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Spring 1996

1996 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

Otterbein English Department
Otterbein University, englishdept@otterbein.edu

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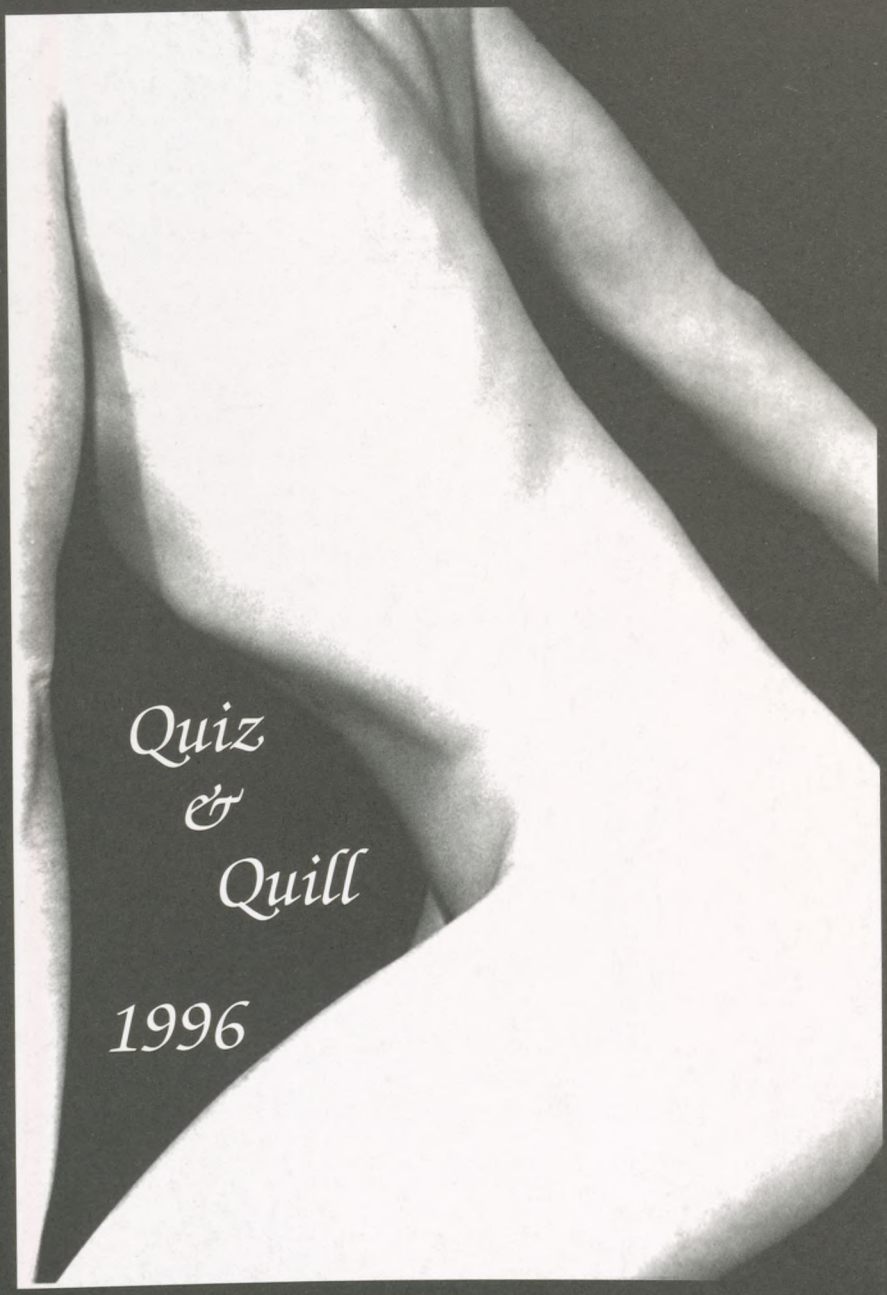

Quiz & Quill

1996

Quiz and Quill

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This year's *Quiz and Quill* bursts with young, new voices that have never appeared in the magazine before. The magazine flows with new ideas and dynamic situations. The staff as well was filled with new members that brought creative energy to our meetings as well as the selection process. Many thanks to an active staff.

Once again this year we had more submissions than the year before, which made the quarter-long selection process even more difficult. We appreciated all of the submissions: they were filled with talent and wonderful voices. At the poetry readings we sponsored this year we had the opportunity to hear many of your voices and look forward to hearing you in the future.

Dr. Rittenhouse was once again a pillar of strength and brought our group the guidance it needed. He excelled at pushing our group through the deliberation process on the work submitted and helped with the entire process of getting the magazine off to the presses.

This magazine is a wonderful and unique opportunity for students on this campus to read and also share their work. Realize all of the voices you hear around you and inside you and keep writing.

This edition of *Quiz and Quill* is dedicated
to Dr. Wayne Rittenhouse,
who is a great friend and without whose support I could not have endured Otterbein until graduation. Thank you.

Editors

Adam Ellis, editor
Dr. Wayne Rittenhouse, advisor
Sunny Killina, layout designer

Staff

Holly Baker
Lisa Cozad-Deisz
Cheryl Crane
Jen Gray
Mandi Greaves
Beth Honeycutt
Jason Green
Sunny Killina
Carolyn Smith
Lara Spendiff
Elizabeth Triplett
Karin Wraley

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Death of a Lap Cat Daughter

He wants me to cuddle in his lap,
look into his mocking blue eyes,
and purr.

I can't,
remembering
the same eyes
locked into mine,
his claws
shoved into my back,
his tail
twitching nervously ...

I glare at him defiantly
My back arches —
covered in the wetness
I despise.

I am not your lap cat daughter.

I killed that passive puss long ago.

Call me Curosity
— for life.

Sunny Killina

Letter to My Younger Brother

Matt,

It seems odd that I sit here writing you a letter. Although you are my brother, you are the one person that I know of in this world with whom I have absolutely nothing in common, aside from the fact that we were born from the same parents. As I sit here searching for words, it occurs to me that I haven't a clue what to say—you and I have never had a conversation about anything personal. I know virtually nothing about you despite the fact that I have known you for 19 years. Almost all I think I know of you are assumptions, and probably, they are misconceptions. When we were both still in high school, I was able to think of you, and describe you, to my friends in very few words: "jock" and "asshole" being two of my favorites. You were the egotistical basketball star, the one who everyone instantly liked, the one who could get away with anything. Never did I stop to think of how you must have looked at me, until now. You must have thought me to be such a jealous, wicked person all those times you tried to talk to me and I ignored you. You used to knock on my bedroom door and poke your head in shyly, but before you could speak, I'd say, "Get out." I never thought that maybe you wanted to be my friend. Eventually, you just ignored me, and I must have become the same thing to you as I was to everyone else— "the weirdo," the girl that you had (what must've been to you) the misfortune of calling "sister."

Your freshman year of high school—my junior year—you made the Canfield High School Varsity Basketball team— "an incredible feat" according to Dad. You were the only freshman ever to do that at Canfield. Mom and Dad, then still together, were so proud of you, in all your glory, that I often felt ignored. They, of course, had no intention

of making me feel that way. In fact, now, I'm sure I imagined almost all of it. But I began to resent you. I resented the extra attention you got from Mom and Dad. I resented the fact that they went to every single one of your games, but often didn't have time to attend my dance performances. I resented the fact that you never had to do any chores because you had to "rest up for the game." I resented the news stories on you; I resented the headline, "Matt Davis Wins Game." I always thought the *team* won, not you as an individual. I resented the college scouts who came to see you play, taking careful notes. I resented your name being announced over the school's PA system on Monday morning as Friday night's high scorer. I resented the day we went to the mall your junior year (I was well into my freshman year of college) and you were mobbed by young children from other schools wanting to meet you and get your autograph. Your autograph. Those little kids wanted your signature on a piece of paper. They referred to me as "Matt Davis' sister." I didn't have a name and I nearly hated you for it. Probably the only reason I didn't hate you was because I was in such awe of you. They knew your name, jersey number (#34, always), and statistics (#1 rebounder, high scorer, highest free throw percentage, number one three point shooter—all of these in the league, not in your school). Because they knew those things about you, they knew almost as much about you as I did. That perhaps, is what I resented the most.

Then, after years of MVP All-American status, you gave it up. Quit. You were offered full rides to some big schools—Ohio State, Indiana, Duke—and you politely said, "No." With no explanation, you turned them down. All of them. That was the first time you had done something that didn't fit with my image of you. Mom and Dad, hell, the entire community—they were all shocked. They shook their heads in disbelief, as if you owed them something. All you were to them was a chance at fame. A basketball player—a machine, an unstoppable force. I was ashamed,

because for years that's how I saw you, too. You were never a person to me, and it was easier that way. I never saw how much pressure Matt "The Rifleman" Davis was under, or how they blamed you if the team lost a game. All I saw was your invincibility. I didn't see that you were forced to be hard like that; I didn't see that you were afraid to let them see how you felt—that you couldn't let them see who you really were.

In that quiet moment when you decided to attend Miami University on an engineering scholarship and not play basketball, I saw you as a real person for the first time. You—not your reputation—and I loved you then. Still, to this day, I have never asked you why you quit, and I'm probably the only person who hasn't. I think I know why, and I think you know that I didn't ask because I finally saw what it must be like to be you. That is, quite possibly, our first real connection.

Your friends have called you a "gentleman, on and off the court." Coach Cullen said of you in his speech at the end of your senior year, "Matt Davis has nothing but the utmost respect and compassion for everyone...Matt Davis is the only person I know that really wants to know how you are when he greets you with 'how are you?'" I didn't think he could possibly be talking about you. I always thought of you as rude and vulgar, when the truth is that you are quite the opposite. You are polite, courteous, friendly, concerned—things that I have never been. That senior year ended just short of the state championships, which was not your fault, but they blamed you for it. I went to that last game, and it was the first one I had attended in three years. After the game, I watched the interview with you that made the news, and I will never forget what you said when the newscaster asked you what you had to say about he game. "I want to thank my sister for coming to see me play. That's all I have to say." I never knew it meant that much to you. I never knew you cared until I saw it on the news that night.

It makes me sad that you quit because I know you love the game. I know how you love the thrill of holding that big, rough ball in your hands, but I also know how you couldn't possibly have withstood another minute of that pressure. I wonder why you didn't start over in college, why you didn't put their red and black "Fighting Cardinal" gossip behind you. I fear that it's because they brought you down, they lowered those cloudy blue eyes and now you can't remember how to look up again. I fear that you, the large, fair, quiet, gentle one have lost your faith in people. I fear that you, the optimist, no longer believe. And I can't blame you for that.

