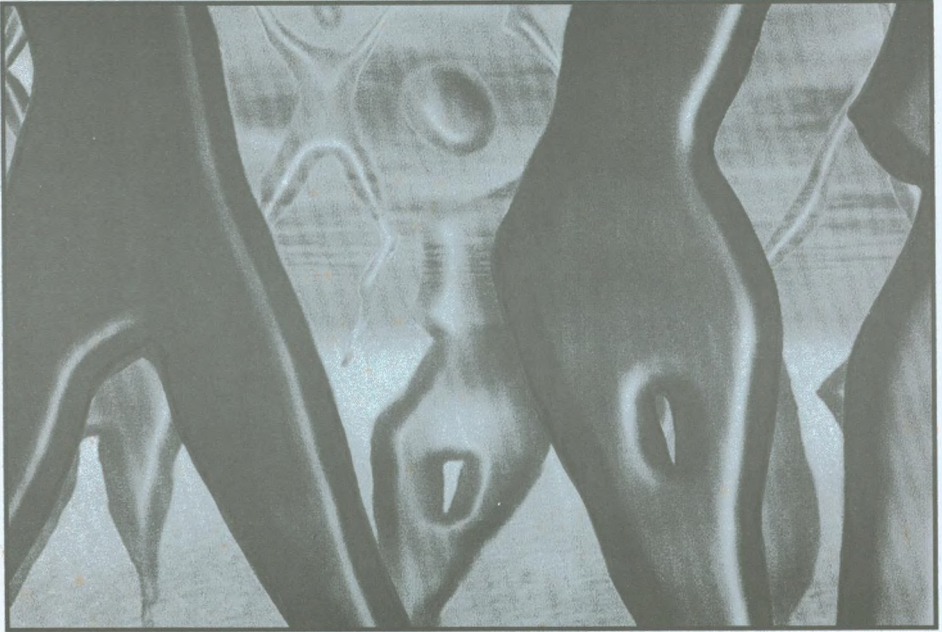


# HARBINGER



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# HARBINGER 1996

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The Stephens College Magazine of the Creative Arts

# Harbinger Staff

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Editors:	Julie Houchins Mileah Patrick Dye
Design Editor:	Jamie Bolger
Poetry Editors:	Samantha Crawford Jennifer Woods
Drama Editors:	Kristen Brown Scotte Hardin
Fiction & Non-Fiction Editors:	Samantha Johnson Lesley Brown Jennifer Osborn
Advisor:	Dr. Grace Epstein

Cover Art by Courtney Clingan, "Untitled."

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# Kistina Wright

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## The Trail to Fried Chicken

It seems like it takes forever  
to get there  
If you blink you'll miss it  
The heat so hot you think  
you've seen the devil  
You finally arrive  
A town with one hundred  
people, five stop signs  
and not a single stop light  
At last you enter the first  
and only hill, miles  
of gravel roads and now  
Grandma's House  
Black and white the house stands tall  
Southern style  
I know I'm there the minute  
she opens the door  
The deep smell of Fried Chicken  
lingers through the open air  
The wait was worth my while

# lesley brown

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## The Princess of the Projects

Shmmaack! “Aaow! These mosquitoes get on my last nerve. You can’t even feel ‘em suckin out your blood,” says DeeDee with a distinct attitude. “I know girl, I got bit up about seven thousand times playing green ghost last night,” another young Ms. Thang exclaims as she bends down to scratch a red circle the size of a quarter on her shin. “My mama says that the mosquitoes have a radar on the projects.”

DeeDee, or Denise to those unworthy of knowing the young black diva, is seven going on thirty-two (or so her mother often tells her). She is the ring leader of a small group of girls on the 38th block of Ash in the heart of Kansas City. All the girls in the “clique” refer to DeeDee about what kind of candy to buy, or what color scrunchies they should wear to school, you know, so they can all match. This is a big responsibility for one little woman to handle, but DeeDee took it all in stride. She welcomed all the questions and concerns about how to properly curl a barbie’s hair with your mama’s curling iron without singeing it off.

Kansas City summers are particularly hot in July and as the girls walked, DeeDee felt the sweat on her scalp between each of her French braids. Her mother had braided her hair so tightly her scalp was swollen, so the sweat gave DeeDee a cool feeling. DeeDee wore three or four gold beads on what felt like a million braids. Her mother had strategically placed aluminum foil at the tips so that they would not unravel. As she strolled along, DeeDee paid close attention to her ghetto surroundings. She noticed the broken glass in the street, the musty smell of unbathed children racing toward the ice cream truck. DeeDee remembered her mama repeatedly telling her not to ask for money because those big boys sold more than just ice cream. Everyone in the community knew what it was they sold, but no one ever said anything. DeeDee never said anything because she saw what happened to a “snitch.” She saw the corpse in the alley on 39th street, the position of escape the body was left in, DeeDee saw all of this in her neighborhood. Although she was only seven, she understood what was to happen if she was to ever tell on the “Ding-Dong Man.”

As the young queens pass the abandoned projects they try to decipher the blue gang tags sprayed on the outsides. “I think it’s a cuss word,” boldly exclaims one of the girls. “No it aint,” says another girl with pink bazooka gum stuck to her upper lip. “Them aint cuss words, they say who just got axed last night.” “Both of y’all need to shut up ‘cause cant either one of you read!” says DeeDee scoldingly.

The buildings are only a couple of feet apart. They reminded DeeDee of the color of dirty bath water. They have cement stairs ascending to the raggedy screen doors. Every project looks exactly like the next. They all have several trash bags on the front curbs because the garbage people are too afraid to include 38th and Ash on their route.

DeeDee and her entourage proceed down the block until they arrive at Ms. Nosy Rose's project. "Where ya'll going?" Nosy Rose commands with a burnt out cigarette hanging off her bottom lip. She sat on her cement steps with a small child between her legs. She was greasing the child's scalp. DeeDee couldn't tell if the child was a boy or girl because the only thing it was wearing was a soiled diaper. Rose's particular project was a darker color. DeeDee once heard her mother telling someone on the phone that Rose's live-in boyfriend keeps burning up the kitchen trying to melt his crack, and the manager has had to paint the place three times. "None of yo funky business!" screams DeeDee from the sidewalk. "Rose is so nosy, huh ya'll?" asks DeeDee, her thin black eyebrows furrowed. "And triflin' too!" says the smallest little girl, trying to put her two cents in. "That's why yo baby stinks!" she adds as she runs ahead of the school of girls. DeeDee knew that Nosy Rose was one of the poorest women in her project and that her boyfriend sold crack. She hated walking by her place because Rose always asked the girls to "bring her a pack of cigarettes," or "pick her up some bread" while they were out. DeeDee felt sorry for the baby that had to stay in a dirty diaper because its mother was too poor and too lazy to buy new ones. As the girls gaped at Rose DeeDee thought about her own mother. She questioned whether or not her mother kept her in clean diapers although they were just as poor. DeeDee knew that her mother did her best to put food on the table and clothes on her back. She knew her mother wasn't lazy, there was no question. They were just poor. So why did the baby on the porch have to suffer because Rose was shiftless? DeeDee didn't have time for Rose or any of the other so-called "adults" on her block. She only had time for her friends and her barbies. Everything else seemed to float around her like bubbles.

As the young girls walked and sang double dutch songs, DeeDee had a feeling in her stomach that she had never felt before. She thought it could have been gas from the hot dog her mother made her eat for lunch, but it wasn't. She was almost sad. She thought about the trash in the street and the stench in the air. She thought about the gang signs outside the abandoned buildings. She felt the hunger of wanting

## lesley brown

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ice cream from the ice cream truck like every other kid in her city. The thought of dead bodies in the alley repulsed her. DeeDee was tired of her world at the age of seven. She did not want to watch out for broken glass in the middle of the sidewalk, where she, the “queen of everything” needed to walk. She did not want to smell the foul stench of garbage when she stepped out of her palace onto her front porch. DeeDee wanted better things for her and her mother. She no longer wanted to lead the group to the store for candy. DeeDee just wanted to go home to her mother and ask, why were things the way they were? DeeDee started running the opposite direction in which she and her friends were headed, ignoring the cries of “where you goin’ girl” from her groupies. She wanted to get as far away from the projects as possible. When DeeDee could smell the aroma of fried chicken she knew she had made it to her castle. DeeDee didn’t mind that her eyes burned from the wind pushing back her tears as she ran. She swung the screen door open and found her queen in front of the stove seasoning the food they would eat later that night for dinner. DeeDee felt safe and protected.

## A Mother's Prayer

Child if I told you once, I've told you a thousand times, Don't be running the streets with all these boys! They aint nothin' but trouble, all of 'em. I'm gonna tell they grandma Charolette to get after them too. You know they momma left 'em cause she was just as fast as ya'll tryin' to be. But ya'll aint gonna drive me mad. And how many times have I told you that young girls like ya'll don't need to be up in no little negro's house when they momma aint home? Ya'll gonna learn when somethin' terrible happen. Lord have mercy on these kids 'cause they know not what they do. I've been tryin' to do yo will by raisin' these kids up right, but they just don't understand yo word, so I gotta teach 'em. I gotta show 'em that you the only thang that matter on this earth. *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, Hmm Hmm Hmm*. See I have to pray for you kids 'cause ya'll just don't know what's out there. You don't know the danger in them boy's minds. They the devil, I tell you! Just evil! I know one thang, while ya'll keep runnin yo mouths, you gone keep from out dem streets, you hear? You ain't gonna have my neighbors of twenty-five years talkin' 'bout me. No sir, that aint gonna happen. Not while I'm payin' the bills. How soon we forget that this old woman been where ya'll are. I seen all the shit these young niggaz be tryin' to pull. I'm just tryin' to open ya'll eyes to it!

I know ya'll remember that fast-ass girl lived down the street. Yeah she was practicin' all the shit ya'll think is cute, and look what happened to her. She got herself pregnant and had to go to one of those pregnant teen centers. *But Ma, we haven't even gotten our periods*. Yes sir. She sho did. She was runnin' the streets too. Messin' with those nappy-headed boys, that's where you'll end up.

But see, ya'll think I'm just talkin' out the side of my neck, but I aint. If I didn't know, Lord knows I wouldn't be tryin' to school ya'll. Everybody got to learn the hard way 'cause they don't want to listen. Now go on and get out my face so I can pray for ya'll. Lord! What am I gonna do?

# Erika Pigg

---

## Inside Child

Red rage,  
my  
senses seeth  
Hot as  
flowing lava  
Mommy, can I  
go?  
Outside, can  
I go?  
Tall stark  
shadow of my mother stands  
high as a  
grumbling giant be  
Heavy, harsh  
cocoa lines crease as she says

No.  
No? I won't  
vision vivid violets  
or smell  
suckling honeysuckle  
Hear chitty-chatty  
brown birds  
or dance  
with the rays of the sun?  
I'm  
going to my room.

# Samantha Johnson

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## Green Bicycle

Greg sat in his wooden chair with a pencil and paper. The pencil was sharp and the paper wrinkle free. Greg thought for a moment, a short story that's not hard to do. I'll write about the bicycle I had as a kid.

What color was that bicycle?, Greg thought. He sat back in the chair and rubbed his head. Green. It had to be green because green was my favorite color. Green, that was the color of G-frog, my first pet. He was my best friend. I remember G. He was one bad frog, the biggest on the block. All the kids would try to bring their sorry frogs to out jump the Mac Daddy of all frogs. G-frog was the best friend a person could have who wasn't a person. He would sit on the table by my bed and talk to me. Well, not really talk, but we understood each other.

Wait a minute, I think that bicycle was blue, because Sue had a pink one. I think. We would go riding along the bank by the old man's house. I never knew what the man's name was, he had always been the old man to us. He had a pond behind his house. Little Bo and I would spend all our time back there. Little Bo would play with G, and I would work on my boat. The boat that we would put all our stuff in and leave to go to the big frog jumping contest in the next town. Yeah, Sue's bicycle was pink, with a little white basket on the front. For a sister, I guess she wasn't that bad, but she was never allowed at the pond when G, Little Bo, and I were there. She was my only sister, and we got along well, better than the Dickeys who lived down the street.

The Dickeys had five kids if I'm not mistaken, Bob, Sally, Sarah, and Little Bo. Their parents were named Bobby Lee and Sally Lou. Little Bo was my favorite one. He wasn't as wild as the others. We both had the same dark brown hair with bright green eyes. He was cool. I find myself thinking about him all the time, a lot more since my son was born. My son has that same innocent face, but with pale blue eyes like my wife.

The Dickeys had just as many pets as children. Children with long stringy blond hair, but Little Bo was different, and that is one reason why I think I was so close to him at first. Dogs and cats were always running around jumping over all that junk they kept in the front yard. Tires, tubes, motors from old cars that were parked in the back yard, rope, old sheets, and pots and pans. I loved that place, even the oil pit that was in the back yard by the fence. I could never understand why Mom never let us have great toys like that. Mom never liked for us to go down to their house because we would have too much fun, and she never wanted us to have too much fun.

## Samantha Johnson

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“Nice children,” she would say “never get dirty or make a lot of noise when they play.” I never understood what that was supposed to mean. I think it was just another crack against the Dickeys. I couldn’t figure out why she hated them so much until the accident and then everyone knew.

Dad didn’t mind us going over to the Dickeys house. Mom and Dad argued about that a lot sometimes, late at night when they though we were asleep. Dad would say things like, “I think Greg should play with Bo, because Bo is not like the rest of the kids.” Mom would then say, “They’re all bad seeds.” Mom and Dad didn’t fight like that all the time, it mostly started after we moved to the new house. I remember one night I couldn’t sleep so I went to sit on the back porch. I hadn’t been sitting there long when Dad came slowly up the steps. “Where have you been Dad?” I asked. He jumped when he heard my voice and dropped his jacket on the floor. “What are you doing up so late?” he asked me. I got up from my chair and picked up his jacket. It had a funny smell to it, it smelled like wildflowers. I didn’t get to smell it good because he snatched it away from me, and ordered me to bed. The next morning he told me he takes packages of food to families that are less fortunate. “Like the Dickeys?” I asked. He turned a bright shade of red and said, “Yes like the Dickeys.” He also said that it was a secret and I shouldn’t tell anyone.

I didn’t understand then why Mom didn’t like Mrs. Dickey. She was very pretty even when she had just got off from work. She had long blond hair which she wore in a ponytail and light blue eyes which would darken when she would see me and Little Bo playing in the yard. I though she was an angel and for a long time I had a crush on her. Once I went to use the bathroom in their house and on the way to the restroom I saw a picture. It was of a beautiful young woman and a handsome man. They both had blond hair and blue eyes, and even at that young age I could tell they were happy.

“Hi.” I heard someone behind me. I jumped and let the picture fall to the floor. The picture didn’t really fall to the floor, it floated like a ghost I had seen in a monster movie. The ones Mom wouldn’t let us watch, because she said they were the works of the Devil. Anyway I turned around to see Mrs. Dickey standing behind me. I felt embarrassed, because I was caught in her house looking at her stuff. I was surprised that she would be home in the daytime, because usually Mr. Dickey would be the only one there. Next I felt overjoyed that she was home and

## Samantha Johnson

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talking to me. This was the first time she had ever said anything to me, and I just about pissed in my pants. She was my first love and I wanted to grab her and give her a big juicy kiss, like I had seen on TV. I was twelve years old at the time and kissing was something I had been thinking a lot about lately. I wanted to take her with me when me and Little Bo left town for the big frog show, and maybe once we got there she would say, "Greg I like you a lot let's stay here and be boyfriend and girlfriend." Everyone said I was big for my age, so I felt I could take care of her, and Little Bo. She could leave all her other children with her no good husband, as Dad called him. Little Bo was six, three years younger than my little sister. He was born one year after we had moved to the neighborhood. I already thought of him as a little brother, it wouldn't have been hard for me to think of him as my son.

"Believe it or not that was me when I was young and beautiful." She said as she walked over and picked the picture up from the floor. "And this handsome man is Mr. Dickey, before the war." She turned from me putting the picture back on the table where I had found it. I couldn't believe that, that man was Mr. Dickey, he looked so happy and clean in that picture. Whenever I saw Mr. Dickey he was always wearing an old T-shirt and a pair of oily overalls. I would not have guessed that he had blond hair under all that oil, dirt, paint.

