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Quiz
&
Quill

Winter, 1992

Quiz and Quill

Winter 1992

This year's contest went very smoothly. The number of submissions was encouraging, and the enthusiasm shown by readers of and submitters to the *Quiz and Quill* has not been overlooked. Everyone involved with the *Quiz and Quill*—staff members, faculty advisors, alumni, and contest judges—is genuinely appreciative of the participation in the contest.

The evaluation of submissions was done this year by judges from as far as Texas A&M and as close as the *Columbus Dispatch*. Each judge donated his or her time to help *Quiz and Quill* with its goal of providing incentive for young writers to express themselves and exercise their gifts. Thanks to all the judges.

Finally, a special note of gratitude goes to Mr. Don Williams, *Quiz and Quill's* primary benefactor. Without Mr. Williams' generous gift to *Quiz and Quill* in memory of his wife, Louise Gleim Williams, *Quiz and Quill* could not accommodate its yearly contests. Thank you, Mr. Williams, and good luck with your history of the *Quiz and Quill*.

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Spectacles*Second Place, Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest*

Were you to look out through my lenses,
So smeared with grime and oil and sweat,
You'd see upon grey stone walkways
A black Ace
of Spades
To listen through my Ears,
You'd hear
The Whisper of the Jackhammer
So subtle beyond my door
You'd know the roar of
Dried Leaves,
Dead brown and tired
Tumbling down the path
Scraping for the earth as they go.
And were you to peer and peel
beneath this hard and stony skin
You'd smell the iron in my veins
The blood which flows in raging river torrents
Full of Passion to a heart which can't be shown.

Bryan Worra

Dusty Coats

My body neither warms nor chills
under the dusty coat of time.
I remain homeostatic—stuck—treadmilling
like a Chevette firing spittles of mud
from its threadbare tires.
I neither gain nor lose intellectual ground
in what I pray is the dusk of narcoleptic calm.

The dusty coat of time blows unseen into eyes
through which I once created,
neutering the wildflower imagination
which once gushed with idea.
The coat neither soothes nor burns,
but lulls me into arms of complacency.

The dusty coat of time has spread
a silky layer of contentment upon me,
dimming the lights of the sensual
which once blinded in its brilliance.
It is carbon monoxide for the mind,
numbing in its indifference of emotion.

Still, my courageous unconscious remains
valiant at its guidepost—watching, waiting . . .
waiting for the lifting of the tired curtain
revealing the serpentine savior of inspiration.
I prolong existence only on a ghastly premise
that the dusty coat will soon depart.

Aaron Firstenberger

The Dandelion

Second Place, Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

You see a weed
A flaw
An imperfection
On your perfect green lawn

I see
A beautiful reminder
That God exists
And creates yellow happiness

Heather Fess

Beach Pollution

2 surgical gloves
one inside the other,
dual protection, from some unknown disease

all fingers are concave
spare the longest one,
its dual-ply repulsion extended

its floating, dual-ply repulsion extended
polluting Long Island Sound

Scott M. Lacy

Where the Unicorns Live . . .

Third Place, Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest

I lie on the grass of the
forbidden garden
This is where the
unicorns live

I am not supposed to be here,
yet I feel I belong
I had to get away
the unicorns need me

. . . they pick me up and embrace me in a cloud
there I float . . . slowly . . . slowly . . . slowly
I close my eyes
and am lost in the unicorns ònce more . . .

He finally rolls off me sweaty and exhausted
I see the familiar red stains
the rumpled sheets . . .

My dolls have been knocked to the floor

I'm crying . . . pray!
Our father who art in heav—NO!
He rolls back on top of me and it begins . . . again
Where are my unicorns?

I close my eyes, and clutch my pillow to my face
Unicorns where are you? What's taking you so long . . .

I lie in the grass of the
forbidden garden
This is where my
unicorns live . . .

Stephanie Marcum

A Mr. Gruskin Story

Honorable Mention, Quiz and Quill Personal Essay Contest

George A. Gruskin was a modern-day Don Quixote. He was a true knight errant in a world of Republicans.

I met Mr. Gruskin because he was also Jim's dad, and Jim was my best friend in high school. The first time I saw Mr. Gruskin, he was watching a football game. Penn State, Mr. Gruskin's alma mater, was playing their arch rival, Pitt. When I walked into the T.V. room, Penn State had just scored a touchdown, and Mr. Gruskin was singing the fight song.

