be you. Could it be yours?"

The man standing there meant more to me than the smiling American Express lady means to the frantic couple. She was only doing her job, whereas this man represented the honest and friendly Australian character I had come to know. During my stay in Perth, strangers on the streets looked me in the eye and offered a cheery "Hello." The shopkeepers said goodbye as I left their stores, even if I hadn't bought anything. I often jogged at ten o'clock at night through the Eucalyptus trees lining the Swan River. There was little to fear.

From the Pemberton bakery owner to the Avon Valley wine servers, I discovered this friendly nature reached far out of the confines of Perth. I thanked the man standing next to me profusely, embarrassed at my previous aloof attitude. We sat down with my friends and spent a lively evening in a grungy little pub in Margaret River.

Toothpaste and Tuna Fish

By Carrie Lumi

She starts to mend the tattered fishnets that she wears beneath her Lycra dress. Her Crest with fluoride waits beside the rusty sink, a solo street lamp's silent servitude.

The doorbell rings, she spits again, her mouth is fresh, her stockings torn, she doesn't care, he knocks again, she opens up, and soon she'll brush away his bitter remnants too.

The baking soda mintiness, her work's terrible saltiness colliding with the flavors of the tuna fish that she endures without the Hellmann's mayonnaise.

The tuna fish will not digest, it chafes her throat and leaves it like the weathered flesh lying lizard-like beneath the hose that with their flayed and gaping holes exploit.

She knows that she will brush again to rinse away the ocean tastes. Yet still remain the stocking sheaths, the parching fish, a rust-corroded sink that bears its labor's scars.

Living Space

By Cormac McCarthy

a sheltered life spent seeking refuge
from the insanities of living
which threaten to impose themselves
upon a lone frightened child
surviving behind the walls
holding him forever close
closing him forever with that (tight) single place
from which he might search inward
or watch outward for escape
somehow always managing to silently avoid detection
where deception wanders all throughout the house
a distant violent world without direction
onward his mind will carry him
away from arguments and emotional baggage claims
which someday will invade the only room
left unscourged by long-fought wars
in which he tries to live
a sheltered life spent seeking refuge
from the insanities of living...

Blue Monday

By Chris Schapira

I remember getting the call
Two o'clock in the morning
They wouldn't tell us much over the phone.
Policy, I guess.

I remember them explaining to her:
Your mom will be all right.
Her side of the car wasn't hit so bad
A lot of broken bones
But she'll be O.K.
"And what about my dad?" she asked.

I remember feeling sorry
For the on-call clergyman
Whose job it was to tell people things like this

Blinded by the light.
She found out, but she never quite knew
If she would make it through the night.

We had just moved into our new apartment
And while she was with me, at age 22,
Her real daddy was dying.
"Sorry you didn't see him."

Sorry.
The only thing I could say.
The only thing I could be.
Just silently watch
And be sorry.
Sorry, sorry, sorry.
Which is roughly the equivalent of
Thank God it wasn't my father.

Then I watched her
Walk to her mom's hospital bed
Borrowing a smile from God knows where.
She knew her mother needed support.
She said nice things to her bloody, swollen mother.

Her mom'll be O.K.?
Oh yeah.
Don't cry, Mama, smile and wave goodbye.

Then back home we went.
I volunteered to make the call:
Yes, I'm calling on behalf of Christine Conz
She was recently hired by your school.
Today is supposed to be her first day teaching
But she won't be in this morning.
Her parents were in a car accident last night
And her father was killed.
Thank you.

New job.
And her dad had a job to do, too.
He was a pastor.
He was to have a meeting
With the Congregation Council
The next day.
Seems they had grievances.
They didn't understand
Why he would teach a sermon
called "God, Our Mother."
No sir.
Didn't like those un-American ideas about
How God shouldn't necessarily be seen
As "Our Father"
He transcends gender
And could just as easily be God our Mother.
The rural congregation didn't like
That kinda talk.
No they didn't.
Sinful talk.
Everyone knows
God is a man.
You know, grey beard
Looks like a cross between
Abraham Lincoln and Sant-i-claus.
Any other kinda talk
About how God is a girly man
Is just plain blaspheme.
Sinful talk.