Now you play intramural ping pong. You were the champion of that league, but someone finally beat you. How did it feel to lose and not be blamed? As that little white, hollow sounding ball bounces off the table, do you still think about basketball? Do you sit alone in your dorm room and dribble your favorite ball, like I used to hear you doing at night through the wall that separated our bedrooms at home? I used to hate that sound. Now I miss it.

I have a photograph of you cutting down the District Championship net your senior year. Maybe, for that second, you forgot about the player on the other team who screamed at you, calling you names when you wouldn't fight him. You had done the right thing, you had shown your character then, but people still blamed you. An old man in the stands said, "What's the matter with that Davis kid? Can't he fight like a man?" Now thinking back on that incident, I am reminded of something I saw on TV the other day–"The game does not create character, it reveals it." That photo of you is my favorite. Your long, strong arms are above your head, one hand holding scissors and the other, the net, your face and light hair are wet with sweat, your eyes are shining, and you're smiling that same mischievous eight-year-old smile that you smiled when you accidentally burned down the woods in our backyard all

those years ago. (Do you remember how you hid under your bed for hours because you were afraid the firemen would arrest you?) And yet, somehow, in such a happy moment, there is a bit of sadness about you that cannot be ignored, and I can't get past it. I wonder if you still have that bit of net.

Sometimes, now, you call me for help with an English assignment. Sometimes, you call me just to talk, and that feels nice. Sometimes, I call you, and that feels even better. I enjoy the fact that we are becoming friends, and that you know I understand, just as much as you understand, that I know I was wrong about you. More than that, I don't know how to say I'm sorry. I regret all the years we lost because of my jealousy. I was never friendly towards you, I never helped you when you needed it, I never went even slightly out of my way for you. And all that time, you said nothing. You remained calm while I ranted and raved; you came quietly to my side in assistance. You poked your head in my door every single time you knew I was upset, even though you knew I'd say, "Get out." I have always turned my back on you because I am just too damned proud, just like Mom. I was a horrid sister because I was afraid of being wrong about you, and you know how I hate to be wrong. I was afraid to discover that you were not a dumb jock or an asshole. But I'm not afraid anymore. Finally, I have grown up enough to admit my folly. Finally, I have grown up enough to be a big sister to a man.

Proudly,

Your sister

Lisa Davis

As You Were Dying

Who were you talking to
that night,
my night to keep watch,
the responsibility that I, your daughter, demanded
from those protecting me
because I knew what was happening.
I was the one
in the hospital with you
that Halloween summer.

Two times that night
your eyes became suddenly clear
and focused
on the invisible someone
standing in the empty doorway.
You spoke to that person
and said in your weak scolding voice
"I told you to go away!"

I knew in my soul
it had nothing to do
with the poisons
playing games in your mind
and body
because your liver was not a liver
anymore.

Were they death doctors,
scalpel in hand
coming to cut your life string,
your connection to this cruel world?

Were they angels
sent by the Almighty

to relieve you of responsibility,
to give you a break?

Was it Grandpa
coming to take you home?

The nurse suggested I call
somebody,
but your body quit
before Dad's car
could speed him to us.
Your spirit, though, lingered
a little longer
and I cried,
as I did in my nightmares,
as I still do today
when I remember
that final moment.

Kim Bales

The Neighbor Lady

Stumbling in
during the middle of the night,
the neighbor lady
lives her part of the day.
Even though she secretly wishes to
be a good girl,
her underwire bra,
the attractively seductive undergarment
with an angry poking wire,
cuts into her like a dagger
reminding her of her
sourness and duty
to keep the neighbors up all night
with her many men and
drunken, conversational confessions.

Hilary Kimes

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Hilary Kimes

Introduction To Me

Part I: On Life

I have really always thought that life stinks. I heard that line on *Dave's World* one night. "Life stinks," and it came out of the mouth of a child. It spun me back to that time in my life, and I don't always look back too fondly on my childhood. We were poor as dirt, had the ugliest car in the neighborhood, and our house was a dump. The one thing I always wondered about was how Mom always managed to buy the best food for us. No matter how empty her purse was, we never starved or bought generics. When it came to grape jam, Kroger brand was not good enough, only Smuckers in our house. My clothes and toys *were* generic, and the Salvation Army was our Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. But we ate like kings.

Our stocked cupboards (and my undying love for chocolate) was why I was so fat. I was bigger around than I was tall, and I always got picked on. Kids say the cruelest things, I do believe, and I'll never forget how many times cruel mouths spat out at my rotund body. "You need to go on a diet," they would say. I can remember when my stepmother, Penny, who was obsessed with the human body, gave each of my brothers a Pepsi and a Twix bar. I waited for my treat as she walked back from the kitchen and handed me a glass of Crystal Light lemonade. Mike (my brother closest in age to me) was shocked and tried to sneak me his Twix, but I was too ashamed to accept it and too busy crying to eat it. I guess not only kids can be cruel.

As time went on, I still never "accomplished" a beautiful, skinny figure. In high school, I was turned down by my first big crush because I was too fat. Strike one. Still, I always tried to be athletic and get into the popular crowd. I finally made it, and had the time of my life with all of the popular, athletic girls. I had many male friends too who flirted with me, because, despite my slightly overweight build, I did have *some* sex appeal. So, I played basketball

with pride and never felt like the fat girl trying to run down the court. In fact, I was a starter my freshman year. It was great until my coach pulled me out into the hall at the end of the season to tell me that she wanted me to drop twenty pounds for the next season. Strike two.

Now that I have got a slightly more appealing figure and go out with guys who didn't know me when I was heavier, I feel better about myself. I always tuck in my shirt now, even tight ones. Before, I only wore big, baggy sweatshirts and loose jeans that sagged on my ass, probably making me look even bigger. So when I'm out on the town with the man of my dreams, or at a party with old friends trying to look sexy, it always happens. Someone has to come up to me, stare into my face for a second, and say really loudly, "Oh my gosh . . . Kate? I didn't even recognize you. You have lost SO much weight! We're talking BIG pounds!" Of course I just smile and say thanks, swallowing my embarrassment, since the guy I'm next to never knew me when I was a chub. And then I think, "Gee, they must have thought I was a real porker . . .". Strike three.

Part II: On Death

For some reason, I have always had this feeling that I am not going to live very long. I remember when I was in sixth grade, teachers and relatives used to ask me what I wanted to do when I grew up, or where I wanted to go to college. I always had the same answer, "I don't think I'll live that long." They always looked at me funny, so I would act like I was joking to ensure that they wouldn't think I was crazy.

Some people know I'm serious though. My first love was with the neighbor boy who always drove like his ass was on fire. He knew. As I gritted my teeth around curves, I would tell him that I didn't want to die a virgin, so he better pull over and have his way with me before we crashed. Then we had sex. I changed my mind and told him I didn't want to die before I had *good* sex. Needless to say, I'm still alive, so I obviously haven't met my prerequi-

sites for dying yet.

I probably couldn't count the many times that I really thought I was a goner. A couple of years ago, I got really sick to where all I could do was lie in bed and cry. I was so delirious that I wrote a will in my little blue diary with the combination lock. Have you ever considered what possessions a teenager could have that would actually be worthy of being in a will? I left things like my stuffed animal collections, my clarinet, my Happy Meal toy collection, and all of the road signs I've stolen over the years. I have written so many "good-bye forever" letters that an archivist of my life will bet his last dollar that I was suicidal. I'm not, I'm just extremely in touch with my mortality.

The weird part about it is, I keep reaching milestones in my life that I never thought I would. Yet, still I believe that my end is near. Recently I bought a new car. Actually, it is four years old, but my goal was to own a vehicle that was manufactured in the same decade I am living in. She's a hot, little red Sunbird. Guess why I bought it. Because I thought I was going to die in my previous car, so I traded it in.

I can remember it so vividly: I was driving home when some dipshit ran a stop sign and caused an accident right in front of me. My whole life flashed before my eyes, and although that statement is so cliche, it is so true. What a boring life. I haven't even had good sex yet, and here's the end. I came out unscathed, but as I sat in the police car with streaks in my pants that matched the patch I left on the road, I knew something was going to happen soon. I must have baffled the officer because I wrote the report all about myself and how I so attentively avoided the collision. What he *wanted* to know was who caused it, not about my valiant driving efforts.

On my way home the same day, crying as I drove, I had to stop abruptly for another man who ran a stop sign. Three days later, a deer ran out in front of me near an interstate overpass. I pulled over and just sat there think-

ing, "I'm doomed, and I'm going to die in this car." I looked to my left and saw three police cars on the freeway. There had been a serious accident. I told myself that if I saw one more accident, I was really going to write a will. Not even a week later, I was back to driving illegal speeds when a man ran out in front of me flailing his arms. His van had slipped on the ice and rolled down the bridge with his two daughters trapped inside. I was instructed to find the nearest phone and call 911. That's it, I'm done for. I went and traded that little death trap in for my Sunbird.

I was so proud of myself, that at nineteen- years- old, I got a loan to buy a car with no co-signer. I also had the "death" insurance added to my monthly payment. I proudly announced, "If I die before my car is paid off, it will automatically go to who I leave it to." So my supportive brother says, "You'll probably die in the damn thing and then nobody will want it . . .".

Part III: On Men

Whenever I got really down about being single for the majority of my life, I always had someone by my side saying, "When you aren't looking for someone, that is when they come along . . .". Good grief, was I ever sick of that little comment. Well, I never thought I would admit it, but it is true. I decided to cop a major attitude this past summer and do what every twenty- year- old college student should do: date around. Yup, that's right. No more crying in my mug that I was always (and I do mean always) the third, fifth, or seventh wheel on a night out with friends. I was going to have fun, and I was going to be a bitch, because that is what men like, ya know.

Well, sure enough, in one summer I met four different men who all wanted a serious relationship with me. Of course I had my lines rehearsed, "Ohhh, well, I don't want any commitments right now. I am going to see other people . . .". Two of them stuck it out and tried to get me to change my mind, but by golly, I was just having too much fun playing with men the way I had been played for years.

Of course it all blew up in my face, and I will be the first to admit that. One of the guys I went out with never called me back after our date, and I was all but happy. I saw him at a party and asked him why he never called. It being months later, I had forgotten the big schpeel I had given him about my freedom and about the three other guys I was seeing at the time. He thought he didn't have a chance and figured I would call him if I wanted to see him. So, the playing hard to get thing didn't work either. He thought I *was* hard to get . . .

So anyway, here it is in the dead of winter, and what do I do on a Friday night? I sit here kicking myself that I went through that damn dating around phase! Not that the phase was bad, but it fell at exactly the moment in my life that more men wanted to see me than ever before! I sit here and envision the fact that on Christmas cards, I am paired up with our dog . . . "Merry Christmas! Love, Ron & Joyce, Matt & Diane, Mike & Anna, Kate & Bosco." How embarrassing.

