APOGEE



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APOGEE

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HOMAGE
to
ALICE SINK

The staff acknowledges with gratitude
the many years of dedicated service
rendered by Ms. Alice Sink as advisor
to APOGEE and other campus journals.

We present this APOGEE to the
University in honor of Ms. Sink.

ALICE SINK

Dibs

Bob and Caroline MacPrincely were considered the perfect couple. Why so? In their hometown of Carterville, Bob was C. E. O. of Aberdeen Incorporated, the most profitable wood furniture manufacturing company in the world, and Caroline had dibs on Gwen, a woman who could not only cook to beat the band but could concoct exotic table centerpieces from magnolia leaves, hurricane lanterns, red roses, and dyed heather. The MacPrincelys entertained a great deal and took tremendous pride in two things: their highly polished marble foyer and Gwen.

Gwen had a knack for arranging tidbits, twists of thin imported ham or pink rolls of aged roast beef nested in beds of red-tipped lettuce and decorated with cherry tomatoes. Complete with evenly squared chunks of aged cheddar, the meat and cheese tray was a creation for which Caroline always received expected raves from her guests.

Performing veggie miracles, Gwen produced fringed cucumber slices and crinkle-cut carrot sticks with a wavy knife she carried, secured in cardboard, in her purse. She made opened-face creamed cheese on rye canapés extra attractive by generous sprinkles of dill and paprika. "Buy fresh dill and paprika," Gwen instructed Caroline before each luncheon, cocktail party, or dinner party. "Always get fresh"—as if Caroline didn't know by now.

Caroline never crossed Gwen because she knew for a fact several of her friends had unsuccessfully tried to lure Gwen away to work for her when she had hosted her last art exhibit reception. So, Caroline bit her lower lip with two perfectly formed upper teeth every time Gwen reminded her to *buy fresh.*

"Paprika that's been opened fades in color," Gwen would tell Caroline, "and dill needs to be fresh." So, Caroline always complied without the slightest qualm or

remotest shudder. Even if it meant making a late evening trip to Kroger Super Store instead of Fresh Market, which she preferred.

Caroline paid well, tipped generously, and supplied fresh spices and herbs for Gwen's perfect chafing dish casseroles, smooth little deviled eggs, and specially concocted sauces for sausages and meatballs. For all anybody knew, Gwen could be stockpiling left-over paprika and dill, slipping it to foreign agents for new atomic bomb explosive thing-a-ma-jigs. But that possibility really did not concern Bob or Caroline. They were perfect hosts.

PHOENIX XXXIII LITERARY FESTIVAL AWARDS

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

POETRY

First Place ALI WASSELL "Remembrance"
Second Place ANDREA GRIFFITH "Hero"
Honorable Mention ADRIENNE FURIO "Terror"

FICTION

First Place ANGEL ASHTON "Girasols"
Second Place DANA YATES "The Lady and the Teeth"
Honorable Mention NICKIE DOYAL "Broken Sandals"

HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION

POETRY

First Place ERIN HARDY "Texas Hill Country"
Second Place ALEX SHEALY "In Certain Rooms"
Honorable Mention
NORA ANDERSON "All I Want for Christmas"
BRANDIE BRAXTON "The Woman of the Hospital Garden"
COREY CLIFT "Knights, Ninjas, and Now"
DUNCAN HUBBS "Deals are Cut"
JAMIE T. RAUSCHKOLB "Purple"
ALEX SHEALY "An Explanation of Art"
EMILY WISHUM "Designer"

FICTION

First Place COREY CLIFT "The Black Slab"
Second Place EMANUAL AGAPION "Little Things"

ALI WASSELL

Remembrance
(Standing on the Road at Majdanek)

One foot in front of the other,
I walk into the camp.
My eyes cast down on the dirt road.
With each step, I remember the history of my people.
Inside of the bunkers,
Piles of shoes and glasses, spoons and cups
Fill the rooms;
Knowing that each one belonged to a different person
Sours my stomach.
My body becomes tense,
As I remove myself from the room.
Outside, the air is cold, even though the sun is shining.
I walk to escape the horror of my surroundings
Yet I am faced with bunker after bunker,
Until I stop.
My body stands parallel with the flagpole;
The string on the pole clangs.
Making a high pitched sound;
But I can't move; my body is frozen
In remorse.
My eyes fill with tears
As they glance upon the large
Smoke stack at the top of the hill.
My great-grandmother stood in this place
Fifty-seven years before me,
Though she did not see the lush green hills of Poland
As they were black and covered with mud.
She could not hear the clang of the string on the flagpole,
For there was a Third Reich flag that flew in the wind.
And the blue sky and the bright sun that warms my body,
She could never see this—
For the sky was overcast,

As smoke stacks from the ovens
Spit out Ashes, that killed generations.
Six million never got the chance to do
What I am doing now:
Walking out of Majdanek
Into freedom.

Hero

What thoughts I have of you John Lennon,
As I bike this dusty trail.
I stop to explore a waterfall,
And hum your peaceful tune.
Look at the kids throwing stones!
Fathers are fishing with sons,
As mothers pick wildflowers with daughters.
I saw you, John Lennon, kayaking alone.
No guitar is in sight.
And I hear you say, "This is the utopia I sang about,
The Strawberry Fields are here, not in New York."
I offer you some refreshing water,
And we speak only of the beautiful day.
I treat you like an unknown soul,
Which brings us together.
You depart in your kayak,
And I on my bike.

Terror

They say if you stand still outside,
He'll get you
They say if you don't zigzag while walking,
He'll get you
They say he makes no distinction,
He will shoot out anyone he can
They say everyone is his prey,
And they're right
To him, this is his hunting ground,
And he is in control
He seeks to create terror,
With only these words
Dear Policeman: I Am God

ANGEL ASHTON

Girasols

My name is Baptista, not spoken out loud, but whispered like the end of a prayer. I live out where the trees vanish and the high grass dances to the beat of the wind. This is our second move since spring. Mama says this place is better than the others, but I feel doubtful as I look across the horizon and see nothing but muted shades of blue, white, and brown.