This was his congregation.
John Conz had a lot of work to do.

But in this version of Footloose Kevin Bacon was taken away
Before the Big Prom.
And John Conz died.

Oh, very middle-aged what have you left us this time?
You've only danced on this earth for a short while
And although you want it to last forever
You know it never will.
Do you carry the book of love with you?
Do you carry the book of love?

And how am I supposed to answer
Do you think my dad is in heaven? Or
What do you think he's doing there?
She'd point to the sky
And explain
See that big cloud
I bet he has a diving board
And he's doing backflips into that cloud.
And we'd laugh.
We'd have to laugh.
Because there is no Captain Jack.
We're not getting high.
And they couldn't even find your father.

Everybody hurts.
Sometimes you didn't even know it
And then you did.
I've always known about the nineteenth one,
But it's that 20th Nervous Breakdown
That really knocks you on your ass.

Blinded by the light.
Now she can't see,
She just stares.

And all I can say is I'm sorry.
Sorry you didn't see him
But I'm glad we talked.

At least your conscious mind
Has an off switch
You can always pretend he's not dead
And sip your tea
Or clean your room.
Whichever seems more urgent.

But dreams are another thing.
Kick you right between the eyes:

This is ground control to Major John
The circuit's dead. Is there something wrong?
Can you hear us Major John?

He was there, floating in a tin can
Far above the Earth.
Planet Earth looks blue and
There's nothing I can do.

Only one thing he could say
From his tiny tin can far away
"Tell my wife I love her very much."
She knows.

Go down Ms. Moses, there's nothing you can say,
It's just that old John has met with the Judgement Day.
Well John, my friend, what about young Christine?
He said, "Do me a favor, boy
Why don't you stay and keep Christine company?"

So break down,
Go ahead and give it to me.
Break down
Cause we all need someone we can bleed on
And you can bleed on me.

Now she can't see
--blinded by the light
So she just stares.

But nevermind the darkness
We still can find a way.
Nothing lasts forever
Even cold August rain.

Afterglow

By Laura Devlin

They share a passion for the sun, it shines
between their faces when they meet. She must
have just awoken, bursting through the doors
with lighted glows kissed in her cheeks. Across
the dining hall she effervesces points
of light. Her eyes are crescent moons. He feels
her coming, turns and smiles, food untouched
dries on his table. His arms disappear
in a purple coat, his voice, a rolling swirl
of syrup, murmurs low beneath the swell
of conversation. Stopping for a glass
of Citrus tea before they leave, she snaps
his baseball jacket tight around her, thick
hair spilling down her back. Their eyes are locked
together, sun between their faces. As
they turn to leave, his fingers graze her skirt.

A Path to Consider

By Jim Kais

I see her silken body next to me
Upon my sheets; a feather from heaven,
She sleeps tranquil, without a care. I sweat
And stare and curse myself, and touch her hair.

Her sweet bouquet captures my bleached linens.
Luckily, scents that many girls wear.
I can't live with myself too much longer.
My hands that touched her skin are now callous.

Life-like tattoos of her illuminate
My arms as her face turns deep gray.
The chill of the damp room penetrates me
As I realize loneliness lies ahead.

A pounding at my door, a gasping sigh;
A phantom wades inside and out of me.
"Silence my love, fret not, it's just..." too late
To make amends, she won't believe the lie.

I've heard wise men wallow, "Affairs can last
Forever." But who deciphers what is unwise
Versus wise? Sorrow fills my voice and
Iron fills my heart. Deceits and lies exposed.
I slither, a diamond-eyed viper on the path.

Endless Summer

By Fred Woll

Sean awoke to the sound of his mother's voice calling him for breakfast. His younger brother was already up. Tossing a quick grin at Sean, Tim said, "Looks like a good day for ball!" and raced out the door, pounding down the stairs. Sean heard his mother scold Tim, like she did everyday, telling him to "Stop banging down the steps!" Sean smiled and jumped out of bed. He walked to the window and looked out. The day was clear and hot. Baseball weather. He quickly stripped off his pajamas and put on his game-day clothes. He grabbed his trusty Reds cap and his glove and went downstairs. His brother was already face-deep in a bowl of Corn Flakes. The morning sun shone through the open windows of the tiny breakfast room. It promised to be a good day.