"Did you come in here for something special?" She asked as she turned back around to face me. I was tall for my age so I could look her straight in the eyes. What beautiful eyes she had, but there was also a sadness there. The same look I would sometimes see in my mothers eyes, when she thought no one was looking.

"I came to..." I started to say but the word "restroom", would not pass through my lips. I just stood there staring at her. Just when I thought I was going to die from embarrassment. Little Bo came in and said, "Momma, what are you doing home so early?" He walked up to his mother and wrapped his arms around her waist. He looked up into his Mom's face and smiled. She looked down at him then looked at me. Her eyes turned a darker color and I felt she was trying to tell me something. I turned and walked from the house as a scent of wildflowers hit me.

After I left the house I started to run, because I didn't want to think about the secret Mrs. Dickey kept prisoner in her eyes. I ran to the pond and started to work on my boat. I don't know why, but I knew it needed to be finished.

## Samantha Johnson

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On the way home from the pond I saw Dad driving by, he stopped and asked where I had been, and something about being worried. I didn't say anything to him or stop walking, because I couldn't think of anything but the look in Mrs. Dickey's eyes. As I think back now I think I knew all along what was going on. I kept walking down the street. I needed to get away from them all. Mr. Dickey with his hunted eyes, and fear of loud noises. Mrs. Dickey and all her secrets, Dad with his nightly packages, Mom and her crazy talk about how God would take care of the Devils in the world, and Little Bo staring at me, like I was his hero.

The one time I asked Dad about the packages he took to the Dickey's he said, "Son, they don't have all the good things you have, like good clothes and a bicycle..."

Wait a minute, I was supposed to be writing about my bicycle. Yeah, my good old bicycle. I remember now it was yellow, because it matched one of Mom's church dresses. I say church dresses, because she had a lot of dresses for different things. One day I asked her why she didn't wear pants like some of the other moms on the block. She said, "A woman wears pants and goes to work, but a lady wears a dress and stays at home to raise her children in the holy way. Do you see how our house looks?" I said, "Yes," and then she asked me if I had ever been inside the Dickey's house. I thought back to that one day Mrs. Dickey saw me looking at the picture, and how it was a nice house if a little dusty. Before I had a chance to tell her how nice their house looked in the inside she walked away, leaving me standing in the hall.

As I recall all Mom's friends wore dresses. Big, puffy dresses. They came in all different types and colors, but they all looked the same. Mom's friends would sit around in their dresses with a lace napkin across their laps. First they would talk about everyone at the church. Usually they started with Mrs. Smith, my Sunday school teacher, who had very large breasts. Sometimes when I would ask a question about something in the Sunday school book she would come up behind me and press her breasts into my back. All the boys in my class loved her, she was a great teacher. Next, they would bring up the Rev. James. Rev. James was a short man with a balding head and he had a huge wife. She stood I know seven feet tall, but she was a sweet lady. She always had candy in her purse for all the children. My mom's friends would say that Rev. did everything his mother said. His mother was on the mother's board and one of the founders of the church. She told everyone what to do, and no

one said a thing about it to her face.

I remember the reason I was home that day, to hear the church talk. It was five hundred degrees outside, and if I went out I would surely melt. So, I told Little Bo come to my house, and we would play with G-frog. After mom's friends had gone she came up to my room with a arm full of clothes. Little Bo and I were sitting on the bed. She stopped in the he middle of the room when she saw Little Bo "What is that brat doing in my house?" She screamed at me. " It's bad enough that we have to live on the same block as that trash, but I won't have it in my house." She grabbed Little Bo by the back of his shirt. G-frog was in Little Bo lap, and when she pulled him from the bed G fell on the floor. I doesn't notice him down there on the floor until I heard a crack. From that moment everything started to slow down like in the movies. I heard this scream, but I don't know were it was coming from. All I saw was the heel of mom's shoe embedded into G's back. I don't know that I was the one screaming until I felt mom's hand smack me across the face.

"Shut up boy! That's what you get for going against my wishes. God has punished you for not staying away from them." She said, with glazed eyes. My heart stopped for a moment, because I had never seen her look that way before. She reached down with her right hand and grabbed G and pulled him from her heel. She looked at the frog in her hand, and then she looked at Little Bo and then me. "I don't want you leaving this house for a week, and I never want to see you at their house again. You saw today what God will do if you don't obey your mother. Next time it maybe worse." She said as she pulled Little Bo out the room.

I sat on the bed shocked for a moment, then I remember the look in Little Bo's eyes , my eyes. I got up from the bed and ran after mom and Little Bo. By the time I ran down the hall and got to the top of the stairs I saw Little Bo fall. I pushed pass mom and ran down after him, by the time I reached him he was laying on his stomach at the bottom of the stairs. There was no blood but he wasn't moving. I picked him up and ran outside with Bo in my arms . I jumped on my bicycle and rode to the hospital. I jumped off the bicycle and ran in the hospital with Little Bo in my arms. I ran up to the first person dressed in white and screamed , "Please save my baby brother, please!"

That night dad came into my room and told me that Bo was all right, but he had to say in the hospital for away. I didn't ask to see him , because I was afraid of what might happen. I found out later that after Bo left the hospital he was shipped to some kind of boarding school. After

## Samantha Johnson

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dad left the room I wrapped G-frog in a sock that was laying on the floor, beside the wet spot on the rug and took him to the pond. I laid him in the boat and pushed it onto the water. After that I didn't worry about G or Bo anymore, because I knew it would be all right.

Greg put his pencil down on the table and rubbed his hands across his eyes. He stood up and stretched his back and walked from the room. He walked down the hall and into his child's room. He picked up his son and kissed him on the head, and said, "I love you, Bo."

# Mileah Patrick Dye

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## Silences

You are all dead.  
Or so it seems.  
All of you gone

    Anne Sylvia Virginia  
You have left me behind  
with nothing left to say.  
Just an echoing emptiness,  
a sort of sadness  
and thousands of unspoken unwritten unsung un...  
    tributes  
swimming in my soul.

What is there left for me to say  
now You are gone?  
Sing Your praises? Mourn Your death?  
What should I do?  
Drape myself in black and impale myself  
on my ball-point pen?  
I feel I should have known You.  
I ache to know You. Your  
loneliness of You grips my heart.

I feel your absence like a vacuum  
sucking me into a silence that is  
thick and heavy as a suicide.  
It smells of gas and tastes of icy water.  
It sticks in my throat like a handful of pills  
gone down backwards.

Yet I am too afraid of the grave  
to pay a visit.  
And what would You say to me, anyway,  
that hasn't already been said?  
What silence would you give me?  
And what if I'm already dead?

Mileah Patrick Dye

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## The Movie Star in Frida's Painting

(There is a painting by Frida Kahlo of a movie star [I think a movie star] who committed suicide by leaping from the roof of a motel in New York. Some rich lady asked Frida to paint a painting of the dead star and she painted a very macabre picture of the star's death. This is...)  
"The Movie Star in Frida's Painting..."

I am falling.  
falling from the roof of my movie star high-rise hotel  
blood rushing to my head  
fighting gravity, flowing up instead of down  
my head may burst before I hit the pavement  
rain of blood and bits of brain  
pieces of my skull like hail  
my skirt fights it  
trying to parachute  
the whole world sees my red satin panties  
clean, of course, for my mother.

The falling is slow.  
I see inside each window as I fall-  
little glimpses of Life  
Other lives  
Others' lives  
I am passing them by, waving and smiling  
They look at me in horror.

My life is on the 23rd floor.  
Room full of champagne and roses  
full glasses and empty promises  
Roses red like my panties  
Everything is red  
except my dress which is blue  
like the sky it longs to fly in  
useless parachute  
no saving yourself from the red of my blood.

My life is on the 23rd floor.  
with the telephone television televangelists  
Tell a story, Mother Dear,

before I go to sleep  
The fall is slow.  
I have much time to think.

My thoughts are spiraling downward  
They will hit the ground before I  
They will leave no mark  
make no sound  
only wait patiently for the impact of my satin panties.

Here I go.  
The fall is slow.

### Scissors

I run. I just run and run until I can't run anymore. By that time I am in the next county. My chest feels like it is about to explode. Boom! and there I'll be, laid out in pieces all over the Texaco parking lot. I kind of like the idea, but somehow my chest contains itself inside its cage. I bend all the way over at the waist, letting the blood rush all to my head, feeling my face get hot and tingly-waiting for another potential explosion. No luck. I notice my hair. It falls from the back of my neck Rapunzel-like into a pile on the concrete. It is all I can see below me. I thrust my right hand deep into the pile, soft, and sweep the concrete with it. It makes a scraping sound that I like. A car pulls up behind me and hooks its horn- I am standing right beside the only available gas pump. My hair twinkles in the car lights, soft and cold around my fingers like distant stars. I weave my fingers through my hair as the car blinks its lights at me. The light makes patterns in my hair, faces that startle me awake. I stand up to fast and swim around to look at the car, look the driver in the face. She is young, early twenties, with angry brown hair. The car is an old black Cadillac, long and a little dusty, but perfectly shined underneath. She glares at me through the dirty windshield. There is bird shit on her left cheek.

Mother is brushing her hair. It is Sunday night, eight p.m. This has been their ritual for as long as She can remember. Always the same brush, the same vanity mirror before Her, the same conversation.

"When you were born the doctors marvelled at your hair," Mother begins, "The moment they could see your head, they all said 'what a beautiful head of hair- this must be a girl!' I had bee praying for a girl for so long. You were the most beautiful thing I had ever seen! And they were right- oh, that hair! For months I was afraid to let you wear a cap, even though it was winter, for fear that it would make your hair fall-out," and at this point she always laughs a bit to herself, "but it didn't. It just kept growing and growing. By the time you were three it was halfway down your back. Everywhere we went people had to stop and touch your hair. All that attention on such a little bitty thing- you just ate it up!" And again she chuckles softly.

The Cadillac honks its horn again. The angry brown hair glares at me. "Sorry," I mutter, waving my left hand limply by way of further apology, self-consciously running my fingers through my hair as I push through the door into the truck stop. And then I stop right inside, my

fingers stuck in a tangle at the nape of the back of my neck. "They'll find me." I think desperately, " they'll see me from the back, they'll see my hair, no matter how far they are, they'll see me."

And then, without thinking any further, I go straight to the woman standing indifferently behind the counter.

"Excuse me, but do you have a pair of scissors I could borrow for a couple minutes?" She looks at me suspiciously, quizzically. " I could use them right here in front of you if it would make you more comfortable," I offer. She still looks concerned, understandably so, but her curiosity seems to be roused.

"What the hell, it's been a boring night," she seems to be thinking. "Alright." she says hesitantly, " but I've got my finger right here on this alarm, so if you try anything weird or don't give them right back to me, off it goes- got it?"

She reaches under the counter and, without taking her eyes off me, pulls out a pair of large orange-handled scissors. My hand is trembling noticeably as I take them, and I sense her finger twitching on the alarm button.

I bend over at the waist again, my hair falling full in front of me, but this time not quite touching the floor. I hesitate.

"Oh my God," she murmurs, and at this my anger flares. I take my hair, gather it into a sort of upside-down ponytail and cut it as close to my head as I can. My hair is thick, and the scissors are old and a bit dull and the strain hurts my hand. I work the blades slowly through my hair from right to left, watching it fall to the floor strand by glorious strand. My head becomes light and dizzy as the blood rushes and the hair falls.

His hands are on Her hair. " So pretty," he murmurs and She smells his foul breath in Her face. His hands smell of cigarettes and of Her. She wants to throw up in his lap, on his face. She wants to scratch his eyes out. She wants his hands away from her, from her hair. She wants to wrap Her pretty hair around his disgusting throat and choke his foul breath away.

There is a woman in the front seat of the car. She doesn't see the woman's face, though She knows it well. The woman's hair is stringy and brown. It smells bad, like cigarettes and time. It looks angry. Not pretty like Hers. Hers is halfway down her back. Everybody wants to touch it. She wishes he wouldn't touch it.

## Mileah Patrick Dye

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The car is long and blue. It is great big, like a boat. It is blue on the inside and blue on the outside and very sparkly. It used to be Her mommy and daddy's car, but they gave it to these people and said that they will be watching Her during the day while mommy and daddy go to work. She hates that car. She hates that car and She hates Her hair.

I stand up slowly; I don't want my head to explode this time, I want to steady myself. I hand the scissors back to the woman behind the counter. No longer indifferent, her mouth is agape and her eyes are wide. She stares at the pile on the floor and shakes her head.

"Honey, are you alright?" she says.

"Yes," but my voice quivers a bit. "Could I have a sack, please?"

"Of course." And she reaches under the counter once again and pulls out small paper sack. "Do you need a broom and dust pan?"

"No, thank-you. This'll be fine." And I bend down and begin to scoop up handfuls of hair. It feels like silk thread in my hands, and for a moment I almost cry.

Mother brushes and brushes. She is almost done, when Daddy comes in: "Has she brushed ya bald, yet, kiddo?"

"Not quite yet, but I think she's working on it."

"Ha, ha," Mother pretends to be insulted. "You have to do this. It distributes the oils more evenly, makes it shine."

"Like gold." And Daddy interrupts Mother's brushing to gently stroke Her hair. "So pretty," he murmurs, and She cringes but She doesn't know why.

I have to stuff the sack completely full to fit the hair in it. Before I even ask, the woman behind the counter offers me a roll of tape to secure it shut. "Thank-You" again and I try to smile.

"Are you sure you're okay?" There is genuine concern in face and this comforts me.

"Yes. I think I'd just like to sit down for a minute." She points to the short row of booths by the window. I go to the farthest one and sit. I ache all over. My whole body throbs. I lay my head on my arms and feel the hair that doesn't fall on my arms and spill over onto the table. My neck is hot and prickly.

The sack is beside me in the seat. I think of its contents and wonder if I miss them. My head feels light on my arms, and a bit cold. I lift my

head and see the black Cadillac with angry brown hair pull away. And then I see someone in the window: someone with short blonde hair cut this way and that, someone with unbelieving eyes and her Daddy's nose. She is a stranger to me, but I think perhaps I would like to meet her.

She is in the back seat alone now. They are driving back home. She crouches against the door behind the lady with the stringy brown hair. But it is his head She watches. His hair is short and dark and speckled with white flakes that fall down like dirty snow when he shakes his head. Little snowflakes on his faded black T-shirt. She can smell him all over Her, though She leans forward and tries to smell the lady's dirty hair instead. It is a long drive home and silent one. The lady looks out her window but doesn't see anything. He reaches over sometimes and tries to touch the woman's shoulder, but she jerks it away without even seeing his filthy reach.

When they get home She runs as fast as She can to the bathroom. He reaches out to try and catch Her but only gets a handful of hair as the woman steps in front of him. "Leave her alone," the woman says and he knocks the woman on the floor. But She is fast, even though She's just a little bitty thing. She runs into the bathroom and locks the door fast. Her body feels funny. It pounds and aches and burns all over.

He bangs his fist on the bathroom door and yells at Her to let him in. "Goddammit! I'm not finished with you yet!" he yells, "I'll break this goddamn door down you don't let me in!" But She knows that's a lie 'cause he's scared Her Daddy will beat him up and not let him have the car no more, so She just sits on the cold tile floor with Her hands over Her ears till he stops screaming at Her and the woman stops screaming at him and he stops screaming at the woman and She doesn't hear his fists banging the door or the woman's face any longer. And then She gets up very quietly and takes off all Her filthy clothes and wraps Her-self up in a towel until Mommy and Daddy come back home.

I stare at this stranger in the window and try to recognize something familiar. I try to talk to her but she doesn't respond. "Shy," I conclude, and continue stare.

The brushing is over now, and they stroke Her hair. "Amazing something so pretty could come from the two of us," they laugh, and stroke and stroke. So pretty...and She sees their family portrait in the mirror,

## Mileah Patrick Dye

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the three of them. So pretty...and the faces begin to change. A skinny, quiet woman with stringy brown hair. And a tall, dark man with snowflakes on his T-shirt and Her on his hands. And his hands are in Her hair, stroking it. So pretty...And Mommy and Daddy are home and She is in the bathroom and there is banging on the door and She covers Her ears, but it doesn't stop, and it is Daddy saying, "Honey, open the door, it's Mommy and Daddy, everything's okay, honey, open the door." And She is opening the door, clutching the towel around Her. And they are coming in and Mommy is smiling and saying, "Now look, you've dirtied my good towels again," and putting Her into the bathtub and turning the water on too hot and getting out the brush and brushing and brushing and brushing... "So pretty," they are saying over and over again, "Your hair is so pretty."

