

HARBINGER



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1998

Harbinger 1998

Editors– in– Chief:

Samantha
Johnson

Rachel
Evans

Design Editor:

Heather
McKay

Staff:

Melisa Berry, Molly Doyle, Quyn Horton, Sarah Palmrose, Jamie Valentine, Mystie Hood, Maria Cepiel, Yvonne Leamer, Emily Dickos

Cover Art:

Jennifer
Derry

Advisor:

Dr. Tina
Parke-Sutherland

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Andre'

I watch you wet the lips of the green bottle
flow away and wet again.
you pass it to me and I
drink
taste
an intoxicated you
you burn, and threat
what I feel is so wrong
Like being addicted to cigarettes

You defrost me leaving me warm, wet and wantin'
I stare into the green and it
happens,
the desire,
for more,
I don't want to
share mine

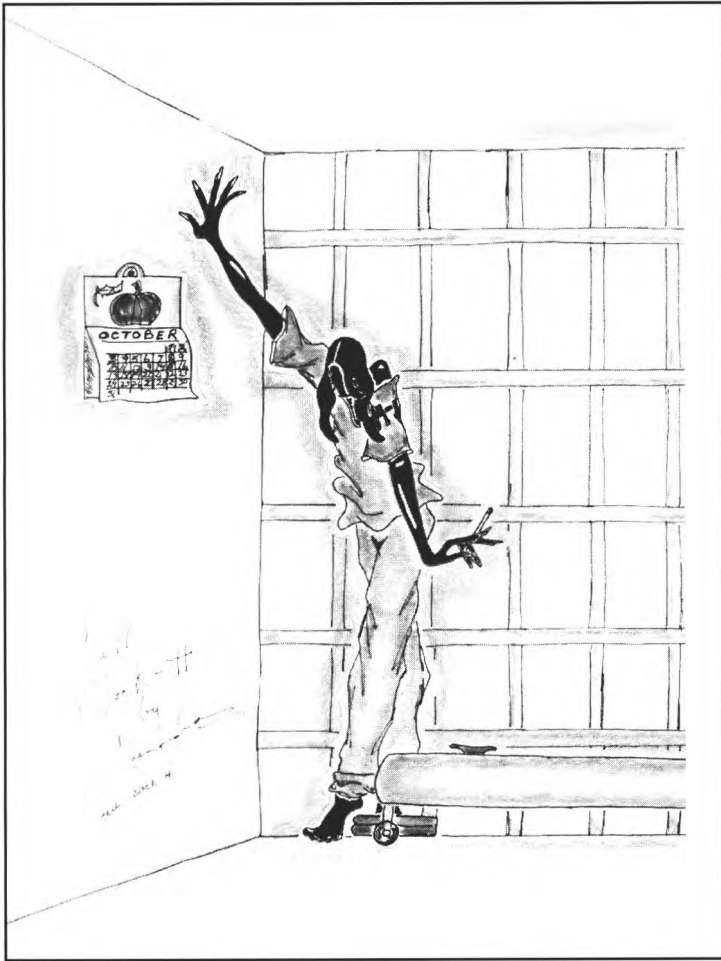
You're mine
You're in my R.E.M., there we're one,
I put my lips to yours, suckin' your wetness
I'm not an alcoholic and one drink won't make me
but God I want that
taste.

brent

it's the christian boys i fear these days
the ones who've been taught women are sacred but not holy
who know so undoubting that virgins and whores
are one and the same
if unleashed and let run religious guiltling free.
i've had run-ins with those boys before
and the escapes were never easy.
the first i knew sang hail mary's against me
shamed in our love making.
but he wasn't as bad as the next
the one whose eyes clamped tight in fear the sight of my skin
my sin, my flesh breathing his
and the last, the pastor's son who took me
like so many extra sips of wine
then claimed he could never love me for my lack of faith
in the sanctity of his god fearing.
but now there's you,
and i don't know what to think about you.
you whose face i fell in love with like a market tabloid cover
that boasted the gate to god
and i the sinner on my knees needing a new lie to believe.
you whose embrace makes me think for one moment
i may need to follow you down past hell and porn
and the places no one belongs
to the warmth of your lips
and the scent of your cheek
like it was my own redemption and jesus sweet

Rachel Evans

and i hate myself because of you,
because of gentle, loving, christian you.
you make me hate the bold face of my impurity,
you make me wriggle in my own humanity
when yours itself isn't that great
you just have the fist of god
and a church full of bibles to hide behind
which is hard to stand up to when you're 5'5"
flat hair nervous eyes and female to boot.
enemy of the three amigos, musketeers,
the father son and holy ghost
and you say you're past that bit of misogyny
but i see it each time you avert your eyes away
anywhere but at me and my female body–flesh full of forbiddens–
what you must see as your temptation to fall
and what i must know as my strength in identity
the one who would die to taste the seed of your soul,
who would sink with you just so we could rise up,
who would melt in your skin to wear it,
who would let your teeth shred me new.
but you won't let me get that close
and i cannot beg you from god.
and i will never be seen to you as more than mere fragility
which is why i fear the boys like you–
because you know me without knowing,
you see your fathers' false foresight,
and you stomp in like messiahs and leave like judas,
and in the aftermath is my body
and the words you threw against me
to mark me, to save me, to bruise.



popcorn

my father sends me popcorn
great huge boxes full
I give it away
to the actors
to the smokers
they love it
they talk and laugh
eating the bits of love he sent me
his greasy salty slightly stale love that he dropped
in boiling oil dumped in plastic grocery bags
to mail hundreds of miles to me
I won't eat it

Grace's Toilet Talk

Grace wheels in a white toilet—on wheels—to the middle of the stage, in front of a red curtain during an “intermission.” At this time, the stage setting does not change. Grace talks unaware of the audience; yet, she is aware, similar to talking to a wall. All that is heard is a siren or two (police/ambulances). She sits with her feet flat on the stage, her elbows on her knees and her hands vertical around her hair line.

GRACE

(Rocking back and forth, slowly talking, looking at the stage)

I like to hear ambulances, no frickin' police cars; You know someone is just dead instead of gettin' robbed.

(Sirens stop)

I can't do this anymore: I can't live. Look at me? Look at me. Oh, look my frickin' god?

I don't know what to do. I can't work: I have a baby comin'. I can't sleep. And, and ... I, I can't keep food down. Jesus, ...

Don't talk to me about nothin'. How do you reason with a person who uses a toilet for her head? I eat, puke, drink, bathe and pass-out in the ... (begins to cry) ba-ha-ha-hath tub. My life is flowin' down with 2000 Flushes ... So much finger work for one life. (Looks at audience for the first time and points at herself furiously) This is it. I can't get my head out of the toilet.

(Puts head down) I keep my weight down and starve my baby. God, the only time I'm happy is when I sleep: no grocery carts, red lights and green lights, guns, umbrellas, old hats and dogs, and people who fly and forget about the birds. No one wants

to know me ... Because, because they think that's the best way to control me. God, I'm sick of usin' a spoon in a new jar of peanut butter instead of a damn knife. New jars ... So fuckin' temptin'. Ahhh! I want out of this cardboard box, no side is "right-side-up." I want the weight off my back. Just keep my load on the floor. (Revelation) You know: It's like ... like, like, like I ... have this second voice. Someone inside telling me I won't smoke, drink, or puke tomorrow. And this tape recorder ... It won't let me forget when I break my promises, all those times I hate myself for what I look like. Maybe I need religion ... But, like ... like I need a whole olive branch instead of a frickin' olive in a martini glass. (Laughs) Where the hell am I goin'? ... Behind bars? No, the kind with back alleys! God, damn. I'm in a world where people put mud on their pretty faces; so, let me dig a hole and put myself in a warm, soft place.

(The sirens start and the curtain rises. Grace gets off the toilet, lifts the seat, and puts her head in. The lights go off and she is then found back in the stage bathroom. She is sitting in the white ceramic bath tub with four rusted lion-like paws for legs. She gets out and lifts the toilet seat directly across from the tub. She gets back in and starts tossing one grape at a time into the rusted white bowl. She opens a beer: She drinks and tosses.)

Re-invention

Paths,
be they black, cobblestone, dirt or sand
black bare feet have walked.
Paths, lined by burnt orange leaves
and misty rain brought in the fall.
Paths, lined by gilded tea roses
and a radiant sun in the spring.

Paths, have the Sigma women walked,
we are black women's re-invention.

Soil,
soft with the DNA of life
is warmth beneath the black feet.
Soil, giving birth to the vine of veins,
her caregivers of life within blood.

Roots, the Sigma women have been grounded by,
we are Sigma women's re-invention.

Out of thick, strong roots grow:

Golden self governing Autonomy
Surrounded by an immense Blue storm of Elation
radiantly adorning a Golden Imani
captured in Antiguo Lyrics of our herstory.

We are Immaculate Perceptions.

Grenada Miniefield



Colors, Colors Pen and Ink

7-11 slurpee

3 years old

I giggle as I lick the cherry ice globs off quilted fingers
rivulets dribble down bare legs to fall off dirty-dark toes
landing on green linoleum

9 years old

swim meet

I walk barefoot on grass beside glittery steamy concrete
gotta get to 7-11 and back before relay
my hair slowly dries strands melding together into a formable
substance
chlorine-prickly skin tightens
and the slurpee gurgles in my throat
as a smile born of half cola half snow
trickles onto my face

14 years old

sneaking out for lunch

escaping cafeteria cold noodles

and wrestler taunts

we get coke slurpees with processed cheese nachos

hiding out in the park we flick bits of the sweet ice

on each other's hair

we smile as we ditch the trash outside

and return to 5th hour science

sticky with the fruit of modern chemistry

18 years old

cruisin'

after the movie we buy slurpees and cigarettes

we park the car and sit on the hood to smoke

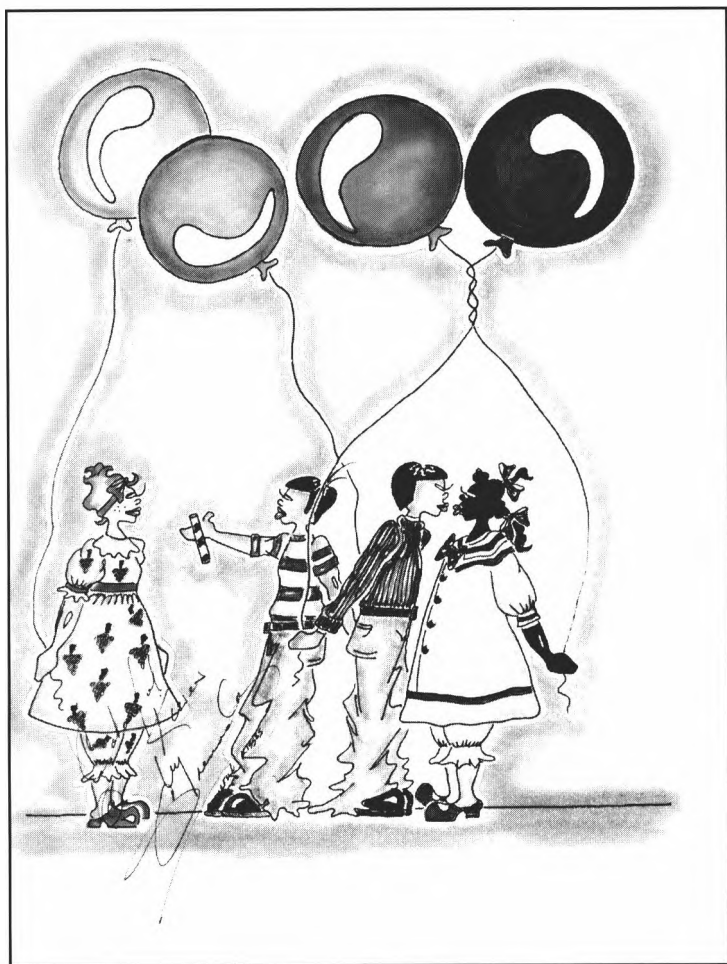
Sarah Palmrose

touching tongue tips to the peak of our slurpees
the steel headlight beams from high school stars
pass on the highway below
we grin juicy
touch with gooey fingers
and the moment crystallizes in the rock garden of my mind