Their mother was fussing around the kitchen, making their father's lunch. In the winter she made the boys lunches to take to school. Today, and for the rest of the summer, she would have sandwiches for them on the kitchen table when they came barrelling in after a morning's hard play. She looked up at Sean as he entered the kitchen and smiled as she brushed a loose strand of hair out of her face.

"Morning son!" said Sean's dad. He looked up from his morning paper and coffee. He folded back the paper. The headline read "Washington Fears Escalation of Missile Crisis."

"Guess you boys are excited that school's finally out!" said their father. Sean grinned as his dad tousled Tim's sandy-colored hair.

"Got the whole summer ahead of us!" said Sean.

"Ah, to be eleven again," said his dad with a wistful sigh.

"What's on tap for today?"

"BASEBALL!" piped Tim, "And we gotta go now, Sean! Or else we're gonna be late and get picked last." No one ever wanted to get picked last. It didn't matter how good you were, because if you got picked last, you were inevitably shuffled off to play deep right field. No kid wanted that. Sean hastily finished his cereal and grabbed his bat from beside the kitchen door. He dashed out the door in hot pursuit of Tim.

The two brothers jumped on their bikes and rode away. The sound of their mother's voice calling through the screen door to be home at noon for lunch followed them as they pedaled furiously down the street. Even though Sean was bigger than his 9-year-old brother, he was hard-pressed to keep up with Tim. His short legs were pumping double-time as they came to the bottom of Hilltop Street. Sean stood on his pedals as they climbed the steep grade. He was panting as he reached the top. He and Tim paused for a

moment to catch their breath, and looked around. Shelbyville was coming to life before them, sprawled out in the valley below. "Let's go!" shouted Tim as he started down the big hill. Sean turned his bat backwards and bent down tight over the handlebars. The wind began to roar in his ears as he picked up speed. Straight ahead was the intersection at the center of town. "Hold on!" yelled Sean as they blazed through the busy intersection. Horns blared as drivers shook their fists at the two crazy boys. Tim let out a whoop as he swerved, narrowly missing a group of pedestrians.

They were on the straightaway now, only a few blocks over from the field. They slowed down as they turned the corner. Ahead was their diamond. They hopped off their bikes, leaned them against the outside fence, and saw that the other boys were starting to show up. Tim and Sean walked around the fence onto the field.

The old field was part of an abandoned school. Back in the early 1920's there had been a population boom in Shelbyville. To cope with the sudden surge in school-aged children, the town had built a new school. At the time, baseball had been well on its way to becoming the national pastime, so a baseball diamond had been constructed. Today, however, the old school was empty and falling apart. Change had come to that era. The depression had wiped out many of the local mills and factories. Families had moved on, and the school, which was located in the district where most of those families had lived, had been closed down.

Today, it was just a boarded-up old mass a few hundred yards away from the field. The neighborhood they played in was quiet, but not yet decrepit. It was located just a little to the right of the hustle and bustle of town. Sean had overheard his parents one night when they had company. The conversation had entailed something called a bomb shelter. Sean hadn't given it too much thought. Just as long as it didn't interfere with baseball, he couldn't really understand what the big deal was. But the baseball diamond had stayed in use. Three generations of kids had grown up playing there, in cut-offs, playing with their old, worn mitts. Old Mr. O'Reilly, the custodian from the school, lived down the block. He was a firm believer that baseball was the closest way to touching God. He had kept the old field in playing shape through two world wars and the occasional Russian satellite. All the boys liked him, and they paid their respects to him by playing as much pick-up baseball there as humanly possible. Today was the first game of the summer of '61.

Sean and Tim walked to the pitcher's mound. Steve Ryan was organizing the teams. The gathering crowd of excited boys exchanged greetings.

"O.K., everyone throw in your gloves so the captains can pick

them." said Steve. "It's Allen and Billy's turn to be captains."

