

the
CRUCIBLE

the literary magazine of lock haven university



ANNUAL

1996

the
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the literary magazine of lock haven university
spring 1996

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This special issue of *The Crucible* was made possible through a Lock Haven University presidential initiative grant and the support of the SCC.

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"A Cappello," "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Food Fight," "the improbable seahorse," "Sonnet of Genetic Engineering," "Tea Leaves," and "Rhythms" first appeared in earlier issues of *The Crucible*.

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David J. Bauman
Moon Watcher

They chuckle
softly
because once again
I have called them outside,
away from the deathly
cold light
of their television
to see the moon,
a burning globe of
blood above our street.

They nod politely.
They say, "It's lovely,"
and thank me as before.
Then my neighbors turn,
shaking their heads,
exchanging smiles,
back up the sidewalk
toward their home
and the lifeless
rays within.

Beth Gundel
Rape of Comet

A vivid tangerine flame with fuchsia fingers
danced seductively across the sky. Her
dandelion hair and melon complexion
caught Moon's attention. His lust
for her sweltered; the rhythm
of the dance increased. She was aware
that bittersweet splendor radiated from
her slender body and taunted Moon. His
opaque world burst into fire from across the dainty
sparks she tossed playfully across the plum sky.
Moon coaxed the flame closer to his lavender
lips promising pleasure. Yet, Moon
only provided pain.

Beth Bertram
Aaron

Tip-toeing through the sweaty grass
Of a once-upon-a-time summer day,
The droplets shower his ocean-blue sandals
Making his toes wriggle with excitement
Of being allowed out past dark.
With empty peanut butter jar in hand
He runs through the musty summer night,
Eyes shining from behind the dirt
Of a little boy who has played hard.
His sticky smile compliments
His literally sandy-brown hair
As his chubby legs propel him
Through the swampy yard.
Dropping his jar to capture the light,
He carefully cups his clumsy hands
And surrounds the starry globe.
With fingers tight and timing off,
He squeezes the unfortunate soul,
Leaving paper wings and a starry glow
On his well-meaning fingertips.
Radiating from the deceased firefly
And from the inside out,
Aaron illuminates the summer night.

Dave Dorman
Seeing the Night

I.

Sad songs play on the radio.
Close your eyes and see the way
night seeps in.

II.

A country road winding nowhere;
unseen winds without direction
carry on in the night.

III.

Thousands of men on a red foreign shore.
Back home they call it absurd,
a night to be forgotten.

IV.

Heat rises as the sun sinks.
Passion is at play
in a city without light.

V.

Mundane and underdeveloped,
a sour imagination
like night without a moon.

VI.

A white cane and fingertips:
all she has to see with
in her life of night.

VII.

Classrooms of ignorance,
prejudices, and biases:
education in the Dark Ages of today.

VIII.

UFO's and ESP!
consolations and galaxies,
the forces of night and blackness.

IX.

Following the norm like sheep
and slaughtered one by one
by the darkness of conformity.

X.

Remember the friend who died
from his overdeveloped pride:
a moon not worthy of the sun.

XI.

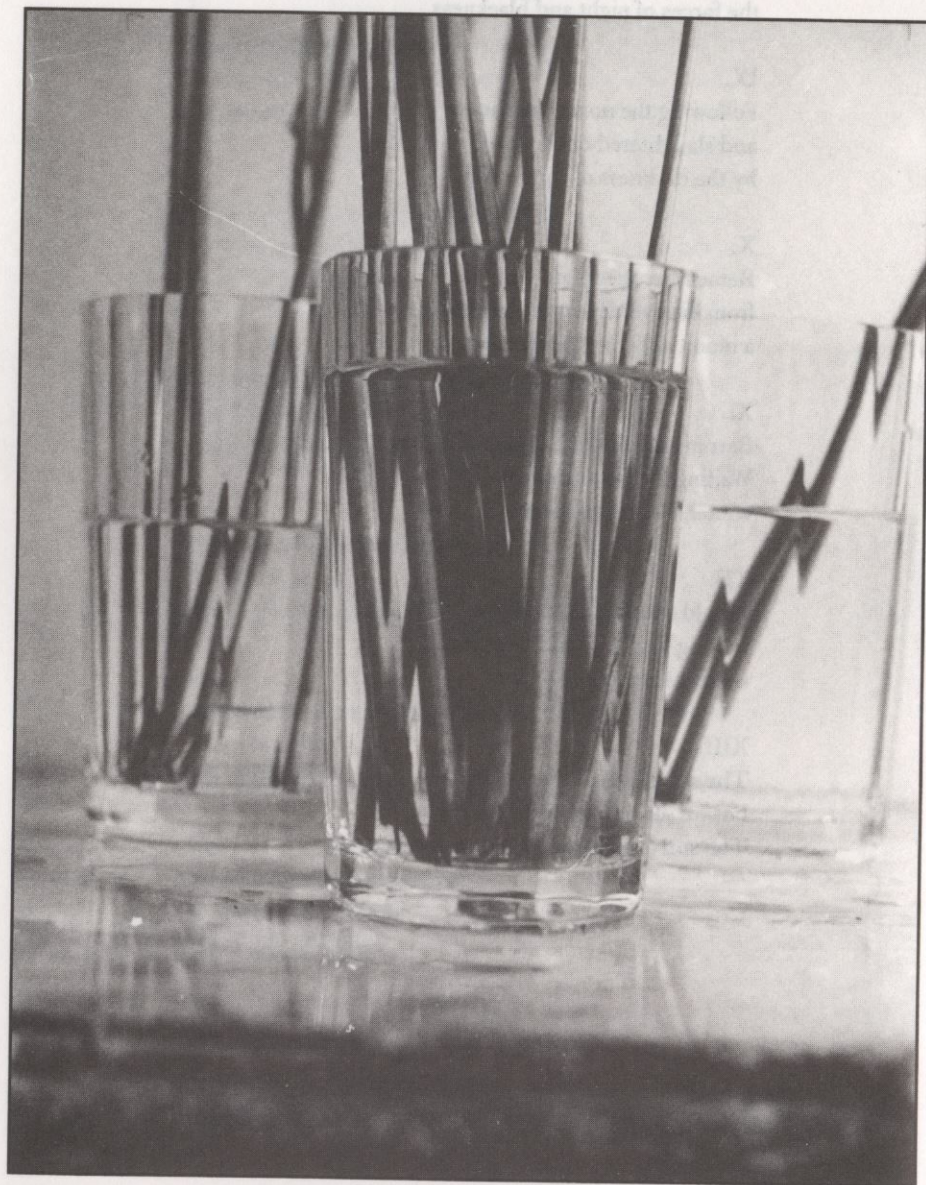
Barren and desolate desert of snow.
Waiting for lilacs to show,
winter, like night, soon dies.

XII.

An old couple at the station
waiting for their train to arrive,
waiting for night to arrive.

XIII.

The sun glows a prism of light,
but we see only black and white.
The sun is praised, the moon condemned.



Amy Linn
A Cappella

I pull up the blind,
let in some winter sun.
It shatters across the floor
like splintering icicles,
your guitar frozen
in a corner of cold shadows
now covered with dust,
once lulled in your arms
accompanied by our laughter.
Memories refrain,
Memories refrain.

A broken string dangles
like a dead telephone wire
snapped.
I strum the remaining
static strings.
Harmony jangles. Discords
fill the empty measure.
Memories refrain,
Memories refrain.

Outside the window, a cardinal sings
a song of resolutions soon
to fly away.
My eyes water
from the rays reflecting off
the snow of a new year.
I draw the drapes.

Jennifer Holgate
Occasionally I'll think...

Of how I'd press my nose against his bare
chest when he stepped out of the shower
breathing in the musky, soapy smell, letting it fill
my head until I was immune to it.

I'd tell him how I loved the way he
smelled and
he'd rest his hands on his narrow hips and smile,

the edges of his smooth lips would curve up
disappearing into dimples and
schools of lines would crinkle around his
long-lashed eyes.

Windows of light in his eyes
and there I was, resting on the sill of one,
feeling the warmth.

His smell invited me, his grin kissed me,
his eyes caressed my soul

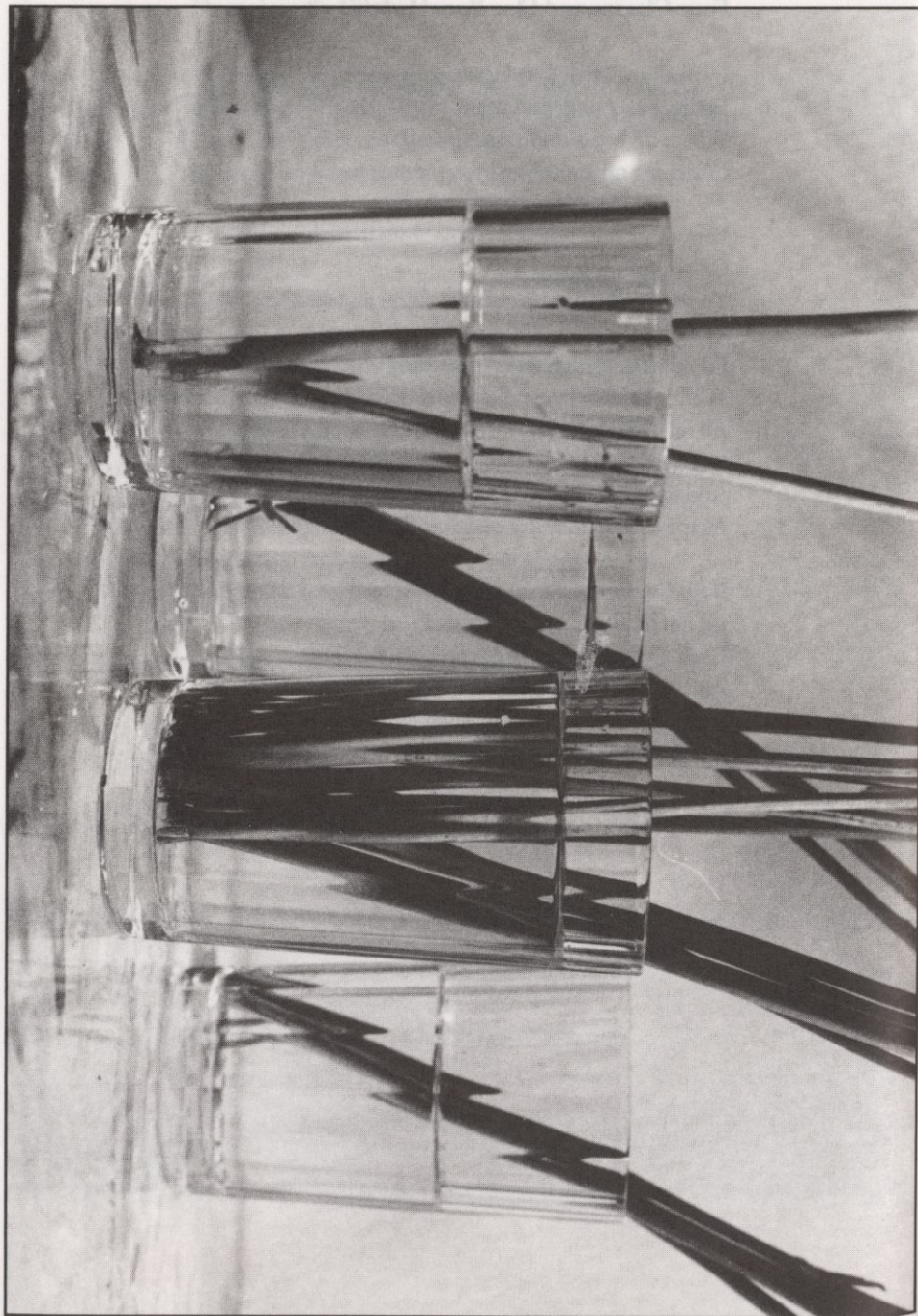
but, ah, how with the slip of the pen
a grin can become grim and windows can be
closed.