Mr. Gruskin looked like Ebenezer Scrooge. But instead of having scowl wrinkles, Mr. Gruskin had deep smile lines. So, he looked like Scrooge after that magical Christmas morning. He had salt and pepper hair with the left side long so he could flip it over his bald spot. He was wearing a Penn State T-shirt and navy blue slacks that were tucked into his Penn State tube socks, and he drank from a Penn State ceramic mug.

After the ensuing kick-off, Jim introduced me to his father. "Hello, Duff. As long as you're cheering for the Nittany Lions, you are welcome to stay."

"Actually, I'm a Michigan fan."

"Get out." Mr. Gruskin pointed toward the door.

"But in this game, I'm pulling for Penn State."

"Good. Would you like a coke or something?"

Mr. Gruskin wasn't as tough as he sometimes came off. Actually, he was a very kind and generous man, but he did have his rules. And he took his rules very seriously.

The first rule of Mr. Gruskin's that I was acquainted with was that if Penn State beats Pitt, then the

Gruskins serve steaks. If Penn State loses, then they serve White Castles.

I was lucky that first day over at the Gruskins'. I got to eat steak with them. But at the dinner table, Mr. Gruskin told me that he was celebrating his fifth wedding anniversary. His first wife and Jim's mother died when Jim was six years old. Mr. Gruskin married Diane in 1976 during the halftime of a Penn State-Pitt game. They weren't actually at the game. They got married at the party house in their apartment complex.

When I asked Jim if this information was true, he just nodded. Then, Mr. Gruskin said, "Yep. Worst day of my life. Penn State lost."

That was followed by a "George!!" from Diane.

But soon all was well, and we were laughing again.

Mr. Gruskin served White Castles at his wedding reception!

The next rule of Mr. Gruskin's concerned the phone. His pet peeves were 15-year-old boys calling and asking, "Is Jim there?" He must have heard that twenty times a day.

One day I called and asked, "Is Jim there?"

Mr. Gruskin said, "Yes." And that's all he said.

After a while, I figured out that Jim was not coming to the phone, so I asked, "Is Jim coming to the phone?"

"OH!" Mr. Gruskin said, "Do you want to talk to him?"

"Yes."

"Hold on. I'll get him."

I don't know why, but I never thought Mr. Gruskin was a jerk. He was just a guy who had a lot of

fun with everything he did. Ever since that first day on the phone with Mr. Gruskin, I've always started my phone conversations with, "May I speak with," whomever.

And one day, after Mr. Gruskin knew my voice, I decided to test him. I started off with, "Is Jim there?" And Mr. Gruskin just said, "Yes," and let me stew. I loved that man.

When Mr. Gruskin drove car pool, he'd ask us trivia questions about colleges. Anything was fair game. Name all the colleges in a given conference. Name a given college's nickname, school colors, and city. After we got good at that, he'd ask us to name Heisman trophy winners. The only rule concerning the trivia game was that you had to know the answer of the question that you asked. If you didn't know the correct answer, then you were barred from asking trivia questions for two weeks and you had to give him a formal written apology. My record was one and three. I stumped him once and had to write three formal apologies.

In an effort to stump Mr. Gruskin, I went to our bible, the World Almanac. The almanac had the color creme instead of white for all of the colleges that had white as a school color. I figured I had a chance to stump the wizard on a technicality. So, on the way home one day, I asked Mr. Gruskin for the colors of Northwestern.

He said, "I consider that an insult to my intelligence. Do I have to answer that question?"

"Yes. If you can." I was really cocky.

"Okay, purple and white."

Then I said, "Wrong! They're violet and creme."

Mr. Gruskin stopped the car and said, "Get out."

That was the reason I had to write my first formal

apology. He did give me a ride home, but I was barred from asking any more trivia questions for the next two weeks. The amazing part about it was that when it was Mr. Seremetis' week to drive car pool, the first thing he said to me was, "Mr. Gruskin called me, and he said that you were under suspension and couldn't ask a trivia question this week."

Mr. Gruskin constantly amazed me when I was a teenager. At that time in my life I didn't know where my father was, and I guess I adopted Mr. Gruskin to fill that void in my life. Whether or not he ever knew it, he was a great father for me.