Two Weeks

There is a moment between a kiss and a sigh when the hair on the back of your knees stands up and the wind dawdles along the slope of your neck. We would sit together bare legs dangling off the ends of pickup trucks while we watched the ball park lights come on. Two weeks in the middle of June. Like two halves of a jewelry box that fit together perfectly, enclosing the growing part of summer. In the middle of a green wheat field going gold we turned cartwheels in the wind. I didn't realize then that those two weeks were the walking stick by which I would measure all the other two weeks that make up my years. Two weeks of floating in the summer sun. Two weeks of angel hair smiles. And now, sitting in a steamy bus station gritty with road dust and oily hair that has not been washed in recent memory, I wonder who she is now, and if she wonders about me. I sigh, willing the wind that I create to travel over the wheat fields to her and brush her forehead.

Grenada Minifield



Notes from the Underarm

A twelve-year-old girl basks in the luminous sun, nestled lazily on a plastic lawn chair, her small legs jutting out in front of her like two oversized plastic fingers. In the glaring heat, she oils her body, paying special attention to her legs. They are to be baked to a golden perfection, so she can show off her new summer shorts the next day at school. She's determined to catch every male eye in her class, knowing all the while that excessive attention from all the boys could very well cost her quite a few female friends.

Sometime later, after a leisurely nap in the backyard, this little twelve-year-old girl catches a glint of light reflecting off the skin of her legs. She inspects both of them closely, realizing the eyesore is caused by a thin layer of fine hair. In the past few weeks her skin seems to have been sprouting out little hairs all over the place; she's feeling uncomfortable and shy about this. She remembers some of her friends at school talking about similar disheartening situations and returns to the house, deciding there is only one solution to her unsightly, embarrassing, and quite unnatural problem. In the bathroom, razor in hand, she lathers up and cuts off thousands of tiny hair follicles, feeling, once again, in control-like she's accomplishing something big, large, powerful: the power to manipulate her own body to make it look "beautiful." Like most girls around her age, she is quickly learning to "mistrust the natural female form"-a lesson that will haunt her throughout her adult life (Freedman 198).

Days later, she tells me about her first leg-shaving experience. She's got tiny cuts all over her calves and ankles, and she comes to me asking how to avoid them. I tell her I don't shave my legs, so I probably wouldn't be much help to her. She gapes, then

frowns, looks at me strangely, finally seeking out our mother for counsel.

This twelve-year-old girl is my younger sister, just barely approaching the brink of the dropping-off point we call adolescence. As Mary Pipher has poignantly described in her book dedicated to outlining the process by which American girls are robbed of their vibrance (*Reviving Ophelia*), my sister will soon discover what her culture defines as womanhood. She will eventually embrace or reject this definition. Viewed through the critical eyes of society, her worth will be measured more and more in terms of the way she looks, not what she thinks or does. I am worried for her.

My sister already understands very well how important it is to be pretty. This necessity is so important, in fact, that the priority of "looking good" has been virtually chiseled into everyone's brain. My sister played with Barbie dolls, admiring their beautiful (plastic) figures; she clumped around in our mother's high heels almost as soon as she could walk; and now she sometimes sneaks a tube of lipstick from mom's purse to practice with (much to our mother's dismay). These pre-dress rehearsals are good practice; my younger sister has been "lucky" in that she's "cute." Now she'll just have to learn to polish her looks- and this includes shaving her legs.

My sister's act of leg-shaving marks an initial rite of passage into the world of American womanhood, which involves an attempt to maintain a perfectly "unblemished" skin texture. In doing so, my sister joins the cult of over ten million women in the United States who remove hair from their bodies in order to achieve a smoother, softer look. (More women in America remove their body hair than women of just about every other Western culture.) Just as her body begins to ripen with the fruits of maturity, she seeks to halt its progress and remain the hairless, scintillating youth she once was: a sexless and innocent being.

This desire to remain completely hairless (while prepubes-

cent boys grow fur freely and proudly) mirrors the senseless value placed on young-looking females in American culture. In fact, within our youth-obsessed society, the popular notion that women's bodies should remain hairless throughout adulthood closely reflects the way in which American culture seeks to keep women looking less like women and more like little girls. As Rita Freedman suggests, "since the social control of children can be readily justified, then so far as women appear to be childlike, their subordinate social position can be rationalized" [emphasis added] (Freedman 194). In the long run, immature attributes render women less powerful and self-sufficient, which, as feminism has taught us, is central to the patriarchal agenda that seeks to maintain its own privileged position.

Perhaps my sister will not yet realize, as she is further inaugurated into her adult female life, that female beauty, for perhaps thousands of years, has been defined only by men. Maybe this fact won't matter much to her. But considering the impact that pressures to conform to standardized American beauty have on females all over the world, many feminists feel it is critical to scrutinize institutions created for women by men if we are ever to arrive at some epiphanal understanding of our culture and ultimately ourselves.

Several contemporary feminists, such as Naomi Wolf (author of the highly esteemed *The Beauty Myth*), have tried to thoroughly explain the beauty institutions that preoccupy women's concern. For centuries, it has been men who decide how women should look, and most women have conformed to those proscribed guidelines of aesthetic appeal. While systematically perpetuating patriarchal values which dictate women's subordination, men make money off these beauty ideals as well. (A quick glance at a few television commercials aired during a program directed to women will serve to illustrate this point.)

Quyn Horton

Not since the reign of the goddess societies have women been in control of their own bodies and images. Nonetheless, female beauty throughout the centuries has been as varied as a patchwork quilt: "During a certain fashion era, women bind their breasts to look more childish; then during the next era they pad their breasts to look more sensuous" (Freedman 193). (Interestingly, the most attractive women in contemporary culture seem to be the ones who tirelessly maintain a balancing act between the look of a curvy, maternalized sex object and a prepubescent girl: Consider, for example, the popular appeal of Marilyn Monroe.) Historically, it seems that relatively few women have actively rebelled against the tradition of the female mold. Although the twentieth century has been less relentless in demanding that women's ultimate goal should be catching a man (the prize of being beautiful), millions of America women continue their fruitless attempts to shape themselves into the "cult of true womanhood," thereby prolonging and strengthening patriarchal systems of oppression.

Let's consider the practice of leg-shaving within the context of American beauty culture. Probably 95% of American fashion magazines boast tall, lanky and hairless women who often appear as though they were frozen in an eternity of suspended animation just before they got their first period. Most display "imitations of inanimate objects, they stare blankly, gaze provocatively, or smile simply, but rarely convey the full range of mature adult emotions" (Freedman 194). These are the women who set the standards for beauty, emphasizing "an infantile look, [which] makes women increasingly more vulnerable as they mature" (Freedman 192). America is the cult of youth, one might argue, as clearly demonstrated by popular media—from fashion magazines to television sitcoms to dolls made for little girls' play.

Since youth and beauty seem to be so inextricably linked in our culture, age also closely corresponds to personal worth. Unlike

other cultures, and even several societies within the “developed” world (such as those in Spain, Italy, Asia and Africa) American women are considered “old” around age forty. Not-so-ironically, women of other cultures also do not remove their body hair, although many of them are much more furry than white American women. As Rita Freedman has suggested, it’s not that women really are old at forty, it’s simply the fact that they “no longer look very young” (Freedman 200), which translates into decreased worth as a person. In short, a culture that recognizes the value of experience does not equate beauty with immaturity.

Aging men in American culture do not experience the same loss of worth pinned on by social standards, as their social worth depends largely upon intellectual, financial and productive performance, not attractiveness and ornamental value. A man with graying hair or lined facial features might be called “distinguished,” while a woman of the same description is notably “old.”

But why is looking young so obviously synonymous with looking good? The answer is complex. The tendency to admire young-looking females seems to be peculiar to contemporary American culture. Rita Freedman has described “juvenile characteristics persisting into maturity” (such as small breasts, skinny, shapeless bodies and complete hairlessness—all aspects of the beautiful 90’s woman) as neotenic traits, a word which comes from the Greek “neo” (new) and “tein” (to stretch) (Freedman 193). These grossly immature qualities evoke a feeling of compassion in us, reminding us of our love for children. Everything from hair accessories (girlish barrettes) to shoes (dainty Mary-Janes) show us that women, if they want to look like the “beautiful” fashion models, need to maintain a distinctly girlish look.

Leg shaving is only a small part of the belle institution. The patriarchy, created by men (and often enforced by women) seeks to render females innocuous by imposing unrealistic beauty stan-

dards upon them, suggesting that all women should look underage. When women can no longer uphold the charade, they drop off the plank into shameful waters of unacceptability. After all, an immature look asks for attention and help, and when someone is in need they aren't very powerful at all.

This neotenic look conveys a definite lack of maturity, self-control, wisdom and authority (Freedman 195). An adult female's childlike image "amuses and fascinates men because it's such a contrast to their own superior strength and masculine ability" (Freedman 194). Clearly, this explanation remains intact only in a society which insists that gender roles continue to be incontrovertibly clear. After all, as Jennifer Reid Maxey Myhre has eloquently described, "if people aren't easily distinguishable as male or female, we run the risk of becoming attracted to a person of the same sex"- a cardinal sin in a flagrantly homophobic and hetrosexist society (Myhre 135).

Hairlessness is part of the larger idea that women should remain childlike, since visible body hair connotes ideas of power and maturity. Its reminds us of some sort of animalistic domain. As Rita Freedman points out, male attractiveness most often stresses dominant characteristics, such as thick hair and muscles, while female attractiveness relies mostly upon the neotenic traits described above. The high contrast between the female and male standards seems to openly reinforce male dominance and control—being a woman, in our culture, is almost synonymous with being not-man (Myhre 133). This explanation accounts for the acceptance of male body hair and the aversion to female body hair although hair on all human bodies is equally natural.

