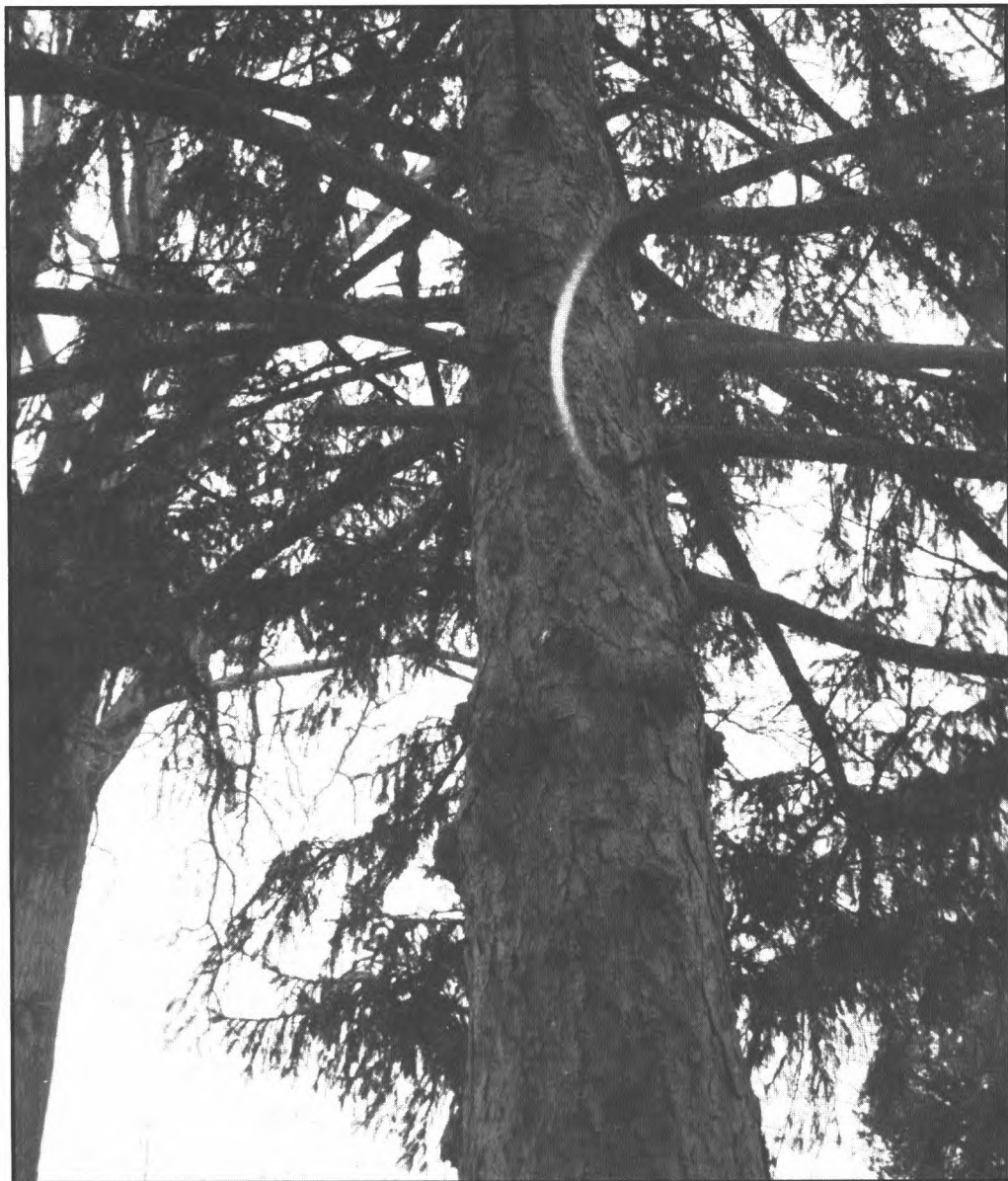




Harbinger 1995



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The Stephens College Magazine of the Creative Arts

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Rebecca Kinder

Tin and Plastic Angels

Tin and plastic angels
of graceful mechanics
in frenzied fancy flights
above our heads,
sweeping into our brains

whisper
sterile hope
and popart dreams
to poets and politicians

a calliope
of crystal sight
and artichoke sounds
to artists
and arc welders

Poof!
Tin and plastic angels
of graceful mechanics
in frenzied fancy flights
have fled.

When I Was Four-A Found Poem

... I had a plastic doll named Laura--she came with a blue stroller and she wore one of my old t-shirts. Laura was hollow and I could take her in the bathtub with me and I would put her under the water and then hold her high above my head and she would pee. I used to take lots of toys in the bathtub with me, but couldn't wash my hair by myself because I always got soap in my eyes...

...when I was four...

... I wore Hee-Haw overalls that my Granny gave me. When I got bigger my mom made them into shorts and the strings hung down, but I didn't like them because they tickled my legs and I wore a yellow chicken scarf that a very old aunt that had to stay in bed gave me and I wore a Red Riding Hood cape that my Gram crocheted for me, but it wasn't a real cape because I couldn't fly...

...when I was four...

... I wanted blond curly hair and blue eyes like my friend Karen. I had straight ugly brown hair and green eyes and freckles that my mother called angel kisses, but I didn't believe her...

...when I was four...

... My dad read Edgar Allen Poe poems in the dark. I would sit on his lap. "Quothe the Raven...Annabelle." And the picture of the old man smoking a pipe would stare back and I was scared of the picture, but my dad told me that he was a nice old man and I shouldn't be scared and I tried not to be, but still was...

...when I was four...

...Ice cream cones made everything better...the neighbor's dog bit me because I put dirt in his food and the doctor said he was going to put on a dress and I laughed, but he didn't put on a dress, he stayed in his pants...the kids made fun of me--they said I was fat and had chicken legs and they made me cry and afterwards my dad bought me ice cream cones and it made everything nice...

...when I was four...

... I picked which cereal I wanted for breakfast by the prize that was in the box--a decoder ring or the one with the tattoos? I would eat Frankenberry Cereal and Frosted Flakes and Fruit Loops (orange, lemon, and cherry flavors) right out of the box...

...when I was four...

... I pushed someone down the stairs. We were playing on the stairs and I pushed her down the stairs and she got a nosebleed and I got sent to my room--I don't know why I did it...

...when I was four...

...We dug tunnels to the neighbor's house because of all the snow...

...when I was four...

... I dreamt of vampires and rabbits and monster machines...

...when I was four...

... I worried if I was going to go to heaven when I died....

...when I was four...

... I got mud poured on my head...

...no, that happened when I was five...

Mara McEwin

Untitled Love

It all comes back to

Sex

He wants you

And you want him

And

despite the words

there also lingers

the constant

wanting

And in your twenty years

you're

finding it harder

to believe in listeners

unless there

lies some sort of attraction

And

your ears are tired

with this truth

And your laughter subsides

as he catches your hand

asking only for conversation for his

lonely heart

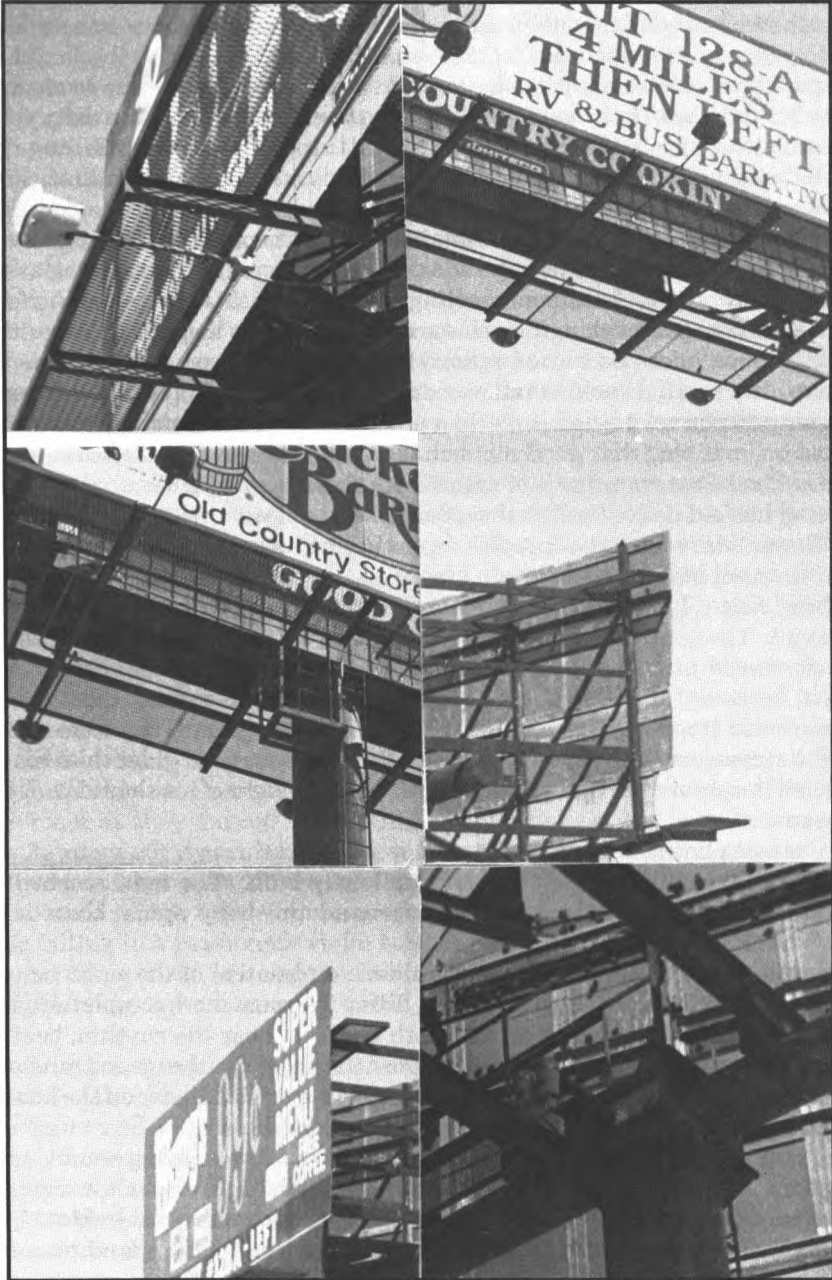
And you wonder if his heart

is really lonely

beneath his words.

Kate DuBray

Billboards



The Waltz

He walked into the room only to see what was there. The room was dark when he opened the door and stepped inside. Searching the wall to his left, he found the light switch and flipped it on. Carefully, he stepped toward the middle of the room, letting the door close behind him. There were no windows in the room, which was a dirty yellow with dark brown stains, probably from water leaking through the ceiling, falling from each corner all the way to the floor; all of it illuminated by a single bright bulb sticking out of a naked socket.

Curiously, at the base of one of the walls was a cassette player. (Nothing unusual, but he found its mere presence to be a paradox). It was not plugged in, seeing as the room had no electrical outlets, but upon kneeling down and pushing a button, he found that a recorded waltz began to play, the volume at just the right height to pleasantly fill the room. Still on his knees he turned toward the back of the room and marveled at what stood there. It was a hat rack. A tall, wooden one with but a single hook. It would have been nothing to marvel at, had it not had a human skeleton hanging from it.

He stood up, realizing that the skeleton had watched him come in. He felt, in a strange way, rude. The bones stared at him with empty sockets, and leaned slightly to the right due to being hooked under the left shoulder. The bones were not old, they were dry and white. Clean. Marveling at what this figure might have been once, he noticed a blue cotton dress rumped up on the ground beneath the small dangling feet.

Stepping closer, he reached out his hand, running his fingers down the front of the smooth skull. The gentle rhythm of the waltz made his fingers tremble with sensitivity. The music moved him and the helpless tranquility of the skeleton stirred the blood running in his heart. He lifted the bare figure off of its stand and walked it to the center of the room. He stopped there and looked at the bones again. They were structurally small. The arms were short, as were the legs, the hips were a bit wider than his own, and the skull fell limply on the right collar bone just at the height of his shoulder. He thought it was beautiful.

As the music played, a large, quick shadow bounced through the room. A moth had awakened and was hitting itself against the lonely bulb. The man reached one arm behind the skeleton, working his fingers around the bony spine, then taking the creature's hand in his, he began to dance.

He started slowly, with little steps, the classic undulation of the waltz being subtle. Gradually though, the music began to grow, filling the room more completely, surrounding the man and his partner. Even the moth began to hear the rhythm, beating itself more regularly. The man's steps were pushed along by the grand orchestration, becoming bigger, circling every inch of the room. His eyes fell fondly on the bones, which seemed to lose their dryness and, strangely, seemed to blush.

As he danced, his partner's feet swung together with a clicking sound, sometimes tangling then swinging free. The hand he used to hold the figure up felt warm and moist, and he noticed the blush spreading down the length of the crooked neck. Moving through the giant shadow of the moth, he watched it. It was really there, and he could see it

spread. He followed it with his eyes, seeing it cover the entire skeleton and then change color, seeping from the slightest of pinks to a deeper, more prominent red. The man swayed on, fascinated. As the music played, the moistness turned into wetness, and the man held tighter to keep his fingers from slipping out from between her ribs. His eyes became excited at what he held onto, for as he danced, a small drop of red liquid rolled down the side of the figure's jaw and dripped to the floor. She was bleeding.

His hands were slippery now, bones became a fluid red. He held on tighter, feeling the weight in his arms changing. The music around him grew stronger, each instrument having its own effect on the man: the high strings increased his awareness, woodwinds pushed his blood through his veins, the pounding of french horns sent his feet sailing around the room. The relaxed nature of the bones became a more elastic tension as what was once empty joints filled with blood and the beginnings of tissue. Empty cavities swelled with tiny strands, blood vessels, that started to entwine the bones like ivy.

The man felt the warm, wet ivy begin to work around his fingers, and he quickly slid them out from between her ribs, now pressing himself against the strange corpse to hold it up. Organs began to form in the rib cage, which was now becoming solid. Arteries fell down from the torso and wrapped around the legs, branching off like a small plant. The man watched the tissues move; he saw the blood moving through the vessels, and muscles grow across the neck, the hands, and the face. He held it all close to him, desperately wanting it to grow. He tried to love it. The music crazed him, and he would have torn out his own heart to complete the body had he not felt, somewhere close, a second heart beat entirely on its own. His eyes fell on the muscles stretched across the neck. They began to quiver. Then slowly, slowly, they tightened, and the skull that once lay lifeless on a dry shoulder, rose. It lifted itself very gently, and with black, empty sockets, turned, and gazed at the man.

The man saw this tender stare from this mass of soft, pink flesh, and he sighed in awe of its beauty. He felt the wet hand he had been holding curl gently around his fingers, the other went blindly to his waist under his shoulder. Her feet would touch the ground more frequently, using their own strength to stand. He watched the busy cells fill in her eyes and build skin over her shoulders. The music peaked. Crescendo after crescendo filled the room as they danced with grand, eloquent steps, her body becoming finally complete; her smooth brown hair falling to her naked shoulders, the small curve of her breasts filling out, her wide, brown eyes blinking softly, and her lips lifting into a gentle smile. She stood wholly before him, smooth and pale, his heart trembling with love, and the music falling to a passionate violin solo.

The two of them stood, hearing the violin. The moth had lost its sense again and flew futilely against the light, faster and faster, seeming to cast three or four quick shadows at once.

The man and woman kissed. He felt her arms pull strongly at his back as he caressed her waist. Gently, she pulled his shirt up over his head. The music began again, slowly. Soon the man stood as naked as the woman, each heart beating separately. They came together, and, with the new music, began to dance.

Once again the music filled the room. The man looked deeply into the woman's eyes, knowing how they were made. He loved every part of her, how strong she was now, when only minutes ago she had been created. It made him feel warm and relaxed, like his skin

was too big for him. As he danced, his skin indeed began to feel loose, like he was wearing over-sized pajamas. The more he danced, the more he loved her. She gazed at him again with her rich, dark eyes and smiled. Her smile made him weak.

The music played on, the moth was more active than ever, casting a blur across the wall too fast to follow. While he danced, naked in the arms of this loving woman, he saw his hand, and the skin on his arm . . . loose. It drooped like rubber from his elbow. He glanced down and saw his own chest cavity sinking. His skin was sliding heavily down his chest exposing every rib. As he shifted his eyes to different parts of his body, his hair fell quietly from his head, first individually, then in clumps. His feet had gone numb, and his strength had left him. The woman pressed him close and held him up. Skin from his forehead oozed over his eyes, obscuring his vision, then broke off just above where his eyebrows used to be. Slowly, his body went limp and he felt himself unpeeling. Bits of skin and organs fell to the floor and disintegrated as the woman danced him to the music, dragging his dilapidating feet around the room. He felt his tongue dissolve in his mouth, his blood vessels run dry, and his heart tear to pieces. His eyes were gone now, but he could still see. He could see the room spinning and dipping in time to the music and the moth beating itself against the light bulb almost hard enough to break it.

He was nothing now, a skeleton: dry and white. The music became quiet with an almost content tone humming in the cellos. The woman held the clean bones of the man up to the light to look at them. The long arms and legs dangled pathetically down and the skull laid sadly on the breastbone. The woman sighed and walked to the farthest corner of the room. She lifted the skeleton up on to the hat rack and hooked it under the left shoulder. After looking briefly at the bones again, she picked up the blue dress that lay just under its feet and wriggled it over her naked body.

The cassette player clicked off: the waltz had finished. He watched her as she walked away, passing through the wild shadow of the moth to the door. With a final sigh, she turned off the light, and shut the door.

Don't Go Down To The Clinic Today

Don't go down to the clinic today
because the pastor's got a gun
and everyone's screaming God's law so loud
you have to cover your ears
to save yourself from the hatred.

