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2004 Spring Quiz and Quill Magazine

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Quiz & Quill

Spring 2004



Quiz and Quill

Otterbein College
Westerville, Ohio

Spring 2004

Editors

Allison Barrett
Daniel Boyd

Staff

Andrea Boggs	Libby Hultberg
Brooke Burton	Amanda Knapp
Marie Burggraf	Teresa Moore
Josh Bradley	Becca Rossiter
Bonita Fee	Mark W. Smith
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Ed Fowble	

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Johnson

Cover Design

Melissa Peace

Cover Design

Ed Fowble

Thanks:

It takes a great number of people to run a literary magazine well. We would like to thank them here.

Our wishes for a successful independent press go out to faculty adviser Lonnell Johnson.

We would like to thank Donald L. Williams for his gracious donation of time and money to the institution of *Quiz and Quill*. His book, *The Quiz & Quill Club of Otterbein College*, which covers the history of Q&Q, can be acquired through the English faculty offices.

The whole staff this year did an excellent job. Whether it was simply showing up to readings, hassling friends to submit their work, or creating flyers, you got the work done and the magazine is better for it.

We would like to thank Allison Prindle for protecting our budget. The magazine will continue to flourish because of you.

Thanks too, to the alumni who submitted this year and to the alumni who will submit next year. Even those that didn't make it into this year's book, we enjoyed reading the work.

Thanks to the readers. We welcome and cherish you.

Editors' Notes

Allison:

Ah, how I will miss thee, *Quiz & Quill*. These past four years, I have seen the staff change faces several times. With most members graduating this year, I hope that English faculty and students will do their best to recruit new members. Thanks to the generous endowment of Donald L. Williams, *Quiz & Quill* will surely reach new heights. Just think—more pages, color photos, submissions from students around the country, access to the gold-plated cover stock Jenny Hill keeps in her safe—the possibilities are endless...but not without a dedicated staff! Not even the new dictator, er, editor, Mandy Knapp, and her Number One, Commander Riker, I mean, Josh Bradley, can do it alone. Work hard next year, kids, but remember to have fun, too. Eat more cookies. And whenever you are late to a meeting, please think of me and smile. Fiendishly. While twirling your invisible mustache and laughing, full of sinister thoughts. I'll miss you guys.

Dan:

I would like to talk about how hard it is to get people on campus to submit. I believe the magazine is good this year, but it could be better. There were 28 seniors in literature and creative writing this year, and some of them didn't submit.

Senior writing projects are supposed to be the piece de resistance, and I have to say, I just don't get it. Seniors, submit your work.

I had to literally grab people and drag them to computers to print off their work. There are good poems and stories on this campus, and people are sitting on them. It's not fair. *Quiz & Quill* wants to read your work. Next year, I don't expect that to happen. Senior writing advisors, please encourage every senior to submit next year. I'm not saying it has to be from their senior writing projects. If they are working on it, they must have at least had one advanced writing course. Help them get one of those submissions read. That goes for *Aegis*, too. Every senior on campus has written at least one critical essay. (I hope).

This year, only two pieces were submitted to the historical fiction contest. This is a no-brainer. Submit work and make easy money.

Obviously I want to see more submissions, and I want to see better submissions, but I also bring this up because I think it's an aspect of the editor's duties one doesn't usually consider. Getting good writers to submit is key to creating a good magazine.

Readers and writers, this is the kiddie pool. *Quiz & Quill* is the training ground for competitive writing in the field. Please, take advantage of us. Your college years are the last times when you will be able to talk, one on one, with editors and staff. From here on out, it's form rejection letters from untouchable people.

Good luck to next year's staff.

2004 Quiz and Quill Contest Winners

Poetry Contest

First Place	<i>Intersection</i> by Mary Teaford
Second Place	<i>Hiroshima Sushi</i> by Becca Rossiter
Third Place	<i>Magnified</i> by Rebecca Zapor

Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contest

First Place	<i>If I Knew Your Face</i> by Becca Rossiter
Second Place	<i>To Be Swiss Mennonite Is To Be Quiet</i> by Becca Rossiter
Third Place	<i>The Toilet Addressing God</i> by Amanda Knapp

Personal Essay Contest

First Place	<i>On Naming</i> by Teresa Moore
Second Place	<i>Reserved to Rudeness</i> by Barbara Hartgrove
Third Place	<i>Heartstringophobia</i> by Becca Rossiter

Short Story Contest

First Place	<i>Proditio</i> by Michelle Yost
Second Place	<i>Times are Hard</i> by Adrian Jones
Third Place	<i>Paint Fumes</i> by Colleen Tappel

Playwriting Contest

First Place	<i>Drunk on the Blood of Martyrs</i> by Jason Ray Carney
Second Place	<i>Nicole</i> by Amanda Knapp
Third Place	<i>Nothing Personal</i> by Rick Rinner

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

First Place	<i>Don't Call Me Again</i> by Melissa Zimmerman
Second Place	<i>Senate to Decide Future of SYE Requirement Wednesday</i> by Katie Crabtree

Walter Lowrie Barnes Award

First Place	<i>The Late A. Albert Fredrickson</i> by Dan Boyd
Second Place	<i>Etymology</i> by Dan Boyd

Student Editor's Alumni Award

First Place	<i>Succulence and Cutlery</i> by Becky O'Neil
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Contest Judges

Poetry and Roy Burkhart Religious Poetry Contests

Steve Abbott teaches creative writing at Columbus State Community College and has been active on the local poetry scene, reading at Larry's and helping to organize the recent Whole Web Poetry Fest and Feast, a celebration of National Poetry Month.

Short Story Contest and Walter Lowrie Barnes Award

Otterbein College graduate, **Michael Olin-Hitt**, is a professor of English at Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Georgetown Review*, *The West Wind Review*, *The Nebraska Review*, and *The Notre Dame Review*.

Personal Essay Contest

Shannon Lakanen is an essayist who lives in Shade, Ohio. She currently teaches writing at Ohio State University, and her work has been published in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Nebraska Review*, *Quarter After Eight*, and *St. Petersburg Times*, among other places.

Playwriting Contest

Doreen Dunn has won two Ohio Arts Council Playwriting Fellowships, a Mary Anderson Center for the Arts Fellowship, and *The Columbus Dispatch's* Short Play Contest for her 400-word dance-theatre piece, "Excuses." Productions of plays include: "Frontiers" (co-author/world premiere at the Victory Theatre, Los Angeles and subsequent productions throughout the country), "Great Grandmothers & Daughters" (Gallery Players), "American Roulette" (Cleveland Public Theatre), and "The Art of Pitching" (Contemporary American Theatre Company). A graduate of Northwestern University, Doreen's most recent full-length play, "Lillian and Ethel," won the Attic Theatre Center's National Playwriting Competition and was produced in Los Angeles in 2002. And "Frontiers" was again revived—this time for an international audience at the 2003 Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland.

Louise Gleim Williams Newswriting Contest

Ella Coleman, President/CEO of Ellavation Enterprises, is also publisher and editor-in-chief of *Purpose Magazine*. She has been a journalist and has been actively involved with media communications for more than 20 years.

Student Editor's Alumni Award

Allison Barrett has had numerous poems published in *Quiz & Quill Magazine*. She has won second and third places in the poetry division of the 2004 ECC Literary Competition for her poems "Another Model" and "The Branch Will Not Break," respectively. She has worked on the *Quiz & Quill* staff for four years. This is her second year as editor.

Dan Boyd co-wrote a short script, *Attrition*, which was turned into a movie by Ardent Production Company. It screened at Cedar Lee in Cleveland and was accepted to the New York Film and Video Festival. He is currently working on www.starveanartist.com, an independent press and forum for the advancement of guerilla poetry and alternative entertainment opportunities, which will launch May sixth. He has worked on the *Quiz & Quill* staff for four years. This is his first year as editor.

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White*Mark W. Smith*

Before,
I had a favorite color
and came to realize
What it was without
its brother.
Alone, it dies.

Succulence and Cutlery

Becky O'Neil

Home after the ice cream social,
she chops fruit for tomorrow's lunches,
thinking of the deceptiveness
of apples.

Rosy skins, too easily knife-split,
disguise a flesh empty of color,
dark seeds embedded
like bullets.

She blinks away a vision
of her life leaking down the drain,
scarlet clouds blooming in
gray water.

Her heart feels cored and quartered,
its paper-white insides bleeding memory:
 red-wine kisses,
 raspberry whispers.

Soon, her daughters will be old enough
to wonder about love.

They have spent the day
splitting open rocks the size of apples,
looking for geodes, knowing that
granite skins disguise dragons' eggs,
stones with ruby-coated throats.

They stretch on the twilight lawn,
all bubblegum, sunburn, and
new-penny hair,
finishing their cardboard-cup sundaes,
the jewel quest forgotten.

Her hope is a heart laid open,
an apple-bright knife,
a small mirror in which
they apply imaginary lipstick
with maraschino cherries.

Trace, or, the perfect atmosphere of loneliness*Teresa Moore*

"It feels like nighttime on the highway," he says.

"Or walking the streets of a big city on a warm summer night,
sounds like cowboy boots on cold cement."

She thinks of his dream
to drink alone in the dark,
listening to Hank Williams
and nursing a heartache.

"But you've got it wrong," she says.

"The cement ain't cold,
and spurs on hot pavement click just right,
like pennies bouncing in a well."



Edward Fowble

Ancient Venice*Barbara Hartgrove*

I open the package curiously,
The love~
between a mother and a daughter
embossed on the card,
inside a silver, compact disc.

I move to *Play*
and unleash a cathedral of sounds
long forgotten...
the steel of her guitar,
and strum of her smoldering voice
over my unsophisticated tenor;
two white-crowned sparrows
with beaks high, harmonizing
“*Lord, I’m Coming Home.*”

I lap the moment
like a chocolate blender spoon
and smells of her famous blackberry
cobbler fill the room;
seeps through closets and doorways
hinged now, with more pragmatic screws-

holding tight a time when she
was the gondolier and I the passenger.

To Be Swiss Mennonite is to Be Quiet

Becca Rossiter

While mother practices organ, I lean far out
of the sanctuary window, eating
sweet summer. Like a crocheted tablecloth, dusk
drapes the graves of great-grandparents, alive to me only
in pictures, only in rusted rakes and milking pails,
now leaning in neglected corners of the barn.
Do they cringe now, inside pine boxes,
at this loud, instrumental prelude, shake their heads
at Sunday girls in bright skirts above the knee
and our long hair, shining silk?

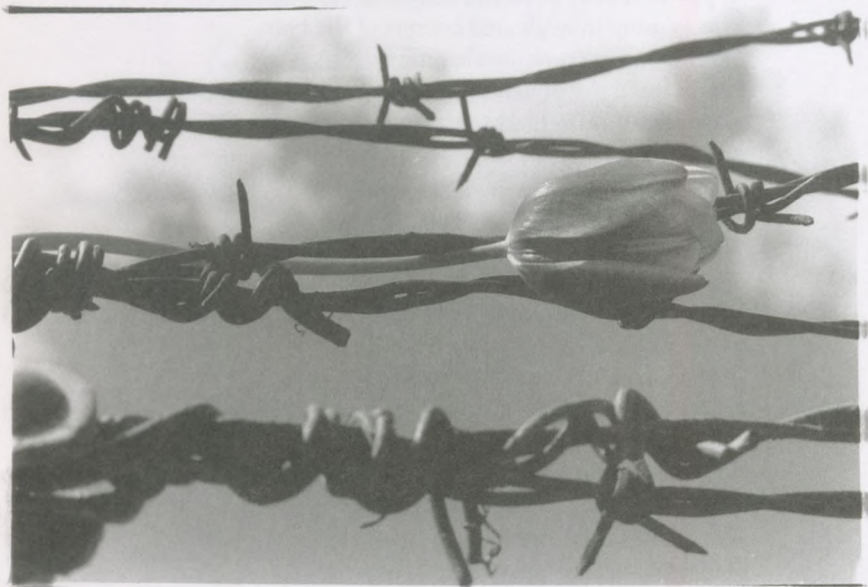
*I know why you were buried here, I want to tell them.
Too many rules, too many quarrels over
dancing and uncovered heads .When coffins
were plucked from the earth like red beets
in the middle of the night, away
from the mother church, you made a pact
to rest together here.*

There is so much more I want to know
about my family— I want to live
their definitions of love.
*Grandma: tell me of the unborn baby
you lost on summer solstice, picking
the last of the apples. Grandpa: tell me
how you felt when your son denied your God,
when the cancer bit into you, when you look out
on your father's father's fields
and know you, too, will leave them.*

I want to know why, when gathered in
dining rooms, we talk about the weather, avoiding
conflict and asking, instead, for second helpings.

Sometimes, our quiet is like a warm quilt
in the summer—I want to fling it from my legs and
onto the floor, dancing in cool, new mornings!
I want to unlatch all the windows,
lean far into the summer, and

let the music out.



Ecce Porter

In Seattle

Vincent Xexaviar

you've broken away
 from the rain
 to dance with soft spirits
 and memories
 of saffron sunsets,
 quiet tuesday afternoons
 on the pier
 with no work to hassle
 the tender hours,

I loved you most then

silent, simple
 holding hands in anticipation
 of the moon's
 nightly performance

"Pennsylvania is calling"
 you said through
 sad eyes
 before laughing
 and calling me a
 "Memphis boy"

I didn't think you would
 leave
 and didn't realize you
 had so much
 to pack

now,
 with all my possessions
 gathered in black bags
 around me,
 I catch myself
 taking achy glances
 as the snow swirls
 around the porch rail

a yellow taxi looming
 in the distance
 like the sun

Main Street
Libby Hultberg

The sun blazes loudly on Main Street in Hopedale, Illinois, the tar bubbling and the heat making the air directly above it a quivering wave of hot breath. If one looked down the empty road as it slopes upward toward the small grocery store called Dale's Red Fox, they would see an image of a sparkling pool of water up ahead on the road. But upon closer examination, the image seems to continually disappear and resurface a few feet ahead, proving to be only an oasis one could follow forever and never quite reach.

A young girl leads two small children out of the small grocery store and down the sidewalk on the shaded side of the street. The little girls are shirtless and barefoot, their diapers making them walk bowlegged as they clutch the older girl's hand. It is clear they are twins, bobbing along on either side of the girl. The older girl is young, maybe ten or eleven, and seems to be their caretaker of some sort, although it is obvious she is not their sister. The little ones have straight dark hair and wide, almond shaped eyes. Their skin is deeply browned from the sun, a contrast to the light skin on the bottom of their feet. The older girl has light brown hair, almost blonde, worn in a short fluffy mound of curls pulled behind her ears by a bright pink headband. Her skin is also browned from the sun, but a white band around her wrist in the shape of a watch proves this is not her natural skin tone. She could almost be a mix of African American, but none of her other features compliment that notion. She is skinny, not frail, rather healthy, her legs revealing hints of muscle with every step. Her light green eyes stand out amid her small facial features and she is smiling from ear to ear. She stops and reaches into her backpack, pulling out some sort of red stick. She has bought them a Popsicle to share. Biting off two small pieces and handing one to each of the girls, she takes a bite herself.