And She is taking the brush and throwing it hard against the mirror so that it shatters and She is screaming, "It is not pretty! It's hideous and dirty and I hate it and I want it off my head!" And Her parents are looking at Her open-mouthed and wide-eyed and they are trying to stroke Her hair again, trying to calm Her, but She will not be calmed. "You knew!" She screams. "YouknewYouknewYouknew! Goddamn you, you knew!" And they are reaching for Her as She runs out of their house and down the street and past the memories to a Texaco station in the next county.

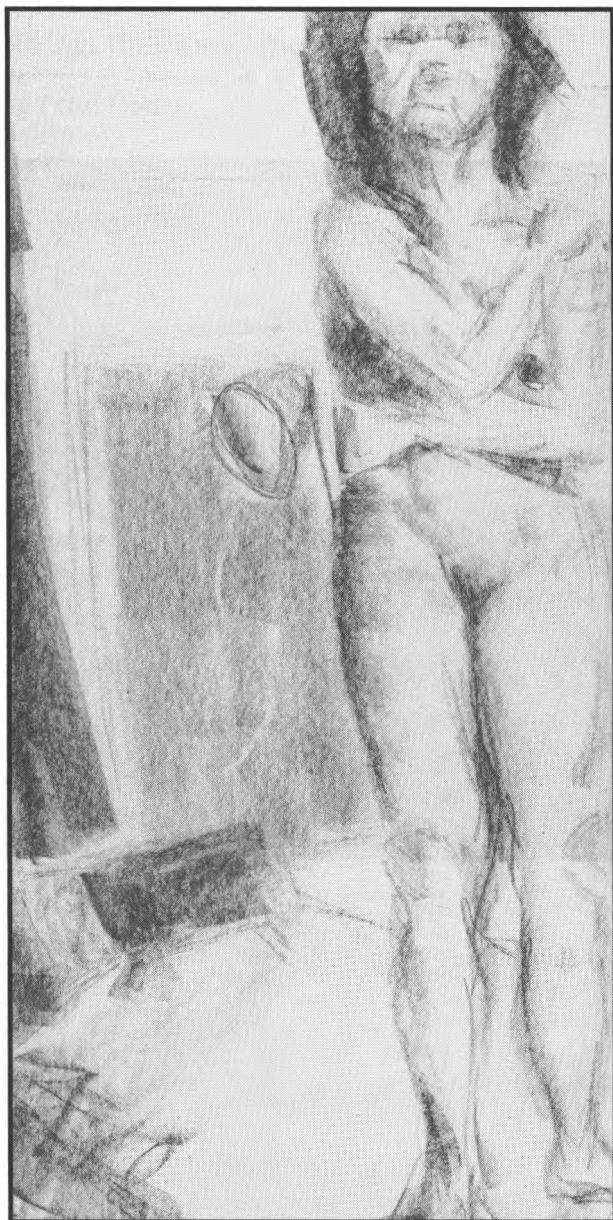
The girl in window is tired. I can tell by the way her eyes look. She would like to lie down somewhere soft and go to sleep, but she's not really sure where that place is. She thinks of a blue car and a bathroom, and shudders. She thinks of a house with a broken vanity, and she begins to cry.

There is a brown paper sack sitting beside her, but she can't quite remember what's in it, so she gets up and throws it away. She waves goodbye to a familiar but perplexed looking woman behind the counter and goes out the door. She walks slowly, calmly across the concrete lot, but when she gets to the grassy shoulder and then the road, she has no idea where she's running to and she's not quite sure what she's running from, but she thinks that if she keeps on running, she might just be alright.

# Regina Wiethop

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Untitled



# Molly Manger

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## Nebraska Farmland



# Beth Rosch

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## Dancing with Chica

Everyone is moving; they know the words  
and the moves.

The bass thumps the floor.  
They step and shimmy  
like it's important weekday business.

Chica is shy, been beaten  
in her first life.  
Her tail bumps the floor,  
but in nervousness.  
She keeps glancing at you.  
She knows you from your walk earlier,  
and now she stands two feet upon your shoe,  
trying to locate an island of still.  
Her ears prick up again and again.  
She sniffs at the sound.

Half an hour thuds by,  
and she feels better.  
You dare to leave her, shake your ass a bit,  
as the night peaks, as the floor shudders  
like a disaster or a miracle.  
The frenzy builds, and you twist it  
with the best of them, forgetting your friend.  
Chica wanders out of the open closet, wagging,  
and offers you a paw.

# Scottie Hardin

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## Fuel

Got myself on a train movin' South.  
Goin' down, down South  
where the rivers brown  
and movin' and  
the air is wicked white. Yeah,  
goin' down,  
down South down  
on a train that just ain't movin'.

Watched a big man in the back room.  
gettin' off, beatin' off, beatin'  
the woman in  
cotton panties  
with his love, love for her created  
for her created for her created her  
cotton panties

Wished I could've said something.  
Didn't know her and this train just  
wasn't movin'.  
But I held her in the bathroom

Heard her screamin' watched her bleedin'  
watched her wash those cotton panties,  
put em' on, on her  
her again  
goin', goin'  
down  
down  
South  
on this train  
that just ain't  
movin'.

## My Mother the Waitress

Mother's salty lips lick  
the dirt off the cheeks of  
this welfare child

me

Freedom to change            some say  
Freedom from  
father money  
with his pea green paper  
in exchange for

him

Her strong hips sway with child  
grease baby                    fried  
burnt coffee in one hand  
tray above her tired head

she pours it for the big man  
and I  
I watch remembering  
yesterday  
she said,

“This is my last fucking day!”

# Carina Widdifield

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## Round House, Square House

In white man talk, my name means "Sun Child." Mama says I am called this because I was born when my people were hurting. She says that the Comanche are strong and never give up. That's why my father will be gone for a very long time.

I like my name, but some people forget that I am just a person. I can't work miracles. I think that sometimes they don't understand that a name and a person are not the same thing.

Some nights I wake up. I have the same dream over and over. I see men dressed all the same. Their skin is pale. Mama picks me up and runs for the river. She is silent but her eyes are wild. She runs swiftly though her belly is big, and she is in pain. I look over her shoulder and see dust flying. Many others run, too. I see my father running the other way, towards the strange men. Mama covers my eyes. I hear loud noises like thunder, but the air brings no storm. I can't breathe- my nostrils burn with smoke, not smoke from fire but from hate. We sit near some big rocks. Mama tells me to stay quiet.

I wake up those nights and Mama is stroking my hair. She tells me that I am too old to dream like that. She tells me the spirits are playing tricks on me and to go back to sleep. My brother is growing fast. He is getting old enough to help move our band. One day he will be a warrior. He says this because he is a boy and all boys say that. He never has to stay home and work. He thinks that he is doing us a favor by hunting, but I don't think he knows how yet.

Mama's new husband is teaching my brother how to hunt and move quietly. He is kind to him, but ignores me. I don't care-he is not my father. Mama says I must respect him anyway. I do, but that doesn't mean I have to like him.

His other wife is nice to me, but she acts so strangely sometimes. Once she began to cry out for her home. I didn't understand because we are home. Mama tried to calm her, but she just kept saying she didn't want to leave. I went outside.

At dawn we move towards the sun. We do that to keep up with the buffalo. It is hard work, but I like to see new places. It is all so beautiful. The sweet smell of the rippling grass is close around me and the wide blue sky swallows me up. Sometimes I make pictures out of the clouds. Once I saw the face of a familiar man.

Sometimes when we follow the herds, I feel restless. I feel like the wind, always coming and going. Sometimes I feel free, although the dirt under my feet has been pounded by the feet of those before me, whom I

must follow.

The buffalo are diseased. I saw it with my own eyes. A whole herd was dead. They had no tongues and were all dead. The ghost dance laid their souls to rest. We practice the ceremony more often. A strangeness is growing among my people. Their eyes are dim and their smiles are gone.

Today we moved but our tepees didn't. We are following a pale skinned man to a place that Mama says has "houses." I am afraid. I don't know what a house is and I don't know this man. He carries what my brother is learning to use to hunt animals. More pale faced men ride all around us. They carry them, too.

The men talk to the chief and make him sad. They talk with their hands a lot. The chief hangs his head. We all hang our heads. We have never walked so far before. My feet are sore and my throat is dry. I am not allowed to speak.

My brother no longer walks by my side. I see him sometimes when we stop for the day. We have to start walking before the sun rises because we can go no further when it is straight above us. My belly cries for food but we only eat green peaches and corn. My brother stays on the wagon they carry him in. Mama won't let me go near the wagon, but I can see him getting smaller and whiter every day. More people ride in the wagon as the days go by, but there always seems to be enough room in it for everyone.

When the moon is high I shut my eyes. I shut them tight and try to block out the voices of the men and the bad smell that surrounds me. One night I opened them and saw the men taking something from the wagon. I couldn't see what they were carrying, but it looked heavy.

When we stopped to rest the next day, I found Mama. She had tears in her eyes. She held me close to her. I look for my brother in the wagon every day but I can't see him anymore. He must have gotten too small....

We walked and walked for nothing. The air feels different here, like a blanket pulled over my face so I can't breathe. The sun no longer warms my skin, but wets it. We have to live very close to many people in square, hard houses. The night is full of strange sounds and smells. Our places are so hard to keep clean- we can't go away to empty our bodies. We are having trouble finding good food. I don't like what the pale faced men eat.

One time, a crow called to me before the sun did. It told me that the white man does not understand our ways, that our sacred land is some-

## Carina Widdifield

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thing to buy and sell. It told me that we do not weave the web of life, but are part of it. What we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

I have a new friend. She is from another tribe. She is very beautiful. Her hair is longer than mine and she looks better in her clothes. That is good because she will be married soon. She is excited to meet him.

The pale faced men are always giving us things that we never needed before. We sleep off the ground and stay warm with blankets that itch, not the soft skins we are used to. I went to see my friend today, but her family would not let me come inside. I peeked in her house and saw red dots all over her. She was asleep. Mama says the white man did this to her. I didn't see them do anything to her. I woke up to lots of screaming and noise before the sun rose. Mama says my friend will not be married.

There are some pale faced people who live in our new village. They are nice, not like those men in the stupid clothes. They are always tellin' us about a man named "Jesus." He seems like a good person, but I wish they would just have us meet him instead of just always talking about him. Mama doesn't like what they say. She says they are telling us that we are wrong. I don't know what we are wrong about, but I sure would like to meet this Jesus. I told Mama that one day and I was punished.

I wake in the mornings with the sun streaming in through the cracks in the walls thinking how much I hate living this way. Every day I live I long to take back my soul, to spread it like dew on every blade of grass that was my home. My people can no longer go wherever we wish; our spirits are fading.

As I watch the fresh light unfold, the sunbeams speak to me- first very quietly, then louder and stronger with each breath, screaming ancient voices. They take me with them at night, back to where I belong, saying,

"The Earth is precious to god

To harm the earth is to harm its Creator

If we sell you land, you must keep it sacred:

A place to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow  
Flowers.

All things are connected.

Every part of this Earth is sacred to our people

Love it, as God loves us all.  
One thing we know: our God is the same God  
We may be brothers after all  
We shall see....” 1

1. Robert Grass, “ The song of the Chief Seattle.” Medicine Wheel  
Spring Hill music, 1992.

# Molly Manger

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## Hand Study



# Beth Shippert

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## Up

and when i'm 5000 years old  
with all my lives and knowledge  
and sedimentary bones  
with fractured lines and painful glances  
scream  
in pain  
as a young explorer  
paleontologist perhaps  
explores what's left of my decay  
only to find that it's tuesday  
and i have to get up to work by 8:30 a.m.  
so shut off the alarm please

# Jennifer Woods

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## Levi's

I can't stop gripping  
Those slipped-hipped  
Half hung on pelvic bones  
Matched with  
Dred locked  
Buzz Cut  
Sweater brought to lips.  
Lips  
Dipped in crowded room crimson.  
Dear God "to be that glove."  
Hands knuckling playing cards  
Cigarettes  
Belt loops.  
"C'mown!" he tips out, tongue to teeth,  
Stray strand flipping.  
I go, all bones skipping.

## Blanket

I think my job is to greet winter now.  
It has done me a favor  
In waiting to come.

I have always been willing to match my chill  
To hers.  
To blow colder  
To be the more miserable.

I never thought we would be friends  
Or that I would thank her for keeping me in house  
Away from danger  
Precious, unharmed like her favorite jewel.  
This year she has asked that I not feel caged up.

Until today it never occurred to me  
That sky is still blue  
That life is still pulsing under feet  
That earth is still revolving.

This winter I will keep in rotation.

## Jennifer Woods

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### Untitled

“I spit on your grave,”  
I think as I lie here,  
1:43 in the afternoon,  
And all I want to think about is sleeping this in,  
Here on this first beautiful day of the year,  
As my box fan blows in rebirth over my face,  
the honks of horns and pulsing motors  
whizzing, two stories under,  
But I can’t escape the trace of your smell still on my pillow  
like thousands of your little disciples,  
preaching relentlessly of you,  
And I think instead  
About how you, you, you,  
Must have loved to be lying here, shirtless  
So that every time I touched you it had to be  
skin, skin, skin,  
You who redirected my hands as if I was  
Your mistress in church  
Slyly slipping in next to you at the last moment, unwanted,  
before the congregation began their holy, holy, holy.  
You cheat me of the kind of day this should be,  
That as I rejoice in letting go of my burning eyelids,  
I should be wishing to go home, home, home,  
And to be too young again  
To find my first love  
And swear to him three hundred times  
that, later, when this day comes,  
I will not forget him  
And I will not know you.

## Characters Lie

It's no wonder that when you  
Create yourself,  
Your anti-being,  
The flipside of what you are,  
Lies will be your labor.

If you find yourself surprised  
When comets begin to fling towards you  
From left,  
Right,  
Her,  
Sit down and count your lies.

If the plan has gone astray,  
Asunder,  
A slip far from the blueprint,  
Lay the plans out. Chances are  
The framework didn't account for  
The real you interfering.

# Mollee Mohr

Untitled



# Stefin Preboski

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## Spam

I stepped inside the cool of the grocery store one weekend last summer, the automatic doors sliding together with a rather final thud behind me, and pushed my cart on the newly varnished floor. The muzak played softly overhead as I wheeled into the produce section. I quickly filled my cart with lemons, peaches, tomatoes, Bibb lettuce, a large purple onion... My cart colorful and one-third full already, I pushed onward, passing the seafood, but stopping to gather cheese, some deli meat and bagels into my cart.

I strolled up the canned food aisle, stopping to balance cans of soup, one on top of the other, at the bottom of the wire cart. I reached down to grab a wayward can, and as I rose from my crouching position, my eyes fell upon a square blue can several shelves over.

Spam. I pulled with one hand my overflowing cart to where the blue can sat on the shelf, the picked unchanged from the not-so-distant past. I looked again at my full cart— so much food— and picked up a can of Spam, a feeling not unlike hunger in my stomach...

I'm setting the white wooden table carefully. Tablecloth down already, I've pulled two Christmas candles from the cupboard— it's March, but these were the only two candles I could find that were somewhat intact. I lay three place setting— Mom at the head, Todd to her left and myself to her right. The familiar blue willow plates gaze up at me, the overhead light reflecting off them. The kitchen is cozy and warm and full of good smells. The bleakness of the March night, threatening rain outside our kitchen window, seems far away.

Mom turns around from the counter where she is tossing a salad, to smile at me. "Almost ready, honey! I didn't think it would smell this good!" she pauses as she brings the salad to table, then, "Why don't you run and get Todd—I think we're ready to eat."

I run the fourteen stairs up to Todd's room and tell him to wash his hands and come down. He's combing his hair before his full length mirror— his nine-year-old face puckered in concentration. I stop to wash my own hands and give my hair a quick swipe with a brush before racing Todd downstairs, where we can hear Mom bringing dinner to the table.

She's bending over the stove as Todd and I clatter into the kitchen, pot holders covering both of her hands. She deposits a baked potato on our respective plates as I pour the last of the milk into our glasses.