After being the ninth wheel on a skiing trip with four couples, I decided it was time for serious action. Yes, time to convince myself that I really don't want a relationship right now. Reverse psychology!! If I carry myself in that "I am dating around" manner, the men are bound to drop at my feet and say they want me all to themselves!

Yes, I am convinced! I need to concentrate on my studies and my job. No better time than my early adulthood to travel, be my own person, find myself so to speak ... Yes indeedy-do. I am single and loving it. It is much easier to get off of the ski lift with nobody next to me that I might knock over. And come to think of it, there wasn't any more room in the van for another person. One less person to buy Christmas presents for. No one to report to. No one to cook for. No name to have to sign along with mine on Christmas cards, just plain old, "Love, Kate." Now I just wonder how to work on that "*good sex*" thing.

Kate Visconti

Confessions of a Zebra

reading the words of Black Spirits
wondering what color my spirit is
trying not to feel like a foreigner
as I dance terrain that should be
my own
own-ed by a vision of thought connected to
skin
soul
sold
soul-ed
having one and testing to see
if it sings
in harmony or
dissonance
dis-tant
n an in-stant

so, I don't know the rhythm
in chicago
I can't tap the syncopated swing of a Jazz
Jester
Be-Jeweled with the Blues

so the canon shoots through
me and sings pastoral
and courtly
in fingers whose color
knows different kinds of courts
in this democracy

eyes fixed like a filter
flattening color
and wondering why
all the fuss as I
eye a white girl with her bright

curves
and dream of darkness
that won't shadow me
cause I'm too light

I fight
Justice
just-us
but us is them
and I am they
and if I learn to swing
am I at the hangman's end
a masked
masquerader
treading too familiar terrain
under boots
or am
I
coming
home
?

Aaron Carter

Blush

sweet words tongued like
jam on bread, a strawberry
uttering warm with butter
underneath and crumbs
dabbing the sides of your mouth,
shutters on Victorian windows

shudder to think a mouth so
reptilian scrumptious could fork
such somethings as I, love, and you,
whence did it pick the ripe moment,
when in its full fruition? only the
cows can tell, the udders sloshing
with warm white cream saying
it's time

so grandma's patchwork quilt is torn
along with some britches you wore
to bed, how can the obvious question
be avoided, how did you get these?

your cheeks blush strawberry
with the jam that you spoke

and your knees turn bashful
and walk you away

Benjamin Hauck

Hatred in the Dark

I walked into the room to see my mother hunched over my vanity table. Her left knee propped onto the circular seat of the stool, she was clutching something that I couldn't see in her hands. Even though my room was in its usual teenage disarray, I noticed that there were many things "out of place." The clothes that had been previously thrown onto the third drawer of my dresser were now in various places around the room. My comic books and trading cards were lying everywhere, as if someone had picked them up and then casually tossed them aside, not caring where they landed.

I felt a queasy feeling in my stomach, wondering what was wrong. The sense of something being completely out of place hung heavy, like a mystical, dark fog, in the air. My mother's eyes were peering at whatever was in her hands.

—

I looked at the paper in my hands with a mix of horror and fascination. "This can't be happening. Surely I didn't just write that." The handwriting wasn't even my own. I *couldn't* have written it. But I knew I did. A feeling of uneasiness and anxiety planted itself firmly inside of me. "Why?" The question rattled through my brain like a pinball, hitting every one of my nerves and sending shivers down my spine.

—

My body shook, trembling with rage. I wanted to yell out, but I remained frozen, my feet cemented to the ground as I stared at my mother's face. She was so engrossed in what she was doing that she wasn't even aware of my trembling frame lodged in the doorway. 'This can't be happening,' I thought, 'Please wake me up now, dear God, please tell ne this is a dream.'

—

"I must be dreaming," I said aloud, knowing I was

fully awake even as the statement was being uttered. My eyes were riveted on the page, growing wider and filling with terror as each line was read and comprehended. Even though the meaning underlying the page horrified me, I gobbled the words eagerly, reaching the end of the page and turning it, almost ripping the page in my eagerness to know the rest of the story.

—

In her haste to discover what else I had written, she nearly ripped the page as she rapidly turned it, continuing to devour each word. Her eyes didn't rest, skimming the lines faster and faster, as if she would cease to exist if her eyes slowed for only a moment. I felt my body grow rigid and tense as I stared at her eyes—a stare so intense that I felt as if I were burning a hole into her head with the hatred forming in my heart. I was outraged!

—

The innocence of the words outraged me, for that innocence had been destroyed forever by someone who should have wanted to preserve it! The intense fierceness of my thoughts frightened me as I realized the significance of the events plastered on the pages. Everything made so much sense, now. The behavoir patterns, the fears. I couldn't doubt what was written on the page. My life now was the proof.

—

"What are you doing?" I screamed, finally startling my mother enough to tear her away from the pages. Her face blanched, her eyes darting nervously as she struggled for an excuse that would prove her righteousness in searching my room.

"I was getting dirty laundry," she replied, feebly, as her right hand fell limply to her side, while her left one desperately tried to hide what she had been reading.

"In my vanity table?" I shot back, sarcastically. "How often have you found dirty laundry in a drawer full of journals?"

My mom stared blankly at the pages of the journal in her left hand, as if they would provide an explanation.

—

I stared at the words written on the pages I was holding, hoping they would help me understand why such a terrifying event had taken place. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, my mind remained blank. There was no excuse, no reason.

—

"Admit it!" I screamed, "You have no excuse because there *isn't* one!" My mom looked around, as if she thought I must be yelling at someone else, instead of at her. She looked sheepish when she realized that my anger was directed at her—and her alone. she stammered for a few moments before saying "You've been acting weird lately. I thought you might be on drugs."

—

'You would have to be on drugs to do this to a kid,' I thought. I didn't want to believe that it had happened, but the icy grip of fear that had wrapped itself around me confirmed that which I wished the most to be untrue. Crazily enough, I remember that the blame had later been placed on me—I had been called "aggressive, demanding and hyperactive." With an inward groan of sadness, I realized that I had been blamed unjustly.

—

"I can't believe it! Don't even try to blame this on *my* behavior!" I screamed, losing control of my anger. "How *could* you? How could you just search my room? These aren't your things! Why didn't you just talk to me first? You could have just asked me. Get out! Get out of my room *right now* !"

—

I urged the memories to leave—to exit into the darkness forever. But they would not go back from where they had come. They were mine now, my conscious memories, and I was forced to feel the pain that was firmly implanted

in each of them. When I first felt the deep ache of losing my childhood innocence against my will, I began to cry. Not tears of a child who has stubbed her toe, but the torturous sobs of one who has known Fear and Violence firsthand.

—

My mother began to weep. Raindrops of guilt fell from her cheeks as she pushed her way past me and ran out of the room. I didn't feel sorry for her. Rather, I was *glad* she was crying. She *deserved* to cry. She *deserved* to feel guilty. I believed it with all of my heart.

—

I sat and felt the anger begin to unfold in me. The anger wanted revenge. 'He deserves to feel like this. He deserves to feel this pain. He should have his very being ripped away from him, just as he stole the very core of my existence and made it his own,' I thought, believing that revenge was the only answer.

—

I picked up my journal to the pages that my mother had been devouring. As I skimmed the pages, I realized with growing horror that she had been reading about my hatred for my father and how I wished to seek revenge for all that he had done to me when I was only three. I couldn't even read some of the writing—it just looked like preschool scribbles. I let the book fall to the ground as I stood, staring into oblivion. My mind panicked, anticipating the worst. 'Surely she'll tell Dad,' I thought, as I wondered what he would do when he discovered what I had written about. I decided to say nothing to him—I would just wait and see what would happen.

—

My first instinct as I realized the seriousness of what I had written was to rip it into shreds. 'If anyone ever found this, what would happen?' I thought, and then, with a twinge of guilt, 'My sisters, Stacy and Suzanne, would surely pay for it if I chose to involve an outsider.' Then I

started wondering about myself. What would happen to me? I needed someone's help. But who?

—

I would have to wait. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't tell anyone, because they would probably want to know what I had written that would be so devastating if anyone else ever read it. And *that* I knew I could never tell anyone. That would just have to remain my secret.

—

I began to doubt whether or not I should ask for someone's help. Maybe it should just remain a secret—a dark, evil secret that would be brooding in my heart for the rest of my life. I couldn't admit it. I couldn't tell anyone. What if they blamed me?

—

I knew I couldn't ask anyone for help. They would probably just blame me. After all, Mom did say that I was acting weird lately. Any adult would believe that. What they wouldn't believe would be the incredible fear. The deep anxiety that had grown inside of me until it seemed to rule my every move, like a dark monster sent to possess my very being. I felt the fear constantly—during meals, while I played, read, sang, or laughed, as I cried, talked, or shouted, all day and all night. I was afraid to breathe—afraid to live.

—

'My very life was taken from me,' I realized and then I knew what I must do. I took a deep breath, shuddered with the anticipation of possible rejection, and then began my letter to my aunt. "Dear Denise," I wrote, the pen quivering with the importance of the message it would soon write, " A horrible thing happened to me when I was three-years-old, Denise. Please believe me. This hurts so much." As I was writing, I could feel other, tinier voices in my head urging me to write for them, too. My hand relaxed and I saw larger letters appear on the page: "*Hello Denise. Come get me Denise. Thank you. You will come*

get me? ok Thank you for helping me then. I knew it that you would. I dont deserve it at all. Bad things happen in the dark. Bad bad bad things in the dark. I hate the dark cause I'm all alone in it. I have to stay in the dark until I calm down. I dunt wanna calm down. I wanna cry but I can't cry cause my stomak hurts. I wanna yell but I can't yell cause my throte hurts. My stomak hurts me a lot. It hurts a lot bad. It hurts a lot when I feel all bad in the dark. I hate the dark. Is that ok? Is that ok that I hate it? Is it ok that my stomak hurts so much? It hurts and I told you already that I feel bad. Now you know about my feelings ok. How come my stomak hurts a lot in the dark? Do you beleaf me then?" My grip tightened and I finished the letter myself: "Please believe me, Denise. Please believe me that it wasn't my fault like he said. Please believe me when I tell you—I was molested..."

Sunny Killina

Black

Gloomy, dismal black.
Dark storm clouds cross the moonless sky.
Ominous and frowning, darkness clouds my eyes.
Discouraging, bleak, somber

Confused, misjudged black.
It's scary, It's evil. It's bad.
"Watch it constantly or it'll get you."
Misunderstood, misconstrued, misinterpreted

Tribal, primal black.
Wild child, silhouetted,
Dances in a ring of fire.
Reckless, raging, ravaged

Sensual, sexy black.
Slinky black velvet drapes over a long lithe body.
Rebellious biker jackets scented with musk and sex.
Seductive, provocative, suggestive

Soothing, comforting black.
Warm and reassuring—my favorite sweater.
Johnny Cash's dark bass surrounds me.
Pacified, mullified, tranquilized

Alpha black, Omega black.
In birth and death, we are surrounded by black.
The universe began and will end in blackness.
Beginning, ending, eternal.