A young woman was on her way down there today
to try and get to the gates for some guidance.
But she couldn't get past all the faithful.
She was noticeably round.
The faithful were gathered in walls and mad mountains
merciless in spreading their mercy,
swinging beliefs like baseball bats
at the head of this skirted woman.
From the crowd came the call to de/liver her:
pushy and firm in their truth,
hitting her with their philosophy,
slapping her with all of their little black Books.
The woman was tripped with slo/guns on sticks
and cast to the ground amid wolves in Lamb's clothing.
Horrors befell her and the shocking sight
of so many people spitting at once
there were rainbows;
beautiful colors surrounding her.
And God? Somewhere within the yellows and blues.
She couldn't have said any prayer but one,
"Dear God, save my child from their hate and their love—
these people who value life so."
When all of a sudden there was a stillness so strange,
a silence ringing so far....
She was bleeding there, on the sidewalk,
amid the spit and the eyes of the good,
bleeding through her dress,
through her pain,
through the crowd,
bleeding a rhythm too soon in its coming.
Their faces gnarled and their voices gone
from screaming,
they stood with their jaws agape
as the woman exposed herself,
convulsed and heaved from inside,
and then silently rested.

With remarkable recovery, she raised her head
and looked at each wide eye in the crowd.

None of them on her.

Her point conveyed, her prayer believed,
she left her child in front of the gates
and walked away
leaving the crows to think.

Don't go down to the clinic today
because the pastor has got a gun
and everyone's screaming God's law so loud
you have to cover your ears
to save yourself from the hatred.

Rhonda Bemis

Spring Circle

we sat on the sand
and thought about looking back
we predicted our sad separation
and planned our happy reunion
waves crashed and music played
clutching our sleeping bags
we sang into the salt-air
The moon rose and we were far from home
but I never felt alone
until many years later

Female Pride

Slippery
stuttering
emerging
faithful

In the mothers' den
warm, watchful eyes witness
the bittersweet scent of birth follows

Two hearts pounding
muscles flinching
lulled to suckle and purr
warm tongue
eyes open

She's assured the lion's share of sisterly protection
He, quite naturally, gets the pride

Front Page News

studies show
the data proves
polls predict
all trends tend to indicate
the broad downturn seems to postulate
4 out of 5 dentists recommend
the graph practically guarantees

that our inevitable doom
is still uncertain

A Letter Never Sent

falling forward
looking back
the days when we dreamt
of rolling hills and lush meadows beckoned
and we succumbed willingly
to our own Irish sea coast

even if we never traveled overseas
we could climb trees in Canada
we could sunbathe in Baja
we could drive to Memphis
in a white cadillac convertible
like Thelma and Louise

your lover would be a member of the IRA
and I would be a woman of savvy spirit and fierce charm
one to make a rock star drop his supermodel
but I'd be too cool to be interested

and he'd write a song about me
and twenty years later,
I'd play it for the kids
on the front porch, sipping tea,
and you'd be there to back up my story

we'd tell tales of our many travels
in our misspent youth, maybe we'd tell
them which ones actually happened
and which ones were just fantasies
dreamt up after that road trip
to Charleston had convinced us that we
were independent and worthy and invincible

post script:

I'll stop worrying about
grades on papers and scores on tests
and I'll start wondering about what
I'm putting into life and what
kind of return I should be getting back on it
I'll write poetry that doesn't mean
anything to anybody but me

I'll start telling jokes that
only make me laugh
And I'll feel alive and awake
just like I promised you I would

Euphemistic Menstruation

I shall now quote directly from Household Discoveries and Mrs. Curtis' Cookbook:

Once in four weeks, at the times when the woman would have been unwell, if she were not to have a baby, she should be even more careful than usual about over-exertion, because at these times there is more danger of miscarriage.

Good Lord, aren't euphemisms *fun*?! "Times when the woman would have been unwell..." In this same book there are detailed instructions on how to build an out-house, how to prepare the breasts for breast-feeding, and the exact causes of typhoid fever, which is definitely not the kind of thing one wants to read while eating. Incredibly nauseating, in other words. So why the problem with "menstruation?" I'll admit the word itself sounds like some kind of virus, but for God's sake, it's a perfectly natural event; not entirely pleasant for the woman, but natural, nonetheless. It's the insidious little details like this that kill me, every time. Everyone knows that women were denied the vote -- this book was first published in 1908 — and that they were their husbands' property, and that if their husbands wanted to, they could beat them. Things like this are common knowledge, but women were assumed to be "unwell" every month. Condescending and insulting, from one point of view. On the other hand, it would have been an easy, sure way to get some rest and attention. Sort of like fainting every ten minutes, for which fainting couches used to be provided. Of course, one had to have had an understanding husband. Otherwise, a woman was out of luck. It's amazing to think how innocent phenomena like "unwellness" could conceivable spawn a relationship of deceit; I can imagine conversations of the time going something like this:

- Woman (at stove):** What would you like for breakfast, dear?
Man (sitting at table): Oh, fried ham, a few slices of bacon, couple of eggs, half a grapefruit...
Woman (grimacing, putting hand to abdomen): Oh sorry dear, just a little cramp. What were you saying?
Man: Oh...um...just toast and coffee will be fine....
Woman (sotto voice): That's what I thought you said...

It would be interesting if one could document an exchange like that. If the women of the time were going to be "unwell" every month, I certainly hope they put it to good use. No sense in letting all that "unwellness" go to waste.

Kristin A. Brown

Suburbia

The blurry haze of weeds
grow in everyone's garden: until
the women come out
of their air conditioned houses,
to dig their parent's earth. Pulling
the ugliness like a determined child
in a tantrum, beating the earth
with her fist.

The weeds don't bother you, as you watch
from the porch: protected.
You never cared for cleaning house.
The dirty work grown wild was left
for me to pull and pull until,
the earth was red: bald adobe
in the sun.

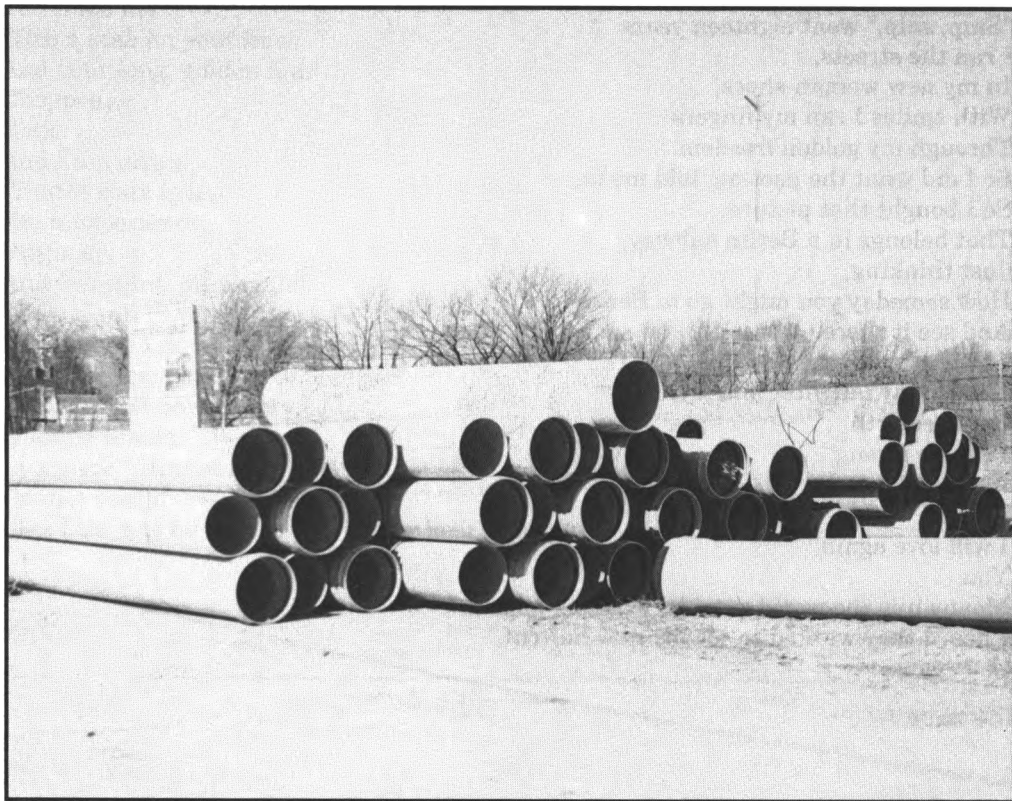
In her sleep, they grow
popping up like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*:
persistence, weeds struggling to the surface.
The women tired; exhausted, until
the child finally succumbs
to the earth, her body thrown flat against the belly
leaving her small impression
as weeds curve around her like white tape.

Kate DuBray

Pipes I



Pipes II



Jennifer Woods

Scissors

Ah, I dropped my schoolgirl ways.
"Snip, snip," went eighteen years.
I ran the streets,
In my new woman-shoes,
With smiles I ran my fingers
Through my golden freedom.
So I did what the poet-me told me to,
So I bought that picture,
That belongs in a Berlin subway,
Just thinking,
How someday you might go to Berlin
And see it there.
I hope you know,
That in my laughter and joy,
In my rebirth,
I can be strong
And say I loved
I love
I will love again
You.
Meanwhile the world outside is asking for me,
I heard they wanted to see my new haircut.

To Her
(his reply to Scissors)

You come here,
With a scab on your knee
And your long, golden hair
Chopped,
Gone.
And I am afraid.
What if your eyes,
See inexperience,
Virginity,
And you think me a child?
What if you love,
That which I do not know,
Like life, sex, and how to breathe?
What if your new beauty,
Is found inside,
In a place I cannot find,
Cannot touch,
Like I used to be able to touch your long hair?

Space Needle

Long, straight into the sky
It must have looked majestic to you
It must have given you a twinge
a shiver
Of this new freedom
This awakening
And I
In the meantime
Still in the Heartland
Was telling my friend that I have begun to think
That I am not in love anymore
She is agreeing with me
We are in my car, (going somewhere?)
I imagine you were climbing its steps
Probably tripping up them at that moment
Probably falling; upwards
I imagine that I missed the right turn
I slammed on my breaks
I'm sure
Even though it was too late to turn around

JoAnn Whitworth

Keeping Her Hands Quiet

Setting: A room somewhere.

As the curtain opens, a middle-aged woman, dressed in black, is seen sitting at a table. The light is very dim, barely bright enough to make her out. Her attitude is one of deep mourning. Her head is down on her arms, which are lying on the table. After a minute, she raises her head and speaks directly to the audience.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I'm one crazy lady--sitting here in the dark.

Well--you see, I'm remembering and I always remember better in the dark. Remembering my daughter's death-day. Kim, my oldest daughter, the one I doted on. Remembering the event, and the horror, and the terror in her eyes. Remembering it all. Twelve years, but I remember it all.

(Pause)

The more I remember, the more I blame myself.

I could have kept her from doing it. I could have saved her, you see, but I didn't.

(Pause)

Know where I was that morning? That perfect Sunday morning? Upstairs doing my homework. My school work--for pete sakes! Chasing my own selfish dreams, and neglecting my poor, hurting, confused, and desperate daughter. Thinking some fool final exam more important than my own flesh and blood child. Well--I heard the shot and ran down. Met Jimmy, my youngest son, met Jimmy coming up. White-faced and scared and unable to speak. "Kim..." that was all he could get out. But I knew, I knew before he even gasped out her name. And I went on down with him and into the back room and saw her--on the floor and still as death. A hole as big as a baseball in her stomach. Her eyes were open but she didn't seem to be focusing on anything. It was like the noise of the gun, or the pain, or something had left her stunned.

(Pause)

And there we were--no phone, no neighbors close-by, and the house halfway down side of a hill--no way an ambulance could get down there.

Well I sent my son, my Jimmy--I told him to get down the hill and find help in the town.

And I got a towel--for the bleeding you know. But there wasn't any--it was all inside. And I got down on my knees and I asked her the oldest and the stupidest question in the world:

"Why Kim?"

(Speaking in a rush)

And I started crying and pleading with God and telling her I loved her and not to die and to hold on and everything would be okay and she kept clawing at her stomach and I was trying to keep her from doing that and crying and running to the door to see if help had come.

(Pause)

And after what seemed a long while, my youngest son returned with a sheriff's deputy. And I look at him in desperation and move over to make room for him expecting him to pull a rabbit out of a hat, I guess.

(Pause)

And do you know what that S.O.B. did? He stood there at her feet and took out his notebook and licked a pencil and asked:

Name? Address? Social Security Number?

Mother's Name? Father's Name?

Date of birth?

(Loudly)

BASTARD!

I mean--me trying to keep her hands still, and begging God, and trying to keep her alive 'till the ambulance got there--and that S.O.B. standing there asking his fool questions--like at a traffic accident--for pete's sake!

I mean--I went to hell and back. But the ambulance got there, finally, just a volunteer ambulance, and the crew just town folks--didn't know what to do I guess. The hallway was too small for the stretcher, so they gripped my poor daughter by her arms and legs and sort of doubled her up--killing her! Killing her! and lugged her into the front room.

Got her up that hill somehow and into the ambulance. And my youngest son and I climbed in the back.

(Pause)

There wasn't much the nice ambulance lady know to do except get on the radio to the hospital and come back there to the back and administer wisps of oxygen to my daughter and urge the driver to hurry.

Wasn't much I know to do either--but I kept trying to keep her hands still--which was hard to do with one hand. My youngest son was holding onto the other hand so hard I thought it would break.

(Pause)

At one point she grabbed my free hand and bit it--hard. But I didn't care. Wished she would bite it off.

And I kept begging God to let her live--take me instead. And crying and telling her to hold on, hold on--we'd be at the hospital soon. Don't die. Hold on we'd be there soon. They'd take care of her, everything would be all right, and trying to keep her hands still.

(Pause)

And she must have heard me, must have believed the shit I was telling her cause she kept struggling back to life. Going and coming back. Going and coming back--like a light bulb being turned off and on.

And oh--yes--something I forgot to mention--when we were still at the house--just me and her--all of a sudden her eyes focused on something over in the corner of the room and a look of the most awful terror came into her eyes and she screamed (signed) "Mommy!--Mommy!"

(Face crumples)

(Pause)

Glad my son wasn't there to see that look in her eyes. Glad no one but me's carrying THAT memory to the grave.

(Pause)

Guess I don't need to tell you that 30 minute ride to the hospital was the longest 30 minutes of my life. Some of you know what I mean--you've been there.

Well the emergency room people got her up onto a table--you know--that cot thing in the emergency room--and the doctor delivered a swift blow to her chest to restart the heart--not something you'd enjoy watching-- even if it wasn't your daughter--even if she didn't have a hole as big as a baseball in her stomach.

(Long Pause)

Couldn't save her I guess.

(Short Pause)

Twelve years. I wonder what she was trying to tell me? I'll never know, now. You see--I was keeping her hands quiet

(Begins crying)

Puts head down on arms again, starts to sob brokenly. After a minute raises head again.

You think I am crazy--don't you? Sitting here in the dark--but you see--I am remembering --and I always remember better in the dark.

(Slow fade to black, accompanied by the sound of sobbing)

(Curtain)

Academic Floor of Wood Hall

Found Poem 1

Confronting
traumatic
experiences

IT feels LIKE HOME.

CONSTRUCTION

You wouldn't eat Red Sea mud,

Combinations

imperative

NETWORKS

What do you want?

Gear Up
to Go

NEWS



MAYBE THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE

powerful

simple,

DESTINY

Academic Floor of Wood Hall

Found Poem 2

intelligently

it's remarkably easy to

Think fast

responsibility

ALL IN ONE PLACE

everything's going to pieces

worldwide

appealing

Nothing comes closer to home.

black

we couldn't start 1995 off
any better than

T H E

Airport maps and gates

For Your Bottom Line

eyes victory

Controversy

YOUNG READERS

Do something delicious.

SPEED

seriously.

BEAUTY

create

Robin D. Richards, Pres.

Take Control

A REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

SIMPLICITY

a good bet

and

THEIR

Office Managers

define

24 HOURS A DAY.

To the good side of Charles Bukowski

Henry, where are you now that I need you?
Your father is dead and you've disappeared,
stumbled off the map you never cared for.
I want you to realize all that I know.
I know. I know. I understand.
I know it wasn't about sex and I know
without you telling me that you have nightmares.
Henry I know how incredibly lonely and lovely
it all is and believe me I can see the sense
in scotch and vodka sometimes.
I know this and I dream of you and I can see
your breath lingering outside lighted windows.
I can feel the warm place your arm fit at my side
and I can smell your room, the shut-up heat and smoke,
without ever having been there. And Henry, sometimes
when I wake, before I remember you're gone, I think
for a moment that I can taste the oranges we shared,
the ones you loved and loved, for being the last things
on this earth that were still pure.

downhill

Maybe tomorrow this unseasonable snow
will say wait, I'm sorry
and go in trickles into the creeks
that line the neighborhoods.
Maybe my head will clear,
the leaks unclogging, and let my dreams
run pure—no more scary bad man
or the fear of cars that lingers
even when I wake.
Maybe tomorrow your fingers won't
feel foreign, maybe I can nestle
into you like I'm laying eggs
without looking first, and
maybe this birth that wants to happen
will take charge, and for your sake
I'll try to rein it in, but I think
that's almost a sin, when everything wants
to run downhill, and everything
wants to begin.

prayer

You are moving out.
You clean your room and find the floor,
painted blue as the dusk of this May night.
You have to close the leaf-filtered screen—
weather still likes to surprise you.

You stay up late reading a novel
that breaks your heart and hands you a new one.
It fits and works. You don't feel pretty
tonight, but you feel sturdy, useful, able.
Ready to lift chairs and dressers,
mow the lawn tomorrow for the last time.

Today was good.
You drove thirty miles to visit your best friend
and she was hung over,
all white skin, naked under a blanket.
Her cheeks were pink like a child's,
and you thought, look at her laugh.
You can move her, too, you are strong enough
to pull her out of her nausea, out of sadness.
Spring's turning to summer and you think maybe
you're making it happen.