I am watching my tios, Carlos and Juan, pull weeds from my mother's small, but beautiful garden on the side of the house. I crouch to look closer at the uprooted weeds behind them.

"Que miras pequena girasol?" my uncle Carlos says. I pause as I try to interpret with my rusty Spanish.

"What does 'girasol' mean?" I ask, standing up as I shade my eyes from the sun.

"They are those," he says, pointing to a row of tall, yellow flowers that looked gangly and uncertain like those older boys I see standing outside of the bodegas.

"Sunflowers are ugly," I say frowning.

Uncle Carlos turns around and puts his arm around my shoulders.

"You should not look so deep into its appearances. Girasols are stronger than they look. And they will one day be fruitful, just like you will one day be fruitful," he says.

I look up at the sunflowers. They seem battered, but not beaten, as they stretched towards the sun against all odds. I turn towards my uncle and hug him.

"Are you fruitful?" I ask.

"No, I didn't pull out all my weeds."

DANA YATES

The Lady and The Teeth

Bright light filled the dentist's office waiting room as the door creaked open. Then she appeared. She was a delicate woman who was well past her prime. She sported a flashy top with elaborate flowers, and vivid teal Capri pants with sandals. Her coarse skin wrinkled to her bones. Brown splotches appeared on her arms from exposure to the sun in years past. She had many spider vanes that ran up her leg like ivy rising from the skin. The lady's makeup consisted of blue eye shadow, a touch of blush on her cheeks, and fiery red lipstick. It served as a distraction from the many creases that imprinted her face.

As she waddled to the front desk, she revealed an object in her hand. It was a small glass jar filled with water and a set of false teeth. The teeth were big and yellow, unpleasant to the eye. She carried it carefully to the front desk, placing the jar gently down. In a sweet country accent she began talking to the receptionist. "Excuse me, miss, my husband's teeth seemed to be a little loose. Is there anyway the dentist can take a look at them?" The teeth were taken from her, and the receptionist asked the lady to have a seat. She slowly walked across the room, taking a chair by the window.

She acted with the highest mannerism. She sat back straight with her legs crossed at the ankles and her hands gently placed in her lap. Inside her eyes you could see the beauty she had once been, but now age had taken its toll. In her blue eyes you could see the carefree soul that was roamed free during her youth. She waited patiently, looking around the whole room. She studied each person and thing in that waiting room. "Ma'am?" the nurse at the front desk called out, "We fixed your husband's teeth as best we could."

"Well, it will do for now," the lady said. She

struggled to her feet, and gradually made her way back across the room to pick up the jar. Beams of light filled the room, ending with the sound of the front door closing. The lady and the teeth were gone.

NICKIE DOYAL

Broken Sandals

They were ordinary, even second hand, the sandals Marie held in her hands. Made of wood with straw flowers in the woven tops, they were for carefree days, but now were useless. A strap had been broken and was beyond repair, but Marie still clutched them in her hands.

Her eyes moistened with tears as she looked at her younger sister. The shoes had been worn without permission and were now returned broken to Marie.

No words were uttered as Marie turned and walked to her bedroom. The touch and smell of the shoes flooded Marie's senses as she remembered her aunt wearing them when new. Those times were filled with laughter as they walked and talked a great many times. The tall, gaunt aunt, never thought of by others as pretty, laughed at everything, including herself. For seventeen years this aunt had been an island of happiness to Marie within a family filled with anxiety and confusion. But no more. Killed by a drunk driver, her broken body lay in a fresh grave.

Marie reached her closet and took out a small box. She wrapped some tissue paper around the broken sandals and nestled them within the box. Carefully, she replaced the lid and set the box deep within her closet. Broken things are laid to rest.

ERIN HARDY

Texas Hill Country

The sun is barely up over Texas Hill Country
A cowboy hatted rancher kicks up dust in an old Ford truck
The cattle are waiting around that last limestone ledge

The hat soaks up southern sun that beats down on the scrubby hills
It will end up on the antler of a trophy deer in the den
The smell of fresh cornbread will make its way past the hat to the bald head on the front porch.

It will reminisce over trips south for swimming
Fly fishing for Rio Grande perch
Just the hat, the bald head, the lake, and a wooden skiff

It knows it is the season for migrant birds to move through
Warblers and Avocets swarm by
Mexican bats appear and vanish, thick plumes of smoke

It has felt like a Tonkawa Indian spirit before
It has taken the trip far up Enchanted Rock
It has let the morning descend gently around it

It remembers truck rides through the dry terrain
Heading to 8 second football games
To see bones break at the rodeo

It has seen the bald head send off his daughter to the Blanco County Fair
Where the big question is, Who will be crowned Miss Blanco County?
By other cash-driven city-oriented kids trapped in Texas Hill Country

ALEX SHEALY

In Certain Rooms

There will always be places in which we are not permitted
to die.
Maybe a virginal room,
Complete with chaste pillows still diapered in a plastic
coating of naiveté.
They must be corner-less rooms.
All white and round,
Lit with only the brightest, purest sunlight.
There are some rooms that drip with joy.
Quiet closets without doors,
Carpeted in fog that lives off of background music and
French wine.
These places don't contribute to casualties.
We can never cry in these rooms,
Places already moist with the intoxicated breaths
Of newly-weds experiencing love
For the very first time.
These corner-less rooms
Are unfit for wan and sullen little women.
The ones that weep uncontrollably
And mutter off hypocritical remarks of "never die while
crying."
There will always be places in which we are not permitted
to die,
But I haven't found one yet.

NORA ANDERSON

All I want for Christmas...