One Christmas, Mr. Gruskin got a digital watch that told the time accurate to the second. From that day on, when Mr. Gruskin asked you what time it was, he wanted the seconds, too.

Often he said to me, "I didn't ask for an approximation of the time. I want to know what time it is." And then I'd give him the seconds.

At the end of my freshman football season, I had a serious knee injury. It ended my football career. (Mr. Gruskin would insist on my telling you that I use the term 'career' loosely). Anyway, when the guys from the neighborhood went to a football camp the next summer, I didn't go with them. But I did go along for the ride, and I must confess that I liked the idea of spending two hours alone with Mr. Gruskin.

On the way home, we had a great time talking. Then, I asked Mr. Gruskin for our estimated time of arrival. He said, "Three-fifty, post meridian time."

I asked him, "No seconds?"

He looked at me as if he was irritated by the

question, "No seconds."

Exactly one hour, twenty-two minutes and thirty-seven seconds later, we pulled into my driveway at 3:50:00 P.M.

He was an amazing man, and I could go on for hundreds of pages about him. But I won't. It starts to make me sad after a while. You see, Mr. Gruskin died of leukemia on December 22, 1983, and the reason I can remember that date so well is that it was my seventeenth birthday.

The crazy thing about Mr. Gruskin is that I can still feel him. Sometimes, especially when I'm having a rotten day, I think about Mr. Gruskin and I start to laugh. Mr. Gruskin was always good for a laugh. Anyway, it feels like he's alive when I talk about him with other people and laugh about something he's done.

The most intensely I ever felt that feeling was one time when I was with Jim at Mr. Gruskin's headstone. Penn State was playing for the National Championship in football that year, and we decided to put a Penn State pennant by the headstone. We had to break into the cemetery because by the time we got there it was closed. Jim and I were just standing there in the moonlight, laughing about what we were doing, telling each other Mr. Gruskin stories, and freezing our butts off. I haven't felt Mr. Gruskin's presence that strongly since, but there are those quiet moments just before I fall asleep that I say "Thank you" to Mr. Gruskin as a quiet tear rolls down my cheek.

Duff Woodside

The Long Ride Home

Second Place, Quiz and Quill Personal Essay Contest

Many combined experiences have accumulated in my eighteen years that have molded my individual personality. I realize that everywhere I have been, every book I have read, every movie I have watched, and everyone I have met has influenced me in some way. However, I believe none so much as one special teacher in 1984 who taught me more than the multiplication tables and helping verbs; she taught me about human kindness and self-respect.

I was a bright fourth-grader compared to the other children in my class. We all came from the "south end" of town, and poverty ran high, along with a stereotype that went as far back as my grandmother's days. People from our side of the tracks were looked upon as poor, trouble makers, and, most often, ignorant. I was a lonely exception, and my reputation spread like wildfire—I was the little girl who could write wonderful fairy tales using her spelling words and already knew how to divide fractions—I was special.

The favoritism led me to a position. I stayed after school and helped mark papers for Mrs. Frosini, my fourth-grade teacher and idol of perfection. For weeks I was allowed to hold the sacred red pen and grade homework for her; often I even helped put up bulletin boards and record scores. I usually walked home after these rituals, and proudly told my mother of the day's successes. I was brimming with innocent pride.

Things went on until one fateful afternoon in the middle of the year. It was growing dark. I had stayed extra long to help grade social studies tests. I

could not walk home with dusk rapidly falling, and my mother was not answering the phone. I accepted Mrs. Frosini's offer to drive me home with relief, and not another thought.

As we headed southward, the houses became dingier; the roads bumpier. Groups of smoking adolescents hung out on the corners, going nowhere and not caring about it. Shabby children dressed in dirty t-shirts stared unabashedly at the shiny blue car as it passed through the neighborhood. I grew more and more uneasy as we drove further and further south. Before, I was blind to the dirt and despondency I lived in. Now I saw it through helpless eyes.

Soon, we approached my house.

That was a dreaded moment in my life, for I lived in a somber grey stone house, with a green tin roof at 48 Logan Street. A rickety black fence stumbled around the yard, and the grass was dead. The moment my teacher, my paragon of success, turned onto my trash-lined street, my anxiety peaked into embarrassment, and yet another emotion I had not known before that day—shame.

