

Baily's Beads 2010

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 University of Pittsburgh at Bradford



BAILY'S BEADS 2010
VOLUME XV
NUMBER I



Baily's Beads are the highest points of light that appear around the edge of the moon at the solar eclipse. The beads are created by sunlight passing through the moon's valleys. The last bead is the brightest, resembling a diamond on a brilliant ring. This phenomenon lasts but a few spectacular moments.



UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH AT BRADFORD
300 CAMPUS DRIVE
BRADFORD, PA 16701



AWARDS

Columbia Scholastic Press Association

2004 Silver Medalist Award
2005 Gold Medalist Award
2006 Silver Medalist Award
Silver Crown Award
2007 Gold Medalist Award
2008 Gold Medalist Award
Silver Crown Award

American Scholastic Press Association

2004 First Place Award with special merit
2005 First Place Award with special merit
2006 First Place Award
2007 First Place Award

American Collegiate Press

2001 First Class with 3 marks of distinction
2003 First Class with 2 marks of distinction
2004 First Class with 3 marks of distinction

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

If you would like to submit to the 2011 edition of *Baily's Beads*, we accept fiction, poetry, plays, translations, and creative nonfiction, including memoir, essays, comentaries and travel and nature writing. Please submit your work with a cover sheet containing your name, the title of the piece, your email address, phone number, and address. In order to be able to judge fairly, we ask that you do not include your name on the work itself. Please keep a copy of your written work, double space your prose, and single space your poetry. Entries can be sent electronically to bailys@pitt.edu, dropped off in the Communications and Arts office in Blaisdell Hall, or mailed to us at 300 Campus Dr., Bradford, PA 16701. We accept submissions year-round.

DESIGN

Baily's Beads is printed on matte finish paper. Its body text is printed in eleven-point Lucida Bright with details in Harrington. Titles are in twenty-four-point Lucida Bright with the first letters of each in Harrington and set in small caps and authors are in twenty point font. We used Adobe InDesign CS4 to do this year's layout. This edition has a print run of one thousand copies and was printed by Ferguson Printing, Salamanca, N.Y. It is a free publication.



EDITOR

Mandy Colosimo

ARTIST

Youngmahn Moon

ADVISOR

Dr. Nancy McCabe

STAFF

Steve Abplanalp
Bruno Cognetti
Sarah Dorben
Kevin Erdelack
Jessica Hamilton
Nick Jones
Kim Katilius
Micaiah Meads
Mackenzie Miller
Shane Phillips
Michael Reeder
Jolene Suchy-Dicey

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This experience will rank right up there with the most challenging but rewarding for years to come, I'm sure of it. For more than three semesters this magazine has been my baby. I am not sure how I feel to finally see it all grown up. It's somehow a tearjerker.

This issue of *Baily's Beads* has quite a diverse gathering of written work. We have chosen a couple of pieces partly for their uniqueness: "Collaboration Cento," a poem compiled from lines written by members of a beginning poetry class; and "Binary Rhythm," a performance poem. For the first time in our history, we are publishing a children's story, "Winter Blast." And, for the first time a piece of writing uses the interrobang (!?), "Changing View."

We would never have gotten through the process of meticulously editing each line without the positive reinforcement of the constant howling of the lawn mowers outside our window during class—which forced us to scream out the correct spelling or use of such words as *dumbass* and *cock*, just as the engines quieted down. Thank you to the grounds crew for all comedic moments.

There are a few others that I need to thank as well. To my children, Ashly and Frank, thank you for your patience. I know this has been a long process and has taken a lot of my time away from the things that we enjoy as a family. I love you both and know that this sacrifice you made was because you love me too. To my husband, thank you for being my sounding board and venting wall, for taking the heat of all the frustrations that went into this magazine. I know it was more than anticipated but your support throughout the process was more than I could have ever expected.

Thanks also to the staff of this issue, without all of you doing all that you did; this magazine would not

be the masterpiece it has become. Huge accolades for all the hours and days and nights of editing that went in to getting this job completed. Never for a minute think that your contributions were not appreciated. And to Dr. Nancy McCabe, thank you for pushing me into a corner to take this class for just one last semester. I'm glad you twisted my arm; I learned so much about the publishing side of writing and all that is involved. One more thank you is in order to the artist, Youngmahn Moon, who sat with me on many occasions and pointed out all the minuscule details that my untrained eye never would have caught and for your beautiful artwork that created the cover and interior graphic, I thank you.

~ Mandy Colosimo



A NOTE ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, Youngmahn Moon found his artistic niche at the age of six, constantly influenced by the art and culture that surrounded him. After learning how to paint, he began sketching when he was seven. Sketching eventually turned into doodling and doodling evolved into a passion for body art. His sophomore year of college, passion met profit when he picked up his new artist's tool, a tattoo gun. Because of his new hobby, he was able to make enough money to buy a Nikon D40 to try his hand at photography. He found his muse when a friend asked him to experiment with artistic nudes. Since then, photography has been his main passion. Whatever the medium, he tries to find the raw essence of whatever he is capturing.

The design for this year's edition of *Baily's Beads* is a combination of photography and computer manipulation. Its ethereal swirls of color are up for interpretation.



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COLLABORATION CENTO

CAROL NEWMAN AND BEGINNING POETRY CLASS, FALL 2008



Dear poets of the late afternoon, trust me:
You will remember this cavernous room,
filled with scraping desks and echoing voices, bright
lights, and a haphazard circle of writers edging
toward the door. By now, you know verse
is the gateway to the human soul. Venture in
through your own creativity, erase negativity;
abandon everything else. It takes more
than a one-night stand of hot, steamy sex in
the backseat of a Pontiac to get you through. Our world

is full of dragons and bears whose mahogany fur
is covered in blood. Even after all-nighters
in the library encased in books, searching
for answers, broken hearts just go home,
and often, only Prufrock's bitch
has had a good time. The blues are funny, the way
they slink and slide like a drug dealer, soft shoe
with bourbon. Bottled poetry, easily procured,
avails us nothing. Like whiskey, liquid solace,

rapture in an empty bottle. Dead on arrival,
life can melt into soil and sand, shift
like the ramshackle person who lost it
outside Jenkintown station as the first car's lamp
broke from the trees. Carrie Bradshaw
has shoes but no clues, she just promises
a good time. Treason has become a way of life.
Our children will grow downward
until they become us, sipping Miracle-Gro
as if it were a finely-aged Pinot Noir.

Meanwhile, take heart. Lustrous colors
still spill across the sky, glimmering, and though
it might take more than the Illadelph to get you to
Cantaloupe Island, you are not merely adequate
but blooming. The stuck-up girls and cool guys
will fall flat like cold lunch meat
on a steel counter top. So paint your rooms
Midnight Bonfire, Morning Fog, and Caribbean
Canary. Diamonds are coal, and
coal still fuels the world's fires.

FISHBOY

JESSICA HAMILTON



All through grade school my last name, Wilkes, assured that I sat directly behind Johnny Welsh, the Fishboy. He wasn't called *Fishboy* because he could swim really fast, or because he was a tenacious fisherman; it wasn't even because he ate the occasional earthworm, though I'm sure he would have done it on a dare or to gross out some kids on the playground. No, he was called *Fishboy* because his entire body, from his transparent eyelids to his presumably webbed toes, was covered in dry, flakey white fish scales.

Yeah, he was annoying, but the only reason he really bothered anyone was because he was so different. He was a skinny kid from a troubled home, with a skin condition nobody understood. He had dull gray eyes and ashen skin textured like papier-mache that was peeling at the edges with squiggly veins sketched in blue ink. His home-cut hair was the color of dust, flaked with dead skin cells and always sticking up from static. Every day he wore long-sleeved sweaters or seventies-style button-up buckaroo shirts done to the collar and flood-proof slacks purchased from the clearance rack of the Salvation Army and then handed down from two older brothers.

His looks alone made him an easy target. But most

days, rather than letting the teasing get to him, Fishboy just went with it. Whenever someone would start a fish-germs-no-returns pass-off, he would curl his mangled lips over his tiny yellow teeth and chase the girls, threatening to kiss them. He might finger every fork and spoon in the tray as kids waiting in the lunch line behind him shrank in horror, wondering how they were going to eat their ice-cream-scoopered spaghetti now that all the silverware had been tainted. He even occasionally let some kids use him as a joke; they would pay him with cupcakes and pudding packs to lick someone's pencil or lunchbox when they weren't looking.

We sat in the back of the room closest to the windows, first Luke, the cute kid all the girls fawned over, and then Julie what-was-her-name with her sweatpants pulled up underneath her armpits, then Fishboy, then me. I spent a lot of time staring out those windows during boring math lessons, listening and repeating phonics crap Zimmer played when he wanted to sneak out to talk with the fifth grade teachers across the hall. I watched the seasons changing from those last warm sunny days, when it just wasn't fair that school had started already, to bleak gray skies tossing rain and then snow.

I got to school early most mornings, riding the number five bus from the country, nearly thirty miles. I was the first kid on the bus in the morning and the last one to get home at the end of the day. I usually spent the first ten miles of the trip sleeping in the backseat, the old bus driver smoking cigarettes and pulling the curlers out of her hair. But once we got to town, the bus stopped every ten feet until it was crammed full of kids and exploded in front of the school around eight-thirty. Fishboy would shuffle in just in time to gobble up his government provided breakfast and slide into his one-piece desk before the bell rang. Julie Whatshername, a big girl with frizzy hair, would crab-walk her desk as close to Luke as she could, attempting to avoid the cootie zone that like an invisible force field centered around Fishboy and circled out approximately five feet wherever he went.

Some days, I noticed, the hardness of life really showed in Fishboy. He would tiptoe through the door of homeroom, hang his same dirty red and blue nylon coat on the secluded hook far away from all the smooth-skinned kids' coats, and shrink into his seat. Sometimes he put his head down in his hands and pretended he was sleeping and couldn't hear the whispering around him. He used his long drooping bangs that, conveniently, were always falling in his face, as a barrier between himself and the rest of the world.

"Good morning class," Zimmer said one day with more dorky happiness than usual. "We have to get through our work quickly today so you'll have time to finish up your valentine mailboxes for our party tomorrow."

I had already picked out my valentine cards, some passionless Garfield ones, and carefully sorted them according to what kind of message they implied. I gave my friends the "you're specials" and "be mines" with a single heart over the *i* in Carissa. Enemies got the standard "Happy Valentine's Day" signed unreadable *Carissa*, no heart. But I thought extra hard about the valentine card I picked for Fishboy. Some kids would probably leave him out of their list altogether, even though we were supposed to give one to every kid in the class. I decided on one with the fat orange cat hugging his teddy bear—"sending you a valentine's hug"—*Carissa*, scribbly heart. My mom bought some heart-shaped suckers for me to hand out with my cards, but I gave most of them away on the bus and stuffed a handful in my book bag for the weekend.

Zimmer brought in some generic cherry soda that he served in little Dixie cups with pink-frosted sugar cookies somebody's mom dropped off. We took turns weaving up and down the rows of desks, stuffing little white envelopes into shoeboxes with slots poked into the top. The boxes were covered in jaggedly shaped construction paper hearts glued to the sides with black marker arrows pierced through the middles. Fishboy had his head down on the desk when I slipped the little valentine into his mailbox decorated with V-shaped black hearts and a Jolly Roger flag attached to a Popsicle stick on the side.

"Happy Valentine's Day," I mumbled and placed one of the heart-shaped suckers I had saved next to his folded hands that encircled his head.

I slid into my seat at the back of the room and shook my shoebox, listening to the sound of valentines chunk against the sides. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched the sucker slowly inch from the edge of the desk, and without lifting his head, Fishboy cupped it in his palm.

The weekend flew by and when I walked into homeroom Monday morning, Fishboy was already at his desk drawing something in a notebook that he kept hidden by wrapping his flakey forearm over the page. He smacked the notebook shut and turned in his seat as I walked by.

"Hi," he said, slipping his hands under his thighs. "How was your weekend?"

The sound of his voice startled me more than I would have expected, and I instinctively snapped my head around to see who else had noticed Fishboy facing me with a strange smile on his face.

"Good I guess, How 'bout you?"

"Okay." He shrugged and turned back toward the front of the room.

I could feel the kid with the thick glasses staring at the side of my head as if my hair was on fire. I pretended not to notice him by rummaging through the cubby hole under my seat as if I were looking for something. The rest of the day I caught Fishboy smiling at me when he passed back papers. He needed to borrow a pencil and he was amazed when I lent him one of relatively decent shape with an eraser and no chew marks, and even more amazed when I accepted its return, now contaminated by his touch. One time he whirled around asking me, "How do you spell *sweet*?"

"S-W-double E-T, I think."

"How do you spell *eww*?" whispered the bug-eyed kid beside me leaning across the aisle as Zimmer wheeled the TV cart into the room.

"Ask your mom," I said, feeling the skin on my face turning hot. "That's what she said when you were born."

“That’s what the doctor said when your boyfriend was hatched.”

“Did you come up with that one all by yourself?”

I sprang out of my seat, needing an escape and not waiting for a reply. I walked up to the front of the room and sidled next to Zimmer who was fighting with the VCR.

“Can I use the bathroom?”

“I don’t know, can you?”

I really wasn’t in the mood to play this grammar game. My throat was as dry as Death Valley and I could feel tears working up from the pit of my stomach.

“May I use the restroom?” I pleaded through clenched teeth.

“Hurry up and take the hall pass.”

I grabbed the pink girl-shaped block of wood from the teacher’s desk and slowly closed the door behind me. I imagined Bugeyes sighing with relief, undoubtedly thinking I had marched up to Zimmer to tell on him. In the dimly lit restroom I checked under each door, making sure that no one else was there before I locked myself in the last stall. I wound a big wad of toilet paper around my hand and held it to my leaking eyes. I didn’t want to cry; it was stupid to cry. It was just some nerdy kid being mean. I made sure not to rub my eyes, just dabbing so they wouldn’t be red and blotchy and noticeable.

When I came back to the classroom, they were watching some reptile movie with all the lights out. Zimmer had pulled the drapes most of the way shut leaving only a narrow slit in the center, letting in a single dim beam of sunlight. Fishboy smiled as I walked past, but I pretended not to notice, following the strip of light with my eyes and pausing on the clock on the back wall. Twenty minutes and I could go home.

I was blackening the teeth of Bugeyes’ yearbook picture when my mom came home from work.

“Mom, you know that fish boy in my class, the one nobody likes?”

“Carissa, it’s a condition he can’t help.”

“I know, I know, but everybody calls him *Fishboy*.”

Anyways, some dumb boy said Fishboy was my boyfriend just because I was nice to him.”

“What do you care what dumb boys say?”

“But he’s not my boyfriend!” You’d think a mother would understand these things.

“Just ignore him. If he thinks he’s not bothering you, he’ll quit.”

“Fine, but if that doesn’t work I’m gonna kick him where it counts.”

“Don’t be kicking people where it counts—just don’t pay any attention to him.”

I was a little disappointed by the simplicity of my mother’s plan, but it sounded like a plausible solution. She let me sit on the counter next to the sink as she filled the coffee pot and got started on dinner. She told me that when she was little she had brown curly hair and freckles like me, and some boy at school teased her that the spots on her face were the effect of standing too close to a cow when it was taking a poop. She said she just ignored him and eventually he got bored with it and moved on to a new victim.

“Tomorrow will be better,” she said. “He’ll probably forget he even said it.”

It was pouring down rain the next morning, and my sneakers made a loud squeaking sound on the tile floor as I plodded into the classroom.

“March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb,” Zimmer sang as I passed him in the doorway. *What a dork, I thought; it’s still February.*

I yanked up my knee-high socks and reached under my seat to find the social studies homework I had forgotten to take home yesterday. As I pulled the book out, a thick square of paper tumbled out of the hole onto the floor. It made a sound that seemed to echo through the room when it hit. There were little penciled smiley faces on the flat side and the rest of the homemade gift wrap bulged with a small object wrapped in the center. The room was empty except for a couple of boys playing Connect Four. I carefully unfolded the paper square revealing a big pink gumball

machine ring and a love note signed *John*.

I didn't take the time to read it as I squeezed both tightly in my fist and slipped the wad into my wet rain slicker pocket. I was relieved when Bugeyes didn't show up for school that day, but Fishboy did. Wearing cowboy boots that barely spanned the gap left from his too-short pants, he walked in with his hair slicked to one side. He was soaked but seemed comfortable with a big yellow smile plastered on his peeling face. *Fish like water*, I thought, and then scolded myself for thinking it. I covered my face by leaning my cheek on my left hand and tried to look engrossed in my unfinished homework.