Eventually they reach the end of the sidewalk and the older girl puts the Popsicle in her mouth, scoops one girl up in one hand and balances her on her knee as she expertly hoists the other one up onto her other side. She looks both ways and they begin to cross the road, twenty wiggling toes suspended well above the bubbling hot tar of Main Street. They are almost to the other side when a car stops in the middle of the road in front of them. A fortyish man leans out of his car to speak to them.

"Hey, you there!" he says. The girl continues the next few steps and gently sets the little girls down in the grass on the other side of the street before turning around, smiling. So often people stop and ask for directions, for many only end up in the town by accident on their way to somewhere else.

"You lookin' for I-75?" she asks, noticing the long white car with the unusually lengthy antenna sticking up from the back.

"Nope. Lookin' for you," he retorts abruptly. She shades her eyes with her hand, squinting at the unfamiliar man. Eyes narrowed, he looks her up and down slowly, lingering on her legs for a few seconds.

"You got nigger blood in ya, dontcha?" he spits menacingly. Stunned, the girl blinks. Looks around. No one is out. Broad daylight, no reason to be scared. She shakes her head and the color leaves her face. She turns and grabs the hands of the little girls, one giggling and shoving a fistful of grass into her chubby mouth. They start walking briskly down the sidewalk, the little ones at her sides running to keep up. The man in the car pulls onto the gravel side of the road, closer to the sidewalk and drives slowly next to the girls, his brows furrowed, staring hard at the older girl from behind.

"Hey, look at me when I talk to you, trash!" he yells. Suddenly the red Popsicle slips from her hand and splatters on the sidewalk, a puddle of bright red slowly fanning out around it. A scratching static sound followed by a robotic voice saying "Unit 453" emanates from somewhere inside the car. Flustered and breathing quickly, she turns to him.

"Hell, I know a nigger when I see one, and don't you think we don't know all about you, Libby."

Her eyes widen at the sound of her name from this strange man's mouth and it feels like someone has just stabbed her in the neck. She cannot breathe, and for a second a dizziness comes over her. Shaking, she bends over and picks up one of the girls, clutching the other one close to her leg. But she knows that the children are in no real danger, only herself. Somehow, the children are now quiet, as if they can sense the terror in the pregnant air. She looks down the street; they are only a half block from her own white house with the screened-in porch and her mother making lemonade in the kitchen. But it seems surreal, like a mirage—something that isn't really there. But did he already know where she lived? Tears fill her eyes and she turns to continue down the sidewalk, taking measured steps that she hopes make her seem confident. The girl she is holding puts her head down and her dark hair falls over the older girl's shoulder, bouncing lightly with each step. The older girl kisses the top of her head. She cannot feel her legs, or any part of her body for that matter. She has to concentrate her grip on the girls as they come within a hundred feet of the white house on the corner. The car creeps along beside them like a tiger on the prowl, the man licking the gap between his two front teeth, his car tires making small crunching noises on the gravel. The sun glistens on his sleek, bald head. His arm hangs out the window, and she notices that he is wearing a long-sleeved blue shirt during the hottest part of the day.

She opens her mouth, wanting to yell for her mother, but something holds her mute. She glances across the street at the small white chapel where her father is practicing his sermon. Her heart is beating loudly in her chest, in her ears, in her eyelids. Everything else is numb. A sudden squeal of tires startles her and she looks to see the car speeding off. Awakened, she squints at the license plate, imprinting the numbers in her mind. She notices a sticker adorning the bright white bumper; it looked like a blue X with feet at the ends, like four hockey sticks joined together by their handles, or sort of like the windmills she remembers drawing in Mrs. Litwiller's class last year. But

something tells her the man was not thinking of hockey or windmills when he put it on his car. She watches him until he is gone, out of sight. For a split second she ponders taking the girls over to the church, but she knows no matter where she goes the heavy feeling will still hang on her heart. She doesn't stop, but keeps going on past the white house to the blue house next to it. They go inside and she locks the door behind her. Ignoring the girls' high-pitched Spanglish, she walks quickly around the house shutting and locking all the windows and doors.

After giving the girls water in their sippy cups she sits down on the couch, one girl on each side of her. They lean against her and their eyes begin to droop as the muted television beams the laughing reds and yellows of Sesame Street across their faces. The house is silent. She cannot tell her parents. They would call the police, and he was one of them. And then they wouldn't let her babysit the girls anymore—those girls were the highlight of her day; she loved playing with them and teaching them games. Then her hopes of saving up for a Schwinn bicycle would be ruined. And even if she did somehow still manage to buy the bike, she would never be allowed to ride it around town by herself. She wonders if the man was the one who had been calling their house late at night, pulling her father from slumber first, and his ensuing argument with the caller awakening her mother.

Dusk falls slowly, the sun easing soundlessly over the horizon. It isn't so hot anymore, but she feels the sweat spot on the back of her shirt growing in the stillness of the house. She jumps at the sound of the door being opened, and breathes a sigh of relief when she sees the dark-haired woman peek into the room.

"Hola! Children good for you?" the woman asks. The girl nods, gently moving the girls' arms from around her waist and laying them down next to each other on the couch. Her face looks flushed, as if she is out of breath or perhaps feeling sick, but one could attribute it merely to the sweltering hot weather. The woman hands her a candy bar with a five-dollar bill wrapped around the silvery paper, and hugs her.

The girl smiles vacantly, avoiding eye contact as she walks out the door across the small yard to the white house next door. She walks into the kitchen and stares out the window. The sun is almost completely gone, but shadows of the backyard are still visible. She gazes at the happy green and white swing set on her backyard, remembering the hours of entertainment it had provided her over the years. It seems smaller now and fragile, like a small gust of wind could tip it over any minute. For a moment she sees a young girl with curly hair swinging on the handlebars, her mouth open in a silent squeal of fearless joy, and wants to go outside and play with her. But she knows once she gets outside the girl won't really be there, her image would only disappear into the distance.

Uppity Nigger*Ladan Osman*

The first time I was called a nigger
I was walking down the street
When a little blond boy grinned
And bared his yellow teeth
Then as simply as you damn well please
He spat the word with gleeful ease,
And kicked some gravel onto my sandaled feet.

The nigger in me
Wanted to choke and beat
That dirty kid with crooked teeth,
The nigger in me
Should've grabbed that beast
And made him kiss my dusty feet.
My Nubian goddess feet.
My mahogany mistress, ebony vixen,
Somali queen feet.

But you'd better believe
As simply as you damn well please,
My Negro step didn't miss a beat
As I sauntered past him
And down the street.

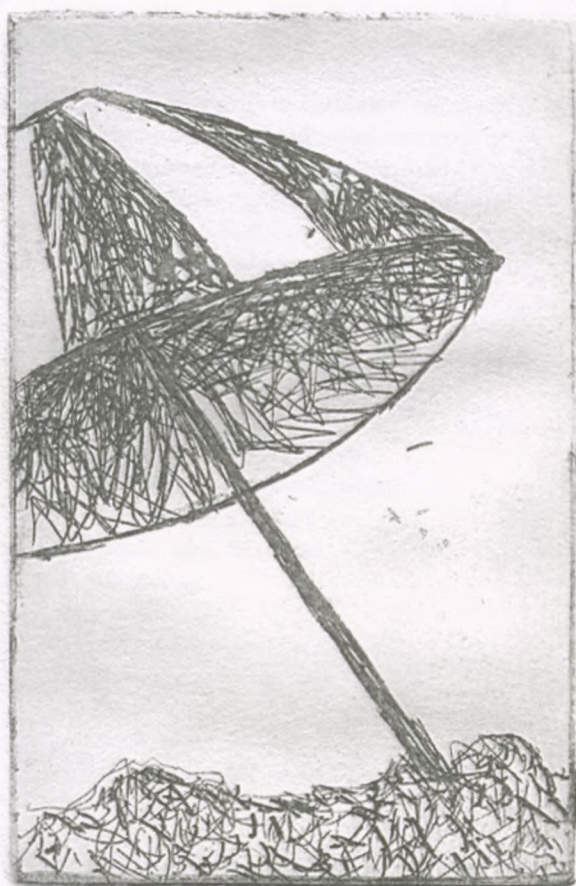
October Evening*Libby Beiring*

The half-empty moon
sighs, emitting an orange hue.

She envelops my face
with somber light and
wallows in my self-pity.

Bruises of a beaten spirit,
of a battered soul,
of a broken child are
carved upon her face.

Like me, she is
cold and distant;
right before my
eyes, yet beyond my
touch.



Susan Nowak

Jesus wears blue jeans.

Amanda Knapp

Sparrows from the north tree declare war
on sparrows from the south tree
and Maurice complains endlessly
how his car gets shit on.

Jesus tinkers with a red hot rod
on cement blocks, wipes his hands
on the seat of his blue jeans, saying
“Now you know why I ditched the robe.”

Intersection*Mary Teafor*

The purple car stops at the light
with Auntie in the front seat,
massive, virile,
a gray fuzz on her upper lip.
I'm filed in the back
with a pile of magazines,
kicking the cover
of "*Mount Holyoke Alumni*:
Raising your daughters to be strong leaders."
Daughterless Auntie asks about
school, boys, clothes,
while I stare out the window
at the reclining billboard woman
drinking whiskey
in a velvet strapless dress.
At the green,
Auntie asks,
"Have you got your period yet?"
I clench
my knees
and stare at the back
of the retreating Whiskey Woman.
"No," I say,
twisting a sneaker
into the *Mount Holyoke Cover*.
"Not yet."

I asked her to, "Put up your dukes."

Dan Boyd

Swing-sets are made of metal
the same way conversations are.

Abby has the freckles of a small town with a big college.
I've got dyed blue hair, in an attempt to look like Max Sterling.¹

I'm swinging and my words are jumping off with triple lutes.
I'm talking and I'm working magic through words.
Better than science, I'm working marvels,
creating Sphinx out of letters,
cardboard boxes out of words.

And then she says something which reminds me of this one time,

"I'm on this plane to Michigan from California, next to this
stunning southern belle. And I'm like, there is a God, cuz I don't pray for
much but I pray for pretty girls on long flights. And I'm talking to this
girl and I'm throwing her game. It's in my hand, it's a metaphor about
sports, involving touchdowns, and home runs, and three point shots at the
buzzer. This girl, the gorgeous one, after ten minutes of talk about being
in our twenties, sex and drugs and romanticism, the type of stuff girls
only talk about when they want to take drugs and have sex with you, the
girl, she turns to me and says,
she says,"

"Are you married?"

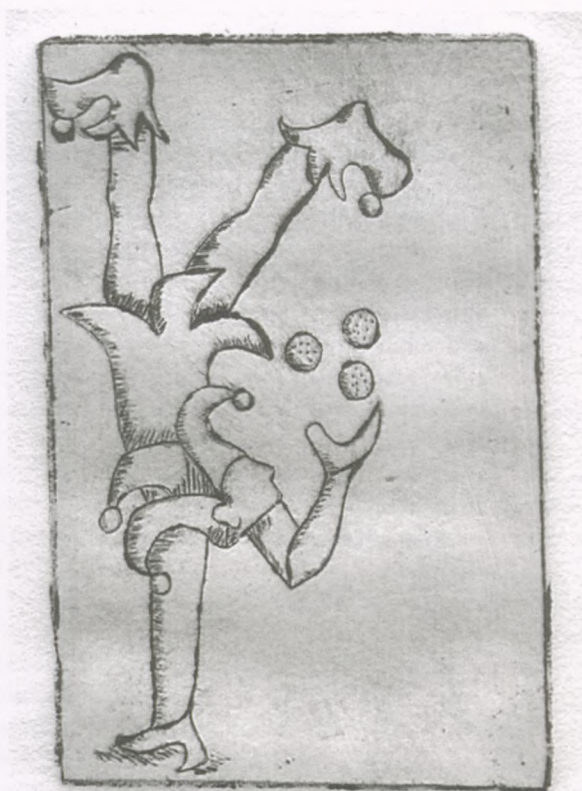
And this Abby girl, after I profess good times and hate and bigotry and sparks and
bullshit and love and all that all that. Abby, she turns to me and she says,

"I don't like to argue with people."

And that says to me, 'Dan, I disagree with everything you've said today.'
And then she says,

"I think I want to be a nun."

¹ A *Robotech* character.



Lacey Loudermilk

Imagine*Josh Bradley*

little boy battles imaginary baddies
down the thin path of death,
swinging
high above the pit.

old man sees little boy
dance over sidewalk cracks
and pop-can trash.

little boy raises his fists
to the sky

Triumphant.

Spinning
Allison Barrett

The hall light is on, like always. I wasn't always afraid of the dark, but then once I thought I saw Snooper in my room, and I reached out to pet him, but he wasn't really there. I got scared and screamed, so now Mommy and Daddy leave the hall light on. I can hear them down in the living room. They sound happy. Daddy laughs his goofy laugh, and Mommy laughs smaller. I wish I could go down and sit with them in the living room. But whenever I ask why they get to stay up and I don't, it's always:

"Because we're the boss."

"But why can't I just stay up a little while?"

"Because we said so. When you're a grown-up you can stay up as long as you want."

"But that's too far away. It's not fair!"

"Too bad. When you have kids you can make up the rules."

"I'm gonna be nice to my kids! Not like you!"

"Do you want to go to your room?"

They always say the same thing. When you grow up...but I think I might really be little forever. Everyone says, what do you want to be when you grow up? Lots of girls pick ballerina, but that only makes me think of a pink tutu, and I don't even know how to dance. I pick veterinarian, because I like animals, especially bunnies. But then Daddy says you sometimes have to give animals shots when they're sick, and I hate shots, so I might pick artist instead. But still, that question isn't real because growing up takes so, so long. I am only four, and I am still not old enough to go to school even though I can write my name! So I'm never, never going to get to stay up late or boss around my kids (even though I wouldn't boss them around because I'd be a nice mom). Never, never, never.