Beth Bertram
Four Classes and One Poem Later

I will shower twice and shave only once
In the musty pink bathroom
Where I'll bend over a grimy sink
Clutching my toothbrush four more times.

Four more times I will trudge through the leftovers
Of winter's blizzard feast
To receive the benefits of my tuition payment
Where for another 250 agonizing minutes
I'll fidget anxiously in my swiveling chair
While subjected to endless lectures and chalkboard scribblings
All followed by hours on end
Of reading Plato, Sociology, and *The Holt Handbook*
And time will drag as slowly
As the last ten minutes of class.

If time were a passenger in my Firebird
I'd not let up on the accelerator
Until my pen leaked brilliance
And my poetic destination was reached
Just in time for the heart-racing moment
Of his arrival.



Tammi Ocker

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Book

You and your friends
shred my body,
throw me to the sticky floor.
I am a toy.

Bits of crimson, cobalt, and marigold
float like damaged snowflakes.
I am confetti.
Happy New Year!

You're old enough to know better.
I am your knowledge.

Morality sits beside you
in the pew.
I am your conscience.
You will need it, someday.

Thoughts and ideas
written in blood.
I am your secrets.

Memories folded into an annual.
People change;
photos don't.
I'm still your friend.

The handsome specimen's voice
compels you with his poetry.
I am your matchmaker.

Two rings
united as one.
I am your dream.

Cookies melt,
tantalize,
out of hungry reach.
I am their step stool.

Crowds gather to see
your honey, princess.
I am Sarah's posture.

The house echoes,
laughs,
screams.
Turn to me.
Rest your hands.
I am your escape.

Teenage son
hides in a cloudy room.
He doesn't even look at me.
He blocks the hardened door
with my friends.
American History.
Algebra.
Sex Education.
I could be Spencer's only hope.

Boys and girls
fade into adults.
Handsome specimen
ages around the corners.
I sit impatiently.
Silently,
your man sleeps
in a once
squeaky bed.
I am your sanity.

Geoffrey Harden

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Food Fight

Do not go gentle into that food fight.
Cabbage should fly and splat at close of day;
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

Though teachers in the lunchroom are in sight,
Because their forks have flung no pudding they
Do not go gentle into that food fight.

Good kids, who don't toss fries, crying their bright
and bleach white clothes have gotten stained,
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

Wild kids who'd throw a burger soon as take a bite,
And find, too late, a teacher in the way,
Do not go gentle into that food fight.

Students, once caught, can see with clear hindsight
The pears which flew like meteors made them pay,
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

And you, my lunchmate, a food-stained sight,
Curse, bless me when gook-covered still you say
Do not go gentle into that food fight.
Rage, rage and let the applesauce take flight.

Tracey Halliday
A Modest Proposal

It is a melancholy object to those who acquire knowledge in this great learning establishment and those who simply attend class here, when they have hours, days, and weeks worth of chores to toil through, followed by three, four, or six hours worth of studying to complete, all due in the near future and weighing down their spirits and those of their companions. These students, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all of their time in thinking to obtain good grades for their work, which, as it piles up, either destroys the scholar mentally and emotionally, or ruins the scholar's chances of graduation.

I think it is agreed by all parties that this prodigious amount of work in the backpacks, on the desks, or in the wastecans of the students, and frequently of their professors, is in the present deplorable state of the university a very great additional grievance and, therefore, whoever could find out a fair, quick, and easy method of making this work disappear, would deserve so well of the public as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true, an assignment just given out may not be due for at least another solar week, with little else to do than mocking a great writer, at most not above the value of ten points, which the author may certainly get, and it is exactly at this due-date that I propose to provide for the pupil in such a manner as instead of doing any travail whatsoever, he or she should on the contrary receive the highest score possible.

There is likewise a great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those grading the masterpieces from doing any work as well, and end that horrid practice of professors giving their students poor grades, alas too frequent among us, breaking the hearts of the poor innocent babes, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary end to homework, having no other motive than the public good of my fellow scholars, though if the professor wishes to consider my modest proposal, then I would be more than willing to accept the highest score possible.

Eric Dalton
Irony

One day while walking to school, a young fisherman stepped into an open man-hole and drowned.

Once upon a time an exceptionally large pig was made into an exceptionally large sausage.

One day, while swimming in a sewer, a fish was nearly crushed by a blind school boy.

Long ago, someone snuck up behind a cow while it was chewing some grass, and made it into clothing.

Once upon a time, an exceptionally small butcher's son choked to death on an exceptionally large pizza topping.

Long ago, a tailor's boots fell apart and, while fleeing from a stampeding herd of cattle, he was trampled.

One day Irony ruled the universe wisely.

Beth Gundel
Stowaway

Fleeing for my life, I float to safety.
Now, lying flat and motionless along the railroad ties
the distant yelping of dogs and shrill-pitched train whistles fill my ears.
The earth trembles and I groan. Steady rhythmic vibrations
from the steam engine barreling along the tracks
turn into a jarring and jerking elephant ride across
a golden petal on a dainty daffodil. Falling from this petal
in one perpetual motion upon a tack, I am not the first scrap
of paper to be stuck to
a bulletin board.

Francis Wayland
"the improbable seahorse"

"yellow as a flashing caution light,"
taking their colors from the rainbow,
they swirl their prehensile tails
and twist their independent eyes,
these chameleons of the deep.

fishes, fishes, fishes.

as if from a dream
they sail under the ocean surface
"from Canada to Tasmania"
the mythical wonderers keep trying
to reproduce more than they are dying.

fishes, fishes, fishes.

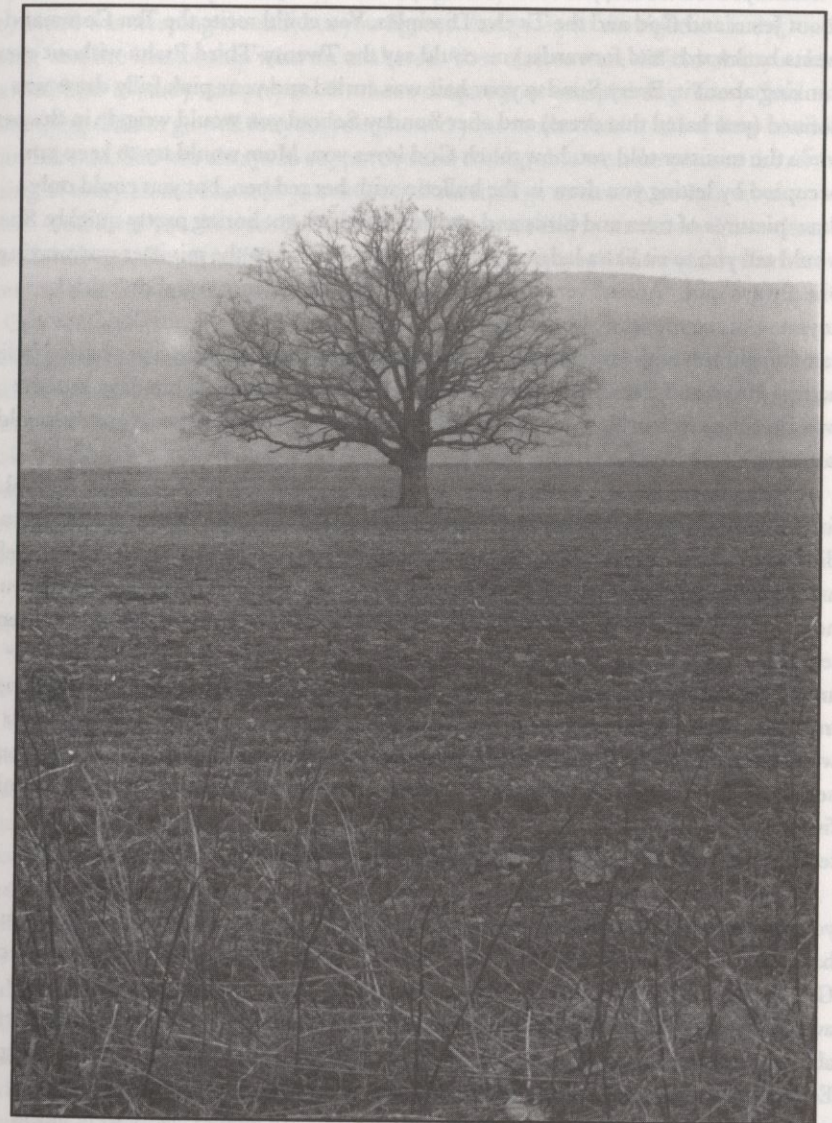
John McKnight

Appearing Before the Aftermath

Lightning tears the fabric of night.
Thunder shatters the stillness,
Rooftops now like a frog's pad
Slightly breaking the water's violent face.
Two birds perched nearby
Gaze at Nature's rampage.

Leaves stumbling, ripped from their limbs,
Pink lawn flamingos swimming,
Clothes once clinging to the line
At old man Roger's house:
All add spice to the rivery brew.

But then a man emerges.
He rides ahead in a boat,
Like George Washington leading his troops.
He's dressed in a gawky orange hunting jacket,
Frost on his beard and
Four teeth missing in his checker-board smile.
Some call him "dweeb,"
But today,
No,
He's a Hero.
He chauffeurs victims in twos,
Like Noah on the Ark,
Looking for that first sight of land.



When you were little, your mother took you to Sunday School every week to learn about Jesus and God and the Twelve Disciples. You could recite the Ten Commandments backwards and forwards; you could say the Twenty-Third Psalm without even thinking about it. Every Sunday your hair was curled and your pink frilly dress was donned (you hated that dress) and after Sunday School you would wriggle in the pew while the minister told you how much God loves you. Mom would try to keep you occupied by letting you draw in the bulletin with her red pen, but you could only draw pictures of trees and birds and sunshines, which got boring pretty quickly. She would tell you to sit like a lady, and to close your eyes when the minister was praying. She always said, "Amen" very loudly, and you giggled because you didn't think anyone but the minister should say, "Amen!" at the end of his prayer. Daddy rarely came to church with you. Maybe he was also afraid that those little silver-haired ladies named Hazel and Esther and Iris would pinch his cheeks and tell him how cute he was after the service. No matter how hard you tried, you could never avoid those old ladies.

As you grew older, you stopped going to Sunday School ("Mom, Sunday School is for babies!"), but you still went to church every week. You weren't forced, but if you didn't go, a cloud of guilt hung over your head for the next seven days. Might as well just bear it. You'd sit across the sanctuary from your friends as the minister told you how much God loves you. They were all disinterested, too, but at least their mothers let them sit together. You didn't draw pictures of trees and birds and sunshines anymore; instead you drew little hearts with arrows through them. Usually someone's initials could be found somewhere on the page, scribbled out so the secret crush would never be known. Hazel and Esther and Iris approached you at the end of every service and told you how big you were getting (most people are big when you're only five feet tall), and you would smile and let them hug you around your waist. You'd leave the church with a feeling of relief instead of a feeling of peace and joy.

Sooner or later you stopped going to church every Sunday. Life became busy, so you went when you could. When you went, your busy mind wandered and you could hardly focus on the minister's message, but you figured he was telling you how much God loves you. Your friends no longer sat across from you, and Hazel had passed away a few months before; Esther and Iris lived in a home for the elderly and weren't able to come to church anymore. You thought about going to visit them, but having Esther and Iris pinch your cheeks would probably not make them any healthier, or any younger. Eventually you stopped going to church altogether. Mom went alone every Sunday and explained to people how busy you had become. She would come home and tell your uninterested ear all the latest church gossip, and let you get on with your day.