"Nice day, huh?" Fishboy said.

I could feel his eyes burning a hole in the top of my head as he waited for a reply.

"Yep," I said, trying to end the conversation quickly.

"What are you doing?"

I looked up into his dripping face. "Homework. You're gonna get sick, you should get yourself an umbrella."

"Probably," he shrugged.

The bell rang and kids filtered in from the hallway, ushered by Zimmer in a nerdy yo-yo sweater. Fishboy took his seat. He never mentioned the note. For a minute I thought maybe it was a mean prank, but I was pretty sure I recognized the writing to be Fishboy's. The note in my jacket haunted me the rest of the day. I wondered what it said while I was sitting in art class carving up a piece of Ivory soap into what was supposed to be a canoe with a man in the middle. I thought about the big goofy ring. I imagined Fishboy standing outside the grocery store pumping quarters into the novelty machine and pulling out little bubbles with fake mustaches and Superballs in them before he got the one with the ring he was waiting for. And I thought of what my mom had told me the night before—*Ignore it and it will go away*.

It was hard to ignore it. Hadn't I planned to be nice to Fishboy? Maybe the note just said something like, "Thanks for being nice to me." As I stood mouthing the words to "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at spring concert

practice, I decided I would give it another chance. I would treat Fishboy like any other kid in the class. How could that be a bad thing? But I didn't want him to write me any more notes.

I waited until the last town kid was off the bus before I pulled the crumpled piece of paper with the ring mashed in the middle out of my pocket.

"Dear Carissa," it said, and I felt my stomach churn. "Thanks for the sweet valentine. You're the nicest girl in the class. From John."

That wasn't so bad, I thought. So Fishboy thought I was the nicest girl in the class, what was so wrong about that? It was the chunky pink ring that made me nervous. I didn't throw it away, but it never touched my finger. I hid the ring inside a small heart-shaped jewelry box and then in a bigger shoebox full of dumb trinkets and souvenirs, stuffing it deep into the back of my closet and shoving the note under my mattress. *If I just ignore it, it will go away.*

I was a little more cautious the next morning and bent down, peering into the desk so as not to accidentally fling some token of love from Fishboy across the room. I hoped as I crouched that there was nothing there besides the usual mess of papers and books, but like the day before there was a tightly folded square of paper centered on top of the messy pile. I reached my hand in and stuffed the little note into my sleeve. I had no pockets, so I kept the note in my sleeve until I had an opportunity to read it.

I could barely concentrate every time I felt the scratchy corners of the note against the inside of my wrist. When we went to gym I discretely stuffed the square into my shoe when nobody was looking. We played dodgeball. All the girls usually stood against the wall like they were facing the firing squad, waiting to be picked off so they could take their seat against the windowsill. But with a decent overhand throw and lots of frustration, I fought the front lines with the boys. I lasted a while, catching a slow lob from the chubby kid and pegging his shadow-buddy as he lost his moving barricade. The tall kid gave me the look-left, throw-right fake out that sent me to the sidelines.

It wasn't until I joined the rest of my team and they were shouting, "Get Fishboy, get Fishboy," that I remembered the note in my shoe.

I poked my finger in between the leather and my sweaty foot and felt nothing. I quickly checked the other shoe, hoping I had forgotten which side I'd put it on, but I knew it wasn't there. I pulled both shoes off and shook them like ketchup bottles, smacking the heels and feeling the insides, hoping that it had turned to mush and stuck to the sole. Nothing. Panic set in immediately and the game ended as our guy took out Fishboy and the tall kid beamed him in the side of the face. Somewhere on this side of the gym was a tiny square of paper with possibly the most incriminating words inscribed to *dear Carissa, from John*. My eyes searched the floor as thirty or so kids raced around the area, victoriously gloating or defeated and bitter.

"What are you looking for?" asked Julie, noticing my frantic searching.

"I lost my house key," I lied, needing an excuse to stay back after the rest had lined up single file, waiting for Zimmer to collect them and take them to lunch. The gym teacher helped me look for a while then sent me to lunch unsatisfied, telling me that if it didn't turn up by the end of the day he would notify my mom. The key was hanging around my neck and stuffed into my shirt. I skipped lunch, retracing my steps but knowing that I had had the note in gym class and it wasn't there now. I slipped into the bathroom and examined each shoe, stripping off my socks and turning them inside out. But the note was gone.

I wanted to ask Fishboy what the letter said, but I didn't want to acknowledge that it existed. When the rest of the class filed in from lunch, I was alone in the dark room, my head flat against the desk top, staring out the window. I could feel my heart pounding hard against the wood. Zimmer flicked the lights on, and I sat up to search the crowd for signs of secret damaging knowledge. It surely would have showed on their smug little faces if one of them had found the note. It surely would have gone around the lunch table twice by now. But I didn't notice anything out of

the ordinary.

The rest of the day passed slowly to the thump of my heart pounding in my chest. I felt like everyone around could probably hear it, but I resisted the urge to look around, knowing the look on my face was the definition of panic. When the final bell finally rang, I waited until everyone else had their coats on and were headed out the door before I got out of my seat. I was one hundred feet away from home-free when I slipped my arms into my coat and pulled my full lunchbox off the shelf. Julie was talking with a couple of other girls outside the door, which seemed odd to me since those girls usually ignored the frizzy-haired cootie queen. I walked past slowly, trying to casually rifle through my bag like I was taking inventory so I could hear what they were talking about.

They scattered quickly, giggling a little, and I pretended not to notice. *If you ignore it they will quit.* I was at the top of the steps when I heard Julie's high-pitched squeaky voice.

"Don't forget to kiss your boyfriend goodbye!"

My pace quickened with the sound of their laughter, and I took two flights of steps in three bounds. When I reached the ground floor, I nearly collided with the gym teacher.

"I didn't find your key. We should call your mom," he said, pushing me backward.

"It's right here," I said, pulling the string out of my shirt, dangling it in the air, and pushing past him. When I burst through the door and the cold air whipped through my hair, I remembered the bus ride and wished I had let the coach call my mother after all. There were two kids from my class who rode the number five bus and I could see them waiting in line as it pulled up to the curb and opened the door. The town kids mostly sat in the front, but seeing how I was the last to board, it put me somewhere between the weird kids behind the bus driver and the townies in the middle.

I scooted in next to a chubby blond girl with blue braces and tried to blend in.

“Hey look, it’s Fishboy’s wife. Hey there, Mrs. Fish, where’s your hubby, your scaly little fish-stick lover?”

Ignore it and he will get tired and move onto a different victim.

“Better watch out, it’s almost fishing season!”

“Sit your ass down or get off my bus!” the driver yelled, tossing a scowl into the huge review mirror. “And shut up!” She glanced at me as her expression changed from pissed to the usual annoyed.

I got a few shoulder bumps as the townies filed off the bus. The one kid from my class yanked my ponytail hard, so I took a souvenir fistful of hair out of his scalp before the other kids forced him off the bus, crying like a baby. When I got home, I found a piece of gum mashed into my hair. I put some peanut butter on it and ended up crying on the kitchen table with a head full of tangled peanut butter and gum. My mom got home ten minutes later.

“What happened to you?” she said, startled by the amount of blood that had run to my cheeks and by my puffy red eyes.

“Some kid put gum in my hair because Fishboy wrote me a love letter,” I managed to get out between heaves and snot bubbles.

I sat on the floor as my mom picked through my hair like a monkey looking for nits. Every time she snipped a little I started crying all over again.

“Kids can be so mean.” She sighed. “I ought to call that brat’s mother and make him apologize.”

“No, you can’t do that, it would make it worse. Besides, she probably heard a different story by now since I sent him home crying with a big bald spot on top of his head.” It was the only satisfaction I had gleaned from the experience.

“Well, I’m glad you did, and I think I managed to save most of yours,” she said, pulling the rubber band out of my hair and running her fingers gently over my head. “You’re just gonna have some bangs for a little while.”

She scooped up the pile of peanut butter-gum-hair

before I could fully assess the damage. She pulled me tight against her stomach.

"Sometimes it's hard to do the right thing. Someday you'll look back on this and know you tried."

She made me some French fries and I told her the story and showed her the note I had stuffed under my mattress. I heard her telling my father as I dozed off watching cartoons on the sofa that maybe she should stay home tomorrow. "I'll take off work and we can go shopping and do lunch or something," I heard her whisper and closed my eyes.

Dad dropped me off in front of the school Friday morning in my new jean skirt and bangs.

"Want me to walk you in?" he asked, not knowing the protocol for assault on a young girl's hair.

"I'll be okay."

He gave me a light kiss on the forehead. "I like the new do. It makes you look older."

I smiled and got out, pushing the heavy door shut. I breathed deep as I turned to face the cold brick building.

Somebody coughed as I walked through the door later than usual. Zimmer was sitting behind his desk for once, to my relief, as I hung up my coat and walked the long way around the room to my desk. I slowly bent down and looked into the hollow of my chair. Next to my pencil was a little square of folded paper with a smiley face drawn on the front of it. I snatched it in my fist and traced my path back to Zimmer's desk.

"Johnny keeps putting love letters in my desk, and I want him to leave me alone," I whispered over his shoulder, and dropped the square onto his day planner. He glanced at me and unfolded the block, flattening it with his palm.

I really didn't care what it said, so I scoured the room for prying eyes and throwing back sneers. Zimmer quickly read the note and folded it in half.

"Let's discuss this in the hallway, Miss Wilkes."

Zimmer pushed the door open for me and motioned for Fishboy to join us.

When we were all three on the other side of the door,

Zimmer held the folded note in the air between us.

“John, Carissa doesn’t want you to write her notes anymore.”

“I wasn’t doing anything wrong,” he protested.

“Just don’t write any more notes.”

“Okay,” Fishboy agreed. I could sense that he was staring into my cold face, but I kept my eyes on the floor, counting the tiles in my head.

“You can go back to your seat.”

Fishboy squeezed past me back into the classroom and Zimmer handed me the letter.

“He won’t bother you anymore,” he said, and left me out there alone with the piece of paper.

I unfolded the page and digested every word with shame: “Are you my friend? Circle yes or no.”



THE GRADUATE

CAROL NEWMAN



Benjamin Braddock explained it to us years ago—and he wasn't all that innocent. Everything is a pretense, a subterfuge of complex lies. It just comes down to sink or swim and all that water imagery.

But that's the whole point, isn't it?

Mrs. Robinson knew what she was doing, and she's the only one who got what she wanted, except for the fish. Observed even as they slept, they were trapped in a world they were conditioned to love.

The beauty of it was—they didn't know it.

INTERPRETATIONS OF ART

KIM KATILIUS



Art can be whatever you want it to be, my teacher said.

Looking at the O'Keeffe painting I see a flower with streaks
of red,

Red, like blood dripping down frosty pale skin,

Red, like thick clots that form when the cutting ends,

Red, like chipped nail polish on the hand that holds the
blade,

Red, like a scarlet letter searing across new memories,

Red, like a heart slowly beating its life away.

MERMAID DREAMS

SHERRI LOTHBRIDGE



Molly sat on the warm tile of the bathroom floor attempting to cut her Barbie's hair with safety scissors. The mirror and windows were fogged over with a thick layer of steam.

"Honey, could you turn on the fan?" Shelia said, peeking her dripping head out from behind the rose-colored curtain.

Molly jumped up, socks sagging around her ankles from chasing the cat. Shelia heard the soft whir of the fan as she lathered her hair with strawberry-scented shampoo. She had run out of adult shampoo, but didn't mind using Molly's. Something about the fake strawberry smell made her happy.

"We have to make you look good for the dance," Molly said, returning to her doll. Her tiny fingers worked at the clothing until Barbie lay naked on the floor next to the red safety scissors. "Now, what should you wear?" She sat back on her heels, digging through an old shoebox full of multicolored clothing and accessories.

"How about that blue dress with the lace?" Shelia turned the water off and grabbed a fluffy white towel from the rack.

"No, she wore that yesterday to Sarah's birthday

party,” said Molly.

“What about the yellow one with flowers on it?”

Shelia stepped from the tub to the bathmat. She rubbed the towel vigorously over her head.

“Yeah!” Molly said. She pulled it out of the box, spilling a few other unwanted outfits on the floor in the process. “With her black shoes and pink hat.”

“Sounds beautiful,” said Shelia. She couldn’t help but smile as she watched Molly force a plastic shoe onto the doll’s pointed foot.

“Mommy, why don’t you look like this?” Molly asked. She held up Barbie, naked except for a shoe on her right foot.

Shelia ran her towel over the mirror, exposing a streaked image of herself. “Well,” she said, “mommy used to look like that until she had you.”

Molly tilted her head to the side. Shelia knew it was just a little girl’s question, but of course it hurt a little on the inside. Funny how an innocent question can cause such ill feelings, she thought.

“Dolls and people are different,” Shelia said, wrapping the towel around herself.

“But you both have these,” Molly said, pointing to the two round lumps on Barbie’s chest.

“Honey, Barbie is just a doll. She’s not made to look like a real girl,” Shelia explained. “See, look at her hair.” She picked up a blond clump that Molly had managed to cut off of Barbie’s head. She handed it to Molly and said, “Feel this, then feel your own hair.”

“Mine feels nicer,” Molly said, rubbing her hand over her hair, clutching the Barbie hair in her other hand.

“Yup,” Shelia replied. “That’s because Barbie’s hair isn’t real and yours is.”

“But I wish my hair was long like Barbie’s,” Molly said, “or maybe as long as mermaid hair.” Shelia had cut Molly’s hair to just below her ears a few weeks ago. It was one of her many attempts to simplify life, but Molly thought she looked like a boy now.

“A mermaid’s hair? That’s really long!” Shelia said,

trying to be silly and make Molly forget about her short hair. "They have to brush their hair a million times a day!" Shelia knew how Molly hated to sit still to have the tangles brushed out of her fine hair.

Molly was absently combing her fingers through her hair, continuing past the ends and moving to well below her shoulders, as though her wishing for long hair had actually made it grow. "I want to be a mermaid," she said with sparkling eyes.

Shelia propped her foot up on the side of the tub, carefully painting her toenails a soft pink. "But you would have pruney fingers all the time," she said, "and you wouldn't be able to live here. You would have to live with other mermaids in the ocean."

Molly thought about what her mother had said, and then replied, "I could live in the bathtub." She moved her doll's legs up and down together, pretending Barbie had a mermaid tail.

"Well, how about we practice?" Shelia turned the hot water on and plugged the tub. After a moment of carefully mixing in cold water to create the perfect temperature, Shelia turned to Molly.

"Time for your bath," she said, lifting Molly off the floor. As Shelia pulled Molly's shirt over her head, Boots the cat ran into the bathroom, a toy mouse hanging from his mouth.

"Can Barbie come? She wants to be a mermaid too." Molly cradled the doll against her bare chest, stroking her uneven hair.

"I suppose, but only if you promise not to splash around." Shelia turned off the water.

"Okay," Molly said. She took off the rest of her clothes and stepped into the tub.

"Does that feel okay?" Shelia ran her hand through the water.

"Maybe Boots should check it." Molly beckoned the cat with wiggly, wet fingers. The cat dropped its toy and proceeded to lick the water from her fingers.

"I don't think so, troublemaker," Shelia said.

Molly laughed. "I know. Water makes Boots crazy."

Boots ran into Shelia's bedroom. She sighed. "So the water's fine, then?"

"Yup." Molly made Barbie swim through the water.

"Good. I'm going to go get dressed. Remember, no splashing." Shelia picked up Molly's dirty clothes and threw them in the hamper.

"I'm going to practice being a mermaid." Molly slid under the water and emerged with a wet mess of limp hair.

"I'll be in my room, holler if you need anything," Shelia said. "You have ten minutes to play, then I'll be back to help you wash up."

"I wish I could take a nap whenever I wanted," she said as she walked into her room. She sat down next to Boots, who lay curled up on her unmade bed, and rubbed under his chin. Shelia thought of all she had to do today. Saturdays were never relaxing. There was grocery shopping, laundry, cleaning the house, and, of course, she had to take care of Molly. She was outgrowing her sneakers and would need a new pair. Shelia thought she could squeeze that in today, or she might have to go out tomorrow. On Sundays she tried to do something fun with Molly, since she hardly got to see her during the week.