I try to go to sleep, but when you try to, you can't. I told Mommy my plan to notice the exact moment when I fall asleep. She said there's no way anyone can do that, but I really think I can! I try to do that for awhile, but it gets really boring. So I sit up and scoot out of my bed. I hate these pajamas with footies. My feet get all sweaty, and they make a squishy sound as I walk across the carpet. The hallway is all golden and glowy. There are still shadows though. I reach up and wrap my hands around the banister and hang there a little. I take a deep breath, getting ready to call out "Mommy! Can I come down?" But not right away. Everything in the hallway is so quiet, and the T.V. is on down there, sounding happy and far-away. Then there's a POP! POP! and the buttery popcorn smell floats all the way upstairs. Now I want to go down really bad, but I know if I call down Daddy will call up, "Just go back to bed," like it's not really important. I just won't ask first.

I creep down on my tiptoes, like I do when Matthew is sleeping. I have to be sneaky, like Pink Panther. One step at a time. It gets louder and brighter as I go. My footies still make the swishy sound, so it's hard to be quiet.

Even though it's just Mommy and Daddy, I feel scared, like when a balloon pops. I reach the bottom of the stairs. Now I'm in the living room.

Mommy glances over. "Whatsa matter, pumpkin? You can't sleep?"

I put on a miserable face and shake my head and rub my eye. Daddy says, "Do you want to watch this movie with us?"

I can't believe I don't even have to ask! I nod my head. If I even talk, I'm afraid they'll make me go back to bed.

"Do you think she'll get scared by the witch, David?"

"No, she'll be okay, I think, since we're here."

"What movie are we going to watch?" I ask in my whisper voice.

"It's *The Wizard of Oz*. It's for grown-ups and kids; it's one of the best movies ever."

"Oooo!"

"There's a wicked witch, and sometimes she's scary, but it's not real. Do you think you'll get scared?"

"No."

"Alright, come sit in the middle. You missed a little bit. Dorothy and Toto—that's her little doggie—were blown to Oz by a tornado. That part was in black and white anyway. Here we go; now watch."

I am really sitting down here in the living room with Mommy and Daddy! I get to stay up because I'm not a little baby like Matthew. I even get my own bowl with popcorn in it. I eat one piece at a time. It tastes salty and good. On the T.V. is the prettiest, most colorful place I have ever seen. When the pink bubble floats up to Dorothy and changes into the Good Witch, I even forget about my popcorn. I have the best Mommy and Daddy in the world.

Matthew is old enough to walk now, but he still has to ride in the baby car seat. I stand in the doorway, bundled up in my coat, watching Mommy and Daddy out in the snow, buckling Matthew in. Suddenly, a question floats up into my mind, maybe the most important question, but one that makes me feel bad. Still, I can't stop it, it floats up: Do I love Mommy or Daddy the most? I thump my fist on my forehead, but not too hard. Go away, go away, why do I have to think about this? Well, Daddy is the one who built a snowman with me this morning, and Mommy is the one who wanted to stay inside. Hmmm.

On most days, Daddy is home with me and Matthew (but he's so little, it's like he's not really there). We have a nest of blankets in the living room, where we watch *Pinwheel* on Nickelodeon. After we get dressed, sometimes we go to the place where there is a tire swing, and Daddy pushes me really crazy in circles. And sometimes we go to the library, and I pick out all the Seuss books, and Daddy reads them all. When Daddy colors, he mixes up all the crayon colors like a real artist. He taught me how to mix a sunset; you need blue, pink, and purple, plus a little bit of orange. He's so good that people at his work give him money to draw pictures of their kids.

I love Mommy a lot too, even though she's not as fun as Daddy. She makes me feel safe and cozy. At night she blow-dries my hair, while Daddy is at work. She takes Matthew and me with her when she goes to the special place to get stickers. Mommy loves stickers. She puts them all in a big scrapbook. Also, Mommy makes the house clean, and she reads to me the same as Daddy does, and she makes good scrambled eggs on Sundays. I really love Mommy and Daddy both. My favorite is when we are all together at the same time, in their room, lying down on the quilt with the bright colors.

Matthew doesn't understand what's going on. He just waddles around, smiling, smiling all the time, with his hair sticking up in the back. That's called a cow-lick. But I'm almost five, so I know things aren't going to be the same now. Daddy isn't going to sleep in the big bed with Mommy anymore. He's taking the bright patchwork quilt and Mommy will only have the brown blanket.

Daddy and his friend look funny moving the dresser. Their feet take baby steps really fast and their arms are all muscley with their fingers like big claws gripping the sides. They are making weird faces with their eyes all squinched up and their teeth gritted. First down four steps, then the landing – oops, the dresser scrapes the wall; turn, down six stairs, then the cold cement floor. I go examine the spot where the dresser bumped the wall. There's a big black scuff there, like when I scuffed my shiny white dress shoes once. I rub the scuff, but it won't go away. I frown. Mommy is fussing with things in the living room. She doesn't help move any of the big stuff down. She is just glaring and moving little piles of clothes and stuff around. Mommy and Daddy aren't talking very much. "Mommy, why is Daddy going to live in the basement?"

"I told you, he's just going to stay down there until he finds another place to live."

"Why can't he live here?"

"Because Mommy and Daddy don't get along together anymore."

"But why?"

"Well, we fight a lot now, and if we stay together we'll always fight, and that's bad."

"Why don't you both just say 'sorry'?"

"It's not like that anymore. We both are sorry, but we just don't love each other anymore, and there's nothing we can do."

"But Mommies and Daddies always love each other. You have to!"

"When they first get married, Mommies and Daddies love each other, but sometimes they find out later that they don't get along. That doesn't mean we don't love you and Matthew anymore. We will always love you guys no matter what."

"Oh. Can Daddy come up to the living room and play with me?"

"Yes, but he'll probably be in the basement when I'm home."

"So you won't fight?"

"Yes. But you can go down there to see him whenever you want."

"But the basement is dark."

"Daddy is taking a lamp down there. See? It's right here."

"But *I don't want* Daddy to live in the basement."

"I know honey, but it's just for a little while."

I walk down to the landing. I can hear Daddy and his friend moving things around down there. "Daddy, do you *want* to move to the basement?" I yell down. But he doesn't answer. Probably he didn't hear me with all of that banging around down there.

I pretend Daddy will be in the basement for only a little while, and then Mommy will miss him and tell him to come back up. It's like he's in trouble and he got sent to the basement to think about what he's done. He has a big rug down there, and the dresser, and the couch for a bed. During the day, Mommy still goes to work and Daddy still comes upstairs to be with Matthew and me. Sometimes when he is down there, I forget he's even at home. Soon the worst day comes.

The sun is coming through the window into the living room. I am spinning around and around in a bright spot on the carpet. I like my outfit; white shirt, white shorts, all with hot pink and yellow and green palm trees. Earlier Mommy was outside with Matthew and me. We filled up the little pool, and then we were playing with the hose. Now I am dressed. And I don't want to think about anything except spinning around and around. While we were outside, Daddy was loading up his stuff, but I just squirted Matthew with the hose because I don't care.

Daddy comes up the stairs from the basement. Mommy brings Matthew downstairs. Now he's dressed too. Spin, spin, spin. I don't care. I'm She-rah. I have to keep spinning. This will give me a force field, and I'll be invisible too.

"Allison, it's time for Daddy to go."

Spin, spin, spin. Force field. I look at my bright palm trees. Daddy gets down on one knee, so that he's only a little taller than me. Mommy says, "Matthew, give Daddy a hug. He's leaving now to go live in his new house."

Matthews toddles over to Daddy with a big smile on his face. He probably just thinks Daddy's going to the store. He doesn't know anything. Stupid. Daddy hugs Matthew in a way that scares me. He hugs him really hard, and he looks all hunched over. I've never seen Daddy cry, but he's got his eyes squeezed shut like he's trying not to. After a really long time he lets Matthew go, and now I guess it's my turn. But I don't move.

Mommy kind of nudges me over to Daddy and she squats down next to me. "Honey, Daddy has to go now." I look down. They made me stop spinning, so now my force field is gone.

Mommy puts on her soothing voice, the one she uses after she's yelled at me for being bad, and then later comes up to say, "I still love you, no matter what you do." She says, "Give Daddy a hug. He has to go now, and he'll be sad

if you don't give him a hug. Remember, this isn't your fault. We'll both always love you no matter what."

Why does she say the same thing every time? I know it's not my fault. It's her fault. I can tell Daddy doesn't want to go. He has the most horrible sad look on his face. I give Daddy the biggest bear hug I can give him, and he squeezes so tight, its like he'll never let me go. But he does let me go. And he stands up, and looks around, and that's it. Mommy is making him go. I don't cry. Mommy doesn't seem that upset, so it can't be real. If I spin fast enough, everything gets all blurry, and I can't see Daddy walking out the door.



Ecce Porter

All Decked Out*Libby Beiring*

The plump cantaloupe
glistens as dew rolls
down its side.

Beading together
on yesterday's paper
a translucent necklace
adorns its throat.

Bowling Alley in January*Katie Sweet*

You wanted to run this experiment,
see if cheering helped bowlers, and
that's why we went.
That's why we went.

Found a team
on a lane with
nobody at the tables,
one with his pack of Capri's.
his winning hand pump
after a good roll, and
his sweat in the 10th frame.

Found
we all sweat in frames,
form moments in squares, rectangles, circles,
taped, pinned to walls,
under glass,
next to us
on a chair,
where we distinguished sweat from tears, and
you tell me how far we are from Fall.

Falling*Libby Hultberg*

The bell rings!
Glimmering crisps of light
blinking orange, red, gold.
Brittle leaves kiss my bounding shoes
and my face feels bigger
than usual.
My smile is on the inside, too.
I run with the crowd today, not behind.

"Close your eyes, Lib,
and I'll push you on the swing."

A dizzy, blissful sway motions
back and forth
back and forth.
A weightless taste of freedom,
of flying almost.

I breathe in the day,
desperately memorize the fragrance of acceptance.
Then a sudden hush covers the air,
like the blanket on a bird's cage.

"Megan?"
I watch three small shadows running down the road,
their faint cackles echoing a path in my mind.

She turns again to point
and disappoints
my falling heart.

Confession to my vegetarian boyfriend

Becca Rossiter

I wonder as you kiss me
if you can tell that my belly is brimming
with the tender thighs of some *poor mistreated chicken*
who never saw sunlight

Can you taste in my pores on this hot-orange
summer night the burger I bolted near the neighbor's garage
at 1 a.m.

like some teenager sneaking a hit
Because I thought you'd
launch into the sacredness of life
the gluttony we keep in our back pockets

Can you feel it in my muscles as we
dem-on-strate this tango
how I feed on other muscles:
pectoralis major
gluteus maximus

And finally when I'm sucking on your fingers
do you see me envisioning instead
last night's ribs (plucked like Adam's) from some animal I'll never
have to look in the eye

sautéed in a sweet
and sassy
sauce?

This too shall pass*Amanda Knapp*

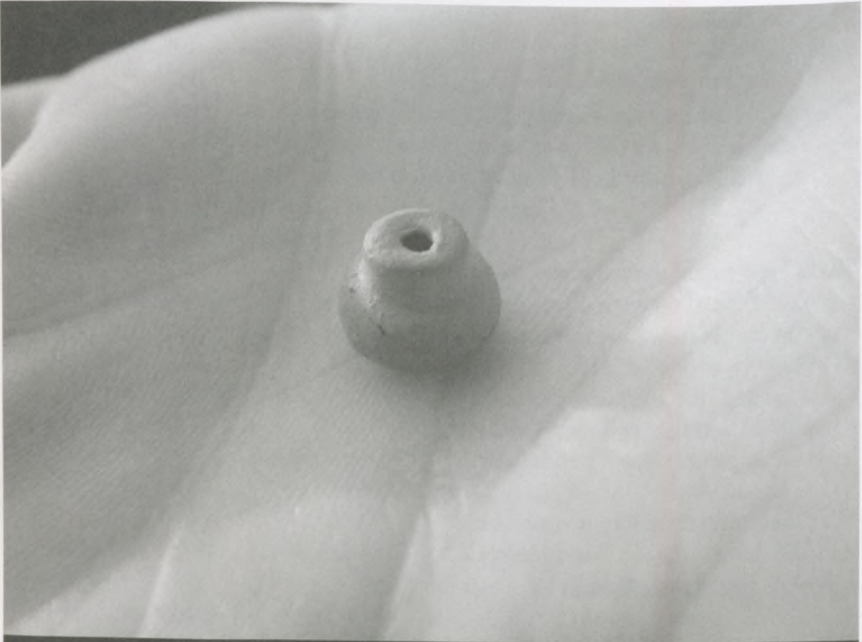
"The notion dawned on the most gifted people of antiquity that Moria [Fate] stood above the gods and that the gods themselves had their own destinies."

~Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion

God's long beard darted about like
a snake's forked tongue. He
stepped inside his cloud bedchamber. He
didn't wave goodbye. His
chest sagged like a crone's tits. His
toenails curled like yellow talons. His
limp penis swung like a pendulum.

"Let's see how they like it now," he
grumbled at the green and blue rock
below, "I'm taking a nap."

His great white head wasn't on the pillow before
there was a knock at the door. Lucifer, long sufferer
of red eye, his shirt cuffs unraveling in the doorframe,
useless as a vestigial tail, mumbled
"I'm...I'm real sorry about everything."



Edward Fowble

Little Pitchers*Jen LaConte*

During tub time, I asked Joey, "What do you want to be?"

The bubble bearded boy replied, "gunned down."

I said, "What does that mean?"

He splashed me, sank his squeaky boat and answered, "it means you're dead."

We always had a rule: No TV-MA around our son. Now we include the six o'clock news.

First, I'd Like to Thank Myself*Jen LaConte*

Recently, I auditioned for American Idol. I straightened my halo, donned my robe of pure light and brought several supplicants who bowed and wailed at Simon Cowell. At the tryout, many young women were dressed in such a way that I knew I couldn't win. The Idol of America must be a deity of lust.

Chick of the Sea*Jen LaConte*

I caught a mermaid on a deep-sea fishing trip. Hooked her right through the gill. She heaved back and forth in the bottom of the boat, legs swinging wildly, walleyes bulging. For decency's sake me and the boys looked away while she pushed herself to her feet and dove back into the ocean, toes waggling.

Stokes-Adam Syndrome¹

Katie Sweet

Stephanie

does spin
 lying supine-me-so-not sangfroid
 she'sa semaphore.
 see'er sporta shirt showing Spiderman spinning-a spider web.
 she can
 get some shenanigans started:
 She'sa scherzo
 you see-
 stepp'n
 every
 where shimmy'n,
 smashing,
 smile shot- like silly putty.

sun, sea, sequoia (sputterer sayings)
 syncopation-idiotiation, set, snaps
 START. some seas

spill suds,
 some suds
 sing songs,
 some songs
 sink soft

STOP.

maybe screedish,
 it serves-as-a salve
 does sit-not?
 but, sometimes, stove-sittings start
 siestas, start saplings, so
 where smy syringe so
 suited-to stipple-a stellate satellite? She
 is stellated.
 surfing starfish
 seek'er silhouette-as she saunters,
 soles snug-n stilts.

every
 where she's
 that samovar, sucking-you-for-a sip.

it
 gets
 you.
 see-

sunspots-with-a scarf, some Smiths.

it
 gets
 you
 every
 where saccharine.