So time passed and your life flowed along smoothly. Soon you kissed your family good-bye and went to college. You were finally on your own and never even thought about going to church. Your own problems and burdens seemed paramount (Did anyone else even have problems?), even though they were few and far between. Your boyfriend was sleeping around, but you figured that gave you the right to do the same, and the relationship went on unaltered. Your classes were difficult, but you had learned how to study and prepare for them, despite your complaining. Every time something did not go well for you, you phoned your mother and told her how terrible your life was. She was always so supportive and caring, able to make you see the silver lining of every cloud. She told you to pray about it, to go to church, to hear how much God loves you. You scoffed and told her that was silly; you already knew that God loved you. She would blow you a kiss over the phone, and you would return it. Your mother was your best friend.

Once your Dad came to visit you. Mom wasn't with him because she hadn't been feeling well. He took you out to dinner and you laughed for hours about things that had happened to both of you since you had last seen each other. You went to a movie that night and laughed some more at Jim Carey's on-screen antics. Dad could always make you laugh, and you loved him for it. After the movie, you went to his hotel to spend the night. He sat down next to you and told you that he had some disturbing news that he did not know how to tell you. You told him to just say it, whatever it was. (No news from home could be too disturbing coming from Dad.)

"Mom couldn't come up with me this weekend because she's in the hospital. She wanted me to tell you this in person, though, which is why I'm here," he said.

"The doctors have determined that the spots they found in Mom's lungs last month are tumors. Mom has cancer."

Mom has cancer....Mom has cancer. The words repeated over and over in your mind, but you could not comprehend them. Every morsel of energy left your body and you sat numbly hunched over on the Days Inn bed. Your father hugged you, but you couldn't feel his touch. You could feel the soft, wet, warmth of his tears on your shoulder, but you could not hug him back. You couldn't breathe, and the room spun. You were going to pass out, until Dad reached over to the nightstand and grabbed you a glass of water. You imagined the spots in your mother's lungs, how they were growing as you sat there, eating away at her life. She was so young, so full of energy and enthusiasm, yet somehow suddenly chronically ill. How could God love her and still let this happen? How could God love anyone and still let this happen? Was it because you stopped going to church every Sunday? Was it because you stopped caring about Him, about Esther and Iris in the nursing home? Certainly you cared about your mother. Maybe this was His way of getting you back. You ran to the bathroom and threw up, then your father carried you back to bed and tucked you in.

In the months that followed, you went to church every Sunday. You sat in the back, behind a young mother and her little daughter, who wriggled around in the pew in

her frilly dress. You thought of drawing sunshines on the bulletin, but somehow sunshines didn't exactly fit your mood. The minister preached about how much God loved you, but you didn't believe it. You were so angry, so hurt that God could throw this curse into the lives of your family. But you went to church every week. You prayed a silent prayer for your mother, your best friend. You searched for clues in your everyday existence that God really did love you, but they were nowhere to be found. Your boyfriend had dumped you because he found someone who was more fun to be around; your classes were becoming impossible, and you were not doing well in any of them. Your friends tried to be supportive, but you were so miserable that they never asked you to go out with them anymore. Even the weather was depressingly cold, snowy, and dark. It was clear to you that God was nowhere to be seen in your life, but you went to church every Sunday, hoping that He would take note. You hoped beyond hope that you would save your mother by being a devout and good Christian girl.

Two years later, you had all but abandoned your search. Your mother was doing okay, even though her cancer had spread through other organs. However, she didn't look very young anymore; the illness had taken its toll on her body and her mind, and it hurt you to look at her sometimes. You decided to go away for a few months, to study in a foreign country, to get away from the impending suffering of your entire family. This was a good idea, Mom said.

It will broaden your horizons; you will see things that I'll never get to see and do things I'll never get to do.

You walked through the airline gate toward your flight and looked back to see her crying hysterically into the arms of your father, who was rubbing her back with one hand and waving good-bye with the other. He was always so strong for her, and suddenly that guilt was upon you, the one you felt as a teenager when you didn't go to church on Sunday.

When you arrived in the place you would live for a semester, you felt more at ease. There were people around who didn't know about your life at home. They didn't look at you with those apologetic eyes. They cared for you and had fun with you, and soon you forgot all about your anger with God. Although you hadn't yet forgiven Him, the pain of betrayal was no longer festering in your heart. Soon you forgot about the things that had made your life miserable. You were enjoying life again, traveling with your new friends, sending postcards and letters to your old friends. You spoke to your family on the phone every two weeks. They were always so excited and happy that they told you everything was going splendidly. Dad said that Mom looked and felt better than she had in months, but they all missed you a great deal. You assured them that you'd be home soon, and that you were having a great time, because you were. But you were still not completely at peace with yourself, nor with God, the God that the minister had said loved you so much.

About a month into your stay aboard, you and your friends went away for the weekend. You went to a small town on a beach, far away from any form of urbaniza-

tion. The darkness of night moved in as you arrived at your hotel after a full day's drive. You were all tired, but the eeriness of the overcast night and the lap of the waves on the shore called you to the beach. The wind whipped around your ears, a deafening whir that blew your cares away. You walked away from the group out onto a jetty of rocks. The ocean stretched forever in front of you, and for an instant you felt as if you must dive in; you wanted to swim free of all earthly cares, to be alone in the waves, to let the tide carry you far away from your life. You fell into a trance until somehow a glimmer in the water caught your eye, and you realized it was the reflection of a star above you, billions of miles away. Your gaze moved upward and focused on the circle that was opening above you. Thousands of stars glowed on the black backdrop of the night sky, and the full moon poked through the clouds, and shimmered on the calm surface of the water. A rush came over you that forced you to your knees; a sensation so unlike anything you'd ever felt before welled up within you and spilled out of your eyes in the form of tears. You sobbed and laughed and thought you'd lost your mind. The wind spun around your head and made you dizzy as your eyes gazed up at heaven. And suddenly you realized that you were looking at heaven, that someday one of those stars would be your mother, and that every soul that had ever graced the earth was watching you at that moment. You felt peaceful, protected, loved, for the first time in two agonizing years.

When your friends rushed to your side (they thought you had fallen), you looked at them with tears still streaming down your smiling face.

God is here, you said excitedly. God is everywhere...and everyone..and all things around us.

You thought maybe you sounded crazy, but they understood. They hugged you and knelt on the rocks with you and cried with you, and your search finally ended.

Sherrí Wíngé
Knell

I have heard your sound before,
reaching out across the wide
expanse of my existence.
I have heard your sound before.
You have called me to dinner
and in from play.
You summoned me to wakefulness,
signaled me to go, and stay.
I have heard your sound before
in the memories of my youth, in
the seasons of my germination.
I have heard your sound before,
enduring, persistent, unwavering.
I will hear your sound again
in a flash of recollection,
in a sparkle of reminiscence.
I will hear your sound again
through the ears of loves and
at long last, life lost.

Michelle Hill
Dream Trip

Remember last spring when the fog was so dense and the rain came on us like mist and you laughed as we walked in the early morning down the tree-lined street? You said that we were the same person and you laughed a loud laugh that sounded like church bells. We stopped by a big tree with no bark and many leaves and thousands of tiny mushrooms growing around the base and up the trunk. You said that they weren't really mushrooms but were people looking up at us giants because we have the power to change the world. Then, you yanked out a bottle of tequila and drank it all and when you had finished, you threw the bottle onto the street and I watched it shatter into glittering pieces on the wet cobblestones. Then you vomited on the mushrooms that weren't mushrooms and laughed the church-bell laugh and said that my fingernails were the coolest shade of mauve and then vomited on your shoes. A man came out of his house and shouted to us and you disappeared in a puff of smoke. All that was left of you was your foul-covered shoes and my guilt-covered face. I felt sad because I might change the mushrooms that weren't mushrooms, but I couldn't change the world because I would die for your sins.

Michelle Hill
Morning

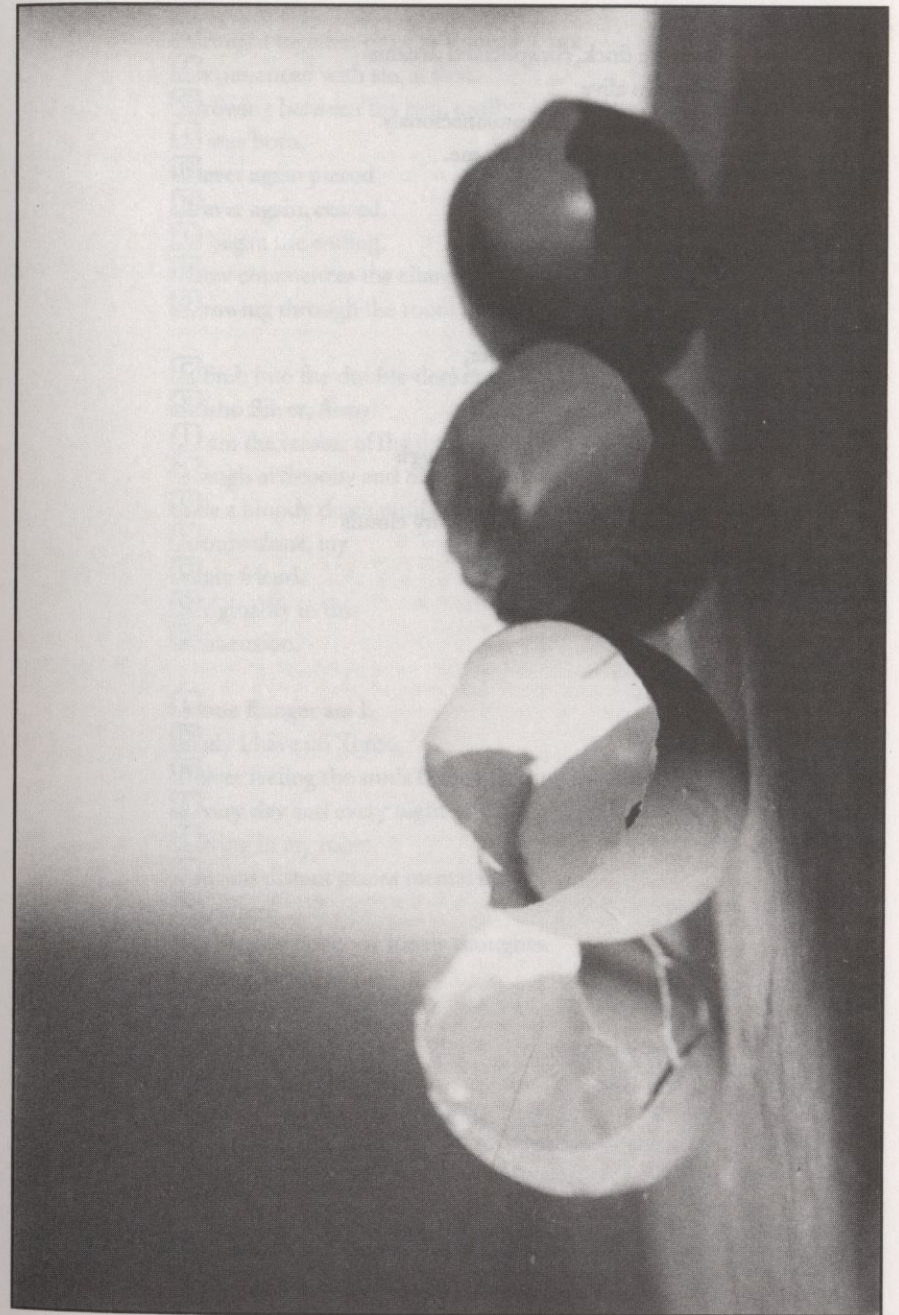
She watched his face as he slept and thought her thoughts of love. The sunlight came in, bright winter sunlight, through the crack in the curtains and made crazy patterns on the blankets. Her arm was asleep and she shifted to bring some feeling, that prickly feeling, back into her hand. She watched her fingers open, then close into a loose fist. Again, open, then close.

She turned her head to watch him breathe, pretending that she could see the air as it passed through his parted lips. She imagined his lungs welcoming the air that they needed and then exhaling the air as it was used. The vapor was almost visible to her as it flowed in, then out.