Kara Putinsky

A Fabled Father, and Son

The wisping wind greets two wing'd warriors,
whose courage cannot conceive
the precarious uncertainty (of the journey ahead)
to which they must concede.

The boy begins his flight to freedom,
forgetting his fear of fate.
Approaching the sun, on his father's design,
gives rise to a test of faith.

Thus the fellow flies onward, and upward
ignoring the architect's cries,
which cannot convince the son to cease
his ascent into treacherous skies.

With waxy wings of white, he soars
into the wayward sun,
where resplendent rays remit a fury
to which the boy succumbs.

And as the son climbs higher and higher
into the sunlit skies,
his father's clever contraption fails,
the warnings hence justified.

His descent to the depths below is swift;
Submerged, his screams are hushed.
A powerless father flies on alone,
as another boy's dreams are crushed.

Charles Salmons

After the Storm

After the storm sweeps eastward,
and the sky,
nothing more than a gray palette,
is illumined in the west,
beyond the clouds—
clouds that blanket the horizon, the way snowfall
shrouds a countryside during a winter storm—
the eastern sky flaunts a great arch
of gold, green, and crimson,
inviting entry into another realm,
beyond the clouds—
where starlight falls as rain,
and the tale of the harmony of the universe
is told through the great tradition
of human experience;
where the state of being of all that is, was,
and will be,
is concealed by shimmering photographs
of an ancient past.

And while the clouds sail on, eastward,
calm blue skies in the west
give birth
to the evening sun.
The arch fades slowly, cautiously
calling.
A chance has come.
And it fades; and I reach—
reach for the portal.
The mist rescinds.
The sun scatters blue heavens, driving
the gateway into oblivion.
And it vanishes; and I weep—
weep the tears of an inner void, in the hopes

that I may, someday,
after the rains of a summer's eve,
reach again,
and fill the emptiness.

Charles Salmons

Writer's Block

I had already put off writing too long. I was either too busy, too tired, or unmotivated. I was waiting for the muse to strike, however I came to realize, much to my chagrin, it wasn't going to happen before my story was due. Advanced fiction writing was supposed to be my "easy A" class.

After spending five minutes staring at the screen, I finally began to type.

Shaded Gray

We didn't use our names on our stories. It is supposedly easier to critique the work if we don't know who wrote what. It doesn't help.

My cursor flashed impatiently. I listened to the hum of my computer. The cursor seemed to flash more insistently now. I double returned and hit the tab key, intending to write a masterpiece. The story to end all. The one that would top all the others. The one that every other person would wish that they had written. It would be good.

The cow, it seemed, was watching her as it ate. Its large cow eyes followed her every move, almost scrutinizing her. She stared back. She would not be intimidated by a cow.

Not bad. Not great, but not bad. If Donna Sue Jarvis could write about purple pots frolicking in an orange field with pink pans and get raves from the class, I could just blow their minds with my cow.

"Cow," she said. "It's time."

Taking hold of its rope, she led it into the barn. It still stared and chewed. Cows, she thought, are the most intense animals, but they can mask their intensity so well. Cows were quite aware of all that was going on around them.

I heard keys in the front door lock. Looking at the clock, I realized that it was time for Shawn to be coming home. I heard the tell-tale THUD of his backpack hitting the floor. My dog, Growler, stood staring down the stairs. Upon seeing Shawn, he

bound down to greet him. After a customary scratch of the ears from Shawn and a good sniff in return from Growler, they came up the stairs to find me. Same thing every night. I was the last to be greeted.

"How goes it?" he asked, looking around the corner at me.

"Fine," I answered. "Writing about cows."

He laughed, "What do you know about cows?"

"Well," I fumbled. "Nothing, but it won't matter because the cow is just a metaphor."

"Sure."

She tied the cow to the stall gate and walked around it. It didn't care. She walked to the tack room and rummaged around for the milking stool. She'd never done this before, but she had no choice. The farm was her responsibility now. At least until her uncle got back.

Upon finding the stool, she carried it back to where she had tied the cow. No cow. The only thing that was there was a piece of frayed rope swinging gently from the stall gate. She. . .

"Cows don't eat rope," Shawn said, his mouth full of bologna sandwich. He had been hanging over my shoulder reading my story.

"How do you know?" I replied, glaring over my shoulder at him.

"My grandparents had a farm and they had cows. Cows don't eat rope. They're not smart enough to figure it out. Anyhow, I bet rope doesn't taste too good. Even to a cow."

I sighed and turned back to my computer. Shawn continued to wolf down his sandwich behind me. I casually rolled my computer chair back onto his foot. He yelped and shoved me forward.

"What'd you do that for?" he asked. "You know I don't wear shoes in the house. Be careful, for Chrissake. I only got ten toes and you just mushed five of them."

"Quit reading my story," I growled. "MY cow does eat rope. MY cow is smart. Now, get away from me or I'll roll over your other toes, too!"

"I'm just trying to help," he whined while heading out the door. "Try to help some people. . ."

"If I need your help, I'll call you."

"Temperamental artist," he spat going downstairs.

Now, where was I. Yeah, the cow had just chewed itself free.

. . .sat the milking stool on the ground and sat on it. How did she get into this mess? She could no more milk that cow than she could run a farm. Who was she kidding? Everyone was right. She couldn't handle anything that was even a vague responsibility, let alone a whole farm. Her mind was filled with grey clouds.

After sitting for a few minutes longer, she stood slowly and walked out of the barn. There, looking over the fence, was the cow. Her black patches glistened in the sun. Around each patch was a ring of grey before the white fur started. The chewed up piece of rope dangled from the cow's halter.

BANG!

"Damn." Huge pause.

"Tasha!"

I went to the top of the stairs to see what happened. It was too quiet down there. I walked downstairs to see what I was going to have to clean up. Shawn was a klutz in the kitchen.

On the kitchen floor lay the broken jar of applesauce. Bending over the mess was Shawn. He was finishing picking out the broken glass and throwing it in the trash can he had dragged over while Growler was starting to lick up the mess. Shoving the dog back, I approached Shawn and the applesauce. He grinned up at me.

"Oops."

"Brilliant," I muttered. "You ought to be a writer. I mean, with moves of wit and charm like that. You shouldn't waste it just on me and Growler."

"Guess you want me to clean that up," he said with the slightest hint of a question hidden in his voice.

"Hmmmm. I don't know," I said, feigning thought. "I have to get my story done that's due tomorrow. That's fifty percent of my final grade. That you keep interrupting. But, on the other hand, I really enjoy cleaning the floor and all that domestic

junk. Gee, Shawn, I just don't know what to do."

He stood and went in to the garage and returned with the dust pan. He began scooping the applesauce into the trash can. Growler came back and, instead of licking up more applesauce, decided it would be more fun to walk through the mess. I grabbed his collar and pulled him back. Snatching the dishcloth off the counter, I wiped off his paws and sent him out of the room.

"Be sure to mop that floor," I said going back upstairs. "Or it'll get sticky."

"Yeah, yeah," Shawn mumbled.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Settling back into my terminal, I began to type with a vengeance. The words flowed and the story grew quickly. My main character finally caught that pesky, yet very smart cow and got her back into the barn. She got the milking thing down the first time. The life wouldn't keep this girl down. She was thrown a challenge and she conquered it. God, this was great stuff! I could almost hear the praise from my classmates and, more importantly, from my professor. This was my crowning glory — the best thing I had ever written. No more slice-of-life stories for me. I could write wonderfully complex stories full of deep metaphor and hidden meanings. I was James Joyce. I was William Faulkner. I was a writer. As I approached the ending, I knew that all would go well for everyone involved. My main character, the cow, and me.

That's when it hit. The muscle cramps of writers. Writer's block. It was like running into a brick wall at a hundred miles an hour. I just stopped. I couldn't figure out what happened next. I sat back, took a deep breath, and thought for a moment. I tentatively touched the keys.

Twenty minutes later, I was no further than I had been earlier. Except now, I was frustrated. I had been writing and deleting and I couldn't get to the ending. I stood and paced the room. I seemed to get smaller by the second. The computer whirred in the background. It sounded like a freight-train. I sat back down and tried another ending.

She patted the cow's shoulder as she put her back in the

field. She could do this. The sun was setting and the sky was alive with color. Not a grey cloud anywhere to be found. Watching the cow walk away, the patches of grey on the cow's body seemed to fade away. Like those patches of grey in her life that brought her here.

Trite. Contrived. Lousy. My inner critic shouted at me. I mentally flipped her off and set the computer to print. I didn't like the ending, but it was better than anything else I had written. I figured that I was just being hard on myself. It really was a good ending, I was just too close to it. Yeah, that was it. Sure.

I ripped off the edges of the paper, tore them into separated pages, put them in order, stapled them together, and headed downstairs to have Shawn read it. He was a very gentle, yet honest critic.

He was sitting in the chair that faced the TV. He was watching some tabloid news show and eating popcorn. Growler sat next to him, watching Shawn's hand go from the bowl to his mouth, waiting for a piece to drop.

"Here," I said dropping it into his lap. "Read this and tell me what you think. Honestly."

He put the bowl on the table and Growler promptly shoved his nose into it and began to graze. Shawn read and I paced. When he finished, he folded the stapled edge of the pages back so it laid flat and put it down on the table. He smiled at me and I sat down on his lap. He was quiet for a moment. I waited, tense.

"It was good. I liked the end. Looks like you gave old Donna Sue Jarvis a run for her money. It all works except for one thing," he said and paused.

Oh no. It was the metaphor. It was the plot development. I ran through every part of the story that may not have worked and listed possible reasons why it didn't. However, nothing really struck me. Sure, there were things that I could change, little nuances that could make it a better story, but no glaring errors. I waited for Shawn to point out the one thing that was obvious to everyone but me.

"So," I said, sitting up to look at him, "are you going to tell me, or do I have to guess?"