"And now for the main course!" Mom announces. Todd and I grin at each other over the tall green candles, now lit. "Ta da! Who knew what a

## Stefin Preboski

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Spam could be transformed into?"

She sets the tiny cube of meat on its serving tray on the table to her right, and we all stop to admire her handiwork. She's basted it with honey and brown sugar and studded the top and sides with whole cloves. "It looks just like the picture on the can," I breathe.

Mom's too-thin cheeks smile as she sits down to carve. The knife slides through the meat easily, like a hot knife through butter. "There's enough for two small pieces each," mom says, depositing exactly that on first my, then Todd's, then her own plate. "Dig in!"

I don't remember most of rest of the meal, save that was the best meal I could remember eating in a long while. We sat, the three of us, the candlelight playing on our faces, and talked and laughed and ate our simple meal—made so much more than simple by my mother.

We none of us were ever too keen on the taste of Spam—still aren't—but that March night, as the late winter rain fell outside the warm glow of our kitchen, we agreed it tasted divine. It was an agreement reached after weeks of eating whatever we could find for the last amount of money, and making do and not complaining. In those days when luxury was not our first priority, my family dined elegantly on a can of Spam.

The lady standing next to me in the aisle has a faded red sweatshirt on. She's saying, "Excuse me, please," in a kind voice. I smile at her daughter, who's clutching the plastic handle of their shopping cart. I still cling to my can of Spam.

"Is that any good?" she asks, nodding toward my can. I look in her grocery cart—see the day old bread, the few vegetables, the small container of milk, and lastly, into her tired eyes. I look into my own cart, filled to overflow, and remember the taste of a dinner on a cold March night.

I smile, finally, and push my cart out of out her way. "It makes for a wonderful meal," I say at last, gently replacing my can of Spam on the shelf beside me.

# Sarah Resnick

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## Pokey Moss



# D. P. Vining

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## Mononucleosis

-When I was young I used to dream, dream of a day when I would make a difference. Dream of a world where the thoughts of every individual would matter and be of concern to the whole of society. A perfect society, a utopian society. I know that I am not the first to dream of such a world unfettered by the chains of bureaucracy. But I felt that if I studied and labored, that I could uncover a way to realistically make that world a reality. And so I studied and I read. I started with Plato's Republic, a common enough starting point. But I was not satisfied. So I went on to the works of Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, Joyce, Iacoca, Nietzsche and all the greats.

(enter some interrupting person)

S.I.P.-Excuse me, do you happen to have a caricature of Richard Nixon nude on a yak?

-Ah, yes (to audience), hold on a sec. (producing picture) Here you go that's twenty-five fifty. (takes money and S.I.P. goes away) So anyway, oh ah, sorry about that, where were we? Ah, yes, but none of the philosophers I read helped me in my pursuit. It was alas at this point that my studies were interrupted, it was time to start school. Out of all the experiences in my life none stand out more than that first day. A yard full of screaming kids clinging on to their parents. As if this was not bad enough my darkest fears were realized at recess, these children were more interested in picking their noses and eating sand than discussing the depravities of man or Thomas of Aquinas's social theorems. Then after recess the teacher, that font of ecclesiastical doldrums pronounced 'nap time'. I replied, "I'm trying to wrest reason into the amenities of life, and you want me to take a nap?" She looked at me with that look, you know the one. That patented contemptuous teacher look that says 'You are just a child, I'm an adult. So sit down, shut up and do as I say and take a fuckin' nap!' Adults. They think they run the world. As you can no doubt surmise I have nothing but ill remembrance for my younger school career. It was not until later that. . .

(enter another interrupting person)

A.S.I.P.-Pardon me, are you the chap with the Rudolf Hess-Minnie Mouse wedding photographs for purchase?

-Yes. Here, that's five and six.

A.S.I.P.-Oh thank you kindly. (A.S.I.P. also goes away)

-Oh ah, sorry about all that. Let's see. It was at this point that Napoleon's Prussian Campaign took a turn for the worst, It appeared that. . .

(enter yet another interrupting person)

Y.A.S.I.P.-'Scuse me sir. Is this where I get the Mamie Eisenhower collectable drool siphons?

-Sorry all out, try next election year. (Y.A.S.I.P. leaves) So it was then that I entered Harvard, on scholarship from the Academy of colloquial Pre-Judaic Sloth Jousting. A sport for which I had great aptitude and pursued diligently during my formative High School years. Truth be known I cared but little for the pastime but it got the chicks. Hey what do you want from me? I was in puberty, cut me some slack, I'm past it now thank you very much. Ah, puberty. A time of chaotic hormone migrations whose marked frequency of pitch change was only overwrought by the frequency in mood change. It was a trying time. Truly the most Kafka-esque two weeks of my life. With that past I forged ahead. Or endeavored to at least. The teens were a difficult and tempestuous period, cliques, parties, fashion faux pas, the assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand the and the German response. I persevered however and kept comfort in the fact that it could be worse. I could be living in the valley. If my older sister said 'gag me with a spoon' but one more time, I was prepared to do it. Instead I opted to bribe her with a pack of Camels. Much like the desert princes but different. If it were not for my taking solace in the works of Proust, the Essays of Goethe and the episodes of Scooby Doo and School House Rock, I'm not sure I could have survived with my sensibilities intact. It was like totally bogus. Oh sorry about that.

(enter still yet another interrupting person)

S.Y.A.S.I.P.-excuse me, do you have a list of words that Don Ho can't say written in Gaelic using a Periwinkle crayon?

## D. P. Vining

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-No. But I do have it in Thistle.

S.Y.A.S.I.P.-Okay.

Here you go. (S.Y.A.S.I.P. goes the way of the dodo. To audience) So anyway. Now set your Secret Decoder Acorns to the transverse of  $x=3q$ . The secret saying for today is 'Trust in Alia, but be sure to tie up your camel.'

(enter stoner guy)

Stoner guy-Hey man got any bud?

-No. What kind of freak do I look like? Go see the freak in the three piece suit.

-Oh, thanks dude. (Stoner guy sallies forth).

-Now, Harvard, that hot bed of celibacy. Harvard proved most disappointing. They were more interested in power, wealth and fame, then knowledge, truth and pimento loaf. Aside from the library—a wonderful place to go if you ever need a legal loophole to get off a murder rap—and the weekly showing of Buckaroo Banzai, I found the atmosphere intellectually stagnant. Sure there was a veritable plethora of Neo-Bohemians, a philosophical debate to them however was pondering if Mr. T. was used as an anchor, could he keep the Yamato at point during a squall? I believe they concluded that he could keep Doctor Doolittle's Floating Island at anchor during a tsunami. The closest I came to finding minds was in the Chess, Oral Jenga and Combat Twister club. I did however learn one thing from all this. Happiness is a blue plunger. Trust me on this. The Metaphysical doctrine behind this would take hours to explain.

I still have yet to realize my dreams of a far horizon, but I am confident that my life work will come to fruition. But for now I have to go and meet a guy who says he has Attila the Hun's authentic paisley placeware that he will trade me for a Pre Mesozoic combination napkin ring/earwax cleaner. It's really a Cenozoic Era piece, but I doubt he will notice. So for now I leave you with this pearl of wisdom: Just remember, life is learning, learning is life and that no matter how good your health care is, you can't win against a rhinoceros. They have poor

eyesight and a bad attitude, besides which they cheat. Do you honestly believe that that bird standing on its head is really just picking off parasites? Trust me on this one.

# Samantha Crawford

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## The Playground

### I.

Sunbeams stretch across  
the vibrant blue dome  
melting clouds,  
leaving only marble smooth  
vastness.

I can feel my face  
drenched in warmth,  
every fiber slowly turning into clay.  
Nerve ends  
tickled by the air's  
sweet blossom kisses.

My head sinks  
like a marshmallow  
into the sweaty metal siding  
of the portable.

Swings buzzing and cutting  
through the clear, crisp,  
crystal  
sky

Call to me.  
A dirt carpet  
spread at my feet,  
decorated by monkey-bars,  
slides, tire mazes.

### II.

Children dart across  
my carpet  
their laughter reaching  
my ears.  
I find their mockery  
and petty games dull.

They do not interest me-  
their dusty rituals of tag.



## Samantha Crawford

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She never teases me  
about my freckles,  
or walks ahead of me  
silently.

We found Pocahontas  
together.  
Her silky black hair  
covering curious  
almond eyes.  
Pocahontas made us laugh  
with her mischievous jokes.

We spend every recess  
playing.  
We scale Mt. Everest,  
run among the buffalo,  
chatter like chipmunks at  
the tribe elders council,  
pick flowers by a waterfall,  
or attend tea  
with the Queen.

#### IV.

My metal pillow  
shakes as the herd  
of children stomp  
past me.  
Giggles and low growls  
are thrown in my  
direction.

I wait.

Savor the sunlight, the warmth  
of its embrace, pulling it close  
into my heart.  
Elizabeth and Pocahontas  
blow me kisses from behind

the fences.  
I wave to the empty  
playground.

# Samantha Crawford

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## Fairy Tales

They talk of  
Destiny,  
of timeless love -  
Devotion.

That is what  
we seek,  
what defines  
us  
as  
Women.

Spinning, tumbling  
dizzy in the  
pre-wash cycle,  
trapped by  
petticoats and baby diapers.

We are Cinderella's  
who must have  
a fella.

Without one  
who would we be?  
For Woman cannot  
be without  
MAN.

She would be incomplete,  
she would be  
Wo.  
(and there is no such thing as a Wo)

That is what they  
tell us,  
Spoon feed us with  
our squashed yams.

But how we gag,  
choke as we are

forced to  
swallow.

Does this sound  
bitter?  
It is only as bitter  
as it tastes.  
And yet it can lose  
all taste when  
injected numbly  
into the brain.

Oh, and how numb  
the brain has become!!  
As it must be  
so the bruising,  
the dissecting,  
the bleeding  
can be tolerated -  
ignored.

## Samantha Crawford

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### The Young Housewife

At ten a.m. the young housewife  
moves about in negligee behind  
the wooden walls of her husband's house.  
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb  
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands  
shy, uncorseted, tucking in  
stray ends of hair, and I compare her  
to fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car  
rush with a crackling sound over  
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

William Carlos Williams

\* The following short story was inspired by this poem.

It was ten a.m. and I was moving about behind the knotted wooden walls of my husband's house. My soft peach negligee floats loosely around me like spring blossoms in the wind. The past few days I have forgotten all of my duties. I have bathed in the freedom of his absence. I can finally breathe. The walls no longer push in on me. My corset lies lifeless on the floor. Slowly, I walk down the halls running my fingers along the cold, hard walls, making lines through the sticky sweat. I can hear them pulsating, waiting for the moment that they can once more suffocate me. When they can close in tight, squeezing out all of the air and collapse into a tiny cube. With a gasp I strike out at them as they rush in taking advantage of my momentary lapse in defense. I hurry to the master's bedroom only to find the air sour and choking. I swing through the thickness flinging my arms like a person drowning. The window. I clumsily fight the latch. Numb fingers. Finally. The window shoots open shutters clattering. Sweet air gently caresses my starved lungs and curls around me. I let my hair fly unfastened in the breeze. I kneel down at my altar and sinfully indulge in the sermon of the oak. The old oak bounces cheerfully and leads the energetic world in a gay symphony. I can hear my voice laughing at the delicious jokes the oak whispers into the endless, unwallled space. I sit there religiously, dreaming that I can sway with the branches carefree and alive. How I wish I

could dance to the oak's music. The desire to have every fiber, every thread of my being blend into the vast cushion of sky tugs at my heart. A flock of birds sweeps in an elegant arc and happily stops to visit the old oak. I am filled with envy. How I would love to soar and cut circles with the birds whose home has no limits. I wave at the visitors and know that out there he cannot hold me back. Out there things do not belong to him, he has no power.

But inside... inside he is king. Everywhere I look I see his belonging, his trophies. His diploma hangs smugly over the bed. His bank book lies hidden tightly protected in his locked desk drawer. And the wedding picture stands on his bureau. Looking at that picture I feel like a stranger. Who is that woman sitting under his shadow? She looks so childish, young and full of energy. Her eyes stare at me full of laughter and magic. She's so happy, so free. I feel a tiny splash on my cheek and realize I am crying. How silly. Silly to remember how disillusioned that child was. A quick glimpse in the mirror reveals what the future truly held for that girl. Hollowed cheeks robbed of color. A mouth that has almost forgotten how to smile. Eyes that have become blank...empty. But him, he has not changed. He stares out from the frame, his mouth twisted with mocking modesty. His hand is clamped on her shoulder and his chest is swelled out with the pride of a successful hunter. He is a victor, his eyes gleam with the fire of conquest. Even now, I can feel his eyes penetrating my skin. I can feel his obnoxious breath on my neck and his cold, sharp fingers cutting into my waist. I can feel him wrapping my corset around me while tightening it with his eyes. I shake as he combs my hair with his voice. I can feel his icy touch in my brain as he rakes through my thoughts and disposes of those he does not like. My blood begins to crystallize as I feel him kissing me and pressing me close. He grasps me, claws me, squeezes me, until I grow numb, until I can hardly breathe, until I ...

The front bell breaks my trance. Reality rushes over me with a gush of wind. I obediently throw on a robe and mechanically begin to pull up my hair. Stiffly I walk to the door and recognize the ice-man waiting by the curb. Through the front window I can see him hunched over his cart, smoking his huge cigar and running his fingers through his greasy hair. A chill darts down my spine as I slowly open the door, and as though the thought was implanted in my brain, I become embarrassed of my appearance. Clumsily I walk toward the wretched man and he smiles at me with a mouth full of rotten teeth. I nervously tuck in the

## Samantha Crawford

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stray ends of my hair. I feel his beady eyes staring through my robe, through me.

I can feel my body walking and hear my voice reproduce appropriate greetings, but I slowly escape to soar high above myself. I see my fragile shell making puppeted motions. A river of sounds rush through my ears and the laughter of the oak calls to me. I perch myself on the cradling branches of the old oak. They sway me back and forth, back and forth. I let all of these new sensations run wild, consuming me as I watch the man below smile and loathsomely bow. I realize how funny those figures look. How awkward they move as if connected to invisible strings dragging them. But the strings are no longer invisible to me. I take hold of the ones that encircle my empty mass. I become my own puppeteer and I am delighted by experimenting with this new power. Amused I notice a passing car and I am inspired. I joyously float over and land on top of it. I give the reins to my body a hard tug. I watch as my body slowly drifts before the car like a leaf falling from the oak. Noiselessly, I make myself comfortable on the car as I hear the wheels crushing the dried leaves on the road. I stare at my husband's house and listen as the walls moan. At the sound I laugh and I share a charming joke with the old oak tree. I see the oak shake with laughter. I notice my body lies shriveled on the road and a crowd has begun to gather around it. I smile and bow as the car continues on and passes my husband's house by.

## The Shower

I am cold. My skin is warm, but I am cold. Cold inside- all along my tissues there are icicles. I feel like this a lot lately. Mom says it is because I have bad circulation like Great Aunt Marge, Aunt Terry, and her. I have never believed that, never believed in bad circulation. Dad says it is in my head. Just like the trains, fences, stoves, and showers I see in my dreams. "All in your head."

I am so cold now I can't stand it. So I walk toward my room to find another sweater. The two I already have on aren't enough to melt the snow inside my veins. And then it happens. I freeze. I freeze in front of the bathroom. I can feel the icy blood circling my brain making the crinkled sponge material turn rigid and sharp. The bathroom. The summer breeze floats in through the little square window making the thin yellow curtains puff out like the yellow cheeks of a fish on the beach. The air from the bathroom is sour as it hits my face, my frozen face. I can hear it thumping on the block of ice that shields me. It pulls me like a train pulling car after car. Cattle cars that smell of rotten straw and old cow-paddies. Through small slits in the slatted sides I can see the country. Cold white snow covers the thin hills. I don't know where I am. I've never seen the hills, never left the fenced ghettos. A white blur flying by taking me away. Pulling me to a place where the sky is thick and sooty. Outside the small bathroom window the train screeches by. The pounding of the wheels pulls me into the dark box with smooth blue tiles. Stepping onto the tiles my feet, wrapped in two pairs of wool socks, become soaked with the coldness radiating from the deep blueness of the floor. It is there. Right there in front of me. The yellow curtains puff into its space, breathing life into its cube. The shower. The white porcelain of the tub glistens like a hollow tooth. It is smooth inside, softly curved to my body. Curved to hold me as I float in the waters of dreams. Dreams where the dogs howl and their masters pull on the leashes. The two pointed shadows circle the fences. The dogs growl and bear their teeth, drool all over when they see yellow. Yellow star stitched over my heart. Stitches with mother's neat, straight lines. I do not have to wear the star in the tub. The tub is safe. It is strong and solid wrapped around my skin, it is my mother-her womb. But the shower is isolated. It stands alone, naked in the sea of blue, staring down at me.