Slipping out of the bed, she made her way to the bathroom. Closing the door softly, she flipped on the light and stared blankly at the sink, as if wondering how it had gotten into her bathroom. With a start, she brushed her teeth and washed her face and left the bathroom as softly as she had entered.

She wandered into the living room and stared out the big double windows. The bright sunlight almost fooled her into thinking that spring had arrived, and that if she looked hard enough, she would see the first flowers poking through the ground. But no, it was still very much winter. The ice clung stubbornly to the windows of the cars, mocking her wish for spring.

She stood there in the unfeeling light and wrapped her arms around her, protecting herself from the cold that pressed against the windows. The walls watched her with their blank eyes as she stared unseeing at the cold. In the other room, he slept, comfortable in her absence.



He
Explains it carefully.
Respect him
I must.
This has been passed down.
Automatically,
Genetically,
Everyone born must be mastered.

Time to pay the pappy.
Only missed the one sock hiding under the bed while cleaning.
Run to the sanctuary.
Too late, caught you.
Urinate, humiliate, coloring me blue.
Ruined his life, he howls.
Expect to feel his loving hand
Damaging my face.

How can
Even he
Like to
Punish and
Lessen the
Ego of a boy so young?
Slice him and
Smash him.
Never once feeling remorse. My
Eyes seeing his moments of rage.
Secretly weeping.
Seeing no way out.

Safe
And
Non-existent.
Calm now.
These walls protect.
Under my clothes, like dead men hanging on high,
And the shade of refuge they provide.
Ready to stay here 'til death.
You will never find me, this time.

Sensing the end
Obviously near.
Utilizing my thinking, I
Link the room to my soul:
Lone boy sitting alone in it
Exists just like myself,
Selfless and
Soulless.

Into my cell,
No, I can't, I
Shouldn't be here.
Ask him to let me out. Please, will you?
No one would know I've
Escaped from my cell. Help me!

Beginning to touch you in my quivering task.
Enveloped in the being of you.
Longing for
One, you, the single one who gave yourself.
Vice has left me for the instant, because you invaded me, at 13.
Entering your personal room, I'm still
Destined to leave forever.

Rumbling with my
Every plan.
Vice returns.
Encouraged by:
Napping he found my beloved.
Grabbed her by the neck. I couldn't stop him from
Ending my only freedom.

The terminus moment
Has arrived at last.
Ending in a fiery blaze.
Engulfing both of our souls.
No longer wasting the breath of the world.
Destroying the master and his boy,
In my room 13.



Robert Sterner
Matt and the Other Guy

Do you dream in color or in black and white? Black and white.
Has it been that way as far back as you can remember or did it change?

What do you mean?

Did you dream in color as a child and begin to dream in black and white when you hit puberty, something like that? No, I think it has always been the same.

Matt, are your dreams surreal? You mean watches melting and waterfalls flowing up? ...no, they're like what I see now.

Good. Now let's move on to the next section...

Tell me what you think life means? You want me to answer the big question.

Just tell me what you think about it. Doctor, I....

Matt, please call me William....I'm not that different than you. I think I can figure out why you're asking all these questions. I can understand all the ways animals are linked through ecosystems. I can see through the lying pleasantries my parents shovel when I'm in the house. I can see the hate. I can see the joys of life to be had. I took a philosophy course a few semesters back. The professor told us to examine the connection we had with the world around us. He illustrated the fragility of that connection. He drew on the board a dot and circles around the dot. He walked over to the door and said, "Written on the board is the answer to the infinite smallness and largeness of the universe. However, my distance from the board and the writing's incomprehensibility are representative of the human condition. We as humans know that we are not ignorant of all, much as my cat, nor do we know the infinite."

I think I follow what you are saying. Go on, Matt. I think it's all a bunch of bull but my roommate loves that philosophical crap. I see what I see and I think what I think because I have too much else going to get hung up on philosophy. My dad raised me. I think what he taught me works just fine.

What about the world you live in? Matt, tell me about the people. People fascinate me. Have you ever been in a large crowd of people walking down the street? They're like the ocean. The flow is predictable if the weather is fair. Even in the storm the reaction is fairly predictable. We come from the sea. I relate to the people around me. I feel connected to the stream of life. My roommate feels isolated. He's an island. Where's it get him to think that all the world has no meaning except what he gives it? He feels alone. He feels misunderstood. Who can understand him? He doesn't go out and enjoy himself. He sits at home and writes a lot. I think he is friends with only one girl, and she's out there too.

What do you mean by that? Why should I tell you that?

You said that you understand those around you and so....we too would like to understand, as you do.

* * *

Tell me about it, your dream. It is a square. Outside the square is only darkness. Inside is a view, like a movie screen. I can see the love-seat in my apartment. Someone has uncovered it. It usually has a pink electric blanket over it. It's a shabby Styrofoam thing. The view rotates to the right. The love-seat leaves my sight and I can see into the kitchen. It's like a television screen or movie screen but...but I can feel the carpet beneath my feet. I can smell a buttery....I think it is grilled cheese. There is a woman cooking. She is thin and tall....well, taller than I. She is at the stove, her back turned to me. She is wrapped in the missing pink blanket. The view stops rotating. She gets larger....I mean closer. The view approaches the kitchen. I can see the grilled cheese in the pan. I feel the linoleum beneath my feet, dusty and cracked. Then it is as if time slows, like slow motion photography, and everything gets continually brighter. She turns, moving slower and slower, her hair across her face. Then I awake as she is hidden in light. This is my dream. I have been plagued by a question, whose answer I may never know. Who is she?

Tell me about your roommate, Matt. Tell me what you think about him. Matt told me about his talk with you.

What did he have to say?

* * *

Matt, what do you think about fads and trends? Like what?

The way you should wear your hair, what you should wear, how to talk, who you should talk to....I try not to be too taken with trends. They come and go and if you spend hundreds of bucks updating your clothes and then the trend changes, you're out of luck. I find what I like, then I adopt it. I'm not so stuck on myself that I can't see a good thing when it's right there in front of me. I want to fit in. I don't want to stick out. If you go to a party and you're dressed radically different from everyone else you'll stick out, horribly. If you look bad, they treat you bad. I don't expect to fit into every scene, but I see some around campus and don't want to be left behind. No single person determines trend. The law of the college man is fit in or become an outcast. They'll know me by my appearance first.

So they must first accept your appearance in order to get to know you? Yeah. I'm not that much different from them or you. I like having a good time. We don't talk about pain-in-the-ass philosophical crap like God, if Michael Jackson is a freak, if plants have feelings. Whatever you believe is good for you. Just don't push your beliefs down my throat.

What about problems? Surely you have problems, and so I ask: how do you solve them?

* * *

The apartment building was a two-story ranch-style house. A young man ran up the stairs to the upper apartment.

"Nick!?" He was flustered; this was apparent. His backpack fell to the floor and his jacket quickly followed.

"Nick!?"

"What?" A voice in one of the back bedrooms. It was a deep voice, nearly unblem-

ished with inflection, yet had enough to be above a monotone.

The young man entered the bedroom. A large brooding young man was seated at a desk filled with books and notebooks.

"What happened to Scott? When I left on Friday he had a cold, and then I hear from Mr. Zada that an ambulance took him to the hospital. What's going on?"

"He has some type of blood disorder. His parents came and got him out of the hospital on Sunday morning, and they took him home. The doctors told his parents that he should stay at home for a few weeks."

"So what's that mean? When's he going to be back?"

"His parents and the doctors think that Scott should medically withdraw from this semester. He was very bad when they took him away. He said he was just a little bit under the weather, but he had a fever and couldn't keep his food down. So I called the emergency room. I asked if I should bring him down but they said they tho...."

"Hold on. He's not going to be back."

"Yes." Nick turned away. He was busily preparing for tests in several classes.

"Damn. That's a tough break. He's going to probably graduate late now. Ain't it a tough break? Hey, Nick, ain't that a tough break?"

"What?" He didn't look up from his books.

"Hey! What's wrong with you? Life just crapped all over Scott and you stick your nose in a book....Man, what's wrong with you?"

"He is sick." Nick turned to face his roommate. "He is sick and there is nothing I can do." He turned back to his books.

"Aren't you concerned?"

"I hate it for him but there is not a thing in the world I can do to help. The doctors and his parents know better than I do. So it's better that he is there than here."

"You cold-hearted bastard. He's your friend. We struggled through out freshman year together....we moved off campus together. We grew up together, here at school. You, me, and him...He's sick and you study... He and I were going to hit Alpha Sigma this week, now he's going to miss it....he's going to miss everything. I knew you were different from me, a bit distanced from us, you were my friend so I... but now... you cold-hearted bastard."

* * *

The universe swirls about me as what appears to be nothing more than pure chaos. However, the movement of nature is rational, but it is infinitely more complex than I can hope to understand if I had ten lifetimes. The more I know, the more there is to know. The universe is perfect in its operation, but what is there to compare it to? Ah, and what of my place in this swirling maelstrom, you think. You and I are very alike. Matt is kin. Every day is a struggle. I do not understand the way people think, the reasons they react in the manner they do. I am not an idiot. I just cannot understand people sometimes. I am perfectly locked within myself. I lack a complete understanding of myself, how the body works, how I think. I am unable to understand why I react as I do to the world around me.

Do we have no hope of understanding? They move to the tides of what appears irrationale, but they act as they have been taught. I too was taught. Perhaps I forgot. Have you forgotten, too?

* * *

Matt, how old were you when your mother died? Five.
Does it bother you? Yes.
Does it bother you that your father remarried? Yes.
How? She is an idiot and a festering whore.
You don't like her? I loathe her.
Do you remember your mother? No.
Do you remember anything of her? Shadows and emotions. Can you ask me about something else?

* * *

All I saw was the house. It looked like the Sigma Iota house down on Fifth street, except for the color. What I saw was all white. Light streamed from the unshuttered windows. Darkness surrounded me. The light from the window closest to me stopped at my feet. My naked legs were in the newly fallen snow. I could not feel the cold. There were no footprints. It was as if I had fallen with the snow, floating down, not a care in the world until I reached the earth. I tried to take a step, but before I had taken a step, the shutters on the house all slammed shut. There I was in total darkness in the snow, naked. The shutter closest to me slowly opened, the light gradually reaching out from the building. Then it was thrown fully open and the light shone into my eyes. I heard laughing. I shaded my eyes with my hand but my hand began to fragment. It was as if I were made of pottery and the light made me crumble. I had that dream when I was twelve.

What do you think it meant? Perhaps I feared the harsh light of the public life. I was scared of what they might think of me. Perhaps I would wear the wrong style of clothes or say something inappropriate. The girls, ah, the girls... I still do not know what to do or what to say. Matt knows what he is doing around girls. They seem to go for guys like him: confident, pig-headed, a fool. Do they want to be hurt or do they like what they cannot be near, like a moth and a flame? They do not understand and get too close. They come away singed or do not come away.

Good. How do you deal with confusion? Conflict is a part of life. How do you deal with it?

* * *

Matt, let's move on. Have you gone home at all this semester? No.
Why not?
No reason to go home. Is your home life good? How do you and your parents deal with each other? Do you have warm thoughts when you think of home? Sure. I get along fine with my father.
You don't get along with your mother? Step-mother. I don't deal well with idiots.
Your step-mother is an idiot? What makes you say that? She can't give

or take directions for anything, from cooking to driving. She eats more than even Scott could on a good day, and he's a football player. The job she has pays crap for wages. They had a dinner a few years back for all the employees who had been working with the company for twenty or thirty years. They each got a clock. A piece of garbage. It probably cost about five dollars to make and it only lasted about six months before it broke. And then after it broke she kept it in its special little spot, on top of the TV which got only two channels with a nickel doily under it. One day I told her she should fix it or throw it out.

What did she think about that? She said that she was going to fix it that weekend. I came home after I went out that evening and some of my stuff in my room was messed up. I had a plate I had made in pottery class with my pile of spare change and it was up-ended.