There is a painfully obvious link between the demand that women be hairless and the perfectionism found in women suffering from eating disorders. The ability to control one's body (thus shaping it into the mold of feminine beauty) evokes a feeling of power

(while the girl is really feeling devastatingly powerless). Numerous accounts of anorexic women describe the feelings of power and control associated with not eating. Is it any coincidence that these starving women are also retarding their body's natural growth? Perhaps the anorexic can be thought of as the ultimate woman-child: She seeks to take up as little space as possible through literally erasing her body.

In June of 1997, a popular fashion/women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, published an article explaining at great lengths "what men really want in a woman," and what will "turn a man off in bed." Along with "thoughtless comments and irksome habits," hairy legs and armpits were apparently on the top of the turn-off list for white American men. *Cosmo* reported later that 84% of all American men were repulsed by of female body hair, the sight of which will automatically "send a man's passion packing" (Katz 172). Apparently, smooth legs benefit women only within the process of catching and holding onto a man. Obviously, it "takes work to look like a woman" (Myhre 134).

Evidently, the practice of female hair removal has emerged relatively recently. As female skirts became shorter and shorter, skin became smoother and smother. However, the Roman poet Ovid wrote over two thousand years ago, in his *Ars Amatoria* (The Art of Love), "let no rude goat find his way beneath your arms, and let not your legs be rough with bristling hair" (qt. in Freedman 198). Still, hair on men has long been indicative of dominance and high power. In Egypt, for example, beards were permitted only for royalty. An interesting variation on this theme is found in the case of Queen Hatshepsut, who "wore a goatee to affirm her high status" (Freedman 198). (Freedman goes on to point out that today even the slightest hint of facial hair on a woman will completely negate all other aspects of her charm.)

Although there seems to be a general lack of academic

literature written on the topic of leg-shaving's history, it seems most logical to conclude that the practice must have emerged sometime this century—probably around the 1920's or 1930's. It was certainly a bona fide institution by the 1950's. After all, for years and years, particularly in the Victorian Age, women's legs were completely covered in layers and layers of restrictive skirts. As skirts became shorter and shorter, hairlessness became more and more a distinct requirement.

Capitalists have certainly cashed in on women's need to remain hairless. In 1997, the female leg shaving industry reported profits exceeding four billion dollars annually (Anonymous 15). Along with the traditional methods of shaving, modern industry has invented a plethora of alternatives to remove "unwanted hair," including depilatories, plucking, waxing, creaming and electrolysis, all of which have often painful and irritating side effects, take up a lot of time, and cost more than an arm and a leg. Shortly after the Epilady machine was put on the market, which painfully tears out each individual leg hair using a series of rotating tweezers, the company producing the product sold 3.5 million sales units. (Apparently, beauty really is pain!) (Garry 45). The recent "laser technique" innovation involves a new laser technology that actually disables hair follicles and retards hair growth. The "treatment" can take up to several hours depending on the area being treated, and although reportedly less painful than electrolysis, laser treatment costs a bundle.

During the electrolysis operation, a "needle is inserted into each individual follicle and an electric current is passed through it. The follicle-by-follicle procedure is painful and typically requires months and even years of regular visits for treatment of even a small skin area, such as the upper lip" (Anonymous 16). A vast majority of women seem to be eternally preoccupied with the dilemma of removing the hair on their bodies, and the industry isn't

showing any signs of relenting. Even one professor of dermatology in the hair removal business has claimed, “hair removal is a false norm imposed on women, a waste of an industry. You’d think women would have stopped worrying about it long ago” (qtd. in Glock 50). Not only is the norm very true, but most American women seem to be very concerned about their unwanted hair, and they’re willing to pay a high price to get it out of their lives.

Alongside scientists in the research labs, who seem to be constantly seeking out new methods to get rid of unwanted hair, fashion designers also “capitalize on the value of the neotenic look by borrowing from kiddie fashions—pinafores, lacy smocks, baby doll nighties, floppy bows and pastel shades” (Freedman 193). In the clandestine advertising industry, women are literally asked to compete with their little girls’ looks. Commercials ask, “Are you protecting your schoolgirl complexion and guarding your girlish figure?” Clearly, a “dominant theme in commercials [is] ‘Women shouldn’t grow up’” (Freedman 193). Conversely, this mentality ultimately leads to the sexualization of little girls, while their mothers strive to maintain their “girlish” attributes. Each might be considered equally appealing in the eyes of pop culture leaves both girls and adult women at risk of becoming sexually exploited.

During the feminist resurgence in the 1960’s and 1970’s (when the media finally began, once again, to pay attention to feminist concerns), women began to vocalize their choice not to remove their body hair. It seems the “second feminist wave” marked leg shaving as a feminist issue. While this choice certainly made a very stentorian political statement, it seems that these women were aiming for a “natural look,” rejecting the high-gloss image of woman that was fashionable at the time.

In the early 1970’s, rock-poet and feminist icon Patti Smith released her popular album *Easter*, the cover of which displayed a photograph of the artist wearing a tank top. Patti Smith never

shaved her armpits, as was clearly visible on the cover. The mere sight of this photograph, a woman with armpit hair intact, was considered so offensive and scandalous that the album was taken off record store shelves for months.

As we approach the 21st century, there seems to be an idea that “rampant leg hair” is an uncomfortable and unnecessary reminder of 1970’s feminism (Glock 48). Still, more and more women are choosing to leave their bodies as they are, thereby appreciating themselves and saving precious energy for other projects more worthy of their time. Leaving your body intact will either encourage other women to do the same or provoke ridicule from those adhering closely to the norm. “Some of us came to feminism because of abuse, harassment, eating disorders...I came to feminism because I hated shaving my legs” (Myhre 133). Women who won’t shave their legs seem to exemplify the media’s stereotypical feminist—an ardently political and strong woman. I can identify with Myhre when she boldly exclaims, “I am one of those feminists that are made so much of in the media: a hairy-legged, strident, ‘masculine’ woman, a ‘man-hater’ (another word for women who chose to tell the truth about men and patriarchy). I am a feminist with whom other feminists are sometimes uncomfortable: ‘She gives the rest of us a bad name’” (Myhre 136). Instead of exerting a more “natural” look, which was the original intention of hairy-legged feminist of the 1960’s and 1970’s, proudly wearing all your body hair exclaims forcefully, “I reject male beauty standards and the gender roles associated with them!!”

Boys in my generation and political ilk also seem to appreciate this act of feminist rebellion. Take, for example, twenty-four-year-old white heterosexual Will Casey, a mathematics instructor at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He tells me that “female attractiveness is really more dependent on charisma for me, and intelligence,” but women who wear their natural leg hair are defi-

nately "making a statement. A very loud statement about refusing to conform. I am strongly attracted to non-conformists, female and male." Leaving body hair as it is, he claims, is "serving egalitarianism. It's an open rejection of patriarchal forces." It's clear that there's really no way to "naturally" wear leg hair now, since it has become such a statement.

My decision to not shave my body identifies me as a feminist in an insidiously surreptitious patriarchy. Ironically, I did shave my head for many years, a practice that evoked an interesting response from my family and friends. "You're shaved in all the wrong places," proclaimed my mother when I was fourteen. My hair habits are still the subject of much debate in my household. My mother, like my friends' mothers, would prefer that I conform to beauty standards to avoid societal rejection and ridicule. What these older women fail to realize, however, is that being accepted by popular culture is not even on my political agenda at all. I have better things to worry about. Having society tell me I am attractive would only hinder my goals as a woman and as a feminist.

On warm days, I wear shorts and tank tops, comfortable with my own body hair. I accept the responsibility of understanding what that means to society. People sometimes feel that it's my job to explain to them the reasons I won't shave. But I don't. It's up to them to figure it out themselves. And while I hope that my younger sister will follow my lead and define her body on her own terms, it is ultimately her decision to shave or not to shave. I can only be there for her when she needs me.

In the end, body hair really is a very personal issue. Ideally, each woman will one day realize that in order to establish her power as a human being, she needs to exert a more assertive look. Overthrowing the patriarchy includes defining ourselves on our own individual terms. Not until women once again define their bodies for themselves will we restore our positive position. Some women

Quyn Horton

claim to shave “for themselves,” as though they would do it even if men didn’t prefer them to be hairless. This explanation is not only fallacious but also a sad denial of the real issue at hand. We’ve all survived over two thousand years of patriarchal hierarchies, so a return to female-defined beauty will mean a restoration of collective female self-esteem and power. One woman at a time, we are moving in on the systems of control. Women all over the world are beginning to rebel. I hope my young sister will join us and learn to reject the prescribed ideals set out for her. Only then will things truly begin to change.



Poet's Independence

Mad harlequin runs up a pole
waves her paper flag.
Stabs at her brain with a sharp pencil.
Waits for that One.
Screams at her foolish mind,
that flies wild.
She stares at the fireworks,
her grin Explodes
Kills her document.

The Time For Woman

Sojourner Truth 1857.

"Ain't I a woman?"

Racism challenging true womanhood.

How she was cheered.

Wasn't the answer "Yes!?"

Me 1997.

Can't I ask the same?

Ain't I a woman too?

Though hair not as fine

My thighs not as supple

My waist not as thin?

Though by no act short of rebirth

could I be your standard of beauty?

But ain't I a woman?

Though my eyes aren't smoke

My skin's not as tight

My lips not as smile-ready?

No Cosmo Redbook Kate Moss

Cindy Crawford movie star frame?

But ain't I a woman and ain't that enough?

Do I not hold that sacred womanhood?

I am what you are.

Can you tell me "Yes!?"

1:49 a.m.

Squeeze me dry
I'll leave this sailor with a kiss
Though I tend to forget
I've been given a seasoned life

When the ink's a bit too edible
I'll fetch my damned dedication
Now my winter made of trees
 is dripping with peanut butter

Can shards of glass thrust in your hand
Help you somehow understand
That I dance to something other than a tune?

I'll tell the stars all I know
While you journey through Bordeaux
I'll glaze my hands and cheeks
 in plaster on the moon

1:51 AM

She creeps like the night
overtaking me in the evening hour.
Darkening my way blinding me

Taking out the color and making
it all black and white.

She's magical, mysterious and scary, but
peaceful comforting, quiet.
Beautiful in the lights that
awaken her color.

She winks like a star
touchlessly grabbing
my attention as she holds
me there with sheer
uniqueness of her full completeness

Leaves with the morning light,
and I feel better for
having a night.

Grateful for that
darkened dream
sad that it's over,
the morning brings forth
a new day, but I live
through it just for the
night.