As always, of course, obstacles appear.
Things break, money runs out, the sky
clouds over, but you can force past all that.
You picture your two lovers and the subtle ways
you change them and they change you.
You think of how you'll paint the new walls.
Blue? Purple. Yes, you're young and yes,
you're a woman, but look at you, you're as good as anyone.
You can do everything and make everything
and what you want to make tonight
in your blue and green bedroom
is some means to say, for some reason, to someone,
thank you.

**(Write a poem using the following words:
cedar, saxophone, yellow, beloved,
conversation, eerie, and poetry.)**

1.

Conversation is a fine start, if you
stop soon after. Talk about the shadows
in the cedar stand out back, how they are eerie
at night. Talk about that strangely loveable dog
who hangs around lately, yellow, skinny, and ugly.
He makes you want to feed him.

Talk about your brother's saxophone lessons,
how miserably he plays, how it violates taste
and art to make him continue. Talk about your
beloved aunt who is dying. Everyone has one.

Whatever you do, don't try to talk about poetry.
Nobody cares and you will get that blank look,
the one that says, Please don't. Please don't start.
You will tell your life while your listener's mind
is out in the back somewhere, burning down the cedars,
the shadows, stray dog, brother, aunt, and all.

2.

If your poetry is full of words like virgin and eerie,
if it reads like a tourbook of Gothic cathedrals,
paint it yellow. If it is full of what you learned
at school, violate something. Put a cigarette in,
a condom. Or better yet, no condom. If it is paved
with sidewalks, plant a cedar. And vice versa.

If you are in love, just for variety, write a saxophone in.
Notes drifting up to a dirty, lonely apartment
might be effective. You know the scene, even if
you've forgotten: Months with no beloved, the bulb
burned out, sleep elusive. If the scene is silent then,
slip an old friend up the dark stairwell.

Conversation is a fine start.

Preparations For the Graveside Service

We have a tradition we follow, on my father's side of the family, whenever somebody dies. We put the corpse in a casket with a flat lid, tell the undertaker to lay it out in somebody's house, rather than in the funeral home, and have visitation there. For the last several years my parents have hosted the visitation, because we have the biggest sitting room of all my father's relatives. Before that my grandmother hosted it. The visitation is open casket; after it's over, and all the children are put to bed, the casket is closed and the party starts.

A bar is laid out on top of the casket. Uncle Mike, ever the joker of the family, always brings his hand-painted sign that says, "Have One On Me!" The words are written in fancy calligraphy. He sets it right on top of the casket, over where the deceased's head would be, and right next to the keg. Everyone in the family brings a bottle of their favorite, and puts it on top of the casket for everyone to share. Everyone in the room makes several toasts, all night long, and the dark glasses worn the next day at the cemetery have nothing to do with the sunshine. All the food brought by neighbors and friends disappears overnight, and everyone in the family is very raucous until daybreak. It's all wonderfully tacky, but I hated the idea of it when I was a child.

I never knew where this strange tradition ever came from; my family was the only family I had ever heard of that did things like this. I knew that people used to sit up with the dead all night long, back before there were proper funeral homes; my grandmother always said people had to stay close by to drive off any rats that might come around for a quick snack. That always made sense to me, but I never knew how my family managed to take a straight-forward custom like sitting up with the dead and turn it into a drunken revelry. When I was young, my little sister and I would sneak downstairs after hours and watch the grown-ups cheer and dance and make loud toasts.

"Why are they acting so happy?" my sister once whispered. "I thought you were supposed to be sad when someone dies."

"You are," I whispered back. This was when I was twelve and my sister was eight. All she knew was that their emotions seemed incongruous with the occasion, but the sight of all that joy was positively appalling to my sensitive pre-teen notions of "proper" behavior. I knew, you see, that other people did not treat death even remotely like we did, and I was horribly embarrassed.

"Maybe cousin Harry died and left everyone a bunch of money," my sister suggested.

"You're so stupid," I shot back. "Harry didn't have a dime to his name. Last time I saw him, he asked if he could borrow five bucks." It was true. Harry was in his fifties when he died, but he was always broke, and he wasn't above asking the little kids for money.

"I'm not stupid!" my sister said, and went upstairs to pout herself to sleep. I remained a while longer, watching through the half-open door of the sitting room as my grandfather waved a hat around in the air. "A collection for Harry!" he cried. "Everybody put a dollar in so the poor son of a bitch can bribe Saint Peter to let him in!" There was

hearty laughter at this, and everyone began throwing money into the hat. Grandpa took it out, smoothed it all into a neat stack, and lifted the lid of the coffin just enough to squeeze it in. "There you go, Harry," I heard him say. "Don't be comin' back askin' for more, 'cause you won't get it." He began calling out for another toast. I went upstairs to bed.

I had a huge family, but we were a lucky family. That is to say, as far back as I can remember everyone has died from natural causes, brought on by old age. Cousin Harry was the youngest one I had ever known to die; usually, the people in my family hung on until they were in their seventies or eighties, and my great-great grandmother was one hundred and two years old when she died. Still, because we were such a large family, we ended up having a funeral every two or three years. There were always forty or fifty people at the sitting-up, ranging in age from eighteen--which was how old you had to be before they'd let you in the celebration-- all the way up to my great-great grandmother.

She died the year I turned eighteen, and hers was the first sitting-up I was allowed to go to. I didn't want to; out of all my family, she was the one I was closest to. My parents had named me after her--Lauralee Jane. She had always had a great sense of humor, and she was sharp as a tack right up until the end. The last sitting-up before hers had taken place when she was ninety-nine; it was for one of her sons, a great-uncle I didn't know very well. Sometime in the wee hours of the morning, I was awakened by her loud, off-key voice, singing, of all things, "Stairway to Heaven." She was a spry one, she was. When they told me she was gone it was like getting hit in the gut with a sledge-hammer; she hadn't even been sick. My mother said God probably just got tired of waiting for her; she theorized that he wanted her up topside, simply because she was so much fun.

"I guess He just decided we had had her long enough," she said. I refused to answer that one. "You can sit up with us tomorrow night," she added, as if she were conferring a great favor. I didn't want to go, and I said so.

"I'm not going to celebrate," I informed her. "I think it's really cold, the way you all have a great big old party whenever somebody kicks the bucket."

"You have no choice in the matter," my mother said. "She knew she was going, and she made your grandparents promise to let you come. She said she didn't want you moping around all alone; she said you could mope just as well surrounded by people, and this way Uncle Mike could slip you his famous Long Island iced tea if it looked like you were getting too upset."

That was one thing I never understood about Granny Lauralee. She was into these death parties just as much as everyone else. I once asked her about it, but all she said was, "Wouldn't you rather be happy?"

I couldn't very well turn down Granny's last request. Not because of any romantic ideas about keeping promises exacted by the dying, but because I knew that if anyone could come back from the dead to haunt the living, Granny would be the one to do it. So the next night found me in the sitting room of my parents' house, watching as my father smoothed Granny's hair before closing the casket. "So long, Grandma," I heard him say. "It was terrific knowing you." He shut the lid, and I felt sick knowing that any minute Uncle Mike was going to show up with his tasteless hand-painted sign and put it right over Granny's head. My little sister, then fourteen, was sent to her room to watch television. Mom and Grandma and a pack of aunts and cousins bustled in and out,

bringing in food and arranging the bar, which was now taking shape on top of Granny. Uncle Mike arrived with that damn sign of his, and he put it on Granny's casket, just like I knew he would. Then he came over to me carrying two shot glasses full of whiskey.

"You look cold," he said, and handed me one of the glasses. I had never been allowed to drink before, so I tasted it cautiously. Uncle Mike snorted.

"You're doing it all wrong," he said. "Knock it back, like this." He threw his head back and swallowed the contents of the shot glass all at once. I imitated him and thought I was going to end up laid out right next to Granny. Uncle Mike pounded me on the back until I stopped coughing.

"You know," he told me, "It was your Granny Lauralee who taught me to knock back shots. She caught me behind the house one day - I guess I was fifteen or sixteen at the time - and I had an iced tea glass brim full of this stuff. I was kind of sipping at it and making faces, but I kept at it because I thought that was the way men did it. She took me in the house and I thought I was going to get the whipping of my life, but instead she gave me a shot glass and showed me how to do it right." He grinned at me. "She made me practice until I could do it without batting an eye, and by then I was so sick I could barely stand up. It took me a couple of years to get over that - I couldn't even look at booze without getting nauseous."

Uncle Mike took back my empty shot glass and told me I was going to have to go easy on the drinks. "You don't want to pass out before ten o'clock," he warned. As soon as his back was turned my dad brought me a beer. He told me not to be hitting the hard stuff too hard. "It hits back," he said. I took a few swallows of beer and then Uncle Mike was back, topping off my glass with gin. "I changed my mind," he said. "You need to catch up with the rest of us." I didn't see how that was possible; the rest of them had been drinking all afternoon, nipping off into the kitchen at intervals during the visitation in order to swallow a short one.

Midnight came and went and I was still sitting in my chair in the corner, watching my family make a spectacle of itself. I couldn't help thinking Granny deserved to go out with more dignity than this, even though I knew she had enjoyed these parties as much as the rest of them. We had already tapped one keg of beer dry; we were halfway through the second one. I had put away four glasses myself, besides the shot and that horrible mix of beer and gin Uncle Mike had given me earlier, but I didn't feel any different. I did notice, however, that the voices in the room sounded kind of far away. One of my aunts came over and told me to get up and walk around. "You look like you're falling asleep," she said. When I got up, my legs felt like they might buckle on me without warning, so I walked slowly. I made my way to the far wall, skirting the casket on the way and avoiding people; I didn't want to talk to anybody. There was a picture hanging there, taken a long, long time ago, of Granny Lauralee. She was standing behind her husband, a man who had died before I was born. My great-uncle Sid, Granny's little brother, came up behind me.

"I remember when that picture was taken," he said. "They had been married about a year. I was only seven, and Lauralee was twenty-seven."

"I thought women got married a lot younger than that, back then," I said.

He nodded, and took another pull of his drink. "Most of them did. But Lauralee was different. She was what you call a tomboy. She beat up one of her boyfriends, once; said

he wouldn't let her ride his horse, and called her a weak female. I never liked her husband, but after awhile he got kind of scared of her and did whatever she wanted him to do. I think it was the way she acted when he tried to tell her she couldn't go to her mother's sitting-up, when she died; Lauralee went anyway, and when she got back the next day he slapped her. I was there at the time; our father had sent me because he didn't know what else to do with me."

"What did Granny do when he slapped her?" I asked.

"She bided her time," Sid said ominously. "Later on me and her went out to the woods and collected a whole bunch of snakes; that husband of hers was awful scared of snakes. We took'em home and put them everywhere he'd be likely to run into them - inside his boots, in his coat pockets, in his bed. We seeded the whole house with snakes. He was bumping into the things every time he turned around, and it made him a nervous wreck."

"Did he get mad?" I asked. I knew I sure would, if someone filled up my house with a bunch of snakes.

"Boy, did he," said Uncle Sid. "He blamed me for it; it never crossed his mind that his Lauralee would have the nerve to touch a snake. He came storming into the kitchen with a switch and gave me a lick across the backside, and when he did that Lauralee picked up her cast-iron frying pan and whopped him right upside the head. After that, she pretty much had her way around that house." Just then a cousin hollered for Sid to come over and clear up some confusion about when Granny's husband had died, so he excused himself. I watched him as he bumped into a chair and apologized to it. Then I went back to inspecting the picture on the wall. It had always been there, but I had never looked closely at it before. Now I noticed that Granny's husband had a slightly fearful look on his face, as if having Granny standing directly behind him made him nervous. Granny herself had the most innocent look I'd ever seen on a human face, which made me think that her husband's nervousness wasn't entirely unfounded. I'd seen that look on her face before; most notoriously when she told me she'd baked me a cream pie for my tenth birthday, then smashed it into my face. The rest of the family had immediately produced pies from behind their backs and followed suit.

I hesitated about helping myself from the bar/casket, but Granny, after all, had been the one who originally started the tradition of using the casket as a bar. I grabbed a glass of champagne just as my father called out for a toast.

"A toast!" he cried, swaying a little bit. "To Granny Lauralee, a woman who died with her boots on!" Everyone cheered. She had, in fact, died with her boots on; she had been wearing her cowboy boots, having just come in from shopping, when she got sick. She refused to let anyone take them off of her.

My father continued. "And a toast to my daughter Lauralee, on her first sitting-up!" Everyone cheered again. I had no idea why they were so happy for me. "We may be missing one Lauralee, but we have another one right there!" I was beginning to get angry; how dare they expect me to replace Granny? My father took a small, square, wrapped package from the desk drawer and brought it to me.

"It's your Granny's diary," he told me. "She's been working on it since you were born; she said it was just for you." He handed it to me and went to refill his beer mug. I returned to my corner, unwrapped the diary, and opened it. The first entry was dated

February 16, 19__; my birth date. It was written as if it were a letter to me. "Dear little Lauralee," it began. "It's about time someone in my family named a baby after me. I have a feeling you're going to be quite a piece of work, when you grow up. I already feel closer to you than I do the rest of this insane family. Don't get me wrong; insane is good. I'll have to remember to read you that Dickinson poem sometime, the one that goes, "Much Madness is divinest Sense . . ." I stopped reading the first entry and began browsing through the rest of the diary. I found an entry written the day after Uncle Harry's visitation and party. "Dear little Lauralee," she wrote.

"I noticed you and your sister on the stairs last night. Your sister went upstairs in a huff, it seemed to me. You really ought to be nicer to her, you know. I saw the look on your face when your grandfather was taking up that collection so Harry could bribe Saint Peter to let him into Heaven. You're at an age where everything your family does is going to embarrass you, but I don't want you thinking we're a cold-hearted bunch. Would you rather have us sit around and cry? Most people who do things like that end up doing it alone, by themselves in their own little chair. It sounds like a cliché to tell you to look on the bright side of things, but that's what our little celebrations are all about. We'll all miss Harry. He was a good boy. It also sounds like a cliché to tell you he's better off now, but we have to believe it's true. What else are we going to believe in? So we'll mourn at the funeral; the funeral is when we'll think of us. Last night we were thinking of Harry. Death isn't so awful; it's not an end. Think if it like a beginning and you'll start to see why we celebrate it."

The last entry was written the night before she died. Like I said, she knew she was going, but she was only worried about how I'd take it. "Dear little Lauralee," she said.

"I find some kind of cosmic rightness in the fact that the first celebration you'll be old enough to go to will be mine. Out with the old Lauralee-- in with the new! Your father will give you this book then. I want you to be a good girl; but don't be a doormat. My brother Sid will probably tell you the snake story; part of the reason we all get together after visitations is to exchange stories about the deceased. Listen to him. Don't put up with other people who try to tell you the way you ought to live. My husband thought it was horrible of us to celebrate our mother's death; I didn't agree with him, so I went. I've been looking back through this diary and I just realized there's lots of stuff I wanted to tell you, but I never got around to doing it. Never mind; you'll read it in here, eventually. Make me proud. If there's any way I can come back to see you, I'll do so."

I smiled as I read that last part. Somehow, I always knew Granny would be the one to turn into a ghost, if she could manage it. This last letter she had signed, "Love, Grandma Lauralee (by the way, I always meant to tell you I hated being called Granny.)"

It was really hot in the sitting room so I wandered out to the foyer for some air. My little sister, then fourteen, was sitting on the stairs. "I can't believe you're taking part in this," she said.

"It's not so bad," I answered.

"You just wanted to go so you could drink," she said, and stomped upstairs. She was currently grounded, having been caught in her room with a bottle of brandy, and was therefore upset at what she saw as the gross hypocrisy of our parents letting me get as drunk as the rest of the family. Of course, she was also at that age where she was convinced the whole world was crazy except for herself.

Well, I thought as I opened the front door and leaned against the door jam, breathing in the fresh air, crazy isn't so bad. I had a friend in high school who was in therapy because of a funeral she attended as a child. She said the family was wailing like a group of banshees, and her mother made her go up and kiss the corpse on the cheek. That wouldn't have been so bad, except the undertaker apparently cut some corners when he prepared the body, so just as my friend kissed it, the eyes flew open. She screamed; several people fainted, and she barely made it to the bathroom before throwing up. I couldn't help thinking that if something like that happened in my family, we would all get a huge laugh out of it, once we got over the initial shock. "That's just like so-and-so, to pull a stunt like that!" we'd say.

At the cemetery the next day, I wore dark glasses with everyone else. After doing some thinking in the doorway, and reading through Granny's diary by the light of the porch lamp, I had gone back to the sitting room and began helping myself. Unless someone else died, I knew this was the only occasion when my parents were going to let me drink, and I knew Granny Lauralee wouldn't have passed up a chance like that.

"Ashes to ashes," intoned the minister. "Does he have to yell?" I heard Uncle Mike grumble. I remembered him telling me about Granny teaching him the right way to drink, and wondered why no one had ever come up with a cure for a hangover. Much to my surprise I found the answer to that question later that night in Granny's diary. "There's always consequences, Lauralee," she'd written. "I'm not saying everything good is followed by something bad, but you'll find that's the case a lot of the time. It bites, doesn't it?" Granny lived, and that was good. Then she died, and that was bad, but the party helped me to turn it into something good--it was good to remember her, and talk about her, and celebrate the way she would have celebrated. The celebration was good, but my hangover was really, really bad, but even that was good. It made me remember the good time I had at the celebration, and it made me forget to be sad at the graveside.

Miranda Judith Smith

Breakfast at Tiffany's

ANNE MENDEHLSON and CHRIS MACKLIN are standing in a video store, choosing a movie. Both are in their early twenties.

ANNE

(Picking up a movie)

Do you remember in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* when Holly Golightly complained of having the "mean reds?"

CHRIS

Can't say I do.

ANNE

You know, the mean reds--a feeling worse than the blues. I think I have them.

CHRIS

Are they contagious?

ANNE

Chris, be serious for a second. Today I sat on my bed and chewed gum. Not one piece, but entire packs. I put stick after stick into my mouth until I could barely close my jaw. I must have gone through thirty packs of gum.