¹ Attacks of sudden unconsciousness.



Edward Fowble

Grandpa's Time

Sarah Grooms

It's becoming a love that stings,
'cause I know that if I live
to see forty,
there will be an empty
space at our table.

And I know that you
haven't left your seat yet,
or asked for your hat and coat.

Your brother asked,
and his family kept him
talking at the door, with his hand
resting on the brass knob,
his departure looming.

I try to savor the time
we are spending
together. We listen
to the crickets
from my back porch and you tell
stories of your adventures, times
in your life when building
caves in the forest was summertime
fun and making the atomic
bomb was just another day at the office.
Eighty-five years of life that
I cannot fathom.

The stars are just peeking
through the dusk,
looking down on us
in the cool October air:
Beauty laced with arsenic,
like frost on the
edge of a leaf.

Sold

from Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere*
Barbra Hartgrove

"May I help you sir?"
 her thin voice drowns
 in the noisy room, pushed
 like the aroma of bourbon
 and swirls of smoke above.

She stands looking outward
 in black baroque, the low neckline
 of her dress trimmed in white lace,
 leading the eyes to silver buttons
 that march downward, landing
 on powerful hips.

Her black velvet chocker
 and cameo charm, accentuate
 the powdery skin of her partially
 exposed bosom, hugs
 her sullen face in its softness.

A mirror exposes the forward—
 advances of stately men, worn
 like a corsage. A new black
 top hat appears from the right. Dark,
 serious eyes, hunched over a mouth
 cleverly hidden in his deep mustache—

speaks silently in the mirror,
 the silver fruit bowl, in droves
 of champagne bottles, lit by
 elaborate chandeliers; revealed
 in the faces of women who watch
 from afar with their heads turned.

Dainty feet of a trapeze artist dangle
 in an overhead corner...
 peaks down upon suggestion buried
 in a bowl of fiery oranges placed
 just below her left breast, in a spray
 of gardenias tucked quietly
 in her cleavage, pointing upward
 to the outline of carefully red lips—

and in two roses resting
 in a vase, only half-full
 of water, home
 of a soon-to-be-flaccid
 and wilting flower.

Prometheus, Who Stole Fire

Dan Boyd

"Any questions?" The reverend smiled. His young adult speech on the moral justification of Hell had gone *quite well*. His white collared shirtsleeves were rolled up to his forearms. He stuck his hands into his suit pants pockets and leaned back against the school rectory's altar/desk.

It was five till, and the silence that ensued was one of intimidation. To speak out was to run late. Several of the boys gave glaring looks to the questioners of the class.

But Sandy Walker was too new, too dense, and too stubborn to let go of the questions inside. "What is Heaven like?" Her grandparents helped organize sit-ins at Cole's Coffee Shopé and her dad had even gone to jail (before his death last November) for civil disobedience.

"We don't know. We can't know."

"Heaven is like sex!" Donny had royal red hair and he yelled.

"Shut up." The back of Kyle Whittington's hand jacked Donny in the shoulder.

"I've heard that before." The reverend blushed, commenting on Donny's remark.

Sandy's big brown eyes flashed as the spokes of her lids shuttered. Her seventeen-year-old lips licked out to Kyle, "So my Dad's having sex in Heaven?"

"Constantly." Donny had never had sex.

"Class. Heaven can't be described, just like Hell couldn't be described. I can give you glimpses of it through metaphors but in the end it's futile because we can't experience it the way a soul would experience Heaven. Souls don't have the same faculties for experiencing environment that we do.

"So what we do is use our intellect, we use logic, and faith. Faith tells us that God exists. Logic tells us that if God exists He is good. Our understanding of good involves a sense of justice. We have to take into consideration what a just end to existence would be. We can't ever know Heaven, in the way that we know two plus two equals four. We have faith that Heaven exists and is just."

"So it could be terrible?" Sandy Walker asked.

"We have faith that it isn't. I believe in a just God, an all-loving God, one that exists for the benefit of all. God created this world perfectly so that every action and reaction is for a just purpose. It's up to us to find the proper actions. We really need to weigh the pros and cons of the choices we make. Plant a tree or cut it up for paper, which is going to benefit all of man for a longer period of time? Maybe the paper you make from the tree ends up writing legislature that saves millions of lives. It takes a complex understanding of how the world interacts.

"Heaven is at the end of that interaction. After all we've done here we go to an afterlife. Don't expect to understand Heaven if you don't understand the knowable processes here first.

"At the same time, we can have glimpses of the future. We can see that everything in the past has led to a future, to existence, which is ultimately good. We can extrapolate on that. If God has been revealed as just, and He has, we can look at our sense of justice here, and get a good idea of what it will be like in Heaven. Here, people are rewarded for doing good works. Your father did a lot of good works, and I'm not worried about his soul. In Heaven he will continue to do good and be just as rewarded. He is safe.

"Let me think about it a bit, and next Saturday I'll come up with some kind of parable."

"Sex is the greatest thing I've ever done. So, taking from my experience, sex is Heaven," said another kid and Shelly Adele in the front row blushed.

Rev. Allan's mind hit sex. The impression of the moment painted itself, moving from left to right, like reading a brush stroke. He got the context and the beauty in just one droplet.

Two months ago he had been with his wife, in the Church, and there had always been something sexual about the control of a crowd, about any group listening to a man. It was the flattering way response highlighted him. It was then, after the sermon, before he bowed his head for a moment of silence, he caught the glimmer in Kat's breath. He always noticed it in Kat's breath first.

Then:

Saying goodbye.

A kiss in the car.

An unmade bed.

The unmaking of dress.

"Sex is great," Allan cut through the canvas and out of the moment, a red smear across his cheeks, a small ripple in time. His head bowed to hide his thoughts. His left eye caught Sandy's breath. "But it isn't like Heaven." He said it almost like up talk, but instead of a question, it was surprise. "Look, class is over, go."

Sandy raised her hand.

"Sandy, stay after, we'll talk."

The room's whites and blacks turned surrealistically in his head from the unavoidable knowledge of future. Allan remembered telling fourth grade Cindy Cooper that he liked her, the same feeling he had when in eleventh grade he asked his mother, "*What the fuck did I do?*" Distinctly he knew the future.

Sandy stayed after class.

Everyone else left.

Allan was young for a reverend five years ago when he joined the parish. "So—"

"I hate the new preacher." Shelly curled her hair in the morning but inevitably by the end of the day it would be straight. Still, she had a strong sense of what was aesthetically right, even if nature was opposed to it. For the most part the boys at the local high school, North, seemed to agree.

"Reverend Allan?" Todd Adele sat at the head of the table and looked up from his dinner plate.

"He always keeps us long." She put her fork down. She wasn't about to eat if she was getting the house's full attention.

"I think that's good," her mother complimented.

"Sure, if we were learning about God."

"What are you learning about?" Todd thought it was a very good question. At C&C Packing on Cleveland he would spend a good part of his day thinking of proper questions to ask his children at the dinner table. Sixteen-year-old Shelly volunteering information about her education was a revolutionary experience for Todd.

"Sex."

"Oh." Perhaps he would have to discuss this at the weekly prayer group.

"I drove Sandy Walker home tonight."

"Was she asking questions again?"

"The rest of the class doesn't want to do anything and she wants to know faith."

"Well, I have faith that you will work it out." Kat's teeth flickered.

"Thanks." He patted her on the head and made his way to the kitchen.

"The kids are in bed." They had twin boys, Cane and Able. Dos, six-year-old playground pirates. Every time Allan saw them, thought about how air filled their lungs and exhale fed the green. He felt how much Kat loved him. He felt it in a sense that didn't seem to belong to the five. It didn't taste like raspberries, feel rough or warm, look sky blue, smell of lavender, it didn't sound like Bobby Vinton or the Four Tops.

She stepped into the kitchen. "They worked themselves into a tizzy at Alum Park."

He probed the cupboard next to the fridge for peanut butter. "Kat."

Kat went to the refrigerator and pulled out his Smuckers grape jelly.

"I will always love you."

"That class takes forever. It's so stupid. Be good to people. Be good to people. Why do I go to an hour-long class to be told, *be good to people*?" Kyle passed Sandy an unopened pack of cigarettes.

"I learn a lot from class." She took the pack of Reds and smacked the top a couple of times, then slowly broke the seal and popped the top.

Matt came over and placed his black hand on her shoulder. "Her coot's just too tight for a black piece so she goes to the Reverend Slim." His smile tried to compensate for his manhood. "Let me have one."

"Go hang out with your *brothers*, Matt." Sandy picked at a cigarette in the middle of the pack. Then her fingers pulled the shaft half out only to throw it back in.

Donnie's red hair blasted against the five o'clock sun line. He called out, "Hey, Shelly." But she kept walking.

"Don't finger up the pack Sandy, just give 'em here." Matt reached for the fire sticks.

"She's got to choose the lucky," Kyle said. Whenever a girl was around, he gave her an unopened pack of cigarettes. That way she could flip one of the squares upside down. That would be his last smoke of the pack, his lucky stick.

"Well, take your time then, Sandy." Matt took a couple of steps back from the circle.

"Shelly is so hot." Donny's gapped tooth grin was set off by his freckles, giving him fangs.

"Shelly is so a bitch." Kyle bit his lip, waiting for Sandy to choose the magic. Sandy just kept shuffling the pack. Not flipping any of them, just pulling them half out and thrusting them back into the foil.

"Shelly isn't so bad." Sandy felt the tips with her fingers. In time every stem would be too hot to touch. Thank God for time, that she wasn't outside of time, that she moved in a leaner fashion. That way she didn't get burnt.

"Shelly's all repressed. Shelly wants to have sex."

Matt deadpanned, "She'd probably be all freaky with you, Donny."

"Fuck you." Donny wanted to add, nigger.

Next Saturday, Sandy dallied at her bag while the rest of the class zig-serpented through the desks and out to the street where they separated into circles, Ford Windstars, or wandered away like disorbited rocks, little comets ready to hit their homes.

Sandy and Allan were alone. She picked up her bag and moved it to the coiled heater in the back of the room. Her slender black arms touched it for short warm bursts that accented her off-the-shoulder blouse.

"Yes, Sandy?"

"Did you have sex before marriage?"

"That's personal." Reverend Allan picked up his bible and stuck it into his back pocket.

"That's why I waited, because if the other kids don't want to know about faith, then I shouldn't drag them along." She was only sure she knew what she meant, not that she had said what she meant. Still, Reverend Allan felt the mix of nervous power in her voice.

"That isn't a faith issue." Taking steps toward the door would be taking steps towards her.

"Did you, though? Did you do it before you were married? Kids say it's real good."

He thought about the term—*young adults*. "Are you going to listen to kids?" He wanted to hit a rhythm, to find a cool speech, to talk his way around the subject, to tell her straight and at the same time not answer her question, but her hips sort of seeped into his alkaline. He didn't respond when she let the silence sit as her answer.

She bit the deep low back of her lip. "Was it good? Did you love her?"

He couldn't help thinking about the first girl he'd ever slept with, and by extension, because the context of that image was memorized, he knew, without seeing, the chain of events that led to that moment.

In the time between two heartbeats, he remembered the look on her eyes as he steadied himself, how he had her hold him. "*If we are doing this, we are doing this together,*" and as he pushed she pulled, and when she came on that first night she cried.

Not specific images, but still memory. In that same speck, he realized all the little details it took to make that memory. He remembered every eyelash he watched her paint, every brow she plucked, every smile before a kiss. Every talk that wasn't about sex, and how they were all about sex, because *every* detail bore weight on the decision to sleep with her that night.

His head was at his feet again. This time his eyes closed, hoping not only to conceal his thoughts but hers too. "How could something not be perfect?"

Rising through the back of her thick denim skirt, she could feel the coil's heat as it slid through her clothes and lightly massaged her skin, up her spine. Her breath glimmered and even she could see it in the room now. She could feel it, almost in the soul's sense. "Is it because loss isn't worth gain sometimes?" Between a question and an answer she remembered her father. "Like it's real good to gain something, but some things, it's better to have never had than to have had and lost."

A memory built on imagination, *I wasn't there*, so her father's face, the one he wore when he took her to the parade, the one he wore when his family from south Georgia came to visit, when her brother was born, it was that face he was wearing when he wearily rose too fast from under the spinning blades of the trash compactor.

"I'm..." he said. *Not ready to accept that.*

"Maybe it's good but it's not, you know, right." She sighed.

"Death is sad."

"Life is sad. Death is something else, I think. Death can't be sad, right? If we can know sadness, can a soul know sadness?"

"Can a soul know comfort?"

And they held each other by the warmth.

Kat used to smoke. She still kept a pack hidden around the house, because she knew the future. Like she knew, *No doctor, twins*, like she always knew someone in her family was dead, even before Allan picked up the phone. He always picked up the phone, because she never could. Someday, she knew, she would need to start smoking again.

She was re-hiding the wolves in her lingerie drawer, behind the Victoria's Secret box, the thin pink lines of which gave her an empty chill. Something she had bought when they were dating, in Steubenville.

She shut the drawer as Allan came home. She walked to the steps and then with a removed, almost stylized elegance, down the stairs. "I consider myself a respectable Reverend's wife."

"Consider? You are." He smiled. "Beyond that you are a consummate Allan's wife."

"However, you need to shave."

"I feel rugged."

"I don't know if Mrs. Appleton goes for rugged." Kat knew she didn't go for rugged.

"Mrs. Appleton? Well, I will be sure to shave before Sunday's communion."

"Before?" She gave him a look.

"Long before. By dinner I will be re-baptized, renewed, and born again."

"Cane and Abel were hungry but I wouldn't let them eat, I thought they should wait for us."

"It will be an in-and-out baptism."

"They love you."

"Are they upstairs? I'll bring them along for the ceremony, maybe they can cut daddy up a bit." His eyebrows popped up twice and he took the steps two at a time, blowing her a kiss as he passed.