She walked to her cramped closet in search of comfy errand-running clothes. Of course, most of them were in the hamper. In the back of her closet were things she had hung on to, hoping that after she had Molly she could fit back into them. But they had remained always a little bit too small.

"Molly, you okay in there?" Shelia yelled, turning her voice toward the bathroom, her hands still searching the depths of the closet.

"Yup! I'm teaching Barbie to swim," Molly yelled back.

Shelia grabbed a T-shirt that looked like it was big enough, even though it had a little stain on the front. Behind the old shirt, Shelia found a shiny, tight, sequined skirt that she had worn to a New Year's Eve party her junior year of college only four years ago. She held it up and let the light bounce off of the sequins. Boots shot up and chased the

dots of light around the room. *I didn't think I still had this*, she thought. That was one of the last happy memories she'd had as a single girl, before she'd had Molly.

Her close friends were having a big party at their off campus house, and Shelia, normally found studying in the library or watching free independent films on campus, decided to go. Most of her friends were amazed at how she looked with a little fixing up. The night was spent dancing, socializing, and drinking, things she didn't do very often. Toward the end of the night, Shelia had caught the eye of a guy named James. He was a star hockey player for the college and pretty good looking. Not being used to drunken flattery, she ended up giving him her phone number.

Over the next month they had gone out a couple times, Shelia always making sure to dress up, not wanting to disappoint him with her normal appearance. But after those couple of dates, which consisted of going to bars, drinking excessively, watching sports, and James being overly aggressive about kissing and trying to fondle Shelia, she decided to not hang out with him anymore. They had nothing in common, and while it was nice to be wanted by someone, James was not her type of guy. She had tried explaining their differences to him the third time they had gone out, but he was oblivious. So she just stopped answering his calls and tried to avoid his local hangouts, which wasn't too hard.

Then one night as she lay in bed half asleep, the phone rang. She ignored it until whoever it was had called back constantly for five minutes. Thinking it must be an emergency, Shelia groggily answered. It was James, very drunk and very pissed. He was yelling something about Shelia being a bitch among other obscenities, then apologizing and asking to come see her. After listening to him drone on for a while she told him to call her tomorrow and hung up. A few minutes later there was a pounding on her door. Before she could even react, James had broken the cheap lock and was stumbling around her apartment.

"You need to leave," she said, trying to act confident although inside she was terrified. "Please, I will call you

tomorrow.” She was inching toward the phone, also eyeing the slightly ajar door, judging her options.

“Nobody says *no* to me,” James said in a drunken slur. Then his fist flew and Shelia was on the floor.

After a minute of confusion, the cloudiness faded, and Shelia opened her eyes to the dingy blue carpet. She splayed her hands on the floor to get up, but before her body was even inches from the floor, James had flipped her over on her back and pinned her arms to her sides.

“Stop!” she yelled, trying to move her tiny body out from under him. Then his glove-like hand was over her mouth, soon replaced by the scarf she had been wearing in her hair that day. At some point during the struggle, her clothes had been ripped off and thrown in a pile next to her head. He hardly made a sound as he raped her, but inside she was screaming, *stop, stop, stop, stop, stop!* It seemed to last forever, even though it was only minutes. When he was finished, Shelia felt half-dead, like her soul had been taken by this demon. He was standing over her, zipping up his pants, and then without another look or word, he left. Shelia lay balled up on the rough carpet, not fighting the sobs that burst from her freed mouth.

Afterward, Shelia just wanted to forget it, go on like it never happened. She started spending most of her time in pajamas, night and day, just lying in bed staring at the slow-moving ceiling fan. She kept her secret for a few days, letting it eat her up more and more each day. Part of her welcomed these feelings of numbness, at times making her forget what had happened. But those moments were short, and her memories only came back twice as concrete in her mind. Shelia knew that if she was ever to reclaim her soul and live again, she had to tell someone.

Once she went to the police and filed a formal report, the word of what had happened spread around the community. Of course Shelia was humiliated and outraged that everyone knew, but what she didn’t expect was that many people did not believe her. Nobody wanted to think that a popular star athlete had done this. So instead, people began turning on her. At first it was just cold stares and

whispers as she went to classes, and even comments like, "Who would even want you!" when she was shopping for groceries. It wasn't long before she couldn't even bring herself to leave her apartment. James was being kicked off of the hockey team pending a judge's decision that would eventually put him in jail. His life had been all about becoming a professional hockey player, and now it was ruined.

But what about Shelia's life? She'd had goals and ambitions too, but nobody seemed to care as she fell into a depression. Some friends stuck by her, trying to cheer her up, but Shelia knew she had to get out of there if she ever wanted to move on with her life. So after a month of torment, she left college and moved to a small town a couple hours away from her family and started working as a waitress. When she felt recovered, she would go back to school at a local college.

Then she discovered that she was pregnant, and naturally, she didn't want a baby at first. Then she went to the doctor to discuss her options, only to find out that she was already three months along. Time had passed so quickly that she hadn't realized it had already been three months. This little thing growing inside of her, while it was half James, it was also half Shelia. She had been hurt enough already. Shelia needed to be loved and to be able to open up again and love herself. She needed the innocent love of a child, her child. She quickly decided that as far as she was concerned, there was no father, just her and this baby who was changing her life. Six months later she gave birth to Molly.

From then on Shelia knew that she would love this child unconditionally and would never let anything hurt Molly like she had been hurt. Shelia had made a decision that had drastically altered her life, but would not take it back for anything in the world. It was hard raising a child alone, especially when she still felt like a child herself. There were times when she just wanted to leave and never come back and times when she cried herself to sleep, but her love far outweighed any bad day she had with Molly.

Suddenly Boots jumped onto Shelia's lap. He nuzzled her wet cheeks as she composed herself. She quickly wiped her face and threw on a pair of holey jeans.

"I have a surprise for you," Shelia hollered to Molly.

"Oh! What is it?" Molly asked.

"I'll bring it out in a minute." Shelia dug in her top drawer for a safety pin. With a little alteration the skirt would make a great mermaid tail.

Shelia sometimes wondered what her life would have been like if things hadn't happened the way they had. She would have been able to finish college and move wherever she wanted. She would actually have time for herself, time to go to a movie like she used to, time to go out with her old friends, or time to just relax. She would love to even sleep one night without wondering if Molly would wake up from a nightmare and want to crawl in bed with her.

Shelia found a pin and folded the skirt to fit Molly's waist. It made a perfect mermaid tail, Shelia thought.

Loud splashing noises came from the bathroom.

Shelia couldn't even get dressed without Molly interrupting.

"Molly," she yelled, "no splashing!"

The splashing stopped. "No more, okay?"

Silence.

"Molly, okay?"

No answer.

Shelia ran to the bathroom.

The shimmering skirt fell from Shelia's hands into the tub. The whole tub glittered like a disco ball as Shelia pulled Molly's limp body from the water.

"Oh God, no, please, no," Shelia cried. She wiped the hair out of Molly's face and cradled her body in her arms. Reality sank in as the water from Molly's hair soaked into Shelia's shirt.

Shelia gently laid Molly on the floor that was still covered with bits of fake golden hair. Tipping her head back, Shelia blew life into Molly's paling body.

"Breathe! Oh, please, Molly! Please. Don't leave me," Shelia screamed, tears mixing with the water on Molly's skin. Her hands pumped up and down, carefully and slowly.

Shelia counted under her breath, then switched back to breathing.

Then suddenly Molly was coughing. Coughing up water mixed with all of Shelia's fear.

"Yes baby, cough it up." Shelia held onto Molly's shaking body. The color returned to Molly's cheeks as she took stifled breaths.

"Deep breaths now. Easy." Shelia sat Molly on her lap and rubbed her back. "You're okay. It's okay."

After a few minutes a tiny voice spoke. "Mommy?"

"Yes, honey, are you all right?" Shelia grabbed a dry towel and wrapped it around Molly.

"I dreamed that God made me a mermaid, but then I couldn't find you in the water." Molly wrapped her arms around her mother's neck.

"I'm here now. I found you." Shelia kissed Molly's face. "I'll never ever leave you."



JAZZ GIRL

NICK JONES



The music was perforated by only the pit bull bite
of my single malt scotch.

My gaze strolled across the smoky room and found her
standing alone like a birch tree in a forest of evergreens,
stark and white in a sea of color.

Her blouse whispered of secrets
hidden from my unchecked eyes.

The bass migrated from the floorboards
vibrating up through my legs, grounding me,
as the trumpet kept the less adulterous part of my mind
on the stage.

The air was thick and held a life of its own,
playing a delicate dancing game
with the hair on my arms and the skin on my face.

Tonight we would see just how far a man could get
on a smile in a room
full of strangers, sin, and staccato soul.

SOUNDS OF HEAVEN

RHYS WEST



The groove of the bass roars like a lion
waking up from a long slumber,
tapping of snare, rhythm, and cymbals,
as if rain was pouring down.

Oh, how that six-stringed masterpiece sings like an angel.
The trumpet con mute displays reckless abandonment
for anything traditional.

Jazz, music's lullaby.

Chill.

Relax.

CONCENTRATE ON BREATHING

DARAH WOLF



It's called *ocean-sounding breath* or *ujjayi*. Breathe in through the nose and exhale from the back of your throat. You're supposed to sound like Darth Vader. So I stand there, in Mountain Pose, both feet grounded on the floor. My back is straight and the crown of my head stretches toward the ceiling. I make my ankles, my calves, my thighs, my back, my stomach, my chest, and my head all start to pay attention to me, my breath, my movements. Arms up in the air. Inhale.

I was hoping yoga would relieve the stress. Ever since my doctor told me that I needed to go on antidepressants, I knew I had to do something, anything, to keep my mind from coiling itself around the real world, choking so tight that I can't do anything but give in. And I don't want to give in. I don't want to be the graduated college student, helpless, insecure, and afraid of whatever problems seem to hit her like a freight train more frequently than expected. Exhale.

I fold forward, placing my hands under my feet, working my toes toward my wrists, feeling the stretch through my legs, and letting my head hang freely. Keep breathing, the instructor says. Concentrate on breathing. I step my legs back and pose in Downward Dog. We'll be here

for awhile. Keep breathing, the instructor says. Let your body be at peace with the pose. Inhale.

I'm trying to breathe freely. To let these knots in my back find their way down my neck, spiraling down my arms, and then escaping through my fingertips. But they stay put. No matter how hard I try, this tension won't go away. I've tried running in the early morning to feel some sort of release, but the entire time my mind races: I need to move out of my parents' house, I don't have any friends, I miss my friends, I'm lonely, single, pathetic, feeling sorry for myself. But at least I'm running. At least my fat ass is getting some exercise. But things can't work that way. Not for me anyway. Exhale.

The instructor walks around and watches us as we ease down, letting go of our breath, letting go of whatever it is that people come here to let go of. Upward Dog Pose. Our backs bent back into an arch. Inhale.

I'm letting go. Or at least I think I am. I'm trying to. That's why I'm here, right? That's why I pay twenty-five bucks a month to be here, right? I can't think about money right now. Not now. Exhale.

I position myself back into Downward Dog, my body making a V with the floor, feet flat, forehead aligned with my navel. I could get used to this. I'm not that flexible now, but, with time, I'm sure I could be. I bring my right leg forward to a ninety degree angle. My other leg stretches out behind me. My hips are open, squared off, positioning my torso directly in line with the wall ahead of me. I feel balanced. My arms come up, one in front and one behind me. Straight line. I feel strong. This is Warrior Pose, the instructor says. And for a few more breaths, I understand why.

Inhale. Back into Downward Dog. Sun Salute Transition. Exhale. Back to a few deep breaths of trying to keep my mind from wandering. But it wanders, and I try to keep breathing my ujjayi Darth Vader breaths so my mind stays grounded, but those knots in my back become prominent again. One knot for work, another knot for missing my friends, another knot for being single. Maybe

I got dumped because I was childish. Do I seem childish? Maybe I shouldn't have wanted so much attention. Did I get that phone call on my birthday saying it wasn't working out anymore because I'm too needy, too loving, too in love with someone who wasn't in love with me anymore? For weeks I never found an answer, still haven't found one, and my brain has been ringing ever since with different possibilities. That's why the running didn't work anymore. That's why I randomly started crying to my doctor at my last appointment when she asked me how I was doing. And, of course, in a moment where I'm supposed to be present, in a moment when I'm supposed to be Darah Wolf, practicing yoga in a dim room in Downward Dog Pose, making Darth Vader breaths, searching for Prana, I'm thinking about the past. Exhale.

Our instructor leads us into Triangle Pose, and we all stand upright, our feet wider than our shoulders. Our hips tilt, and we bring our fingertips to the floor on the instep of our right feet. Inhale. Stretch the other arm toward the ceiling and twist your gaze to the sky. Exhale.

Maybe now isn't my time for answers. Maybe now isn't my time for a resolution. Maybe people really do know what they're talking about when they say that time heals everything. They say that yoga is about being where you are at that very moment. It's the present. It's not the future, and it's not the past. Those moments are gated. But here I am holding the gate wide open for how I want the future to turn out and how I am waving in the past, cheering as it stampedes through. I need to focus. I need to be in the present.

I unfocus my gaze and look back down at the floor for a brief moment and get my mind back in the room of mirrors and hardwood floors. Inhale. Place my feet at the top of the mat and fold forward. Exhale. We bring our arms back up into the air. Our gazes fix just past our furthest fingertips. Inhale. Arms down. Exhale.

My heart slows down its beat. My mind eases its way out of a steady throb from too much thinking. Inhale. We move into the balancing poses, our feet planted, toes dug

into the wood as much as we can. Exhale. Inhale. I lift my bent knee up to my chest and grab my toes in front of me with my right hand. Exhale. Stay balanced. Don't let your mind wander. I pick a spot on the wall to keep my focus and slowly stretch my leg outward and to the side. Balanced. I look over my right shoulder while keeping my leg out. I'm focused. I'm in the moment. I've lost track of my breathing, but I'm in the moment. Exhale.

I let go of my leg and stretch out the other one. It comes fairly easily. Focus, breathe, concentrate, balance. After balancing, we move into Lotus Blossom Stretches. I sit on my hot pink mat and touch the bottoms of my bare feet together. Inhale. Straighten the back. Exhale and lean forward. Inhale to stretch, exhale to stretch deeper. And it comes so easily now. I'm right here, right now. Touching my forehead to my toes. I've brought my mind to the moment. My body is in control. Exhale.

The instructor tells us that to invoke the art of yoga into our lives, where we are in each exact moment is all there is. Right here, right now. Let thoughts float through and leave again. Let there be no ulterior motive in this moment but just to be. Inhale. Just be. Exhale. Concentrate on breathing.



DYLAN AT BONA'S

CAROL NEWMAN



Up on the bleachers are the gray-haired
professionals, goddamn yuppies who
said they'd never sell out. All of them
in fifty-dollar haircuts, designer
jeans, and Birkenstocks, peering
out over the crowd through
reading glasses, jingling keys to
SUVs and Infinities. Establishment
to their capped teeth now. Down

on the floor are the up and coming,
the new rebels. The girls wear hats
like J-Lo and skin-tight shirts. Bare
bellies, pierced navels, and tattoos
peek up out of low-slung jeans. The guys
with shaved heads, dreads, or spiked hair
slouch in baggy pants and sport
ten-dollar bandanas that used to sell
for a quarter at Woolworth's. All of us

wait to be entertained. Dylan
is twenty minutes late. The acoustics
are bad, and no one can hear the words
he seems to bark into the microphone,
the words we came for, the words
claimed by two generations. Every time
the lights go down Dylan staggers
from the keyboard, reaches
up to steady himself. Still

trying to live his own dream, play
his own music, his own way. Many
leave early, some pissed off,
mumbling. Dylan doesn't joke
with the crowd, won't toss trinkets,
act like a superstar. He gave us
the words to say it, music
to sing it to, and he just won't give
anything more.

RAVENSONG (FOR GEORGE CARLIN)

LES BUHITE



Another day, another dead celeb.
This time, it's personal. Did your famous timing fail you in your heartbeat's ebb, Mr. Carlin? Did you choose this sorry bit that's stolen your encore? Too many dead too soon, too fast these funerals come, the vault of platitudes is bare and any further words are empty words. We're dumb and blinded now. Perhaps it's right and true you shock us yet again, that we're accosted by your final play on words: how to express our naked grief when grief's exhausted. When Tricksters, at long last, use up their chances, Coyote laughs, and Kokopelli dances.