CHRIS

Was the gum sugarless?

ANNE

What does the sugar content of my gum have to do with my mental state?

CHRIS

It has nothing to do with your mental state, but I imagine chewing thirty packs of gum could severely impair your physical health. Although you probably have really fresh breath. You didn't swallow it did you?

ANNE

No, I didn't swallow it. I would have choked. I had a ball of gum the size of a kiwi.

CHRIS

I just thought if you were feeling suicidal...

ANNE

I'm not feeling suicidal, that's the funny thing. If anything I'm feeling **homocidal**. Yesterday I was in poly-sci and once again Dr. Preston had wasted the entire hour telling us how apathetic we are and how the world is in utter chaos because of our lack of humanity, and he asked if anyone had any response to his accusations. Suddenly I felt my hand shoot up. I didn't have anything to say, I never have anything to say in that class, but there I was, waving my arm like a goddamn maniac. So Dr. Preston calls on me and before I can stop myself I shout out, "You're all a bunch of assholes!" It was like I was suffering some sort of spontaneous Tourette's Syndrome, because I kept yelling out profanity. And I was directing my hostility at everyone. I told Mark that his arms looked like "fuckin' twigs in that muscle shirt." I

screamed at Mimi that blue eyeshadow made her look like a “cheap whore,” and I told Dr. Preston that “pants that emphasized his dick were not flattering.”

CHRIS

(Laughing)

So what’s wrong with that?

ANNE

What’s wrong with that? Chris, a student does not make comments about her professor’s penis in his political science course. Or anywhere else for that matter. Nor does a student verbally abuse the very people she goes out with. I was out-of-line, disgusting, abhorrent.

CHRIS

You were just being honest.

ANNE

I think Miss Manners would disagree.

Chris sits down in the aisle. Anne follows.

CHRIS

You’re not the only person who does that you know. Sometimes I think I should wear a muzzle. I go to porn theatres, the super sleazy kind with the plastic booths and overpowering scent of Lysol-

ANNE

I really don’t think now is an appropriate time to talk about your sexual dysfunctions.

CHRIS

This isn’t about me. I just like to go and hang out by the booths and wait for the, um, patrons to come out. When they exit, I stare them right in the eyes and just smile. And then, when I know I’ve caught their gaze and they can’t for whatever reason look away, and their faces have begun to redden, I yell out “Ha! Caught you masturbating!” You should see how quickly they flee.

ANNE

That is crude. Besides, masturbation is normal.

CHRIS

I know that and you know that, hell we do it, but I still get some sick satisfaction out of stalking Sex-o-ramas.

ANNE

Well as long as we’re admitting embarrassing secrets--I like to go to the grocery store late at night...

CHRIS

(Picking up on the story)

...and load up carts and leave them.

ANNE

(Really excited)

Sometimes I pick a theme. Like I’ll fill a cart entirely with feminine hygiene products or canned vegetables. And sometimes I just go by color.

CHRIS

(Out of control)

I get off moving people's carts when they're not paying attention. You know, they're scanning the shelves or rifling through coupons and their backs are turned, and that's when I just wander off with their cart and leave it in some obscure location in the store.

ANNE

I put things in people's carts. Embarrassing items, like douches and laxatives. Then I follow them to the check-out counter and watch the surprise register on their faces when they pick up Metamucil.

CHRIS

(Barely able to tell the story)

You know what's the best? When I'm driving, I get the urge to just honk and wave, like I'm in a fuckin' parade. (Breaks into peals of laughter.)

ANNE

(Laughing as well)

Does this make us weird?

CHRIS

Hell no. We just like to fuck with people. Everyone should do it. I think everyone should feel free to just yell, "Fuck you" to their baker, or stick a potato in the tailpipe of a police car. I betcha Holly- what was her name?

ANNE

Golightly. Holly Golightly.

CHRIS

I betcha Holly Golightly would do it. And it wouldn't be because she had the "mean reds" either. It'd be because she had a sense of humor.

Doggie Style

A cab pulls up in front of a black building on 42nd street. A man in a navy overcoat and a dog hop out. A few moments later, Sue and Steve get out of another cab in front of the same shop. Sue and Steve Bishop are a married couple seeking help from a sex therapist. Sue is young and adventurous. Steve is young but reserved and somewhat neurotic.

STEVE

So we really want to do this?

SUE

We really want to do this. I really want to do this.

STEVE

I realize that our therapist said that exploration would be good for our relationship.

But are you sure this is what she meant?

SUE

We are seeing a sex therapist, Steve. I highly doubt she was referring to space exploration.

STEVE

All right already. But I feel like a pervert. You could have at least let me have worn my trenchcoat.

SUE

And then you would have looked like a pervert as well. C'mon Steve, where's your sense of adventure?

STEVE

Adventure? You want adventure? Try *Macgyver*. Now there's adventure for you. The guy gets trapped on an island, is being hunted by a herd o' cannibals, and is suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome but with the aid of a mere corkscrew, manages to capture the savages, escape the island and perform free physical therapy on himself.

Now there's adventure.

SUE

Cute Steve, real cute. Now move your ass into the store-I feel like a hooker out here. *They enter the Sex Shoppe. Steve refuses to make eye contact with anyone. Sue walks briskly to the back wall and begins searching for "fun" items. Unbeknownst to either of them, a dog has slipped in with them.*

SUE

Well, they have everything from blow up dolls that give blow jobs to whips that shoot whipped creme.

(Seductively)

What'll it be, **big boy**?

STEVE

Can't you just pick something, have them box it up, and we can go?

SUE

This isn't Hickory Farms--we're not picking out a cheese wheel. We're supposed to be choosing something that will enrich and enhance our sex life.

STEVE

Fine. First of all, could you please not say the words "sex life" so loudly that everyone in the store can hear you. Second, you can rule out (picking up doll) Chatty Cathy (reading tag)-oh, I'm sorry, **Chewey** Cathy as an item that would enrich or enhance my sexual pleasure. And third...

Steve's tirade is interrupted. His mouth agape, his eyes wide open, all he can do is point.

SUE

What? What were you going to say?

STEVE

This place is disgusting. I mean whips and chains, those are fine. Cock rings--what the hell, it's jewelry, it's functional--go with it. But live animals?

SUE

What the hell are you talking about?

STEVE

In case you didn't notice, there is a dog, yes a dog. A living, breathing canine being in the clearance bin over in aisle six.

SUE

It's probably a pet. Or a toy.

STEVE

A pet or a toy you say? A pet or a toy? Does the word bestiality mean anything to you? Or maybe you'd better understand the situation if it were filmed. Let's roam the movie aisle, shall we? Maybe they have *Debbie Does Daschound* or *Louise Does Lassie* or better still *Chewey Cathy Does Chi-Chi the Chihuahua*.

SUE

Steve, calm down before they throw us out.

STEVE

(Having lost all control)

Throw us out? They're going to throw us out so, how can I put this delicately? They're going to throw us out so they can screw the pooch!

SUE

Steve be quiet. Great now the manager's coming over. I suppose it comes as no surprise to you that he's big and balding and can probably break us in half.

STEVE

If he can break us in half, think of the poor dog.

The manager swaggers over. He walks up to Steve and towers threateningly above him.

MANAGER

Is that your dog?

STEVE

What do you take us for? A couple of perverts?

Sickos?

Maybe that kinda stuff flies where you come from, but not here buddy. My wife and I

came here to purchase some innocent toys. You know dildos, handcuffs. Notice
nowhere did I say “dogs.”

MANAGER

No need to get defensive. I just asked if that was your dog.

STEVE

You’d like it to be, wouldn’t you? You’d like me to say, “Yes that’s my dog” and then lovingly scoop it up, place it on the counter and buy it. Well not me, no way. I’m not going to pander to your...pooch peddling. Puppy pedophiles, that’s what you all are!

MANAGER

I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to leave. You’re disturbing the other
customers.

STEVE

Disturbing the other customers? Yeah, I bet I am. And right now some guy in a
raincoat is giving it up the ass to an Afghan hound.

*Steve is violently escorted from the store. Sue follows behind. The dog is quick to
follow.*

STEVE

(outside store)

Sure, throw us out. See if you ever get any business from us.

(Turns to Sue)

Isn’t that right?

SUE

Neither the store nor you will be getting any business from me any time soon.

The dog barks.

(To dog)

Let’s go for a walk in the park. Mommy needs to relieve some stress.

(To Steve)

And Daddy needs to go play in traffic.

First Confession

Julianna is alone on stage. She is retelling one of the most horrific albeit humorous experiences of her childhood.

I used to want to be a nun, but that was before I went to my First Confession. I was twelve. It was Saturday, and I usually slept in on Saturdays, but on this particular Saturday I was up before sunrise. I tried to fall back asleep, because even as a child, sleep appealed to me more than Mighty Mouse and my dreams were far more intense than any episode of Tom and Jerry. I remember waking up with the same sense of dread I felt before going to the dentist or later, the same sort of fear a girl feels before going to the gynecologist for the first time.

I couldn't eat breakfast. Everything looked the wrong color and felt the wrong texture and smelled putrid. Even my Cocoa Puffs looked like perfectly round, teeny-tiny balls of shit.

Getting dressed wasn't any easier. I spent an hour in the bathtub, scrubbing every inch of my body pink while silently mouthing the mantra "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." I spent the next two hours deciding what to wear. I must have changed outfits nine million times, trying to pick what color would most please God. My guess was white, although I would have preferred He liked purple or hot pink. The whole time I dressed, I rehearsed in my head what I was going to say. Forgive me Father for I have sinned. This is my First Confession and these are my sins. Drumroll please. I'd written my sins on an index card stolen from my mother's recipe box. The card was crumpled and the ink had smeared thanks to my sweaty palms. I wasn't sure where I was going to keep it, as there weren't any pockets in my white dress. I opted to put the card in my shoe, which made walking uncomfortable, but that way I felt more like a martyr.

On the ride over, my mother must have noticed that I was sweating profusely and having a mild panic attack, because she gently reminded me, "Julianna, it won't be so bad. It's confession. Confession is good for the soul." Confession might have been good for my soul, but it was wreaking havoc on my stomach.

Walking into Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow, I felt like a Roman being fed to the lions. Couldn't they have come up with a peppier name for a church? My mother nudged me in line behind a silver-haired lady dressed in a suit the color of a burnt sienna crayon. She was wearing a mink stole and the mink's small face was contorted in pain. I wondered if she was here to confess her bad fashion sense. My wit caused me to giggle, and my mother glared at me. I tried to pretend it was only nervous laughter but that damn mink kept staring at me with its beady glass eyes and I couldn't help but imagine an entire line of roadkill ornamentation. A cloak of possum, a cape of squirrel. I was practically peeing my pants so I shifted my attention to the figure of Christ hanging over the altar. It was always my biggest fear that during Mass, the statue would fall down and impale an altar boy. I'd voiced this fear to my mother who had said I was rotten to think such horrible thoughts and I must confess my evil thoughts to the priest. Altar boy maimed by Christ was number six on my index card.

Suddenly it's my turn and I take one fleeting glimpse of my surroundings--my

mother's gentle smile, the huge statue of Christ, the silver-haired woman saying the rosary. Is the nink saying it with her? I step forward.

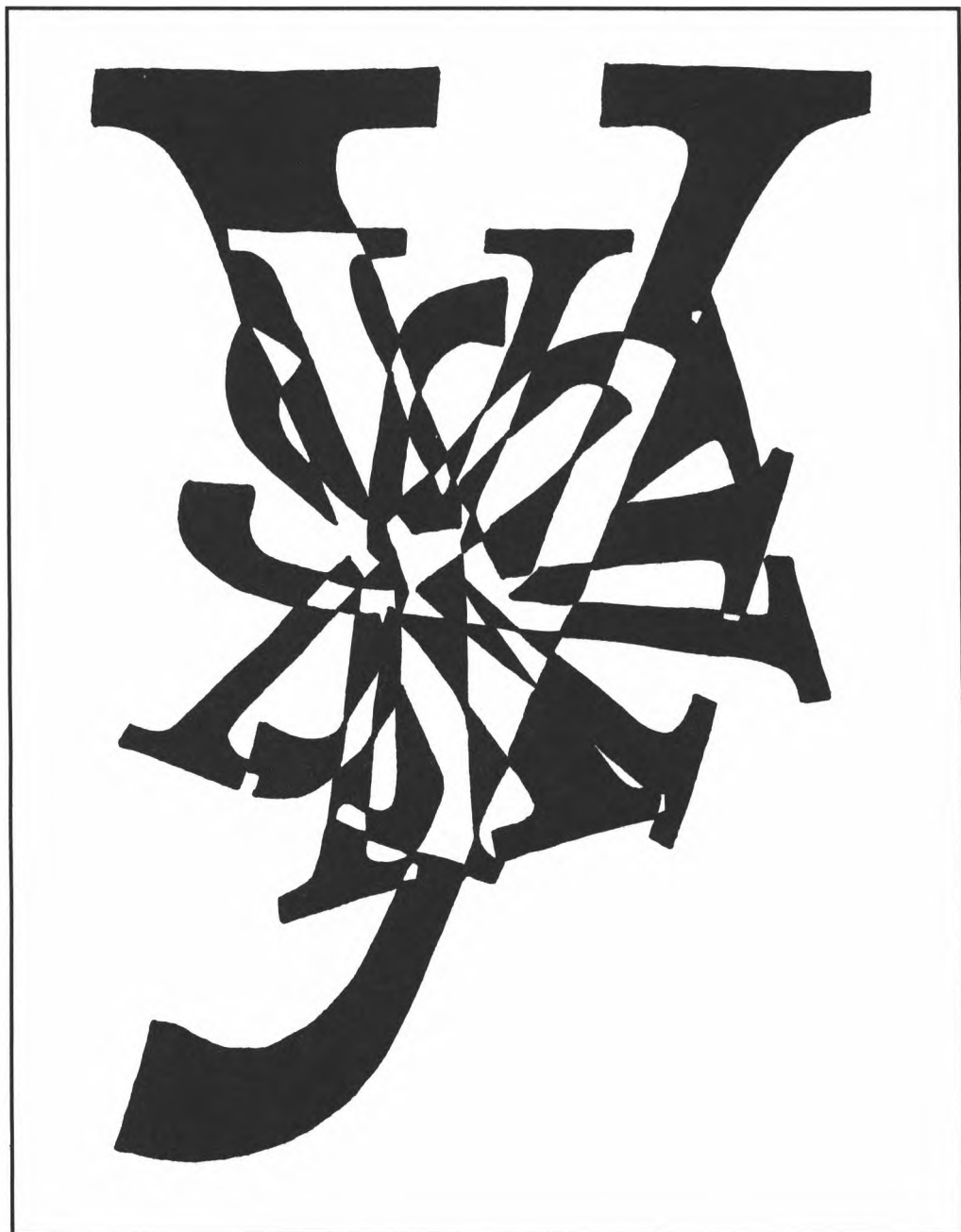
Inside the confessional it is black and my eyes can't adjust to the lack of light. I fumble for my index card and realize I won't be able to read from it anyway. I can't decide whether to sit or stand so I just sort of lean against the wall. I'm feeling claustrophobic because the room is no bigger than a broom closet. I notice a window about eye level and it quickly slides open. Light pours through the ornate lattice separating me from the priest. I wait. All is silent. I wait some more. I clear my throat so he knows I'm in there. No response. Maybe he's dead. I decide to start anyway. Forgive me Father for I have sinned. This is my First Confession and these are my sins. I take a deep breath and rattle them off one after another. I pictured Billy Skelecki naked. I fed my creamed corn to the dog knowing there are starving people in the world, but would they really want *creamed corn*? I purposely stained the shirt Aunt Gretchen gave me for my eleventh birthday because it was ugly and I hate polka dots--they remind me of chicken pox. I copied Beth's answers in Math, but I had to trade her a candy bar to get them, so that's more bartering than sinning. I lied to the P.E. coach about taking a shower, I just stood in the stall with my towel around me and splashed water on the exposed parts. But every seventh grader does that. Oh yeah, I imagined an altar boy impaled by a statue of Christ. I don't pause or breathe for fear the priest will interrupt and sentence me to death. After what seems like forever, I am finished. I wait. All is silent. I wait some more.

"Is that all?" Is that all? **Is that all?** What more does he want? Murder? Adultery? I'm only twelve for Christ's sake! I'm suddenly seized with an overwhelming urge to nudge the priest, just poke him and say, "Hey, I'm a kid, what I just told you is a big deal to me. This is a big deal to me. I'm in a fucking broom closet, talking to the Dark Shadow, pouring out my heart, and you ask if that's all?" So I reach out and push my fingers through the lattice, and I guess I misjudged my aim, or maybe I judged it correctly, because the next thing I hear is, "Aaaargh, my eye!" And that's when I realize it. (beat) I've poked my priest in the eye. I'm going to hell. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200.

I haven't been to confession since.

Sharon Tebeall

"Y"



k. brown

night

candles cast shadows
looming with blurred edges,
and flicker against dark brick
damp with the night's humidity.
spanish moss laced in
barely perceptible breeze
beckons chinese lanterns
dim now, hung low
over smooth tabletops.

a study in brown

subtly
tiger eye growls
glancing over moon
waltzing
with cinnamon lady

graciously extending
coffee-colored invitation
amber apologies
silver-tipped

hesitant,
brown spilling
onto cedar-scented smile
(and sculpting
brown lips,
brown hair)
with mirth
collected in pools
of controlled calm

amaretto artemis

yosemite falls

in my dream
we stood where we had
the morning before,
at the top of the waterfall
we had for months lived under
and looked up up to see;
that all summer stared down at us
asking if there was an end.

at the top
the rocks were smooth as antique silver plates
buffed by water's unrelentless polish.
deep pools were carved
centuries old
by the fierce churning of icy snowmelt
fighting to take one last breath
of back country air
before its descent to the valley floor.

in my dream,
you said as you did the morning before,
look how we stand now—
on these rocks that in spring drown
under furious whitewater.
in my dream it did not stay august
when next to the waterfall's dwindling volume
i would have to climb back down the steep trail,
but instead ran through the seasons
in a flash,
and come spring we were swept off the top
and down the cliff;
tourists took pictures for their vacation albums
but we just wound down the curves
of the merced river
holding hands.