Mirrors scared Kat; they were reminders of the unknown. When Kat looked at her reflection, she realized that without it, she could never know herself. If she kept probing, it only got worse, because if she needed mirrors to know herself, then she didn't know herself. That was part of why she was never drawn to more ascetic lifestyles; she wanted to know who she was, and to know that, she needed people. Though sometimes when she forced herself to stare, to keep her eyes open, whether it be at Cane's pulse, or her curves she saw in Allan's pupils, she would discover that, *Truth is unattainable; there is only faith*. True self-awareness was impossible. Without ceasing to exist, without changing entirely, without being able to examine from the outside, she would never fully understand herself.

Allan loved mirrors. He appreciated the benefits of seeing himself. If he angled them, right he could observe the strange way his ears looked and heard things. Over years he had found all sorts of parts he hadn't even known existed. For Allan, everyone could be a mirror; through other people he found reflection. To find out how he would act, as a father, as a husband, he needed his senses, a source of tracking, and a way to see himself do those things. He also needed his memory, a way of recording those actions. If Able flipped his Big Wheel, he wanted to be comforting, but without Able, he could never have truly known.

Being a father was a flattering mirror. It showed Allan that he was to be respected, that he was to be a leader as well as a nurturer.

Cane and Able were filled with fascinating insights. By watching them, Allan found out not only who he was but also how he could become a better person. Cane's knees were on the counter and he patted white foam on his father's cheeks.

"Put it everywhere there's hair, buddy—not my head... you big goof ball."

Able stood expectantly with the razor in his hand.

Without mirrors, *I could never have had this experience*. Allan placed Cane on the floor and picked up Able.

"How was class tonight? I heard some other parents complaining last week."

"Whose parents?" Kyle was vaguely interested.

"Shelly's."

"Yeah, well I guess she would be upset. She has a crush on preacher 'Be Nice to People' and B-Nice has a crush on Sandy."

"What?"

"The black girl."

"What do you mean, crush?"

"He feels her up after class and stuff, I don't know."

"Are you being serious?"

"No. Look, this is about as much parent-child interaction as I can handle."

"Have you been hanging out with Sandy? Has she told you this?"

Sunday Rev. Allan noticed that his congregational mirror was a little less flattering.

Rain was good for washing cars, and drives were good for families, Rev. Allan always said. The kids had a babysitter so it was just Kat and Allan. Allan flipped his right turn signal on. "Did you notice that?"

"Notice what? Wait... I guess not. No. What is the 'that' though?"

"The congregation was a little off tonight."

"You think you should have made a Simpsons reference? Is that what this is about? I told you, do them if you want, it's just I don't care for them. I'm the least of your concerns on the pulpit. I'm your biggest supporter." Kat traced the seatbelt across her belly.

"No. Maybe. No."

"Calm down. Tell me."

"I want to tell you what I think it is before someone else tells you, because our relationship is God-centered, and if we are centered on Christ then we need to be centered on communication. Sin is the break in communication with Christ. I need to have clear communication with you."

"Okay."

"I love you."

"Allan, we have had this talk before, but I think, I don't know what you are going to say, but I want to tell you again, I won't leave you, nothing can separate us, nothing. I will not hate you, I will not despise you, I love you unconditionally, if you suddenly became Hitler, I wouldn't let you become a Hitler, but if it happened, I wouldn't leave you. My conviction to this marriage

is that strong. I know that yours is too, and I'm not saying this to rush you, I'm saying that just so you know."

The light had turned green yellow red but there weren't any cars behind them. "Oops."

Kat didn't need to steady herself, she didn't need to work against the grain, she loved her husband, she didn't doubt him, and he didn't lie.

"They think I'm having an affair with Sandy."

"Okay."

Allan started to drive. "I'm not."

"I know."

"I don't want to lose the congregation."

"I love you. Do you know who started this? Was it the cranky Adeles?"

"Probably, the way they blushed when you told them you were going to bring in a real child sex ed teacher. Ugh, when they sent us that letter, it made me want to wretch.

"Did the kids ask you about sex again? Of course they did. They ask you questions, tell their parents, and ugh. Every other parish has some kind of outlet, some way for their children to learn about the horrors of premarital sex. If the Adeles just talked to their children about it, like they said they did, if Shelly was comfortable enough to talk to them about sex... just ugh. If sex education were going on in the home these kids wouldn't be asking you, they'd know. This is exactly why you proposed that program because these weren't the questions you wanted to deal with, you'd think that some of these people were Baptists.

"It's outrageous; it amazes me that some of these people even had children. At least I like Sandy; if it had been Kelly Kaposi I'd probably explode. Though I'm sure the Wisenheimers are besides themselves that she's a *negro* girl."

"Thanks. Kat, I didn't do anything."

"I know. Her mother would kill you. I remember when Mr. and Mrs. Walker moved in that first year we were here. When they took over the choir, no, Mrs. Walker doesn't mess around. Sandy Walker wouldn't stand for it either. She gave Jimmy Stewart that black eye." She leaned over and pecked him lightly on the cheek to the rhythm of clean air kissing the windshield with wet spats. "Not to mention the fact that I believe in you."

"There are a lot of good things about being a member of the clergy. People think I'm connected to God in a special way. That's a nice feeling.

"There are some annoying things about being a minister too. People think you have a special connection to God. People look up to you and when you fall short of that, you start to look a lot less like Christ and a lot more like a post cockcrow Peter.

"Now, I'm not picking on Mark Mairy, I got his special permission to use his name and store, Record Records, in this sermon, so I don't want you thinking I'm going to call any of you out from the pulpit.

"But I was in Mark's record shop the other day and it hit me, the perfect parable of what I sometimes am going through here. Being a minister is sometimes limiting. I was in the record store, and in front of me in line was a kid with a ring in his ear, a spike in his nose, and a chain from one to the other. I thought to myself, I would never do that, but if I wanted to, I'm not so sure I could. Not only would my parents be upset—I imagine his parents weren't thrilled—but my *peer group* wouldn't even let it slide. Can you imagine the uproar the next time I went to a fiscal report meeting, a big long booger chain flopping all oogly boogly from my nose? No-no-no. It would be a led zeppelin. That was special for Mark.

"Now, I'm thinking about this because I'm not getting up in age like Ms. Mable who's one hundred years old this Friday, and who I'm planning on giving communion to this afternoon, no, I'm getting old like Robert Downey Jr. I'm midlife crisis old, and what am I going to do about it?

"How am I going to deal with life and age and the slowly creeping feeling of death? I thought maybe I would rekindle my youth, by buying what the kid in front of me was getting. So I asked him, 'what have you got there?'—I don't think he knew I was a preacher.

"I'm buying the new Jackie-O Mother' and then he dropped the F-bomb on me.

"Oh."

"He showed me the CD, and there on the cover it said the name of the band in big bold letters. Jakie-O Mother _____. Now, I thought, I don't know anything about this Jakie-O, maybe they make a joyous noise for the Lord. I had my doubts, but maybe. Maybe there was some cultural reference that turns the title away from vulgarity and towards art; something that I just wasn't getting—because I was getting old.

"And the kid put his money on the counter and he bought the CD. And there was Mark. Mark was blushing because Mark knew who I was and the kid had just used the 'F-word' in front of me. Had the kid said that in front of anyone else, it probably would have rolled right off Mark's back. I've overheard kids on the playground. I've overheard a couple of these kids at youth group. It was different this time because I was there. That's a nice feeling, people trying to be on their best behavior for me.

"But that day, because I was in a mood, Mark's blush said to me, 'Rev. Allan, you can't have a midlife crisis that involves buying a Jakie-O Mother record.' If people blush when someone else says a bad word, imagine the response when I slip up.

"So what can I do? I can't buy a sports car. —I'm not asking for a raise.

"What should I do?

"What's the popular phrase these days? I think it has something to do with putting your eyes on Christ.

"Ask yourself, 'What was Jesus' midlife crisis?'"

Their grandmother's red stitched and stuffed covers covered skin, but first pajamas. A girlfriend doesn't sleep like a wife like a mother sleeps even more rightly with the fit of children and poetry in her dreams. In bed, Kat's fingers, digits, numbers were free, Allan reached to add his unique swirling patterned tips, to touch skin.

And Allan thought, *On a night like this, shouldn't we be naked?*

Kyle covered his whole room in black construction paper, the walls, ceiling, and floor. Though admittedly the floor had become ripped, torn, and marked with the artful tread of his boot, revealing the wood beneath. His sheets, his loan table, the squirrel's skull, the window.

"No, I think the question is, do we all come here to gossip, or do we come here to study the scripture?"

"We should just confront Rev. Allan about it."

"What are you going to say?"

"I didn't say me. I don't know."

"We will just ask him?"

"Ask a Rev. 'Did you abuse Sandy Walker?' What do you think he will say? He won't say, 'Yes, I'm a pervert,' now will he?"

"Even if he's innocent."

"Don't be wise, Jerry."

"Maybe we should talk to Sandy about it."

"Probably traumatize the poor girl."

"He's been here for six years. I think we would have known before this."

"I feel like I'm Catholic."

"Let's not be bigoted."

"The questions are, do you feel safe, do you trust your kids with him?"

"I don't know."

"So, been a long time." Kyle cracked his shoulder.

"What you mean?" Sandy took the pack of Cools out of his coat's breast pocket.

"You haven't come out to smoke for a while."

"You already opened the pack." She looked down at the ripped cellophane.

"Kelly did." The center stick was flipped upside down.

"Fuck Kelly." Sandy tossed the pack back at him and walked after Matt.

Donny popped a lit cigarette into his mouth. Orange blue burn, wet coxcomb pink lips, royal red hair, apple sun setted sky.

Over at Alum there was a giant slide. "Twice the size of Dad." The park was fun when other kids were there, but it was best when Cane and Able got to play by themselves. Their feet needed space.

Allan watched his kids as they both teetered on the yellow lip of the twisty tube. Mischief scampered rampant through their cheeks as their eyes tagged back and forth to see if Dad was watching.

"Are you sure you want to go up that way?" The far edges of Allan's eyebrows bent towards the crux in his lips.

"It's secure, dad." Able grabbed Cane by the shoulders and helped him to his knees. "You go up through the tube."

"Yeah, it's sturdy." Cane shot up the tube and started to kick it from the inside while Able tried his best to run up the outside of the tube.

"Mom lets us." Able grabbed the next ridge while Cane rocked the makeshift ladder as hard as he could.

"Well, if mom lets you." He felt, then, a sense of place. It secured itself with the tickling motion of tiny glowing inchworms climbing up his belly. He didn't want to leave Westerville; he didn't want to get kicked out. He wanted this whole mess to be done with. *They're holding a meeting. They're talking about my relationship with Sandy.*

He liked the water.

I like the mix this church holds. I like the cranky Adeles. I like the flamboyant Walkers, with their deep choir voices.

They are going to kick me out. They are going to move me some place else. They are going to change my life. Why would they do that?

Sandy wouldn't lie. Did she say we hugged? I didn't do anything wrong. Why are they doing this, God? I know I can't understand You, but help me to understand the. Please help me to save my children, save my wife. Please lord.

Prayer is talking to God.

"I made it! It's your turn, it's your turn." Able leapt over the guardrail and on to the correct side of the platform.

"Okay." Cane could be heard climbing up from inside the cylinder.

"No, start from the bottom." Able jumped head first down the tube.

A crunching noise and a few moments later both boys came tumbling out. Beauty, love, and a Greek sort of godliness bursting through their gap toothed smiles.

Dinner.

"Bless us Lord and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, through your body, through Christ, our Lord, Amen." Mr. Adele's hands reached out and mingled for a moment with the women's.

"And for Dad." Danny nodded from across the table with his eyes closed.

"And for the reverend's soul." Shelly's voice quivered, she wanted to sound sincere, to be sincere.

"I just want to thank You, Lord for these children, they're our pride and joy, they are what is ultimately fulfilling in our lives, they are Your perfect gift to us. Thank You Lord. Thank You for my husband who has been ever strong and ever virtuous. Whom we all love so much."

Mr. Adele squeezed their palms and said in unison with Danny, "AAAAAAmen,"

"Sandy!" Mrs. Walker called up the stairs.

"Yeah, mamma!"

The silence left by the stopped dryer distracted. "Oh, wait, I'm just coming up in a minute anyway." She hustled down the steps, to the basket, and finally stopped off in Sandy's room with warm shirts for her to fold. "I don't want to harass you."

"Then don't." Sandy thought she knew what was coming. She was looking through the cracks of her plastic blinds. Outside, a blue jay fed its children. Watching life perpetuate was an escape, an escape from her mind and her *petty teenage problems that everyone has*. That everyone had gone through girls, sex, boys, and confusion. That everyone continues to go through: girls, sex, boys, and confusion didn't comfort, they only compounded her isolation. Because knowing that God existed wasn't enough for her, she needed to understand God's existence. Without understanding, she was lost and she suffered in her lack of progress.

"Well, you know you can talk to me, if there is anything you need to talk to me about."

"What am I supposed to talk to you about?" The little bird had taken too much worm and had to spit it out.

"I need you to talk to me sometimes."

"About what?"

"Anything."

"Rape."

"No." Sandy's mom stunted. "Yes? Maybe. Tell me. What is this?"

Sandy was embarrassed, alone, she told the whole story, how she liked the Rev. Maybe even felt something for him, but they didn't do anything, how Kelly Kaposi and Kyle and everyone was talking. That the Rev. Allan didn't like her the way she liked him. How boys harassed her at school. How she didn't understand... anything.

Mom had just wanted to talk about Dad.

Night.

"Am I a prude?" Mr. Adele took his shirt off in the walk in closet. The brown folding door shut behind him, cut and traced by light.

"No, dear." Mrs. Adele's pudgy fingers pulled back at the comforter. *Maybe*, she gave the crack in the door's fold another look. "Maybe."

The light behind the door shut off and she climbed into bed to the sound of wood awkwardly creaking. "What does that mean?"

"The way you asked the question. I wasn't sure what you wanted the answer to be."

"The truth."

"But I don't know whether being a prude is a good thing or a bad thing. How are you using it?" She reached over with her right arm and turned down his corner.

"Thank you." Then step three of the ritual, a kiss between the two, their nightly sign of love. Almost oriental, extremely automatic, something they never forgot to do. When they were younger, when they were first married, they used to kiss at every stop sign, every red light, but teenage Shelly put a stop to that. She didn't want them giving Danny, their youngest, the wrong ideas. It wasn't that she couldn't handle it; it was for the boy.

Mr. Adele snuggled into their king-size bed, leaving the required foot or two of space between them.

"Well, is it good or bad?"

"Are we doing the right thing? Trying to get him moved?"

"Reverend Allan?" She knew whom they were talking about.

"Yes."

"The absolute right thing."

At the lunch table.

"Dude, my dad is having a fit." Kyle sat down with his slice of pizza and cardboard skim milk.