Smiling Moon Woodblock Print

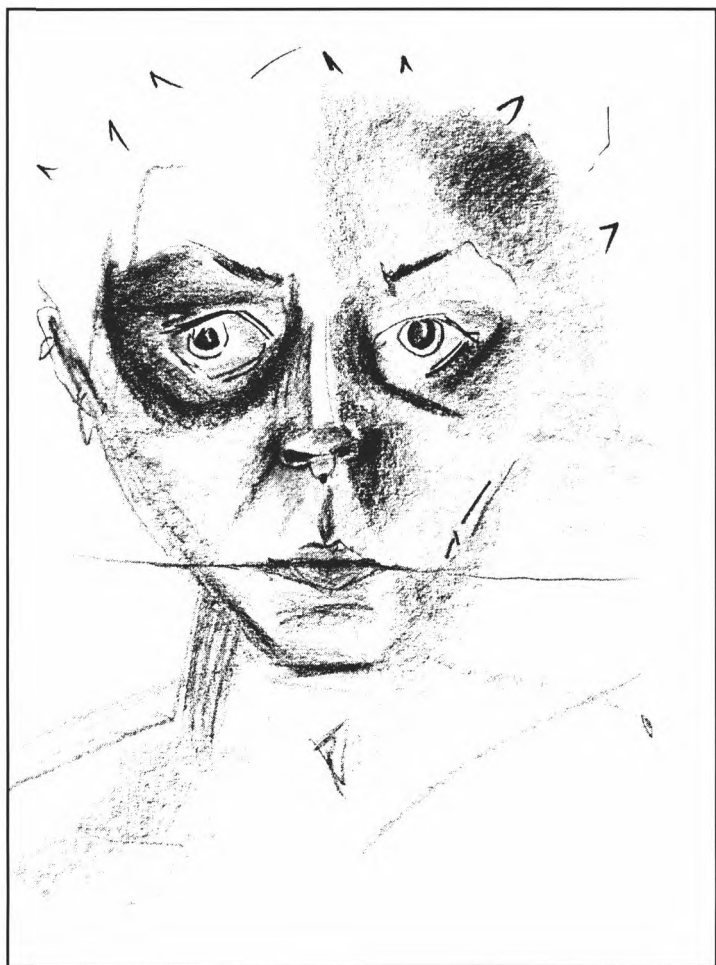
8:30 A.M.

I creep in on cat's paws
Hang up my clothes and
Start my overdue laundry.
I pick up a pen and go.

Down the hall, I sit to write.
I eat my Tootsie Roll breakfast,
Think of Byron and you and ska bands.
I decide sleep sounds good at last.

An encounter at the crosswalk

It was an orangish morning
as opposed to a reddish one
and she shown like a newly polished diamond
like a hero's armor in a fairy tale
like sparkly freshly cleaned teeth
the kind that can't stop smiling
they cannot be encased by rosy lips
Her laugh captured my breath
and the hiccups of early morning
evaporated into the air
like the dew of that self-same morning
It's time to DANCE It's time to SING It's time to LIVE
she says
I stand still and stare
as usual I am flabbergasted
she floats by me in an easy way
but she doesn't grab my hand
and with a giggle
a bubble from the very depth of me
I hop upon her cloud
There's always enough float for two
she says
And I believe her





Self Portrait 2 Pencil

Still Life

Semi-circles

Square

Rectangle

3x4

Fake thick wood

Silver metal shining in the sun maybe plastic

Sitting on my window mantle

holding life

still life

Nabbing at words arresting actions

Find expression

5x7

showing chronological years

artificial or real

Sears Wal-Mart professional

now a piece of my mantle

You fit in my wallet keeping me company

cut between two pieces of glass

maybe plastic

Wire loops hold you together

You sit on my mantle and strike my brain

as I strike a match

Oh yes, Isabel, Todd, Cory in '86

Prom '92 in Korea, how fun

Black and white capturing all that isn't grey

distinct shapes and shades

Color, vibrant red of the lipstick wore out that night
the mahogany of our eyes
the carnation whiteness of our teeth
still ... no life ... giving life
Parts of my life
"Wear light colors not dark so your brown skin shows up"
Blind shades with fireplaces back yards
blue white or black
Thin sheets of paper, not liking water
Not liking fingertips or prints
Caught between a sheet of glass and cardboard

On my mantle - keeping ventricles pumping
I feel lids blink at me
Laughter bounces from eardrum
I remember life
It is...
still life.

Write to Life

Defense of Possie, a responsive piece

I am my curved fingers, calloused by keys striking, typing metaphors all in the honor of the hard-as-nails job every human has in common. This "job" is life, living.

The hardest thing I have ever had to do is live. I choose not to work two jobs: living is it for me. I write; therefore, I never have to work, in my eyes. Days are often times made worse for people by doing the arduous "nine-to-five," parking in the double car garage, closing the white-picketed gate at that "5:31 and a 1/2 p.m." time slot, and getting a kick in the ass as it latches shut. Ask Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, or Jane Fonda; never Mr. Heart And "Ouch," halloo and three and one-half kids from behind the three-and-one-half-bath holding-tank built to be a "home," never a "house" Life is supposed to fluxuate?

Life. Scales, roots, flames, cocoons, and phone bills never remain constant: their consistency is their state of flux. My scale is balanced and rollercoasters to the unbalanced; my roots siphon water and sometimes rust; my many flames burn, but burn me into wisdom; my cocoon gets plucked from its perch by wingless bats; and my phone bills are stacked next to Emily Grierson's taxes. All my inconsistencies are compiled and tapped from my pen to my paper, from my keys to my monitor in order to make a common sense for me and for others to interpret into sense by way of their senses.

My profession, Creative Writing, is the only thing in my

career which has remained solid, balanced like two ice-cubes at the bottom of a once lemonade-filled glass. Bitter-sweet are the cubes that melt so I may drink again. Thirsty am I for words of life, quenching me in explanatory therapy, dissolving into a common, universal sense from me to you.

Without writers the boy named Christian would not have his Bible, and numerous scribes would have picketed outside the abbey walls; Betsy Ross could have gone with pastels (written, however, that red is red, blue is blue, and white is white); without documentation, history would be fiction, and Mr. Smith would never have gone to Washington without script writers; bridges would collapse as easily as the engineer's coffee dribbled on her blue prints; without written descriptions, lilies would smell like leavings of the valley; "life" would have no definition in Samuel Johnson's dictionary; Hellen Keller would have been one more noisy bitch; "P.M.S." could have turned out to be the original sin; Forest Gump would have eaten the wrappers along with his truffles—some call them truffles—someone had to write the warning label on his box of chocolates; and I,...I would be unemployed with no right to a worthwhile life—in my eyes. P.S. "'Ain't' ain't a word, and 'ain't' ain't in the dictionary" would be poetic, and Shakespeare would have been tragically employed by Hallmark and comically staffed by Shoe Box.

Ode to a finality: I am alive because I write. My profession comes from my name chosen from many words, formed by letters; I have a background in the arts, my religion; I have an education through books, taught by facilitators educated by books—fact or fiction, the written word; I have a sense of humor and commonality; I have wisdom through suffering; and I find sanity in my manuscripts. You, the reader, you the listener have all of me in creation. You have what every writer wrote for you or to you. A factual Ode: Life is stiff; death is limp... You have

Molly Lloyd

the freedom to interpret these words... But not my clothes, my nose, my posture, not my cigarettes, my flat tire, my dialect, not the rings on my fingers, but instead the roses in my ink stolen from your gardens.

Ode: to a pen

Black lips spill
Passion, across my page
Your rounded mouth speaks
my imprisoned impressions,
your blood speaks my thoughts,
But when I need a transfusion
your vein is bloodless.

God, Send Me A Poem

Beside the bum Bo bee picked sunflower
on a piece of petrified wood
around 6 a.m. when the sun
is playing peek-a-boo with the mountains I
try to write a poem

Among the angel whipped clouds
within my shadow the
likes of myself rage to reflect
In a poem

Without the fog of traffic
far
from the stench of people's want
past the media parade
I still can't write a poem



In Utero

dull flesh tones
hint the obvious
but since our eyes
are ignorant of
light
we do not
see one another
but can feel
an arm,
a head
I can hear her call out
sometimes

The Cleansing of Emily

The endless ticking woke her up, hammer blows pounding their frustration and compounding the guilt again and again. An indigo blue light from the bedside clock, illuminating the shame, cast an ugly glare around the room. She was blinded.

A warm mass lay next to her unaware of her discomfort. She knew, even before she reached out her hand, she would encounter clammy, sleeping flesh moving slightly with each intake of breath. Easing from under the suffocation she edged back the covers, sat up slowly, and forced her muscles to strain and stretch. God forbid she wake him up! She moved slowly to the edge of the cardboard box mattress. She dreaded the shrieking protest of the overworked box springs, but at the same time, she questioned the injustice, the injustice of being a silent human. The box springs were capable of yelling everything she couldn't. Where had her screams gone?

Clawing through the imitation leather handbag, soft and worn and cheap, she grasped the lighter at the bottom and searched for the half smoked cigarette butt she had crammed there. Too many burn marks on lower back and buttocks meant he would never catch her smoking again. She still recalled the sizzling terror and contained shrieks; screaming only fueled his fury.

Jerkily, she made her way down the hall to the bathroom, only vaguely aware of the pale shadow reflected in the dresser mirror. Her breasts caught her attention. It wasn't what was there that surprised her. Rather, it was the absence of white, glowing globes demanding her concentration. Throbbing and bruised, her breasts were too big. Outlines of round hands and

purple fingerprints embraced the soft flesh, fading okra yellow. They sagged in defeat and years of betrayal. What bitter milk must have passed through these odd shaped sacs into her daughter! Perhaps it was the same bitterness he had inflected into her the night he learned his son was a girl. Perhaps. She didn't know. What she did know was that these two zits filled with bitter pus, sitting there with no real attachment to the body, were ugly and out of place. Somehow they didn't fit.

He always told her that her breasts were too small, unless, of course, his friends were groping at them, in which case, 'Why in the hell don't you cover them up, you stupid whore?' A whore: breasts too big, thighs too flabby, and eyes too black.

Shaking her head, as if to rid herself of the memories, she groped her way down the hall, hurried into the bathroom, snapped the door shut, and flicked on the light. More mirrors. It wasn't the mirror that frightened her really. What frightened her was what lay behind the mirror. Sitting on the toilet seat, the cold penetrating her naked flesh and giving rise to goose bumps, she tried not to think of Emily.

These were the nights she hated, nights when he used her horribly, stripped away all dignity, and mocked her. The mocking she could handle. She had lived long enough to know she wasn't the reason why he was angry. No, Daryll was mad at the world, and had he not learned of Eve's sin and Adam's expulsion, he probably wouldn't have hated her as much as he did.

"If Eve hadn't sinned, Adam surely would have." She forgot where she first heard that. It didn't matter anyway. Women had sinned, and that was what mattered. Yes, she sinned, and he knew it, too. But hadn't she had reason? Emily would have understood.

She stared at the cracked porcelain and peeling tile of the bathtub. All she could think about was cleansing herself. At that moment, she wanted more than anything, even more than Emily's life, to get that musky smell, his muddy stench, off of her. He had done it again: pushed her legs behind her ears and ripped into her with a million years' fury of wrongful accusation. With her legs back and him above her, she felt like a spider, a black widow tipped on her back for all the world to see her mark of Cain.