"Go ahead and tell me when to slow down," she said, in between her chatter that had filled the empty space on my side of the car. "Here," I told her, and the car rolled to a stop beside a white linoleum-sided house that had a real silver link fence and a porch with a swing. It was 47 Logan Street.

"See you tomorrow," I said over my shoulder and I slammed the door, walking, head down, toward my own, plain home. I did not look behind me.

Mrs. Frosini, good woman that she was, let the car idle until she saw that I got in okay. She watched me trudge dejectedly up the steps to my house. She recognized the look on my face. The next day she

insisted on again taking me home, arguing that if she'd known I lived so far away, she'd never have let me walk home to begin with. My protests went unheard.

Once again, we made our way through the neighborhood. This time, though, Mrs. Frosini pulled up to the grey stone house, my house.

She, in all her wisdom, said, "I'm sorry; yesterday I thought you meant the house by the alley. You do live in this lovely grey house, don't you? The stone pattern is so unique. I don't think I've seen anything like it. Since I was a little girl I wanted to live in a house with a stone front—it reminded me of a castle. Do you ever pretend to be a princess up in your room? Is that where your imagination conjures up all those tales you spin with your spelling words?"

My nine-year-old mind did not know she told me what she did to make me feel better. I only realized this years later. She gave me confidence that day in myself and my roots. Later, that confidence turned into self-respect; for I had made it from the streets that mocked my dreams of success to a strong, young woman, who recently won several college scholarships.

My life might have turned out just as well without Mrs. Frosini's influence, but I doubt I would be as assured of myself as I am today. She is truly a great lady. I know for a fact that many of my peers still consider her their favorite teacher. She made us feel we had a place. I have found that place. I owe her much, much more than I can put down on paper in this small, but relevant tribute to a woman of great magnitude, one that accomplished near miracles with simple experiences.

Katrina Renee Seymour

Once in a While

Once in a while
when a person is gone
some sob for their soul.
More oft than not
their going is marked
with a stone . . .
then covered with moss.
Not many care for
the dying and dead.
They are not here
let them care for their lot.

Once in a while
someone will care to grieve
for the one who is gone.
Sooner than not,
their heart becomes stone
and all the caring the world
has is gone.
Once in a while.

Nancy A. Ketzler

Rain Falling

Rain falling
Rivulets of martyred drops
Cast away
By the mechanical execution
Of my windshield wiper

I watch them fall
Steaming inferno onto the road
Blowing suicidal against moving metal
Splattering selflessly

Some fall onto solid pavement
Joining in homogeneity
The others
Forming a unified flow of mediocrity
Running always running
To easily attainable sanctuary
To gravitational gods
Forever ending
Slipping almost unnoticeably
Beneath the city
Looking back onto the possibilities of light
Potential unforgivingly forsaken
For the security of constant unbroken motion

Yet others refute the smooth silvery motion
Choosing instead to fall to the earth
The thirsty uncertain earth
She clutching solely onto each drop
Insisting upon painful singularity

Rain falling
And I see myself
Headed precariously for the sidewalk
But a drifting wind
Catches me in watery suspension
And I fall instead upon the shoulder of a weed
Rebelliously forcing through an impossibly small crack
Green in a monotony of gray
And now greener still

Jennifer Lynn Hillmann

g.o.d.

Third Place, Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

i would have sworn (my love)
that my heart (which watches
april's coming—the daffodils—
safely from the porch) has known love:

—it has been haunted by every
essence of Spring (lilacs and magnolias)
and every full moon (every haunting filled
with frozen memories of lovers past)—

and i would swear (by april) that you
have always been the one haunting me
(magnetically) till now (the meeting
of our) ghostly (hearts and minds)

the warm breath of your laughter
melts memories (in the pool of our eyes)

Duff Woodside

My Wild Love*Honorable Mention, Quiz and Quill Poetry Contest*

Gypsy girl w/
syrup hair
softly parading through
green summer fields
laughter whispers like
bells in the enveloping mist
skirts of soft color
twirl in dancing firelight

James Dye

Progress

Untouched Paradise +
Indians +
Explorers +
Colonists +
slaves ÷
(farming x
manufacturing) =
Twinkies

Scott M. Lacy

Dusty Rooms and Dead Flowers
Third Place, Quiz and Quill Short Story Contest

The lawyer pushed up his glasses and sat back slightly in his chair, gazing at the lady sitting across the desk from him, her reddish brown hair streaked with grey. "Mrs. Trevor, don't you think it would be more fair for you to leave the house to your children to decide if they wish to sell? It might comfort them at your death to have something of you left."