CAUTERIZE

SHAILENDRA GAJANAN



1. MegaRama

Horns, trumpets, giant tubas, bassoons, contrabassoons, clarinets, and saxophones converge on *Sea to Shining Sea*, and America knows and waits for Herbert Altovsky to emerge from the pit, into the brand-new decked-up Astrodome to conduct the MegaRama Marathon of the year. America loves Herb, and he knows it. Herb loves America, and they know it. Herb's all spiffy in his brilliant tux with a single rose as a boutonnière. He claims the mic that's hanging on a long sling. "Is America ready to get down and dirty with the greatest MegaRama Marathon event ever?"

"Yes!" That's the crowd going bonkers.

"I don't hear you, America!"

"Yes, Yes, Yes, HERB, HERB, HERB!"

And Herb extends his arms to them lovingly, displays his palms, and signals, and there, in great splendor, arrive fifty-five wrestlers wearing tight spandex, all deep blue, followed by beautiful slim blonds, one for each wrestler. Each blond is a hand-picked cheerleader from a different school district, donning a silver bikini, a top hat with U.S. flag stripes, her buxom breasts heaving with silver and

gold glitter. As each cheerleader pouts to the screen, each wrestler picks his partner and throws her over his neck and strains to show his grand, well-oiled, taut muscles.

And the horns go full blast, as 150 Jeeps, ATVs, snowmobiles, giant military trucks, SUVs, Humvees, 4Runners, Wrangler-Zs, Delta-Durangos, Beta-Rodeos, Mother Cherokees, Altroids, X20s, Hustlers, Fargos, each with six, eight, and even ten mega-tires sometimes, all line up, and out of each vehicle come several Army, Navy, and Marine officers, and they genuflect in front of the wrestlers and blonds, and suddenly, at Herb's cue, lift their bayonets, swords, AK-47s, 48s, and 49s and point them to the right, when about seventy-five Elvis look-alikes prance on the stage and they have capes made of gold and silver as well, and they shimmy to the orchestration of "Hound Dog." The crowd goes berserk.

But by then, about seventy-five rap-star artists come out all in black baggies, and all their caps are in reverse. Each rapper holds on to his crotch and moves to the rhythms of the remix of "Don't Be Cool." Female dancers join them, and each is in black tights, a black sleeveless T-shirt, and a black cap. They all mix it up, with the wrestlers throwing the cheerleaders in the air. Suddenly, there is a lull, and floodlights fall on a piano, and there is the famous ZTV-male-sex-symbol-of-the-year, Bessie, starting the chords of the hit melody, "Where R You," and the floodlights go to the ceiling of the arena, and now, on various swings designed like boats, ships, and sails are Pocahontas, Mulan, Lilo, Stitch, Simba, Pumba, Cinderella, The Mean Queen, Tarzan, Hercules, Sleeping Beauty, Aladdin, Nemo, Dumbo, The Cruel Witch, and others waving at the crowd, and Casper the Friendly Ghost flies across the astral-ceiling, throwing truck loads of confetti on everyone. The party's just begun.

Back to the pianist, and there is the-coolest-heavy-metal-electric-guitarist-of-the-world, Steel Lady, banging the chords for "We Work Hard, We Play Hard, and We Die Hard." And the piano joins in, and here, for the first time ever, is Bessie jamming with Steel Lady, and the fact that

all 250,000 spectators are on their feet is sure enough a clear sign that this is the biggest bonanza this city has ever seen. This does not include the count of TV viewers that is in the millions. Then, as the horns, trumpets, giant tubas, bassoons, contrabassoons, clarinets, and saxophones hit the crescendo, there is a huge roar, and all eyes are on the biggest and coolest mega-truck of the century. It galvanizes its speed and prepares to launch from its turf. And when it does, it is an amazing sight. It lunges forward like a tiger, puma, leopard, hyena, jackal, cheetah, panther, jumping over all the vehicles in one full sweep and landing on the other side with a thud that rocks the bejesus out of everyone. The crowd can hold it no longer.

Almost instinctively, about 100,000 of the spectators release their pistols, Uzis, revolvers, rifles, sawed-off shotguns, handguns, Berettas, Benellis, Brownings, Stoegers, Weatherbys, and Winchesters, and blow them in the air shouting, "AYYYYYY!"

The local college football and baseball teams line up in their uniforms, and it becomes impossible for anyone to control the crowd. Except Herb knows how to hold them back. Gently he looks through the giant TV screen, opens his arms to them, and asks,

"Is America happy with the MegaRama?"

"Yes!"

"I don't hear you, America!"

"YES!"

Herb signals to the orchestra and they begin to play, *Oh Say, Can You See*.

The Army, Navy, and Marines are at full attention. The football and baseball players have their clenched fists on their chests, each wrestler holds his partner on his thigh, and each blond is a flying angel with her outstretched hands and face held high, a flag in her bright white teeth. The end is choreographed perfectly. Each cheerleader kisses Herb on his cheeks or his forehead or his lips and takes her position to his side or back. A few kneel by his side, hold his palms to their faces, and look up to him as if asking for something, and for some reason are moved by him, by the

music and the entire situation, and begin to cry. Hundreds in the crowd are moved to tears. And Herb looks at all of them, extending his palms to the entire gathering while his eyes and smile convey that he has received them. They have his empathy, compassion, understanding and, yes, love.

With the shatter of drums, the show comes to its rousing end, and the TV stations switch to commercials, and it's time for Herb Altovsky to get out of here as fast as he can to catch his next gig on time. Just then he sees his manager, his good Clara Schenectady, nodding at him, which means, "Let's go." She collects Herb's stuff. "You got your last one for tonight with 'People,' it shouldn't be long."

Herb's on his second wind. "Hell, Clara, that was crazy out there. And remember? When I first pitched this? Yeah, there were a few takers, but hey, there was no way anyone could have guessed at the size of this shindig. Hell, none of the real big guys wanted any part of it, remember that? For crying out loud, I was practically a nobody sometime around this time last year."

2. Sometime Around This Time Last Year

"Around this time last year," Herb says to the panel on "People," the famous late night TV show, "I was just another broadcaster for some out-of-the-way channel, setting my gig for some out-of-the-way events. For some strange quirky reason someone from a big-time station started taping the final sections of a spelling bee contest in Waltham, Massachusetts, for which I happened to be the moderator. The final two contestants were up and were doing the twenty-drop list. The way the proceedings went to their thrilling climax was recorded by this someone, and he turned it in to his boss, who in turn turned it in to her boss, and soon this whole shebang ran, believe it or not, as a filler right after 'Greatest Moments in Sports.'"

"The coolness with which Herb interviewed the winner, Ashish Desai from Maryland, was an instant hit, as we all so well know," says the show's host. "Let's run those famous moments once again." And they show Herb running

the spelling bee's famous final moments.

"Ashish, here you are after two days of intense battling for the Bee Championship. Started with the top three hundred in the U.S. and were down to the top one hundred this morning and then to fifty, thirty, and later two, and YOU were one of them. How did you feel at that moment?"

"Well, I was kind of excited, but I knew I had to keep my cool."

"Great. And here was the last word, and it was *cauterize*. When you heard the word what did you think? What were your feelings at that specific moment?"

"Well, I knew the word *cauter* is from the French for *caut`ere*, but I was not sure whether it was an *a* or an *e* and so I had to think of it etymologically from Latin for *cauterium* and backtrack it to the early Encarta English and American syntax to derive its metaroot from Greek for *caustic*. So I was sure it was an *e* followed by an *i*."

"Once the judges rang the gong, how did you feel?"

"Well, I was kind of excited, but I also had to keep my cool."

"Excellent. Ashish, the new champion of the spelldown bee. And one more thing, what does it mean, *cauterize*? Tell our viewers."

"I think it means *branding of humans*, but more generally it is a way to stop bleeding through branding."

"Great. Ashish Desai from Maryland.

Congratulations. And remember folks, it is never too late to cauterize."

The panelists on "People" are ecstatic and clapping virulently. "That was it," says one panelist. "That was the clincher, *it is never too late to cauterize*. It's not exactly what he said, but how he said it: with a whimsical, almost disarming, smile and gentleness."

"Yes, exactly," says the host. "There was—and is—in your smile, Herb, a strange kind of love and consideration that jumps out and captures our something inside, almost like an undiscovered yearning. Then, of course, what happened after that show is common knowledge. Letters,

e-mails, blogs, YouTube downloads, hits on Facebook and Twitter, cell phone inquiries crammed for weeks wanting to know more about Herb Altovsky: who, what, how, where, why, when, with whom, what now and what next. And now you are a big TV star and on almost all anti-smoking advertisements, Got-Milk sponsorships, hair care attestations, and even, if I may say, a big crowd puller within the talk show circles.”

The straight man looks at the camera now, then concludes, “And here is the review about Herb written by Sarah Wittgenstein from *Cover*. ‘Everywhere, everyone pines for that embracing invitation of his hands, his soothing palms, his smart sayings, and his drawn-out smile. We long to get near him, get to know him. We itch to be close to him like football players with the quarterback, like when sport stars pour a huge keg of limey energy drink on their coach after the team wins the nationals. Herb extracts the same respect, love, fear, and awe from all of us. He is all that as one wholesome package deal.’”

The show ends. Clara gives Herb a ride home as usual. “Ready to unwind and call it a night finally?”

“Can’t yet. Mother is probably waiting and totally antsy. Remember, we have our store run all set up for tonight.”

Clara is just pulling into the driveway. “Geez, Herb, I wonder how you can keep it together, with the shows and all and still taking care of your mother.”

3. Taking Care of Mother

Taking care of Mother is not exactly what Herb’s got in his mind, because he is still on a post show high, and just as he closes the back storm door, he hears, “Kill Joy, you come here this instant.” Herb’s mother is yelling from her bedroom. She is now fully awake.

Herb enters his mother’s bedroom. She is lying on her back. Huge pillows prop up her head. The only lights are those from the TV. Her nightgown is everywhere, and her huge thighs glint as the light from the TV flickers on

them. Months have rolled on, and Mrs. Altovsky has put on an additional thirty-one pounds to make her current weight close to 635 pounds. Herb had to call in construction workers to widen the doors. Special ramps had to be set up to push her and her wheelchair into his car. Invariably, a hand towel or a wayward napkin finds a home within some unseen fold of her skin, and the resulting discomfort annoys her. Only Sylvia, the freelance geriatric caregiver, knows how to bathe her. Only Sylvia calls her *Mama*.

“I was just getting in, Mother.”

“You come in and kiss your mother when you get home, not encourage Sylvia.”

“You were sleeping, Mother, and Sylvia’s long gone.”

“You just make sure with all your grand appointments to take me to WholeLots. You know I am always asking Sylvia to take me. *Take me to WholeLots Sylvia. Please*, I says. And she just stands there and smiles and goes, *K.J. loves to take you there every time, Mama. So I don’t want to spoil your poor child’s trip to the mall with his mommy*, and she smiles in that crazy sort of way, and I know that sort of smile, so I says, *Don’t go showing your teeth to my boy*, and then she says, *Don’t worry, your boy has a lot of growing up to do, and where he needs to go, he won’t be hurting to see some of my teeth*. So I says to her, *You watch when you squeeze them sponges, and don’t let no soapy water drip on the floor or on your shirt*. You be careful with her now, K.J.”

“Sure, Mother.” Herb is curt.

“Don’t *sure*, Mother me. You think I don’t know about what’s going on between you and all the other sluts out down there where you work? You think just cause your mama is homebound, she knows nothing about all them TV floozies who wrap you around their little pussy fingers and lather you up with their glitter? You stay away from those hussies. I don’t want you prancing about town with them men, either. You come home to your mother like a good boy when it’s all over, and you know you have to take me to WholeLots.”

“Yeah, the manager left me a message in my

voicemail. We can get there around 10:30. It looks like everything is set up, Mother. He says we are on for tonight. I am going to set up the wheelchair in the car, the ramp, and the cart now and then take a shower.” Herb does not tell Mrs. Altovsky about all the rejection calls from Elderly Care, Tri-Point Chapel, Altenheim, A Touch of Home, Sunrise Inc., and Halcyon Days.

“You better hustle now with all them jigs, you know it takes a while to get them all set up and now hurry with my meatloaf, will ya? How long does your mother have to wait to get something to eat around here? Sylvia left yesterday’s herrings in the freezer. Get them all thawed out. You know how I hate ice shavings in them herrings.”

“Yes, Mother.” Herb is in the garage setting up the wheelchair and the ramp, as well as the steel shopping carts and rollers that are attachable to the three sides of the wheelchair. These wheelchairs are specially designed and new with a remote control for speed and turns. Mrs. Altovsky could move around in the old one only if she put her good leg out to shove herself.

Mrs. Altovsky is yelling from her bedroom as Herb comes in. “Just don’t let me get to sleep. You know how I hate to wake up in the middle.”

“I am going to shower. We got time, Mother.” He is in her bedroom now, and the top of her dresser is filled with medicines, lacy doilies, blue pet rocks, half-used makeup, and about a gazillion pictures in small and large photo frames. The corner of his eye catches the family picture in the silver frame on the corner of the dresser. That’s the one taken at Cedar Point, when he was barely eleven, with his father and mother on either side pressing their cheeks to his and all smiling in front of the Corkscrew Rollercoaster, the pride of Cedar Point. That’s the one taken before his father’s leg was amputated and when Mother would religiously weed whack the yard. That’s the same one that the bipolar Sylvia had pointed to when she told him sometime last year, “Herbie, you were so cute, and a spitting image of Mama even way back then.”

Hearing that, Herb was all shaken up, but made a

good comeback.

“Spitting image of my mother is not how I wanna picture myself.” He laughed a little too loudly. “Oops—pun unintended.”

Very rarely does Herb Altovsky have to rehearse his smile in front of a mirror. He usually avoids a full-frontal at the mirror anyway. But for a second tonight, he is in the mood to rehearse, and so he slowly takes his time to deliver, in front of the mirror, the words and smile, those motions that got him so famous, and for which a lot of people pay a lot of good money. Tonight he is happy that he has got it all down pat. Especially the smile he is going to pull at the right moment for the camera, the security guards, their friends, and everyone later at WholeLots.

4. Later at WholeLots

Later at WholeLots, the manager is only too happy to indulge Mrs. Altovsky in a free run of the store past its closing time. Hey, after all, Herb is a great guy, and everyone knows Mrs. Altovsky. The manager does his thing like always: “Yes, you are right on time as usual, cause we are just getting ready with the outdoor nativity inventory which is going on sale, and we can get you some real good deals with the Supersize Blow-up Bart Simpson Santa with cherubs and angels doing wheelies behind in the giant ATV that’s got mega-monster truck tires studded with chainsaw spikes, and hell, I can even throw in the dresses for free.”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, I want them all. You got any of the demons and savages left?” Mrs. Altovsky is always asking for vintage and can never refuse trends.

“Geez bazookas. I think we just ran out on the closing stock bargain we had just last week, and you know what? Just last evening I had a lady come in here asking for that exact same thing. Well, wait a minute, let me—” He gets his pager and presses a red button. “Hi, Sammy, you got any of that American Camaraderie Collection left over? Any returns, maybe? Yeah, I know. Well, Tina said she saw some on the top shelf—yeah? Can you bring them over? I got a

customer in Aisle 69. Great, thanks, Sammy. Well, you are in luck. Sam will be here in a minute, and he can help you with whatever. Oh, there he is, you are in good hands.”

Now Sam is all tall and thin and is new to this setup and is working on commission, and is all ready to go. “Here you go with demons and savages of the ACC, and now they just got the new series with faceless hoods, charlatans, shysters, and quacks, did you see them?”

“No, no, no, no, I want them all.”

“No problem.” Then Sam tells Herb, “I got her, Mr. Altovsky,” and handles the wheelchair perfectly toward the section that’s got faceless hoods, charlatans, shysters, and quacks.

Herb sits on the bench near the cash counter. He knows exactly where the security cameras are, and he knows that all the security officers, the secretaries, their buddies, telephone operators, janitors, and maintenance crews are watching him, waiting for his turn toward them on their screen to smile and say his line. He loves to keep them waiting. The right moment will arrive, and only he will know when it does. And when that optimal mood reveals itself, he will turn to the camera with utmost control and exhibit incredible flamboyance. He will not disappoint them. It’s all taken care of. In the security room, all the officers and their pals, the secretaries, their buddies, telephone operators, janitors, and maintenance crew are craning their necks and are looking at Herb with awe and expectation. They know he will not disappoint them.