Kara Putinsky

The Deliverance of Nancy Prague

The infant of Prague,
Nancy Prague; the Messiah it
was, she claimed, she said she
was a virgin, like a virgin she was
white, white with fear, white
with innocence, in a sense it
was not going to be a regular baby, baby! it
would be a big baby burden the whole world
watching her for her every movement meant for the
well-being of baby Boy, Boy was too holy too be named
what would she name it, **Him**, it
will be a He, He must be,
without scar he must be for all to see
when he grows up, high school
will not be good enough for Him,
will any school be good enough? will
we want this child running wild
without a mother Virgin's overlooking,
watching it so it, Him, on a
whim, doesn't toodle into the road and get
whammed on the grid of a wide Mac truck
what a tragedy, anticlimax, we must watch and
wait for the messy antics of the Messiah to pass,
wave by us like schools of sacred fish, whirl in the
wind he must like any boy, Boy!, He's no regular boy
wielding fists, rubbing welts, He shall not be spanked,
whitey trash the media say His mother is, isn't a
whore? no a virgin, if there is such a thing
wing it, they tell her, husbandless she is,
wealth buried in the cushions of her three-legged sofa,
win this battle, win it for the world,
without even a mobile home, a lone wrecked apartment
where the west side cramps the east side,
wilderness, wild the media yell, should a Messiah
why should a Messiah grow up there?

with a poor, unwed mother, with a
welfare check and no father, she's not a
wife, she's white virgin, versions have said
we have Jesus, we we we do, Do!, but
won't, she **will**, but won't either because she's not
well, won't be able to put up with Him, with the
world watching through her window, wishing to
wipe the precious Boy's bottom, but the baby's her baby's hers, the
woman won't wait, won't withstand the wolfing and hounding,
wounding her more, won't have the money, the will, the money,
wealth to send him, she has welfare, can't find
work, must reject throw out rid of trash expel purge expunge
with all her love for her lil' Messiah
worship ruined with a wrench

which was to be demonstrated.

Benjamin Hauck

Just Another Night

I got bored just sitting in the apartment by myself, so I walked across the street to a dollar theater to watch a movie. It was an interesting movie, and it ended the way I thought it should have. I watched a few of the credits roll, then put on my jacket and started walking home. It was a nice night; the moon was bright, and there was a slight breeze blowing. After I made it across the street, I took a golf ball out of my pocket and bounced it as I walked through the empty Grace Lutheran Church parking lot. The ball hitting the blacktop made sort of a clicking sound. I tried to bounce the ball to a beat playing in my head, but the noise of the cars passing on the road behind me made that difficult. I was coming to the end of the blacktopped parking lot and to about seventy yards of brush and weeds. I threw the ball high into the night, it disappeared in the bosom of the dark sky, reappeared with a sharp "click" on the blacktop, then began another climb. Attempting to judge where it might come down this time, I put my hand out. The ball landed in the center of my palm. I smiled, tucked the ball in my pocket, and walked on.

The movie I had just seen was "Lionheart" starring Val Kilmer. He played an FBI agent sent to investigate a crime on an Indian reservation. He was assigned to the case because he was part Indian, but he had long since disowned that part of himself. Twice in the movie he said "They are not my people." The first time he was talking to his partner about the Indians, the second to a befriended Indian about the other FBI agents. How sad it is that someone will run away from, or attempt to disown that which he doesn't understand is a part of him, was the message I walked away with. Overall it was a good movie, and since it only cost a dollar I thought about going to see it again next week.

I walked through an opening in the fence that separated the complex I lived in from the field. I was still a

ways from my building. It was nine forty-five, and I had left some homework for my morning class unfinished for the sake of the movie. It was only some reading, but I wished I hadn't procrastinated all weekend because I really didn't feel like fooling with it now.

When I got back on some pavement, I took the golf ball out again. The complex was quiet -- a sharp contrast from the noise of hyperactive children during the day. I could clearly hear the "click" as the ball struck the sidewalk. Passing a building with a second floor window open, I could hear a couple arguing about something one of them had done wrong. From the sound of their voices I know they were black. It's funny how one can usually tell whether a man is black or white by his voice, most of the time. Women are a little bit harder to tell apart, but there had been plenty of times that I had been called "brother" over the phone by someone I had never seen before. I didn't mind because I had already assumed that they were a brother or a sister.

I was a parking lot away from my building, and the homework that awaited. I cut behind a dumpster and in between a couple of trees to shave some of the distance off. When I emerged there was a white family getting out of a station wagon over by my building. They lived in the building next to mine. They were about twenty-five to thirty yards in front of me. Paying no particular attention to them, I flipped the golf ball into the air. It struck the ground with its usual "click." I caught it, then glanced up to notice that I had gained the family's full attention. The man took at least five steps before turning his head back around to watch where he was going. His woman picked up their child and quickened her pace.

A sudden noise in the night could make anyone uneasy. I shrugged their reaction off and flipped the ball again. The resulting "click" echoed in the parking lot's silence, and again they turned their attention to me. This time the man put his hand on his wife's back to guide her

along faster.

So it wasn't the noise they were reacting to. Was it the hat I had gotten as a free gift, that I felt like having on backwards? The necklace I had around my neck, a thin black cord with a Ankh hanging from it? Perhaps my black warm-up jacket, that I had gotten for busting my ass on my high school track team? The black jeans, which I had spent twenty-four of my worked-for dollars on? Or the comfortable high-tops I had thrown on, which were about two years old at the time?

Were they even reacting to me, or more to something that was inside of them? Did their fear stem from the news they blindly believed, or the lessons their parents had ignorantly taught? They knew nothing about me. I could have been anyone from Dr. Julian Carson to Imhotep reincarnated. Or a homeless person needing a meal to an out-of-work father of three. But all they saw was a young black man walking in the night. No clue as to where I had been or where I was going. I was just a black man, with nothing better to do than to harm them.

Given recent events, I should have been the one frightened. Not more than a few weeks earlier two men who looked like me had been legally beaten by white people for having brown skin, and being in the wrong place: Rodney King in L.A., and Oletha Waulh right on the other side of town. Still, seeing their fear spurred something...devious inside me. They wanted to be scared, so why not scare them?

I doubled my pace, making sure my footfalls could be heard, and let the golf ball strike the pavement again. The man looked back and saw that I was now less than fifteen yards away and trying to catch up to them. His cold, frightened blue eyes tripled in size. He almost tripped over his wife as he hurried her to a scurry. He started patting his pockets for his keys, so I dug out mine -- making sure they jingled. From eight yards away I could see the child the woman was clutching just looking at me. The lesson we

were teaching him was one I'm sure he wouldn't soon forget, and later pass on to his kids. I lobbed the ball into the air. The man jumped when it "clicked" right behind him. I coughed loudly, and picked it up.

They reached their front door, and I walked up to mine. We were standing across a bush from each other. He fidgeted with his keys at the lock as his wife hurried him up. I opened my door, then stood there looking at them. The man looked over and froze. I thought of yelling "boo!" or faking a sudden move towards them and watching them faint or something.

"Hello," his voice trembled.

I just shook my head and went inside. I imagine they went inside and thanked Jesus they were still alive and unharmed.

More and more I see T.V. ads and signs about "Erasing the Hate," "Freeing Your Mind," and "Increasing the Peace." Still, every day I am reminded that America will always see me, and those who look like me as automatic criminals when the sun goes down - and even when it's still up. At times I'm even seen as that by my own people. And *I am* supposed to melt into the pot so we all can become one nation under God? How sad it is that some people will run away from or attempt to disown that which they don't understand is a part of them.

Aaron Martin

A Kind of Prayer

And I was whizzing past parked cars,
abandoned for the night,
thinking about the poem
"and not make dreams your master"
and the violin part to Nightswimming.
My companion left behind
to wind her weary way back
home and house ahead
while I flew on
every bump
a gentle tossing
and though the night was crystal perfect
I rushed on
ignoring the moon
placed there by a God
who wanted me
to
fly.

Shannon Reed

The Dandelion

Yesterday I was a dandelion
Swaying in the wind,
Until
You came and picked me for her.
She made a wish and
Blew me to pieces.
Now I am scattered,
Which is how I feel when I am with you.
I am trying to find myself
Like a dandelion in the wind,
I never seem to accomplish my goal.
So, I die,
Pieces of me to live again
Once more in the spring.
I live to be scattered by your breath
And hers,
Blowing me apart.
Then you've gone, it's too late
You've scattered me again,
And again, you seem to find me.
You pick me once more,
Her at your heels
And me in your hands.
I want to be strong and not let you
    break me--
But, I can't.
You're lifting me up to your lips,
I wish for a kiss--
You wish instead.
I try to call out to you
But it's too late--
You're gone.
You've scattered me again.
You've used me all up,
Taken every wish that I had,

Just to blow it all away.
Now it is autumn and I won't see you
For awhile.
Maybe never
Since now
You blew me dead.

Danielle Carter

A Winter's Welcome Home

When the moon flows blue
over snow-covered plains,
and the warm breath
of a child's laughter
grows moist
in the frigid night air,
as he guides a slippery sled
sliding gliding
through powdery slopes,
I hike an icy trail
home.

Above the fragile limbs
of slumbering oaks
a lunar lantern
enlightens my trek,
while spirited firs greet
my arrival,
with the snap-crunch of
twigs and cones,
and the scent of needled pine
arousing my nose
and mind.

Outside my cozy cabin,
in a mostly-frozen ravine,
a sluggish stream
trickle-trails its way
'round a wintry wood.
Through a frosty window
pane you're waiting
I gaze
at your engaging figure,
silhouetted by a snug fire
made all the more inviting

by thoughts of you and I;
a mellow mug of hot cocoa
sweetened
by butterscotch schnapps
and your tender
kiss.

Charles Salmons

Trying to be Thankful for What I Have

When I was small,
I learned to stand
turned out
from the hips
heels together toes out
knees and back straight
bottom stomach ribs in
neck long shoulders down
eyes up
perfectly placed
3 year old
I was born for it—
Mom used to say
I came out of her
with pointed toes
and when I learned to walk
it was like a duck

So every day for years
I climbed the narrow stairs
and entered the humid
human smelling studio
to push myself for hours
just for the joy
and the freedom
it gave
After puberty
I was perfectly proportioned for it
bony chested
skinny armed
muscular legged
small, but strong

College would wait

my body however
would not
last forever—
doctor once said
Do you understand
that if you don't
stop
you will not walk
when you're 40?
He said
I was born
to have brain far outlast body
But I, I was strong
so I traveled and trained
and auditioned
all over the country
and rumors spread—
I was "the One"
I was born for it

I was born for it
not to happen
dropped from a
carelessly planned lift
by a man I never trusted
dropped too hard
to go on
Surgery postponed
I thought I was
invincible
young
and it would fix itself
but didn't

Bastard never said he was sorry

Now, at age 21
they ask me
curious
Miss Lisa
how old are you?
and I'm almost ashamed
to admit my youth
One of them conjures a guess:
I bet you're my daddy's age—
he's 40
She assumes I've retired to teach
after a long glamorous career and
I look at her a long time
stunned
and think
Yeah, honey
I'm retired alright—
retired
without ever having the chance
to be great

But
I still stand
heels together toes out
knees and back straight
bottom stomach ribs in
neck long shoulders down
eyes up
perfectly placed
but broken

So to you
Brian
I'll give my reverance
even though I'm not sure
you've left me
anything

to be thankful for
I wasn't born for this.