From Humanity

(two women are on stage. they are both addressing the audience, but are not aware of each other's presence. their words overlap slightly sometimes, during transitions, and they speak the middle column of lines simultaneously. in the beginning of the piece, there is the sound of an orchestra tuning up. behind the women is a scrim showing a silhouette of a violinist—tuning and eventually playing silently, separate from the barely perceptible sound of a lone violin that should weave in and out of the women's words during the scene. at the scene's end, the violinist's silhouette bows to silent applause as the lights on the two women dim.)

first woman

both

second woman

i'm moving.

what am i doing here? i'm rotting.
i hate this tiny town because it is
not what i need. i don't know how
to describe why i hate this comfortable
town. unless it's just that it is
comfortable. but i do know how to
describe where i need to go.

i have to get out. i'm going crazy,
i think. i can't take any more of this
city, please listen to me. i need out.

you want to know why.

well then i'll tell you. i'll tell you
what i do want. need i need a city,
to live under a skyline, in the midst
of whatever is moving. i need to
feel the concrete under my feet.

well then i'll tell you. i need to get
out of the city, this vast portrait of
anonymity. don't laugh. it's like
swimming in a cold concrete sea.
concrete.

and i need to lose myself in the
sea of faces...i always marvel at
a city's people—the old and the

young and the rich and the poor
and every color you can imagine,
everywhere you look people you've
never seen before.

i'm tired of seeing people i've never
seen before, i'm tired of reaching for
recognition. and i'm tired of expecting the
unexpected. yesterday i saw a man die.
on the street. i don't need that...and i
don't need my block on the nightly news...

and the unexpected. on the news
last night they showed the block
where a man had died. right on
the street. the rhythm of the city,
i think, is a pulsating sadness.
it's driving, reaching. and it's
what life is all about—death, and
pain and loss and hope and thrill
and darkness and lust and

noise and confusion.

i'm tired of that, too. all night long,
honking, yelling, music playing.
and flashing lights and neon signs
and street lights. stop, go. stop, go.
the people here *never* stop. but they
don't go anywhere. they just keep
circling, dashing between the office
and the theatre and the coffeehouses
and the symphony in a desperate
attempt to find peace.

a whirlwind.

that's what it is. a mad,
swirling wind of change
and speed. the theatre, the
galleries, lunch breaks in
the parks between the statue
of a dead president and the
motionless form of a sleeping
homeless person. and night,
when the city comes alive, says
hello, this is me, and her lights

sparkle like diamonds. she dresses
up for everyone. everyone can
enjoy her beauty. everyone is
looking.

everyone is searching.

the business woman in suit and tennis
shoes on her way to work...

the sad punk kids with pink hair
trying to fit in...

old ladies selling flowers on the street
corners...

lonely old men playing checkers on
the marble table in the public square...

and lights...

and lights...

and noise...

and noise...

and confusion...

and confusion...

and buildings that reach for the sky
and block out any uncertainty of what
may lie beyond.

and that's why i need to move. i
need to have that surrounding me.
because i know it's inside of me
already.

and that's why i need to move. because
i'm afraid that what's surrounding me
may be seeping inside of me. and i need
to get out.

and i need to be anywhere but here.

*(lights out on the two women. the last note of the
violin's song dies, and the violinist's silhouette
bows to silent applause.)*

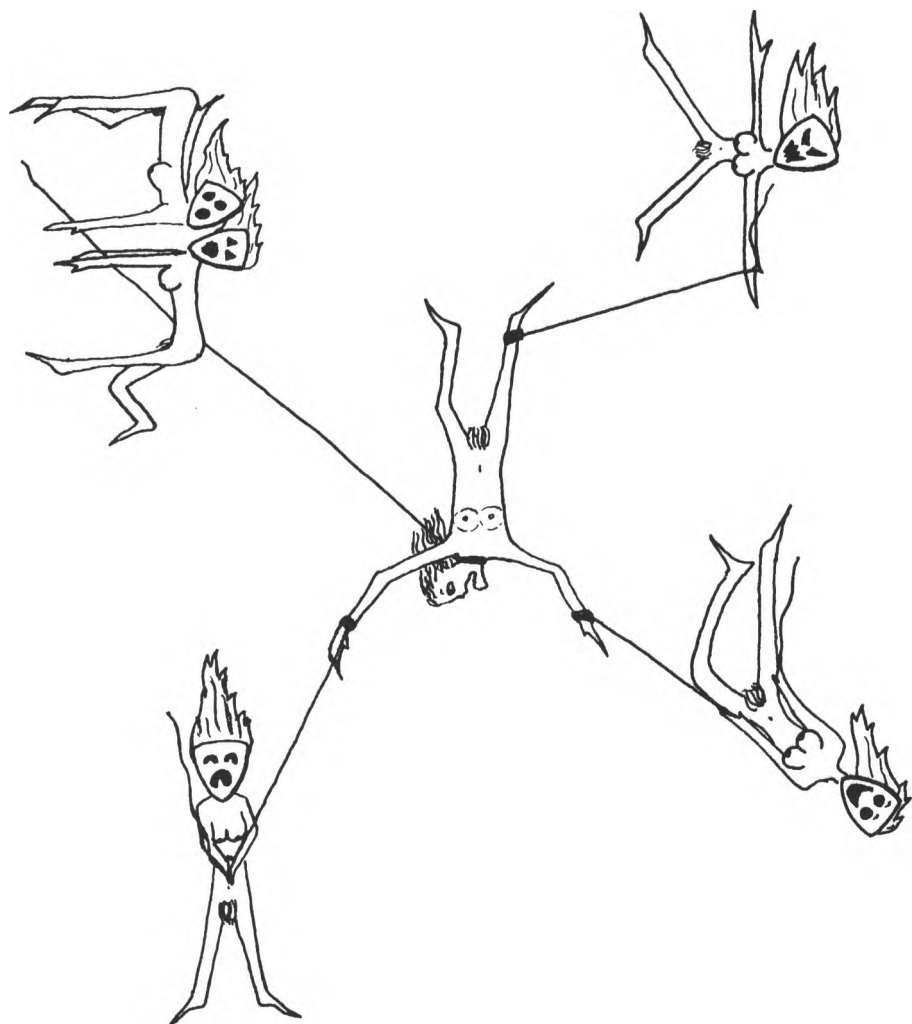
Kate DuBray

Picture of Bulimia

PICTURE OF BULIMIA



The black and white
of this photograph
cannot capture the
red BLOOD that was
on this toilet.
The sound of
RETCHING
and the STENCH
are also missing.



Untitled

I think maybe
you need to **think**
about who you are talkin' to
sister.
That word you didn't say
of who I am,
so he says,
as you're lookin'
at me,
me who confuses you.
Don't want to be me
do you?
So thrust out your chest
sister
be delicate, voluptuous
dainty and girlish
like **real** women
not me,
who is a man
to you,
or something
you can't think
about—seeing that
I'm you
sometimes
when you're alone
in your bed
touching
you, me, her,
you
who is **not**
confused
and knows why
he calls you
a woman
and me
D-Y-K-E.



Pirouettes

I'm looking down at my pink feet as I count under my breath—one, two, one, two. The leather ballet shoes move from first to second position, from third to fourth to fifth. I finish with what I think is an impressive flourish, my arms above my head. In the mirror at the front of the studio, I see ten other girls' feet and arms line up, identical to mine.

"Very nice rehearsal girls. Stefin, we don't need to be quite so dramatic. May I speak with you after class? Girls, I'll see you next week." Miss Jenny's voice is as firm and hard as the wooden blocks of her toe shoes, hanging from the practice barre. I am suddenly quite scared.

My classmates gather their bags, change into street shoes, and file down the stairs to waiting parents. Miss Jenny strides across the practice room, places her hands on my shoulders and propels me toward the mirror running the width of the wall.

"I want you to look in this mirror and tell me what you see," she orders me, giving a curt nod with her bun-topped head.

"I see...myself," I say, faltering at this strange request. Somehow I know this is not the reflection she is searching for.

"Well, what I see is a little girl who is too fat to ever be a ballerina. Let's give it up Stefin," she says, squeezing my shoulders too tightly, pinching. Her voice drips with false concern; she thinks this is for my own good. "You've been in my classes for three years now," she sighs, as if telling a horrible secret. "And, let's be honest, you are never going to make it—not with that body. Now, let's have no more dramatics—tell your mother she'll need to withdraw you from my class." Miss Jenny finishes up briskly, undoing the thin ballet skirt covering her black leotard.

"A dancer's body should be like the wind," she explains, turning a perfect pirouette, admiring herself in the long mirror.

I stand watching her; watching me in the mirror before us. My own black leotard is suddenly too small, too tight, stretching painfully over my suddenly fat ten-year-old body. I do not cry, though I feel as if I've been slapped. I have never been subjected to criticism such as this before; I don't quite know what to think.

"It's for the best, really," she smile into my face, a horrible, saccharin, evil smile. "Run along."

I cannot see as I run across the wooden practice room floor. My pink slippers make a soft, sandpaper-like sound on the boards. I grab my bag, my street shoes, my leg warmers. I run down the stairs to my waiting mother, leaving Miss Jenny to turn endless pirouettes in front of the mirror.

* * * * *

That year I do not withdraw from Miss Jenny's ballet class, much to her exceeding disappointment. After a heated confrontation with my mother, in which Miss Jenny assures her that I've misunderstood, there is absolutely nothing the matter with my body, I continue on, turning and tip-toeing my way across the varnished wood of the practice room.

"Are you sure you want to stay with her?" my mom asks me anxiously as she braids

my hair into twin plaits for class. "I'm sure there are other places we could get your lessons."

"I want to finish the year," I tell her. It has turned into a test for me. My ten-year-old self is going to best this woman in the pink ballet skirt.

So I continue on, learning the arabesque, the grand jete, the plie. Watching myself in the mirror, I see a ten-year-old in a black leotard, toes pointed, arms stretched above her head. Sometimes I see a girl who will never be a ballerina. Sometimes I see a girl who is too fat.

* * * * *

I'm looking down at my black boots, tapping in time to the music being played backstage. The floor is painted concrete, gray, industrial looking. My boots make a hollow sound as they hit it. There's a dull hum of conversation, the aftermath of a ballet performance. I'm waiting for my friend Anne to finish changing out of her costume, for it is she I have come to see.

Anne emerges, her hair still tightly wound around her head, her stage makeup still intact.

"You were great!" I greet her. "Clearly the star of the show!"

"Thanks! Hey, I have to find my teacher—do you want to come with me, and just leave after that?" she asks, glancing around.

"There she is...Jenny! Jenny!" she calls, waving her arms, catching up with an enormous woman, dressed in a loose, floor length skirt, the top of a black leotard peeking out from a knit shawl.

"Jenny, hey, I just wanted to tell you I'd be late to rehearsal next Tuesday because of a dentist's appointment..."

I do not hear the rest of Anne's explanation, so intent I am on this woman, this Jenny, Miss Jenny, my ballet teacher of ten years ago.

"Well, it's all right, just this once," Miss Jenny is saying, her fat jaw moving up and down, her cheeks squishing together like the jowls of some horrible chipmunk. She does not recognize me, does not acknowledge me. I want to laugh, I want to scream, "Serves you right!"

I watch her waddle away from Anne and I, the elastic of her skirt straining heavily around her gigantic waist, a cane supporting her huge bulk. "Serves you right!" I say to the retreating back, laughing.

Miss Jenny does not hear me, or does not think I am talking to her—she does not turn around, but continues on her way, slowly, squeezing herself through the narrow stage door at the back of the auditorium.

"How does she teach you?" I question Anne before she can wonder about my outburst. "She can't possibly dance!"

"No," Anne explains. "She just sits on the practice room sofa and counts the time. We're advanced so we don't really need her to show us the moves. It's sad, isn't it?" she continues. "I guess once she had a really great dancer's body—really took pride in it. That was before I knew her, though. Come on, let's get out of here!"

Anne pushes open the stage door and we step into the winter night, the cold wrapping itself around us. After the warmth of the auditorium, the cold comes like a rude shock. We both inhale sharply, bracing ourselves. Anne chatters on about the performance and

the other dancers, but her words fall on deaf ears.

I am remembering pink toe shoes and leg warmers and the one, two, one, two counting under my breath. A black leotard, long retired, twin braids marching down my back. Arabesques in front of a long mirror.

“A dancer’s body should be like the wind!” I shout into the night. Anne stops, startled.

“What?” she asks.

I don’t answer her, but instead turn a perfect pirouette under the stars.

Relations in Yosemite

Light dances on the rippling river
And the majestic rocky cliffs
That loom around the river
Like parents, protective of their young.
Whirlpools spin and giggle to each other
As they swirl over the stoney bed.
The cliffs, wrinkled by impressive age
Relent to the descending chilly dusk.

Another Vision

I want to walk peacefully in a land of great beauty
Breathe in the sweet air, taste the passion in the wind
Race to an open field of grasses and lilies
Roll like a colt in the splendor of Nature's wonders.

I want to do whatever I want to, whenever
A good deed strikes me, I can carry it out
Pressures of the materialistic life will avoid me,
Racing to meet the wind with all of Nature's children.

I want to love everything and not be afraid.
No child would cry out in the night, terrorized by
Nightmares lurking under the bed. No army would
Launch their bombs in fright of one another.

Nature is the peace, the life. Not war,
Not discomfort. We must live naturally
Together, peacefully, calmly, and with wisdom. Only
Together can the treasures of life be uncovered.
Only together.

Samantha Crawford

Untitled

I am mud.
Not ordinary chocolate mud:
not thin, runny,
weak.

No
I am thick, sticky,
hot.....

I am anger.
a flash!

How can you expect me to
sit and watch?
watch Him mold you like
soft
red clay.
Pat you into a pleasing
shape
and then toss you into the
fire.
watch you burn into a
crisp shell.
Tap tap
He loves to laugh
and slowly makes cracks in
your fragile crust.
Tap tap

you expect me to
listen to you
silently moan
as piece by piece
you fall apart.

Divided.
Harsh...baked hard by the
intense heat, pain.

I have lost

all of my tears.
I am red dust
which blows in your
eyes and claws at your
face.
But you turn away,
you cover and hide
from me.

Your tears are not
dry...
they fall on me
and fill empty cracks

I stick to your shoes-
you carry me with you into
His house
where you break...shatter.

I will not leave you.

I am there
on your shoes
that you forgot
in the hall.

I am thick
I am strong
I am hard
I am mud.

WOMAN

They ask me if I am a Feminist.
How should I know.
The word is obscure, unclear, unsure.

What is a Feminist?
Does she parade about
in her big boots?
STOMP. STOMP.
Does she smash everything
in sight?

How should I know.
What do I know about being a woman?
A woman, is that what a
Feminist is?

A woman, who is she?
Where has she been?
What is her history?
What is her tale?

Her tale is one which
vanishes quicker than the
first snow.
Her past is always pushed away,
denied, hidden deep.

Why?
What is there to fear?
Why can I not learn of my ancestors,
of my past?

What I am allowed to learn
hurts.
Pain which penetrates
deep into my heart and spreads with
my blood,
to every part of my soul.

YOU ARE TOO WEAK.
YOU ARE TOO FEEBLE.
YOU ARE TOO STUPID.

YOU ARE TOO SLOW.

I WILL WRAP YOU IN CHAINS
HIDDEN BY SILK AND LACE.
I WILL TELL YOU
WHAT TO WEAR,
HOW TO LIVE,
WHEN TO SPEAK,
WHAT TO LEARN.
YOUR HEART AND MIND
BELONG TO ME.
YOU SHALL NOT WANDER
YOU SHALL NOT QUESTION.
YOU SHALL OBEY.

Such history cuts,
leaving open wounds to
Bleed. Bleed.
Such words burn like a brand.
Woman, she is marked.
She is labeled.
She is bound.

My angry screams are muffled.
My words are erased.
I slowly vanish from the world,
from existence.

I am ignored.
Woman never lived.
She never fought,
she never loved,
she never smiled,
she never cried,
she never hungered,
she never thought,
she never died.

I search and I search.
Knowledge of my past
always escapes me.
Knowledge of my existence
always hidden, out of my reach.

What anger they must feel,

these women of the past.
They kick and scream,
"Let me out!"
"Let me be heard!"
But their words are ridiculed,
torn into tiny bits and
thrown to the wind.

Who bears such authority?
Who dares deny me of
my birthright?
I was born to hear these women.
I was born to let their voices run free.
To hear their voices pulsate in my heart.
Who dares lock me out?
To kill them?
To kill my past and narrow my path?


My future path should all but
disappear without those voices
of the past.
Erase. Erase.
What a fear.
Shall my words vanish before the ink is dry?
Shall I slowly, piece by piece
be swallowed by the walls?

Will my voice join so many
of my sisters in the
wind?

They ask me if I am a Feminist.
I say I am words.
I say I am past, present, and future.
I say I am woman.
I say I will be heard.

Emily Bunning

Papillon

Voilà! Il sort
comme le printemps de l'hiver et la belle fleur
de la terre.  La renaissance fragile
baise le temps nouveau qui est tellement beau.

Flying!

It comes out of the cocoon

like the spring from winter

and a beautiful flower from the earth.

The fragile rebirth

kisses the new season

in all of its beauty.

Kate DuBray

Lines of Construction



Obsession: Part II

Based on a True Story

Mitch stood with the bloody bat in his hand, thinking, not knowing what had gone wrong. He didn't know what to do about the body so he remained motionless, staring at the blood-spattered wall, trying to summon rational thoughts. He wanted to call his mom, wanted her to fix it the way she'd fixed everything since he was little. She would kiss his hurt away like she used to, and stroke his hair, and put a bandaid on it and everything would be fine...everything would be fine. The thoughts echoed with startling loudness in his head, pounding like a herd of horses storming across the Kansas prairie.