Sean and Tim threw their gloves on the pile. He walked over to stand next to Billy and said hello. "Hurry up!" he called to two figures who had just walked onto the field. It was Beth Detlin and her brother, Tom. "Sorry," she said as they hurried to throw their gloves in. The boys were glad Beth had shown up. Normally, girls didn't get to play baseball with this motley crew of 11-year-old boys, but Beth Detlin was an exception. For a girl, she had one hell of a fastball. After having blown a couple of fastballs right by many of them at the plate, she had earned their respect. Now she was considered a definite boon to the team that got this pig-tailed pitcher. Sean watched Allen and Billy go to opposite sides of the mound as they waited to pick their teams.

"O.K., are all the gloves in?" asked Steve. He stepped back as Allen and Billy approached the pile and started tossing gloves to either side of the mound. Sean wasn't quite sure why it was done that way, as opposed to just picking teams at random, or having the captains just pick players straight up. But it had always been done that way, and he would not conceive of questioning it.

When all the gloves were distributed, the sides were formed. Beth was on Sean's team, as were Tim, Sean's best friend Dave, and their usual gang. Sean got a kick out of the fact that no matter what, whether he or Allen or Dave or another one of their group was captain, it always seemed as if the same group of friends was on each team. He looked at Billy's team and saw the usual crew. For the most part, Billy's team had the good stuff, the new bats and gloves and such. For some reason, this seemed to always be the case. He looked at his own beat-up mitt. No big deal. Sean didn't hold it against those guys. He didn't mind them for the most part; they were just the way they were. Kids are kids reasoned Sean, whenever he bothered to think about it. But that didn't mean that he wouldn't relish stomping the tar out of them on the field of honor.

Sean's team drew visitors, so they batted first. The teams retreated to the benches on either side of the plate to discuss batting order and position. Sean was batting fifth. He had a pretty good arm, so he was going to play third base. He sat down on the bench to cheer with the rest of the team. Tim was up first. His freckled face snarled in competitive defiance at Seth, who was the pitcher. Tim almost always batted first, mostly because he was small and quick. Even though he was a pretty good hitter (definitely better than Chet), he got walked a lot because of his small strikezone. It was a good bet that he would get on base right away. Crack! Tim looped the ball over the shortshop's head. The team cheered. A good omen. Once again the strategy of Tim batting first had worked to their advantage. Tim stood on first and

jumped up and down, hurling taunts at the opposing pitcher. Cries of "Nice meatball! I could eat those ALL day!" and "Is that your mother or a hairball?" regaled the pitcher, eliciting a snarl in Tim's direction. "Let's stack up some numbers!" shouted Sean, and the game was on.

Three outs and two runs later, Sean's team had its turn in the field. Sean's adrenaline began to pump as he jogged out to third base. He liked to bat as much as the next guy, but he knew that playing the field was his true meat and drink. Third base was the definite hot spot on the field. Contrary to popular belief, shortstop was not the position with the hottest action. The less glamorous third base was what separated the men from the boys. Balls shot like bullets down the third base line. There was no margin for error. You had to be on your toes all the time, or the next ball would be past you and into left field. An out would turn into a double. But Sean relished the challenge. He tipped his hat forward as he got down into the defensive crouch. His alert eyes scanned the field as his body wound itself up and prepared to pounce. For one moment, time seemed to stand still. Somewhere else, a cold wind was blowing. A hot, dry breeze wafted across the infield, stirring up some dust. The infielders and outfielders were still in their crouch. Beth was on the mound. Sounds seemed to fade out and the earth itself seemed to be hopelessly lost in the thrall of endless summer. Poised on the brink of change, the world seemed to catch its breath, then lurched as time resumed its constant flow.

After a windup, Beth fired the ball for a strike. Cries of "All right, Beth!" and "Way to fire!" filled the air as Sean's team came to life. They pounded their gloves and cheered for the ace of their pitching staff as they watched the batters of the opposing team go down one-to-three. The game wore on. After the promising first inning, the game tightened up. As the last inning drew close, the score was 7-6 with Sean's team in the lead. Sean himself had gotten two hits. Shouts and curses flew back and forth between the competitors as each team tried to break the other's concentration. Insults ranged from the reliable "Screw you and your mother!" to Dan Fitzpatrick's more inventive, but less effective, "A pox on the tongue of your firstborn!" No one really ever understood what the hell Dan was talking about. He usually played deep right field, where he couldn't confuse anyone. It gratified Sean to see Billy, Seth, and co. get angry. They needed to lighten up a little. They were starting to get a little too personal in their shouts of "Blue-collared, grit-eating faggots!" and the such. Sean guessed that they just couldn't help being the way they were.