The image of bugs and spiders and smell of musty graveyards and humid mud reminded her of childhood years spent playing behind the wood shed. She and the little neighbor boy played games there. David's favorite games, besides marbles, was tying her up, stripping her naked, and putting bugs all over her until she wet herself from fear. She had sinned. She had lost at marbles. She always did. She heard David's words ringing in her ears, "Girls can't play marbles." Still, he forced her to, and when she didn't have enough nickels to pay, he forced her to play the game. She remembered lying there in the mud, head turned so that her eye was level with the muck, and she had only to roll her head an inch more to suffocate in the black goop. She would watch the roly poly bugs crawl by. There were so many. She'd watch in apathetic horror as David rolled them up in little, tight balls, stretched them out again, and wedged them in the mud on their backs. Their little legs would beat the air in a hopeless struggle for life. Did her legs beat the air when David pretended to go into her, using whatever he could find?

Even at that age she was beginning to realize that the little hole which she had and David didn't provided some sort of atonement for her sins. Shaking her head, she hunched over the toilet, peering into the bathtub. She knew Emily wouldn't be

there, but that didn't stop her from checking. The memories flooded back. Emily, bath time, Daryll is going out drinking with friends.

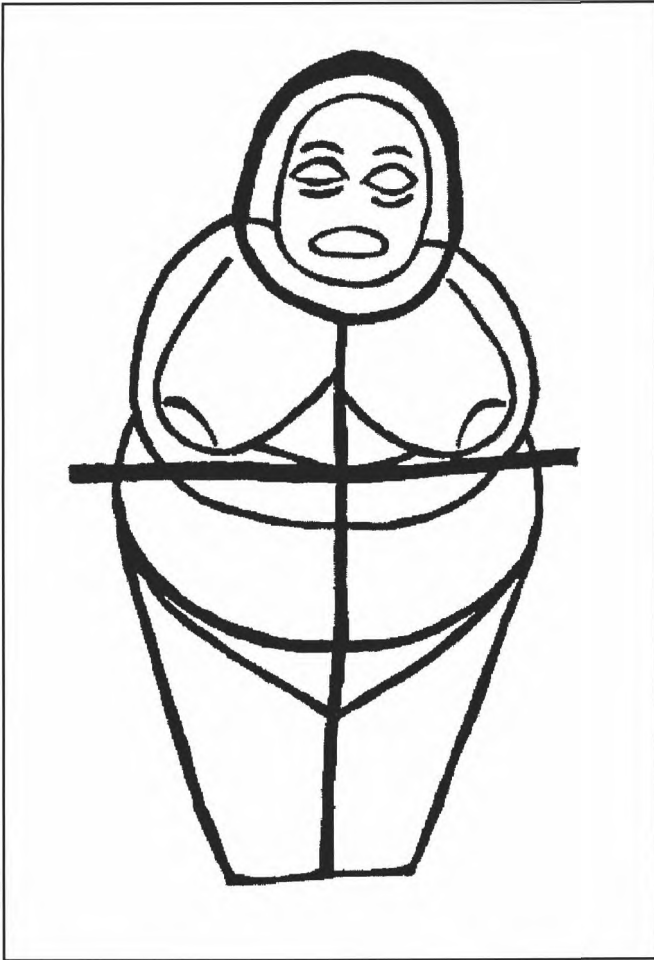
"That little bitch had better be asleep by the time I get home. If she wakes up again, I'll give her something to cry about."

"Her name is Emily." A mere whisper as though it had never occurred to her before. Emily had sinned. From the moment of conception, Emily had sinned. Daryll had realized something he shouldn't have, something no father should have. Emily had built-in atonement.

Daryll slammed out of the house. An engine revved, gravel spat, and a car roared. A decision was made. Emily's gurgling drew her attention. Smiling eyes. Slowly removing her hand from the base of Emily's head, she turned her back and left the room.

Daryll never questioned her story. Secretly, she knew he was glad; one less month to feed meant more money for booze. She never mentioned Emily's name anymore. A special secret she wanted to keep to herself, Emily was hers and always would be. She would never have to remember her pain mirrored in Emily's eyes, shining bitterness and hatred at the life she hadn't chosen but had been forced to live. Smiling eyes, that is how she would be remembered.

She peeled her sticky skin off the toilet seat and shoved the now crumpled, unsmoked cigarette butt deep in the garbage. Throwing one last glance at the cracked porcelain, she flicked off the light and crept down the hall. She didn't regret Emily. She didn't regret Emily's death. She didn't even regret marrying Daryll as she slid back into bed that night. What she did regret was that little hole, the injustice of silent atonement.



We are the Women

We are the women
A great fight scars us
We are skeleton women
Scavenging for what is left, building a greener future.

You are the industry you are the enemy.
I can say it is *you*
You have failed us in the name of money interests.
Left us while you whore around with your corporations.

How much scorn you have for women's philosophy.
You forsake to see the difference.
You are afraid you will see into that mirror,
reflecting the horror of your own soul.

You can't make a treaty with devastation
By opening oil fields in Yellowstone or putting particles in your
children's lungs.
Passing your legacy of overconsumption biohazards toxins:
destruction.
Stop thinking of power structure, and sodomizing the one that
gives you life.

We are the women who have decided you are wrong.
We are the women who fight this rape of the earth.
We are the women who will stop you from polluting our wombs.
We are the salt of the earth, as you are without flavor, and we
are the power of change.

Finish The Story

She swallowed the last of her formula 44D, put on the blue wig, instead of the green, walked out the front door, turned and locked it ...

He always locked the door, he was obsessive about it. She wished she could be there to see the look of surprise on his face when he walked through the door and found his place empty. There weren't even ice cube trays left in the freezer. She turned and skipped down the sidewalk.

He was a slave to his passions, and he had a passion for material objects. He lived in a world only of images, namely, his image. If it made him look cultured and affluent, he bought it.

So where was he, she asked on the phone last night when she finally got a hold of him. Where was he on their anniversary??

"I was shopping ... you should see the stuff I bought ... Why? Were we supposed to do something?" Idiot.

She smiled as she headed back downtown, thinking of how all his new toys had been carefully laid out on his bed ... hmm, now there was no bed. Satisfied, she turned up her collar, adjusted her wig, and walked on.



Dream House

Two eleven year old girls, one black with two long ponytails and the other white with a mushroom haircut both sit on a street curb talking.

White girl: Who are you? Where are you from? Where do you live? I have never seen you before.

Black girl: Who am I? Where am I from? It's a long story.

The world is my world. My house is that brick box over there. That used car over here. Those ugly white walls with no floors. My home is that red, blue, and yellow castle you built from leggos today. My house is that sandcastle dirty and brown. The castle held together by the sun, like glue, and melted by the mean, jealous, dirty ocean. My house is the cool one made with black clubs, red hearts, spades, and diamonds weaker than the hot, angry breath of the big bad wolf.

My favorite house is the good tasty house not made of sugary candy, white icing looking like Elmer's glue or stale gingerbread. No No. i like the splinter giving, teeth-freezing, popsicle sticks but it had a neat look to it. A cross between a log cabin, popsicle sticks.

Then again did you ever have the Fort house? Two old couches pushed together with fitted, queen, King size sheets. Twin bedspreads tied in knots looking like oversized bows holding my pony tail together. Crawling through one end always lowering your head as not to rip the fort-house. All colors—checked, plaid, tie-dye, orange, blue green, red, even white. Polyester but never silk for the sheets with holes had to be our roof or windows.

Shaashawn Dial

i bet you're thinking of that other house –the game children are known to play. You know ... the game of house. The girl plays the mommy, a boy plays the daddy, someone plays children. I'm not talking about that house because it is not for me. i don't want a husband or to be a mommy and don't want to cook that hard plastic mixed up colored supposed to be food. It is boring after three minutes. i like better to play school because i am always the teacher or lawyer because i am always the boss. i like games where i am in charge, everyone listens to me and does what i say—like in my house.

Okay, no more jokes—my house is several houses though with no backyards. My house is a base, post, academy, or military installation. Not like the bases used for baseball – i mean an army base or post, academy or military installation. Those houses with thin walls, neighbors within an arm's reach. Bleached walls, tall floors, quarters is what we call them. No silly, not like what goes in the bubble gum machine. Military quarters— that is what mom and dad call them.

Many of my houses have had a fort before their names like Fort Ord, California, Fort Sheridan, Illinois, Fort Lee, Virginia. Others have been installations in Germany, like Giebelstalt and Leighton where i was born in an old castle. The castle was dark and gray on the outside and huge in the inside. High ceilings, millions of windows like in the movie *The Princess Bride* but it didn't have a cool drawbridge or gates. At least not ones that worked. i still like it anyway though.

i was only at an academy for one year --it was called West Point. For six months i lived at the Armed Forces staff college in Virginia, and later i lived in Yongsan; i didn't pronounce that wrong – it's Hongual. It's the language of the people who live in Korea. i lived in Seoul for two years; it's the capital of Korea. Korea was a huge rice field. The fields looked

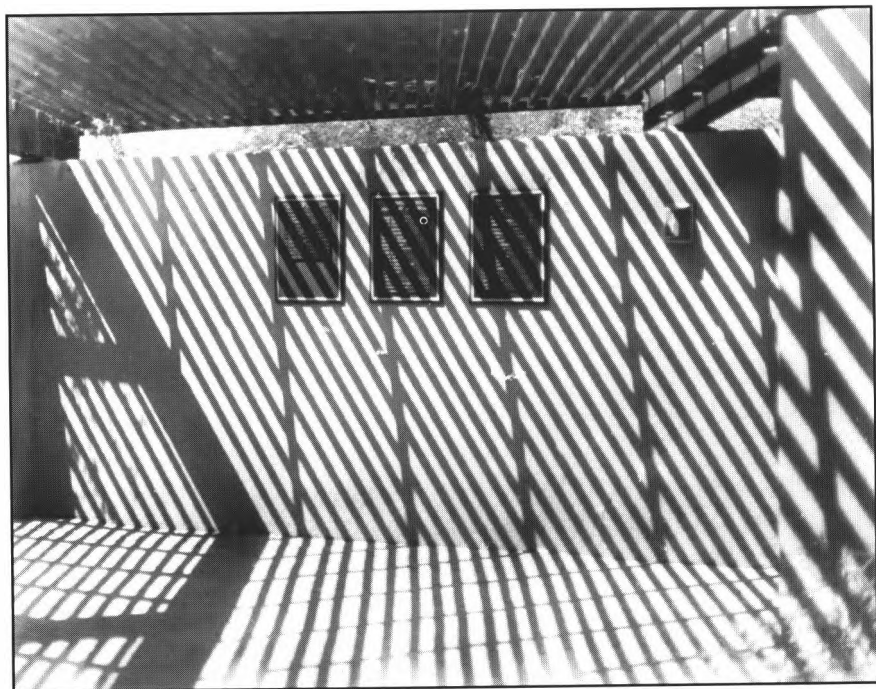
like tons of perfectly braided cornrows, green instead of black and on land instead of in my hair. Lots of the people lived in tin huts. They are hard to describe if you haven't seen them. i guess they are like metal igloos or metal tents. Not everyone lives in those, just people in the country. In the city they live in houses just like people here, except they go up and up into the sky. The tallest buildings i have ever seen.