Shivers. The ice around my brain is breaking apart, cracking. I cannot move my eyes. The shower. I slowly take off my sweaters, my turtle neck, my sweat pants, my double socks, my thermal underwear,

## Samantha Crawford

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my bra, my panties. They all lie around my feet, hunched over, shriveled. Hollow stripped shells cover the hard ground. One and then another and another. I hold onto mother. I try not to look around at the piles of human snow. I try to ignore the heavy flakes in the air. I look at the line in front of us. Mother stares at it too. We are all clutching each other, ignoring. Holding our breath. The snow around my feet is so cold that it looks blue. The blueness soaks my thin boots. It is as blue as mother's dress. The yellow stars are so bright against the blue. They are all yellow fish floating on the blue ocean. I am naked. Naked like the shower. I step into the whiteness, into the snow curved to fit my body. But I do not close the drain, I do not sit down into the womb. No I stand. I stare up at the shower, it laughs. Reaching for the faucet knobs I see my arm, I see the numbers. They are green, thick numbers pressed into my forearm. 462667. I blink, shut them out. I look at my arm and they are gone. I run my fingers over my flesh and it is solid, closed. It has swallowed the numbers, they must be on my bone. I reach for the knob again and the shower laughs. It's laughing so hard it hisses and its foul breath mixes with the summer breeze and the sour yellow curtains. I am cold inside. I look at my arm and the numbers are there-462667. They are there, and I tear at them, rub, but they won't go away. The foulness of the shower spits on me, my eyes water and the ice and snow inside me fill my lungs, my throat. I sink into the hard empty tooth. The yellow curtains (yellow stars?) puff over me, outside the sky is full of grey ashes. The shower laughs, it laughs and it hisses. I can not breathe. The ice has consumed me. In the very core of my brain I realize. Dad is wrong. I was there. I was in the shower. I died in the shower.

# Molly Manger

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## A Second Look



# Jamie Bolger

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## Deer on the Beach

Fire Island in December  
Is set ablaze by  
Reflections of the vanishing sun  
In frigid waters.  
Through the windshield  
We glimpse movement  
In the brush.  
Conversation stops,  
Brakes squeal to a halt,  
Engine idling.  
*Look*, we simultaneously  
Whisper  
So as not to disturb  
Them with our human voices.  
I am awed to see  
Deer on the beach  
Foraging  
Amidst the evergreens,  
Just like in the Rockies  
But at sea-level.  
Their elegant bodies  
Stand too close to the  
Ocean-blue Toyota.  
Waiting  
Watching  
With eyes deep as the Atlantic  
And brown as good earth.  
They expect  
Granola bars, potato chips.  
Unaware  
That their learned habits are  
Unnatural  
Dangerous.  
*Go*, I whisper,  
*Run*, my shaky voice  
Warns them.  
Be Afraid.

## Glimpse of Manhattan

The city's ugly breath rises from the ground.  
New Yorkers, wrapped tight  
like broken limbs in plaster  
rush past, fast.

Stench of suffocating fish  
swims in Chinatown air.  
Arms and fins flail during deals  
on tuna, salmon, eels,  
who are destined to be tonight's tasty meals.

The aromas of death and pastry mingle  
where Little Italy meets the Orient.  
Cappucino and songs of amore  
lure lovers like bees to flore.

They are souls yearning to be found.

# Montsho Pettaway

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## My Inferno

I always consider myself outgoing and able to conquer any challenge. And I have, up until now. I haven't had the easiest life. I am a woman, a black woman at that. I had to work hard for the strength, respect and dignity I have. Little did I know the whole time of my fifty-three minutes everything I worked so damn hard for would be yanked right from under my big toe and send me plummeting into the depths of hell. I'm doing my internship at Jefferson Jr. high, and while it had it's perks, I often find myself in a reoccurring nightmare of Dante's inferno.

I'm surrounded by what seems like a million-but really it's like 24-little, evil devils. Actually 23, Shawanda Dietzal is never in class. I'm not sure I'd know who she was even if she did drop in. They all have happy little faces and angelic smiles, but when I look closer I see what's really behind what looks like a pointy, red, tail straggling behind their backsides. You know, their halos are a little crooked too. Are those horns under there? Can't be, I mean, look at those gorgeous little smiles and shimmery white Colgate teeth. "All the better to eat you with my dear," I hear over my shoulder. What did I just hear? I know I didn't just hear a snide remark. I quickly jerk my head in search of potential smart ass. "Who did that?" But there is nothing, just blackness. Extreme blackness. Damn, did someone turn up the heat? It feels like Texas on a hot-as-hell day in the middle of summer echoes back at me. Hot...as...hell. Hot...as...hell. I keep hearing this in the back of my head. Hot...as...h-e-l-l. H-E-L-L. Oh shit!

I reassess my life trying to figure out where oh where did I go wrong? I am a really good person. Sure I don't make my bed, but who really takes the time to make their own bed anymore; it's like Kangaroo's and parachute pants and Jams. Remember Jams? Right? Right? But I don't hear a friendly "yes" of agreement or even a sporadic "here, here!". All I hear is them- the devils. I can hear them behind me, breathing-incredibly hard. Panting like dogs in heat. Savagely wheezing like gremlins who just got the tiniest splash of water on them. Tons of them waiting for me to turn around. Little beads of sweat pour down my face and I make an impulsive, but most intelligent decision. Run. Oh Lordy, feet don't fail me now. I make a conscious effort to jump over the puddle of sweat in front of me, take a deep breath, and run with swiftness. And believe me, this isn't *Halloween III*, I'm not going to run into some scheduled alley that's peopleless, then fall, and scream at the top of my lungs. Oh no.

Like an Olympic gold medalist, I run top speed from the crazed heathens. With the legs of Jackie Joyner Kersey and the speed of Flo Jo, I run. All the while, I can hear the constant rumble of shuffling papers, giggles of stupidity, and cackles of smart alecks who play their games of idiocy. The cacophony gets louder and I realize that the sound is blasting in my ear. It's like there's a Miracle Ear in my left ear. Wait, there's one in my right ear too. So tiny that they can't be seen by the naked eye. Too tiny, I can't get them out. They must be on extra high, George Burns level or something. They're so damn loud. They're pounding in my ear drums which inevitably leads to—. Alert! Alert! Calling all body parts, calling all body parts! A migraine has escaped and is running loose on the corner of cerebrum and cerebellum. But before I scream "Excedrin!", my legs start to burn as though they are about to give way. In the underscore of my mind I can hear my childhood playground sing songs. My backbone's aching, my bra's too tight, my head's exploding like dynamite. To the left, to my right. My head hurts, my legs hurt and...oh my God! What is that awful smell? No, this can't be my fate. I'm sorry for cheating on my history test. I'm sorry for the time I broke the front door window. I'm sorry for tricking my little brother into eating a cockroach. I'm sorry for everything I've ever done, but please, please...not the boy's locker room! Anything, anything but that. The smell cuts just like Lorena Bobbit, my nose slashed now by the awful aroma that can no longer function. Gasping for air, I turn, and there out of darkness comes—IT.

"T.J. is that you?" suddenly IT opens what I think is a mouth and releases a high pitch whine that could bring in dogs from miles around, "but Miss Pettaway I want to go outside!"

"No T.J., now how many times do I have I told you—", and before I could finish, IT picks up the chair and throws it to the ground. IT speaks once again, but this time ferociously in an I-don't-give-a-damn tone, "you got us detention!"

"Oh Shawn, now you know who got you that detention and it wasn't me," I try to explain.

"But I wasn't talking," IT screeches out in that ghetto Rosie Perez, Mary J. Blige voice.

"Now Teenya I just saw...you...and—" I can speak no more, nor move. What's happening to me? Is this a nervous break down? Can't move, can't talk, can't breath, can't hear. One last sense left. Eye spy...eye spy—say what? The little butt munches have tied me up like Gulliver

## Montsho Pettaway

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and look at that! Hey, hey you asshole give that back. IT has my voice box. I mean it, right now! But they can't even hear me or maybe they don't want to hear me. IT's coaxing them to ignore me, can you believe that? Let me loose, I sign, laboring to remember the Goddamn sign language alphabet, and trying not to mix up the e. Y-O-U-F-U-C-K-S! I can feel the muscle spasms in my fingers and I want to cry. I want to curl up in the fetal position, suck my thumb, and call for mommy. No, I won't let them win. "Never give up, never die," I mouth to myself, but they all know what I'm saying. IT knows what I am saying.

They see me struggling. Why? Why do you little bastards make me the enemy? Reading can be fun you know? I can make it fun, just let me up. Butterfly in the sky, I can go twice as high. Come on everybody now. Take a look, it's in a book, Reading Rainbow... Reading Rainbow...reading...rain...bow. This isn't working and the natives look restless. Could this be the end of our faithful hero? Holy crapola, what in the Wayne's World are those? Out of nowhere come those itty-bitty moving figurines dressed in army fatigues and armed with lethal weapons. I guess it ain't over 'till Roseanne sings the national anthem. The GI Joes help me break loose and as each one unties a rope they grow bigger and bigger. IT starts to wail like OZ's evil, misguided witch; every snap of the ropes like water dousing it. One by one my limbs are freed and one by one the little devils surrounding me vanish as though they were never there. Thank heavens, thank God, and I notice—my voice is back. These little soldiers have come to my rescue. But are these soldiers really soldiers at all? It's Jerome—funny, lively and kind at heart. I could find out the Simpsons were going off the air and Jerome could still bring a smile to my face. I have to get on him about his homework sometimes but with a little shake of my head he knows. Deep down inside, past his lopsided afro, past his cute pudgy face and dimples, even past his quirky smile, he knows. Deep down inside his union bay T-shirt he wears every other day, inside his skinny, little, boney body he knows. He knows he'll do it, and not because he's afraid of getting into trouble. He'll do it because he doesn't want to disappoint me, and most importantly, he doesn't want to disappoint himself. Mary—always prepared and willing to work. She carries every one of her books to class, never wear's pants, and always asks for her assignments in advance when she's going to miss a day. Actually she asks for them about a month in advance, talk about studious. She always wears skirts because her parents think she's the actual Mary, mother of Christ. Like

wearing skirts is what kept her a “virgin.” Eric—not the smartest, but very nice. He’s one of those who needs the occasional boost of energy to get his mind back on his studies. You know, like a slap on the back of the head to wake him when he’s fallen asleep in the middle of class. But all in all he’s nice and considerate—when he’s awake. Quinton—a talker, but very energetic. Who am I kidding? This kid must take valium before and after every meal. He always wants to read out loud, always wants to perform in front of the class, always wants to do just about everything. Which is good, except, unfortunately, everything also includes blurting out, moving from seat to seat, saying whatever he thinks whether it’s appropriate or not—non stop. Which leads to graphic discussion about tonguing your first love on the playground, bungee jumping into your own vomit, and twelve year old transvestites. Angie, Reed, David, Julia and John. But those aren’t guns, just pencils and books. No fatigues, just baggy jeans and whatever brand-name is in the style this week. No darkness. and most importantly, no IT. Just a quaint little fern by the window hanging from the ceiling. A brown clock on the wall under the vent and the trusty old sharpener next to the door. Only there’s this eerie hush as if Dr. Willard had just asked for a moment of silence over the intercom. No sound. Ahhhhhh. Quiet. The bell rings. All good things must—well, you know the cliché. I watch my soldiers shuffle out and squirm their way through the restless halls. I turn to gather my things, my mind frustrated and pondering one simple question. Actually, a heavy question like the great question of life. Or the mind boggling which came first, the chicken or the egg? The \$64,000 question: was it all a dream? And as I walk out the classroom door past the no running hall signs and I hear someone say, “O captain, my captain.” I smile. Today was a good day.



## Jewish Ghetto, Venice, 1995

A trio of Venetian clotheslines  
reach  
across murky blue-green water  
grasp  
chipping stucco wall of neighbor's faded villa  
and indifferently suspend dazzlingly white bloomers  
in famous Venetian light.

k.brown

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## Untitled

He sits  
in his tiny cage  
in the mall, eyes dull, listless.

You try  
to make him look up,  
tapping the thick glass window  
in hopes  
of putting light back  
in those ghost-blue puppy eyes  
(staring unblinking down  
at wire floor beneath his paws).

But no,  
you do not succeed.  
The puppy sighs—he does not care.

But you  
do. Your fists clench  
in frustration, knowing  
(eyes grief-colored)  
your powerlessness,  
without the money needed  
to give  
this weary purebred  
a home, a life, the light back.

# Mandy Leamon

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## The Incantation

Frog legs, rabbits' feet, fish eyes.  
Rag weed, tulip bulbs, raw apples.  
Mix and mix in my witch's brew.  
Form my spell, form the devilry I have conjured.

Flinky winky willow trees.  
Steal the water from the colored seas.  
Hocus-pocus rat-a-tak, rat-a-tak bah.  
A do run run run, a do run run.

Slimy, slinky, crawly creatures squash your guts to form my spell.  
Decaying road kill enhance my spell with your luscious perfume.  
Little children with your snotty noses.  
Pour your juices to moisten my spell.  
And of course without the eye of the PurplePeopleEater there would be  
no  
Spell.

Mushy gushy stinky slime. Melt like butter in my lemon-lime.  
Squishy squashy wishy washy, twist and turn to make it burn.  
Hunka hunka burning love to roast the tweety bird.  
Star light, star bright rip out Satan's heart tonight.

Dolly Parton wig, Cher butt tatoo, John Travolta Stayin Alive leisure suit.  
Finally, the carburator of a Honda Civic.  
Evil ones cast my spell.  
I'll be demoned, I should have went American.  
Gets me every time.

# Meredith Pennell

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## Scattered

a woman's life dropped to the floor,  
erupted like St. Helens spreading  
her ashes across the asphalt earth.  
people looked — a wicked smile on  
their faces — as she watched all of  
her past, her present, her future  
laid out for all to see.  
no one lifted a finger,  
except to point,  
of course.  
i'm sure she lost some pieces,  
puzzles are like that,  
you know.

# Rachel Evans

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## Sweet-n-Sour

Poster children I think. For what, who the hell knows, but poster children for something just the same. Some fucked up, diseased sub group. Caught up in the movement toward being unmovable. Keeping up with forgotten generation as it's aiming away from being generic. Aiming hard at nowhere.

Spouting some psycho babble bullshit from the background doesn't help take the edge off the thoughts of being frantic, but they try not to think about the sex clanging in their limbs.

I know their restraint is me, on the roof outside their window, listening. Sucking up the absurdity of my own search for a tidal wave of belonging, feeling, needing, not giving a damn.

Out of context and the world is purple. Imploding and exploding in haze all at once. Swallowing any fabric softened thoughts I may have had and turning them into game show trivia. Dirty laundry.

The yellow tone of their voices reaches with the breeze through the bedroom curtain and I crawl higher to get away from them. Saboteurs.

Streaks whiz by in the form of cars on the street below, and air follows them right the midnight joggers. Narcissistic bastards. A curl of kamikaza spit slips its way off my lip and finds its way to the sidewalk right in front of one. A branch from a tree next to the house leans over, its leaves winking approval at me. I'm bored.

The mood music changes, the beacon signal that they're about to give in inside. I don't care. I wouldn't have cared if they'd screwed in front of me. Maybe I would have felt something. Had an original thought.

Sigh and the stars tango in and out of focus, taunting me with their candor. Breathing a sense of apocalypse with each drag I take and my eyes lap lazily, wandering for an anti christ. Only a cop car surfaces briefly and then drives off. Shit.

Feel like I'm swimming and I lay my head back against slated tiles. I hear him scraping his way up onto the roof next to me. Quick fuck, I think, but stare straight ahead in silence. The bats are out now.