"Over what?" Donny asked.

"I told him that the Rev molested Sandy, or something, accidentally, and he won't let it go."

"Dude." Donny wiped his hands on his jeans. "I didn't like him anyway."

"Sandy's pissed. Someone asked her about it or something."

"Whatever, who's heard of Saturday Sunday school?"

"Yeah."

"S.S. day is the ghey." Donny looked at his lunch, a slice of burnt pizza. "This meal is the ghey too." He pushed his plate and leaned back to see who was still in the line. "This whole world is trying to turn me into a fag."

"S.S. day. Ha."

Matt passed them with a nod and went to the back of the cafeteria to sit with some kids of color.

"Know what I hate most about this pizza? It looks like my face." Donny held the slice up to his profile. "This wouldn't be that big of a deal if it was like an anomaly, like the Jesus Fritos that pop up every now and again, but you can't find a slice of pizza in this cafeteria that doesn't spit my image. Check this out." He ganked the slice out of Kyle's mouth. "Every pizza is Donny pizza."

"That's why Shelly won't go out with you dude— Pizza face." Kyle ripped his pizza back.

"My image relays constant and horrific flashbacks of cafeteria food."

"And the only time you talk to her is at S.S. meetings. That's gotta be awkward."

"Fuck you. You fucked over a minister."

"Touché."

Dear concerned members of Church of the Messiah,

Some of the members of the church have heard whispers of unseemly conduct from Rev. Allan. As far as I can tell, nothing has been substantiated, but a lot of things have been said. A lot of, "I heard from someone who heard from so-and-so." Maybe some of you who are receiving this letter will laugh when you read this but I don't think of myself as a rumor mill. I don't usually hear about what Sally Sue or Wilma Blake is up too and that's why I'm even addressing this issue. If it got to me, then it has to have grown into just that—an issue. I've been a member of this church for quite some time and I don't want anything to take it apart, lies or truths. If people are talking just to hear themselves talk, then lets give them a forum, so they can get it out of their systems. If people have something to say, then they have to say it, and something has to be done about it, even if it's hard.

In this case, we have to be especially discrete, because we are talking about abused kids. I'm not saying don't come forward, I'm saying create an environment where members feel safe to come forward. That isn't going to happen if they think their words are going to get all twisted or they're going to get in trouble.

So this is what I'm proposing. We are going to hold a meeting at 10:00 Sat. night, in the rectory-meeting hall. A meeting without the Rev. where all of us can discuss what we want to discuss. If someone is willing to come forward, for his or her kid, or for himself, that's fine. Lastly, if this is really a criminal matter, I urge you to go to the police. They are the ones who should be dealing with this.

As long as it's *other stuff* I think we can all get together and work it out. If you don't want to show up to the meeting, but want to talk to me in private, and in confidence, I am willing to listen. If you think I can help, I will do my best, even if that's just being there.

I haven't sent this note to the entire church so if you know someone who should be going to this, make sure they know about it.

Thanks,

Everyone's Good Ole Grandpa Joe

"What are you doing, Kat?"

"Nothing." She shut her lingerie drawer a little louder than she would have liked.

The night was quiet in their room because for Kat's birthday Allan had caulked all of the windows tight.

"I used to smoke, in high school," Kat told him.

"Did it make your breath smell?" Allan pushed his ass back and pulled her leg up so they were knee to knee.

"Like smoke?"

"Yeah."

"It gets in my hair." She could feel his breathing through his back, through her stomach.

"We don't make love."

"Smoking wouldn't help, would it?"

"Well..." so many things rushed through his head, *Think about the kids. Maybe. You're thirty-five.* He said, "No. I don't know, it might be kind of scorching, like you aren't a minister's wife."

She put her face into his neck with a smile. She didn't want to have sex.

"It would make you seem young, I guess." He said the wrong thing. He felt bad, *If Sandy hadn't happened, that would have been okay to say. I'm stupid. Stupid. Stupid.* Had time just played out in a different order, it might have been okay. "I'm a dirty old man." His own words kept jabbing him, little boxers inside his stomach doing a drunken foxtrot.

He struggled for her wrists. First, grunting and lifting up to pull her under arm through and around. Then her right arm over him so that they hugged comfortably. "I hurt myself," he said.

"My arms are like band aids?"

"Uh-huh."

"Mother of three." She squeezed.

"We don't make love," he said again.

"It's not about Sandy."

"Kinda."

"No. It's really not."

"You sure?"

"Yes. Yes, darling, yes."

"Than what is it? Can I help? Do I smell?" He sniffed the air, and then tucked his chin into his neck. "Do I smell down there?"

"No."

"Not that you'd know," he meant it as a joke but she was hurt.

"Stop."

"I'm sorry. I just miss you. I... still see you that way, I still think about you every day. I still think about the first time we kissed. I..." It was hard to talk about these things.

"I do too. I do too. I— and I miss it too. Everyday, when you're not around, sometimes I want to, to just, go crazy... you know?" And she thought about Wednesdays, when the Kimmel's watched the kids. When she had time to think; only her thoughts denied her. They would take her to long walks, to kisses, to sex, acts that in the moment were so sanctified but when she accessed them alone, felt sinful. She would stare at her hand, struggling between, *sin and grace.* Worse, *Knowing how much I like it. That I enjoy what I hate so much. My flesh my Judas.*

"I know." Sexual want had been lashing him out of bed in the mornings. His frustration crippled his workdays. Around women, he had to grasp virtue and push against sinful thought. Before seminary their relationship was different.

On nights like this it was the worst. Allan wanted so badly to touch Kat, to show her love in that way, but to love her perfectly he needed control, to love her was to not have sex, and it seemed so backwards and wrong. That love would take a sacrifice of not giving, of withholding. *If this weren't a problem, would I have held Sandy? Would all this be happening? Shouldn't I be stronger? How can I want to give her my body even though I know she doesn't want it?* These thoughts slinked over and around his skin, making his joints and cartilage hurt under the stress and pull.

"But when you come home, when I see you, or, I don't know, it's not bad, it just goes away. It goes away in a good way almost, I just stop lusting. I just stop. I pray for it to stop, to stop wanting it, and you come home and it stops, and I say, Lord, that's not what I meant." She rolled her lips in and bit down. "I'm sorry. I've been a bad wife."

"You are a consummate wife."

"You believe me that I love you, even if I don't, even if I haven't been, making love to you?"

"I believe you."

"I'm sorry I masturbate."

"Bunches of people were missing today. Was there a ball game or something?"

"No." Behind Donny's eyes little mechanical men worked pulling switches and turning giant metal cogs. "Who are you asking about?"

"All of them. Do you know what was up?" He thought, "*I know what's up,*" but he didn't.

"Sandy didn't come to school today. Maybe they're looking for her."

"Is she okay? What did her parents say?"

Donny shrugged. "I guess they called to see if she came to school or something. People are upset."

Rev. Allan hadn't thought of himself first, but he thought of himself then.

"I should call her." The first time Allan met Sandy was at youth group.

"You can't call her. What if someone has pressed charges?"

"I need to call her parents."

"I don't know, Allan."

"Maybe I should just wait it out."

"Pray for them."

"Will you pray with me?"

"I'll get Cane and Able."

Grandpa Joe had been baptized eighty years ago in the same baptismal font that the newborns used. It was church where little Joseph first learned about music. When he was eight he made his parents get Elmo, the son of the Church's original organist, to teach him how to play. Eventually he ended up going to Oberlin on a music scholarship.

His hands fettered across the keys, in bands, jazz ensembles, and for a stint for a local symphony. He was never tenured but he did adjunct work for Heidelberg and Columbus State. He taught at various high schools around the Midwest, but when it was time to retire, he moved back to the familiar faces of his past. He liked that he could still play on the same pipes he started out with, whenever he snuck in, or when Jimmy Durum, the new organist, got sick.

He helped start a number of prayer groups for all ages and was on every board he could get elected to, which was any board he tried for. He felt he had a pretty good idea of where the Church was going and how to keep it together. He felt a kind of responsibility to the church, for all it had given him. So he was the one who tried to take down the church's fears now. He was the one who organized them. Listened to everything everyone had to say and decided that they were just rumors, but they were too big, the Rev. couldn't stay and be happy.

When Sandy came up missing, any hope he had for a reasonable conclusion to this stuff was gone. He knew it was really hard for people, especially the religious, to let go of their fears. *I'll have to talk to him.*

Ding-Dong.

"I'll get it." Cane dropped the Nintendo controller and ran to get the bell. Able dutifully took Cane's place on the couch. "Hey!" Cane opened the door.

"Why hello, can I talk to your father, the Reverend?"

"Sure." Cane shut the door. "Dad! It's for you!" And he went back to his seat on the couch, ignoring the light knocks of the old man.

"Who is it?" Allan came in from the kitchen.

"The old organist."

"Where is he? Didn't you open the door?"

"He's outside, dad." Able grimaced and then released the controller up to his brother. "I almost had him."

"Yeah, you got far."

Allan opened the door. "Sorry, Grandpa Joe."

"Oh, it's okay. You know, I almost might prefer to talk outside for a bit, if that's okay."

"Sure, Joe, sure."

They talked it over, and as it turned out, Rev. Allan could go buy that Jackie-O Mother Fucker record.

"This isn't for me. I just don't want to be a minister anymore. I tried, heck, I did it for a good six years. I don't want to anymore, Mom." He thought, *No matter how old you get, you're that much littler than your mom.*

"Well, I still love you."

"I know you still love me. I feel terrible." He felt lightened, too.

"You could do it somewhere else."

"I could maybe put in for a move out of state, but I think I'm just done.

I don't want to deal with the stigma of getting reassigned by way of mob rule, and even then I don't know if I could hack it. Being in seminary prepared me for a lot, but it wasn't preaching. Seminary could never be preaching. It could never be organizing people; it could never be learning a thousand names, backgrounds, sins, and virtues."

"Oh, honey. I'm still proud of you. I still love you, but..." she sighed.

"I love you too. I'll tell everyone for you. I know it's on your mind. I will call Gladys right now and tell her, that way you don't have to."

"I'm not disappointed in you."

"What? Oh, mom, I know, okay?"

"You don't have to call Gladys. Do you want me to tell your brothers and sister?"

"I'll tell them."

"You seemed so happy the last time I talked to you, I just want to make sure you're making the best decision for yourself here."

"I have kids and I want so much for them. God's pretty mysterious but when He's calling me He's calling me. Ten years ago he called me to be a minister. He's calling me in a different direction now. I'm not sure if I accomplished what He wanted but I need to move on."

"Do you really think that's best?"

"I'm done, Mom. This was as much as I could take. Maybe it's not what Jesus would do, but it's what I'm doing. I have these two boys to think about. I have a wife I can't stop thinking about, and if that's what God put on my mind, then I have to listen. I did some good things. I learned some lessons, but I'm done. I'm done with this." He cupped the receiver and coughed.

"What about that girl? Is she okay?"

"Yeah, they found the girl—Sandy. Or she found herself. She'd just run away for the night. Her dad died last month and then this. Kids and teachers at North, the high school, weren't too cool about it I guess. She just needed some time alone."

Awkward weeks led to plain brown boxes and a yellow Ryder truck.

Sandy pedaled her bike to the edge of the driveway where she could see the shifting of life. Kat muscled a line of boxes into the bed.

Looking up and brushing a strand of hair out of her face, Kat saw Sandy waiting by her bike and watching. She looked back to the house and heard Allan playing with the boys, threatening to pack them into boxes.

"Hey." She wiped her forehead of sweat and she waved a little wave.

"You here to say goodbye to Allan?" She was halfway down the driveway. With each long step Kat felt herself get a little smaller while Sandy kept getting bigger.

"No." Sandy dropped her bike. She felt that Kat had gotten very big and she had gotten very small. She bit her lip. Sandy had seen Kat before, intellectually she knew Kat existed, but seeing her now, hearing her voice, feeling the thick between them, judging herself in the sun's reflection, was different. "Yes, but I just want to talk to you. Say goodbye to you and you can pass it along."

"Sure." Kat pointed, "Nice bike," and then felt her pockets for the pack of cigarettes.

"Thanks."

The girl and the woman both looked away for a second, checking for that anonymous car or bird or something that would prove it wasn't uncomfortable, it was distraction. Kat reached for her cigarettes.

"Do you smoke?" Sandy looked at her dark ankles between her cuffed jeans and shoes.

Kat hesitated. "Yeah, you?"

"No, but here." Sandy held out her light brown palm.

"Okay." Kat handed the wolves over.

"I'm sorry about all of this. Mom said I made it all worse by leaving. I..." She ripped carefully at the gold pull in the cellophane. "Rev. Allan was always real nice to me. Some people talk to you different when you're black. Some people talk to you different when you're a girl. But he just talked to me." She pulled back the top and looked at the foil. *I like the hard packs*. She ran her fingers over the folds. "He just talked to me." She unfolded the paper and studied the three rows.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm choosing the lucky." She pulled the top far right corner out and flipped it upside down. "Smoke this one last."

"I always smoke them in order."

"Smoke that one last." She closed the cover and handed it back. "I'm sorry if this is my fault but you can't ever think he did anything, not to me or to any girl, and maybe I came on to him. I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry and I'll never do it again, and I know that doesn't count for much, because he's your guy, and a girl sees a ring, and he's older, and if I did, if I was out of line you have every right to hate me... but smoke that one last, okay? Your husband's a good man."

"Thanks, I know."

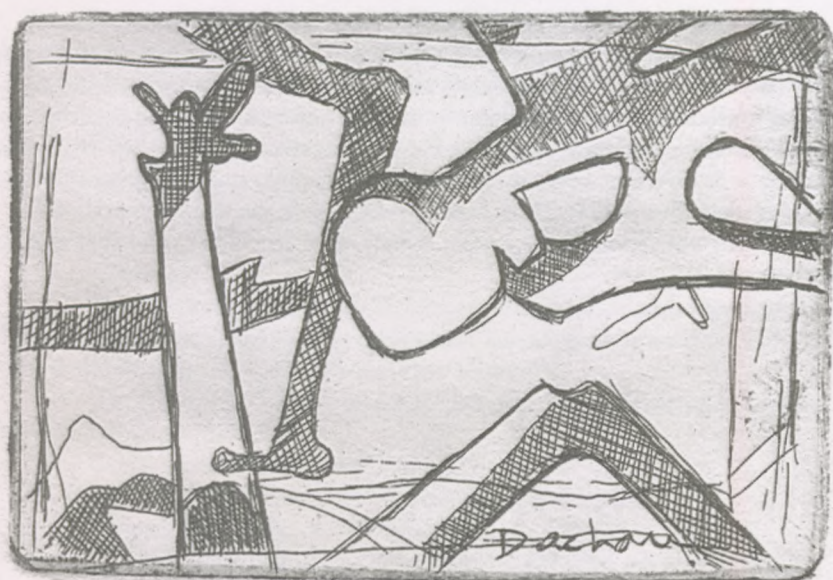
The road's air was liberating. It whisked against their palms, along arms and over the tiny hairs, giving them goose bumps. All four of them let loose, asking each other life's hard questions.