Besides that, i live on a base or post. No, i don't mean a post like the brown wooden thing you put in the ground to hold up signs or something. i'm not talking about Post Raisin Bran either. It is the place they call the area that most army people live on.

The thing i hate the most about these places is OD Green. It means olive drab green—that gross color of green. It isn't dark, dark green like a pretty forest or pretty, lighter green like my birthstone Emerald. It is the ugly sad green that looks like it has brown and gray and other sad colors mixed in to it. It's on the GI's clothes, duffel bags, hats, scarves, everything. Oh, i didn't tell you what a GI is. It stands for government issued. Weird, huh? i wonder if that means GI Joe is government issued? We normally call the people in the army soldiers or GI's. i guess if you become a soldier the government owns you and gives you things so you are called a GI. Anyway, i like them cause they are really nice, like the big brothers and sisters i never had.

flagler

standing barefoot on dirty gritty salt
squishing toes together like petals
I stare across the concrete fenceposts
defeated window screens flapping
tangled easter bonnets twisting fall
like a rope strand by strand
shards of sunlight splinters prick slit eyes
as the sweat drips down behind my knees
you snap up behind me with dirty hair
my beads around your wrist
crusty with my love
I watch my edges dissolve
to become transparent
clear liquid for you to pour whenever you choose



Shaded Name

A man I never met
Known only through pictures and
letters not mine.

Your existence laid in a
pile of numbers
Turning, swishing, meshing
You were given clothes,
a gun,
a serial number,
a mission to win the unknown war.

With lens eyes you captured the truth,
but these eyes cannot speak and do not show the
reality

You were ready to come home to the
vast mountainous hills of green, to the
mixed smell of Mama's fried okra
and homemade biscuits,
the land of hay and cows
HOME, HOME

The familiar, the life of no demands of patriotic duty,
No killing,
and what is it you are killing for,
for whom, why?
WHY?

So close was your freedom,
but how dangerous the jungles.
When you heard the sound,
the hateful cry of the angels,
did it swallow you instantly, or
did you feel the warmth and thickness of life slowly
drain out of your body?
So close,
So close was your freedom

I know little of you, only stories rarely spoken.
Sadness flickers in the eyes of those your memory passes.
I knew you only by pictures, yet
your eyes fill me with years of acquaintance.
You remain as the man I never knew
We never said hello
Or had those southern Christmas moments

With black and white eyes I see
history, heritage
Two souls on different paths,
Separate destinies

All that remains, to touch, is a
granite name
shaded on paper

Portrait of Pain: Frida Kahlo

I distinctly remember the first time I heard the name Frida Kahlo. At a small bookstore in Lawrence, Kansas, I came upon a book full of vibrant and disturbing images, most centering around the face of a Mexican woman. This face intrigued me: I could not divert my eyes from hers; they stared at me as if in contempt. Her single dark eyebrow, her faint yet noticeable mustache and her black, thick locks of hair made me think, "This woman is beautiful." I turned to my friend and inquired, "Who is Frida Kahlo?" She answered, "A Mexican artist who was split in half in a bus accident."

Frida Kahlo's life was defined by art and pain. Sarah Lowe describes how Kahlo, diagnosed at the age of six with polio, lived her young adult life with one leg shorter than the other and excruciatingly painful trophic ulcers. These "deformities" were the source of much self-criticism and self-consciousness, the beginnings of the self-evaluations which would dominate her adult life and her art. However, during her teens, in September of 1925, Kahlo was in the accident which began her lifetime of suffering. On her way home to Cocoacan, Mexico, from the National Preparatory School in Mexico City, a passing trolley crashed into the bus she was traveling in (Lowe 18). The impact of the collision thrust a metal handrail into Kahlo's back and through her vagina (McEwen 43). This handrail, as Kahlo describes, took her virginity (Lowe 18). John McEwen tells how Kahlo was said to have been found: "bleeding and stark naked but covered in gold dust from a burst packet carried by one of the passengers" (43).

This accident left Kahlo both physically and emotionally

scarred. Her physical injuries included numerous breaks in her pelvic bone, spinal column, and collar bone. Her right leg was broken in eleven places and her right foot was crushed (Lowe 18). The emotional effects are far less easy to explain, but through her art and her words, Kahlo literally paints a very clear picture of her own suffering.

Although physically weak and vulnerable to infection, Frida Kahlo's spirit and drive were strong and unwavering. Though the limits of her fervor and zeal for life were more amazing aspects of her character after her accident, they were always part of Kahlo. Her resistance to "patriarchal constraints" was apparent even in adolescence. Frida's going to school, for example, stretched the limits of the sexist society she grew up in (Lowe 10). It has been said that in:

every facet of her life, Kahlo took a stance of defiance: against conventions of behavior and dress, against the circumscribed roles for women, against foreign imperialism and political oppression, and even against pain, illness and death. (Lowe 20)

The fact that Kahlo, a woman engulfed in the extremely patriarchal beliefs of Mexican culture, was an artist illustrated her deviation from the norm. She was "an exception to the rule of her time that women were no good at art" (McEwen 43). Furthermore, the way in which she created "overturned the expectations of the image of women in art" (Lowe 11).

Historically, self-portraits have been signs of vanity. For a woman to paint a self-portrait, let alone fifty-five, was exemplifying women's stereotypical obsession with appearance (Lowe 36). However, Kahlo did not portray herself in the modest, voluptuous, attractive way one would expect of a "vain woman." As Lowe notes, "nowhere does [Kahlo] present her body according to the notions of the female body in art" (61). She did not

Jamie Valentine

take pains to exclude her heavy and dark eyebrows or her thin mustache; if anything, she exaggerated them (Johnston 33). In one self-portrait, entitled *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*, she “eliminates from her self-image ... the social trappings of womanhood: long hair, dresses, and even modest posture” (Lowe 59). Kahlo was often seen in men’s clothing, a practice which infuriated her family, but which she felt declared her independence from societal pressures (Lowe 59). As Lowe further notes, “while Kahlo cannot be claimed as a feminist in the sense of the word that is used today, at moments throughout her life, with certain attitudes or decisions, in opinions or actions, Kahlo demonstrates a distinct feminist awareness” (26).

Feminists today might question Kahlo’s undying love and devotion to the famous painter, Diego Rivera. The self-respect and strength that seem so intrinsic in Kahlo’s character falter in her relationship with this fellow artist. Kahlo’s diary, which was published recently, “reveals deep conflicts about her role as Diego Rivera’s wife, a role she took quite seriously” (Lowe 20). Perhaps more startling is Kahlo describing her marriage to Rivera as her “most wounding experience” (Solomon 12).

Kahlo married Diego at the age of twenty-two in 1929; he was forty-three (Lowe 20). Through Kahlo’s description of the pain suffered because of Diego, it is obvious that their marriage was one of unhappiness and turbulence. Both sought extra-marital affairs to satisfy emotional and physical inadequacies at home (Lowe 22). Diego did not do well in keeping his affairs private and thus maintaining the couple’s dignity. At one time, Diego had a passionate affair with Kahlo’s younger, and favorite, sister Christine (Lowe 22). Kahlo had more discreet affairs with both men and women during this time. Her lesbian relationships have been described as “a form of resistance, a defiance of established behavior and sexual roles, a disregard for

propriety and bourgeois values" (Lowe 26). They could have also been simply good sex and good conversation. Diego and Kahlo divorced in autumn of 1939, only to be remarried one year later, December 8, 1940. Kahlo agreed to remarry Diego after his agreement to the conditions she set forth, including, "contractual independence, both monetarily and sexually, [the stipulation] that each would pay half the household expenses and they would refrain from sleeping together"(Lowe 28).

Despite pain and betrayal, the relationship shared by Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo was one of intense emotion and dependency. Kahlo described Rivera as her child, boyfriend, painter, lover, husband, father, mother, Universe, etc. Diego once said that "The more I loved [Kahlo], the more I wanted to hurt her" (Johnston 33). Kahlo and Rivera were in love and felt connected, but they were perhaps too passionate to have a happy and stable relationship.

It was her pain, her love and her self which constituted the theme of the vast majority of Frida Kahlo's one-hundred and fortythree paintings. She received many honors for her works, and her popularity saw a rebirth in the 1970's (McEwen 43). The often disturbing images most associated with her paintings include "bloody births and equally bloody deaths, fetuses, corpses, and disembodied organs" (Lowe 11). All of these images are directly related to her feelings of fear and incompleteness as a result of the accident. Unable to have children, Frida was obsessed with birth (Hopkinson 39). Being in constant pain and sickness, the anticipation of death must have haunted her. However, even in the years just prior to her death Kahlo produced numerous paintings, even five the year she died (Lowe 25).

In the last years of her life Frida suffered immensely. She was forced into eight corsets a day from 1944 on (McEwen 43).

Jamie Valentine

By the time of her death both of her legs had to be amputated, one because of gangrene infection (Lowe 68). She also started losing her fine motor skills, making the act of painting even more excruciating (Lowe 30). In response to losing both of her legs from the knee down, she wrote, "Feet, what do I need them for, if I have wings to fly?" (Lowe 68). Kahlo died at the age of 47 of a pulmonary embolism, although some wonder whether or not she committed suicide (McEwen 43).

When I first wondered about the amazing art and beautiful face on the cover of a book in Kansas, I had no idea what inspirations lay behind it. Now, looking into those piercing brown eyes, I see a whole life reflected. A life that ended, after Frida Kahlo's last diary entry declaring:
I hope the exit is joyful and I hope never to come back
Frida (Lowe 30).

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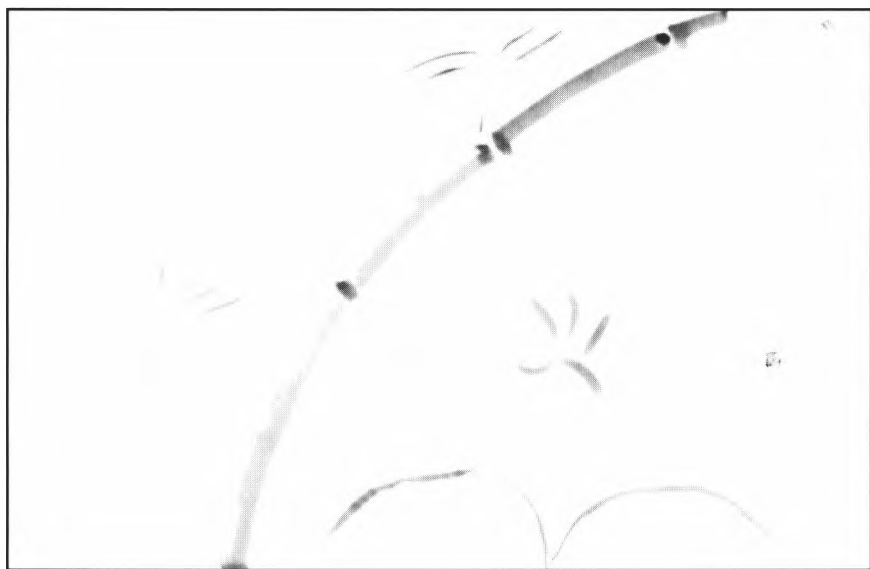
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Untitled Japanese Brush Painting

Woman Hands

When Jane was 16 she was in a car accident. A car date driving too fast down a dirt road. She sat shotgun with one arm casually resting in the window. The car tipped. Jane's face was ripped, her ear torn off, and her delicate arm scarred.