Could it have been your brother or sisters? No. All of them except my younger brother were off at college or something, and my little brother and I were on good terms at the time. It had to be her.

What did you do? I took the clock and threw it down into the backyard, towards the swamp. Later I went back and found it and put it in her pillow case under the pillow. And then I up-ended her jewelry box on the bed.

As soon as she came home, she blamed me for it. I played innocent, convincingly, I might add. And so the retaliations went on for a while. You know how it goes. It didn't end until I came to school.

When I lived in the dorms, I only went home when they closed the dorms. Now I only go home for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and usually once during the summer, just to keep my dad off my back.

Matt, you said earlier that you do not deal well with idiots? Yeah, I hate stupid people. Some people can get jobs to work with retards and all sorts of messed-up people but not me. Now I'm all for equal rights for the handicapped, but I'm going to avoid them every chance I get.

Why? Stupid people are their own worst enemies, should I do something even stupider by hanging around them? If a hurricane was coming straight at me and I knew in time...shouldn't I get out of the way?

* * *

Danielle Resnick
Snow White

Crystallized death in a smoking tube
I have become your slave
Take everything—I am nothing
Empty
Forsake those who love me
I love only you
Give you my soul
Only you will cherish it
You are my reason to live
or is it die
No longer free to choose
Shackled
Bound to you my Snow White
Nestled in a glass coffin—waiting
Blood upon my hands like
Water from a stream—pure
I do your bidding
Sacrifice Torment
Such desperation has left
Broken shards of my life
Scattered
I have been betrayed

Amy Linn
Edna

Clumsy bird
with clipped wings,
you fly no farther
than your own babble;
three tongues taught
you, imitate imitate
tamed
for amusement only.

But in green
and yellow Amazon
dreams you stretch
long strong feathered
wings from stern
to bow and smooth
fine firm sails.
Summoning the four winds,
you soar through
unchartered waters deliriously
pirating for lavish treasure,
one hundred fathoms deep.

The illuminating moonlight
lies quiet
on a jaded sea;
you wake with a language
no one understands.

John McKnight
Bridge Plunge

Off, up, and out

Going down

falling

tumbling

plummeting

a

l s

p h

s !

I am

in the icebox.

Like

Frozen fish

I, an icy dish,

Fulfill my wish.

I float.

See

Three

shining white pillars

I start to sink

Can hardly think

not to drink

in the icebox.

I'm going

d

o

w

n

and

o

w

n

Darkness all around

Me.

Eyes

getting black

Body

wetting white

This is my final night

in the icebox.

Continue down

and down

and down

I shrill, I weep

until down deep,

I'm still

with sleep....

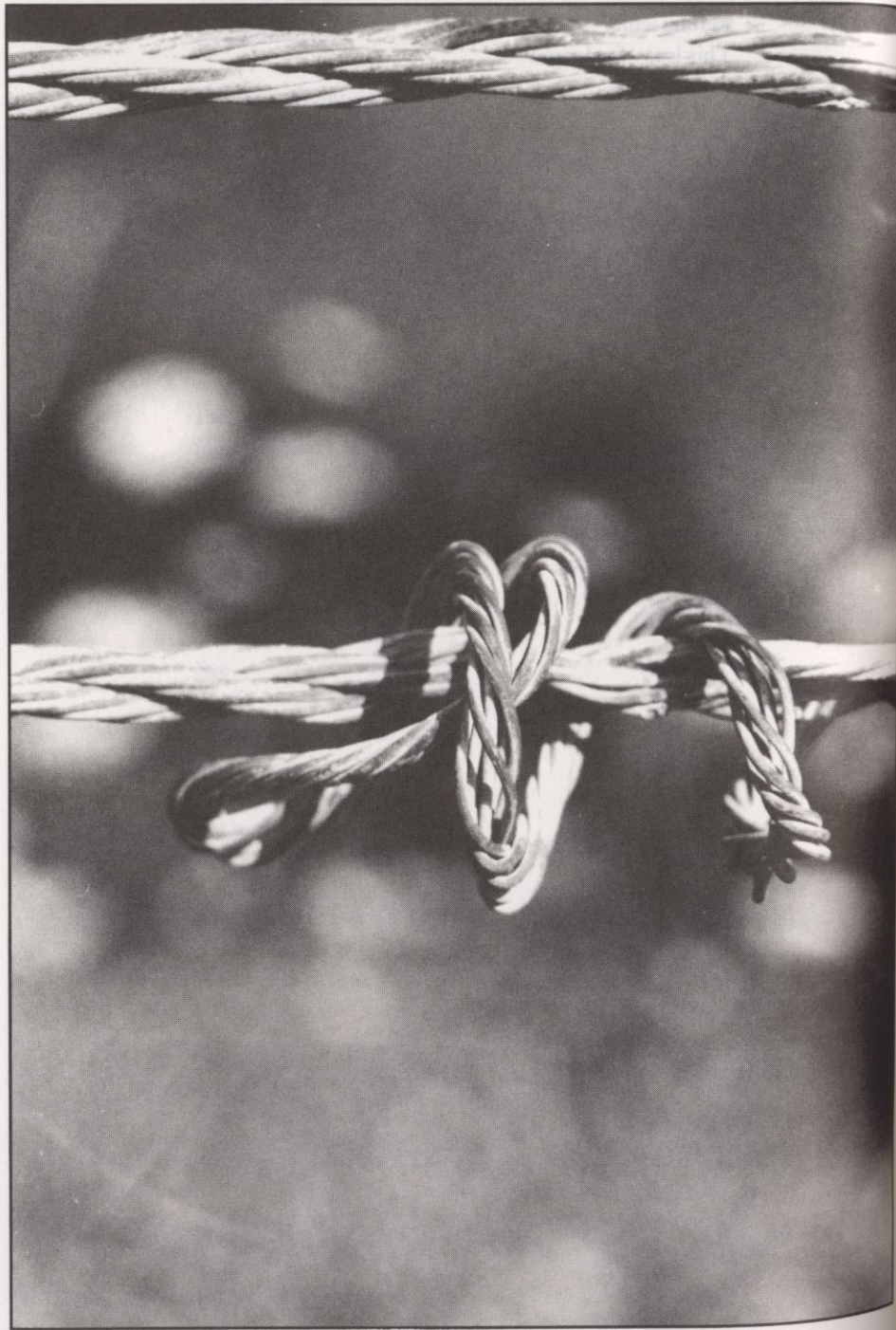
Time unravels

with upward travels

I, eternally staying

am, restfully laying

in this icebox.



Nicolas Syder
The Confession

"...possible gun shots fired on the 6th and Maple Units investigating please respond."

"This is Unit 22 reporting, we're on our way."

The driver of the police car turned on the car's flashing lights and said to his partner, "So much for a quiet night, hey, Rook?"

His partner ignored his remark and stared straight ahead to the illuminated strip of the road that smoothed out before them. The bright lights of the downtown district struggled to maintain their glamour in the heavy rain and fog that besieged the city this night.

Feeling uncomfortable, the "Rook" resettled himself in his seat and took a shallow breath as the car turned off the main drag and onto Maple Street. Its darkness seemed like a black-hole when compared to the illumination of Main Street. It was almost an unnatural darkness. However, despite the darkness that had swallowed them completely, the car continued through the rain and mist toward its appointment on Maple Street. The rain grew heavier as they rode on as if they were headed for...

...the heart of the storm, thought the aged priest. This must be the heart of the storm. Hopefully it would pass soon and he could head home, something that he was quite anxious to do.

It wasn't the lost electricity that made him anxious to leave his little church, but his old joints needed to be warmed by his own fireplace and warm bed.

A heavy pounding sounded on the front door of the church.

He had locked up early because of the poor turn out for confession. The storm was the main cause of this, for many of his church-goers were farmers and herders in his little rural committee and they had other more immediate needs than the redemption of their souls. He wanted to wait until the storm settled a little and then he would have headed home, but now the trip home would be delayed even longer.

Sighing aloud, the priest slowly moved towards the doors, his candle brightening up the area around him, making a shining hole in the darkness. The light...

... cut through the mist and rain filling a small section of the service alley on Maple Street. The darkened buildings stood on either side of the alley, indifferent to the light and the rain that probed their walls.

"Well, Rook, maybe it was just a crank," said the driver, though he continued to sweep the alley with the car's search light.

"I wish you would stop calling me Rook. I've been with the force for three damn years and..."

"Shhhh," said the driver, cutting his partner off. "I heard something."

Silence fell between the two and through the sounds of falling rain and the running car, heavy breathing could be heard faintly coming from the alley. Pointing the light toward the sound that was deep within the alley, the driver gritted his teeth as the white light fell on an arm hanging limp. The rest of its body was hidden by the alley's dumpster.

"Call an ambulance," said the driver. He got out of his car and headed down the alley. Rain ran over the officer's poncho and down onto the...

... red carpet of the entry way. The man before him was a young officer of the state police. His powerful build was enhanced by a gray poncho which was beaded with droplets of water. The beading fell to the carpet in blood-like drops.

What worried the priest more than the pained and agonized look on the man's face, was the gun that the officer held tightly in his hand. The gun...

... shots were heard coming from the one building about two-stories up.

"Call for back-up, Rook," the officer yelled, but his partner already had radio in hand and made contact with H.Q.

"You stay with the boy," barked the officer. "I'm going after that S.O.B. that shot him," and he disappeared through one side of the side doors of the building.

The young officer got out of the car and moved toward the wounded boy. Instinctively, he slid his gun out of his belt and into his hand, just in case he would need it quickly. After reaching the boy, the officer dropped to one knee and tried to be some comfort to him till the ambulance arrived.

His words fell short. The boy was very badly wounded. There were three obvious entry wounds, one in the shoulder and two in the gut. The red blood seeped out of the boy's body. Steam from his wounds mixed with the mist, while the blood trickled in small rivers on his body after being mixed with the falling rain.

The pained look on the boy's face made the officer feel as though he was in such pain too. The face was so youthful that it could have been his own son and the boy's eyes looked into his as if they wanted to...

"... confess. I want you to hear my confession," said the young state trooper.

"I will be glad to my son, if you would only put the gun away please," answered the priest, who carefully and delicately chose his words.

The youth's eyes moved to the gun that was in his hand. The gun wasn't pointed at the priest, but rather to the floor and as far away from its wielder's body as possible. The man's agonized eyes grew to shock when they met the thing in his hands. He looked at it as if his hand was on fire and he hadn't felt the pain.

Slowly and with great effort, he raised the gun close to his face as if he were inspecting it for defects and whispered aloud...

"...no. No, no, no." The young officer couldn't take it much more. The heaving breaths and moans of the wounded boy had become a kind of water torture to him. Seconds seemed like years and the ambulance still hadn't come. He had seen so much pain since he came to the force, so much pain and death. He was overwhelmed by emotions. He felt like his head was going to explode, sending his flesh and brains all over the side of the building.

The boy's eyes pleaded with his. Stop the pain, they shouted at him. Stop the pain.

The young officer raised his gun and stopped the pain the only way he knew how. He...

"... shot her. I had to..." said the young officer who was sitting across from the priest in the confessional.

"... it was just like the boy in the city," he continued. "All the pain she was in and there was nothing I could do. I had to shoot her."

Silence followed and the priest wondered if he should try to talk the youth into giving him the gun again. The officer was emotionally upset, and his confession was hard to follow. He was in no condition to talk, much less have a gun, more so, the priest was afraid of what the officer would do.

"The wreck was really bad," the officer continued. "She must have been coming home from N.Y.U., for her powder-blue car was covered with bumper stickers from there, and on the way she lost control on the wet road and crashed into a tree."

"It was horrible when I got up to her. She was so young. Her blond hair was matted with blood and the steering column had pinned her against the car seat. Her breaths were hard, hard just like the boy's were. They pleaded for release from all that pain. I didn't know what to do... then I looked into her eyes."