He met Lena on the first day of his first year of college. One of the fraternity houses was having a big keg party and he went with a couple of friends, wanting to seem cool, to fit in. He had had about five beers when he saw her playing pool with one of his friends. With an exaggerated saunter he moved towards them, anxious to meet some college women, anxious to appear calm and sophisticated while doing so. Barely glancing at him as he made a production out of saying hello to his friend Brian, she made one swift shot which put the eight ball in the corner pocket, won the game, laid her cue stick on the table, and began to walk off. Mitch grabbed her sleeve, holding on the way a child clutches a dime on the way to the candy store. She turned, smacked him, and walked off. A week later they began a relationship that would carry them through three years.

His parents didn't approve of her. They wanted him to go out with someone "nice," like Elaine Murphy from church, who always said "yes, ma'am" and "yes, sir" and never had a hair out of place, but he didn't want that or anything like it. He liked Lena, the one who had gotten eight speeding tickets in the span of a week, who sold an heirloom ring at a pawn shop so she could fly to Chicago for the weekend to see U2 in concert, who has sat in the front row at the football game and pulled a water gun on the cheerleaders. He wanted no part of a relationship with someone like Elaine Murphy in which he would smile tightly and laugh little.

Every Thursday night they would go to Mike's Bar to shoot some pool and have burgers and beer, ZZ Top playing on the stereo. She would always beat him. They both knew this before they started, but they played anyway, with a sense of good-natured rivalry. Afterward they would go to his friend Brian's for poker. She would beat them at poker the way she'd beat Mitch at pool and they would groan and complain as they handed over their money, grinning all the while. She and Mitch would then go home, to her apartment, where they would spend the night curled close to one another. That was when things were good.

Lena had been stunned by the realization that things weren't working. There was no foreshadowing, no buildup, just one day the thought struck her like being punched in the stomach. Knowing that Mitch wouldn't be happy with her revelation, that he wouldn't feel the same way, she avoided telling him for two weeks, until it became impossible for her to maintain her silence. He had pleaded with her for half an hour, telling her he loved her, asking her to give him another chance. When she refused to

his anger shook his entire body and he slapped her, then left.

He had been confused by her quicksilver change of heart. He had been feeling confident about their relationship, their compatibility, their future with a station wagon and dog and two little boys and his mom and dad in the house next door. He had bought her a ring. When she told him that she wasn't happy with him any longer, they were sitting in a fast food Mexican restaurant next to the college, eating hurriedly so that they might make it to class on time. She dropped the bomb right there, right when he had a spoonful of beans in his mouth, right after he told her how much he loved her.

His eyes grew wide, the size of Dixie cups, and his mouth dropped open. She mumbled an apology and scrambled out of the restaurant. Seconds later, he rushed out, finding her walking towards campus with an aggressive step. He ran to catch up with her and grabbed her arm roughly, much as he had the night they'd met. She pulled away and began to run as if she had a pit bull at her heels, but his long legs made her effort to escape useless. He tried to articulate his hurt, tried to tell her how he couldn't live without her, tried to make her understand what she was doing to him. He slapped her, carried away by anger, unable to stop the violent impulse that rolled through his veins. He looked at his wide hand, unsure if the thunderous slap had come from his body or someone else's. By the time he realized what he'd done, she was gone, sprinting across campus and into the crowd, her red shirt becoming a smear as she was eaten by the mob.

She thought that was the end of it, that the relationship was over, that she could go on with her life. But he was there, calling her, showing up at her apartment, leaving notes on the windshield of her car. It continued for months, with Lena not going anywhere alone, not answering the phone, not living. It continued for months until the night with the bat.

Lena and her friend Jeff walked to the parking lot together that day, talking lightly about class, the football team, her hometown. There had been no note on her car from Mitch, as there usually was, and the absence should have alarmed her. She drove to her apartment, singing with the radio, windows down, wind in her hair, as happy as she had been in the last month. She opened the door to the apartment while juggling an armload of books and went in, setting her things down on the counter and checking the messages on the answering machine. She was humming lightly, happy that it was Friday, happy for the warm weather, happy that there had been no note from Mitch.

He had seen her with Jeff Smith in the parking lot next to the Fine Arts Building. He saw the way she smiled up at him. He saw the way she laughed with her head back, her hair falling around her shoulders and catching the afternoon sun. He loved her so much he hated her. "There's a fine line between love and hate, Mitch," his mother used to remind him when he said he disliked the boy next door or his algebra professor. There was no line now.

Driving to her apartment he flipped through the scrapbook in his mind of memories of better times. There were photos of him and Lena skinny-dipping the college lake on a frigid November night, turning all the books on the library shelves upside down, toilet papering the door of the Dean of Students office. The photos made a kaleidoscope which swirled in his head until he reached her apartment building. He got out of the truck, sighed heavily, climbed the stairs, picked the lock on her apartment door, and let himself in. He went straight to the closet where he knew it would be. He grabbed it, the bat he

had given her as a token of good luck for her softball tournament, and went to wait in the living room, sitting calmly in an arm chair. As he heard her key in the lock, he put both hands around the handle of the bat and crouched forward, like a jungle animal stalking its prey.

She saw a movement in the living room and she called out the name of her roommate softly. No response. The heavy continuous thumping of her heart was drilling a hole in her chest and her palms began to sweat. She called out for her roommate again. No response. She crept into the living room quietly, hesitantly and saw Mitch sitting on the chair, his knuckles white from clutching the bat. A frown distorted the features on her face and she opened her mouth to speak. Mitch rose, seeming taller than usual. Pivoting, she tried to run, tried to scream, tried to escape the madness. Then she felt the first blow.

Kate DuBray

Bouquet



High School Creative Writing Conference

1994 and 1995 Winners

The *Harbinger* staff wishes to congratulate the winners of the 1994 and 1995 High School Creative Writing Conferences. For the past two years, Stephens has hosted this conference, which brings high school students onto our campus to share their work and to meet other writers. Each year, the faculty and community volunteers who lead workshops for the high school students choose winners in for each of four genres: poetry, non-fiction, fiction, and playwriting. We have included these winning selections for your enjoyment.

—The Editors

Nora Love

1994 Poetry Winner from Jefferson City High School

the question

it crawls from under
the cleanly manicured fingernail
of a finger
stretched in accusation and
scuttles down the pant leg
of checkered trousers
to land at feet
where, like the butt of a cigarette,
the steel-toed shoe
smashes it into the ground.

it knows destruction
but cannot be annihilated.

it knows life
but cannot
create it.

it is there
on desolate, hate-filled streets,
flipping like a piece
of discarded paper
past squandered lives
curled in doorways.

it was there as a small Jewish girl
raised her eyes in bewilderment
to learn harsh hatred
from the fierce face
of a German soldier.

it is there as the barbed strike
sends an anguished cry into the night,
and a woman,
who knows no other life,
sprawls
at the feet of a man,
who knows no other way.

it is the question
but cannot be the answer...

it is there
when small tears are rubbed aside
by small cupped hands
as small ears try
not to hear angry voices that
filter flimsy walls.

it was there when
a woman despairingly stretched
for a son she would never see again
as Nazi soldiers
herded them to death.

it is always there
and it has always been there
when eyes are averted
and minds search not
for the answer
that cannot be
found

it is there
at the detonation
of a warrior's gun
rocketing into the night,
ending a God-given life.

it is there
when man and man
confront in irrational
hate,
neither willing to understand the other,
but rather willing only to
kill.

it is there now.

But there
is also here.

here spinal chords turn and curl
as noses touch knees,
and eyes try

not to see and minds try
not to ask
the question
that falls—
an oppressive stone
into the hollow of my stomach.

But it is there.
Asking why.

Liz Graham

1994 Fiction Winner from Jefferson City High School

Return of the Sun

The sun scorned Charlottesville, leaving us in endless pool of gray, shadowing the distance in tiresome steel.

Miss Mary Whitaker, an old maid with peppered hair, declared it was a bad omen to be so long without the sun.

Miss Mary Whitaker had large hips and cherry red-rough cheeks, flushed from her continual chatter and heat from her baking stove. Miss Mary Whitaker felt it her duty to inform herself (and anyone else who cared to listen) all about the inhabitants of Charlottesville.

Every Thursday, when my grandmother went to tea at Miss Mary Whitaker's house, I went with her. It was ritual to sit politely and wait for the old ladies to begin their gossip. I kept well informed of all the sins and trials of the township. I was the first to know all the good chew about the minister, his wife, their children, and, naturally, the people involved with them.

One particular day I remember quite clearly. I, dressed in a blue cotton frock, followed Grandmother up the creaky stairs and onto the rotting front porch of Miss Mary Whitaker's. Grandmother rang the complaining bell and waited patiently for Miss Mary Whitaker to waddle to the door.

"Come in, Dody, and little Annabelle," she cooed. Miss Mary Whitaker was the only person in the town to call me Annabelle. Everyone else called me Belle, but Miss Mary Whitaker said it was improper not to use a person's full given name.

Anyway, we drifted into the parlor where the familiar silver teapot with the dent in the side sat waiting for the talk to begin. Grandmother sat on the end of the fading flower print sofa where she'd sat every Thursday afternoon for the past fifteen years.

"I would wait for you to get your tea, Dody, but this just cannot wait!" Miss Mary Whitaker's doe-brown eyes took on the knowing-a-new-secret sparkle; her red-rough cheeks, a lobster-like glow. She drew in a deep breath and glanced about her dusty parlor.

"It's said that he's come back, Dody!" Miss Mary Whitaker whispered the dramatic words and rolled her eyes back in her head to make an emphatic gesture. The room darkened; I noticed shadows I'd never seen before. A wailing moan came from every corner and shivers ran over my frame. Miss Mary Whitaker shuddered and went on.

"He's living in the old home, you know, and I've heard him at night...rattling and wailing in his tormented dreams," her voice came high pitched and scratchy from the excitement in her throat. "Sometimes, I even smell soured whiskey, the brand he always drank, and this morning...this very morning there were footprints on my veranda. I know it was him, Dody. He's come back." Miss Mary Whitaker glanced at my grandmother and sipped her rose-bud tea. Thinking she was finished with the ghostly story, I prepared to wait for gossip on the minister's latest sin. But Miss Mary Whitaker went on.

"I know that's why it's been so unbearably gloomy around here. He never did like the sun. I'm so afraid for all of us. I knew someday he'd come back."

Miss Mary Whitaker said she felt faint and fanned at her plump red face with a flowery napkin. That's the first time I looked at Grandmother. Sunken eyes glassy and wide with fear, she was drained of blood. I didn't understand anything. Who was this "he" and what was all the nonsense about footprints and soured whiskey? It was too much. Besides, this whispery talk gave me the quivers.

Miss Mary Whitaker placed her china tea cup on the coffee table and whimpered the last words of the Thursday afternoon conversation.

"Well, if he is back, God save us all!"

The fire started. In the quiet stillness of the Charlottesville night, the homes on Beacon Hill suddenly burst into incandescent orange. Even the famed Charlottesville fire department was not in time to help. Death had come—like a thief—and stolen, with no conscience, every home and family on Beacon Hill.

Miss Mary Whitaker was, naturally, the first to arrive at the horrific scene, tears in her faded brown eyes, her weathered coat flung carelessly over her robust frame. The whole town clustered about her, hoping for some maternal comfort.

My grandmother with the look of a rabbit in hunting season kept glancing toward the old Lowery house. It stood in the middle of our primitive village, rusted and worn with disuse and abandonment. Most of the townspeople looked nervously towards Lowery house, having heard that it was again inhabited. After realizing nothing could be done for Beacon Hill, Grandmother called to Miss Mary Whitaker and whispered in frightened child-like tones, "You don't think...surely not...not, him, Mary!" Miss Mary Whitaker nodded and whimpered as the tears rolled over the wrinkles in her aged face. Others overheard their conversation, their eyes reflecting Lowery house in the half-lighted blaze of the fire. They all knew Captain Lowery had returned.

After the inferno, an unidentified illness claimed several inhabitants of the town. The fever demolished entire families, and Doc Madison had no clue as to what it was, only a bacteria that poisoned the blood. It started slowly, with a cough and then raged into a fitful delirium full of constant pain. After leaving its victim kissed with death, it waved and silently left a shadowy corpse. Miss Mary Whitaker took it upon herself to nurse several families in the village and was often out late at night still washing the perspiring faces of the "poor lambs." Nothing anyone could do saved those stricken with the Charlottesville Plague.

Grandmother took to her room with a bottle of port wine and a handkerchief. Drunk and terrified, she moaned about Lowery House and Captain Lowery who was slowly destroying our town in his vengeance. I was too young to know anything other than to stay away from Lowery house.

Over the period of a year and six months, nearly every family that had survived our tribulation had either packed their belongings and left or stayed cloistered in the assumed safety of their homes. Only Miss Mary Whitaker, my grandmother, the minister, a scattered array of remaining citizens and I dared to face the curse over our town.

In ancient Charlottesville fashion, the dark tale of Captain Smithton Lowery still haunted the cob-webbed edges of every mind, terrifying senses with anticipated chills.

Miss Mary Whitaker told me that story not long after the plague. "Years ago, during

the war I suppose, Captain Lowery's beautiful wife, Nancy and his four beloved children were savagely murdered in their peaceful slumber and their bodies burned. Captain Lowery, upon his return, felt the anguish of his loss and took to drinking large amounts of whiskey. He took fever and died shortly afterwards but not before promising his revenge would live on in Charlottesville—no one would escape his desire for retribution.”

She also told me, in sad nostalgic monotone that she had been engaged to Captain Lowery's oldest son, Marcus.

“We were young and foolish, not much more than children ourselves. But I think our love might have been real.” Her eyes misted over a bit, and then she continued to explain the curse of Captain Lowery. “I just knew he'd come back one day!”

Grandmother nearly drank herself to death, existing in a world of fear and intoxicated illusions. I'm glad, in a way, that she wasn't coherent enough to face the truth when it came.

The last one to go in our crippled town was the minister. He was found sleeping in an eternal tranquillity, rope burns around his neck.

The day after, they found Miss Mary Whitaker's body, a suicide, sitting upright in her flower-print tea chair. On the coffee table, where the silver teapot with the dent in the side should have been, sat red-tipped matches and two empty bottles of bacterial poisoning.

Lowery house still stands, rusted and vine-covered. The sun releases its rays now, and Charlottesville has quite forgotten its plight so many years ago. In a shaded corner of the churchyard, hidden from sunglow and wondering eyes, are the graves of Marcus Stonewall Lowery and Miss Mary Whitaker, truly devoted until her last moment to her love, his family, and vengeance for his life.

Aidan Strickland

1994 Non-fiction Winner from Jefferson City High School

Paper Doll

I stared out over the city. Bone white skeletons of sycamores and the river, a ribbon of mercury, mirrored the pale moon light. Oaks, with pieces of old paper bag still stuck to the ends of their branches, hundreds of them, loomed between the river and that hill overlooking the city.

I was tired, stranded here at some stranger's house. It was a party. My friend drove me here three hours ago and agreed to take me home. I hadn't seen her since. For the first half hour, I had tried to mingle, chat with acquaintances about nothing while they offered me wine and orange soda concoctions. Pleading my distaste for Orange Crush, I escaped to a porch swing on the lawn. Oh, well.

Four or five people had shifted around me, blocking my light from two citronella candles. I'd tried to read fortunes from the tea leaves left in the bottoms of their cups. But it was too dark to see well, and I'd had to strain my eyes to make sense of the dark spatters and sodden clumps in the cup I'd been holding at the moment. The flames sputtered and died; I gave up.

"Sorry," I said, "but I'm just not getting anything. It's too dark." I handed the cup back to the girl who shrugged.

"I did see a cross though . . . it's supposed to be good luck . . .," I said, raising my voice as if I asked a question. She strode away, indifferent.

The swing I sat on was heavy rose wood, English garden style, with a curved back and crossed pieces like a decorative gate. A sprawling oak supported the swing by a horizontal branch, and from here I could see every thing.

Oh well, things aren't so bad . . . at least I'm not too cold . . . she'll have to come back some time soon. I wanted to hide my ultra-white keds. Everyone else had on big black boots, heavy shoes with military soles. What was I doing here?

The city light flowed below me, somehow serene, and somehow vital. A channel of white lights surged towards me while smaller beacons like red-hot candies wriggled upstream. The buildings, floodlit from the ground, reminded me of camp outs in a friend's backyard. Her brother had held the flashlight under his chin and told us ghost stories. Fireflies had blinked in the darkness.

Everyone was tired, or they should've been. It was too late for me to imagine that anyone had to be up early in the morning for church.

I was alone, but across the yard I saw people huddled under a dingy porch light. Cigarette butts still glowed orange in the shadows outside their circle.

It was cold; the tea in my own cup was cold. I'd spilled some on my knee, and now I had wet denim clinging to my damp skin. Maybe I could bum a ride from someone. Looking at the group, I couldn't see anyone who hadn't been drinking. She'd better be back soon.

A boy trampled through the orange leaves and sat down on the swing. I just sat there while the two of us listlessly kicked at the brittle leaves.

"If I tell you something, you won't write about it in your English class?" he said, turning to me.

My fingers stroked the oiled rosewood, surprisingly smooth for something kept outside. I should have been indignant instead of numb, but I just listened and felt the smooth wood under my finger tips.

What he'd said was stupid. I didn't know whether to laugh at him or shake my head. I imagined at that moment that this whole scene was being duplicated all over the world, multiplying like a string of paper dolls. Everyone I could think of was corrupt. They were the paper dolls, identical in their lack of individuality, corrupt because they had no reason for doing the things they did and no sense of self to tell them not to.

Suddenly, I was no longer tired. Looking around I saw that I was in the middle of some cheesy after-school special. It was one of those "It-is-O.K.-to-say-NO!" peer pressure situations they drill into elementary kids' heads.