Suddenly Sam’s back and is just standing there, and he has a new box with the title *Three Midgets*. “Mrs. Altovsky, meet the three midgets who have taken America by storm: Mr. Vain, Mrs. Rogues, and Ms. Braggadocios.”

“No, no, no, no, I want no midget ruining my party.” Now is when she clips on her wheelchair and scampers through the various aisles, and Herb knows her enthusiasm will have no limit now as her *heees*, *haaws*, *woooes*, and *waaass* echo through the vacant aisles from and between the various counters while she fills her steel crib shopping basket with various artifacts of sea-blue terracotta, dark

green marble, pure synthetic ceramic, deep purple soapstone, and off yellow granite, all solid, bold, lumpy, bulky, made-in-China molds of various gores, globs, ghouls, grotesques, gargoyles, gremlins, goliaths, gargantuans, goblins, golliwarts, gobblers, geezers, gruesomes, ghastlys, grimlocks, grinches, godzillas, and giant gilias.

And as she proudly rips across one aisle to the other claiming her collectibles, stuffing the goodies in the steel baskets on the sides and back and shaking her head with hectic vigor and across the distance shouting undecipherable codes to the winds such has *whoohaam*, *jinnгаа*, *kaaboose*, *K.J.*, and more *K.J.*, Herb knows that the dignified moment that everyone has been waiting for in front of the security camera has arrived.

With a sheer, no-nonsense smile and bewitching seduction, he slowly turns towards the camera, the security officers, the secretaries, their friends, telephone operators, janitors, and the maintenance crew, and all the awe-struck fans witness firsthand Herb's signature smile as he extends both his hands with evergreen flourish toward them and with open palms slowly relays, "May the healing begin."



PERSPECTIVES

CAROL NEWMAN



Georgia O'Keeffe knew
that it all comes down to bones,
empty sockets and tunnel vision views
of sky and earth.

Diagnosis: fractured pelvis, Alzheimer's
Dementia Axis I. The rat disappears
over the side of the bed, his tail like a
shoestring trailing across the blanket.

Bleached white pelvis on sand,
concentrated view of blue sky, infinity
seen through a leg socket. Transience of
life, final purity of death.

A crack runs diagonally where embryos
once curled. A woman waves at
the window, a dog on the roof, seen
through unfamiliar glasses, bewildered views.

Cow's Skull With Calico Roses, 1932.
Sweep of bone, curve of eye, two white
roses, one over teeth like a Spanish dancer.
Vestiges of femininity, raw beauty.

Memories crowd the brain
like a stream of bubbles, too quickly
float out of reach, iridescent,
shining for mere moments, then gone.

BINARY RHYTHM

JAMES BALDWIN



10010010
10110110
10010010
10110110

11001100
01010100
11001100
01010100

00100101
11001010
00100101
11001010

01101101
00010001
01101101
00010001

ON THE SEVENTH DAY

SHANE PHILLIPS



One morning a long, long time ago, our Lord and Savior woke up and gave a mighty stretch. He put on his favorite pair of slippers and white robe, walked to the bathroom, and brushed his teeth. He sat down in his favorite chair (the one with a fold out leg rest, reclining back, and dual cup holders), and thought to Himself, “I wonder if I can create a world in seven days?”

On the first day, God made light. On the second, God created the oceans and lakes. By days three and four He had created the land, the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the fifth day, God flooded the world with a menagerie of ducks, pigs, flamingos, bears, seals, fish, hamsters, goats, snakes, mosquitoes, and poison dart frogs. Finally, on the sixth day, He lovingly gifted this new world to a couple of smooth apes that He named “humans.” The rest of the story will tell you that God, after putting in six days of creation, was ready for a nap. He had put in six long, hard days of labor, and He was ready to sit back and let freewill run its course. I, personally, find this hard to swallow. Am I to believe that my God, the creator of everything I’ve ever known and ever will know, gets winded? That my God can only do so much before His back seizes up and He becomes a bedridden construction worker? That is not *my* God.

God, the supremely omnipotent being that He is, is a real “go-getter.” He’s the kind of guy that puts in an eighty hour week and then says to Himself, “You know what? Maybe I should do some more overtime.” Six days? Not for my God. My God buckles down for the full seven. No naps, no coffee breaks.

It is my belief that on the seventh day God sat down at his workbench, folded His hands, twiddled his thumbs, and rocked back and forth in an old, squeaky chair. “Hmm...” He might have said, “I’ve made all of these beautiful lands and animals, all these sunsets and all these oceans, but what am I going to do with all these spare parts? I’ve got a wing, a pouch, a couple feet, a few eyes, and a bunch of feathers. What in the heck can I create with all these?” And so we come to what I believe God created on the seventh day. On the seventh day, God created humor.

The duckbilled platypus. What in the hell is this? It’s almost like God said “Let’s see: I’ve created ducks, woodchucks, and beavers; so how about I take the beak off the duck, the tail off the beaver, and the body off the woodchuck? Haha! BRILLIANT!”

Penguins. They’re birds that can’t fly, but can swim faster than most fish. Again, what in the hell is this? You know that God took the Popsicle sticks from his Hungry Man dessert dinner and Crazy-Glued them to a bowling ball with flippers. And then, just for shits, He put them in a forsaken icehole to waddle about for a few thousand years.

Another mystery is the sea horse. Most likely the ugliest animal on God’s green earth, the sea horse is nothing more than a half eaten holy burrito that God thought would make a good snack for a passing eel or hungry shark. The only problem was that nothing on earth would eat the damn thing. God, being the avid environmentalist He is, recycled the burrito. He painted a couple of eyes on it, gave it a few fins, and just like that, the sea horse was born.

These animals all show the same thing: They show that God isn’t some tightass executive sitting in the clouds, judging people from on high. He’s a goofball, a goofball

who likes to play as hard as He works.

I guess when it's all said and done, I am still left with one question: why is God never portrayed as a comedian when there is so much humor in his work? With platypuses and penguins and possums and sea horses and ostriches and squirrels that fly and blah blah blah, so on and so forth, how can we not laugh? How can we turn a blind eye to God's punch lines?

God is one funny son of a gun, and wants all of His children to enjoy what He took so much pleasure in creating. The Sabbath shouldn't be a day of rest; it should be a day of jest!

I leave you with this recommendation. What if every Sunday your family went to the zoo and walked around God's gallery for a couple hours? It would be considerably less painful than church, and the possums could probably use the extra attention.



REQUIEM FOR A SOLITARY MAN

PAT MCQUISTON



A moving van arrived
at our neighbor's house
on this December day.

He died alone,
when first daffodil
thrust golden trumpet
above cold earth,
and cardinal strutted
bright red vest.

He left possessions,
a baby grand piano,
now hauled away, sold
to strangers eager
to hear notes long-stilled.

We wondered how he'd judged
the passing of his ninety years.

We, whose tapestries are
from threads of others,
respond to patterns—bright,
dark, and undefined.

Our neighbor wove his own cloth,
resisting all intruding threads,
content, it seems,
with his own design.

HUNTING SEASON

SHAIENDRA GAJANAN



jack's in his red-white-black plaid fleece
irish wool kinda, only thicker,
standing just about where
the brick-look-like siding meets grade
staining them concrete and cinder blocks
forever with his spew of chaw
tonguing his toothpick like
a uniforked asp or a rattler
making them sucking sounds
pumping his cock all getting ready
and his dog's figuring it's that time.
jack's checking out the backyard
for gerbils, raccoons, beavers, groundhogs,
critters, rabbits, squirrels or porcupines even.
after jack lets go one big bang
the dog gets totally riled up
starts bolting into the backwoods
dragging the carcass and ripping them insides.
jack high-fives the dog and it yanks on his jerky.

now the dog's horsing around in the red pickup
way-squished in the rear quad-cab.
jack's getting in, cranks up the radio first,
lays the shotgun on the side.
the dog's going wild and jumps in front
and lands on the frigging barrel,
blasts jack's privates.
the noise hustles the dog to the gulch
weird-assing for some unshot cadaver.
jack's balls are with the winder glass,
leather, gravel and peat, all looped up.

later sheriff maggie's whistling
into the gorge for the dog,
and here the SPCA guy with his bottled water
is with her getting all touchy-touchy
oh mag hon! just chill will ya?
bud'll smell herself home.

SNOW, THE COMMANDER OF EXISTENCE

RHYS WEST



As I look to the east,
the sky mixed with emotion,
I notice a speck
floating toward me,
gleaming with light.
Catching something out of the corner of my eye,
I look to the west,
still dark and smooth as black satin
with armies of these mysterious flakes.
Making an about-face,
I turn back east
just in time to catch one.
I open up my hand, and there lies nature's
steppingstone: the building block,
the rock that starts life in the palm of my hand.

THE IRONY OF FIGHTING DEMONS AT A PLACE CALLED ANGEL'S

ROSS SHARKEY



I entered the diner just in time to see a scruffy looking man nudge his way past me with a cigarette housed neatly behind each of his ears. I held the door open for him and watched as he leaned against the wall outside and lit up both of the cigarettes.

I'd only been in Angel's Diner once before, and that was during my interview the week prior. It was a fifties diner. It seemed like a restaurant with a concept such as this would have some real potential, but the owner had messed it up by poorly maintaining the atmosphere. The jukebox looked worn and abused, likely from the customers visiting from the bar next door at 2:00 a.m. every weekend. Some of the tacky pictures and ornaments on the wall were crooked, damaged, or missing the initial luster they'd likely had when the diner was opened eleven years before. While the floor appeared well-swept and mopped, it was clear that the manager didn't yet see the need to replace many of the cracked or flat-out broken floor tiles.

I held my standard-issue Angel's Diner convict identification tag up to my face to read it before loosely

attaching it to my blouse. It read “Carolyn.” It’s spelled “Carolyn,” and I go by *Carrie*. Fuck-a-doodle-do. Whatever, it was just a high school summer gig anyway. I was donning the typical white, worn blouse with black slacks, standard at just about any diner in the area. For the most part I didn’t mind the way the outfit made me look. I liked that I could let my long, wavy brown hair fall over my shoulders and chest to camouflage the tacky nametag. I also liked the way this brought out some of the features in my face that had only recently won a vicious teenage battle against acne. I didn’t really like wearing makeup, but just a little bit here and there really seemed to make a difference and even (dare I say) made me look relatively desirable—if I were to choose to give off this perception. The pants were whatever.

I began to make my way through the diner. I noticed a few of the red booths had some gashes in them, exposing the uncomfortable material beneath to the customers. Behind the front counter I noticed several bottles of booze lined up on top of one of those red 1950’s-style Coca-Cola refrigerators. I made my way toward the back in search of guidance.

I entered the breakroom. There was a tall, skinny teen sitting at the only table, waiting eagerly for his Hot Pocket to finish incinerating in the microwave. His hair was coifed into a perfect pompadour, perfect for a fifties diner. The hairstyle looked good on him, almost as if he were a New Age half brother of Arthur Fonzarelli. His shirt was untucked and wrinkled, but didn’t have a speck of dirt on it, and his skateboarding shoes were just barely freed from under the cloth-trap that was his baggy slacks.

He was watching some corny horror movie in which clowns were turning on the citizens of a fictional city and hacking them to pieces. I could hardly stand to see him watching the screen so intently. After standing there for roughly thirty seconds, I noticed that his eyes hadn’t moved away from the TV, not even to blink. His Hot Pocket exploded loudly in the microwave.

“Whoa, what the shit?”

I stood there chuckling. The microwave looked

ruined.

"How long have you been standing there?" he asked, looking a little embarrassed about the state of his Hot Pocket.

"I dunno, maybe a minute. I saw the whole thing happen, it was pretty sweet. I was gonna tell you to turn off the microwave, but you looked pretty deep into what is, quite possibly, the worst horror movie I've ever had the misfortune of watching thirty seconds of." It was my first day and I kinda felt like being a bitch, in a friendly new girl way. The manager emerged from a back office.

"Jeff, what the hell are you doing? Clean that mess up and get back out there and seat our customers."

"Yes sir, Mr. Wiley, sir!" Jeff saluted.

Mr. Wiley looked a little drunk. It was only 1:30 in the afternoon. He turned his sights to me.

"And you must be Carolyn, huh?"

"Yep, that's me. Except I go by *Carrie*, and I was hoping you'd be able to fix my nametag."

"Yeah, we'll get right on that. Listen, have you ever waited tables before?"

I'd told him the week before that I'd worked a few years at a diner down the street. He was either drunk or had the memory of a goldfish.

"Yeah, I have. Remember, I worked for two years down at—"

"Oh yeah, that's right. Okay, well, go ahead and follow Jeff around for a bit while he seats customers. I've got more paperwork in my office." And just like that, with his large posterior, hairpiece, broken glasses, and fake Italian shoes, Wiley stumbled awkwardly back into his office. I looked over at Jeff, who was trying to get the microwave cleaned up. I had to admit, it was kinda cute.

"So, what's the plan then, Captain Explosion?"

"Hey, if you were as intent as I was about finding out whether or not that small Irishman was going to be hacked to pieces by a clown who just happened to be on PCP, then you'd be edgy too. That's some scary shit," he said with surprising confidence. "Anyway, let's get out on the floor."

The scruffy cigarette king was on his way back inside.

“Oh this guy coming inside now is Vietnam-Tom.

Don’t mention anything about any wars or he’ll corner you with an M-16 that I swear he keeps in a locker in the breakroom.”

“I see Wiley has you showing the new waitress around the place, eh Jeff? Word to the wise—don’t let him corrupt you just yet.” Tom chuckled to himself and hobbled off back to the kitchen.

“Eff you Tom!” Jeff yelled back in front of all the customers. He started to laugh before Wiley roughed his way back into our vicinity.

“Okay, Carrie. Do you know your way around yet? I need you to cover tables one through six. Ask Jeff if you have any questions.” Wiley vanished again. I found myself feeling nervous that I’d had no formal training to work in this diner. Sure, it couldn’t have been that different than my previous job, but hell, I didn’t even know where Table 1 was. Jeff sensed my nervousness.

“No worries. Tables one through six are over there. It’ll be just like your old job, and I’ll give you a hand when you get stuck.” I smiled at him and made my way over to that section before realizing that no one was sitting in it yet. I went back to shadowing Jeff. He showed me where everything was, what to do in case of *this* or *that*, and who to give my orders to. I watched him as he went to clean up one of my tables for me while I was bringing an order to another customer. The people at the table he was cleaning were a typical middle-aged couple, and the gentleman had not finished his burger. Jeff immediately looked to the woman with a big grin on his face.

“Miss, could you do me a favor and ridicule your husband mercilessly or even force him to sleep on the couch tonight for not finishing his burger?” he said with a grin. The man looked back up at him.

“Hey, now that was a cheap shot. It was a big burger.”

“Oh, yeah, sure it is. I’ll just bring your plate back and tell the chef you couldn’t eat his burger because you

left your testicles at home.”

I really thought Jeff was pushing his luck.

“Come back in ten minutes and I’ll have it finished!”

The man laughed at Jeff.

“Atta boy!”

There was a lot I could take away from this confused teenager.

I was quite pleased with how things went on my first day. I had just finished my junior year of high school and was hoping to save up a good chunk of change to support my various habits for my senior year. I suppose there wasn’t all that much to support in retrospect. In the past I’d promptly spent most of my paychecks on clothes, junk food, useless electronics, and weed. I guess that didn’t leave much room for saving, but I was going to try this summer.

I had built a reputation at school for being somewhat of a recluse. Sure, I had some friends at school that I conversed with, but those relationships typically stayed on school grounds. I guess I began building this status for myself sophomore year when I lost my boyfriend to my best friend. I really didn’t think that happened as often as the media portrayed it. I had only just lost my mother to cancer a few months prior to this, and had absolutely no one except Mary Jane to turn to for help. I was alone.

Regardless of my social stature, I still enjoyed making myself look nice in as little time possible. Like any other girl, I enjoyed being admired by the opposite sex, even if they did think I was batshit insane.

Over the next few days, Jeff and I seemed to share similar work schedules, and by the second or third day, I pretty much had things down. The hardest part had been memorizing the menu, and that’s always difficult starting out.

A few days ago, Wiley had fired Jeff for the third time this month. Jeff had been talking with a customer who just happened to be his buddy. In Wiley’s defense, they were talking for quite a long time. Jeff had stopped keeping track of how often he’d been fired. He figured that every

time he got fired, he just got the afternoon off and would get to come back the next day with no questions asked. Wiley was normally too drunk to take notice.