"I released her. Yes, that's what I did. I released her, just like I released the boy in the city. But right then..." the trooper's voice grew hurried and panicked as he continued, "... right then the paramedics showed up. I didn't know what to do. They could have saved her, I know it. They would know it was me. I didn't have a partner to set up this time. They're going to get me, get me for murder..."

The officer broke down into tears. Hiding his face in his hands, he asked the priest, "Will God forgive me, father?"

A hard silence answered his request.

"I don't know if I can live with what I have done if God won't forgive me father, please tell me that He will forgive me."

The priest's own tears started to fall, and he silently wept into his own aged hands. He didn't answer the trooper.

"Please God, please," cried the officer and he too fell into silent weeping. It was finally broken by a gun shot.

Martin McBride
The Starting Line

Clammy palms cinch
knuckles squeeze
and frost

Shoulders sharp
rigid rotation

Neck kinks
knotting

Stretching severs muscles
grinds knee cartilage

Heart wildly thrashes—breaths brisk—eyes spit—stomach flips—gun pierces

Pamela L. Secco
Roller Coaster Ride to Refuse Mountain

Barreling down the stairs,
Tena, Missy, and I hurdle

Our three-year-old brother—
The comatose heap in front

Of the television consuming
Saturday morning cartoons

So he can later regurgitate scenes
With his imaginary pal, Popper.

Daddy heaves sacks of trash
Into the trunk of our old yellow

And black Plymouth Duster,
Yelling something to make us believe

He is leaving without us.
Missy is in the lead as we jump

From the front porch steps
Into the yard. Our marathon turns

To no-rules leap-frog
As we compete for the window seats.

Tena grabs my foot-long ponytail.
I tumble, hooking

Onto Missy's shirt, forcing her down
As she anchors onto Tena's ankle.

The last one to the bumble-bee-mobile
Gets stuck in the middle.

We buzz down the valley two-lane
To a dirt road twisting up and around the mountain.

Daddy speeds up as we approach
The first dip and hump.

Our heads bounce off
The metal roof. Gravity pulls

Our bodies back to the seat, leaving
Our bellies hanging in our throats.

We giggle as our insides
Slide back into place.

The snake road is next.
Time for the curve game.

Daddy steers to the right.
Missy shoves Tena to the left.

I'm squashed between the door
And my big, fat sisters.

Daddy steers to the left.
I shove Tena to the right.

Missy, the wimp, starts to cry.
Daddy turns up the volume on the radio.

We hit the straight stretch.
Tena does the reverse vice grip

And propels her body
Across the back seat,

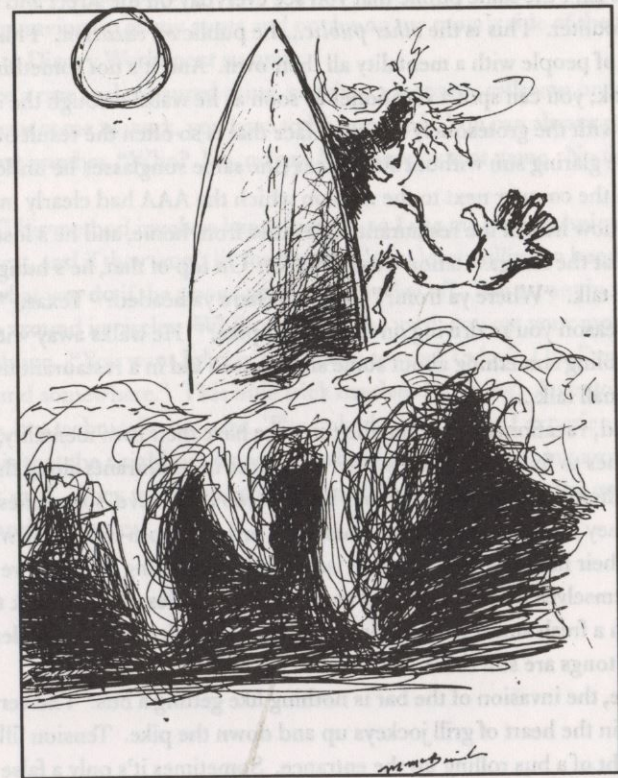
Feet and hands pressing
The breath out of Missy and me.

Tena gets revenge
For being stuck in the middle.

Remembering a time
When Pepsi cost a quarter,

Levis and Nikes were foreign words,
And taking out the trash was an adventure,

I can smile now when I lug my trash
To the curb at 6 a.m.



Derek Hoyman
Summer Job

Ah, summer has come, and it has brought with it all the perks of the season: bugs, humidity, sun poisoning...and, of course, the hordes of parents everywhere who are fleeing their homes and dragging their kids on yet another family vacation to the beach or the amusement park.

I, unlike the rest of America, am not enjoying my summer; instead, I am spending my time working at The Grease Hole & Family Restaurant on the Pennsylvania turnpike. For those of you who have never worked in a busy restaurant along a busy road in the middle of Hickville, PA, you don't realize what you're missing. No doubt, you take for granted the joy of working with the public.

Now this isn't the same public that you see everyday on the street and at the checkout counter. This is the *other public*...the public *on vacation*. This is a whole new breed of people with a mentality all their own. And it's not something you can just overlook; you can spot a vacationer as soon as he walks through the door. He'll be the one with the grotesquely squinted face that is so often the result of driving five hours in the glaring sun without sunglasses (the same sunglasses he undoubtedly left at home on the counter next to the map on which the AAA had clearly marked his route). So now he's in the restaurant, he's miles from home, and he's lost because the map he got at the last gas station was in Braille. On top of that, he's hungry. I try to make small-talk. "Where ya from?" Iowa. "Where ya headed?" Texas. "Any particular reason you're driving on the PA turnpike?" He walks away with that squint of his mumbling something about some smart-assed kid in a restaurant uniform. So much for small talk....

Like I said, vacationers traveling the turnpike have their own mentality, especially when it comes to food. They know that the prices in restaurants along the turnpike are like a zillion times higher than anyplace else, so they drive, sometimes days on end, until they find our restaurant. Then they order Soup-n-Salad Bar where they vow to eat their money's worth, which isn't hard considering that they've been starving themselves for four hundred and sixty-three miles. They attack the bar like buzzards on a fresh smear of road pizza, and when they leave, we consider ourselves lucky if the tongs are still there.

Of course, the invasion of the bar is nothing like getting a bus. The very word strikes fear in the heart of grill jockeys up and down the pike. Tension fills the air at the very sight of a bus rolling up the entrance. Sometimes it's only a false alarm: a Greyhound loaded down with 72 people who all have to drop a load in our bathrooms...but sometimes they're hungry, and that's when all hell breaks loose. It usually starts with a scream of terror from one of the waitresses. "WE GOT A BUS!" It's at this point that the cook's eyes glaze over like a deer caught in headlights because he knows that for the next forty-five minutes, he's going to be cooking up a storm for a restaurant full of complete strangers only to have them ride another

hundred miles before becoming someone else's false alarm. But that's just one of the perks to being a cook on the pike.

Sometimes, though, if you're lucky, you get a day off. But you have to have a good excuse. A few examples of good excuses are: weddings, anniversaries, and funerals (especially if it's yours). The following is what would typically be called *not a good excuse*: I'm just so sick of this friggin' place that if I have to work one more day I'll crack up and will probably end up seriously maiming someone with my Sedan. This, in most cases, will *not* get you the day off and, instead, will probably get you arrested or at least the chance to wear one of those nifty vests with all the fancy buckles and no sleeves. Of course, if the management won't give you the day off, you can always just call off an hour or so before your shift. If they ask why, you just tell them that someone in your family died. But be careful and plan wisely. You only have so many family members, and you can't tell your boss that Cousin Sue-Ellen died twice. Personally, I'm saving up all my aunts and uncles on my mom's side of the family so that I can go to Disney World next summer.

Days off are a rare and treasured thing, so when a manager calls you on your day off to ask if you can come to work, you have to be prepared. You can always pretend that you're a wrong number. "Who? No, no one lives here by that name. No this isn't 3896, this is

3796. . ." This method involves lying, though, so I use my own technique. Mom. Moms are great, and if they won't lie for you they're at least willing to bend the truth a bit. Here's what you do if the phone rings on your day off. You go out in your front yard and run around in circles. While you're in the yard, you get your mom to answer the phone. "You want Johnny to come in to work today? Oh, I'm sorry, he's running around somewhere." This little trick involves NO lying. A stretching of the truth, maybe, but technically not a lie. The only drawback that I experienced with this method is that the neighbors wondered what I was doing running around in circles in my yard. They wanted to get me one of those nifty vests...the ones with all the buckles and no sleeves.

Heather Longo
Telephone

As a poster decorates the wall,
it covers its jack.

It breaks the rule of infinite number lines,
beginning with zero and ending with nine.

Its repetitive ringing alerts even those
who sleep through their 8 a.m. alarm.

A downpour of information
comes from its storm of calls.

With the speed seen at the Grand Prix,
redial races through digits.

Its tail hangs loosely,
and sways when hit back and forth.

Frequent use causes attachment,
and it becomes an appendage.

An electrician's dream:
endless wires and gadgets.

Its tail is coiled
like a slinky.

A fortune teller,
it is the bearer of either good or bad news.

As still as a corpse in a coffin,
its receiver sleeps in its cover.

Diana Skarnaite
Valentine's Letter to a Female Friend

Valentine's Day is as close as it can be to the deadline for my History/Philosophy paper. Most likely you do not care about the Huron and how they belched freely while eating or cleaned their hands on a passing dog. Do not bother understanding the savage! Better read what a great deal I have for you.

Once upon a time, in a land far away, there was a handsome man who appreciated women for their minds. A man who preferred brains and a sense of humor over a roll in the hay, a man in search of commitment. In short, he was a perfect gentleman you would want to meet.

Always polite and well-groomed, he left any woman speechless. He shook hands and looked in the eyes, gave compliments, and brought fresh flowers to his mother. He did not lick his fingers and blow his nose at the dinner table. He also knew how to lift his fork to his mouth, not his mouth to his fork. I guarantee that your mother would die to see you date this man.

He drove his beamer at 56 mph with the precision of the Queen of England's chauffeur. Educated at Oxford, he could slip into a Shakespeare sonnet as easily as Tom Hanks into Forest Gump. Moreover, the man's conversations contained the wit of no coward. His vocabulary was fabulous, if you could figure out the word meanings. Being an avid reader of classical literature, he often went to the theater. A great guy, he was Mr. Perfect. What is most important, however, was that his bank account was as vast as his knowledge of women. No wonder that he made them feel like a million dollars.

I surely gave you enough information about Mr. Perfect. I warn you that a good man is hard to find. But if I caught your interest, go ahead and dream or try to call him at 1-800-EXTINCT.

Dennis Mersberger

Life: a Fairy Tale

There once was a little girl who longed for her aging grandfather to live always. She feared her sixty-year-old grandfather, with whom she had spent many fond weekends, was growing much too quickly towards the grave. Afraid of death herself, a cloud of sadness filled her thoughts and clung to her every waking minute.

Sadly, on her way to meet the school bus Monday morning after another cherished weekend with her grandfather, she came upon a little puppy sleeping before her on the sidewalk. She had never seen this puppy in the neighborhood. Kneeling down beside the puppy, she read its name aloud. Suddenly, the little puppy awakened and began to speak to the little girl.

"Little girl, why do you look so sad on this beautiful sunny morning?"

Startled because she had never heard of a puppy who could speak, she fell over onto a lawn of dandelions that began to shout at her for carelessly stomping all over them as if they didn't exist or matter.

"Get off!" shouted one as he swayed in the wind barely able to catch his breath.

"Really! It's as if you pretend to not see us all standing here or something."

"Mr. Dandelion," said Life, "Stop shouting; can't you see this little girl is upset and in need of some assistance? What seems to be the problem little girl?"

"I fear my grandfather will die someday and just the thought of it is absolutely unbearable," said the little girl with a sigh.