"No. The house is to be sold upon my death and the money is to be split evenly. I will not give them one more problem to face upon my death." She leaned forward, her face pale and weary from the cancer which was eating away at her. "My husband has been gone many years now, and I won't last much longer. All that is left in that house is dusty rooms and fond memories. My kids need to move ahead with their lives and not be trapped in the past."

The lawyer nodded and bent over the will. "I'll just need you to sign here, and we'll be done."

Mrs. Megan Trevor walked to the bus stop down the block. She waited for the bus, lost in the memories of a girl who got lost in those dusty rooms and vivid memories.

* * * *

He was finally dead. Megan Hathway gazed out the window at the sun dancing on the corn fields surrounding the house. Her face was thin and tired, and her light reddish-brown hair was pulled back with a black ribbon. The pain, the blood, and the stench were finally over. In just six months her father had turned from lively giant with an astonishingly red tuft of hair, to the withered-away, gaunt corpse that had been put

underground just a few hours ago. And now his house, that he had built with his own hands, was hers.

"It's supposed to be dark and rainy for a funeral, isn't it?" Megan's mother said, as she stood in the doorway. Her black hair was pulled back as tightly as Megan's and her thin face was creased with a sad smile.

Megan turned away from the window shaking her head. "I just don't understand, why'd he leave the house to me? Becky has a family and could use it, and you have no place to stay. Why me?"

Mrs. Hathway frowned in surprise at the sudden question. "Becky's husband has a house, so they have no use for this, and I've already decided to live with her. She works the farm and needs help with the children, so I'll be useful around the house. I won't be lonely there, like I would here," she said matter-of-factly. "Your father gave the house to you because he wanted you to sell it. He wanted you to be the first of our family to go to college."

Megan shook her head again and walked over to the front door, where three bags of clothes were sitting. She grabbed one and called over her shoulder, "How could I sell this place? The people out here want the land, not the house. Dad built this house. They would tear it down."

Megan's mother sighed extravagantly, walked over, and grabbed a bag. "It's a house, Megan. Nothing more. A bunch of dusty, lifeless rooms that are crying out to be torn down. Your dreams are much more important than that." She picked up a second bag and flung both over her shoulder. "This is the last load. I am officially moved out; and I'm hungry. We'd better get to your sister's before the little monsters eat our dinner. You drive the beast."

The truck really was a beast, with rust everywhere— but the drive to Becky's was beautiful. The

corn was in tassel, and rows upon golden rows gleamed in the sunlight. They passed a black Amish buggy, the brown horse's hooves flashing in the sun.

At the driveway they were greeted by Becky's plump form. She waved them into a spot beside the barn and said "John took the kids to his mother's so we could have a night alone. I've got to finish the milking." She waved her hand towards the two-story farmhouse, "Dinner is on the stove reheating, I've already eaten. I'll be in, in a little while."

It was dark before Becky came in. Megan and her mother had already done the dishes and were settled in the dark, wood-paneled living room.

Becky hung up her coat and settled down on the couch with Megan. She sighed. "No matter what happens, the cows always need milked and fed," she said with a tired smile. She brushed her short red hair out of her face with one hand. "Are you settled in, Mom?" she asked.

"Everything is moved out of that house and into this one," Mrs. Hathway replied, settling deeper into the rocking chair she was sitting in. She glanced around and said, "I'm going to like it here. Plenty of work, lots of children—I've missed little ones." She looked from Megan to Becky, then back to Megan. "Your sister doesn't think she's going to sell the house," she said with the air of a little girl tattling.

Becky turned to her sister with astonishment. "Not sell? But what about college? I thought you wanted to be a teacher!" she asked.

Megan glared at her mother. "I do, but maybe I can work and save for it. There are so many memories in that house, especially with Dad gone now, that I couldn't sell. It would just be too hard," she replied.

Becky started to protest, but Mrs. Hathway cut her off. "Yes, quite a few memories. As a matter of

fact, I remember having Becky in that house . . ." She started rocking her chair slightly.

Megan and Becky exchanged a glance and settled back, recognizing one of their mother's stories.