"Tell! Why should I want to tell anyone—that you're just like every other stereotypical loser? Why would they want to know? God! Where's your own identity!"

Then I stopped and realized. Conformity was his identity. How silly. Was I the only stubborn person left who refused to do anything that I didn't want to? But that wasn't the issue: He had wanted to be like everyone else.

"Hey, you're still cool," he pleaded.

Whatever. "Who said I wasn't?"

Surely I had never met these people before. I smiled to the boy and stood up. Then I walked down the flight of uneven concrete steps to the street.

The lights were so much stronger down there. Families, exiting from a spiritual revival, surrounded me on the sidewalk. It was a relief to be back with my own kind—back with people that didn't make me think. I kept walking; I blackened out all the spinnings in my head. But thoughts of myself flickered through my brain: claustrophobia in a narrow shoe box.

Michael Flower

1994 Playwriting Winner from Jefferson City High School

Permission to Kill

The Characters:

Eddie: Around his mid-20s, dirty, unshaven. He's an alcoholic who, in the course of the story, will suffer from paranoid delusions. His typical attire is a dirty leather jacket, dirty jeans, black construction boots, and a white t-shirt.

Burton: Within one to two years of Eddie's age, he holds the same dress code, drinks excessively, and his hygiene is similar to Eddie's. He tends to be bossy and inconsiderate to the feelings of others.

Horseman: The fourth horseman of the apocalypse, the pale (yellowish-green) rider with the power to kill. He is a figment of Eddie's imagination.

The Setting:

The room is the main room of an apartment in Manhattan near Central Park; the only other room is a bathroom. The apartment is nine stories up. The year is 1957. In the apartment...

The door from the hallway is at stage right center.

There is an open window on the opposite wall of the door; it is at downstage left. A bed is at upstage center. It is unmade, and its sheets have not been changed in months.

A bedstand sits to the left of the bed with a phone.

On the wall with the window, there is a sink upstage beside some cabinets.

Also, there is a full-length mirror between the sink and the window.

A radio rests on a dresser on the right of the bed, against the upstage wall.

A small table is placed at downstage right with four beat-up kitchen chairs with ripped fabric lining.

The curtain opens to reveal the presently silent apartment...

A man enters, shaking nervously. He slips through the door, looking into the hallway as he slowly closes the door. Still holding the doorknob, he looks around the room for anyone. Convinced that the room is empty, he walks quickly across to a sink on the opposite side. There he washes his hands and then wipes them dry. He reaches into the cupboard beside him and extracts a glass and a bottle of whiskey. Still shaking, he pours the whiskey into the glass. He sits down on the bed behind him, setting the glass down on the bedstand beside it. He sheds his overcoat, which is drenched, and lets it fall on the bed. He then grabs a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket and lights one. He drops the pack beside the phone on the bedstand. He pauses to rest his head in his hands with his elbows on his knees. He then raises the alcohol to his mouth and shoots it down his throat. Putting the glass on the bedstand, he grabs the phone and dials a number. Waiting, he puffs once on his cigarette.

Eddie: (mumbling) Come on,...come on. Burt? Hey, man! Look, I—What? What'dya mean why'd I call? We gotta talk... (panicky) Yes, I know what we just did! I just—(dropping to a harsh whisper) I just cleaned my palms off for Chrissake! (pause) Sorry...Look, could you come over, man...like right now? (raising his voice) Come on! I need to talk about it and I— (falling to a whisper again) I don't want to do it over the phone. (pause, desperate now) Look, Burton...I really need to talk, man. I'm flippin' out over here. (pleading) Come on, pal... (pause, his expression is worried, then he smiles, relieved) Aw, great! Thanks, man. See you in a few, right? Great. Hey, man,...hurry, okay?

Puts down receiver, puffs on cigarette. After a second, he stands up, crosses to the cabinet and pours himself another glass of whiskey. Drinks it at the sink, leaves glass on cluttered counter. Crosses to radio, turns it on.

Radio: Look, Thompson, they all know what you did! Everybody knows! Who do you think you are that you can just take a life like that? (accusatory) You killed him! In cold—(Eddie jumps at the radio and turns the channel) (Light, innocent voice) Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It's been several months since my last confession, and, well...(pause) yesterday..., Father, I... I sinned... I sinned... I mean I... I need cleansing, Father! (desperate, panicky, yelling) ...I need you to wash off the blood, Father, wash away the sins, please! (voice deepens, turns sinister and evil) The blood felt so good! I reveled in my own sick selfish appetite! It was so easy... I just walked up from behind her in the shadows of the park and—(switches channels again, to newscaster voice) A body was found in Central Park tonight near 65th street. The woman's body was mutilated almost beyond recognition. Police say...Police say...police...police say (voice changes to low, sinister voice)...Police say you should be ashamed of yourself, Eddie! (dark, haughty laughter. Eddie jumps to turn off radio)

Shaking tremendously, he takes one last puff of cigarette, drops it and grinds it out on the floor. Sits down on bed and holds his head in his hands. He cries.

Eddie: (crying and shaking his head) Oh God! Why did I do it...Why did I think I could do it? She didn't do anything to me. Nobody ever did anything to me... (pause) Three times! Oh God, three times! (standing) That's it. No more (yelling, shaking his fist at the ceiling) Goddamn you!

He crosses downstage of the bed to the bedstand, picks up the glass, crosses to the cabinet and puts more whiskey in the glass. He sits on the bed and slams the alcohol. He then rests his arms limply on his knees and his head droops.

A loud three knocks at the door startles Eddie. He drops his glass and curses.

Eddie: Hold on! I'm comin'! (another three knocks) Keep your shirt on! (He opens the door, Burt steps in looking around nervously) Hey man! Oh wow, am I glad you're here! I'm goin' nuts, man! I—

Burt: What the hell is the matter with you? Are you stupid or something? Look at this! (he grabs the door, whispering harshly) Look at all this! Why the hell'd ya leave this crap on the doorknob for Chrissake!

Eddie: (surprised, a little hurt) Sorry, man. I just forgot to wipe it off the knob, I guess.

Burt: (crossing to the sink to get a dish towel, mumbling to himself) Yeah,... You're just stupid, I guess.

Eddie sits on the bed and sulks while Burt wipes the doorknob off. He throws the towel at Eddie when he's finished.

Burt: Make sure you get rid of this. (sits at kitchen table, and, leaning back in the chair, lights up a cigarette. Indirectly) Hey, man, why don't you move, anyway? Do you like walkin' up nine flights every time you come home? I hate it, man. I wouldn't be able to take it.

Eddie: (crossing to table and leaving the rag on the bed, hesitantly) Hey, Burt, I'm really shaky about this, y'know? I mean, that chick, man, she didn't do nothin' to us, y'know?

Burt: (standing, smacking Eddie around) Quit cryin', ya little bastard! (falsely comforting) Whatssamatter, it's over, isn't it?

Eddie: (stammering) Yeah, but—

Burt: Okay then, forget about it, man. Look, I'll be right back. I'm going down the hall to the bathroom. Pull yourself together. (he leaves)

Eddie crosses to bed, lies down. Loud hoof steps are heard from hallway, offstage. Eddie stands, crosses to door as "Come and see" is heard offstage (this is a reference to Revelation. When the seals are broken and the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse escape, "Come and see" precedes their riding). Eddie stops, creeps to the door. Begins to open the door when the lights flicker and go out suddenly. When the lights return, Eddie is covering by the bed. A large pale figure, looking like a medieval horseman stands above him, hunched over, breathing on Eddie's neck. Eddie looks up at him.

Horseman: (harsh, raspy voice) Do you think you have permission to kill? Do you think you have the power to kill? To slaughter innocent lambs? (laughs hauntingly, lights flicker and go out)

When lights return, Eddie is cowering by the bed alone. He stands, shaken, looks around the room. He crosses to a large mirror (full-length) on one wall, near the sink. Eddie examines himself.

Eddie: Oh my God. I must be going crazy.

In the mirror, suddenly, appears the horseman. He steps out of the mirror toward Eddie. Eddie stumbles backwards to escape. He scrambles to the table to help himself stand. The horseman walks toward him, laughing.

Eddie: (standing and shrieking) I'm sorry! I'll never kill anyone again! Please leave me alone! (now on his knees) I'm sorry!

Horseman walks past Eddie toward the door. Eddie reveals a jack knife and lunges for the horseman as Burt enters and the lights flicker and go out again. When the lights return, Eddie lies on the ground, beside Burt who is on his own stomach. The door is closed. Eddie gets up.

Eddie: (looking at Burt) Burt! Hey, pal c'mon! Get up, man! (rolls him over, the knife is in Burt's chest. Burt doesn't move) No way, man! (panicking) C'mon, man get up! Hey, Burt, man, don't play around!

The horseman's haughty laugh resounds throughout the room, echoing eerily. Hoof steps join the laugh and get louder, gradually.

Eddie: (yelling) Stop, man! Stop! I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! I didn't mean to kill anyone! (stands as the door blows open suddenly. Horseman stands at door, laughing at Eddie. Eddie backs up to two feet away from the window)

Horseman: (chanting) Sinner! Sinner! Sinner...sinner...sinner...

Eddie: I'll never sin again, never, I swear it! Please— (with his last word he stumbles and falls out of the window. Horseman slips away. Silence. Sirens begin to sound in the distance.)

Curtain

Charlena L. Wright

1995 Poetry Winner from Northwest High School

Burning Rainbows

Stinging zephyrs
carry the scent of rain
but there isn't a drop to spare
though dark clouds hover overhead.
An old man strikes a match,
tosses aside the pack,
kicking back,
to watch the earth blow smoke rings,
flames engulfing
fallen leaves with each puff.
Scarlet. Magenta. Brown. Gold.
Rising into blue background.
Green dwindles like my cash flow.
Frosted leaves are brittle,
frail to touch.
Yellow. Blue. Indigo.
Walking through the pumpkin rows,
they murmur back their "hellos"
to my sneakers trampling dead grass,
Soles crushing souls.

Jennifer Stahlman

1995 Non-fiction Winner from Jefferson City High School

But We Love Him Anyway

Our family was the norm: the average, middle class with two children and another on the way. Life at that time was great: school--full of homework and boring teachers--for that year was almost over; summer was on the way with free days of games and friends; and Michael, my brother, was still small enough to be bossed around. But May 26, 1983, changed our family forever.

I woke up that morning to my brother and our baby sitter, Maureen, chasing our gray farm cat around the house. A simple explanation that my parents were at the hospital was all the comfort I needed before escaping outside to find my friends. That day continued with the normal games of Barbie, "house," and tag as any other day would, till that afternoon when my father called.

"Hey Jenny, guess what? You've got a new baby brother!" he announced excitedly. "What do you think we should name him?"

"Nathan," I responded firmly. There was a boy in my class with that name, and I liked it.

"Well, how about Jonathan?" inquired Dad cautiously, and then he added with a quick thought, "It has Nathan in it."

"I guess so," I replied. It wasn't like I really cared about what his name was; I'd just never thought about it before. In my mind nothing had changed, yet, still, everything had.

While visiting my mother at the hospital, I hardly even glanced at the scrawny being in the incubator. Flowers in hand, I just ran to my mother continuously asking when she would come home. I don't think I even noticed Jonathan until the day he and Mom came home. He was lying in a crib in the living room when I walked up and took a good long look at him. His deep brown eyes gazed around the room as my eyes moved lower towards his nose and then his mouth. Born with a cleft lip and palate, Jonathan didn't look like any of the other babies I had seen before. I just stared at this strange baby that was my brother: his nose was flattened so only one true nostril was present on the left; the other was part of a gaping hole that led his upper lip which didn't curl as it should but was broken into two parts leading into the same hole. Soon my father's arm wrapped around my waist, pulling me towards his side.

"What do you think about him, Jenny?"

"He looks funny," I said.

My father's eyebrows drew together as his face grew serious; he gave me a penetrating stare and spoke the most meaningful words he has ever said to me, "But we love him anyway, don't we?"

As the days flew by, our lives lost the normality they once had. That summer Michael and I, a three and five year old, fended for ourselves since caring for Jonathan took all of our parents' time; Jonathan had to be fed every three hours, but the cleft lip and palate caused such difficulty that it took one and a half hours to feed him only two ounces. The transpiring years led to several trips to Grandma's while Jonathan had surgeries in St. Louis. Soon we discovered that Jonathan was not only physically but also mentally

disabled as he began to fall behind in his development: he was late to sit, crawl, walk, and talk; in fact the only development he was on time for was rolling over. More and more our lives revolved around this one person.

As both Jonathan and I grew, the bond of love between us evolved even more. We soon created our own game labeled “copy cat.” The game became more monotonous to the rest of our family as Jonathan and I would sit on the floor and repeat nonsense at each other for hours. As the game progressed the sounds became more difficult, more numerous, and actions such as shaking heads or hitting the floor with a fist were added. Now that Jonathan can utter several staccato “ahs” and bow a kiss by pursing his lips and producing a “smooch” sound, I still copy the sounds and actions back exactly. Jonathan also loves music, as do I. Often he has interrupted my guitar practice by bursting into my room but then simply sitting and listening. He tells me he enjoys a song by voicing an approval through vocal applause filled with varying “oo”s and “ah”s, waving his arms above his head enthusiastically, and spreading a big smile on his face. We also both love to swing on the swing sets. Many times we’ll have races to see who can swing the highest: as the set rock vigorously back and forth, we pump as hard as we can to reach the sky first. All these activities are special between Jonathan and me—these times are when I know as much as I possibly can about Jonathan’s feelings and fears at that moment, without normal everyday communication.

Jonathan, now eleven years old, has been diagnosed with combinations of Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Developmental Delays, and Mental Retardation, but these diagnoses continually change. This past August, while performing an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) to check for signs of Autism, doctors discovered that Jonathan had a brain tumor. In the following difficult weeks, Jonathan still looked and acted like the person he had always been; we still played our old games, but they weren’t the same. Every time I looked at Jonathan I kept seeing this *thing*, this blobby mass growing inside his brain until the day of the surgery. I could hardly look at him without breaking into tears. Within eight hours the tumor was removed, and Jonathan was home after only one week. Still non-verbal, he understands everything that is said around him and will show us what he wants through signs and actions—mainly by taking our hand and pulling us to what he wants or retrieving it himself and bringing it to us. Of course he loves Disney movies, “Mister Rogers,” and “Sesame Street” like any other child, yet he only learned to walk when he was five, and after all these years he still hasn’t grasped potty-training. Throughout these eleven years though, Jonathan has become one of the dearest people in my life. The brain tumor in August made me realize this even more. If he were not around I would forever miss our games of “copy-cat” and the presence every morning of his beautiful smile with his wide, deep, shining brown eyes, open mouth, and crooked teeth. Whenever I become angry, discouraged, or wonder why me of all people in this world should have a brother like this, I can hear my father saying, “But we love him anyway,” and I soon lose all resentment.

John Bonner Kleman

1995 Fiction Winner from McCluer Senior High School

A Defiant Circle

I was a mature twelve, loitering around a fire within a circle of societal rejects. We'd entitled this wooded refuge, with all the grim condensations a group of rebels require, "No Man's Land." The boys and men with whom I sat, John, Forest, Danny, "Tyke," Eric and "Goat," were publicly nothing but family in the circle, having been given drunks, adulterers, dealers, and abusers for legitimate family. It was here in this unlikely time and place that I met a circle of men led by the finest leader and composed of the most durable spirits and bravest explorers of life I've ever met.

In the summer after seventh grade, I found myself living somewhere between rural and suburban Illinois. My middle class, American dream family had split in the fall of that year, and I'd chosen to live with my father (the only respectable and appropriately macho thing for a twelve-year-old boy to do). It was summer, and since I was out of school, I now had the opportunity and the excuse to be a rebel. My father, conscience of the adolescent mentality, started me on the path of my needed rebellion with the cliched mark of a modern rebel--the Army jacket! Off I went; the sun was out and I was a fledgling rebel complete with a frock of morning hair and a wonderfully exhausted old army jacket.

I wandered around for days, building anger at the thought of the parents and the society who cheated me. The fashionable thing to do was to rebel, justified by a group, and I was simply looking for mine. I'd become attracted, via some rebel sense, to a dirt path that led, reluctantly, into woods where a littered old creek ran. The path was behind a ragged billboard and looked as good a place for the "losers" I was seeking as any. My curiosity quickly overcame me and, to spite its somewhat forbidding appearance and wooden sign that shouted "No Man's Land," I walked down the path with as rugged a look as I could bring to face. I was stopped dead in my march by the sound of an angry boyish cursing exceeded by the high pitched, tinny whine of a motorcycle. The sounds I heard I both sought and feared, but regardless of my feelings for the, they were nearing fast. I was frozen by fear or by some desire to look like a western villain, or possibly both. The brush ahead exploded as the front end of a dirt bike plowed through it and both villainous posture and my rugged face were replaced by fear. The figure coming for me was tall and thin and sported an insidious grin—that is until he saw me. The bike's rider turned the handle bars with such force that the tire bit into the ground and with a forward lunge the bike came to a violent halt. The rider, now looking more like a mouse than the former insidious rat, gave me a look of confusion and surprise and bared down on the throttle once again. I slipped into the bush at my side and tried my best to blend before what sounded like an angry mob arrived on the scene. A stampede of about six passed, cursing with a sort of playful tone at the now distant motorcycle. I escaped as soon as they'd gone by cutting through the brush in a direction I thought would take me back to the road from which I'd seen the sign in the first place. I ended up walking for miles before I encountered a set of train tracks I thought was surely that proverbial division that separated the good and bad parts of a town, judging by what I'd just seen. I was tired and just wanted to follow the tracks toward home when I heard from behind, "Hey, L.T., (making reference to the single lieutenant's bar on my shoulder) you new around here?"

I was hopeful and managed, though terrified, to regain my rugged face and turned to see the motorcycle rat pushing his bike toward me.

"Yeah, I've been here a couple weeks," I managed to mumble.