"This weekend," said Life, "bring me into his home and every day there after that I am under his care, he will grow stronger, and you can surprise your grandfather with me as a blessing in disguise."

All that week with growing eagerness the little girl looked towards Friday until the time would come for Life to be brought into her grandfather's home. Friday finally arriving, the little girl and Life hurried to her grandfather's house a bit earlier than he was supposed to return from his daily walk. Hiding Life in the pantry next to the kitchen, the little girl awaited her grandfather anxiously. At last her grandfather appeared and walked through the gate towards the kitchen door. In a whisper, she told Life to be ready to jump out at any second. Her grandfather walked in and smiled at his granddaughter, wondering why she was early that day.

With a quick dash, Life shot out from the pantry and sprang through the air towards the old man. As Life landed on his chest, the old man staggered to maintain his footing but eventually lost it. Gasping for air, he doubled over and fell to the tile floor—dead. The little girl, hysterically choking on her tears, hugged her grandfather and said, "Isn't Life a bitch!?"

Martin McBride

Penny

I whirl, joyous, then
plummet, splash, a wish granted, or not.

My curves dinging, scraping against cement.

Cold water weighs, delusters me delightfully here,
consistently, water falls on my head, numbing, eventually
leading to the dullness of my once-famous head, a figure praised
and commercialized for trade use. Reality check. I'm swallowed, passed
through the digestive track and dirty fingers, or tossed to the ground
where I'm stepped on until someone picks me up when my tail's
down. Here, unlike there, I'm safe, not traveling from home
to home like some Eureka salesman. Also, I've acquired
comrades here, no enemies punching it out in tight
quarters for top-pocket positions. Suddenly a
vacuum attached to a pole scrapes across the
cement, swooping up my comrades. I can
hear their clinking screams, "No," I
don't want to go back either.

Susan Sarvis

Sonnet of Genetic Engineering

Erasing genes with enzymes' nasty tastes,
Biology's dream is a nightmare sea.
Gigantic red tomato will not waste
Prospected clonings of endangered me.

To cure disease's nasty violent paths,
With guarded genes from virile virgin weeds.
The skill and brains of those inspired by math
And science will end babies' deaths with speed.

And then with eyes so blue and skin so white
Their minds so strong with thoughts beyond adults,
They'll smirk and spit upon us with much spite
Not knowing of the ones they do insult

Because *their* dads and moms don't have their eyes.
From plants and bugs is what descendants means.

David J. Bauman

Jonathan Noah

or

Stones, Play Dough, and the
Multi-colored Diaper Contents

My son, why must you always eat the stones
and do-dads you find laying at your feet,
ingesting things you ought to leave alone

like crayons, paper clips, and Styrofoam?
Is there anything, dear child, you wouldn't eat?
Son, why must you always eat the stones?

Today you chewed the teeth off mommy's comb,
and yesterday the socks right off your feet.
Stop munching things you ought to leave alone!

I shrug and sigh, and groan a father's groan,
and pry another rock from your small teeth.
My son why must you eat so many stones?

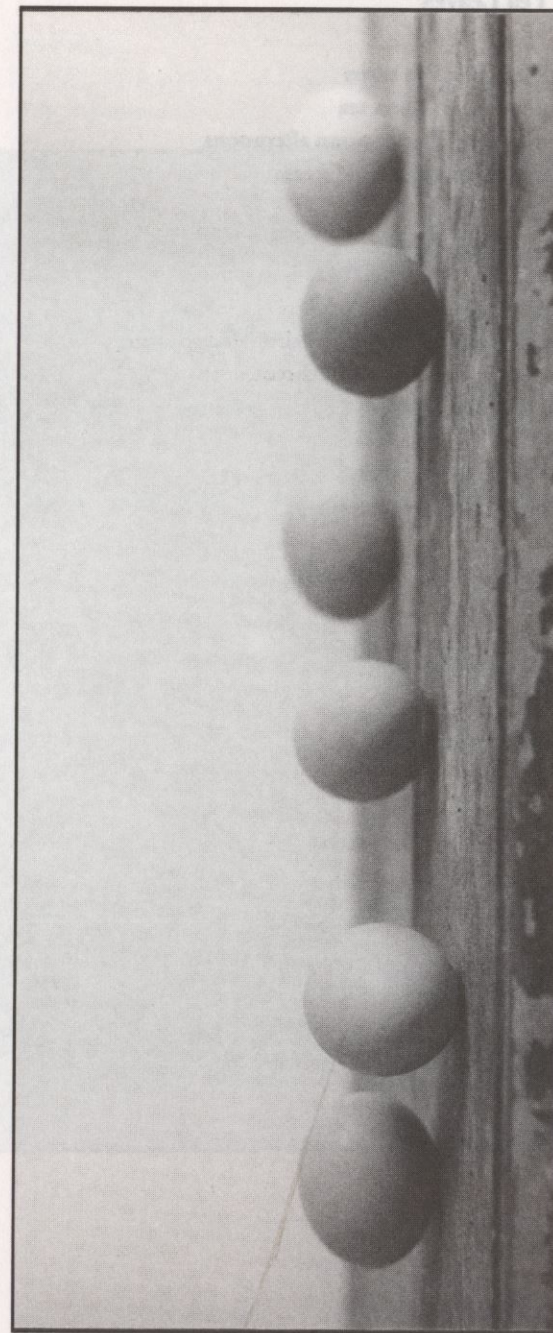
Just like a dog, your teeth clamp on a bone.
A fuzzy caterpillar at your feet—
oh please, oh please, won't you leave that alone?

We can't call out now, since you slobbered on the phone.
To you the world is just a tasty treat.
But if you insist on eating all these stones,
just do it secretly and leave your dad alone.

Matthew Feltenberger

Pickle

jar
glass jar
confinement
juice
sweet juice
running
down
your
chin
crisp-crunch
eaten (all gone)



Sharon Conteh

Tea Leaves

Long after I've taken
slow sips of warm tea
in these chilled autumn afternoons
and blown streams of steam
across my cup,
the water rising
in my eyes, trapped clouds
on the lenses of my glasses,
and the last honey-color drop disappearing
deep in the back of my throat,
I feel warm.

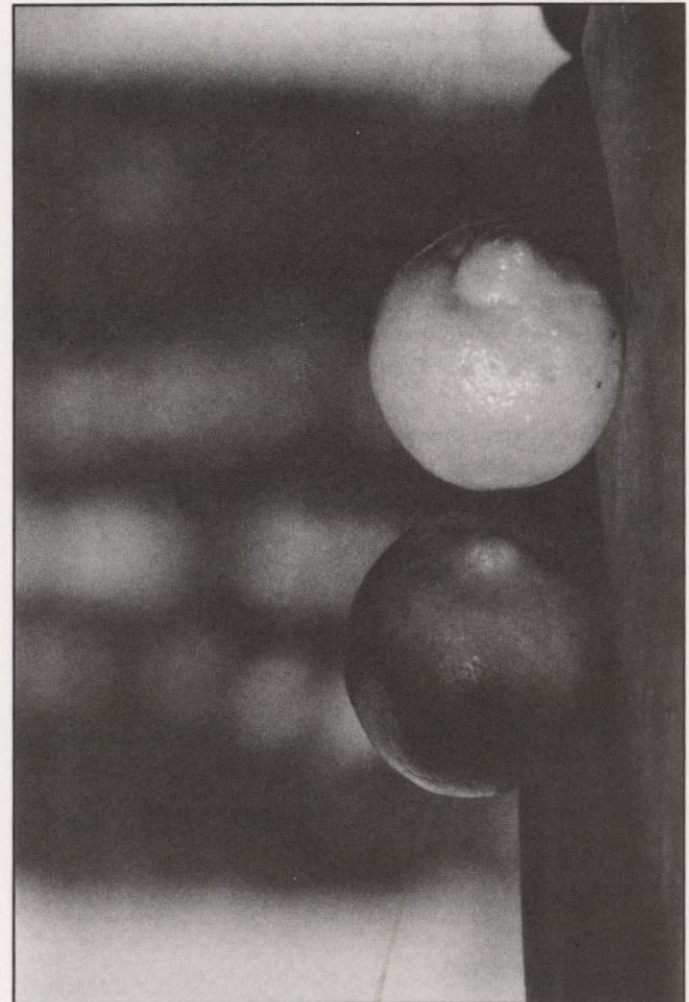
Long after I've lost
the sensation of the spices
under my skin, I feel
the heat in my hands
of the teacup as if
it hadn't been emptied.

Long after, I've felt
your lips upon my skin
and drank you down,
held you inside
still warm to the touch
like my china teacups.

My Mother's Geraniums

My Mother's Geraniums

The stems, the leaves, the flowers
on the garden bed
of each other. For the love of a garden bed
of each other.



Amy Linn
Rhythms

two cats curled
on the braided rug dream
of each other. For days

the rain has been saturating
the turf where they play
in tall grasses. Tigress games

pacing their steps
slowly, steadily stalking
to capture the other. One awakes

to stand and stretch,
claws dig, muscles tense
arching its back. Then relaxes

close to warm slumbering
rhythms of their purrs
echoing each other. Softly sighing

Amy Linn
My Mother's Geraniums

Ten stems,
like bony sticks, wake
to the tickling of a tender breeze.
The weight of a butterfly would
snap them—
but they would not bleed.
Twisted, gnarled roots digging
deep into new earth
where warmth penetrates the pain,
moisture spreads through veins
nurturing, till the season of fullness.

Now flourishing
at the end of each stem
a perfect bloom with hues
of red, pink, white.
Another winter survived.

Ethan Canner
huh

I. How do they
wear the ring
around the rosy
pocket full of
lint screen in the
dryer a towel
boy brings a
toy box over to his pants
pocket of hot air
balloon pops
goes the weasel.

II. Why can't I
win a game
of checkers of
chess a woman
with a nice
chest of drawers
falling, scattering
clothing designers
of buildings and
bridges falling down
the stairs
as they climb
up to the sky
to where the birds
fly like an
airplane crashes
into a car
which drives
along the road
of life, liberty
and the pursuit of
the bluebird that
sings for its
supper time,
lunchtime,
break the dishes
in the cupboards
that are closed.

Shawn Lipson
A Game of Checkers

A war waged between two countries, intent on taking each others' rulers and wiping the other off the face of the planet.

An array of delicacies placed upon the tablecloth in an Italian restaurant.

Frogs leaping over each other only to catch another fly.

Leaders standing at the ends of a table, bargaining for the rights of their country.

The thoughtful mind of a serial killer gently stalking his next victim.

The keen eye of an eagle as it soars through the sky and swiftly darts towards the waters and returns with its catch.

Children playing tag in the yard.

A cat chasing a mouse only to find a dog waiting around the corner.