Last Thursday, I sent my Christmas wish list to my mom
and dad,
And I still can't understand the reaction they had.
I felt my gift suggestions were quite reasonable--
A pair of glass slippers, King Arthur's round table,
Two checkered giant pandas and a pink princess pony,
A statue of Karl Marx made of bologna,
And a matching bust of Lenin (preferably ham),
Both princes of England (Harry *and* William)
A restored VW van with black shag carpets,
At least four players from the New York Mets,
One nuclear bomb (two if they really love me),
Original portraits of U.S. Grant and Robert E. Lee,
An A on my next five history tests,
Maybe a few tanned cabana boys with lovely biceps,
The Hope Diamond and that jewel from Titanic,
A Rolling Stone member (my preference being Mick),
A date or two with a Baldwin brother—
Oh, I could not *believe* the reply from father and mother!
I never thought anyone could sink so low,
Their response was beyond caustic—horribly so,
They said no to every wonderful idea I sent!
(Next Christmas, I'm asking Santa for new parents.)

BRANDIE BRAXTON

The Woman of the Hospital Garden

Riding along with my mom in the car,
The spring day was as unusual as they come.
Except now, I was off for a check-up.

Passing the hospital, I caught a glimpse
Of a woman in the center of the garden
With a single flower in hand.

With her head hung low, she gazed at the ground,
Still as if time had instantly escaped her.
Suddenly, she fell to her knees and wept.

Her eyebrows frowned with anguish and heartache
Before she lifted her head to the clouds
As if to ask only one favor:

To be given the one thing that she'd lost.

COREY CLIFT

Knights, Ninjas, and Now

A phase-change ago
I remember,
Fear did not exist
This child had wings and armor,
Equipment to face the darkest foe.
A makeshift shield to block plastic dragons,
A knight was made from a boy,
A sword was made from a branch.

Just a tied headband created a ninja.
Quiet and quick,
Skillful with force,
Balance and grace.
Facing the evil martial arts masters
Out back, under the oaks.

A towel and pin granted flight.
The cape gave me power
To soar up there,
Without propellers or giant jets.

When a situation tests my
Strength and nerves,
Wings, armor, and weapons would help
But by now I am told to suck it up,
And face daily opponents unprepared:
Adults should find confidence in themselves.
I try to recall all my training
In the imaginary arts.

DUNCAN HUBBS

Deals are Cut

money changes hands and
the heads fall off under the guillotine
chamber pots are emptied out of windows
onto leprous urchins
and the duchess leaps into the river
with a stone tied round her neck

the priest forecasts apocalypse and mutilation
and the constables walk away with a clink
and jangle in their pockets

the farmer stumbles in his field and
is trampled maliciously by his ox

the painter looks upon his finished fresco,
vast as the sun...
dread impales his viscera and the soul
leaks out of him,
flows out under the door of the cathedral,
and wets Luther's feet

JAMIE T. RAUSCHKOLB

Purple

Most of the colors had dulled, not so much as faded,
Specs of all the other 8, 64, 96 most visibly stained
the yellows and electric greens.
the paper jackets pealed off most
others half rubbed away clung to their labels
possibly fearing contamination by other bars
of the spectrum...
Navy, Robin's Egg, Midnight... Blue, but not just.
One from the other mattered little
in such an ancient toy box collection.
Brick reds, Indian Browns and Raw Siennas...
The purple to me seemed unphased.
Though naked, rounded on bothered ends,
broken and speckled,
and often times in the dim mistaken for black,
once pressed across a notebook,
better yet, the living room wall,
It was forever violet.
Unmistakably bold, no Lavender,
no Purple Mountain Majesty
...just violet.

ALEX SHEALY

An Explanation of Art

I suppose it's better to read
on dreary days sitting in a bay window,
drinking coffee.
But I read in the bathroom--
Sometimes with the water running
because it's unusual.
They told me that it was strange that
I made figures out of wire hangers
and used them to illustrate
Freud's theory on dreams...
(but you know, hardly anyone appreciates art
these days.)
Some people don't wear shoes because it's "down to earth"
I roll in the ground to become saturated with nature.
tasting the flowers
feeling grass in my hair...
and loving all the tangles.
I guess people question all this.
But I'm not really in the position to explain why.
They say things with sleep embedded in their eyes,
wrapped in cellophane, still moist from the womb.
So I tell them that one day,
they'll see the world,
take in the view,
and breathe
for the first time.
But of course, they don't understand, not yet, at
least.
So I shrug and continue reading in the bathroom, playing
with flowers,
spinning in circles when it's raining...
or crafting wire hangers into
immaculate structures of beauty.

Designer

With a light touch
She brushed
A sleek coffee-colored strand from her face.
Sighing a little,
She resumed her reading,
From the romance novel,
Placed ever so gently on the table.
Behind large black rimmed glasses,
The only moving part of her body was her eyes.
Slowly they moved
From side to side
Scanning the page.
Curled in almost a ball
She was sitting crossed-legged,
A large sweatshirt covering her body.
A few minutes later
She reached the last page
And with a slight smile closed the book.
Her emotion filled eyes
Showed her reaction.
A small sparkle glimmered
Deep down
And for an instant
She seemed alive.
Then realizing it was almost six,
And she was late,
She rose.
As she turned
I saw that the spark of life
Had already faded from her eyes.
Grabbing her large designer purse, she turned to leave.

COREY CLIFT

The Black Slab

Peter's breath flowed out white. It was still condensing in the winter air when he got into his car. He cranked it up and fished for the directions in his inside coat pocket. Turning out onto the Longfellow Bridge running over the Charles River, he was feeling glad. Finally, he was heading out to a party where he might get a chance to build a social life at his new college.

Saturday nights came just in time to ease bad thoughts of the previous five days at the job he was beginning to hate. Peter was going to vomit if he had to make one more twelve-inch club for the same huge woman that always came in at 4:19 every day. In between sandwiches, he daydreamed about the night to come and it brought him into another place.