"Where are we going?"

"When are we going to get there?"

"Are we there yet?"

As Allan took off his shirt, Kat felt her libido bounce almost through her throat and into her lungs where it sifted into mini's and continued to spread good chaos in her chest. *Maybe, maybe this will be perfect.* Allan was no longer a minister and somehow that freed her from a self-imposed sexual fasting. She wouldn't have to hold back anymore. He wasn't spiritually above her. She didn't have to carefully weave masks to hide her feelings from gossiping little old Harebells. She could kiss him hard in public again, be the perfect Allan's wife, how she wanted to be the perfect Allan's wife. She didn't need to smoke that last one.



Jon Juravich

Kissing the War Goodbye
Times Square, New York, August 14, 1945
Jason Ray Carney

In a ceramic mug with purple chrysanthemum,
lukewarm coffee cools
unattended beside an unfinished piece of
Kitty's cherry cheesecake,
on a glass plate,
on a red and white checkered tablecloth.

His hair shimmering, slicked with tonic,
unblemished in a pinstripe suit
and a blue and red bowtie,
a radio announcer
with a nasal voice
spews the details of
Germany's surrender
to an empty diner.

Daddy*Amanda Knapp*

Daddy, in our very last photograph I
stand behind you, a newly minted
woman. You are as gaunt as a
supermodel. In the picture, you eye
the candle-ridden cake before us, but
your body is busy lunching on itself.

Earlier, you sat on my bed tearing.
Fifty-three would be the final
party to celebrate your birth.
I didn't believe it.
Spaghetti sauce stained your lapel,
your breath bathed in beer
and your sweater riddled by moth holes.
I believed it.

Later, dying, you sang like a French horn,
mournful and deep. Your mustache drooped
like General Custer's. My gentle skyscraper
had fallen down. It was Easter Sunday
and your tomb was full.

I cooked you dinner and
you didn't come. . .

Jason Ray Carney

Superman's cape
dangles from a curtain rod
over the sink.
The cherry cordials glistening on the table
tremble like cold scarabs
gossiping about my aftershave.
Mrs. Utherpenny the lady bug,
late for tea,
crawls across a mutilated tomato
dead on my napkin.
The filet hemorrhages
un-nursed
on my cutting board.
The red peppers grow arms, legs, and faces,
laugh and point,
arm themselves with pitchforks,
and praise Satan.
I loosen my tie,
pull a petal from your crooked rose,
and pour some
cheap
merlot.



Donna Wilgus

Before reading, ask the audience to scream, "burn," after every quote. Start them off with the chant. It is recommended that you chant with them. I have found pointing at them helps as well.

Cribs burn
Burn MTV
Dan Boyd

"BURN
 BURN
 BURN"

"Sir, how many cars do you have?"

Pitts BURN
 BURN Pitts

Read as though you are Keanu Reeves.

"Dude, I have like, 10 cars."

Britneys BURN
 BURN Britneys

"Congratulations. All of you masses, aren't you jealous? If you made money, wouldn't you do the same? Wouldn't you spend it on yourself? You already do."

Hollywoods BURN
 BURN Hollywoods

What are they trying to tell me?
What are they telling you?

Imitate voices from The Osbornes.

"Ozy! Ozy! OZZZZZZY!"

Why can't she find him?
 Is it because the mansion is too big?

"I CAN'T FIND YOU IN THIS HOUSE!"

Camera: Cut to cute kid.

"Mom bought me this knight's armor. I didn't even really want it, I was just like, 'Mom, will you buy this for me,' and she did."

Why would he ask for things he doesn't want?
 Is it because the American dream demands it?

"That's awesome. I wish my mom would buy me whatever I wanted."

And now I want a house... A BIG MOTHER OF A HOUSE
 I want a bigger house than caps lock will indicate.

HOUSE

I want a bold house. I want twenty point **HOUSE** bold **HOUSE**

I want ten of them **Hut** in the Bahamas

Castle in England **Villa** in Spain

Pagoda in Japan, and that one can be on stilts.

| | - | | | | | | | |¹

MANSION

Residence six in some jungle **hOusE** built in some funky manner

ABODE PALACE CITADEL—and-why-the-fuck-not-house.

Read like a two-dimensional Hollywood stereotype of stupid.

Natalie, on the way home from Church, "I wish I could retire at 26. I would just travel."

Colleen, "What happens when you run out of places to go?"

"That would never happen. There are a lot of places. I just want a couple homes. Have you heard of the Hilton sisters? If I could be them, I could be truly happy."

HILTONS BURN
BURN HILTONS

Permit me to say more

If my tongue flint,
let me lick to light souls.
If: entertainment | war,²
Let me be the cross to it.

If I Diablo, "*pass the kerosene.*"
To Dublin, Bexley, Granville,
Gahanna, and Westerville,
I endorse a wholesale murder of those that make over \$100,000 a year,
the cost of a match
the cost of a life.

I have a hallucination
Alone, amongst a multitude,
seeing some band at the Wexner Arts Center.³
I, with a Zippo.

¹ Read, "Ding dilling ding ding ding," and play the air drums.

² Read, "If: there be a thin line between entertainment and war,"

³ Les Wexner owns the Limited and Victoria's Secret Stash. He lives in Columbus and graciously supports the arts, particularly new DIY and postmodern artists. The Arts Center also brings in art from all mediums, past and present, along with well-versed guides and instructors. Burn this poem. Art is evil. STOP ALL ART NOW.

A meal best served raw.

Amanda Knapp

Death stands in the kitchen rolling out cookie dough, the fat of her upper arms jiggling. Her checkered apron is covered in dusty flour. Her hair is white and clean as the top of Mt. Everest. She flashes the bridges and crowns of her teeth, smiling. "Oh honey," she sighs, "You have worked so hard all day. The family is about to sit down for dinner. Come in and wash your hands."

"Show me a place setting!" I scream. "One knife, one fork, one spoon!"

Death's light eyes chastise me. "Darling, darling. You know there is no place for manners in this meal."

After

for Pierre Bonnard's *Nude Against the Light*
Allison Barrett

The arch in my back,
the tilt of my head;
I am the good-luck-maiden strapped
to the prow of the ship,
onward through the ocean crash.

The painter has given
me a pear to hold
as I stand in the drench
of sun that bombards my
fragrant bedroom.
My bath waits
in the shadows,
growing cool as I face
the window, still as a sunbeam.

No one sees me
empty the dirty
bathwater, dress myself
and go out to walk the gray streets.
After all, this isn't really my bedroom.
Decent women don't pose
nude.

I'd like to keep his pear,
hold its plump gold weight
in my hand forever,
marvel at its clever hat of leaves,
its burnished skin all light
wrapped tight
in a curve,
like my body when I stood in that sunny
room for the painting to keep
forever. But I know the fruit will
brown, turn rancid,
and I am very hungry.

First Snow

Vincent Xexaviar

Breaking softly
to appease a temperamental road,
I watch the hills and
naked fields
mimic the clouds

great tufts of flaky innocence
blessing the sleepy trees

these clouds were over
your head
only a day or two
before
and why would it not
surprise me
if you let them pass
without a glance

woven rings of perfection
passing like passionate words
gliding across your shoulders,
careful against your breast
only to be brushed to the ground
an inconvenience
as you
rush toward
your car

some nights I wonder
why I bother
to even speak

these clouds, this snow
make little difference
to your cell phone,
another pale conversation,
clatter of car keys
and a pause to look back upon your
footsteps

so you know,
the sun is expected to rise
tomorrow

no flakes,
only silence

I won't be around to miss it



Allison Barrett

At 4 O'clock we take mom to work

Barbara Hartgrove

Our drive to the Clark County Nursing Home
is always pleasant. Her smile, noble
in the face of a uniform stained; shades of yellow
that detergents can't erase. My older brother,
not old enough to drive, maneuvers the back roads
usually – but today

Gib is at the wheel; Mom's friend with midnight
hair and polar bear skin. Moonshine pours
from his breath, as he sings along to a quivering
Willie Nelson – it ricochets around the car,
like my mind, in search of an open window.
The August air is sticky;

my cotton tank top obliges in its heat, clings
to fledgling breasts. I watch the sun rise
and set behind the knobs of mountain hills,
as we make our way back to the single-wide
trailer home he shares with my mother.

Alone in the cramped dark box

covered with paneling and ashtrays, half empty
beer cans and bottles. He clears a spot on the floor,
a challenge for our familiar wrestling match. "\$5.00
for some sugar," he teases with thin, wet lips. I think
of the spoils... lemon drops and saltwater taffy,
his wrinkled bill my invitation.

We tangle and toss – I'm Helen of Troy fleeing
abduction, lighthearted squeals heard by no one,
twitching and tickling. He hovers
over me, "*I'm wait'n doll*," face smiling, eyes
clenched, lips puckered – a practiced peck.

But today – tragedy

not Greek – but French, with an overweight
tongue. My face captured in hot Paris breath
and spit, moonshine and cigarettes. His eyes,
a stony black. My stomach aches, cramped
like the room, as it fills with dusk
and sugar has never tasted the same.

Out To Get You

Amanda Knapp

Colby Mann stepped out of the tan sedan and, cautious of his footing on the icy ground, trudged though the dark parking lot. Staring down at the uneven cement, he kicked at the patch of loose gravel. Three chunks broke apart and hit the red brick of the bakery. He smiled. He looked up to the solid metal of the bakery's back door.

Wait. Did he remember to lock the front of the house when he left this morning? Oh, my God, what if he forgot? Someone could walk right in and steal his things, those assholes. Was it too late to drive home right now? Are they already inside? Oh holy mother, they could already have taken everything, he'd be as good as a pauper. Worse, even. What had he been thinking? Shit.

No, no, wait. He had locked the door; right before almost falling on the ice on the front walk this morning. Even though he had salted that very same walkway just the other day. That he clearly remembered. Figures that even salt had gone down in quality.

He began to climb the cement steps leading to the door. His wedding ring clinked against the metal railing as he grasped it, wheezing, for support. He pulled his strength together and trotted up the last few steps. It was time to get to business.

Where are those lazy kids? They should have arrived by now. Likely they would be late. Likelier they would forget entirely. And now how was he supposed to eat breakfast, ask them that. He'd be so busy trying to make up for their lazy slack that now there would be no time even for a single donut. When was his time? Never. Assholes. No one at home to cook breakfast for him either, what with Betty gone. Dead, she was dead to him. The moment she walked away she was as good as dead anyhow.

"Widower", he whispered. That's what he'd tell people these days, widower.

She sure could make eggs though. Every morning he'd wake to the smell of the cooking in the downstairs kitchen. Delicious. She with tiredness ringing her eyes, bent over the counter. He would walk through the door, sit at the table and silently watch her work. That's what he really missed, those quiet early mornings. Whatever, he knew how to cook too. He could make his own eggs, goddamn it.

Colby reached into the pocket of his overcoat, and, sifting through cough drop wrappers and crumpled tissue papers, pulled out a key ring.

He held one key up to the dim light, "Which one is...?" He tried to fit the key in the lock. No luck. He held up another. Maybe it was this one.

This key slid easily into the top deadbolt. Ah, good. Were those scratches on the lock? Has someone been trying to get in? A couple young punks could be sitting around the safe counting his money. It was enough to drive a man insane. On the count of three, he would burst in and surprise them.

Glorious. Triumphant. He'd be a hero. Everyone would love him. Betty would love him. He'd be famous, she'd have to. She'd come crawling back, begging to make him breakfast again and he would laugh right in her face. He laughed aloud, his breath fogging the chill morning air.

He slammed the door open. The lights came on, flooding the room. The safe sat silently under the dark metal desk. He crossed the uneven tile floor to the corner. Kneeling down, he grasped the safe's handle firmly and tried to turn it—still locked. But, that doesn't mean... Three turns to the right stop at 06, two turns to the left, stop at 12, one turn to the right, stop at 63. Month, day and year, he'd said those damn words in that damn church. Really, he should change the combination, but Christ, it was easy to remember. Maybe he would change it. Yes, he would. Maybe tomorrow. The door swung open this time. Two drawers stood filled with bills, boxes filled with rolls of quarters, nickels, dimes and pennies for change, inside, calm as a crypt. The bag with last night's deposit in it was shoved sloppily, as usual, into one corner. He unzipped this bag quickly and peered in. There was some money inside of it at least.

He exhaled slowly, his large body slumping at the release of tension. He put the deposit bag back. Everything was fine. The money was fine. He closed the safe, remembering to turn the dial to make sure that no one could force it open again.

"Okay, okay, it's okay." He stood up.

Beginning the day is easy if the person closing the store remembered to do everything that they were supposed to the night before. If they forget, it's a huge pain, since most of the product comes in the form of frozen batter. Usually even the bum kids who work for him got it right, but every once in a while he'd have to ream someone out for it.

He groaned aloud. Those idiot kids. Damn hard to find honest help these days.

Five more minutes till Carrie should be here, which meant ten more till she was officially late. He walked over to the refrigerator door and opened it. There it was, right where it was supposed to be, the plain muffin batter. The plastic lid tore off easily. The batter lay inside as rich and creamy as yogurt. He leaned in to sniff it. Soon the warm homey smell of baking would fill the air. His mouth watered. He grabbed the tub off the shelf. Moving back across the room to the baking table, he cradled the bucket in the crook of his arm. Reaching the counter, he held the container at such an angle as to ease the dough out from it. The milky white dough slid into the mixer bowl with a plop.

Opening the refrigerator once more, he took out a box of semi-frozen blueberries, and placed them on the counter beside him. A flip of the mixer's switch and it was on, turning the dough into a churning whirlpool amid a pure white ocean. He scraped in the last remnants of dough from the bucket. They dropped into the batter like a few grains of sand dropped on the coast of Florida. Very precisely he began to add the blueberries. The first few to roll in dented the dough like purple bruises. Then, the rest poured in faster, streaking the dough with lovely blues, indigos, and violets. Beautiful.

"Heya Col."

The door banged shut. Carrie stared at him as she mumbled excuses through her lit cigarette. Its smoking foul stench quickly permeated the air. His air. Some of the cancerous tube's putrid ash fell to the floor. His clean floor. If he had wanted the product to taste like filth, he would have thrown dirt in the batter. How *dare* she? What on earth could she be thinking? Moron.