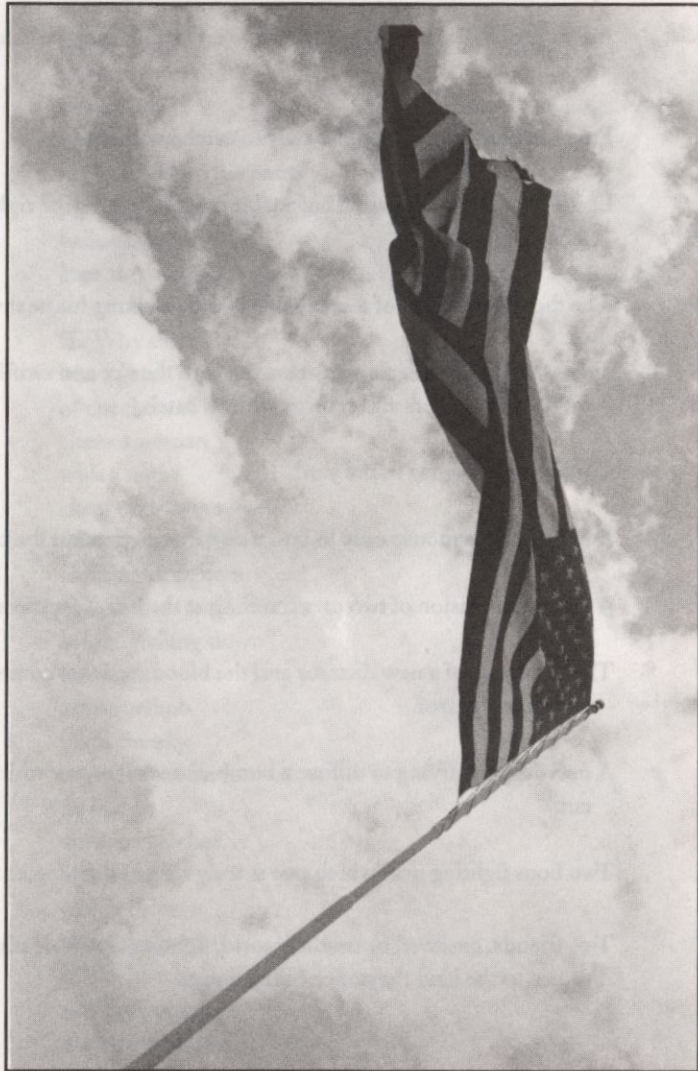
A head-on collision of two cars traveling at their highest speeds.

The crowning of a new dictator and the bloodshed that comes with his reign of terror.

A nervous man trying to diffuse a bomb, indecision over which wire to cut.

Two lions fighting over which one is truly king of the jungle.

Two friends, enslaved in another world, fighting till the death, just to return to the land they once called home.



Mandy L. Maneval
Democracy

Democracy is the Native American
standing, head bowed,
mourning the shadowed ruin
of his culture.

It is the deadly green gas,
the young, frightened eyes
behind the mask.

Democracy is the thousands of lives
destroyed by the atom blast,
robbing their futures,
obscuring our past.

It is ranks, soldiers, and flags
of a nation that will never die,
sending its young to fight on
“a field where a thousand
corpses lie.”

Democracy is the eagle that perches
upon the shoulders of the poor,
preying on their helplessness,
and slamming forever
opportunity's door.

It is the flower
that strives toward the sun,
and is mowed down for not
being the perfect one.

Democracy is the black granite wall
immortalizing the blood,
of those who answered
draft's call.

It is the villages of
cardboard homes
that lie in the shadows
of our capital's
gilded domes.

But democracy is also the land of the free

giving me the choice
to be what *I* want to be.

It is the clothes on my back
and the books that I read,
as well as the cracked hands
that worked for these.

Pamela L. Secco
A Love Affair With Pierogies

I rummage through the cupboards,
Wedging my hands,
Forcing boxes and cans aside,
Hoping to discover the ingredients of my desire
Buried beneath the bland.

I find nothing.
My heart rate slows
As disappointment replaces desire,
Feeling as I would if ripping open
My lover's shirt in a passionate moment,
Lusting for the feeling of his flesh,
Only to find a T-shirt underneath.

My taste buds know what I desire.
They tease my brain
With hints of sweet and spicy memories.

I open the refrigerator door.
My eyes search
Up and down, side to side.
My brain signals my hands
To remove a jar of mushrooms,
Leftover marinara, and a red onion.

As I search the freezer,
I locate the red box with yellow letters reading
Pierogies stuffed with jalapeños and cheddar cheese.
Seeing that box stimulates
My mouth to water
Like one of Pavlov's dogs
Salivating in response to stimuli
Associated with the meat powder he truly desires.

My heart rate begins to rise
As I wait and watch with anticipation.
On the back burner the pierogies

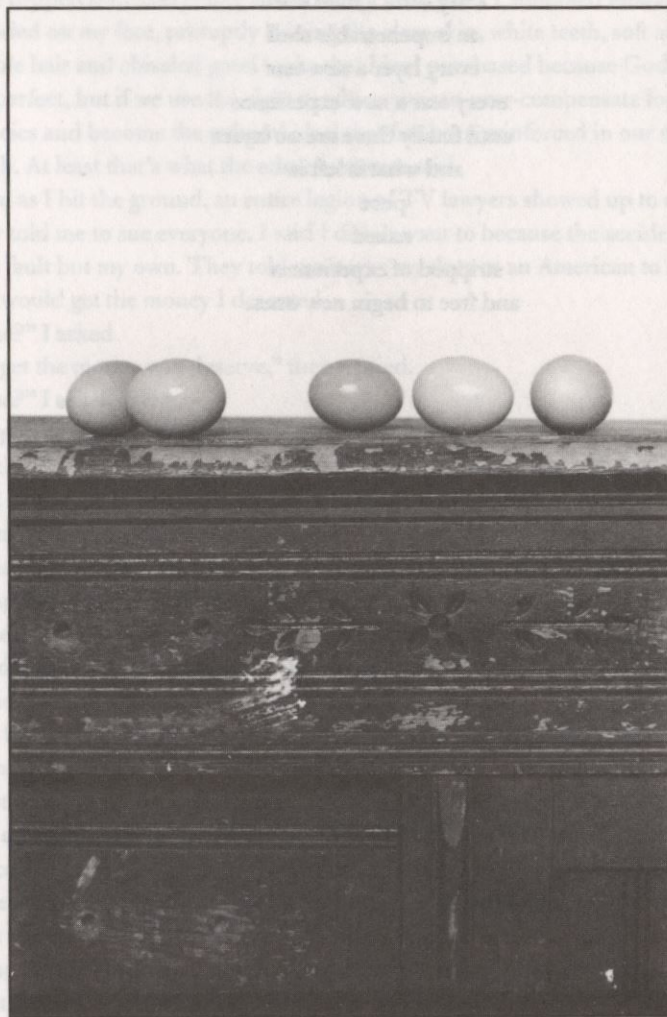
Chase one another through the bubbling water
Like two playful lovers in a jacuzzi;
Sauteing nearby, the onions relax
As the mushrooms jump about in the hot butter;
On the front burner, the marinara blows bubbles
To release its sweet steam.

I scoop the pierogies onto my plate,
Tilt the pan, allowing the onions and mushrooms
To slide on top,
And smother with marinara.

I close my eyes as I am overcome
By the sweet smell of marinara and onions
Rising from atop
Those two firmly stuffed pockets
That I long to sink my teeth into.
Pleasure is just moments away
As though holding my lover,
Eyes closed, smelling the aroma of his cologne,
Aching to place my lips on his bulging pecs.

I can't wait any longer.
I bring the heaping fork to my lips,
Anticipating pleasure.
Yes, Yes, Yes!
The orgasmic rush
Of flavor and texture
Fills my mouth,
Sending tingling sensations
Rippling through my jaw,
The warmth of my passion
Descends into my body.

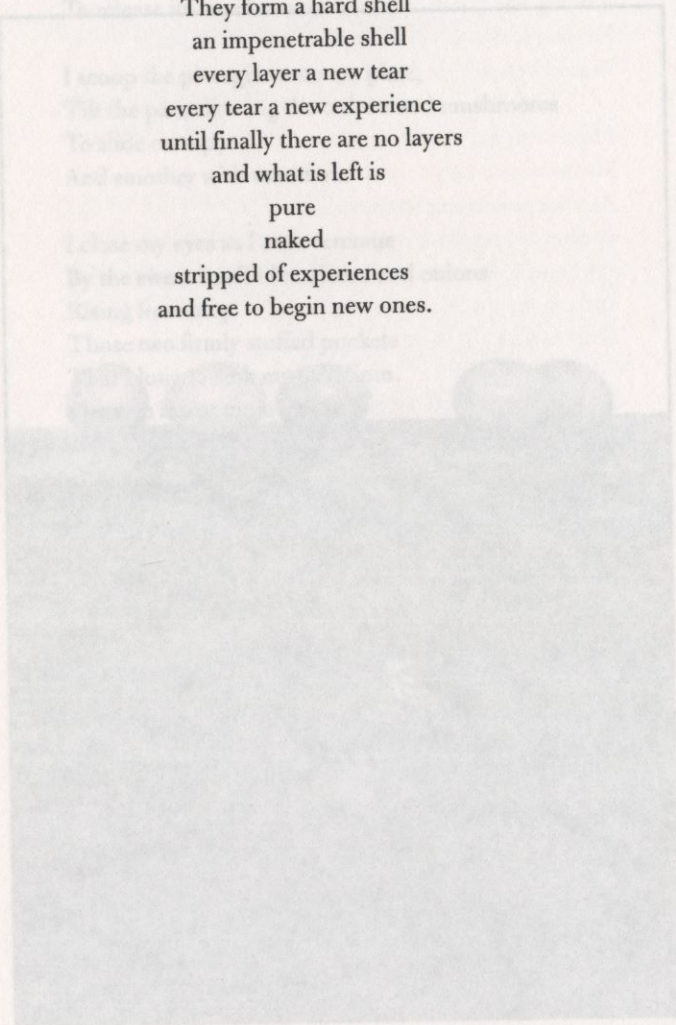
I lie down afterward.
Relaxed, satisfied, I savor the memory.
Suddenly, I have an urge
To smoke a cigarette.



Michelle D'Amico

Onion

Layers cover the core
in an intricate web.
They form a hard shell
an impenetrable shell
every layer a new tear
every tear a new experience
until finally there are no layers
and what is left is
pure
naked
stripped of experiences
and free to begin new ones.



Ed Smeal

The Ride

I was walking to town one day, just walking along the cracked sidewalks parallel to the pot-hole-pathways that lead from here and there to evermore and nowhere, and I tripped. I tripped over everything and nothing, I suppose. I stumbled forward and firmly landed on my face, promptly ruining the clear skin, white teeth, soft and manageable hair and chiseled good looks that I had purchased because God didn't make us perfect, but if we use the right products we can over-compensate for our inadequacies and become the cultural ideal that has been reinforced in our minds since birth. At least that's what the advertisements said.

As soon as I hit the ground, an entire legion of TV lawyers showed up to counsel me. They told me to sue everyone. I said I didn't want to because the accident was nobody's fault but my own. They told me it was my duty as an American to sue and that they would get the money I deserved.

"For me?" I asked.

"We'll get the money you deserve," they replied.

"For me?" I asked again.

"We'll get the money you deserve" was their ambiguous reply.

I politely asked them to go away, but they refused and said I was still suffering from the initial shock of my fall. Trying a different approach, I threatened to sue them for causing my pain and suffering by not leaving me alone. This ploy only made them more intent on handling my case because they had never sued themselves before and they thought it would give them a lot of free publicity. I was quite frustrated by now, so I tripped the next person who walked by. The lawyers huddled around him, convinced him to sue everyone and everything, and had him unknowingly sell his soul to the devil, and then they all went happily on their way.

After a few hours, I decided to roll over because I was tired of people walking up and down my back. I soon grew tired of people walking up and down my front, but I decided it was better this way because I had a nicer view of the people stepping on me and I could look up women's skirts, at least when there wasn't someone standing on my face.

You see a lot of interesting things by looking up women's skirts. Okay, I'm lying. You can't see much of anything because it's dark inside a woman's skirt, but it was a fascinating thought anyway. I guess it's good that it's dark inside a woman's skirt because it forces people to use their imaginations if they want to know what's in there, and I don't think enough people use their imaginations today. It seems like politicians and advertisers are the only people using their imaginations, but they're using them for the wrong things. I guess that imagining what's inside a woman's skirt is the wrong thing too, though, so maybe it would be better if no one used imagination.

Another good thing about lying on my back was the wonderful feeling of an expensive athletic shoe—made in a third-world country by impoverished children who work for almost nothing—stepping on my genitalia. It was excruciatingly painful

and made me feel like throwing up the heart-attack burger and cholesterol pizza I had had for lunch. It was kind of kinky. I think I liked it.

Eventually it started to get dark and I started to get hungry, so I decided to get up and go home. So I did, because I could.

The moral: Most Americans are overweight, and it's a good thing most people don't wear stiletto heels.