Even while driving to the party, he pondered what it would be like. Peter could imagine a warm rush of air through the carefully carved door of a packed party house. He thought of the heat, collecting as time passed, with all the busy bodies moving together. He thought of striding past groups of spinning, bouncing people, smelling the scents of the girls. Giving a passing yet confident glance to the more attractive ones and looking for people he recognized, Peter realized, he knew no one. But as he sat down next to the speakers, he imagined that people wanted to know him. "Who are you? Do I know you from somewhere?" one girl would ask.

"You have nice eyes," another would say.

Contrasting the warm thought of the party, was the pain from the biting winter wind. It wrapped around him as he ended his contemplation, and he rolled the window down to discard a finished cigarette. Peter took one last look at the directions in the fleeting light of the street lamps as he approached his destination. The people made

him apprehensive. He began to feel a little anxious about them and was tense. Peter began to muster up his courage to face the crowd.

Dragging the heels of his loose sneakers, Peter walked to the party after parking his car in an alley just up the street. The slow steadiness of his footsteps came to an abrupt stop at the front door—a thick black slab. His heart began a persistent acceleration, beating like the hit of the bass inside. Staring at the door, he gradually shut his eyes and began to count backwards in his head. The thought of so many people inside gave him the familiar knot in his stomach, it was too obvious to disregard.

His eyes split open instantly when he suddenly felt a tap. "Um, you're kinda standing in my way," a nervous voice said. The voice belonged to a bundled up girl with a fair face and frost blue eyes. Peter pivoted toward her but avoided eye contact.

"A-a-after y-y-you," he stuttered.

Little Things

My parents got divorced when I was five years old, and I saw my father about two or three times a year after that. And when he found out that he had cancer, he decided to bring me to this exact beach, at this very same spot and give me a big pink seashell and say to me, "Son, the answers are inside of this."

I smiled, then nodded and I thought to myself "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Then I realized that the shell was empty!

So when he died, I knew that there's no point to any of this...it's all just a...a totally random lottery of meaningless tragedy through near escapes...So I've learned to take pleasure in the details...a Quarter Pounder with cheese...those are good. The misty sky about ten minutes before it rains...A moment when your laughter becomes a roaring cackle. And I sit back and I smoke my Camel Menthols and just whatever. I kept the shell though.

MICHAEL GASPENY

The Migration of Muddy Waters, King of the Chicago Blues

South Side sure enough was Little Mississippi
When you had home in your house;
Then Cookie, Azelene's child, went to fetch
Uncle Joe for pancakes, came upstairs
Said he was playing dead.
You found him knees up, soul gone, an empty tent
Saw he got his headstone,
Not just a hole six feet in the ground.
Joe bought your first electric guitar.
Joe, young enough to be your brother,
Way back buddy in the Essaquena muck,
Then with Grandma on Stovall Plantation.
Rough as it was, still it was home.

Next night playing Theresa's Lounge
Where they had you painted on the window
Like Jesus on a storefront church
You felt weird at the waist
As if your belt had slid off
Under some outside woman's bed.

You felt light, young, and lost—
Strange at fifty, to be so loved and so alone:
With Geneva keeping your happy home
Waves of women spilling at the stage
And beloved Spann at the piano.
No matter how dumb you felt,
About like a singing deer,
You never missed a growl.

But at two leaving the club
Man outside was selling pig-ear sandwiches
And for the first time in your life

You thought about what it was like
To be a hog under a sledgehammer
One stroke from stone deaf.
Your time, though it took twenty years,
Wasn't long.

No Plot

He wants me to watch the scenery. He says I should enjoy the ride and not read the newspaper. He's driving and wants company. So I sit in the passenger seat of our new red Volvo with my head up and my eyes closed behind dark sunglasses.

"Does the map say to make a hard right turn here?" he inquires.

My eyes lift a quarter-inch. The squiggly red line runs across the map spread over my thighs. The red line loops to the right on the inner part of my left leg. "Yes," I answer and shut my eyes again.

He continues to drive. "Whoa! Were you sure about that hard right back there?" His tone is somewhat demanding.

"Yes." I say it with eyes still closed. I wait. Silence. The emergency has passed. No need to open the eyes.

"Did you see my sweatshirt back in the motel room?"

He's testing me. My head must have bobbed. "No." It's the truth. No sweatshirt.

"Maybe I threw it in the suitcase. I can't remember." He talks on.

I grow uneasy about his forgetfulness. So much time spent in the doctor's office two days before we left on this trip. So many tests of his memory. They were testing him for Alzheimer's. Did they find it? I need to come up with a story for an assignment. I can't even think of a plot. Nothing there. Now this worry thing is back with us. Like a distant thunder cloud in a blue-bird sky that grows silently.

"Did you pack my suitcase?"

"No, you did," I answer, now fully awake. "Remember?"

He sighs, still driving. "No."

There is silence between us. He clicks on the radio.

The trip was meant to de-stress our lives. Loosen us up as our twenty-something son says. But the unleashing of the dark cloud disease threatens to swamp us before we are loose.

"Men, do you want more zip in your sex drive?"

I turn off the radio and close my eyes. Why can't I think of a story? I only need three-thousand words of a compact made-up story. Easy enough. One problem, though—it needs a plot. It needs to say something. I don't have anything to say.

We've reached the departure area of the ferry to Ocracoke Island. It's slow to load up, twenty minutes slow.

Gulls circle overhead and out over the water. The early morning is softened by a sea breeze. No cold, just moving sea brine air. The boat gets under way and on the top tier of the boat I sit on a steel bench.

The operator announces, "The distance of twenty-three miles will be covered today in two hours and fifteen minutes. Pamlico Sound is the largest inland body of water in the world. The average speed of the ferry will be twelve knots. Last year, one million vehicles used our ferries."

I tune out the announcement and listen to the screaming gulls overhead. Many of the birds rest their small white bodies on the rocks guiding our departure from shore.

The announcer breaks back in. "Feed them only off the stern—the back of the boat."