Wanna smoke? I ask, flipping a candy striped box his way.

Yeah, thanks man.

She go home? Asleep.

If I reach my arms out, separate them from my body and let the palms fan out, my fingertips can feel the swinging of bat wings like bug footsteps brushing against my nerve endings. The first time tonight

## Rachel Evans

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I've felt remotely like living. Breeze above me tingles and my mind keeps repeating words. Luscious. Rolling like peach skin from some annal of my memory box. Luscious.

What's eatin' ya' man? You're trippin' me out being so quiet, he says. Wonder what it's like to be a bat. No sight, just sense. Movement by radar, ya know? Like being a fucking blind man, he says.

I think it would be like swimming underwater with no goggles, eyes closed. You know, how you can sense the wall of the pool, even though you're not looking. Yeah, like being a fucking blind man. You know how incredibly aware they must be, man? To just feel air passing around their wings and sense another object by only a subtle, minute change in the air pattern around them. Damn, that's cool.

You fag, that's not how they do it. They've got some messed up radar shit in their heads that senses stuff. Nothin' to do with air pressure, it's all worked out in their heads like a micro chip in a computer. They got a fucking homing device. Whatever, man. Think about being so aware. They can touch everything with their senses, even shit that's far away, out of reach. What? What the fuck are you muttering over there? Fuck you. I didn't say anything. You're messed up, man.

I just fucked my brains out. What do you expect?

I let my arms relax from their vigil with the kerosene sky and send them to pivot behind my head, pillowing, leaving my back to arch and my pelvis to jut forward like some belly dancer seducing a satellite. Wonder if he notices he's still hard. Wonder if he notices that I'm not.

The album that's been playing because he didn't turn it off to let her sleep, ends finally, shutting itself off, and the whirlwind in my head stops abruptly like sweet n sour pork passed from mom to dad on a Lazy Susan.

Blares from the city life rise above us and then sink back again like bowels. Colorless town breathes shallowly, shifts in its chair and scratches, and then relapses into another self-induced slumber. Glance over at him and then back at the shadowy sky overhead, angled like a receding hairline. I've gotta get the fuck outta this town.

His only response is to spit and I want to bash him for being the shit he is. I rip off a leaf from the tree, shredding it slowly, rhythmically. Ashes slip from the end of my cigarette that's been lit and ignored for some time now. No longer feel like sucking that crap down. I let the white stick tumble from my fingers and roll haphazardly down the roof, zigzagging back and forth with the grooves of shingling. Leaving a

trail of pixie dust ashes, smoldering without desire.

My legs have gone numb now, but I stand anyway, jerking life into them as I totter back and forth in a liquid slow-mo gyration, The obelisk of Elm street has mounted the building, and from this height I feel like a dumbshit nothing punk. I feel like a banshee with a dick.

Swaying and he looks at me with nothing more than repugnance, poit blank indifference in my presence. Poised, undecided in my actions, and I raise my arms like the bats that have gained in numbers since the last time I issued breath into the dried air. Seeping, the night finds its way into me and I feel incongruous and empty and frozen in this place to this perch. Nothing but to run, and nowhere to go but down. I want to let go, I want to release, and I want to find something to fall on. What are you doin', man? Don't you wonder what it would feel like? Absolute release, a perfect sense of rushing before you find the ground at your face and it's all flashing and for a split second you know what you've done and you don't care because you chose it and then it's silence. Everything. Serene. You're stoned dude. I'm alive, and I don't fucking think I wanna be. Fucking jump then. Just shut up and let me sleep.

Swirling, the air covers me like smoke from a pointed gun and I breathe it in, fumes from the joint. Flapping around my head and I close my eyes, sensing the movement of the bats around my face. Rancid, the smell of the crawling heap below me. The world tilting on it's axis spinning uncontrollably like a hamster wheel and all I can think is that I want a dinner mint. Something to suck on in these moments of flurry. Something to take the edge off the dryness.

The darkness empties itself onto me and empties my pockets, dropping gum wrappers and ripped up match boxes onto the stone of the ground below. Each piece falls loudly, amplified somehow by my lack of interest. There is an allegory here I think. There is a children's fable somewhere in this moroseness. This black pea soup.

I don't jump. I don't fall and I don't run. I sit on my ass and slide down a few feet, scraping jean against friction, and then I get bored with this behavior so I leave him alone on the roof, blank with the sky and the night and the smoldering colors of the nothing breeze.

Crawling back through the window and the suddenness of the light jumps inside my mind, arousing sea shell spots. I stare at her, mouth open in a jellyfish snore, spread across the bed. Her naked arms curve around the thin blanket that is enveloping her frailty and I think she looks like the Virgin Mary. Perhaps we all do when we're sleeping.

## Rachel Evans

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Perched somehow between heaven and hell and I want to sit on the stoop watching her, thinking about nothing. I can smell the evidence of her beauty amidst the rot of beer cans and stale puke, and the combination plenishes my gut.

Staring out the window now and I want to go back, crawl through the darkness to the edge and peer at the cauldron as it all floats by. Blank eyes and I forget what I'm staring at. Blank thoughts and I forget what I'm sitting on.

Little slits flutter and flush out two light blue pupils to contemplate me I stare at my hands. Aware of her awakening and I glance over towards her nest to find she's lost her virginal glow.

Lithe voice floats over at me from what seems like a cosmic distance.

What are you doing? she asks. Where's Jethro?

Just sittin here. He's on the roof.

Can you get me a glass of water? I'm really thirsty. Please?

Clear shimmering liquid slips across her lips and causes her throat to yo yo. I have a sudden urge to strangle her and take the water back. I clear my throat and decide it's time to leave.

Do you ever get the feeling that there is nothing in the world that is worth the shit that we go through? Her voice tremors at me as my hand swallows the coldness of the doorknob. I stare at it as if it were an alien being. Something so foreign rather than the familiar object that always shepherds my back as it locks me out of people's worlds.

Sometimes, I guess, I say, thinking she sounds desperate, like a woman who's just had sex.

Do you ever just get the urge to jump, when you're out on that roof I mean? I think if I ever went out there that I would just go that edge and just let myself fall. That's why I never go out there. I don't trust myself.

I don't answer and I can feel her staring at the back of my head that faces her because I still haven't turned around, away from the door. My hand still clutches the knob, beginning to slide because it's turned warm and then sweaty in my palm. I have a prescription, she says, for sleeping pills. Her voice is jagged and empty and it glares at me from behind. Sometimes I think I'll just take the whole bottle. Just to see. Do you think I'm crazy? You probably think I am. I think you're crazy though too sometimes, sitting on the roof like you do all the time.

I stare at her with the back of my neck and I can see that she is trembling with cold. I want to leave but I don't want to be rude. I just don't want her to start crying on me.

I gotta go now, Jane. See you around.  
Come visit me at my house sometime, Jimmy. I think you and I have a lot in common. Sometimes I get the feeling that you would understand me. You can stop by anytime. You're welcome anytime. I'd like that, I mumble, meaning that I'm never going to come within five blocks. See ya'

Bye Jimmy. Jimmy? I'm falling you know. Sometimes I think I'm close to understanding something, but really, I'm only only falling. Do you understand that Jimmy? Do you? Never mind. I don't understand it, how could you.

Muscle turning, effecting the opening of the door and cold air from downstairs rushes inside the room hitting me full force. I think maybe I'll make myself trip down the stairs. No, too many broken bones to contend with. I turn now, looking at her for the first time since I grabbed hold of the door and notice that she has blonde hair, not brown like I always thought she had. Good night Jane. Careful with those pills.

Grimace erupting on her face and she pulls the blanket over her head like I was going to hit her. Then I notice that she's weeping and I think it is strange that for some reason now, I want to sleep with her. Poised between two motions in a moment of deliberation, and then I remember that she's not a virgin and I only like to sleep with virgins. Something about corruption. Something about them not knowing if I'm good or not.

So I ignore her heaving beneath the pillow and turn to face downsrs. Out of the light of the room and into the darkness of the unlit lower half of the house and I feel suddenly maladjusted. Unprepared.

Thinking of the feeling of flying as the thickness of the room washes ovr me and I decide to go about the descent carefully, taking one step at a time. Holding tightly to the rail, like a fucking blind man.

## Headlights

There she was. Standing enchanted in the midsummer's mid evening sun, her face glowing. I couldn't see it against the dark shadow outline of her sun encased head and hair, but I knew it was glowing. Surrounding her bleeding gazelle eyes. And somewhere in there, as I gazed against the sun that gleamed through her hair and into me, I knew there was a reason I was not supposed to leave.

But I was leaving. In no less time then it would take to say it. Pushed from the palms of a cramping life and wading forward to greet my new ship. Or so the cliches go.

It was her idea. I had grown too hedonistic for her. Or too pretentious. One or the other. I never could keep track when her words ran together like that and I was thinking of my hard on or sleep. I just know she was feeling restless, and I was feeling an intensifying urge to scoop her outlined head into my arms and kiss her lightening hair. But I only stumbled into the car instead.

And just before the lock clicked behind the closing of my car door, I caught a glimpse of her profile in the sun, curved away from me like the last lick before the center of a tootsie pop. Or maybe just curved like some voodoo perfect goddess. I shrugged. What else could I do.

Pulling away from a curb once more without any assurance of what lay ahead, and I glimpse her form in the rearview mirror. She is standing like a still life, looking confused. Looking apathetic and unaware of me, and unaware of her.

She finds a hand with which to brush a strand of long, brown hair from her unsmiling brow, and then crosses her legs to enter into a walk. One step, following another, following by more. She goes slowly. There is no hurry to get back into the house. I wonder why then, there was such a hurry to get back out of life with me. Maybe she thought that if she waited there long enough I'd drive back and run her over where she perched in the street.

But I could never do any such thing and she knows that. Maybe that was what was wrong.

Jumbled, I remember lying with her arms across my chest, her hair played out across my neck and shoulders. Calm wind and I think she is touching me, lightly caressing my cheek with her tissue paper skin.

She murmurs warmth and I cannot tell where she ends and I begin. There is a place where we are not one, but I cannot find it at the moment. I can't even feel my own hand with which to search.

She rolls away. I don't know why. Maybe she is thirsty or too hot or

twisted funny in our tangle of appendages and needs to breathe for a minute. Was that it? Was there not enough air in our room?

I can feel my hand now that hers has slipped away, and I can feel that it is empty. Except, of course, for the skin in it. I curse her name and then take it back. It is a beautiful name and she knows nothing of what she has done. There is no need to curse her.

Bleeding gazelle eyes peer at me without a trace of curiosity from behind the thick glass of a dusty black picture frame. A purplish haze shadow and nothing more of me touches her as my finger leaves a smudge on the glass above her nose. I wonder if I ever touched her. Ever.

Seedy light from a neon motel sign slinking in through the window at me, and I laugh at the comic, B-rated 50's movie irony of the whole scene. I wait for the curling smoke to make it's appearance from my over-thick cigar, but then I remember that I don't smoke. Then I remember that I am not an actor. If I had been, maybe I could have convinced her to let me stay. Not to love me, just to let me stay.

I wonder what she is brooding over at this exact moment, and I wonder if she's wondering about what I'm brooding about. But I know she's not, so I flip off the lamp and feign sleep, hoping I will fool myself into feeling tired.

A fly buzzes around my head, and I count the number of times he lands and then takes off. Funny that I would assign sex to a fly without knowing how to go about doing so.

He lands for good on a pile of wadded up paper towels, and I begin to drift off, pathetically begging sugar plums, when the reverie is broken by the sound of a bottle being smashed on the concrete outside in the parking lot. I realize then, that I have nothing better, so I answer the call of the splintering glass by sliding over the window and lifting one of the faded orange blinds, scratching as I walk.

The woman is standing with her hands on hips, poised awkwardly, like a porn queen in a spiritual revival movie, and the man is circling dangerously, threatening imbalance at any moment. I get the feeling that he is mesmerized by her dizzyingly white spangled get up, but from this distance it is hard to judge.

She is pissed to the hilt, as is apparent by the puckering of her toxically red lips, and he is just as uneager to attempt a compromise. He continues to circle her like a peacock looking for the best angle from which to perform his exotic mating dance, and she remains unmoving,

## Rachel Evans

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like queen peacock from upstate peacock land. Not about to budge.

He turns suddenly and tosses a few curt words her way, and they enter and leaves by her frizzy white hair. His impatience grows and seeps out like oil through his pores. He flashes some big words on her again and once more she remains unimpressed, refusing to answer his morse code call.

I wish I could hear the cause of their anger, and I lean against the coldness of the glass, knowing it is futile, but still, I crave the touch of something. Finally he explodes and flings a loud, abusive barrage that causes her to jump her inactive perch and slug him across the face with a spangly stud purse. He jumps back in surprise. I lean away from the glass in shock and morbid admiration. She rolls up her sleeves in disdain.

There is silence for a moment now. Silence broken only by the crackling of power lines mixing with the damp night air overhead. Then he sinks to his knees, slowly, putting on a new show. Gasping her hands and his lips are kissing acrylic nails. I wonder how acrylic would feel in my mouth and then decide not to wonder anymore. It doesn't seem to bother him.

He nestles his head into her stomach and rests his around her waist. I can see his mouth moving, words oozing out gentle and slow now, and recognize the speech. The guy speech. The get me out of trouble speech. The one I thought I had memorized so well.

I can see her anger loosening slowly as his words pretend to become more heartfelt, and I see the crisis is near its end, and there is another low life that is getting laid tonight.

I climb back into the stiff bed disappointed and lay still for a moment, watching the headlights of passing cars casting Halloween shadows across these life bare walls, and I wonder if those headlight drivers know where it is they're going. Probably. Maybe not.

I flip onto my side and stare out the window and watch as she nuzzles his neck and he playfully squeezes her ass.

Then I think that maybe, if she'd had acrylic nails that I could have kissed to prove I really loved her, I would still have a home and marriage and a life to wake up to. But then I think that it's not likely. Nothing feels likely at the moment.

I turn over again and try to settle into the white starched pillow. I close my eyes for a moment, trying to take in air, and then open them and reach out my arm to grasp the nondescript phone sitting patiently

beside this bed. My hand touches the cold and hovers there briefly, before deciding upon an action. Then I take the receiver off the hook and set it face down on the strength of the bedside table.

Somehow it's easier to sleep, knowing that no one will be disturbed.

# Pearl Moultrie

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## Martin Luther King, Jr.

### I.

I had a dream;  
No prophet in my land,  
I preached and walked my soul, my  
Shoes, my vestments to a  
Ragged seam and felt  
Inertia of despair and yet———  
When, I can't recall- felt strength  
And gentleness of hand, a  
Fellow pilgrim, a man named  
Paul, stride with me for stride  
Upon that long and cruel road  
In a prophetless land.

### II.

And finally, I was dust  
Upon that road,  
When as quiet, purple  
Evening fell, a sound arose,  
Crisp thunder,  
And suddenly did life implode.  
I had a dream.

A Poem for Easter

O Lord, let not the valediction of the  
Tear or the mourning of the soul  
Stand long before the vacant cross.  
O let us your children arise and sing,  
Rejoice in the passion of your short and earthly days;  
O let not the death knell ring  
For your dear, mortal agony.  
But let the sun burn off the haze,  
And let the lark ascend above the lily purpling;  
O let the joy of your resurrection raise  
A shout, a song, hosanna in praise  
Of child and lamb and quiet battlefields  
And soldiers home, alive in joy and blinding  
Tears and wordless embrace.  
O let us your children see your face  
And love the gentle, morning rain  
And wedding troth and banns and hands  
Across the human race interminable  
That stands-before the glory of  
The vacant cross.

# Varvara Kalinin

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## Taste Buds

It's 2am at the diner  
But time is arbitrary to  
Long, lonely, faces eating away their pain  
Smoke ringlets, joining and parting  
Coffee turning cold  
Ashtrays overflowing with  
yellow polka-dotted filters beaten  
to their deaths, silently lying in bed  
one on top of the other.  
Chatter- in the distance- in the minds  
Empty faces  
Shifty gazes  
Pretenses- sweet and low on the tips of the tongues  
Playing Russian Roulette with cigarette lighters  
Dipping fingers into honey-  
drops of amber on the lips  
Deep down to the tummy  
The only genuine, sweetness in their lives.