"You better watch where you go, L.T. Goat and them other boys would kill if they knew you were in No Man's Land."

I crumpled my brow to look stern and responded harshly (trying to keep with the theme and sound tough), "Why? What's so special about this No Man's Land?"

The boy responded, "It's supposed to be for Goat's friends only—and they like to make trouble."

"I take it then you're not a friend of this. . . Goat?"

"I just give them trouble, keep 'em sharp."

I thought the rat must be okay; he hadn't answered any of my questions as harshly as I'd asked them. With a little less gravel in my voice I asked, "You know how to get back to Wood Street?"

"Come on; I'm goin' to get gas down that way," offered the rat.

After a walk of a couple miles I had learned that the rat boy's real name was Danny and that he lived about a mile away from my dad's house, across the tracks. Danny was blunt and managed to spew out his family history and a brief summary of his conquests into No Man's Land before the end of the journey. His father and two older brother were plumbers but spent most of their time riding in a gang called "The Red Skulls." Danny was the youngest and, according to him, living all but on his own in the garage outside his house. My new companion's voice was lonely and a desire to belong in No Man's Land was obvious—although he maintained that they were much too dangerous a group for his taste.

Danny and I became close friends in the month to follow and spent days in his garage, which served as his shop and home, always working on the motorcycles. I was learning more about mechanics than I realized, and Danny's lessons remain the only mechanical training I've ever received. Danny and I talked a lot about being one of Goat's friends, and before long it was obvious that the group at No Man's Land was my ticket to the fashion of rebellion and Danny's sense of belonging.

The following Saturday, Danny and I tuned-up his prized motorcycle and prepared to go on a mission. "We come in peace" (followed by an exchange of the Vulcan hand sign) was, by my thinking, probably not the most appropriate greeting for our soon-to-be acquaintances, but as we rounded the turn in the trail toward No Man's Land, I had little else planned. Danny slowed the motorcycle to a near crawl as we approached a clearing in the woods never before seen by non-Goatians. It was well after sun-down and when Danny turned the headlights off, we could see, although the brush still concealed the ground, the glow of a large fire illuminating the circular clearing ahead. "Why don't we get a look at this little party before we just jump in, huh?" I suggested.

"Okay—but if they see us, we're dead. When we go, we gotta look like Duke if they're gunna' let us in."

We turned the bike around to allow for our getaway and crept up to the edge of the sacred clearing. Danny and I peered through the bushes and saw all the guys in the group sitting, as if Indians at some tribal meeting, in a circle around a fire made from broken-up shipping pallets. The fire was surprisingly small, given the amount of light it

produced, and was set in a large ash-filled pit. The faces of the group all wore the fire's glow and shadows that suggested evil by darkening their brows. They were talking in as calm a way as I'd ever seen. It was strange. They weren't like the rugged, dangerous hell raisers they'd been made out to be. The oldest and infamous, Goat, appeared to be mediator, asking questions to a boy with a pockmarked face Danny called Forest, who sat crying and mumbling directly across the circle,

"...he just beats the hell out of my mom because he knows she's hidin' money for me. The bastard just wants to support his habit—he doesn't give a damn about his family!"

"How many times is that this month, Man?" said the one called John.

"I lost count."

Danny and I sat speechless as we watched our Rebel ideals sit like boy scouts around a fire, talking about their families as if in a support group. I was shocked and impressed. I came seeking rebels and found a cross between the Swiss Family Robinson and AA.

On of the smaller Goatiens, Tyke, stood and exclaimed, "We oughta' go, Man—just go, leave them all, like Goat said—we could survive if we all got jobs and brought all our stuff—We could do it easy!"

"We can't go yet; we gotta wait for the right time," Goat said calmly.

"Just say when, and I'm with you Man!" the excitement was clear in Eric's face. The entire group lit with rousing approval at the prospect of leaving their apparently unanimous family troubles. Although all looked at the fire with an expression of thought, the group now stood silent, and I felt awkward watching them.

Danny and I took advantage of their preoccupation to pull back from the brush. My foot caught hold of a tree in my backward crawl and the shaking drew the attention of the entire group. "Hey! Get em!"

Danny and I leaped up and shot for the motorcycle. We had just reached the bike and raised it when we were overrun. Excited by our short chase, two guys jumped directly for Danny who was already on the bike and all three fell hard. I sat straight down as John lunged for me and posed little trouble—due in part to my lack of affection for pain and in part to the collapse of legs! We were taken to the fireside, sat like prisoners on the ground, and made to wait as a rope, that was rolled an hidden in the branches, was pulled down and knotted in a loop. "Climb the tree and stand on the first branch!" Goat commanded.

"What!?" I shouted.

"Stand on the branch next to John!"

John was perched on a branch, made accessible by a makeshift ladder, twenty feet above where I stood. When I looked at him, John grinned at me, lifted an eyebrow in a grim hint at our impending ruin, and directed at us a beckoning gesture.

"The hell I will!" I answered abruptly.

"Go or we'll make you go!" Goat insisted.

I looked around and the faces seemed to climb up over me with long angry stares—all fire-lit! I stepped up each wooden rung reluctantly and each backward look brought even more insisting stares. I was dragged up the last rung, and John's strong grip ensured a firm landing on the branch. "All right, what now?" I asked.

The group gathered in a causal huddle and whispered as John whistled the opening bars of a funeral dirge directly behind my ear. The command came up as a lethal whisper,

“Take the rope!”

I lifted the rope from John’s willing hands and slipped it around my thin white neck. “Put the rope under your foot,” Goat laughed.

“What?” I said in a quivering voice.

“Under your foot!” Goat shouted.

I quickly removed the rope from my neck and slipped it around my right foot. “John—come down,” Goat said with a wink.

“Now grab the rope and swing—if you think you’re so bad as to walk in No Man’s Land!”

I looked down and saw the path of my imminent swing took me directly over the fire. Two of the other guys were throwing whole shipping pallets onto the now raging fire. I shot a look of fear directly at Danny, and he answered it with a stream of sympathy that I could feel as I stepped out—then pulled back and regained my balance. I reasoned that if a finger can go through a candle unburned, then I could pass through the flames equally undamaged. Once again, Danny and I exchanged looks and once again I stepped out. I remember the rush of cold night air, then heat and fair-like screams dragging past my ears. A bright flash consumed me, and I threw up my arms in a sign of submission.

I woke to the on-looking faces of everyone in the circle with Danny and John screaming profanities and the smell of burning hair fresh in the air.

“You were supposed to hold on, Stupid!” a voice shot from the group.

“What now?” I asked under my coughing.

John paused and asked, “What’s your name? I know Danny, but I ain’t seen you around here before.”

I began to tell I had just moved here with my dad when Danny shot out, “He’s my brother. . . My step-brother.”

“You’re Danny’s brother?” John asked with a cross tone.

After a long pause I answered, “Well kind of--my mom married his dad.”

John helped me to my feet and said, “Well Danny’s brother. . .”

“Jack,” I interrupted.

“OK. . . Jack, what do you want here?”

Goat interjected, “It doesn’t matter, John, they’ve seen us and they’ve been through No Man’s Land. Now they gotta be in—Jack even did the swing.”

After a short conference of “the circle,” the group came back and started introductions. I was confused and then excited (inwardly, of course). We were in--with real rebels, who even made me face death by hanging and then by fire! It was exactly what I had been waiting for--the all-important identity (a concern at twelve years of age). Torches made from T-shirts doused in gasoline were lit around the perimeter of the clearing, wedged in the valleys of the big tree from which I had swung, and staked in the sand bar that lined the adjoining creek. I felt powerful bathing in all the light and surrounded by such bold dissidents. We ran through the woods along the trail with flaming torches in our hands. It was primitive and dangerous and nothing less than I expected. We held mock battles, using sticks for swords, still glowing with fire! We shouted and laughed and ignored all danger—time, authority, all the things I’d been taught to respect! We seemed to be everywhere, in the trees, in the water, and screaming through the woods.

I woke to piles of black ashes and the smell of dead fire. I had apparently slept in a

bath tub that was anchored to the shore. I looked around and at first thought I'd been left. I soon saw arms and legs, however, draped over the tree branches and noticed some snoring in the brush. I went home and managed to sneak past my dad and into my room.

The pattern I learned well in the next two months; the circle became my home and not a night went by that we didn't start a fire and sit and talk. Rarely did we reenact the chaos of my first night. I was accepted as Danny's brother and became closely tied to the guys in the circle; they fascinated me but I didn't belong there, for I wasn't abused, forgotten, abandoned, or taken advantage of by my family. The circle was something for which I gained tremendous respect. The circle gave me an opportunity to talk about some of the frustrations of going through my parent's divorce, but my problems, as hard as I tried to make them seem similar, were clearly trivial compared to the daily crises that the circle heard from other member. Goat was a tremendous leader; he forced the group to think and to react in healthy ways to their situations, and did it all while avoiding the feeling of an authority by speaking in language the circle understood and from experience they could relate to. They needed one another and depended on the circle's support to drag them through their horror-filled lives. The circle, under Goat's leadership, was all the family and hope that each member required. I later discovered a pile of blankets, cans of food, and other provisions near a tree marked with orange tape. I asked my closest connection to the inner working of the circle, Danny, what they were and he told me that Goat had set it up so members who needed a place to escape to could stay in No Man's Land, free from the abuse of their families. Most times a member called "Tyke" (after the dog on Saturday morning cartoons) would ask excitedly about the circle's long standing plans to run away together, and Goat always promised that the time would come. Danny was more a part of the circle and their plans to escape than I ever expected. I could see that he had become dependent on the circle's support.

We were sitting in the circle just as we did on any other night when Goat came and sat down in his normal position. He announce, "For years we've taken the s—t our families force on us and for as many years we've been meeting here and keeping on another alive." (Nods of approval were given all around.) "It's time that the circle leave the s—t behind and go find our futures." (Realizing what this meant, everyone turned in a mechanical stare directed toward Goat, but were all silent.)

I realized as I watched Danny, Goat, John, Tyke, Forest, and Eric walk out of the clearing the next morning, that the source of rebellion is need and not fashion. All the members of the circle were heavily loaded with bags, food, and bedding, but Goat carried a small familiar wooden sign that whispered, "No Man's Land."

Joe Reinert

1995 Playwriting Winner from McCluer High School

Shadows on the Wall

Cast of Characters

David Stannel, Carrie Stannel,
Michael Tolesen, Carly Willander,
Eric Stanz, Jean Quilet,
Louis Melbourne

Scene 1

(Scene: The inside of a house. The living room, on the right, is sparsely furnished with a coffee table, a padded chair, and a wooden chair. To the right is a study with a desk, a padded chair, a shelf of books, and a psychiatrist's couch. The walls of the house are simply wooden frames. The only actual wall is the upstage wall, which makes for the outside wall of the house. A door is set in the upstage wall leading into the living room. There is a door connecting the living room with the study, and another leading offstage right to the rest of the house. David Stannel, a well-dressed man in his early sixties, is in the study sitting in the chair behind the desk. The couch is turned to three-quarters right and lying upon it is Michael Tolesen. He is in his late thirties, and is wearing disheveled clothing. At curtain, a light is on the study.)

Michael

I can't believe she's doing this to me. My wife! My wife... *(With contempt)* She wants to put me in a "Mental Institution." *(Rises and begins to pace)* She thinks...She thinks that...She doesn't think I can get the help I need...here...from you. *(Rounds on David and speaks pleadingly)* I told her that you *would* help me, Dr. Stannel. You will help me, won't you? I mean, you can, right? *(Sits down on edge of couch, puts head in hands, and begins to cry)* Please, Dr., you've got to help me. Please.

David

(In a soothing voice) Of course, Mike. Of course I can. Now, why don't we... *(Light comes on in the living room and Carrie Stannel enters upstage, shutting door behind her. David hears the door close and interrupts himself)* Excuse me for a moment please, Mike. I think that's my wife coming home. *(David rises and crosses into living room through door. Light dies on study and Mike is gone before light comes back on. David crosses to Carrie and takes her hands in his)* Hello, Carrie. Why are you back so soon? It's not even one o'clock yet.

Carrie

I took off work early. I...had to see you again. *(Takes her hands out of David's and turns down stage. There appears to be a deep pain in her eyes)*

David

(Slightly confused, he does not notice she has turned away) But...why did you have to worry about seeing me? You are going to be here tonight, aren't you?

Carrie

I'm sorry. I wish I could, but I have an important meeting to go to tonight. It'll be too late to see you by the time it's over. *(She crosses and sits in the padded chair)*

David

(Slightly downhearted) Oh. Well, I understand. *(Suddenly cheering up)* Hey, I know. Have you had lunch yet? I can call Louis to bring us down something. What do you want? *(He crosses to an intercom on the upstage wall. Carrie crosses to David and takes his hands in hers)*

Carrie

David, listen. I...I have to go. We're pretty busy down at the office today, so I told them I'd be right back. *(She kisses him on the cheek, then turning to exit, says)* Bye.

David

(After she closes the door) Bye *(David crosses back into his study. Light's die on living room and come on in study, where Jean Quilet is standing by the bookshelf, thumbing through a book.. David enters and stands by the door)* I'm sorry about the interruption, Mister Quilet. *(Crosses to desk)* Now, where were we?

Jean

(Carefully closes the book and places it back on the shelf. Speaks with a French accent) You were trying to convince me that my wife is not cheating on me.

David

So tell me, Jean, what exactly makes you think she's having an affair?

Jean

Well, for one, she is always being busy. She never spends time with me anymore. I hardly ever see her.

David

Do you think she might have some reason for this? I mean, has work been busy for her lately?

Jean

Ha! Busy? The most work she has had has been keeping this secret from me. And even *that* is too much work for her.

David

Perhaps what we need to do... *(Lights come back on in living room, where Louis Melbourne has entered with a tray of food. He crosses through the dividing wall, not the door, into the study)*

Louis

It's time for your lunch, Mr. Stannel.

David

Oh, thanks, Louis. Just leave it in the other room. *(Louis looks questioningly at him. He points toward living room)* In there. *(Louis crosses through wall again and sets food on table. He then exits through upstage door. David turns back to Jean)* I'm sorry, but it looks like that's all the time we have today. Can you come back next week?

Jean

I believe so. Thank you for your time, Mister Stannel. *(As he is saying this, David is crossing into living room through the door. The lights die in the study. David sits and begins to eat as lights die in the living room)*

Scene 2

Scene: David is back in his study. He is talking to Carly Willander. She is pacing above couch.

David

So what you're saying is that nobody understands you.

Carly

(Angrily) Yeah, everybody thinks that I don't *know* anything. I mean, it's like everything I say is a joke. You understand, don't you?

David

Yes, Carly, I understand completely. Now, is there anyone in particular that you seem to have this problem with?

Carly

Ah, well, it seems to be with people who are close to me, you know, like family, friends, that kind of thing.

David

Um-hm, and...is your husband one of these people who...misunderstand you?

Carly

My husband? He's one of the worst, but in a subtle kind of way. He tries to understand, really, but I can tell...oh, I don't know what I can tell.

David

I think I know what you're trying to say. *(He rises)* Will you excuse me for a moment? I need to get my other notebook. *(He crosses through door into the living room. Lights die in study and rise in living room. David crosses to table picks up a notebook, opens it, and jots down a few notes. He then crosses back into the study. Study lights rise to half illumination and living room lights die. Eric Stanz is now seated on the couch. David sits at his desk)*

Eric

(Speaking monotone) I want to die.

David

(Obviously shocked at this announcement) Surely, Eric, you don't mean that, do you? *(Eric does not move)* Mr. Stanz?

Eric

(Glances up) Why not? What have I got here to live for? My wife? She thinks I'm nuts. My friends? How conveniently they've all disappeared. Work? I *don't* work anymore. Life is just a game. One big game, and I want out.

David

Eric, I don't normally tell my patients this, but I think your case may be too severe for me to handle. I suggest you go to a fully equipped counseling center. *(Mike enters through stage right wall and begins to talk to David)*

Mike

You mean a mental institution, don't you? You're just like my wife! *(Jean enters right and speaks to Mike)*

Jean

At least your wife cares about you. At least she's not off spending all her time, all *your* time, with other men. Your wife loves you!

Mike

My wife *loves* me? You don't have any idea what you're talking about. (*Carly enters right and spins Jean around to face her*)

Carly

Nobody understands what I'm going through! *Nobody!*

Eric

(*Rising*) I just want to end it! (*David rises and tries to exit. As he is moving around the room, all the other characters take turns yelling at him*)

Mike

I'm fine! I don't *need* to go anywhere!

Jean

You knew she was cheating on me, didn't you? You tried to hide it!

Carly

Why can't you understand me? I *try* to act like everyone else!

Eric

Come on, Doctor, just let me end it now! (*David finally breaks out of the room and runs into the living room through the door. All others remain in study, yelling at him. He runs to down stage left, falls to his knees, and puts his hands over his ears. He lets out a long, loud shout. Other's voices fade out under this shout, and all lights die except a spot on David. At the end of his shout, this spot also dies*)

Scene 3

Scene: Lights are on in study. Louis is seated in the wooden chair, Carrie is in the padded one. Louis is attempting to comfort Carrie.

Louis

I'm sorry, Mrs. Stannel, but as I told you before, our facilities just weren't enough to treat you husband. But don't worry. Quinten Terraces is a state-of-the-art institution. If anybody can help him, it's them.

Carrie

I know. It's just hard to believe I can't come visit him every day now.

Louis

Yes, it often is. But you'll get over it, and if all goes well, he'll be back in a year or so.

Carrie

So who's going to be here from now on?

Louis

You mean in this room? Ah, a young lady by the name of Maria Canborough, I believe. Why?

Carrie

Oh, no reason. Just wondering who will be the next in here to talk to the shadows on the wall. (*Both sit in silence for a moment, thinking about this. Finally, Carrie rises and crosses to the upstage door*) Well, thank you for your time, Mr. Melbourne.

Louis

You're welcome, Carrie. You're welcome.

Curtain