"Morning," he glared at her smoking exhalation. "Can you take that outside?" he growled, pointing at her cigarette. "Wouldn't want the room to stink, now would we?"

"Oh, right, sorry." She put the cigarette out on the doorframe and with a quick motion of her hip, flung the door open and flicked the butt outside. "I was about to do that anyway."

"Sure. Sure you were." Really did these kids think about anything but themselves? Honestly, bringing that in here, what the devil was going through her mind? Lucky for her, he had been in a good mood today otherwise he would have really given her a piece of his mind. He made the mental note to give her a talk about it the next time it happened.

The batter continued to swirl contentedly in the bowl. If he hadn't been here to stop her she might have gone through the whole pack. Chain smoker, that's what she was. Probably smoked the dope too. All these kids these days did. They thought an old man like him would be in the dark to their shenanigans, but he was wise to them. He was wise to them alright. Lazy bums. That foul smog would have totally...ugh.

He shuddered and looked down at the swirling dough once more. It was almost hypnotic the way it churned down and down, down and down. He wondered if he could stick his finger down into the center, where the whirlpool opened, without getting dough all over his hands. All the way down to scratch the bottom of the mixing bowl. No, he thought. Probably not. You'd get dough all over your fingers and have to scrub and scrub to get it all off.

"Now get to work. I'm sure that there's *plenty* around to do. You don't need to be hanging around wasting time."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever." Her large gold hoop earrings bounced against her neck as she snapped her face away from her reflection on the refrigerator door, a bottle of mascara still in her hand. She had been just standing there, staring at herself. Women were always doing that. Every day Betty would 'put on her face,' as she called it. No one's ever going to look at you but me, he'd say, but not mean though. He was never mean, just teasing. No, never had he been cruel to that woman in all his days. Never. Not once. She had no right to say those things about him. He knew the reason why she had to put on lipstick every morning. It wasn't for him. That was for sure. She wanted other men. He wasn't good enough for that spoiled little rich girl. Not successful enough. 'Look nice for my husband.' Liar. He knew what she was thinking. Always thinking, that one. Conniving whore. And he'd told her so, didn't he.

The same switch flicked down stopped the whirlpool in its tracks. He began to scoop the muffin batter into little paper cups. So regular, baking. It's

chemistry, really. One tablespoon of this to make the bread rise, a half a cup of that to make it sweet and voila! Perfect bread. New recipes are like scientific experiments into taste. A tablespoon too much can turn an oozing cinnamon roll into a Frisbee. To make something you know is good, you just have to repeat the same recipes that you already know are good and use them over and over again. There's no point in trying to improve upon perfection.

"Hey, what time is John supposed to come in?" Carrie remarked.

"I don't know," he snapped, annoyed at the interruption into his daydream.

"Well, I think that we're supposed to come in at the same time. That's how you usually schedule it."

He frowned. Maybe she was right. That was the way he usually scheduled people. She'd worked there a while, ten years since after barely graduating high school, she should know little things like that by now. He walked over to the billboard where the work schedule hung on a tack. She was right, John, that lazy slowpoke, was late. He better not be expecting to be paid for this five minutes. In fact, this time should be deducted from his pay from when he did finally show up. Asshole.

"What do you think is his problem, being late all the time? What a slacker!"

"I dunno." She pursed her lips in thought. "I think he lives kinda far away."

"That's no excuse; if you live far away then you should just start out earlier."

"Yeah, you're right." Turning her gaze away from him, she stared at the wall, lips still a little tight. "It's just that, well, maybe he's got, like, other problems than coming to work on time, you know. Like other things he has to do and stuff."

"What sort of things do you mean?"

"It's just, I dunno, I heard some shit about John."

"What sort of sh...I mean things?"

"I dunno, like about being in some trouble. I just heard it; I dunno anything for sure, or anything."

Colby's mind reeled. The Law. One of his very employees, right under his nose, a felon. He had never trusted that John kid. Shifty-eyed, that one. Shit, maybe he was stealing money right under his very nose. He had closed the register at night sometimes. He had the opportunity. There was nothing stopping him from taking the money. Greasy fingered little punk that he was; he probably spent it on something illegal. Or booze.

"Yeah, I sure dunno about that kid," she said. "Sometimes he seems like a cool kid but then he does something just freaking uncool. Like when they were closing up the store, yesterday night...."

In horror, Colby ran his finger down the schedule. John closed yesterday. The money, on my god the money. He wasn't late, he wasn't ever coming

back again. He must have taken part of the deposit and run away with it. Oh my god oh shit. Shit. Shit. Shit.

"Hey, what's the rush?" Carrie's ramble stopped short as Colby dashed over to the safe.

He ignored her. All his hard work, all his time and effort into this lousy store and now some bum kid ripped him off. They were always out to rip you off. One moment they see your weakness and crack! Cut you off at your knees. Just like Betty. You try and you try and all you end up with is crap.

His shaking hand turned the knob on the safe. He twirled the knob to make sure it was clear to turn. Three turns to the left, stop at 06, two turns to the right, stop at 12, one turn to the left, stop at 63. The handle to the safe wouldn't budge. The entire universe was out to freaking get him. The safe was in league with John, they were all in it together. Betty too. A vision of Betty and John sipping martinis by a pool and laughing flashed through his mind. Laughing at him they were. Plotting against him every step of the way. He could hear their laughter ring in his ears. His teeth clenched.

"Boss? Boss, do you want me to call him and see if he's slept in or what the deal is?"

"Why don't you go ahead and do that, Carrie?" He pronounced every word carefully, like dimes being dropped one by one in to a coffee can. "Why don't you go right ahead and call him?"

She looked at him quizzically, but shrugged and picked up the phone. He inhaled. It never did to rush things. First he needed to find out just how much that bastard took. And then he'd get his. Oh yes. That lying cheating beanpole would get his. Where there is a will there's a way, and Colby Mann was not one lacking in will. Just wait, John, Betty. Just you wait.

He turned the lock slowly this time. Three turns to the right, stop at 06, two turns to the left, stop at 12, one turn to the right, stop at 63. Now the handle turned, smooth as butter. His trembling hand snatched the deposit bag. What had he taken? How much of his hard earned money had that freak taken?

The register print-out claimed that there should be 1124.57 in the deposit bag. Well, we'll just see about that. He divided the money into piles of twenties, tens, fives, ones, and change; no one could say that he wasn't careful. He counted each pile. Three one dollar bills, eight five dollar bills, eighteen ten dollars bills, forty-four twenty dollar bills and cents, how many cents. Three quarters, a nickel and two pennies. Eighty-two cents.

"There wasn't any answer at John's house."

Of course there wasn't. Colby smirked. Asshole. That punk won't even know what hit him. He'd kill him he would. Curling his fingers around that lying throat and squeeze and squeeze. Squeeze the truth right out of his scrawny neck. No one would get away this time. Liars, cheaters, they all eventually get their due. Even Betty knew that, she'd been afraid, afraid of his power. She knew that he knew all about her lying thieving self. Oh he knew

all right. He knew what kind of woman puts on red lipstick for when her husband isn't around.

11038.82. Twenty dollars missing. Gone. Twenty dollars and seventy-five cents. When he was young twenty dollars could buy you anything you damn well pleased. Twenty dollars that bum kid squirreled away to spend on his dope. Twenty fucking dollars! God knew how much he took with him over the night, a twenty here, a twenty there, that asshole. Saving up to run out on him. That lying cheating no good bag of bones. Now, damn it he was one to be reckoned with.

In one swift motion he rose to his feet and hit the counter top with his fist. The pan of unbaked muffins slid off the edge of the counter, flipped over and, fell onto the floor face down with a crash. He stared at the bottom of the pan.

"Morning, cheese man. Sorry I'm late." John's tall lanky body slipped the rest of the way through the door. His squinty eyes peered at the spilled muffin batter on the floor. "Better be more careful there, chief."

Colby stared at him. "You..." he trailed off.

"I know, I know, I'm late. Sorry. You see, my little sister she was throwing up and..."

"Twenty dollars," Colby cut him off. "There's twenty dollars missing from the safe."

John's brow furrowed. "There is? Are you sure?" He walked over to where the money still lay in piles. Colby made no move to stop him. "It was all there last night." He picked up the stack of twenties. He counted aloud. "Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred, one twenty, one forty, oh here's the culprit." He slowly unstuck one twenty from another. "Just a little stuck together. Jelly, I guess."

"Jelly." The word stuck in his throat as he said it. "Right, jelly."

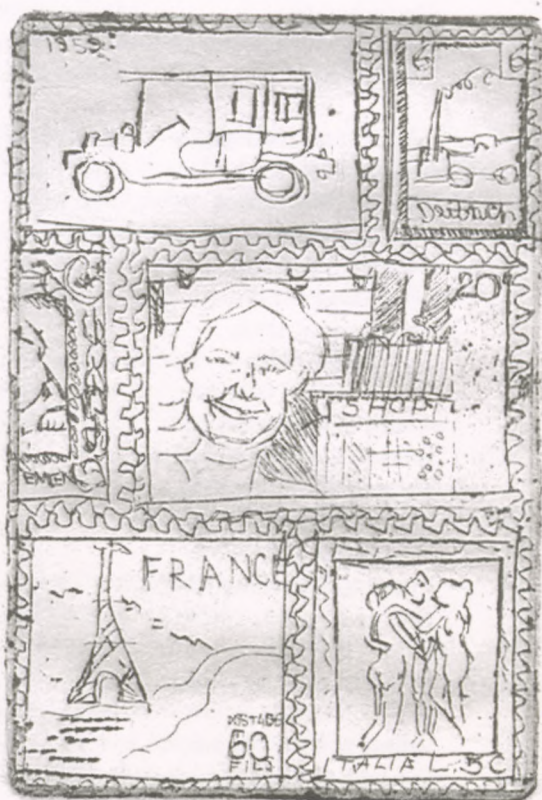
Colby Mann looked at the ruined pan of muffin batter on the floor, a piece of batter stuck to the ring on his finger, the unstuck twenties held in John's steady hands. He walked outside, sat on the steps, and cried.

Perfect Moments Are Always in the Past*Teresa Moore*

I watch Allison take off her shoes
and roll her pants up to her knees,
toes red, then blue in the cold.
She searches for shells along the shoreline,
hair escaping hood to whip around her face.
Sarah and Lesley walk ahead, staring out at the ocean.

I take off my shoes.
The cold of water freezes the blood,
turns feet into weights
that can't feel the points
of shells and pebbles.
I look at sand and water
and say, "I will remember this."

And I do, right then.
It is happening but already a memory.
Allison is a memory of Allison,
her shells a memory of shells,
and Sarah and Lesley fade into the salt pillars of dreams.



Lauren Suveges

Replacement*After Sonia Delaunay's Blanket**Allison Barrett*

I made it from scraps
of sun,
tattered strawberries,
pumpkin stripes.
Perhaps the shadow
of a bird or hot
air balloon darkens
these fabric fields—

— but I'm not outdoors;
this silhouette I seem to see
comes from underneath.
I may have trapped
an angel, smothered it
in patchwork, something
to keep now that you've gone.

I've tried to suggest imprints
of your weight,
valleys you left behind.
I've built horizons and paths
that meander and dead end
in memory of your fingers
trailing my skin.

Light colors of harvest,
middle ground of dirt,
bits of night sky scramble
and intersperse to trick the eye,
hint at a form beneath
my blanket,

and I believe in the power
of formal elements.

Hiroshima Sushi

-Aug. 6, 2003

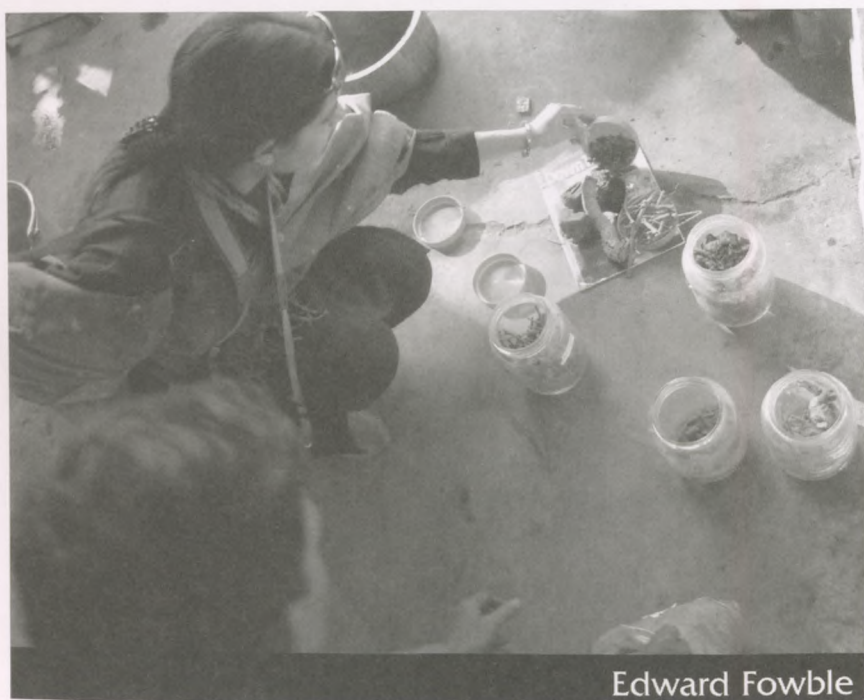
Becca Rossiter

On the anniversary of ash, I sit
 watching your delicate bird hands stir cold wasabi
 into carp-shaped dishes of soy sauce.
 A televised baseball game in the background, your
 spontaneous laughter, an everyday restaurant conversation
 on a day when hearts literally burned. *It takes*

one thousand folded paper cranes
to send a wish up to the heavens. One
 sits on your car dashboard, a limp, red promise.
 I try not to think about the flesh of fallen schoolgirls
 as you offer me the salmon with rice that sticks
 to my fingers, or the delicate pickled ginger. *In Japan,*

we do not tell our children we love them; they
already know it, they already
feel it. Behind the glass counter, shrimp and eel,
 great slabs of tuna—you want me to try them all.
 My blonde reflection still as you confess
 you changed your name to something more
pronounceable when you moved here
 more than twenty years before I was born, how
 you used the dictionary to speak with your new
 American husband, whispered Kyoto lullabies
 into the seashell ears of your babies
 only until they were old enough to understand. Then

you became the wife in the cul-de-sac,
 the mother with soccer uniforms and chilled
 summer salads, and now only mourn for *kigakiku*—
love shown without words—in the middle of the night
 and when the sharp, creased shoulders of paper birds
 are born into your hands.



Edward Fowble