Now, when she gets upset, the corner of Jane's mouth twitches; she doesn't know that it does and I've never been able to tell her.

She's nervous. She doesn't like her kids driving at night. She's gone though, so they do. They get way out to the rich neighborhood and the car breaks down. They get rescued by a drunk fifteen year old boy's big brother, they think they're home free. Until Jane and her date for the night, the architect, come home from looking for them. The big sister gets yelled at, the little sister didn't want to stay home by herself, what else could she do? That architect, he had promise. He had a big screen t.v. with surround sound to watch *Top Gun* on. But he had too many cigarette burns on his white carpet. It didn't seem right. So I never saw that architect again, neither did Jane. He was just one of many, to come, coach little league, or let me drive the Pinto, and go. They all go, funny, since they're all so different. Jane doesn't cry.

Her three kids are all by the same father. She tries to be proud that all of her kids have the same father, Richard. He was Jane's second husband. He built the screened-in porch on the house on Webster St., the one we had to leave when he did. Don't worry, though, he'll still see us all of the time. We didn't worry, we knew. He took me to play bingo, but took the \$35 I won, just before Thanksgiving. They don't see much of Richard

anymore, they knew. Jane keeps all of her wedding bands, no matter what the marriage was like. I don't know how she can stand to look at some. But she does.

Now her ring finger is naked. Her knuckles are too swollen now for a wedding ring. Her hands are red and dry, the skin is cracked, each finger has a hang nail; she paints her nails thick with mauve, but doesn't cut the hangnails. She does it late, after laundry and M.A.S.H. and half a box of GPC menthols. Jane has always been a hard worker; she's always been a survivor.

Jane's hands seem separate from her body. She never touches herself. She never runs her hands through her hair or rests her chin in her palm.

Her right hand shakes; it's the one which holds tight to her menthol cigarettes. Her twitching mouth captures the smoke, and with short, tight, exhales, releases it into the old furniture.

She stays in the kitchen most of the time. But Jane doesn't cook, not really. Our food comes prepackaged. She has to empty the trash a lot.

In her tight Chic jeans and yellow t-shirt, the one she bought last week at the garage sale, the retired janitor across the alley loves to watch her take out the trash. He hollers and whistles and makes Jane's mouth twitch. She has to hurry so he doesn't make it out to her. She always has to hurry because she never has time.

SARA (Not At Home)

knock-kneed and mary-janed she's
ruffled down on cuffs of socks
bright-eyes
talkin' gawky and hot
sayin' 'omigod omigod'
and flashin' her friends'
pictures in my face

tip-toed her shoes mark
her pouty-mouthed stout
stalky she says
'billy corgan sang to me'
then flutters out of the room

spun head in taz and whirlwind
been invested in Wednesday
when her work should be done
and she's off in a blaze
piled-up thought
says 'my mother's dead' and
pops a zit and
falls asleep too late

on Saturday 2:37 (in the a.m.)
Sara pounds down each
door in the hall
to let us know she's o.k.
had a bit (slurred)

too much to drink and
bobs off over rounded shoulders

head cocked in class she's
queen at playing dumb
cuz how can she
concentrate when
her neck is crooked
and her head is stuck
on the high fuzz of imagery?

'o girl,' she twangs, heavy brow under
ratty-fad and fingered locks
'should I do it should I do it?'

eckley

The wind bumped me next to your silk velvet eyebrows
my turkey carved fingertips
snagged
on your edges
leaning between water logged brick you say
I guess a lot has happened

I start to drown in your space
circles of your air cover me
hands soapy with last years
still remember the road
they trace the way your hair
was

photographs of us
big with lips
trickle through my blood river
and I say yeah
a lot has happened



Finish The Story

She swallowed the last of her formula 44D, put on the blue wig, instead of the green, walked out the front door, turned and locked it, saying "Damn it!" Softly as the key got stuck in the lock. "This happens every damn time," she thought, as she finally wiggled the key free. She turned to leave looking at her watch pensively, and spied a rip in her newly bought hose. "Oh well, that just goes along with the rest of today". She dismissed the thought and started down the hall at a fast walk. Getting to the stairs, she stopped and checked her wig to make sure it was straight and then bent down, pulling up her hose as she stood, so as not to let the world see the "infamous" rip. With a sigh, she straightened up and ran down the spiral of stairs and past the front desk, where a receptionist stared at her with raised eyebrows. Out on the street a taxi was waiting and she tipped the driver for her tardiness. "Take me to the corner of 9th and Walgreen," she said. The driver smirked, looking in the rear view mirror and asked, "Taking a walk on the wild side baby?"

"No!" she retorted. "I'm meeting my boyfriend."

"Oh, well I guess that's the way to do it, but why are you all dressed up?"

She grinned mysteriously, and replied. "Because we're going to take a walk on the wild side."



"Untitled" Photography

Guest Pages

The Lincoln, Westminster, Stephens Joint Creative Writing Project

For the last three years, creative writing students from Lincoln University in Jefferson City and Westminster College in Fulton have come together with creative writing students from Stephens College to read from their original works in a series of events scheduled at the three institutions each spring. These readings have provided students with wider audiences for their work as well as given them opportunities to meet and share experiences.

In an effort to extend our collaboration to the printed page, the *Harbinger* staff this year for the first time invited submissions from Lincoln and Westminster students who had participated in the joint reading series. We are happy to print the following selections in the following guest pages and hope that our three-way collaboration can continue to grow.

We want to thank both Ginger Jones, English Professor at Lincoln University, whose bright idea started the joint series and whose energy keeps it going, and Westminster Professor Wayne Zade.

Tina Parke-Sutherland
Harbinger advisor

On Grandma's Porch

The first image to come to my mind when I think of a porch is my Grandma's porch in Moro, Arkansas. Where's Moro? It's about two hours from Little Rock and ten miles from any town. Yes, I did say town. There was no cable TV, or paved roads, parks, or convenience stores in Moro, but there were ditches, board driveways, snakes, and fields; more fields than Mrs. Fields has cookies. I remember one Monday (I know it was Monday because Monday was when a van took older people who didn't have any transportation into town to take care of business) I couldn't go with Grandma to town because I was "bad." I was left with my Aunt Red. Red's fourteen-year-old son, Sam, had just started working in the fields. I wasn't old enough to go with Sam. I had to be twelve and I was the ripe old age of eight. I decided to get on my bike and find which field they were plowing, anyway. Aunt Red could see my thoughts.

"You better not be getting off this porch, Monty."

"Why?"

"We been finding snakes under the house and burning 'em all week."

I sat down on the edge of the porch and dangled my legs.

"Can I go upto Mrs. Hill's house and play with Cedric?"

"No. Stay outta that road."

"I can't do nothing here."

"Sure can't. You know how people drive like fools," Red said, smacking her gums and smoking her hand-rolled Prince Albert cigarette. The mailman drove up to the mailbox and waved.

"I'm gonna go get the mail." Red made her way to the mailbox, and I made my way into the house to get a drink of water. By the time I came back to the porch, Red was coming in the house with the mail. This was it. I jumped on my bike as fast as I could and took off down the road. I heard Red's distant voice and pedaled faster. I rode my bike from field to field looking for my cousin. I was about to fall over from the heat when I looked over my shoulder and saw Mr. DJ driving up behind me. He stopped his truck beside me on the road.

"Mr. DJ, you seen Sam and 'nem?"

"No, but I seen Miss Flo' Lee and she lookin' for you. I suggest you put your bike in the back and get in." I couldn't move. Stiff as a board, I was. He got out and put my bike in his truck. I don't remember getting into the truck, but I do remember driving up to the house. Grandma was waiting for me on the porch. Oh my God, she was mad. She came walking down to the truck.

"Thank you, Mr. DJ."

"No trouble, Miss Flo'lee." By this time I was standing beside her.

"Get on the porch," she said to me. I went up on the porch and sat down. Grandma talked to Mr. DJ a little while longer. They laughed and talked. They laughed and he left. Mr. DJ drove up the road and I wished I was with him. Grandma came up on the porch and looked at me. She said, "Do you know what I thought when I came back here and you was gone?"

"No, I don't."

"You know all right. You could have been hit by one of those tractors or bit by a snake. Looking for Sam? Looking for Sam. Since you in the mood for looking for stuff, I want you to go look for me a good switch."

Tears ran down my face, not because I was about to get

the whooping of my life, but because Grandma had never whooped me before. A pinch and a twist didn't count. I had seen Grandma whoop my brothers for running her chickens and killing one of 'em, but I had never had to go to the switch tree. My eight-year-old life flashed before my eyes.

"I know you heard me."

I looked up at my Grandma and kept my eye on her as I was walking. Guess what? I fell off the porch. I thought then that I was out of the whooping, but that's what I got for thinking.

"Don't think falling down is gonna get you outta this. You know I can't stand no hard-headed kids!"

I got up and went over to the switch tree. There I was looking for a switch so I could get a whooping with it.

"You better find me a good one," my Grandma called, standing on the edge of the porch with her hands on her hips.

I asked myself if I should pick out a thin switch or a thick one. A thin one would hurt and a thick one would break. But, a thin one would break too. I should have stayed on that porch. I found one, not too thin, but not too thick and definitely not too long because switches can wrap around your legs. This was going to hurt. I took the switch to her and stepped up on the porch. I braced myself for the first swing of the switch. Come on, I thought. Maybe she won't do it, I thought. Then it happened. The whooping had began. My mouth was wide open, but I don't remember any sound coming out, then, I fell off of the porch.

"Get up."

I got up and did the whooping dance. It's a dance similar to the one done in the movie *Flashdance*, only in the whooping dance, the dancer runs in place. Next thing I knew, the whooping was over. When I think back to the whooping I

realize my Grandma only hit me with the switch three times but the sting from the whooping lasts to this day.

After the event, I was put on chicken detail. I had to clean the chicken coop, feed the chickens, let the chickens out, put the chickens in, gather the eggs, and, of course, wash the porch off every day.

I alternated living in Moro and in Kansas City, Missouri. But Moro was more my home. I felt secure and free there. Even though I wasn't with my mother and brother's, I had Grandma, Aunt Red, my cousin Sam, and Aunt Belle. When my mother and brothers would visit, the house would fill with relatives. Everyone would sit on the front porch and talk.

"You like school down here, baby?" Aunt Verlee asked me.

"Umm-hmm," I answered.

"You know your ABC's?" she asked me next.

"Yep," I said.