Lisa Davis

Invasion

He controls her without even knowing it. She lies in her bed day after day, not eating, not talking, not resting. She just lies there, afraid to move, to breathe, and especially, to sleep. If she sleeps, the dreams will come back. If she is awake, so many thoughts jumble together that not a single one is clear. She cannot concentrate on one idea. It is better this way. She will not have to feel the hot steam of his breath on her face or hear his heavy panting in her ear. She will not have to feel his rough, forceful hands and wet lips on her body or his weight on top of her. She just lies there in the warmth of her blankets. She is afraid of the cold that awaits her outside of the bed.

He tells his friend about the girl he slept with last weekend. She wanted him so much. She could not get enough. He did not think she would ever want to stop. If all his friends had been there, she would have screwed them, too. He has not seen her since that night. Maybe he will call her, so they can get together again.

She can no longer keep her eyes open. As much as she fights to stay awake, her body is exhausted and she falls into a restless sleep. The dreams come back. The door slams and locks behind him, startling her. Darkness encompasses her. A window is opened and the bitter cold of the winter night swirls into the room and bites at her nose. The television comes on and casts a dark blue light over the room. The volume is up just enough to hear the murmur of voices, but not loud enough to understand what they are saying. She cannot see him, but she can hear him getting closer. His footsteps are heavy. His breathing is quick and intense. As he gets closer, she is sickened by the musky scent of his cologne. She does not recognize the actual fragrance, but will never forget the smell of it. He warms her face as he exhales and kisses her, on the neck, the ear, the cheek, the lips, and finally, inside her mouth. She can taste the alcohol on his

breath. His overpowering hands are holding her arms. He drags her to the bed and pushes her down. The sheets are scented with the musky smell of his cologne. She tries to get up, but he is stronger and bigger than she is and he shoves her onto her back, then climbs on top of her. His hands move down her body to her jeans, pulling her zipper down slowly. "STOP," but he ignores her. He works back up her body and pulls her shirt off. He tries to lift her to unhook her bra, but she does not cooperate. Angrily, he tugs at her bra, so hard that it rips and falls away from her body. He kisses her all over, on the shoulders, breasts, stomach. He covers her mouth with one hand as she screams and tells her not to be such a baby. With his free hand, he furiously unzips his pants. She cries as he enters her body. She must have said NO a hundred times. Her face is wet from crying and she can taste the salty tears as they slide down her cheeks into her mouth. The phone rings and wakes her from her nightmare. This time, it is only a dream.

He asks her when she wants to go out again. Silence. She sounded like hell when she answered the phone. He asks her what is the matter, and is answered with a dial tone. Why is she being such a bitch? She screwed him once and does not want to have anything to do with him anymore. That is what she thinks, but he plans to have her in his bed again.

Hearing his deep voice on the telephone sends chills up and down her spine. She cannot believe he called. He asks her a question, but she does not really hear it. Her heart beats rapidly, her body shakes. He says nothing. She says nothing. She cannot think. Silence magnifies the sound of her alarm clock, ticking seconds of her life away. The blankets fell away from her body when she jumped to answer the phone. Quickly, she snatches them back to her chest to protect herself from him any way she can. He sneaks through the phone and touches her against her will, assaulting her again with his haunting voice, his heavy breathing. She no

longer needs to be asleep to remember the pain. She feels his dark eyes watching her every move and sees the smirk on his face. Closing her eyes, she shakes her head, trying to get him out of her mind, but the darkness inside her head reminds her of the darkness of his room. She cannot breathe. Everything is pressing down on her. The weight smothers her. She has to escape from the memory, from the pain. She does not want to hurt anymore. The tension building in her arm causes her to realize that she still holds the telephone tightly in her hand. She slams down the receiver.

He remembers when he first saw her walk into class and sit by herself in a corner. Something about her attracted him. She was not drop- dead gorgeous, but there was something unique about her. She was quiet and avoided drawing attention to herself. She seemed delicate and had an innocence about her. He never spoke to her, but he found himself glancing in her direction a little more each day. He anticipated the days he would get to see her. Somehow, she brought a strange sense of peace to his hectic life. When he finally spoke to her, he said the wrong thing— insulting one of her friends. He did not realize it would offend her until it was too late. He had ruined his chance to get to know her. Watching her in class would have to be enough. But everything changed one night. He could hardly believe it when she showed up at the party. He had never seen her outside of class.

She remembers when she first saw him. He was handsome, but his personality left much to be desired. He was loud, always cracking jokes, constantly putting on a show for his friends and trying to impress girls. Once in a while, she would catch him looking at her in class. He seemed almost like a different person then, more serious. She never spoke to him, but day after day in class, they would exchange glances. When he finally did speak to her, she wished he never had. He was trying to be cool and in the process, offended her. They did not talk again and she stopped paying attention to

him altogether, until one night. He was at the same party.

He watched her throughout the night. Hoping to make a good second impression, he made sure that if he talked to any girls, she was not in the same room. Whenever he saw her, he smiled and tried to appear friendly. After a few hours, she came around. She had decided that they should be nice to each other and start all over again. Why she had this sudden change of heart he was not sure, but he did not care either. Things were starting to go his way. They talked for a while and then he convinced her to go for a walk, in order to escape the noise of the party and have a more private conversation. He used the cold of the winter night to his advantage. Every chance he got, he put his arm around her and asked if she was warm enough. He told her how all his friends thought she was cute. And when he thought he had flattered her sufficiently, he kissed her. She giggled. He smiled. It was working.

He was watching her all night. She hated to admit it, but she was flattered. Of all the girls at the party, he noticed her. She decided to give him another chance. She had also learned more about his life—he had just lost a friend to a bullet, his father abused his mother, and money for school was disappearing quickly. She approached him and said that they should start over. He seemed pleased and they started talking. He made her laugh and feel good about herself. The party was getting out of hand, so he suggested they go for a walk. It was so cold outside she could see her breath with every exhale. He kept putting his arm around her and making sure she was warm. He was up to something, but he was so adorable about it that when he kissed her, she was not angry. She just laughed.

He easily convinced her to come up to his room. The night air was so chilly, they could warm up in his room and watch television or something. She had a different idea. As soon as the door closed, she was all over him, kissing him and

trying to take off his shirt. He laughed and said, "Slow down baby!" but she was on fire. She said she had been waiting for this for a long time. She was so horny that they did not even make it to the bed. She fell to the floor and pulled him with her. He felt her body beneath his. She guided his hands over her smooth skin, her face, her neck, her breasts, her stomach, her thighs. She smelled so sweet. He kissed her, on her body, her face, and in her mouth. Picking her up from the floor, he carried her to his bed, kissing her all the while. She helped him take off her clothes and he helped her take his off. They did it for hours— he does not even know how long. He just remembers how tired he was when they finally finished. He passed out and when he woke up, the only sign she had been there was her ripped bra lying on the floor.

She went to his room with him. It would be nice to talk and watch television together in a warm room. He had been a perfect gentleman all evening. She was glad she had given him a second chance. As soon as he shut his door, his character changed. He lost his playfulness. When he kissed her, it was aggressive, not gentle like before. Despite her pulling away from him, he managed to get her over to the bed. She pleaded with him to let her go, but he did not listen. He used his dominance in size and strength to keep her from moving. Her body was pinned beneath his. She felt him tearing off her clothes. She tried to fight him off, but soon became exhausted from the effort. He raped her over and over again. Tired of crying and trying to push him away, she just laid there and prayed for it to be over. She looked at the television and imagined she was the thin actress smiling on the screen. She pictured herself in this woman's world, happy and beautiful, loved and admired. She thought if she did this, she could separate herself from what was happening in her own world. When he finally finished and rolled off of her, she did not move for fear of what he might do. His turning away from her suggested that she was safe. Still, she did not move until she heard his light snoring. She rolled gently out of the bed and threw on her clothes as fast as she could. She did not notice

that she had left her bra behind.

Weeks have passed since he called her. He does not see her around anymore. She has not been in class since the day of the party. The teacher asks almost everyday if anyone knows anything about her. He smirks as he thinks of what he knows about her. He volunteers to call her and see what is the matter.

She had not heard from him in a couple of weeks, but he has called every night lately, asking why she is not in class, why he never sees her around, and why she will not go out with him again. She does not say anything, she just hangs up. Again, he forces her to do something she does not want to do, think about what happened that night. His calls snap her back into reality, away from the world she has been living in—lying in bed, thinking of anything to keep him out of her mind. Her memory of the darkness suffocates her. When she closes her eyes or lies in the blackness of her room at night, the dark steals the breath from her body. The thought of his hands on her body makes her feel dirty. A million showers cannot wash away the permanent scars left by his hands. Nor can it wash the scent of him from her mind. Thoughts fill her head and she loses control of her body—she shakes; feels faint; cannot breathe; vomits; her eyes are heavy; her heart pounds; she blacks out. Any man's hands touching her body are his hands, any man's lips are his lips. She will never know what it is to trust a man and to believe that he truly loves her. For this, she will never forgive him. He invaded her, body and soul; she will never be the same again.

Shannon Cuff

The Sweet Days

The sweet days will wonder
where I've gone,

they spoke to me
with the soft melancholy
of a hundred dead years
I could not rescue

Oh, well,
like dew I fell
to reclaim my broken days,
those who waned indignant
in the tumult of my unexplained absence

I will talk to the speechless
hours,
drink the water the dry leaves
did not want,

You stepped out to tell the days
I was gone,
You told them I blew away.

You were the rich silk
of my life, loomed fabric
of my dreams
With you,
I dressed in silk to sleep my demons,

I will walk the empty sky,
eat the seeds the ground spits
out
I will live forever
in between.

The years you greet with
words I used to say
will bleed their proper own,
bitter/sweet Camelot,
You will die
trying to forget my name.

The sweet days will wonder
where I've gone,
You told them long ago,
I blew away.

Yosvany Reyes

Steer Clear of Perfume Spritzers

I had just finished a great day of sales and shopping, and was ready to head home. But using the exit closest to my car would mean going by the perfume counter. Oh no! Maybe I should just use the nearest exit and walk the extra 1,000 yards to my car. Nah, too cold for that. I was feeling strong, maybe even a little brave. Oh, what the heck, I'd do it!

Nearing the perfume counter, I passed and pretended to be interested in the overpriced jewelry-- I had to scope out the positions of those pesky, persistent perfume people, and form my strategy of escaping with the least amount of contact.

But wait! What was this?! One perfume spritzer was temporarily occupied with a small child crying that he'd lost his mommy. This youngster's teary-eyed, traumatic misfortune was my blessing in disguise. Sure, it's a cruel trade-off, but, hey, this is no small matter. Seizing my opportunity, I escaped the perfume people laughing wildly as I ran. Yes, these are the little small victories that make life worthwhile!