Jeff gradually rubbed off on me. I even called a customer a wimp for failing to finish his grossly oversized sundae. He laughed with me and gave me a \$10 tip on his \$27 meal. Awesome.

I spent some time with Jeff outside of work, and our friendship continued to grow. We'd talk about things. Not cliché things that I couldn't tell anyone else, but things that maybe no one else wanted to talk about. We'd often go out to get ice cream or hang out at another diner after work and bullshit for hours about useless junk. I loved it. It'd normally go something like this:

"Okay, here's a few guys. Would you rather sleep with guy number one who seems to have some severe aesthetic deficiencies, number two whose head has chosen not to grow at the same pace as the rest of his body, or number three who has apparently been taking steroids since the age of three?" Jeff asked, throwing a ketchup-covered pickle against the window of Burger Barn. I instantly burst into laughter and held my hands over my face in embarrassment when the three guys saw me glancing their way. Jeff was still waiting for a response.

"What? You want all three, then?"

"Jeff!"

"Okay, okay, I get it. All three it is then. Carrie's gonna score a hat trick tonight!"

I punched him in the arm between breaths of laughter. Even though he was being a jackass, it was reasons like this that I liked spending time with Jeff. I knew he cared about me in some way or another, and making me laugh was something I really liked about him. Time well-wasted is time I look forward to.

I grew to count on Jeff for his unusual thoughtfulness. I didn't realize this until one day when it was raining extremely hard outside. Upon opening my garage to drag my bike outside, I noticed a black Chevy Cavalier parked in my driveway. There was a familiar face

waving me over to the opened driver's window.

"Lookin' for a ride, Gorgeous?"

I smiled and climbed in the passenger seat, my hair already dripping wet from the six second journey to his car.

"I didn't even know you had a car," I commented, wringing my hair out the window.

"There's a lot of things you don't know about me. For example, did you know that I once ate forty-two breakfast burritos in one sitting?" He laughed and put the car in motion. This became a regular occurrence with Jeff. I found him waiting patiently in my driveway every single morning that it rained. Without fail.

Jeff, Tom, and I shared some oddly interesting and useless conversations during slow weekday afternoons. We'd joke about things such as whether or not a middle-aged blond customer's breasts were real or fake. It was always Jeff who started these conversations. He'd normally begin with a comment along the lines of, "Hey, did you see the rack on table three? Five bucks on fake." Another conversation that I recall didn't get started until one day after work when we smoked a joint by the dumpster behind the diner. He'd been bothered all day, and I guess all it took was some hand-rolled happiness to get the words out.

"You know that I'm not much of a fan of your gender as a whole?"

"I could assume that much based on the smartass attitude you give me most of the time," I replied, chuckling. He ignored my comment.

"You start out on one of two ladders with women. You know that?"

I shrugged.

"You're either on the friendship ladder or the ladder whose rungs are devoted to those she wants to sleep with," he began between drags.

"Ladder? What are you—" I tried to interject before I was cut off.

"It's like the guys on the friendship ladder are just there in case she's upset and lonely for a night. Then suddenly you're on an emotional rollercoaster spiraling out

of control until you find yourself blind and right back on top of the friendship ladder. As if that's not bad enough, then you have to try dealing with the paralyzing feeling that comes with being someone she loves but doesn't want. They build you up and up and when you try to make that leap onto the other ladder, you lose your footing and fall. Let me tell you about how much it hurts when you hit the ground from that high in the air."

I paused for a lack of words.

"I—I'm sorry Jeff. I didn't even know there was someone you'd been seeing, or I would have tried to offer some advice before it got to this level." I replied, moving over to the bench sitting down next to him. He leaned over and rested his head on my shoulder. He took another drag and sighed.

"I know how cruel the opposite sex can be, having lost my last boyfriend to someone who I thought was my good friend. Frigid bitch." I glanced down to find him at a loss for words. His breathing increased in speed.

I was late for work the next day. It was one of those mornings where you oversleep to the point that you aren't late for work yet, as long as you can make it there in the next two and a half minutes. I ran out the door with my hair a mess, my breath consumed by disgusting bacteria, and my work clothes wrinkled. Jeff wasn't there when I arrived twenty-five minutes late. It was difficult to take Wiley's long, painful lecture without Jeff there to make smartass jokes afterwards. I didn't take it to heart; I figured Wiley would forget by the afternoon anyway or find someone else to beat up on. I consulted the schedule after Wiley freed me from my cage. Jeff was scheduled for the morning shift with me.

"Hey, Tom, you seen Jeff this morning?" I asked, looking over to Tom flipping pancakes above his head for dramatic effect.

"Nah, he didn't come in this morning. I think that's half the reason Wiley is in a bad mood today. I'd be careful what you say around him."

I had to go about finishing the rest of my miserable

shift alone. Wiley wasn't happy about Jeff's absence and assigned one of the other waitresses to serve as hostess. He must have had absolutely no interest in any of his employees because he chose Prissy Patricia. To give you an idea as to how she got her nickname, she wears lots of pink and says "ohmygosh!" a lot. Even I, the still somewhat new girl, had to help her choose which tables to seat the customers at. Wiley emerged every so often to check on things but made no effort to correct any problems. It was a long and arduous day. On days like this Jeff and I would normally smoke a joint while we walked home and make fun of all the stupid customers we'd seen. His absence proved more bothersome than I would have liked. My phone rang on my walk home from work and the caller ID read "Captain Explosion."

"Hey, Dork, where have you been?"

"Carrie? My name's Dan, I'm Jeff's older brother." It was a voice I wasn't expecting to hear.

"Oh yeah, Jeff has talked about you a few times. Why are you on his phone?"

"Well, something happened last night."

"What? Is everything okay?"

"He got mugged as he walked home last night, after he left you. I dunno what you guys were doing out so late, but Jeff tried to fight the guy off. He had a knife, Carrie. I thought Jeff would want you to be down here based on how often he talks about you."

"Oh my god! Please tell me he's going to be all right," I said in a panic, my eyes beginning to water.

"The doctors think he's going to be okay, but he's still in bad condition. The knife hit him just under his heart. He was very lucky."

Jeff lay unconscious on his uncomfortable hospital cot. His face was pale, and his lips looked deep blue. He was breathing and all the monitors showed a steady pulse, but I still couldn't stand to see him like that. A tall, handsome doctor came into the room.

"I'm going to have to ask you to leave now. Visiting

hours are over, and I need to keep a close eye on this patient.”

“But I just got here. He’s my best friend and—”

“I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to go. He needs consistent attention and your presence may interrupt that.”

I couldn’t remember the last time I cried over anything, let alone over a person who could draw so many strong feelings out of me. With my eyes watering, I walked with Dan out of the room. He offered comforting words as we traversed the long, poorly lit hallway out of the hospital. I took the long way home.

Every chance I got, I called Jeff’s cell phone with the hopes that he’d finally answer it to tell me himself how he was doing. Ring after ring after ring, there was no response. I went to bed early that night.

I had the next day off from work and decided I had to get to the hospital. I wasn’t gonna bullshit around all day with this awful feeling in my stomach like a teenage girl waiting on the results of a pregnancy test. I needed to know if he was going to be all right.

I rounded the corner into Jeff’s room. The first thing I noticed was his cell phone that lay shattered on the floor, followed by Jeff looking down on the pieces angrily from his bed. I stood in the doorway watching him for a moment. He was better than yesterday but still looked like shit. There were a few small cuts and bruises on the right side of his face that I’d failed to notice the last time I saw him. He looked up and noticed me.

“Carrie!” he yelled, bending over his wound in pain. I ran up and gave him a hug carefully.

“Don’t do this to me! Angel’s hasn’t been the same, and I’ve been sitting around all day worried about you with no one to comfort me but some prissy waitresses, and my boss who looks as though he hasn’t shown a single emotion in years! Why didn’t you call me back?”

“Well, as you can see, I had a little bit of a falling out with my cell phone. It said some insulting things about my family, and now we aren’t on speaking terms. Oh, and

it doesn't get service in here. The nurses were giving me a hard time for trying to use a cell phone in a hospital, but I tried anyway and then kicked its ass in frustration." It looked like it hurt him to speak.

"Well, are you gonna be all right?"

"The doctors seem to think so, but I've seen enough creepy murder stories on TV to know that patients often die after doctors tell them things like that."

My thoughts exactly. "That's what I was worried about! I've missed you, even though it's only been about a day and a half." I was beginning to get all girly on him. That was new.

"I may be in here for a while longer. They want to keep an eye on me for a little while, and I think I heard one of them talking about physical therapy." He didn't seem all too keen about the idea. I wasn't either, to be honest. I wanted him back with me at work and in my life as soon as possible.

"So when are you gonna get back to work? We have a lot to catch up on to get things back to normal."

"Well," he paused for a minute, "I don't actually know if I'm going to be coming back to work."

"What? Why not? I need you," I stammered.

"Well, first of all, it hurts to move. But there's only a month of summer left, and I think I'm gonna be in physical therapy for most of that time."

"Okay, well, I can come visit you in the hospital and see you during the school year when I'll be working less, if at all." I sounded desperate.

"Carrie, I haven't been totally honest with you," he replied with his head down. "I'm not from around here. Somehow it never came up in conversation, but I live in Brampton. My parents bring us up here every year because they get sick of the ritzy lifestyle there and prefer a smaller atmosphere for a few months, but because of my accident, they've decided to sell their place here."

"You mean you aren't coming back?" I asked, my eyes watering again.

"I thought I should tell you sooner rather than later."

His head was still down. “I know you really cared about our friendship, and I can’t tell you how awful I feel. I come up here every year and work for Wiley and go through a day-to-day routine with whoever is working at Angel’s. It was always the same bullshit, and I never really connected with anyone, but I always managed each year because it’s such a big change of pace from what can be expected in Brampton. I wasn’t expecting to find someone who cared about me, or someone I was capable of saying I felt strongly for.”

I couldn’t say anything. I just rested my head on his shoulder and started to cry.



I stopped smoking so much pot after Jeff was gone. It was one of the few vices that helped me in getting through my boring and melodic days alone. Jeff taught me a lot of things in that one short summer. I realized that I wasn’t a complete recluse since I’d found my best friend on the first day of a new job. I found out that there are always people to turn to if you’re willing to look for them and guide them into your life.

I kept working at Angel’s after Jeff left, which was one of the harder decisions I’d had to make in a while. I didn’t need the money because Wiley had given Jeff and me so many hours over the summer that I had a ton of tips saved up. I wanted to keep my footing at Angel’s with high hopes that I could be someone else’s “Jeff.” I wanted to pass on his Angel’s wisdom, sarcasm, and wittiness like a baton of endless, stupid knowledge that most of the other employees here would drop during the hand-off. I wanted to be that mysterious older girl who was there to console the next new guy and make him feel awkward until he earned my respect and friendship. I wanted the power that came with that.

I never did find out about that girl he was so torn up about. A large part of me always hoped that he was referring to me, like I could have had him and things would be different now. I struggled fighting off those demons until the pain went away.



LOVE, FORKS, KNIVES, AND SPOONS

JAMES BALDWIN



When I said, "I love you,"
you dropped your silverware.
Later, when you whispered, "I love you, too,"
I did not hear you—your silverware
was still ringing in my ears.

TO YOU AGAIN

DARAH WOLF



When was it?
Tuesday night?
The night when I had two tests the next day
and I decided I needed a 2 a.m. break from studying?
The night I decided to come pick you up
and rendezvous to an empty, snowy tundra of a parking
lot?
The night I decided that our loneliness created this
beautiful scandal?

Because nobody knew our secret,
nobody knew about the kiss you gave me in an empty room,
making sure no one was watching.
Salty, but there, that kiss,
sealing a lightheadedness induced by the smell of bleach
parading through the air.
Or maybe that was from a rare brush of skin, unnatural but
moving.
Nobody knew that when I smiled to myself and licked my
lips,
faintly tasting what minor perception we had of love,
that we had something to be ashamed of,
and we did.

And although the musty smell of beer and cigarette smoke
loomed in the backseat of that green sedan,
windows foggy from our warm panting breath,
you laid there with your back to me
and I traced the outline of your naked body
while you slept off your dazed drunkenness.

I sketched your hip bones,
your spine, the four stars tattooed vertically along your
vertebrae,
the crease between the back of your arm and your ribs,
and made my way to your hand resting on the windowsill
beneath the heart that I drew into the condensation
lit by the dim orange parking lot lights
gleaming through glittered ice.
I traced your knuckles
and fit my hand in yours.
With a sliver of hope that you would hold mine back,
I clung tight,
but you never noticed.

WRINKLES

CAROL NEWMAN



“Did you ever see a dead person?” I asked with my eyes on the barely breathing bird that lay on its side in front of us. We had found a robin under the bushes in the backyard, its fragile brown claws tangled hopelessly in what looked like a whole spool of unraveled black thread. Its frantic thrashing had reduced the thread to a clump of fuzz. Sherry got her mother’s scissors, and I crawled through the underbrush to snip enough threads so that the bird could wriggle free. After a few tentative steps, it found its freedom and flew through the hedges toward Clark’s house where Sherry’s mother had just that morning ironed the shirt in which they would bury Hunter Clark.

Sherry usually skirted around the kind of bluntness that came easy to me. I thought maybe it was because she was Catholic and seemed to me, a sort of part-time Protestant, to slip in and out of piety like a pair of shorts. Dead people might be one of those subjects that could send her into what I called her churchiness of pursed lips and flared nostrils, her eyes downcast behind her glasses—especially this dead person that we both had known personally.

"My mother and I went on the train all the way to Connecticut to see my Uncle Johnny. He died while we were riding the train back, but I saw him just before. It was awful."

"That doesn't count." Though I had seen only one dead person myself, a distant uncle of one of my many aunts and someone I had never even seen alive, I felt a smug superior knowledge based on close-up experience. My aunt's uncle had been really old though, and old seemed to make the experience less valid in some way I couldn't have explained. Of course I didn't point that out to Sherry. Hunter Clark had been old, too, at least to us, and we had both seen him alive.

"Doesn't it make you feel funny that your mother touched the clothes that will be touching a dead person?" I couldn't seem to get the image of those long empty sleeves hanging down on either side of the ironing board out of my mind.

Sherry's mouth went all prissy and I knew I'd gone too far. "Well, that's my mother's job and she has to do her job," she said. "Besides, it's not polite to talk about people, like someone I know who does it all the time." She actually flounced when she said this, and I thought of Patty Clark and the way she'd get out of her car, skirts swinging. Already, Sherry was a good flouncer, though she was right, of course. I was shamelessly curious about people. It was one of my major faults.

We had heard Sherry's mother say that Hunter Clark had two families but in our minds he had only one: Patty and Jane Clark. Jane Clark was Hunter Clark's second wife. We couldn't remember when his first wife had died but we knew she was Patty's mother, and we knew that Patty had a brother. Hal was grown up, years older than we were, and though he must have visited his father at times, we never saw him. Patty was almost eighteen, a year or so older than Sherry's brother. We had always thought of her as a big girl, certainly bigger than we were, evidenced by the miles of material in the gathered skirts that hung from the ironing board.

We didn't particularly like Patty but we were interested in her, I suppose because she was older and had the freedom to do what she wanted. All through her senior year, Patty hadn't ridden the school bus like the other high school kids; she drove her own car, a red convertible. No one else in town had a car like that. We would see her pull up into the driveway in that little red car and flounce up the steps and into the house with her skirts swinging and her ponytail bouncing.

The morning of Hunter Clark's funeral, we were outside jumping rope and hoping someone would notice that we were dressed exactly alike in our Bunny Bread T-shirts and navy blue peddle pushers when Patty came out.

"You girls get away from that hedge," Patty yelled across the driveway as she came down the steps on her way to her car. It wasn't her hedge; it was Sherry's. That hedge had been there long before Hunter Clark had even thought about building that house. Sherry's mother had told us that, and she should know because she had lived right there her whole life.

"You're not the boss of us," I yelled back, staying well behind the hedge.

"Ssh-hh," Sherry hissed. "My mother said we have to be respectful." I had forgotten for a moment that Hunter Clark was dead. Subdued, I watched as Patty jumped into her car and backed out of the driveway, edging, deliberately it seemed to me, way too close to the hedge.