The breeze has picked up and is not quite as warm now. The birds bob up and down in the light gray water stratified by dark gray swells. The strip of land falls away from the rear of the boat.

"They focus on that and forget. They'll run smack dab into stuff." A stocky male passenger drinks coffee and talks at the far end of the boat. He doesn't wear a hat on his bald head. He stands with one hand in his pocket below his orange-striped rugby shirt. He laughs.

People wander around on the top tier of the boat, unsure of social correctness. Talk with strangers? Yes? No? Maybe just a little talking and mixing, but mostly they just stick with their own singular group.

We're in Carteret County. Carteret. Carteret. The name becomes like a one-word mantra to calm my soul. Nothingness looms ahead. No visible landmarks to get bearings from.

A sign posted on the bottom rail reads "Do not sit on rail." A round orange-and-white inflated lifesaver tube sits nearby.

The boat is gray with white trim and gray slate floors. The gray is the same color as the inside of San Quentin Prison when we toured it years ago on another coast. Prisoners there were encased by metal and water almost the same as we are now.

My husband stands like a silent lighthouse at the upper deck railing looking out over the water. Is he just watching the gulls or worrying about the outcome of the tests? I'm usually the worrier, he isn't. How much longer before I take over the driving? He has driven us through forty-five years of marriage. His short white hair contrasts with the golden tanned face. His arms are crossed over a "well-served" belly. He's had a good life, but he's got so much more. We've got so much more to do, to see, to be. How much more would satisfy me? Ten years? Thirty? A hundred? His face and arms are freckled, but fear of cancer and plenty of sunscreen have kept the darkening spots to a medium covering.

His cell phone rings in its holder on his hip. He answers, talks, and hangs up. He walks to me. "That was the hotel. No sweatshirt in the room."

"Okay." My hands lock around my knees and I rock silently on the steel bench. He still doesn't remember what he did with the blue sweatshirt.

He sits down near me with his dark blue jeans and tan short-sleeved shirt. His gold watch picks up the light flecks in the soft curled hair on his arms. He packed the sweatshirt—he just can't remember.

Below us on the lower deck men stand sandwiched between cars. Fishing poles jut straight up out of the rear of a specially rigged truck. Fishing is the only game in this town.

We're half way across now and the air is cooler but

tolerable. Gulls still pierce the air with their screams, and sequestered groups of people chatter quietly on top. Below, a man checks his fishing poles. He secures one and takes another to check the line. Talk below has broken up.

My husband sleeps now next to me on the steel bench. I inch over and we meld together as if one flesh. I rest. He's warm; steady; there. Always there. Good or bad, he's there.

I try to birth a story while I rest. It rolls around unseen in my brain and bumps against my cranium. Eventually it will firm up and birth itself with a burst of electricity that courses through my arm and out my fingers, connecting pen to paper as I lose myself deep within its current. No worries then. He couldn't remember where he left his parked car yesterday. I had to drive out to the store and help him find the car. I thought I saw a tear in his eye when he asked if I knew why he had come to the mall. Where is my story? Why can't I get this assignment done? He'll be seventy next month.

The ship's passengers are mostly retired people. Or at least they appear to be. The younger men are the fishermen. They're in a group. Together.

Last week his hat got left behind at a restaurant. Before that he couldn't remember the name of the highway that runs by our house. It's been there for twenty years.

We contrast, he and I. His face is golden tan and mine is pale and topped by short salt-and-pepper colored hair. But both our faces are time-softened. Softened, but not ravaged. Not yet. He's tall, almost six foot, and I'm shorter than the five-three I maxed out at years ago. We'll look for the sweatshirt. We'll find it balled up in his suitcase. There's still time. Has to be time.

Our two boys grew up and moved away. Then thay each rotated back through our lives and house as each of their lives came undone. Job, marriage, kids, unemployment, debt, divorce, seek shelter. Both were able to get back on their feet and drive away from our house in their bright shiny trucks.

The sun beats down across my back and neck. The air has warmed considerably and the skies have cleared of

the thin haze. We're closer to shore, and talk has picked up. Fishing poles are rechecked. Trips to the lounge are more numerous. A dark mass looms ahead of us.

Where is that story? I tossed and turned all last night. No relief. No jolt of lightning. No connecting of pen with paper. No current in which to bury myself. No forgetting of how fast time goes. How slow it goes.

He stirs, my husband, and gets to his feet. "I need to walk around. I'll go talk with the fishing group."

"Okay." Maybe I'll be able to think of a story.

I get out my notepad and draw. Drawing anything, putting anything down on paper. Pictures sometimes lead to words, but not today. Nothing but stick figures. No flesh on them. No story. No plot. The steel bench wearies my back, and I get up and stretch.

The doctor must know the results of all his tests by now. They must be back by now. But, it will have to wait. Wait until we're back home.

My husband bounds up the stairs at the end of the boat. He walks briskly toward me, smiling, smiling broadly.

"I found it!" Waving the blue sweatshirt above his head.

YESSICA VAZQUEZ

Latina

I am latina!
Mujer
Woman
Born in the tropical jungles of the
Cacique Nicarao...

Mestiza!
Indian and Spanish blood
Struggling within my veins.

Strong!
As a result of the two X chromosomes.
Filled with lots of corazon for my people.

On top of the mountain, I scream...
Here they come to conquer us,
Colonize us, to assimilate us!
I run following the howls
And the guiding arrows,
Feeling the soft earth beneath my feet,
I run to join my proud, brown people against
The horse-riding, pale-faced,
Helmeted men.

I see the birth of my race,
I feel mi cultura, my customs,
Mi raza evolving.
I see it grow,
Maturing, to what it is today...

Latinos!
The wildness of los Indios
Mixed with the heart of Spain.

I am red, blue, green, all the vivid colors!
I am rhythm, beat, dance, celebration!
I am waves, high peaks, rough edges...