I was very pleased to have made such a clean get-away. Not all exit experiences had been so kind. With a grimace, I remembered the time I tried to maneuver around one of those friendly perfume spritzers by using the old 'I'm-in-a-hurry' ploy. This is when I walk very briskly and look at my watch numerous times, in hopes that no perfume person will have the audacity to stop me; but beware, spritzers are known for their audacity. Unfortunately, my ploy was foiled when the perfume person blocked my path and spritzed at will. This led to an outrageous fit of uncontrollable sneezing which raged on long enough for a small crowd of onlookers to congregate. I clutched my fists and fought for breath. Through watering eyes and stinging throat, I managed to get out "Damn you" between sneezes.

Then, of course, there was the time I was shopping with my mom, and we encountered an unmarked perfume person. We were both caught off guard, and I saw the fear in my dear mother's eyes. Having a knack for quick thinking, I grabbed my stomach and cried, "Oh, Mom! All the perfume smells are

mixing and making me sick!" Not completely untrue, I continued with theatrical flair, "Oh, Mom! I'm gonna puke! I'm gonna puke!!"

This immediately sent the perfume person scuttling to the next department, for what perfume people fear most is getting their little white 'lab coats' soiled. And just why are they wearing lab coats anyway? Are we to believe that they just emerged from a botanical lab after having concocted this latest, odiforous creation themselves? Or, is it more likely that they just don't want to go home smelling like perfume anymore than I do?

But when I am saddened by those less than dignified escapes, I find pride in knowing I survived the toughest perfume people in the business. That's right: Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City. My husband and I thought we'd enjoy a stroll through the infamous store of posh, ritzy merchandise. Much to our horror, we first had to dodge the obstacle course of perfume people on the ground floor in order to reach the elevators. No premarital counseling by our pastor had covered such a trial as this. Looking deep into my eyes, my husband clasped my hand, and with a fiery spirit said, "We're going in."

The perfume people appeared as a strategically placed army, all looking hungry for battle. Spaced about three feet apart, they stood on alternate sides of the aisle. These people were pros! We pressed on and braced ourselves for the greatest challenge of our young married life. The following moments remain a blur. There were screams. There were jabs. I believe someone broke a fingernail.

Our exit was even more dramatic than our entrance, as my husband simply swept me up in his arms and ran. As we again stood out on Fifth Avenue, we were filled with joy of knowing we could handle anything this world threw at us. It is with fond memories that I now look at one of our pictures from the New York trip. In the photo we're grinning from ear to ear, wearing matching T-shirts that proudly proclaim, "I SURVIVED THE PERFUME PEOPLE AT SAKS FIFTH AVE!"

Andrea Hecker

When I came to see you December 27

Me and you
stroll through
your grandmother's knicks and knacks,
her little santas.
The butter knife
in the door
wedging out the winter wind.
The television
babbles about a cubic zerconia ring for cheap.
Grandpa and Grammy
gone playing cards,
somewhere, faraway.
Good.

You and I go upstairs
you have something in the attic
you say.
I don't know.

You say
this is where I was going to live,
if I moved in with my grandparents.
The carpet
pinks up the stairs.
I look over in darkness,
but I can't see you,
you're light bulb searching
the room to no avail.

Then you slide me
in front of the window,
light streams from the stairway
slowly you unleash your lips on mine.
Our silhouettes cold chill my spine
as I recall your grandmother

and her wrinkled prune face,
upon hearing I was a writer.
They wouldn't stay out late,
missing the eleven o'clock
farm report
qualifies as sin
in the country.

We melt down to the floor,
beneath the sash,
where your breasts come free
from your bra,
and you unzip us both
remarking on the lack of heat in the attic.
I stiffen like your nipples
as you move on top of me.

We decorate each other's bodies
with saliva, licking the delicacy of flesh.
Your body heaves up and down on me
like my lungs, breathing heavy
up and down.
Your body earthquakes slowly
from a small divide in our continental plates.
You sit on my cock
like a barstool and look down
saying you love me,
as I lie back thinking
just four more days till the new year.

Adam Ellis

All in One Place

"This is what I do when I can't take life anymore," says Maureen, as she slams us into the left hand lane. "I get out a map I have of the United States and I just stare at it. I imagine losing myself in it, in the country."

The trees are whizzing by us. We must be going at least 70 miles an hour. El always said that Maureen drove like a particularly nasty part of hell on wheels.

"Like going into the witness protection program?" I ask.

"Well, kind of. Just losing myself, really. Like I'd just leave everything behind and go somewhere new. Leave my car, leave my house, family, dog, everything and start over, somewhere new."

"People have done that," I say. "There was this guy who was a college professor somewhere in New Jersey, and suddenly one day he just left. So when they started searching for him, they went through his records, and get this: he wasn't a professor. He didn't even graduate from high school! He was just some guy who lied on his job application and taught physics–Physics!–at a college for years."

"Wow," Maureen says, resting her arm against her Volvo's door.

"Yeah!" I say. "And there's more! They found him eventually, in Phoenix, teaching college physics! And he had used the college in New Jersey as a reference on the application!"

"Oh my god," Maureen laughs. "Such chutzpah!"

We laugh for a few more seconds, and then it falls Silent in the car, the capital S silent, the kind of silence in which you can hear the remains of the conversation bouncing around and around. I can feel the echo of our laughing ramming against the thick, deep quiet that's descended. After a long moment, Maureen hits the radio scan button.

This is how it is with Maureen and I — we talk, we

chat, we joke, we even share, and it still comes back to this silence from our past between us, filling the space and forbidding the clichés and pleasantries people usually rely on during conversational lulls. We are too close for those, and too far apart for silence.

El was our pathway to each other, allowing conversation to flow through her translation. It's just now that El's gone that Maureen and I realize we've never known each other really.

I never would have met Maureen if it wasn't for El. El was my first college roommate, and I clung to her through freshman year with such a terror of being alone that I'm now terribly embarrassed to think back on it. El met Maureen at a meeting to form an anti-war group. Maureen came back to our room on the day of that meeting with El.

I could hear El coming down the hall. Her boots whacked firmly down the long hall leading up to our room. Her voice filtered through the door to me. She was saying, "I wouldn't know what do if I were rich. My entire fashion philosophy is based on scarcity of money and durability of fabric."

Maureen's deep bark of a laugh sounded, and they came in. Maureen was beautiful, obviously wealthy, and most foreign to me, sure of herself. As she entered, I made some joke, small and dry. I remember how she laughed at it, and I remember glowing because I caused that laugh.

This turned out to be a pattern for our relationship. I trotted out my best jokes around her, thrilled when she laughed, and cringed when she merely smiled at me. I felt that she saw me as a small child, amusing, but unable to exist at an adult level. So, El and Maureen were best friends, El and I were best friends, and Maureen and I stared at each other across a gulf, bound together by El. In our college yearbook, there is a picture of the three of us. El is in the middle.

We had not been brought together or torn apart by time. We simply existed to each other through holiday cards and El's calls. I had no need to talk to Maureen, as El filled me in on anything I might want to know.

Until last week, when Maureen had been the first to hear of El's death from her parents. I supposed her name and number came first alphabetically in El's address book. Maureen called me at three in the afternoon, when I was cutting an apple, and said, in total, "Jill, this is Maureen. El killed herself last night. I'll leave in an hour and I should cross into Pennsylvania in three or four hours. I'll pick you up eightish then."

"What?" I said, dropping the knife. "How?"

"Drowning," Maureen had said, Then a pause. And then, "Don't cry, Jill. Just get ready. We have to get there. 8 o'clock." And the click of the receiver slammed down in Roanoke.

Now, this hell trip, up north to El's home in Cabot, Vermont. Alone for twelve hours with Maureen. I knew my joke repertoire has severely dwindled since college, and I am slowly turning frantic as I contemplate another eight or more hours in a silent, grief-stricken car. It seems like something El would have found great delight in.

"All right," I think to myself. "I will talk to her. I will make her talk to me."

So I say, "Maureen, what did you bring to wear?"

Maureen hits the scan button to secure a station. James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" is just starting on some oldies' station flitting through the radio waves of the sky.

I try again. "El loves, loved, this song. She loved the story behind it," I say. "Supposedly, James Taylor wrote about an old girlfriend of his. They had a break up, I guess, and moved to opposite sides of the country."

Maureen hasn't moved, but I am trapped into the story now. "Um, some of his – James Taylor's – friends, bought his girlfriend, Suzanne, a plane ticket to go visit

him. And the plane crashed and she died."

Nothing.

I forge on, "It was weird how El loved this song, like she knew what his pain was, this guy she never met."

Maureen shifts in her seat. She says, "I bought a cashmere sweater set. Green."

James ends his lament.

"Oh. That's nice. I bought a pantsuit. White."

This doesn't seem to register, so I turn the radio way up and monitor the view going by again. Don Henley sings that the Hotel California is a lovely place and the rest of the Eagles echo him. Yes, indeed, it's a lovely place.

It's dead fall outside, my mother would say. That's what she calls the period between when the trees' leaves have changed and fallen, but before the first snow. Dead fall. It seems appropriate to travel through this season on the way to a funeral.

Suddenly, I realize that people use so much deathly imagery every day. It seems El has made me notice. These pat references to death everywhere. Just a while ago, Maureen said, "This trip is killing me." The way we refer to it so cutely, you would think death is something we're intimately and comfortably aquatinted with, an old friend we love to toss a joke at.

In northern Pennsylvania, Towanda slips by us, then a strip of shopping malls and restaurants. It's getting dark at four now, and soon we should stop for the night. We should reach El's house tomorrow. I dread the round of greetings and weeping from El's family, and yet I crave it, the rituals of a funeral, a proper place to let my grief go. Besides, anything would be better than this drive across the country, this bubble of moving grief set to the tunes of the past.

The Eagles gradually recede into static and Maureen hits the radio scan button again. She reaches around into the backseat and rummages, pulling out a red delicious apple that she polishes on the dark blue wool of her

sweater. She remembered to pack snacks.

"Jill?" she says to me and then breathes heavily on her apple.

"Yes."

"El would like the white pantsuit thing." She polishes once more, then takes a bite.

"Really? You think?" I say.

"Yeah. She always tried to make you the rebellious one. Y'know, I was the funny one, she was the smart one, and so you had to be the rebel one."

I smile. "Yeah, even though I was funnier than you, you were smarter than El, and she spent her whole life rebelling."

A pause. Then Maureen says, "Up to the end."

"Yeah," I say. "Up to the end."

Maureen hits her turn signal and frowns. "Do you think it was, like, her ultimate rebellion?" she says.

"Hey," I say. "Let's stop and get some fries."

Maureen looks at me for a second. Then she hits the gas pedal so we streak by the McDonalds' at 80 miles an hour, taking up the right hand lane with our haste.