"It was an easy delivery, right in the living room. Your father stayed with me the whole time, even though the midwife tried to drive him out. He actually wanted to be there." There were tears in her eyes as she glanced at her daughters. "He had to be the first to hold her. He looked so ridiculous, a giant with his red hair glowing in the candle light, holding this wee tiny baby. He gazed at her for a long time then looked up at me with wonder in his eyes and said 'Her hair is red.' He was so amazed." Mrs. Hathway wiped her tears with the back of her hand. "Six years later Megan came the same way. He was never angry at not having sons, that it took six years for me to conceive again. He was just lost in the wonder of what he had, and what he could make out of what he had." The room was still when she finished speaking.

Becky broke the silence, "Remember when he bought that pony for Megan and set her on its back . . ."

"And it took off and left me in a mud pile," Megan interrupted with a smile, remembering. "He was so upset. But he didn't get rid of the pony. Instead, he worked with it and worked with it until it was the gentlest pony in the county."

Mrs. Hathway smiled sadly. "He told me it had to be a good pony, and it ended up being one. He knew what someone or something could be, and worked till they became it."

A tear slipped down Megan's face and she asked "How can I sell such wonderful memories? There's a part of him in that house, a part that I can't replace, a part I don't want to replace. I'd think that after all you've remembered, you'd want me to keep the house

too!"

"No, Megan," Mrs. Hathway reproved, walking over to settle between her daughters. "It isn't the house which holds such memories; they'll always be there even without a house. When my grandfather died, each grandchild received a rose from the bushes by his house. I held so tightly to that rose because I felt that this was the last piece of him I had. It wilted and died, yet I still kept it because I felt that throwing it away would be tossing away my memories of him. Then one day I got tired of looking at the old dead flower, so I threw it away. When I did, all of my memories remained the same, except I wasn't evoking them with an old dead flower any more. I was letting them come naturally." She took Megan's hand in her own. "Don't remember your father through a dead flower, honey. Remember him through new experiences. Make him proud."

Megan let herself cry with her mother's arms around her. She didn't want to sell and give up that part of her father, but she had to. If it was just to make her father proud of what she could become, she had to.

* * * *

"Hi, Mrs. Trevor!" A voice spoke at her elbow, jolting her out of her memories. She turned to find one of her former students smiling at her from behind a beard. She smiled at him and thought that maybe she'd saved her children at least one decision on her death. They wouldn't be held back by dusty rooms and dead flowers.

Kelley Grant

Huh?

Second Place, Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

How
Do I get through
To those who will not listen?

They speak
And talk
Of what they know,
But when it comes their time to hear,

They will not listen.

Must I be loud and brash
or soft and kind
Like a lion or a lamb
or must I take the middle road
Persuasive, clear and cunning
or the back alley of deceit,
Which plays upon emotion
and throws dignity out of the window?

Or should I sit and reason for days on end
Hoping that they will one day see
That the choice is up to them?
What should I do to get through to them?
What must I do for them to listen?

Kelvin Carter

Finish the Story

Second Place, Quiz and Quill Short Story Contest

Kim was racking her brain to come up with a story. She couldn't think of anything. She squinted her eyes, hoping to jog some memory or idea. She wished she hadn't agreed to go first this morning. She looked around; they were snuggled under the fluffy down comforter that her grandmother had given her last summer. It was warm and comfortable and neither one of them wanted to leave its warm embrace. The wintry cold penetrated the old apartment and they had decided not to brave that cold just yet. They had resigned themselves to the comforter and bed for the morning, at least until the squeaky furnace built up enough energy to drive out the icy winter air and reclaim its hold on the tiny apartment.

"Ahem!" Mark coughed, his face pulled up in a sly grin.

"Okay, okay. This isn't a very good one but here goes," Kim said. Then she began her story.

"To her, men were like razor blades to be used whenever she felt the need, then discarded when they got dull," Kim said.

"Oh god, Kim, that has got to be the worst line yet," Mark said. His voice had a sarcastic and sleepy tone.

"Well, excuse me, Mr. Steven King," Kim said. "Why don't you try it?"

"Oh no, you don't get off the hook that easy," Mark interrupted. "It's your turn to tell a story, so tell."

"Well," she began. "How about . . . I'll make you breakfast if you tell the story." She smiled, knowing that he wouldn't refuse the offer.