My Aunt Belle interjected, "What'd you just say?"

Thinking I had cussed or something, I looked at her and said, "Yeah?" I didn't know what I had said to attract her attention.

"You don't answer with 'yeah.' You say 'yes, ma'am.' I don't know what to do with you sometimes."

"Yes, ma'am," I said back.

Belle was my mama's sister, Granny's daughter and Grandma's granddaughter. She was my second mother. Belle taught me to respect education and to take it seriously, even though I was in the third grade. I remember Belle drilling me on my ABC's from the letters painted on the Ouija board kept behind the couch. Belle loved the soap opera *The Edge of Night*. Before my family had a VCR, I was Aunt Belle's human recorder. I would tell Aunt Belle what happened with whom. Being Belle's

recorder made me feel important. Watching the soaps became part of my day, everyday. Even now, I watch *Days of Our Lives*.

When I was a recorder, *Superman* and *The Edge of Night* came on TV at the same time. My cousin Sam and I would race to the TV; I almost always got to it first. One day, Sam got sick of me and Belle's story.

"*Superman* is on," Sam said.

"So. I'm watching my story," I told him as the picture of the moon and the skyline of New York appeared on the screen. Sam reached over and turned the TV channel until he found *Superman*. "Stop playing," I said and pushed him over on the couch. I turned the channel back to my story. Sam rolled off of the couch and threw me in a chair. Our fight was on. Grandma came in from outside.

"I know y'all ain't in here fightin'," she stated.

"Sam hit me and turned off what I was watching."

"Monty pushed me on the couch and started passin' licks."

"You a damn liar!" I said before I could stop myself. Grandma turned off the TV and told Sam, "Go on back to the trailer." I knew I was going to get it. I heard the screen door slam as Sam left. "Belle will handle you when she get home."

"Sam started it," I muttered.

"Go sit on the porch and wait. And I mean don't get off of it."

Belle got home and she chewed me out. She could fuss better than anybody I knew. She fussed at me for hours and ended her ranting with "This is gonna be your last summer livin' here."

Granny came to visit and then took me back to Kansas City. The trip was my first plane ride. Granny stayed to babysit me and my brothers during the day when my mother worked.

Granny had a job in the evenings. One evening changed my life, all of our lives. My brothers and I were playing in the front room when the phone rang. I answered it.

"Hello?"

"Hey Monty, this is Grandma."

"Hey Grandma. Where's Belle?" Grandma cleared her throat.

"Let me speak to you Momma, Monty." I dragged the 25-foot-cord into my mother's room and went back in the front room to continue in the festivities. We heard "No. No. No!" from the bedroom. I went to the bedroom door and saw my mother rocking back and forth. "Oh God, no," she said. "We'll be down." My mother hung up the phone with tears rolling down her face. I had never seen my mother cry before.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

Momma said "Go get y'all shoes on."

We ran to get our shoes. What did I do this time, I thought. We all ran out to the car and before I knew it, we were at Granny's house. This was where we found out what had happened. Belle had died of a heart attack. Momma had to tell Granny before she left for work, but we had missed her. We got back into the car. I wondered how Momma would tell Granny her daughter had died.

I remember sitting in the car, waiting, while Momma went in to find Granny at her job. It was my fault, I told myself. If I'd known how to act, Belle would still be alive.

Momma helped Granny to the car. We all went back to Granny's house. The phone was ringing as we came in. Momma was the brave daughter, fielding phone calls. I looked at how strong she was and decided that I would be strong too. We made our journey back to Moro. As we drove down the rocky road to Grandma's house, I saw Aunt Belle's car sitting off

to one side. They were just playing with me, I thought. I got out of the car and went into Belle's room; it smelled the same as it always had; her clothes were still in the closet, but she wasn't there. As I stood in her room, I realized Belle was gone. My Aunt Belle died at the age of thirty-five. We had just talked to her on the phone, on her birthday, two days earlier. My life changed after Belle died. Moro wasn't the place I went to anymore. My momma got married to Willie (but that's a whole other story). Belle never got the opportunity to have a child; we never filled the void she left in our family. Belle had been my second mother. She had encouraged my education. She taught me to love stories. Now, *The Edge of Night* is off the air. But, I remember the porch where we spent the days of our lives.

Visiting Writer, David Malouf

Shaking his hand, there was a familiarity in the hold
And later, when he held his salad fork in the right,
I noticed his hands were mine:

crooked in the last three fingers, knuckled all over,
the pudge on the far edges, the sculptor's thumb,
flat palms,
a grip perfect for gardening, small and curious.

His hands were darker, though, older,
wiser,
and worn from writing his novels by hand,
as contrasted to my naive and newly trained tools.

Wheat Fields with Crows, Oil on Canvas

The Black Bird flew through the sickly moonlight
Abandoning the crude green space
Of those oblivious to His race.
Wings blessed the canvas with the Grace
Of Genius gleaming from purest height.

Above the world of rooted grain
He flew into the canvas blue.
Two days to paint the relieving pain
That pierced his weakened body through.

His brother gasped at the untamed colors,
Clear, winged brushstrokes, the dynamic caws,
were cloaked behind the muddled greys.

Shot when he took the friendship bait,
The world tainted with his blood,
Spilled with a pen of false brotherhood
And minds tracked with ignorance-mud.

He soared into the night He knew
Without the comfort of His name.

Prisoners or The Butterfly Ring

Wings of jade flutter
on a chilly ring of gold.
Embracing my imprisoning finger,
the metal wings fold.

Symbol of the anti-statis,
the butterfly's nature is used
to satisfy my human eye.
The fist-fingers fused.

Purity is worn,
delicate plans are foiled.
The butterflies are mostly dead,
their wings, darkly soiled.

Red

I never knew what to do with red in my paintings.
Then again, I didn't paint.
I'd imagine a great fear
and walk, homeless, through the streets not clearly marked
and think, I should paint this great fear.
Then I'd go home and not paint.
The beer never rested in my belly. I had no beard.
And I finally resorted to scratching obscenities on glass,
on all of my windows,
without painting them red.
I didn't understand red.
It was as if it'd never entered my vocabulary.
Then again, I never painted blue either.

When He Comes

He combs through layers of snow.
No, I am not covered.
He combs up inches, years
through a warm cold that hangs across his ears
like hair.
The world is a calm blue pool,
and there he is, crawling,
doing the crawl through white hair
that might be his.
No, I'm not in the pool.

He'd present her with her children's bones,
she isn't my mother,
after he'd eaten them all, each one,
and swallowed them down with fingers stained brown.
There he is hiding.
See how he sheepishly, knuckles sucked bare,
picks fairy bones out of his teeth?
Oh, no. He didn't grin at me.

I make myself clear.
He is subway-driven.
He chalks up the walls with his shouts.
I'm surrounded by glass so when he comes
he'll have nothing to figure out.

White Sands

Graceful is a Stealth Bomber
gliding with computer accuracy
over the desert.

Even car commercials today
betray a fragility
vulnerable as models in a supermarket.

It's true, everyone takes part.

As if the nation plunging into the millennium
were like the auto crash only overheard,
never witnessed, by students pausing in formation,
on the football field: a midnight
rehearsal.

It was in New Mexico, somewhere around White Sands.
The car broke down at noon, but we continued on
and by 5 o'clock we saw, flat-eyed
and dazzled,
the sand,
fine and white as a bird's bleached skeleton,
halting in its on pace,
timeless.



"Untitled" Photography

Back Home

hopping onto my starry-eyed steed,
rivers flowing of my sweet nectar dew,
clouds expelling from deep inside,
the vile blistering and bronzing,
winds rustling through my hair,
tying knots,
matching my straining chords,
breathless and bellowing,
giving an award-winning performance
fro my large gathering of fans,
traveling from sea to shining sea
to see me
dancing back over my trail of tears,
joyously approaching the gateway,
moving out of misery
and back
to a natural state
of mind,
of mine,
where the delicious juices of reality run
wild and free;
hopeful and hungry
for the wicked and weird,
knowing and needing the true blue,
reassociating and replanting my roots,
baptizing myself in the spring water,
listening to the tender lullabies
of mountain breezes
accompanied by an orchestra of whippoorwills,
tunes sketched in my memory
and relives in my heart,
realizing, finally,
this is my home.

LRCHS

I sit in the parking lot
Before class and get high
School is just a big test
S every Friday
Night everyone gets drunk
EN kids driving through the LR streets
To Central are lined with crack houses
Around the school in the 20s
Were homes of the members
Of high social class
Is about to start
Your engines
Rev up at 3:25
Is when school is over
And over, again
I check my watch
Out for the kids dressed
In all red or blue
Eye shadow is what Mrs. Donham wore
Out my love for Biology
is 2nd house
S go by slowly
I crawl up to the 5th floor
For art
Is an imitation of life
Sucks during the high school years
Are lost staring at a chalkboard
Bored

Bored
God, I'm bored!
I have to write a paper for history
Repeats itself
And I have a test in English
Is my second language
S are my strong point
Your finger in another direction
S and maps are needed to find your way
To be Tigers!
And lions and bears?
Lions and tigers and bears!
Lions and tigers and bears!
Lion, tiger, bear
With me through this
Is far from reality
Bites is one movie I skipped 6th to go see
You in D-hall-
Of-Fame page is one that I'm on in the yearbook
S are thrown into lockers
Line the walls
Are full of graffiti
In the parking lot is best
Friends come and go
To the attendance office and get a pass
The papers to the front of the room
Number 311 is Mrs. Cloud
Teaches Classics
Is what she wants my major to be
Her replacement is another of her dreams
Are not going to come true
Is the answer to number 4

Brooke Butler

A while I liked it here
Is where I got hit
The floor
S are so dirty
Toilets are characteristic of the bathrooms
Are havens for skippers
And Gilligan and Ginger and Mrs. Howl-
Ing dogs are all you hear during the drug check
For security guards
Are assholes
Are the only guys I date
For the prom—
Yikes! I have three
Two-One-Contact
Your guidance counselors
Do nothing but piss me off
The beaten path Down to the parking lot
S of teachers like me,
But not as a student
Assemblies are when I get in trouble
D patriotic teachers sent me and Anna to the office
Workers didn't care
To stand up for the SSB
Sure to note it was the daughter of the governor
Is now in jail for Whitewater
Rafting would be nice
If I didn't have to go to school.

Our Storm

crash
boom
the curtains open
our bodies clap together
with the thunder
rain
falling on my flesh
and rolling onto yours
mixed with sweat
this sweet liquid
shares us
and takes shelter
in the grass
lightning
flashing
hopes
the lights shine
on our desires
glowing from the sky
and all around
the heavens sing along
the tunes of melodious happiness
echo
through the mountains
and in our deep valley
God watches and smiles
angels
perched

Brooke Butler

on the clouds
behold
the only peace on earth
my moist lips
meet with yours
applause
a loud crack from above
the standing ovation
lit up the world
doused
with nectar from above
you embrace me
our opening night
a box office smash
the crowd lingers
they want an encore
I need a cigarette