Sherry's mother, a part-time housekeeper for the Clarks, was gone most days of the week, though she was just next door. Except for Sherry's brother, Roddy, who was five years older and either avoided us or teased us, we usually had the house to ourselves. Most days, we played jacks in the kitchen, our fingers sliding across the shiny yellow and gray linoleum scooping up the scattered jacks, the ball bouncing sharply back up into our hands. Sometimes, but not often now that he was over sixteen and interested in cars and girls, Roddy sat cross-legged on the floor making a sound every time the ball hit the floor. *Putt-ting. Putt-ting.*

When we weren't playing jacks, we jumped rope outside on the big rock that served as a stoop by the back door, or we'd sit on the front porch watching cars go by and planning our lives, which at eleven going on twelve seemed stalled somewhere between childhood and what we then perceived as that vast freedom of choices—adulthood.

Just that week, on lined notebook paper, we had written the criterion for our future husbands: mine would have green eyes and blond hair, and Sherry's must have thick, brown hair and dark eyes, suspiciously, I thought, like the novice priest that had taught her catechism class in the spring. We sealed the pages in an envelope and put it in Sherry's attic with her hope chest dish towels that came free in Fab detergent, swearing on our mothers' souls that we wouldn't open it for at least ten years.

In the meantime, we depended on jump rope chants, solemnly believing that our destinies lay somewhere in the swing of the rope.

Gypsy, Gypsy, please tell me
 what my fortune's going to be—
 Rich-man, Poor-man, Beggar-man, Thief.
 Doc-tor, Law-yer, In-di-an Chief.
 Tink-er, Tail-or, Cow-boy, Sail-or.

Since none of the boys that we knew actually had occupations yet, we always tried to get at least to *doctor* before tripping on the rope and getting stuck with someone poor, or a beggar, or worst of all, a thief. *Cowboy* seemed just as acceptable as *doctor*, and applicable to most of the boys that we knew. It's not that I would have exactly minded landing on *rich-man*, but I was too competitive and dreaded having to face the humiliation of tripping up so soon.

Who would have thought that digging a hole in the ground would be a way to become rich? Yet that's exactly what Hunter Clark had done when he dug a gravel pit in the field across the road to become the richest man in DeLancey. From Sherry's front porch we could see the little office by the scales where Jane Clark had worked right out of high school. Though we couldn't see the pit itself surrounded as it was by piles of gravel and signs that said

No Climbing on the Gravel, we saw sea gulls, white flashes, dip down behind the piles then soar up and around to head north toward Buffalo and bigger water. Roddy told us that turtles big enough to ride lived in the gravel pit. We had tried once to climb over a pile, hoping for a glimpse of the turtles, but Hunter Clark had seen us from the office and yelled, threatening to tell our parents.

No one called Jane Clark *Mrs. Clark*. She was Jane Clark and that was that. A big picture of her hung over the fireplace in their living room, soft brown hair curling around her face, brown eyes, and the slightest smile with no teeth showing at all, though we knew hers were perfect.

Once, while Sherry's mother ironed in the Clark's kitchen and we sat perched on stools at the counter, Jane Clark, in blue jeans and one of Hunter's white shirts tied at the waist, had told her how she came to marry Hunter Clark.

"Hunter, well he was Mr. Clark then, this was after his wife died, not before—" She said this part really fast, her eyes on Sherry's mother. "Well, he started asking me for advice on things like, did I think he should he get Patty a car when she turned sixteen, and should he paint the house a deeper shade of gray? Then he started asking me to lunch, then it was dinner, and then he began to bring me presents, but Hunter's just like that; he's so generous."

Without turning my head, I swiveled my eyes to see how Sherry was reacting to the statement about Hunter Clark being so generous. Sherry's mother said it was important that we do well in school so we could go to college and get good jobs and not have to work for peanuts like she had to. Sure enough, Sherry had her eyes downcast and her nostrils flared. Sherry's mother listened to Jane Clark without saying anything, pushing the iron down hard, paying particular attention to the pleat up the back of a shirt. Later, she said that it just wasn't right, Hunter marrying a girl the same age as his son.

The Clarks had the biggest house in town, two-storied, gray with white shutters. Sherry's house right next door, an old yellow clapboard behind two giant pines, was dwarfed by it. When it was raining and we couldn't jump

rope, we sat on the front porch in the swing, our toes barely grazing the cracked cement, watching cars go by and trying to guess what color car would come next and who would be driving it. The pine trees, dripping rain and smelling of pine tar, screened us from the road. Through the gap between the trees we still had a clear view of the whole neighborhood.

Part of our interest was the Clark house itself, newer than the house of anyone we knew, with thick carpets and big windows in every room. Sometimes Sherry's mother took us with her while she cleaned or while she stood in the shiny new kitchen and ironed the Clarks' clothes. If no one was home, we crept through the house, looking in all the rooms, touching nothing. Sherry's mother usually did the ironing in the morning because, she said, "In the morning light it's easier to see all the wrinkles."

And now Hunter Clark was gone. Three days before, Jane Clark had come downstairs in the morning to find Hunter just sitting stone-cold dead in the chair by the fireplace with his eyes wide open. "Heart attack," Sherry's mother said, looking at me, almost as if she thought that without an explanation my imagination would run wild.

Hunter Clark had been big-bellied with a square jaw and black horn-rimmed glasses. It seemed strange that we wouldn't see him coming and going from house to office and back again throughout the day, sometimes tossing his cigar into the hedges between the houses, always on the lookout for what we might be up to. "You girls keep away from that gravel pit, hear?" he'd say every time he saw us. He clearly was never going to forget that one time.

I imagined him in his coffin, buttoned into that starched white shirt, and I wondered if Sherry's mother had ironed his pants or if he wore a pair of suit pants that had hung on a hanger, creased and ready for just such an occasion. I wondered if Sherry's mother had ironed the first Mrs. Clark's funeral clothes, too, but something told me not to ask.

Sometimes we stayed out on the porch until late in the evening after the security light in front of the office

across the street came on and Patty and the other older kids gathered there. The light was high enough that all the insects that collected at the top didn't seem to bother the high school girls whose crisp white blouses showed bluish in the dusk. After a while, Roddy and some of his friends would show up. They shook cigarettes out of crumpled packs and lit them carelessly, as if it was something they had all been doing for a long time.

"Have a smoke," they'd say, each of them eager to have the girls take a cigarette from his pack.

Dusk was also the time when Gino Carelli made the last run of the day for the gravel pit. He'd pull up right in front of the office, brakes hissing, bent door on the driver's side making that steel on steel crack as he opened it and jumped out, slamming the door. Older than the high school boys that hung out under the light, Gino had been working at the gravel pit for a long time, right out of high school just like Jane Clark. It was Roddy who told us that that was why the girls hung out there. "They all like Gino," he said, "especially Patty."

Patty usually came prancing out of her house just before Gino pulled up in that truck to turn in the day's paperwork, and since the Clarks owned the gravel pit, she didn't have to stop under the light with the other girls, but just marched right past and walked into the office, then right back out again.

"Patty should know that Gino's way too old for her," Sherry's mother said as steam rose off one of Jane's dresses, "but that kind of thing never made any difference to the Clarks."

All day long, we'd see Gino come back to the gravel pit in his truck, drive up on the scales, his T-shirt tight around the tanned arm that hung out the window. He'd get out of the truck, and instead of going right into the office, he'd stand there and sort of casually look toward the Clark house. If we had seen Patty leave earlier that day, we wanted to run over under the light and tell him that she was gone, but Sherry's mother wouldn't let us. "You girls don't need to be standing under that light over there anytime

soon," she told us, the iron making a clean smooth trail from hem to waist on one of Patty's skirts.

Sherry and I weren't sure why the girls liked Gino. He didn't seem that special to us, but even the high school boys like Roddy showed off when Gino was there, punching each other and talking cars as if they had all been driving for years.

"Hey, Gino, how much that truck hold?" and "Looks like your shocks could use a tune-up" or "What kinda mileage you get?" they might say as they kicked tires and pretended to be knowledgeable. Gino usually leaned against his truck for a few minutes, his curly black hair shining under the glow from the light, while he bantered back and forth with the boys.

"Maybe someday you guys'll get lucky, I'll take you for a ride, show you what it takes to drive a truck like this." Sometimes he opened the hood and they leaned in over the dented fenders, their heads disappearing inside.

Since Patty was nearly out of high school, we just took for granted that the next step was for her to get married. We began to imagine how it must be between Patty and Gino. Where once we used jump rope chants to taunt our fellow classmates, we now inserted Patty and Gino, as clearly certain of the outcome of their relationship as we were of our own.

Gino and Patty under the tree,
K-I-S-S-I-N-G.

First comes love, then comes marriage,
Then comes Gino with the baby carriage.
How many babies will they have?
One-Two-Three-Four
How many more?

When we heard that Patty was going to college at the end of the summer, Sherry and I tried to decide if Patty and Gino would get married before she left, or if Gino would have to go to college too.

"They have to get married before or Gino will have to stay here," Sherry said with her usual authority. I understood the practicality of this statement, but at the

same time, I couldn't picture Gino without his truck, and a gravel delivery truck didn't fit anywhere into my as-yet-unclear view of college.

"Let's go with your mother when she irons again," I said as I swiped five sets of twosies up off the floor.

"You're just nosy, and you want to hear what Jane Clark tells my mother about Patty," Sherry said, all self-righteous and churchy, her eyelashes magnified by her glasses.

"That's not true," I said, trying to muster up as much indignity as I could considering that she was dead right. "I just like to watch your mother iron." That much was true.

Sherry's mother had a way that I liked of smoothing out clothes, a no-nonsense way of sliding the iron across all that fresh clean fabric.

It just seemed natural when Jane Clark started to spend time in the office.

"With Hunter gone, I need to get out of the house. Besides, I already know how everything is done in that office." That was true. If Jane Clark hadn't married Hunter Clark, she probably would have been working in the office as long as Gino had been driving his truck.

Sherry's mother had to iron twice a week now to keep up with all the clothes that Jane Clark seemed to need just to go across the street to work in the office. Every day it was a fresh blouse and skirt, or a different suit or dress, and she had shoes to match all of them. "You'd think it was New York City to judge by the amount of clothes that woman wears," Sherry's mother said, running the edge of the iron around a tricky ruffle.

Patty seemed to spend a lot of her time jumping into her car and tearing out of her driveway, dust flying all the way down the road. When she returned, hours later, she'd jump out and run up the steps, her blond ponytail swinging, turning gold in the sunlight. Later, we'd see her out under the security light taking puffs of Roddy's cigarette, laughing with the other girls. "Waiting for Gino," we'd tell each other knowingly.

I started wearing my hair in a ponytail and staying

out in the sun for hours trying to get it blond like Patty's, wanting it to swing when I jumped rope the way hers swung when she ran up the steps. I was annoyed when Sherry wouldn't answer me when I asked her how it looked. She just said with her lips pushed out, "My mother says that not everybody can be pretty, and that's okay because beauty is only skin-deep." Skin-deep seemed plenty deep enough to me.

Roddy had a summer job working at the gas station on the main road, and Patty began to give him a ride home most evenings. The first time we saw Roddy in Patty's car, we teased him. "Gino will be mad at you, trying to take his girlfriend."

"You two are S-T-U and P-I-D," he chanted.

Every evening, as soon as he ate and changed his clothes, Roddy was out at the security light with the other boys. Of course, Patty was there too—to wait for Gino who showed up at dusk like clockwork. We could hear them all laughing, and as it got darker, we could see the red dots of their cigarettes and the rings of light around their hair like halos.

For a while, time seemed suspended, as if day after day went by with nothing happening in our lives. Our days fell into our summer routine of jumping rope, playing jacks, and watching the neighborhood. Mainly, I wondered about Patty and when she and Gino would get married.

"Jane Clark really likes running that business," Sherry's mother said as we all sat in the Clark kitchen. "She'll really miss that." Sherry and I fidgeted in kitchen chairs, not allowed to put our feet on the rungs. Sherry's mother was ironing a pair of Patty's shorts, being extra careful around the zipper where a hot iron could leave ridges. She held the iron out from the fabric and pushed the steam button.

"When are Gino and Patty getting married?" I blurted out, then held my breath waiting, not necessarily for an answer but for something that might help me gauge the situation, which suddenly just didn't feel right. Sherry's mother kept her eyes on the iron, concentrating hard while

she adjusted the heat setting. Then her head disappeared into the cupboard under the sink as she asked, “Where did I put the spray starch?” Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sherry tighten up her lips, and I felt a stab of excitement followed quickly by a surge of annoyance. I had the distinct feeling that Sherry knew something she wasn’t telling me.

“Want to jump rope outside?” I asked.

As we ran through the hedges and got our jump ropes off the porch swing, Sherry whispered, “I have something to tell you that I just found out.” I had the unpleasant feeling that she had added that last part about having just found out to placate me. In an attempt to pretend indifference, I began to swing my rope, lifting my feet and coming down hard, exaggerating my movements and my articulation of the chant,

I had a little monkey,
his name was Tiny Tim.
I put him in the bathtub
to teach him how to swim.
he drank up all the water,
he ate up all the soap,
he died last night,
with a bubble in his throat.

I knew Sherry hated this version, preferring instead the ending that brought in a doctor and a nurse that saved the monkey. I didn’t care; I wanted to annoy her as much as she annoyed me by not telling me whatever it was that she knew.

“I swear I just heard about it. Before that, I swear I didn’t know anything.” Curious as I was, I just kept chanting and swinging the rope.

How many bubbles did he have?
One-two-three-four-
five-six-seven-eight.

“Patty and Gino are never going to get married,” she yelled. It took about four more swings of the rope until what she had said filtered into my brain. Finally, I stopped.

“It’s Jane Clark,” she said. “Jane Clark is going to marry Gino and she’s not going to live in the Clarks’ house

anymore, and we think someone else will own the gravel pit because Patty and her brother own it more than Jane Clark." Breathless, she stopped and waited for my reaction.

I remembered all the times that Gino had come to the scales during the day and how he always seemed to be glancing over at the Clarks' house. Now that I thought about it, not once had we ever actually seen him talking to Patty. Of course, Roddy had told us that Patty liked Gino, but Roddy had also told us that the gravel pit held turtles big enough to ride.

"So, is Patty mad at Jane Clark?" I still couldn't quite get the complications of this situation worked out in my mind.

"Patty isn't even going to live here after August, so I guess she doesn't care." Sherry said this with a slightly irritating know-it-all tone that I tried to ignore.

Later that day when we sat out on the porch to watch cars go by, we saw Gino pull up outside the office just like every other day and take his receipts inside. After awhile, he and Jane Clark came out together. We could hear Jane Clark's heels alternately clicking on the cement and crunching in the gravel as they crossed the street to the Clark house, where one by one the lights came on.

"So, what do you want to do tomorrow?" Sherry asked me.

"Let's ask your mother if she'll teach us to iron," I said.



WHIMSICAL PLAY

CÉCELIA PROSSER



Yesterday my old cat and I
watched from the windowsill
four fawns play in the morning light.
Heavy mist hung like fallen clouds
while they danced
like fairies of the wood.
Thoughts come of my own
ages-ago pink jellies
with dirt-spotted jeans,
giggles, ponytails, and faint-sprouted wings.

WINTER BLAST

ROSS SHARKEY



Snow was falling, ice was freezing, air was cooling, buses were slipping, the children had the day off from school, and a boy named Walter Winterspring emerged from his snow-covered house wearing a red poofball hat. He crafted the perfect snowball, and this perfect snowball gave Walter an idea. He would create the largest snowman his town had ever seen, and he would do it today.

The Snowman

The snowman grew quickly, and it grew tall and wide. Before long, Walter had made the snowman at least two times his size. Unfortunately, Walter could not reach the top of the snowman. He rushed inside and called his friend Simon Snowfield for help. Simon arrived on the scene quickly, and helping Simon carry a ladder was Walter's classmate, Ian Iceflow.

The three of them added to the torso to make the snowman beefy and intimidating. They added powerful stick arms to allow him to crush their enemies with ease. They gave the snowman a comically large top hat, fierce coal eyes, and a scary carrot nose. The boys imagined the

snowman came to life as in one of their favorite Christmas stories. They could ride it through the city and rampage on an opposing school called Wimbleton Elementary. The snowman would pull large snow boulders out of his comically large top hat and hurl them at all who opposed him.

The snowman grew, and grew, and grew. However, at 10:17 a.m. on the morning of the snow day, the snowman grew too large to sustain itself and collapsed under its own immense weight.