My head is an intricate design of nature.
I am the beautiful by-product of two
Strong cultures brought together
In a covalent bond. A perfect equation.

I hear bombs blasting through the crisp black sky.
La Contra are leaving us abandoned, they flee in fear,
The Sandinistas have won...
I do not give in.

I see students learning life lessons
In a classroom of shattered dreams.
I am not broken down by the mandatory
Late-night vigilansias,
By the rationed food,
Or by the constant threats of the rifled
Sandinistas.
Siempre con fe en Dios, I go on.

Here I stand in triumph,
My people never lost hope.
Violetta Chamorro,
(The X chromosomes have prevailed!)

Guides mi gente towards change.

Here I am,
Latina,
Mujer,
Nica!

Beautiful, strong,
With the world at my reach,
Y con Dios at my side!

Home

It's funny how everyone despises home, until they leave and can't go back. They find out what it means to have to regret the things they say. As soon as we get a small token of freedom, we come runnin' back with our head tucked between our tails. It is ridiculous, but it's an age old tale.

My roommate, during my freshman year of college, hated home. Her dad had left her mom when she was in elementary school, her mom was currently dating a loser, and her brother, well there is nothing remotely nice to say about him. She hated home, and I don't blame her for it. This was the first time I had ever been away from home, and as far away as I felt, I was only an hour away. I felt sorry for my roommate, but not as sorry as I felt for myself, having to listen to her dilemmas constantly. My roommate was twelve hours away, and wasn't far enough. The truth is, I wouldn't have cared if she were a thousand miles away. She brought all of her problems from home with her, and picked up a few more of her own. She complained about how bad she had it, constantly.

So I was left with no other choice. I moved back home.

My roommate moved to Miami.

I thought I had things so bad at home, but to look back on everything, home is heaven. And also, my room doesn't smell of greasy foods, the shower doesn't turn to cold water whenever someone decides to flush the toilet, and I don't have a roommate with major issues.

That was last year. School has begun a new year, but this time, I did not return as a resident. I stayed home. My mom actually did as much persuading as was womanly possible to convince me to stay at school. My parents just got their oldest son married off, and now they just can't

seem to get rid of me.

I have a pet cemetery in my back yard. About ten fish, two dogs, and a rabbit named Julie call it their "home." My best friend is buried just over the hill, down the road a ways. My grandmother is buried on a sloping hillside in the North Carolina mountains. She isn't close geographically, but is never far from my mind. I'm pretty sure that my mom misses her mom a lot. I'm sure, though, that from that mountain side, my mom's mom can see us down in this valley we call home.

I wonder if my mother misses her childhood home. Or what home she could call "home." My mother's parents did not want my mother around, so they left her wherever they could. Momma lived with old drunk ladies, bible beaters, and many other types. It is amazing to me that my mother turned out to be as sane as she is (although she may jokingly dispute that claim). My mother went on to become Miss Wilkes Community College of 1969 (I am very proud of that and she would hate that I just told you that. "Ohhhhhhhh Jaci!," she might shriek.) She had the chance to go to model school, but couldn't afford it. The drunks she knew as a child were already dead, the bible beaters had given all of their money to the church, and everyone else had their own children to think of. My mother had nothing or no one to call home.

My mom's mom went off, had an affair, and a little boy. She ditched her little boy, as well. She ended up dying when the little boy was only thirteen.

I've forgiven her. My grandfather (mom's dad) is still alive. Maybe when he dies, Ill forgive him too. But not a minute sooner.

The man my mother's mom had an affair with died a month ago. The once little boy that never had a mother grew up to be my uncle, and my mom's step brother, as well as my mom's only family connection, he also grew up to inherit his biological father's farm. He is forty years old now, but can't afford what he probably rightfully deserves. He never had a family or home either. HE wants my mom to buy his inherited house.

How awkward! Buying a house built by her mother's

lover. It is a beautiful home though. Next year it will be one hundred years old. It has five bedrooms, lots of land, and is located next to the historical New River Valley in Alleghany County. That house was once thought the nicest house in the area. IT was someone's prized home at one point in time. Now my mom will seek her revenge on life by making it a home of her own. Or perhaps, it is my grandmother's way of reconciliation. My mother finally has a childhood home.

My father's childhood home was overcrowded with women. Now that's something to pity. Two sisters and a bossy mother. All living together in a one bedroom house (up until they decided to enclose the porch and make it into a bedroom). No wonder my dad moved out right after high school, and never went back. When he mentions the tight living quarters, he speaks of the situation as if talking about his days in the army barracks.

Everyone's childhood memory of "home" is quite different. Yet, they are all the same. They exist in some form or another. Mainly, in the fact as to whether you had a home or didn't. Also, it is good leverage to hold over your spoiled child's shoulder when finding appropriate punishment.

I've never felt so guilty in all my life as the moments when I wished I could leave this house and never return. I didn't know it at the time, but I had rather go through torture than to say those words. Yet, I still repeat those horrible thoughts. I can't tell you anything about my experiences with my home that isn't so cliché or average. The only reason I managed to be so lucky was through my parent's faults. They said to themselves when they were my age, "I don't ever want my own child to go through what I had to go through." And, they kept their promises. What is going to make me keep mine? I am terribly lucky. "Terribly" in a sense that I don't know what it's like to do without. Terribly, I must learn, or else I have no reason to carry a sense of pride with me to the next generation of people experiencing what it truly means to have a home. I can't move to Miami to prove this notion, but I can learn from the past (as in my situation). I guess this is what home

means to me. In between time while I am so terribly worried about losing a sense of the meaning, I am losing my home. It's slipping from my grip as the past comes to haunt the future. Past mistakes that have occurred in my family can't tear away from the effects. Consequences carry themselves on to future generations. Even if through such an inanimate object as the home.

GENA SMITH

15 Feet

From 15 feet away he was cute, almost in a rugged way. He looked like a sweet, southern mama's boy. He was always smiling without a care in the world.