# Elizabeth Usimaki

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## Rosa's Petals

white cotton T  
the fruit of life  
on the tag  
barely covering your  
bare ass, lying  
on the red velvet sheets  
four arms pointing up  
to a mirrored ceiling  
you lie there, staring  
at your tan body  
seeing yourself, new.

# Sarah Resnick

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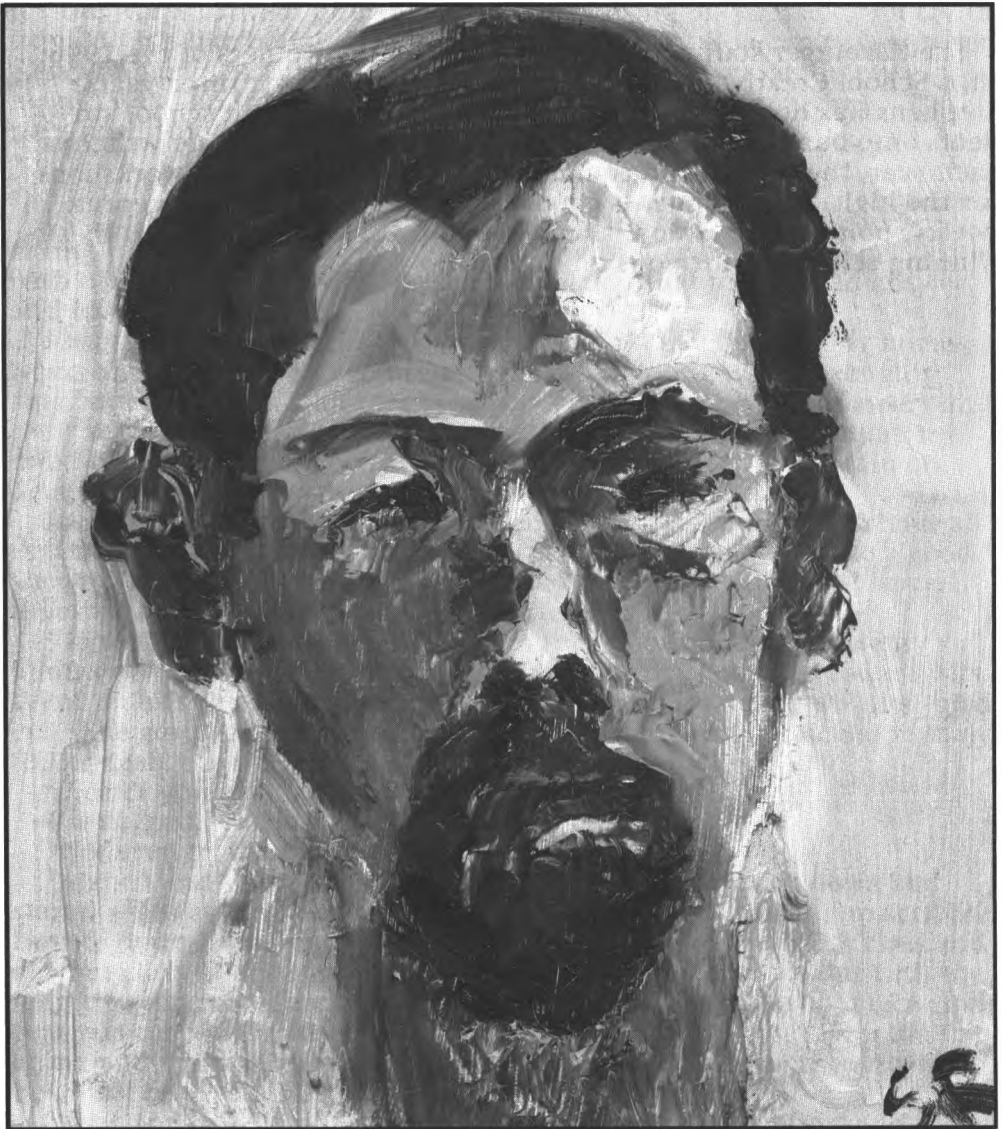
## Portrait of a Lady



Sarah Resnick

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Portrait of John



# Missouri High School Creative Writing Conference

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## 1996 winners

The Harbinger staff wishes to congratulate the winners of the 1996 High School Creative Writing Conference. For the past three 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 each of four genres: poetry, non-fiction, fiction, and playwriting. We have included these winning selections for your enjoyment.

--The Editors

# Adelaide Brown

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## The Dancing Purple Elves

If you've never had depression, I'm glad, and I hope you never do. It's the worst form of punishment you can bring on yourself. I'll try to explain. It's like being underneath a big blanket. You can't seem to get a grip on yourself. I wanted someone to slap me or scream in my ear, so I could wake up from it or something, but even that didn't work. The pain never quite reached the core.

I sat at my desk, staring at the test paper in front of me. I had been sitting there for fifteen minutes, watching that crisp white paper dotted with black inked numbers. Every problem on that test had an answer, and I knew I didn't know any of those answers.

I hadn't studied. I hadn't listened in class. I hadn't done my homework, and our beloved algebra teacher, Mrs. Wynn, was thoroughly aggravated with me. Not that I was any good at math. The numbers and their terribly important sequences and formulas slipped through my mind like butter on a hot skillet. One of those "this is your brain on drugs" commercials, only it was my brain with numbers.

I was one of those pert, smart students, and I was expected to have all that math done correctly, and I was especially expected to make a good showing on this test. I had always pulled off a C or better, and sometimes an A. This test would be a lot different, like, say, an F.

I looked up at the clock for the fifth time and found I had twenty minutes of class left. It was only by accident that I glanced toward Mrs. Wynn's desk, but she was staring at me as though I'd just grown a third eye. She gestured for me to come up and talk to her. I slouched my way to her desk.

"Aren't you even going to try?" she whispered harshly.

I shrugged. "I know I don't know the answers."

"Not even try?" she prodded me.

I sighed and slouched back to my seat as a reply. I sank down and stared again at that foul piece of paper, then slowly I started to scribble. I wrote down all the formulas I could remember from physics class and algebra class. I drew a couple of triangles, measured the sides with the length of my eraser and added them, then subtracted the area of a circle that was carved into the desk. I glanced up and saw Mrs. Wynn looking at me and smiling to herself, as though she knew I knew the answers, but I just needed a little encouragement.

When the bell finally rang, my test paper was a masterpiece in the art

## Adelaide Brown

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of crap. Mrs. Wynn accepted it and gave me a little smile.

The look on her face the next day, however, was one of disgust and irritation. She handed mine back with a little flourish that showed off the big red F circled at the top. "You might as well see me after class," she told me loudly.

I slouched further down in my seat and visualized myself shrinking away until I disappeared into a little hole under my desk. I tried to swallow my F with a certain amount of pride. After all, I'd earned it, and I could be sure there wasn't another student in the class who'd gotten so low a grade.

Mrs. Wynn wasn't at all amused with my progress. She tapped her pencil against her grade book with all the subtlety of a flashing neon sign. "Your work this quarter has been miserable. In fact, your work this year has been miserable. I used to be able to count on you to at least *try*. You aren't a good math student, but you *tried*. Now you don't even seem to care."

I avoided her gaze and concentrated on the laminated purple elves that decorated her bulletin board.

"I've talked with your other teachers, and you're slipping in those classes, too," she continued.

I wondered what laminated purple elves had to do with algebra.

"You used to be top in your language classes, but now you've got one of the lowest grades."

I tried to be elusive about looking around Mrs. Wynn to find out why elves were dancing all over her bulletin board, but she stopped midsentence and stared at me in that loving way of hers.

"You're not even paying attention now."

"Oh, yes, I am," I said quickly, straightening up.

Mrs. Wynn studied me for a minute, tapping her pencil hard, then spoke. "I think you should talk to the counselor about your problems."

The counselor, an older, balding man, was Mr. Keating.

I sure considered him an expert in the field of adolescent problems, with all his recent first-hand experience. I was pretty certain that there were very few wheels clicking along behind those empty brown eyes of his.

"So. . . how are we feeling?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Well, I'm feeling fine. How about yourself?"

He blinked rapidly. "I'm . . . sure I'm doing well myself."

"Well, that's good."

"Yes, it is." He seemed to have gotten off-track. "Ah, well. your algebra teacher seems to think there's something wrong."

I didn't say anything.

"What do you think?"

"I really couldn't say," I answered.

Mr. Keating nodded, then reached forward and shuffled some papers together, extracted one particular sheet from the stack, looked it over, and began to write. Finally, he looked up again. "Your other teachers think there's something wrong, too."

"Hmm," I replied.

"How is your home life?" he asked.

"Wonderful," I told him. "My home life couldn't be better."

"And do you like your parents?"

"I love my parents," I said. "They brought me into this world."

"Ah," Mr. Keating said, as if this explained everything.

I noticed that he had elves on his bulletin board too, but instead of purple, they were orange. These elves weren't dancing; they were just stupidly stapled there, staring off into space. They seemed to have mental problems. That was fitting for a counselor's office.

Mr. Keating took another sheet of paper from the stack and folded it in half. I thought for a minute that he would make a paper airplane out of it, but he stopped folding and wrote something on it. Then he looked up again. "I want you to tell me what you think that your teachers think is wrong with you."

Oh, that's not confusing. "You want me to tell you what I think that my teachers think is wrong with me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because Mrs. Wynn thinks there's something wrong with me."

"But you don't know what it is?"

"She didn't tell me. Didn't she tell you?"

Mr. Keating didn't answer that; he just wrote something else down and said, "I think you need to get in touch with your feelings."

Fine, bring out the Care Bears. I'll be the little girl who can't seem to get her mind on her homework and whose teachers think is nuts. Then all of us will fool some bad guys, have a big hug, and I'll go back to

## Adelaide Brown

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human world, and the Care Bears will go back to La-La Land. "I don't like to talk about my feelings."

A huge expression of understanding spread over Mr. Keating's face. "Oh, no?" I didn't think that deserved an answer.

Then he said it. "I think you need to go to a psychiatrist."

I raised an eyebrow. "A psychiatrist," I repeated.

"I'll call your parents and introduce the idea to them. I'll give them the number of a friend of mine, Dr. Bob Paris." He seemed so happy to do it that I shrugged my shoulders.

My parents freaked.

"The counselor called?" my mother yelled when Dad told her.

"Yes, he said that she needs to go see someone," he said, taking another bite of linguini.

"I think he wants me to see a psychiatrist," I said.

"Of course, a psychiatrist," they said together.

I plucked a grape off my bunch and popped it in my mouth.

"A psychiatrist?" said Mom. "My little girl?"

"He mentioned a Dr. Rob Harris," Dad said.

"Dr. Bob Paris," I corrected him.

"Dr. Rob Harris," Dad repeated.

"Why does she need a psychiatrist?" Mom wailed.

"I'm crazy," I explained in technical terms.

"Well, I don't think she's crazy," said Mom, suddenly quieting down.

"Maybe it's school-related."

"Or stress-related," added Dad.

"It's not genetic," I said.

"Of course it's not genetic," they said together. They ate their linguini, and I ate my grapes. It didn't have to be said. I'd be going to the psychiatrist.

The appointment was for four o'clock on Thursday, so like a good girl, I showed up at four and sat in the waiting room for forty-five minutes, reading magazines and watching fish.

I read once that fish calm people down. I guess that it's a lot easier to watch little fish swimming around than looking at laminated purple elves. There was one particular fish that I remember. It was yellow, but

I don't think it was a goldfish. Anyway, it was always trying to keep up with the rest of the fish in the aquarium. It just kept swimming after the big herd of the other fish. I kind of felt sorry for that fish. The other fish weren't any better off than he was, but he kept swimming after them anyway.

The receptionist called my name, and I got up and went into the office. It was a big, oak-paneled room with a lot of burgandy undertones and a lot of pictures of ducks.

Dr. Bob Paris stood up to greet me as I came in, then sat down again and indicated that I should sit across from him.

"So, how are we feeling?" he asked me, the same as Mr. Keating.

"I don't know about you, but I'm fine."

Dr. Paris nodded like that was an acceptable answer. "Where are you from?"

I told him, and he nodded again and recognition came over his face. He shuffled through his papers, then said to himself, "Oh, Keating's depressant."

I didn't quite understand that, so I just shrugged and sat there. He pulled out a piece of paper and started writing. "So, why do you think you're here?"

Original question. "Dr. Keating suggested it. I guess he thinks I'm nuts."

"Do you think you're, um, 'nuts?'"

"Oh, everyone's a little crazy," I told him.

Dr. Paris raised both eyebrows and nodded, sort of.

"I think I'm just tired," I explained.

"Ah. Are you always tired?"

"Well, no. Not when I've just drunk six Mountain Dews and eaten a very large Hershey bar. Then I'm usually not very tired."

"Ah. Do you consume much caffeine or sugar?"

"Enough," I told him.

Dr. Paris asked me about forty questions, and I answered some or most of them. Usually, I just sat there and stared at the little black statue on the table behind him. The statue wasn't an elf, but I think it was a troll or a goblin or a gnome or something. I'm still not quite sure.

Anyway, after I finally got a foot out the door, he handed me a piece of paper, a prescription.

"I think you might want to try this," Dr. Paris told me. I grabbed it, stuffed it in my pocket, and left him standing in the doorway, shaking

## Adelaide Brown

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his head.

I left his office downtown and got on a city bus that ended up near my house. I sat there on the broken vinyl seats and stared at the big route map on the wall. The lines were colorized, corresponding to different lines. I followed the yellow line with my eyes, as it twisted and turned around downtown and out in the suburbs, and then suddenly stopped.

I wondered where it suddenly stopped.

Mom and Dad had already eaten dinner and were sitting in the living room, waiting for me. From the look on their faces, I knew that Dr. Bob Paris had already called them, and they knew what I was going to say before I even said a word.

“Well?” Mom asked.

I didn’t say anything, but I dug in my pocket for the prescription and flung it at the coffee table as I sank into a chair. Dad snatched it up and read it. “I don’t understand this message,” he said.

“Maybe it’s in code,” Mom suggested.

“It’s a prescription,” I explained.

“Of course it’s a prescription,” they said together.

“I’ve heard of this,” Dad said finally, after studying the paper long enough.

“Prozac?” Mom asked him. “What is it?”

“It’s an antidepressant. It’s pretty new. No one really understands it yet. It came out last year, in 1992. It’s groundbreaking.”

“An antidepressant?” Mom’s voice reached the shriek level. “My little girl?”

I sighed.

“It’s not something to be ashamed of,” Dad said.

“My little girl?”

“Your little girl has been diagnosed with clinical depression,” Dad said.

For the five hundredth time in my life, I wished they’d talk like I was in the conversation.

“Why?”

“There’s no ‘why.’ It’s because of everything. I studied a little psychology in college,” Dad said.

I sat there and bit my thumbnail, and my parents stared at the little, crumpled-up piece of white paper. I knew I’d start on Prozac as soon as

the drugstore opened tomorrow.

Mrs. Wynn was standing in the front of the room, screeching her chalk across the blackboard in an extraordinarily interesting sequence of numbers. I was sitting in the back of the room, trying to break my pencil in half without making any noise.

The purple elves had been replaced by a very large duck. I had already studied this duck over and over again in the past week. It was a white duck, and out of its beak rolled numbers of all sizes. I really had been trying to understand the symbolism of this duck, but to no avail. Ducks certainly don't have anything to do with numbers or math.

I stared at the ceiling again. It was the Prozac doing it. If I thought hard, I could feel the little green-and-white pill surrounding all my nerves and preventing them from absorbing serotonin. Dr. Bob Paris had explained everything to me on my last visit.

It was working, sort of. I felt stranger than usual, like I should be doing cartwheels or something, but now there was something looming in the distance, and I was trying to get to it.

"May I interrupt your daydream for the answer to this next problem?" Mrs. Wynn glared at me.

"Six," I replied right away.

Mrs. Wynn pursed her lips and squeaked something else across the board. "Now what's the answer?"

"Four," I replied.

"Incorrect. Please pay attention. Now, this number follows this one. . . " She wrote rapidly on the board, putting out formulas faster than my eyes could follow, let alone understand. "Bobby?"

Another student said, "Nine," and Mrs. Wynn nodded ferociously.

I slipped back into my world.