It was the bottom of the eighth inning. Beth had just fanned Billy for the third out. Billy scowled and screamed a curse, throwing his bat at the fence. That was her 14th strikeout for the day,

and she was showing no signs of slowing down. The team let out a cheer. It looked like they were indeed going to win. They only had to bat, and then hold their lead in the field for one more inning.

It was only 10:45 a.m., but the day was turning into a real scorcher. As Sean's team sat down on their bench, Billy, Seth, and three of their entourage approached.

"It's getting hot as shit out here," stated Billy.

"Yeah, it's hot," agreed Allen.

Seth, Billy, and their friends whispered together for a minute, and then Seth smiled. It wasn't exactly a nice smile.

"I'll tell you what. Let's play skins. It's too damn hot."

Allen shrugged. "Fine by me." He took his shirt off. The rest of the team complied, and began stripping off their t-shirts. Tim tore off his dusty shirt, exposing his skinny little body with the beginnings of what would be a truly monumental farmer's burn. Sean began to take his own shirt off when he noticed the leering grins on Billy and co.'s faces. He then realized who was sitting next to him at the end of the bench: Beth.

"Hey, you can't play if you don't take that shirt off," said Seth.

"Yeah, everyone else has their shirts off. Don't you want to play?" crooned Billy.

Sean felt his face grow hot as he realized what was going on. Beth remained totally still next to him. Her face looked flat, without expression. In spite of himself, Sean began to wonder what she would look like with her shirt off. The beginning nubs of breasts could be clearly seen, outlined by her shirt. Sean felt a strange pressure in his groin. What would they be like to touch... Sean angrily suppressed those thoughts as he realized what he was thinking. She was his teammate, and more importantly, his friend.

"Yeah, show us those tiny little boobies," said Chet in a hoarse whisper. They started a soft chant, "Take It Off, Take It Off, Take It Off." Sean's team was quiet. Sean looked at Beth. She glanced down at her shirt, seemingly lost in its dirt stains. Horrified, Sean watched as she tugged it a few times, then held it out, as if for inspection. Her face showed not anger, but something else. Then, without a word, Beth stood up. She gathered her bat and glove, and walked off the field. The boys were quiet. She did not look back. Sean wanted to run after her, wanted to apologize. But he couldn't. Billy broke the mood with a raucous laugh, "Thought we'd see us some titties today, boys. Let's play ball!" The game resumed. Sean's team won. It was strange now, without Beth. Somewhere, bearded dictators and old men were threatening each other. Somewhere else, there was a baseball game.



scaredy-cat aboard american airlines flight #5

By Chris Deussing

my steel & fiberglass escape vehicle
climbs to thirty-one thousand feet
the truth of my motivations
becomes enshrouded in
wispy atmospheric vapor
clouds of evaporated hydrogen & oxygen
cleanse & sterilize my behavior
i ask myself
"is this the right answer?"

dr. dawley screams
"birds do not seduce each other...you are incorrect!"
red ink fills the lungs of my reasoning
viciously choking, drowning my rationalizations
my conscience weakly gurgles
"this is so wrong..."

my actions are black, thick, unpure
resembling the ominous storm system below
thunderheads supersaturated with deception
pelt flip & pat
with stinging sheets of shallow lies

i need a hit ...

injection of pain-killing untruths
release my troubled soul
my turbulent thoughts are bathed
by seven thousand miles of mental morphine
i feel numb
nothing
empty

there's a scaredy-cat aboard
american airlines flight #5
seat 25e
fleeing the ferocious pit bull
fueled by industrial strength Alpo
flavored with conflicting emotions
a dog tortured by the
acid aftertaste
of unfulfilled dreams.

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