From ten feet away, I could hear him laugh, see the gel he masterfully put in his hair; and I could see his eyes, those big brown, mysterious eyes.

At five feet, I could converse with him. Maybe not see his innermost secrets, or hear any deep conversation, but I could feel his smile now, and those eyes were cast on me. And the mystery about him, although not yet solved, was slowly being pieced together.

Two feet away now, and I can smell him. It is that crisp scent that gives my imagination flight. The hope of becoming friends was no longer necessary. It was as good as a signed contract. His thick, southern accent only made the cuteness I saw at fifteen feet even more cute; because it was now not only looks, but sounds and smells. Standing right next to him and after long nights of conversation and deep breaths inhaling his intoxicating cologne, the fourth sense set in: touch. Two bodies with minimal space between allow two hands to weave inside each other.

And yet I still gain ground. It is not just hands now, it is hands touching backs, and arms and hair, soft wonderful hair. Embraces, some long, some short. That doesn't matter as long as I get an embrace. With no more distance left to measure by ruler, it is measured in time: the hardest type of distance to cover, but yet the sweetest. The last sense, taste, has not been experienced yet. It is because we don't want to. If the last sense is expired, what happens then? More of the first four. And that is where we give up control. We don't mind that distance, because it represents the future, a hope we have that we will one day cover that ground. We know we don't need it now. We are

content with the distances we have traveled, and those we have not.

Holding hands, playing with hair, deep conversations, piece by piece putting together the mysteries each other has. They are good enough for now. To think it all started fifteen feet ago is a miracle I shall never understand.

Feminia

"Open your computer files to chapter ten. You'll be quizzed on this chapter in tomorrow's class. Alisha, would you please read the list on page three?"

"Page three. . . . let's see. Okay. Number One, no males may work jobs that are overly taxing on the mind. Number Two, no males may participate in excessively physical activities, work or recreational, unless with permission of the Empress and her Council. Number Three, no males may hold political offices. Number Four. . . ."

"That's good enough, Alisha," Professor Jefferson said as she rose from her seat and rubbed her palms together. "Only a few of our current laws are listed on your screens. Many more exist, and I plan on discussing some of them with you in greater detail. Does anyone know where most of our laws come from?" She looked around the class of fifty young women sitting before her, searching for a raised hand. "No one? Well, then I'll give you the full lecture." Dr. Jefferson smiled as a few students groaned.

"Most of our records come from post-Second Dark Ages. Males had destroyed not only civilization with their greed, but had made the environment intolerable with ecologically altering weapons. No one knows for sure how many years the Second Dark Ages lasted. Historians estimate from two-hundred to three-hundred-and-fifty years. So much was destroyed that they can't narrow it down more than that.

"Males had finally proven they were incapable of running the world with their barbaric warrior tactics. So, how did we pull ourselves from the desperate situation? Women did it.

"The first steps were taken by women in the areas of the world that were once Asia. Women of those regions organized survivors into productive communities that no

longer had to struggle to survive. One of the most important factors in their survival was their realization that the males had to be controlled.

"Over seventy percent of the world's male population died in World War III. The most devastation occurred in the western hemisphere where atomic bombs were dropped over the United States. The North and South American continents experienced high levels of radiation. Even today, those areas cannot support human life.

"But, back to the male issue. The males who survived the war were needed for reproduction. The world's population wasn't even a fifth of what it had been. Males were too valuable to allow to roam freely, so women leaders started keeping them contained in reproductive centers.

"This is what led to our current government that the first women leaders named Feminia. After thousands of years with males dominating society, women had finally gained control.

"To keep males in their place, the Empress of Feminia formed the Council of Wisdoms to draft laws that would successfully control them and help women adjust to their new lives. For instance, the few males who are currently allowed to work in secretarial and cleaning jobs make only seventy-five cents for every dollar a woman makes. Women were finally given the advantage that they had rightfully deserved in the workplace.

"Changes were also made in the area of sports. Medical studies suggest heavy labor over long periods of time causes severe pain and physical damage to the male reproductive system. For that reason, only adult males that have been officially declared sterile by the Wisdom Council may participate in any athletics. Sperm is too valuable to chance males damaging themselves. If males who were counted upon for reproduction could no longer perform that function, then the continuance of the human race would be jeopardized."

A student raised her hand.

"Yes, Susan?"

"Isn't it true that some males have had themselves illegally neutered so they can pass the Council's require-

ments?"

Jefferson nodded. "Certainly. Such activities are severely punished if the Council discovers a male has had himself operated upon to be unable to bear children. The male may be put to death, and the doctors who helped him may be imprisoned or put to death as well.

"This leads me into the next major change that contributed to the success of Feminia. Within the first hundred years after the Second Dark Ages, scientists found a way to make males pregnant. The advantage of this was that productive women of the community no longer had to lose time being bed ridden with long pregnancies. Since men were physically and mentally incapable of contributing to society, females gave them the burden of birthing children. Of course, we don't allow the males to raise our young," Jefferson laughed. "If we did, who knows what kind of barbaric ideas they might put into the children's heads? Our world has survived this far because we realize the importance of peace and compromise, rather than the ruthless tactics of trying to conquer everyone.

"Our fine researchers have also determined how fragile the male mind is compared to a woman's. That is what led the Empress to declare that the few males given permission to work in minor, low paying jobs cannot participate in activities dealing with complicated mathematical principles requiring understanding above the pre-algebra level. Intricate scientific ideas are forbidden to males as well. Most of them don't have the mental capacity to understand them in the first place, but long exposure to these ideas can cause an increased chance of insanity or the actual destruction of brain cells.

"The ingenuity of women researchers has also dealt with the issues of environmental preservation and population control. Their inability to solve these rather simple problems gave males countless years of frustration. Luckily, women quickly implemented strict laws on recycling and human reproduction. The Council of Wisdoms determines the number of males and women to be reproduced every year based upon the availability of resources. Does anyone know the ratio of this year's creation of women and

males? No? Currently, the ratio is nine women for every male. There is a larger percentage of women today than there was before the Second Dark Ages.