There was nothing out there besides the bird and me. Even though the day was bright, and the city was awake and alive, I couldn't feel anyone else's presence. I opened my purse and took out my pill case. Mom had picked it out for me, gold colored metal with a dark blue flower etched in the top.

I opened the case and took out one of the green-and-white pills and held it in front of me. I stared at it a moment, then flicked the Prozac

## Adelaide Brown

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off the ledge of the building and watched it go.

So easy.

The bird stared at me from the edge of the wall and then flew away. I saw it spread its wings and coast on the edge of a breeze high above the city streets. A city bus lurched its way through the cement flower gardens thirty stories below me.

I lay back against the ledge and threw my purse away on the roof. It was nice up there, with the whipping winds and the warm sun beating down around me.

I put my head over the ledge and looked down, and all of a sudden, a rush came over me of the people and the noises of the city and the smell of pollution. My head began to swim and I sat back again, watching another bird that had landed on the wall. It stared at me, and I began to imagine dancing purple elves and great big ducks spouting numbers and statues of gnomes or goblins or trolls or whatever, and they were all together swimming around in the aquarium and riding around on city buses. . .

# Reeve Davis

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## Poltergeist

The mosquito netting fluttered against my face, bringing the new day to me. My recollection was almost non-existent. Where was I? Home in Missouri? Where's the old black and white TV? No, the smell and sights are foreign. I'm looking over the gloomy receding tides of the Mediterranean. Morocco, that's right, a thousand miles from home.

Now, in the car almost upon the railroad tracks. Moving slowly, klunkity-klunk, the old Taurus said. The train leaves, the caboose making a red blur through my tearing eyes. The summary of the words that my sister spoke came out as simply "divorce." Being young, I acted unknowing, like I didn't know what it meant. Of course I knew what it meant, little gifted black boy. Admittance was the problem.

How can I cry, I thought. I'm lucky enough that I get to travel across the world, see sights that other Americans would just dream about. I shouldn't be like this — two events collided into each other. They cancel out, neutralize.

But somehow not seeing something that was rarely seen affected me. The sight of my father. My father? I'm sorry. I don't know that man. He is the man next door. I only know of the shadow that lurks during the night and is occasionally seen during the day sitting on the old rocking chair. That chair. The one that does not rightfully belong to the stranger, but he is not restricted from it. Food and soda are usually left by the stranger, either in an act of kindness or in return for board, I wouldn't know.

After the vacation, the shadow walks no more. Where is he? In the closet? No, I'll scare myself if I look in there. I guess he's gone. Why? You know the answer to that, stop fooling yourself.

My subconsciousness speaks to me. Did you ever consider that shadow being your father?

No, I answered. That was the nice man who always gave us food and sodas, a middle-class robin hood as I thought of him.

Well, not to despair, these things happen. It shouldn't affect me that much. In fact a lot of boys and girls probably have divorced parents. Yuck, girls have cooties.

Traveling over the railroad tracks, I thought our car was going to fall apart. The silent barrier stood between me and my sister. The assassin had come to deliver her message and then strike. The poison sunk in deeply, making a knot in my dry thought. The knot prohibited any expression of feelings escaping. All emotion was put in a doggy bag and taken home after reality had taken a few bites from it.

## Reeve Davis

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The white house at the bottom of the street, that's ours. The Taurus is pulling into the driveway, skipping over potholes. My first destination upon entering the house was my room. My bed felt soft and comforting compared to today's events—rough. Yes, sleep away the troubles, little boy, that's the solution.

The morning somehow broke into my room the next day. I arose, gaining once again my sense of reality. No, this isn't Africa. I waddled and stumbled to the entrance of the bathroom. The race was on. The tortoise and the hare. Me, of course, the tortoise (since I love turtles), and my sister, the hare. Her fleet footlessness beat me to the bathroom, as the draft blew against my tired eyes. No matter, I'll lie on the couch until I'm needed to leave.

While I'm lying down, my mind takes a vacation without me to dreamland. Right now I'm talking to Inspector Gadget. He's a cool guy, I think as the cereal gets soggy in the red bowl on the nearby chair, and another Inspector Gadget rerun carries on. The noise that my sister's hair dryer makes sticks in my head, the loud whir. Her singing grows louder as she exits from the bathroom. Being out of energy, I'm in no rush to get there. But eventually education drowns my mind, and I waddle to the bathroom. What do I need to do again? Brush my teeth, change clothes, wash my face, deodorant, and something else. Oh yeah, comb my hair, reminded by the mirror vision of my hair standing up on end.

"Hey, what's up, guys," I said, as I ran to meet the guys at the bus stop.

"Nothing much," they replied as a group.

Erin slept against her back pack. One more year, I thought, then I get to be in sixth grade. I'll be a big kid then.

"Here it is," says David.

The big yellow bus came to a halt. The doors opened up, and the bright white teeth were all that were visible on the black man with the jerry curl. Whoa, I almost missed it.

"Hey, Mister Hobbes," I said.

"Hey, how ya doin'" said Mister Hobbes.

I sat next to Billy and Adam. Their conversations wailed on while my eyelids slowly met each other.

"Ride's over!" exclaimed Bill.

I stretched, bumping my arm on the glass. I went and took my place outside of the building next to my friends. We talked about yesterday's

episode of the Simpsons. I missed that one.

The bell rang almost immediately. We ran inside to our classroom.

Wait, this day is like any other. Do math problems, play with the guinea pigs, eat, then recess. The day wasn't meant to pass in that manner. I was supposed to be depressed all day. Fate took a left curve.

I took the big yellow bus home again and saw the small white house at the bottom of the road. Nothing seemed any different. I got inside and listened. The words rung in my ears—"locks." As I understood it, we were getting our locks changed. I guess to keep the shadow from lurking about in the house.

My mom and I went to the grocery store. When we got back, the door was cracked open, and the light shone into the house and revealed the identity of the shadow.

"James, how did you get in?" my mother said.

"Oh, a friend of mine is a locksmith. I just came to get my stuff," he replied.

"There's some stuff on the counter for you, Little Red. I guess I'll talk to you later. Here's my beeper number, if you ever need a ride or something," he said to me.

"Okay, Dad," I said to him, not really knowing what to say.

He left the house, and we were left alone. The little trinkets left on the counter didn't say much to me. So I went back to bed. I always compared my dad to Batman when I was little. He lurked around the city, and I could sound the bat signal if I ever needed him. Still, he was a fighter, for a good cause, just not against the penguin and the joker.

# Nea Hildebolt

## The Three Little Pigs in Shakespeare Language

[Enter *Chorus*]

Chor. One household, of three young, all kin  
Set off for each in their own adventure.  
The first met a merchant who had tales he did spin  
And hay with which the first structured his covert  
Yet the villain of our story did threaten him  
And the first did meet the second  
In his beseeming house from faggots.  
Alas, alas, it did not last,  
And the two lost souls did join the third.  
He who had the strength and will  
He whose house was standing, still  
The three rejoiced, making merry  
As the protagonist did perish in flames.

[*Exit.*]

Act I

Scene I [Family cottage]

*Enter Pigs 1, 2, and 3 (with luggage) and mother (in tears).*

Moth. Alas, alas, farewell my noble children. Be not in such haste to part, for the morn hath only just broke.

Pig 1 Madam, do not be so deep in tears, for we shall return for you when the moon has made a full turn and we have made our homes.

Pig 2 Farewell, parting is such bitter happiness. Joy for we shall be encompassed by the freedom of thy world, of Mother of all nature; yet bitterness for leaving my kinsmen. Adieu.

[*Exunt Pig 1 and 2.*]

Pig 3 My brothers are leaving me, and I must do the same to you. The brilliant morn hath said hello and I must say good-bye.

[*Exunt.*]

Scene II [Along a dirt road]

*Enter Pig 1 and Merchant (carrying a bundle of hay).*

Pig 1 Greetings dear sir, can you enlighten my thoughts and tell me, by the name of my stars in heaven, I am prest. Will you, to me, sell your load of straw?

Mer. Why, to your question, dear fellow, I say "Ay."

Pig 1 How much for it doth thou claim?

Mer. A mere three shillings I do say. Canst thou pay it?

Pig 1 And to your question, dear fellow, I, too say "Ay."

Mer. Then take my load and be off.

[*Exunt Mer.*]

Pig 1 With this bundle I do declare, I shall build my home, which my kin are apt to envy. This morn is looking far lovier than all mornings past. Such sweetness comes with such an easy trade; it lingers on the tip of my tongue as the powers that be dip down and kiss my soul. I must be bless'd.

[*Exunt.*]

Scene III [Along same road]

*Enter Pig 2 and Merchant (carrying a bundle of sticks).*

Pig 2 Fellow, for how much wouldst thou give to me thy faggots in thine arms?

Mer. For but five shillings to you, these I wouldst give.

Pig 2 Four shillings and I shall say "Ay."

Mer. Your five shillings I do need for my family must not perish from lack of food. The city has been unkind, and I should hope to think better of a fellow resembling yourself, than to keep a poor man starving.

Pig 2 Four shillings is all I have.

Mer. Then farewell.

*Pig 2 looks at the Merchant and bites his hoof in his general direction, much to the amazement of the Merchant.*

Mer. What? Doesth thou bite thy thumb at me?

Pig 2 To this I shall say "Ay."

Mer. Then have at thee, fool.

*They draw swords and fight. Pig 2 has Mer. at his mercy, yet has not killed him.*

Pig 2. I shall spare thy life if thou wiltst give me thy faggots for four shillings. I feel mercy for thy family as I remember mine own. Sweet mother (*reminiscing*) she wouldst look finely upon her flesh this moment. Doth thou say "Ay?"

Mer. Thou art a generous man, and to you I do say "Ay."

[*Exunt.*]

Scenc IV [Further along same road]

*Enter Pig 3 and Merchant (carrying a bundle of hay and in the other hand, a bundle of sticks).*

Pig 3 Hello good sir, hath thou some goods to sell?

Mer. Ay. That I do. Wouldst thou desire them? (*shows his goods to Pig 3*)

# Nea Hildebolt

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Pig 3 Nay, for with them I could do nothing.

Mer. Not so. There hath been nothing ever said more untrue.

Pig 3 Well then, enlighten my heavy thoughts, and share with me what I may do with your hay and faggots.

Mer. Two previous knaves, with wisdom wise, I trust, hath purchased them with which they are, this very moment, structuring their family homes. Doth thou see any future in mine words?

Pig 3 Why no. What ignorance didth these knaves possess. Humble homes they will produce, for neither shall stand long. Farewell, for thou hath nothing to offer me, yet I thank you kindly for this chuckle I have had.

Mer. Adieu.

[*Exunt Mer.*]

Pig 3 Nay, I shant flitter my earnings away. I shall instead build myself a home of bricks, bricks that I shal form from stone and the clay-filled earth. The sun and its warming rays shall bake my home in which I will make jolly and be festive. Never before have the stars in heaven seen such a structure as what my home shall be. Faggots will burn in the hearth of my home, and straw will cushion mine own bed, and life shall be prolonged amidst it all.

[*Exunt*]

[*Enter Chorus.*]

Chor. Now our story folds unto  
Events of horror and things anew.  
Our heros flee unto another  
Seeking the aid of little brother  
Oh how useless he used to seem  
'Tis not so and shall remain.  
Who doth cheaply build thy home  
Must suffer tragedies yet unknown.

[*Exit.*]

Act II

Scene I [In Pig 1's newly constructed home]

Pig 1 How wonderful my humble covet is; it cannot be matched to my dear mama's home. If only she knew, why, how proud she would be, of her dear little child, the best of her three. I have conjured up a masterpiece unknown to piglet eyes. 'Tis a sight to behold, and I must not withhold my emotions. 'Tis a monumentous day in this pig's life. Well-a-

day, I must give thanks and pray.

*He kneels and begins a silent prayer when he hears a loud knock upon the door.*

Pig 1 Who goes there?

Wolf 'Tis me, fair tender-skinned pork. I have come for thy life, so be merciful, and let me in.

Pig 1 Thine eyes and mouth shall never lay upon my flesh. Be gone.

Wolf How naive thou art. Doesth thou not knowest who knocks, whom I am?

Pig 1 It is true, I knowest not, and if you please I like to keep it that way. Thy sour breath is penetrating my newly founded home. I like it not. Flee while you can.

Wolf Dear pig, do let me in.

Pig 1 Never, not by the whiskers on my chin dear chap. Doth it temptest thou? Well, it shant any longer, for I wilt not let thou in.

Wolf Suit thyself. Bear your arms, for I am coming in!

*The Wolf is heard blowing very hard, and with a rush, the pig's house collapses and Pig 1 runs off, followed by the Wolf.*

[*Exunt.*]

Scene II [Pig 1 is catching his breath while safely inside the wooden house of Pig 2. The Wolf cannot be seen.]

Pig 2 Why art thou here in such a puff? Art mine eyes deceiving, or art thou in danger?

Pig 1 Thy eyes do spell the truth. In my hay house I did pray, when The Wolf, a terrible intruder did invade, and he did blow down my home. There was a great to do, and I ran to the safety of thine house. Wilst thou protect thy kin in me?

Pig 2 Why yes my young brother. My home is an appertaining one for protecting both our lives.

Pig 1 God bless you. Be wary, for the Wolf may have followed my scent. Brace yourself, and we must pray.

Pig 2 Thou art correct in thy assumption. Listen to the wind-carried sounds.

*They listen and they hear loud footsteps as the Wolf approaches, on the hunt.*

Wolf (*from offstage-outside the home of the Pigs*) Foolish Pigs. Thou have led me to thy den. Prepare to die young. Tender thy few last moments. I stand that you do so.

Pig 1 and 2 Oh, if you wouldst, do give leave awhile.

## Nea Hildebolt

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Wolf To cowards, I give no leave. Dear pigs, do let me in.

Pigs 1 and 2 Never, not by the whiskers on our chins dear chap. Doth it temptest thou? Well, it shant any longer, for we shall not let thou in.

Wolf Suit thyself. Bear your arms, for I am coming in!

*The Wolf is heard blowing very hard, and with a rush, the Pig's house collapses and the Pigs run off, followed by the Wolf.*

[Exunt.]

Scene III [Pigs 1 and 2 are seen safely inside the brick house of Pig 3. The Wolf cannot be seen.]

Pig 3 Brothers, why hath thou comest to my humble home, with the look of death upon thy eyes?

Pig 1 For we have seen it, Brother. The Wolf hath blown down both our homes.

Pig 3 With what didst thou makest thy homes from? What material was so weak?

Pig 1 Mine was made from straw that I did buy from a merchant along the road.

Pig 2 Yes, and mine was made of sticks which I acquired from that very same merchant.

Pig 3 (*To himself*) How tragic. T'was my own kin that lost their minds, and bought for little what would get them nowhere. How foolish they have been. Alas, alas, greed is the enemy here, and not the Wolf. He is but a messenger, a teacher, yet I must help my brothers, for if they die, how wouldst I explain their deaths to our Mother? T'would break her aged heart. (*To brothers*). I have a plan. This Wolf, he doth blow down the homes he does attack, yet mine is made of solid brick, which he couldst never budge unless he hadst the breath of Zeus, which he hath not. He shall try another entrance, and it shall be my chimney, the unguarded hole. We shall build a fire, in which he shall kiss the flames and die a passionate yet exquisite death, surely in ecstasy.

Pig 1 Thou art a messenger from the heavens. How foolish we have been. Thou shalt live and prosper in heaven when you die. We are forever bound to you. Behold, I hear the footsteps of the beast!

Pig 2 Quickly! To the fireplace. We shalt have a barbecue tonight!

*They rush to the fireplace and make a fire. The Wolf knocks on the door.*

Wolf (*from offstage-outside the home of the Pigs*) Foolish Pigs. Thou have again led me to thy den. Prepare to die young, and mark my words, this time I shant fail. Dear pigs, do let me in.



# Jessica Sindel

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## Poise

Nightcool autumn  
slaps my cheeks, rippling  
my skin. Poised on  
my bedroom sill —  
outside, I feel home  
and the foreign nature of night.  
I have crossed  
these two before.

An ease I've felt now slips  
my fingers. No glass bars  
the beating locust cadence  
out my window. I watch still  
swings of forgotten boys, shed for  
taller girls with dew-wet ankles. Children  
sleep as grass turns  
into winter night.