The Space Station

Thinking quickly, Walter began to salvage the heavy snow rubble by digging through the former base of their snowman. Each segment of the snowman became a room for the construction of a brand-new space station. The boys cut through each segment, creating rooms as they went. They used shovels, spades, sledge hammers, spatulas, and even Ian's dog.

The base of the snowman would become the command center of their construction. Here, the boys could call in space cannons and lasers from satellites that linked to their command center. They'd call in photon torpedo strikes against their enemies, or crush their parents' cars when they were told to come in for dinner. They'd call in fleets of small shuttles to pick them up and explore outer space.

Simon began by taking excess snow from their former snowman and attaching functional laser cannons for defense. He took extra snow, a few AA batteries from his calculator, and some broken twigs and string to build an operational shield generator to stop incoming fire.

Next, Walter began constructing satellites on the roof of the station to help uplink to any passing satellites in orbit. He attached small satellites, large satellites, and even one of those huge ones that looks like a big cereal bowl on its side. However, with so many tools, instruments, devices, gadgets, contraptions, utensils, doo-dads, and

whatchamacallits, the station was growing too rapidly. Unfortunately, the roof of the station caved in due to the weight of all the devices on top, and the boys were left with a big pile of futuristic rubble at 11:30 a.m.

The Submarine

The boys came up with a new plan that would take them under the darkest depths of the ocean by constructing a submarine.

Repairs were made to the rear wall of the former space station, and a sturdy roof was built to act as a cockpit. The boys coated the outside of the submarine by using Ian's Super Soaker and allowing Old Man Winter to give it an icy touch.

They installed a technical sonar device, life support systems, and large oxygen tanks on the outside.

Next, Walter had the good idea to construct working arms with claws to interact with underwater creatures and pick up buried treasure.

The boys found elusive water monsters and battled them to the end. They dove deeper and found pirate ships and claimed sunken booty. They also discovered the lost city of Atlantis thanks to Simon's navigation. Walter dueled with swashbuckling pirates, went synchronized-swimming with dolphins, and wrestled a fierce eight-legged squid.

The boys returned from their journey and attached more oxygen tanks to allow for longer trips. Unfortunately, they built one too many and the immense weight was too much for the rear wall to support. The oxygen tanks crushed their submarine at 1:22 p.m.

The Tank

Wearing his army helmet, Walter quickly informed his troops that they would fix this problem by creating a battle tank.

Without missing a beat, they built a roof and extended the walls. When they finished forming the tank,

Ian soaked it from head to toe with his Super Soaker. Now the tank was protected with a solid layer of titanium-reinforced ice armor.

Walter took some of the scraps from their former creations, such as the snowman's stick arms and the space stations laser cannons, to create a battle turret.

Simon ran home and returned with four garbage can lids to act as wheels for their tank. He placed a garbage can lid at each corner of the tank for base support and to protect the wheels from enemy fire.

Next, the boys planned to drive the tank and torment the children from Wimpleton Elementary. The Wimpletons were always trying to ruin the fun of the children from Awesome Elementary. The boys would drive the tank towards the Wimpletons and ruin any game they might be playing, any activity they were enjoying, or any snow structures they had created.

Walter was a commander on the battlefield and it was up to him to lead his battalion to victory against the enemy forces. He could maneuver the tank through mine fields, battle zones, and bombing raids with the greatest of ease.

Unfortunately, the boys made the cannon on the tank too heavy and it crumbled to the ground in a pile of armored rubble at 3:47 p.m.

The Siege

Soon the walls of a castle began to rise. The boys used available snow concrete and materials from their ruined tank to double the size of the wall. They had to build stairs to help them reach the top of the castle. There, Simon carved slots where the boys could lay weaponry and ammunition, and Ian opened windows halfway down the wall for more attack positions. They stockpiled snowball after snowball.

The boys pictured themselves in medieval times. They were the primary defense that lay between an attacking siege and the castle. They pushed back the invading enemies and reinforced castle walls as they went.

The boys manned catapults and hurled large boulders to protect the castle.

As Walter worked on top of the castle he noticed that a large portion of the Northern wall had blown off. He looked across the field and noticed the children of Wimpleton Elementary opening fire on the stronghold. Walter jumped to his feet, and at 4:58 p.m., yelled to his soldiers,

“Battle stations!”

The Last Straw

Ducking for cover, the soldiers returned fire on their adversaries. The Wimpletons hid behind a nearby armored car and hurled snowballs. Chunks of castle walls began flying off left and right.

Walter took action and, noticing the trash can lids from the former tank, he came up with a plan. The boy soldiers loaded their pockets with snowballs and each grabbed a trash can lid shield. With Walter and Ian up front presenting their shields and Simon holding his shield straight up like an umbrella, they were protected by a homemade turtle shell. They advanced on their enemies with thoughts of revenge. They came closer and closer to the Wimpletons' hideout, reflecting bullets here and there. They soon reached the armored car and Walter threw his shield down and yelled to his troops:

“Open fire!”

All three boys leapt out and assaulted the Wimpletons with snowballs until the enemy fell to the ground. Their commander was unable to accept defeat and scrambled to his feet, looking frantically for his lost mittens. Walter aimed one last shot at their enemy.

“Walter, it's time for dinner!” A call beckoned Walter, and at 5:32 p.m. he dropped his snowball and walked away from a pile of Wimpy rubble with his head held high.



BABYSITTING BLUES

SHANE PHILLIPS



Sammy's tummy hurts,
and so does April's.
Now Zack's tummy is turning,
and it's a pandemic.
I send 5 or 6 of the bunch
to the nurse's office,
and they all bound back
10 minutes later.
"Don't send any more fakers,"
Zack says.
"Nurse Hopkins says so."

Time for gym,
and everyone lines up.
Alex keeps licking his finger
and touching April
(whose tummy still hurts).
Jimmy can't find his lunch money,
Ashley is halfway out the door,
Alexis is shushing the entire class,
and Anthony is in the corner
because Sammy said he smells bad.
Lunchtime.

Did everyone finish their class work?
There is an eruption of
30 yeses, and 18 noes;
then 30 noes and 40 yeses;
and then, finally,
70 yeses, 60 noes, and 2 maybes.
Marvin is showing David how
he can walk on his hands,
Jimmy is crying
(he still can't find his lunch money),
April is puking,
and Sammy has completely
disappeared.

The buses grumble and hiss
and shake the classroom walls.
Anthony can't find his coat,
Zack can't find his hat,
Sammy is missing a shoe,
David is taking cartwheel lessons
from Marvin,
and I am on the phone with April's mom
desperately explaining how I did
send her daughter to the nurse,
and how sorry I am for her new T-shirt
and waist-length pigtails.

CHANGING VIEW

KEVIN ERDELACK



“**K**evin, you don’t have a fever of 137, and it smells like Folgers,” my mother said, seeing clearly through the lies on the thermometer.

The last thing I wanted to do that morning was go to school. I had bet my friend five dollars the day before that I was the sole owner of an extremely rare holographic Ken Griffey Jr. rookie card. My friend said it didn’t exist. I told him he was in for a big surprise, but he was right. You would think a ten-year-old would be a little smarter than that. As soon as I walked through that classroom door, I would have to deal with the humiliation sure to be coming my way. I continued to beg and plead with my mother to let me stay home.

I tried holding my stomach, my head, anywhere that could possibly ache. “Did they teach you how to act like that in school?” she questioned in her ever sarcastic-tone. “You’ll be a movie star someday with skills like that.”

It was clear I had to pull out the big guns for this one. “Hey, Mom, did you hear?! There was a water break at the school and it’s flooded now! School is canceled!”

That did not even merit a response, just “the glare.”
“Come on!” my sister yelled. “It’s your fault we’re

running so late!" Since when did she want to get to school so badly?

"It'll be okay, Kevin," my mom tried to assure me. "It's Friday. Just get in the car, get the day over with, and I'll take you out to dinner tonight, deal?"

I hated that damn car. The '94 Ford Tempo or "P.O.S." as my Dad always called it. It wasn't until a few years later that I found out what "P.O.S." actually meant, and he was right. I held a special distaste for the car that morning; it was, after all, delivering me to my doom. I was never sure why I hated that car. Maybe it was the awful sea foam color or the fact I was always assigned the backseat because my sister always called "shotgun." What does that even mean? She would yell it and then race to the car door and always get to ride in the front. What a stupid rule. What a stupid car. What a stupid card. What a stupid sister. It wasn't my fault that we were going to be late, well, technically we'd be later than we normally were, but we'd still be there in time.

I hated the ride to school just as much as the car. I had it memorized; I had been taking that same road twice a day, every day, to school, for five years now, how could I not? I could close my eyes and still see the road and where we were and what was going past us. Nothing ever changed on this road. Stop sign, slight turn left, mailbox, fields to the right, straight, bump, slight right turn, down the hill, speed limit 35, everyday. What was I going to say to my friend? Maybe I could avoid him? No, that wouldn't work; we were in the same homeroom. Maybe he forgot? No, he remembered the time last year I'd borrowed thirty-five cents for milk at lunch. The only thing I could hope for was that he wouldn't be there.

Then I heard it.

It's that sharp gasp for air, and something inside you knows that it can only be bad.

The sound my Mom made is something I'll never be able to forget.

The sound of crunching metal and shattering glass

was deafening. Everything went black for a moment and when I came to, I had never felt fear like this. My sight was blurred, and everything was silent. I didn't even realize for a second that we'd been in an accident. The car had not ignited, but it still felt like flames were engulfing me. The smell inside the car burned like hell. It burned my eyes, my throat, and my lungs. Every breath I took felt as if someone was slicing my lungs apart with a razor.

I looked out the windows trying to see where we were, but the spider webs of broken glass blocked my sight. I screamed for my mother and sister, no response. Again and again I screamed, no response. I looked ahead where my mother lay back in her seat motionless and my sister slowly regained her senses. Thoughts raced through my head. My mom couldn't be dead. She just couldn't be. I had memories of my birthdays, holidays, special moments that I had shared with her flying by at light speed.

And then I heard it.

It's that sound of reassurance that only a parent can give.
"It'll be okay, Kevin."

Something was so incredibly calming about those four words. Everything paused, and I knew that it really was going to be okay. As things began to slow down, it felt like my seat belt had become a branding iron. I released myself from its grip, but the sensation continued, and burned even more as I climbed through the shattered window.

I finally had a chance to see where we were. There were cars passing by on the busy morning highway, and I wondered what the people driving thought as they flew by this scene. Were they horrified and wanting to help or did they just look and worry about what their day of work entailed? I looked beyond the road and realized that we were directly across from the cemetery in which we had buried our grandmother only a year before. The tears began to well in my eyes as I looked back at the carnage of twisted metal in front of me, seeing how close I was to joining her. Nothing else mattered to me at that moment. The card

was immaterial now. The fact I had to sit in the backseat probably had saved my life. I had never felt more love for my sister than I did at that moment. And as much as I hated that car, I knew it had saved all of our lives.



BATHWATER

PARAH WOLF



In the stillness of warm water,
our knees bend and peak above the translucent pool
like rock islands. I want to climb them,
climb my way to the top and look out onto the ocean,
this ocean of bathwater.
But instead,
instead I walk my fingers up your knee, hiking,
then spread my hand wide and rest there on that solid joint.

In the stillness of water,
my bare back against your chest,
like the waxing moon cradles its darker self,
we wrapped ourselves in each other's nakedness.
And your arms, golden, promised comfort.

In the stillness of water,
the world waited for us outside of plastic shower curtains
and porcelain,
outside of wet hair sticking to the back of my neck,
outside of steam rising from our arms,
outside of warmth dripping between my breasts and
down my stomach, reuniting with the fragile stillness.

In the stillness of water,
we wait,
wait for the world to forget us,
just for a moment.

AMERICAN GANGSTER

SHANE PHILLIPS



And flat-brim-wearing soldiers protect the front lines
with small-time dime-deals and empty threats.
They're not gangsters,
not thugs,
and most have done little more than slap around
an ex-girlfriend or push down some punk
too small to push back.

These soldiers line up like colonial militia in the streets
with one hand on their huge, denim, gangster cocks
and the other in the air.

On picnic hill the Canali suits call the cops
and watch their target audience scatter.
This street,
this barrio,
this city,
just one big, self-sustaining wrecking machine,
an ecosystem of thirsty sheep
and hungry sharks.
The small-timers on Elmwood Avenue
hold up bodegas and get paid fast or die trying,

but the real money,
the real power,
comes with a suit.
Real power comes from wanting something
and taking it.

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

JAMES BALDWIN is the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Registrar at Pitt-Bradford. He lives with his wonderful wife and daughters in Bradford, and he is an incurable wonderer.

LES BUHITE is the Technical Director of the Bromeley Family Theater at Pitt-Bradford. He has a B.S. degree from Edinboro, a M.A. degree from University of Akron, and Ph.D. from Florida State University. He lives in Jamestown, N.Y., with his wife, daughter, too many cats, and not enough guitars.

KEVIN ERDELACK is a junior writing major who can't write an interesting bio about himself, but still believes he's an interesting person. He's probably wrong.

SHAILANDRA GAJANAN teaches econ. He likes to veg out. He is mostly spaced out.

JESSICA HAMILTON is a senior writing major at Pitt-Bradford. She enjoys camping and sleeping in.

NICK JONES is a junior writing major hailing from Philadelphia, PA. The poem published in this edition is his first poem. He has seen every Bruce Lee movie and wants to own a Triumph T-100 one day.

KIM KATILIUS is a sophomore at Pitt-Bradford. She is majoring in writing with a minor in communications.

SHERRI LOTHRIE received her B.S. in English from SUNY Brockport in 2006. She works at the Hanley Library as a serials/cataloging specialist. Sherri lives in Olean, N.Y. with her son and husband.

PAT MCQUISTON was born and educated in England. He married an American professor, Julian McQuiston. He was active for many years in Fredonia Community Players and remains engrossed in the Penelope Writers' Group and also the Fredonia Shakespeare Club. He enjoys his ever-expanding family.

CAROL NEWMAN teaches intro classes in poetry and fiction writing at Pitt-Bradford. She has been a regular contributor to *Baily's Beads* for more years than she wants to say.

SHANE PHILLIPS is a brother, a son, a lover, and a teacher. He has been stupid and gotten lucky, lied and gotten caught, and only regrets the things worth regretting.

CECILIA PROSSER is a retired Verizon truck driver residing in Ormsby, PA. She and her husband of thirty-four years, Pete, have two grown daughters, Molly and Krista, and one cat, Sophie. Cecelia loves traveling, canning, baking, and writing poetry. This is her first of hopefully many publications.

ROSS SHARKEY has surmounted many insurmountable obstacles in his twenty-two years of awesome. Utilizing a complex system of telekinetic abilities, unflagging speed and wit, unmatched intellect, and snappy dressing, he was able to weasel his way into this year's *Baily's Beads*.

RHYS WEST is a senior sports medicine major at Pitt-Bradford. He loves Philadelphia.

DARAH WOLF is a Pitt-Bradford graduate with a degree in writing. She is also a former Robert C. Laing Award winner for writing.

CENTO COLLABORATORS: Kayla Bougeois, Andy Buyea, Mandy Colosimo, Jason Deforno, Sarah Dorben, Sara Gigliotti, Jessica Hamilton, Melissa Hamilton, Chris Lalicata, Becky Mahoney, Carol Newman, Brandy Patrick, Von Scheivert, Scott Sipko, Maddi Smith, Jolene Suchy-Dicey, Adam Turner, and Rhys West.

AUTHORS' NOTES

~ “Binary Rhythm” was an experiment in rhythm. Most musicians have probably been exposed to the use of mnemonic devices in the teaching of rhythm (Kodaly, Dalcroze, and Orff are three prominent composers and educators who have independently added to the development and use of this approach). I was interested in the visualization of rhythm as poetry. However, instead of choosing words to create rhythm, I decided to use numbers, which represent words, to display the rhythms that I was trying to conceptualize. The numbers, “zero” and “one”, have two and one syllables, respectively. Combinations of “zeroes” and “ones” can be combined to create different rhythms. The name of this piece was derived from the choice of numbers; the binary numeral system represents numeric values using two symbols or units, usually 0 and 1.

James Baldwin

~ A cento is poem made up of passages from poems by one or more authors. The lines of “Collaboration Cento” were compiled by me, and except for a few lines, taken mostly from poems written by the Beginning Poetry Writing Class—Fall 2008. The names of the collaborators are listed in the Contributor’s Notes.

Carol Newman