"Ummm," he said. His face scrunched up as if he was in deep contemplation. "Okay, but give me a minute to think."

A minute, he always said that. The worst part about it was that it did only take him a minute! God,

one minute and he would come up with an entire story! None of them were short, and he told them so fluently.

She looked up at him and almost laughed aloud. His hair, those brown curly locks that dangled so lazily over his left eye, and that he spent an hour fixing each morning, looked exactly the same when he first woke up, perfect.

Her mind wandered back to when they had first started telling each other stories. It had been their second date.

"The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." Her mother's voice had echoed in her mind as she put the lasagna into the oven. She surveyed the kitchen, a total disaster she thought. The counters were covered with flour, empty boxes of pasta; and worst of all, the stove was covered with her mother's special sauce, which had boiled over.

"What a mess," Kim said. She closed her eyes and hoped the mess would disappear, it didn't. "Oh well, Mother better not be wrong about this stomach thing!"

She had let out a small sigh as she started to wipe the counters off. As the last drop of sauce was wiped off of the ancient stove top, Kim glanced at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was four o'clock. Mark was coming at six, which meant she had better get ready. She hurried towards the bathroom, tearing off the soiled apron and the sweat suit beneath it. Kim stopped momentarily in front of the mirror; her long blonde hair cascaded down upon her shoulders, framing her face in a splendid display of golden light. Her body, still tan from the summer, was firm. Maybe that's why Mother had to go through dad's stomach, Kim thought, as she pictured her mother's somewhat stocky form.

"Well if he doesn't like the meal, I'll just have to use some sex appeal!" she said. Kim then burst out laughing at the unintended rhyme.

After a quick shower, Kim stood before the

closed closet door. Her heart was racing and her face felt flushed .

"Now the hard part," she said aloud. She opened the closet and sighed, "what to wear, what to wear."

Twenty minutes and ten outfits later she had finally come upon the black, somewhat revealing, cocktail dress her mother had gotten her last Christmas. She hadn't worn it yet and felt a bit apprehensive as she pulled it from the clear plastic bag that encased it. It fit perfectly; she felt a sense of satisfaction. She had found the perfect dress for the evening and she hadn't gained any weight since last Christmas!

Kim was feeling very happy as they cleared the dishes from the table. Dinner had been a complete success, and she thought, "he could hardly keep his eyes off of me." She smiled as she amended her mother's advice to, "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach and his eyes!"

They had settled down onto the couch to watch a romantic movie her friend had recommended. It started out quite well but sitting this close to Mark anything would seem wonderful, she thought, and then took his hand in hers. Just then the lights flickered and complete darkness descended upon them.

"Uh oh," she said. She felt her heart plunge into her stomach and she knew this wonderful evening had come to an end. But then he had brought up the idea of telling stories to pass the time. By the light of a few flickering candles, he had amazed her with a horrifying tale. Then he had asked her to tell him a story. Reluctantly she agreed and told him about the family trip to Las Vegas and how they had gotten lost somewhere in Wyoming. While it had not compared to his fictional tale, he had seemed so enthralled by it that she had wanted to tell him her entire life history. Since that night they had given up on t.v. and adopted the ritual of story telling.

"Kim. Kimmy, hey Kim, wake up!" He teased her out of her reflections.

"Oh sorry, I was just thinking. Are you ready?" She winced at the absurdity of her question. He just smiled.

"Yup," he said. "This is gonna be a good one." Going to be a good one, she thought. Out of the hundred or so he had told there were no bad ones. He was the grand narrator who set the stage in her mind and pulled the strings of her imagination, with the end result being a visualization so vivid she sometimes felt she was dreaming. She tuned into his voice and realized that he had started and she had missed the first part of the story. Mark didn't notice; he was already engrossed in the story. His eyes glazed as if he was recalling some far-off memory.

". . . When the police arrived at the one-story ranch house, they found a brutal scene. The members of the family that lived within had been killed. The police termed it a ritual killing, since the family had apparently died at the hands of a satanic cult. The bodies, what little they found, had been hacked so many times a murder weapon could not be established, though some suspected an axe or two. In their search of the house they found a little boy who was still alive. He sat motionless in front of a t.v. staring into the static-filled screen. His arms and legs were a mass of bruises and cigarette burns. They tried for weeks to get the boy to talk, to tell them what happened, to even say a word, but they failed. They called in social workers and the state's best psychologist, but he wouldn't respond; he just sat facing a window or the wall open-eyed and speechless.