Two hours later, off the highway just east of the New York border into Vermont, we sit in some diner held together by time and grease. I rub my stomach, my hand shoved under my coat and sweater, trying to massage away the rumblings of hunger surging through me. Maureen sits across the booth from me, flipping through a Triple A tour guide, as wanderers move in, eat, leave money, and are gone into the night, back on their journey. An oldies' station plays on the speaker system. A voice from the sixties is singing about how he keeps making his way back to you, girl.

Maureen says, "We could stay at a Motel 6 just over the highway, if you want."

"Oh, God, I'd like to sleep in a real bed, I think."

"Ok, there's a Bed and Breakfast called, 'A Well-

Deserved Rest' in the next town over. Wait, I think that's the next town over. Let me get the map."

"No, we can't get into a B and B at this time of the night," I say.

Maureen puts down the tour guide and smoothes the cover very precisely. She says, "All right then, where would you like to stay?"

"I don't know," I say.

"Goddamn it!" Maureen says loudly. "I hate this! I hate this trip! I hate the way you're acting! Why do I have to make the decisions? This is such bullshit! I don't care where I sleep tonight, ok? It's not like I'll be able to..." Her voice wavers briefly. Then, "Just choose some place! Where do you want to sleep?"

"I don't know," I say.

Maureen picks up the tourbook and her purse and stalks out.

I sit for a few moments, looking at the napkin holder. It's silver and plastic. Unbreakable, probably. Then, I stand up, put on my coat, and walk over to the counter, where the waitress is watching me.

"Ma'am?" I begin.

She rips up the check.

"Thank you," I say and then walk out to the parking lot.

Maureen's Volvo is still there. It looks like she's not in it. Did she decide to take a walk along the highway?

When I reach the passenger's side, I open the door. Maureen is lying on the front seat, sobbing into the gray vinyl. Her body heaves up and down. Her sobs are spaced widely apart, as though she is wringing her full due of grief from each one before moving onto another.

I reach out and gently touch her shoulder, making her contract and recede onto her side. I pull my coat tighter around myself and then sit down. Once settled, I pull Maureen's head onto my lap, stroking her hair while she cries.

Just as I feel she might be calm again, she grabs my sweater. Her head is still buried in my lap, and she twists her handful of my sweater around and around until it is a hard little knot in her hand, pulling across my back and sides, forcing me to curve myself closer to her. She says something but I can't tell what it is.

"What, Mo?" I say, using El's nickname for her. "I can't understand you."

She lifts her head off my lap, where a wet stain has formed. Shaking, she sort of whispers, "Why weren't we there for her? She needed us. She must have needed us. We weren't there for her."

I don't know what to say. We sit there, seeming to hold our breath, waiting for time to start again, ready to move on from this moment, yet not ready to put this into memory. Something is unfinished, unsaid.

Finally, Maureen sits up and wipes her face off on her sweater sleeve. She digs for her keys in her coat pocket and starts the motor. I shove the heat button all the way up to hot and strip off my coat and moist sweater. My stomach growls loudly. Maureen starts to laugh shakily.

"You'll never get to eat again!" she says.

We both laugh.

"It's my new diet plan," I say. "Travel with Mo. Lose weight, gain more angst."

Maureen laughs so hard she has to lay her head down on the steering wheel. I lean against my door, enjoying watching her. Then she hits the horn with her head and we lose it, laughing so hard that our noses run and we can hardly breathe. After the crying and the laughing, we must look horrible. Truckers walking into the diner stare at us, like we are rowdy teenagers, bent on enforcing our fun over everyone else's.

"Maureen," I say when we have calmed down somewhat. "El never called. How could we have known that she needed us? I mean, how could we have known?"

"I don't know," she says. "But I just feel like I should have. Somehow. If I had just looked once in awhile, checked on her once, maybe I might have seen how bad she was."

"I really don't think so. I really don't, Mo. I'm not lying. I don't think anyone could have...I think El could have stopped herself, if she had wanted."

The car hums, ready to take us on the next part of our journey. Maureen sighs deeply. Her head sinks to touch her chest.

"Oh dear god," she says.

"What?"

"I've got to keep driving."

"No, what are you talking about?" I tell her. "We're going to stop for the night, right?"

"No, I've got to keep going. If I stop..." she hesitates, then continues. "I won't sleep till I get there."

Maureen straightens her shoulders and curves her back into the seat. Then she shifts the car into reverse and smoothly turns us out of the lot, her lights illuminating the lane that promises to lead us to Vermont.

I've wandered into a bad movie, where no one ever sleeps and the soundtrack is nothing but horrible old songs that the rights to were easy to secure. The clock in the Volvo shines twenty past one a.m.

Maureen squeals suddenly, ripping me out of the sleep I was sinking into.

"American Pie, Jill!"

"Oh great."

"Long long time ago, I can still remember..." Maureen sings along with the song, her face peering out into the night.

"This song is so long," I say.

"Sing along, sing along, sing along!" Maureen commands.

"You're insane! I've never seen you like this before!

You're giddy!"

"Bye bye Miss American Pie, drove my Volvo to the funeral..." Maureen sings to me.

"Ok," I say. "Maybe we should stop for the night." My glance catches the speedometer. It reads 85 miles per hour. I should never have let her drive this late into the night. It's been an obscene amount of hours on the road now, and I feel like we're no closer to Cabot.

Maureen says, "Sing Jill!"

"Slow down!" I say.

Maureen takes her foot off the pedal and we slowly sink back into a legal speed. The radio blasts out "Then we were all in one place..." before Maureen clicks it off. She runs her hand through her hair, leaving greasy finger marks in the front.

"You don't remember, do you?" she says.

"No, what?" I say.

Shaking her head slightly, she smiles and says, "We were coming back from the airport. Remember? In school? We took El to the airport to say good-bye when she flew home that one time?"

"Oh, yeah, junior, no, sophomore year. Yeah, I kind of remember that."

Maureen looks over at me.

"You don't remember the ride home, do you?"

"Uh, maybe. Well no, I guess not. What happened?"

Maureen sighs, and all of the sudden, she looks so tired. She looks like she has literally carried the world today.

"Well," she begins. "We dropped El off and said our good-byes and all."

"Ok..."

"And then we got into my car to drive home and we both realized at the same time: We had absolutely nothing to say to each other."

I start to protest, but Maureen cuts me off.

"It was all El," she says. "We couldn't talk without

her. We were just starting that long, silent, 40 mile trip back to campus and you said, out of literally nowhere, ' Pull over!' So I did, I didn't ask why, but I did. And you got out of the car and laid down on the hood."

I say, "You're making this up!"

But I like the story, and I'm glad when she says, "No, I'm not! You laid down on the hood of the car and I got out to yell at you. You looked up at me and pointed to the sky. The airplanes were flying right over the highway. We could see their bellies flying over us, so close, it seemed. So fragile. 'See?' you said. ' We can wave good-bye to her!' And that's what we did. We laid on the roof and watched the planes take off for a good 20 minutes and American Pie was on the radio. We sang along. I wasted probably a gallon of gas, keeping the motor on like that."

"Mo," I say, " I have only vague memories of this."

"Too bad," she says. "It was one of only two times in my life I ever felt close to you."

"What was the other time?" I ask, hoping I remember it.

Mo smiles. "When I whacked my head on the horn back at the diner."

I watch the dark shadows of the trees slip around the car and then back to the smooth blackness of the road. The sky is clear and deep blue, the stars sprinkled across the heavens. I can feel the coldness of the air outside creeping in through the cracks of the car, even though the heat is turned on.

"Pull over!" I say.

"What?" Maureen says.

"Do it!" I say.

Maureen pulls off to the side of the road and I climb out stiffly.

She says, "Are you sick?"

I clamber up on the hood of the Volvo and rest my back on the windshield. Maureen opens her door and climbs out to stare at me.

"See?" I say. "We can wave good-bye to her."

Maureen smiles at me. Really smiles. Then she plops down on the Volvo next to me.

"Ok," she says. "She'll like this."

We both look up at the stars for a while.

Maureen bunches her knees to her chest and pulls her sweater over her legs. "Jill," she says.

"Yeah?"

"Do you think El wanted us to...not be friends?"

"I don't know," I say.

"Hmmm," Maureen says.

I sit on my hands to keep them warm. "You know what, though?" I say. "I think she really liked the fact that we needed her."

"Yeah."

"I guess I liked needing her, for that matter," I say.

"Yeah." A pause. "Hell, I guess I still need her."

I get off the car hood and reach in the car. I flip on the radio as a truck screams by, blasting his horn. James Taylor's "You've got a Friend" is on. His voice gently seeps into the night.

"Oh God!" Maureen says. "Find something else! Anything else!"

I hit the scan button and stand there while it goes on through the stations. Songs and words pass but none seem right. Maureen leans over from her side of the car and says to me, " Leave it on scan."

So I do.

Shannon Reed

1996 Quiz and Quill Contest Winners

Poetry

First Place "Confessions of a Zebra" by Aaron Carter
Second Place "Blush" by Benjamin Hauck
Third Place "The Sweet Days" by Yosvany Reyes

Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

First Place "Deliverance of Nancy Prague" by Benjamin Hauck
Second Place "A Kind of Prayer" by Shannon Reed
Third Place "Driving After Death" by Adam Ellis

Short Story

First Place "All in One Place" by Shannon Reed
Second Place "Writer's Block" by Kara Putinsky
Third Place "Invasion" by Shannon Cuff

Personal Essay

First Place "Just Another Night" by Aaron Martin
Second Place "Introduction to Me" by Kate Visconti
Second Place "Traversing the Void" by Kara Putinsky
Third Place "Steer Clear of Perfume Spritzers" byAndrea Hecker

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

First Place Stories by Jeremy Wermter
Second Place Stories by Krista Papinia
Third Place Stories by Tonya Coles

Front Cover Credits

Cover photograph: Kate Visconti
Cover model: Tara Hill
Special thanks to Jim Hunter for his assistance.

Judges

Poetry and Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry contests

Freda M. Walter is a freelance writer and former Otterbein student. She has published poetry in *Midwest Poetry Review, Best of 1993, The Dream Shop* and *The Lyric.* She received the Best New Poet award from *Midwest Poetry Review* for the poem "Papa" and was named an Outstanding Ohioan by The Ohio House of Representatives for the sonnet "Sugar Creek."

Short Story Contest

Candyce Barnes has published stories in *The Southern Review*, *Story*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Ohio Journal* and *High Plains Literary Review*. Candy was a participant in the 1994 Otterbein Writers Festival.

Personal Essay Contest

Marty Saveson was a professor of English at Otterbein College from 1983 to 1993. During that time, she served as the advisor to Quiz and Quill.

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

Tom Sheehan is the assistant city editor for *The Columbus Dispatch*. Sheehan has been a journalist for more than 20 years. He started at the *Dispatch* as an intern and eventually covered nearly every beat on the city desk. He has worn several different editor's hats for more than a decade. As an assistant city editor, he supervises about a dozen reporters.