"Finally the police had to place the boy in a mental institution. They tried, unsuccessfully, to locate any surviving relatives. They talked to the neighbors to try and establish someone who could make contact with the boy, but they were met with hastily closed doors. No one seemed to want to talk about the little boy or the family that had lived next door. The police were baffled at this lack of concern and avoidance by the

neighbors, but after the boy was institutionalized he just became another file gathering dust. No more of these bizarre killings occurred and the whole affair turned into a memory that faded with time."

Mark paused and he seemed to be struggling to continue the story. His face tightened into a grimace as if he had lost his train of thought and couldn't continue. Kim was overcome by a sense of unease; something seemed wrong. Mark had never fallen silent during a story; it almost seemed that he was in pain. The silence that filled the room was growing unbearable. Even if he didn't continue his story she wished he would say something. Kim couldn't believe that Mark still had that distant look in his eyes. She wanted to reach out and touch his hand but she felt herself tremble as she tried. Finally his face eased and he became more relaxed.

Kim's stomach growled; she pushed against her flat stomach trying to quiet the gurgling noise. She looked at Mark. He looked like he was getting ready to talk again, probably to continue his story since his eyes still held that distant look.

"Mark, Mark honey," Kim said. "Are you hungry?"

Mark shook his head slowly and looked around as if to see where he was.

"Gee, I've been talking for a long time," Mark said as his eyes came to rest on the clock.

Kim looked at him, her face scrunched up in a frown. She had never seen him act so strange.

"Mark, are you feeling all right?" Kim asked.

"Yeah, I'm all right," Mark said. "Just a little tired, that's all."

He turned away from her and looked into the mirror on her dresser. As she glanced at his reflection the frown on her face deepened. He seemed different; something about his face wasn't so innocent; he seemed older. She dismissed the thought as being caused by the horror story and lack of breakfast.

"I'll make us something to eat," Kim said, break-

ing the silence that had settled on the room in the absence of Mark's story. "Then you can finish your story."

"No, I'll do it," Mark said. Then he rose and walked into the kitchen.

Kim smiled and lay back onto the pillow behind her. She sank into its softness as a feeling of relaxation coursed through her. She was surprised and relieved by Mark's offer to make breakfast. He's acting okay now, she thought. A loud clanging shocked her from her joyful thoughts.

"Mark, are you okay?" She asked. "What happened?"

Silence was her only answer. She sat up and put her feet over the side of the bed. She was getting ready to run into the kitchen when she saw Mark round the corner of the hallway leading to her room. He was smiling madly and had one hand behind his back.

"Mark," she said as a smile appeared on her face.

She was relieved that he was all right and happy that he was getting playful again. Back to his old self, she thought. She knew that he was teasing her, and it made her smile even more. Her eyes widened in anticipation of his gift. What could he have, she wondered? The suspense was killing her; she loved it when Mark brought her a surprise. Mark kept approaching and slowly he started to bring his hand into view.

"You are supposed to be cooking me breakfast," Kim said in mock anger. She pointed her finger at him in a motherly way. "Mark, what are you doing?"

Kim watched as he drew his hand from behind his back. It held a knife. Kim retreated a step and opened her mouth to scream but her throat was clenched tight; no sound escaped.

"Finishing the story," Mark said. His laughter shattered the silent winter afternoon and echoed madly on the cold, snowy breeze.

James Dye

Contributors

Kelvin Carter is a senior chemistry major. "Through the years, I have learned that we all feel lost sometimes, and we all feel hurt inside, and we all need."

Greg Davis is a junior English writing major. "Art is like poetry, but you know when a picture is done."

James Dye is a senior psychology major being printed for the first time.

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Stephanie Marcum is a freshman musical theater major. "I felt the message in this poem needed to get out to open the readers' eyes."

Katrina Renee Seymour is a freshman English literature major. "Interesting? Me? Nahhhh . . . not really."

Duff Woodside is a senior English writing major. "I have no social conscience."

Bryan Worra is a freshman who is undecided about his major. "I believe in the rights of the inscrutable to be annoying so long as they're interesting."