"However, the Council and the Empress realize the only importance of males is their sperm. Some scientists have even suggested developing a method of growing sperm without the need of males. The supporters of this idea are women who strongly believe males only drain our resources and time. Too much effort is wasted upon them. Women are still fully capable of carrying a child to term, so that would not be a problem if males were no longer needed. The argument against this is that there will be great difficulty in developing a procedure that can grow sperm using a variety of genes. Women opposing the idea say that over time Feminia would be reduced to inbreeding. The Council is debating this matter as we speak. Once they have made a decision, the Council will make a recommendation to the Empress. She will have the final say.

"And what about the effect on males that their current roles have on them? There still remain a small number of women who say our treatment of males is wrong. But why should women be compassionate towards them? For thousands of years males who believed they were the superior race degraded women.

"Right now, male suicide rates are higher than they've ever been. Riots in the Reproduction Centers occur more and more often. So, what should be done? Males claim our mistreatment of them is driving them to kill themselves.

"For your assignment, due when we next meet, I want you to write an essay on possible solutions to this problem.

"Well, it looks like time is up for class today. Remember, there won't be class tomorrow because the Reproductive Center will be using the classrooms. There is a new batch of males who have to be taught basic education. I think the class in here is going to be Emotions 101."

Looking Back

Freezing rain pelted Jenny as she wandered aimlessly though the cemetery. She could feel a chill go up and down her spine as she walked between tombstones. She heard leaves rustling in the nearby trees and the slight flutter of birds taking off in the stormy weather. Wearing an old pair of jeans and a coat, Jenny kept warm as she strolled through the death of her community. She noticed graves dating back to the 1900s and several recent ones. That's when she stumbled across a tombstone that read:

Jennifer Robertson (1983-2000).

She remembers that day as if it was yesterday. Jenny and her best friend, Mark, were driving along a road to the basketball game at their high school when they saw someone on the roadside. The girl looked to be about their age and was wearing a white letterman's coat and knee length blue skirt. Although it was windy, her long auburn hair didn't move to the rhythm of the night. Mark didn't think twice and kept driving on towards their destination. Jenny on the other hand kept looking back and became concerned about the stranger they had seen. After constant torturous questions she finally convinced Mark to turn around and at least offer the girl a ride.

The girl stepped into the car without a sound and immediately pointed in the direction she was headed. Jenny tried to get some response out of the stranger, but all the stranger did was point. Mark began to drive and figured that she would eventually say where to go and what to do, but silence was the only thing deafening the atmosphere of the 1999 midnight blue Cavalier.

Jenny couldn't help but stare back at the strange girl as she looked blindly into the distance without even blinking or reacting to bumps or turns of the main road. Suddenly she raised her arm and pointed to a small dirt

driveway hidden by the turn of the main road. Mark turned hoping that this would be the girl's final destination, oblivious to the fact it could be his own.

The Cavalier turned carefully onto the dirt road and slowly accelerated though the dark and winding path. An immense forest engulfed the little car and Jenny could no longer see the stars or moon which lighted the main road. Using his high beams Mark cautiously continued down the road where anything could be lurking beyond the shadows of the darkness. However, there were no signs of any civilization anywhere on their long journey, no mail boxes, no farm equipment, not even a wild animal attracted by the light of the car. Jenny began to feel cold and scared as the road seemed to be going on forever. When suddenly the forest emptied out into a clearing where a single solitary wooden house stood on the top of the hill. The girl pointed at the small building where no life seemed to dwell and Mark slowly approached the decaying building.

The windows were cracked and covered in dust, the wood on the sides of the house were breaking and full of holes, but in the window on the top floor was a single burning candle. The girl got out of the car and began to walk up the stone pathway to the front of the house. Mark, ready to leave, had his car in reverse and immediately started to back away from his surrounding. Jenny on the other hand had slipped out and was right behind their strange acquaintance. Not wanting to stay a minute longer Mark kept the car running as he went to catch Jenny.

He caught up with her as the girl entered the house; he grabbed Jenny by the shoulders and looked into her pale face. Her eyes were filled with tears and her body was sweating with immense fear. The girl disappeared into the depths of the house without making a sound, and returned a few moments later with a package addressed to a woman living in a nearby city. She handed it to Jenny and pointed in the direction of the car, then within the blink of an eye she vanished.

Jenny and Mark walked back to the car. Mark glanced back to see the candle in the window was blown out. Suddenly he saw a figure coming out of the house; it

was large and seemed to barely fit through the door. Mark rushed Jenny into his car and quickly began to escape the property they had trespassed on. The figure came into the light of the moon. It was a man dressed in old overalls and a white shirt. His hair was fading gray and his body was immense in muscles, and in his arms he cradled a rifle.

The man slowly raised his rifle as Mark maneuvered his car to make a quick escape. The car was about to disappear into the forest when Mark heard a loud ear-shattering bang. Within moments the bullet fired from the man's rifle hit a rear tire on the innocent little car. Going down the hill, the car spun out of control. The Cavalier raced down a flood of trees and undergrowth where it finally stopped at the edge of a river near the bottom of the hill. Mark still in shock looked for his companion. He got out and searched everywhere and that's when he saw the package Jenny was carrying for the girl. He looked all night and called the police who seemed to take forever. After calling in specialists and other officials, the search began for Jenny Robertson's body.

It took two weeks of searching all over the abandoned forest, but Jenny was finally found at the bottom of a gorge with a broken neck. It had been determined that she was thrown from the car and fell into the place of her doom, where she died instantly. The funeral was held a day or two later, Mark was asked to give the eulogy. He had carefully prepared his speech the day before and just as he stood up he threw it away and walked before the congregation to honor his friend. He didn't concentrate on her attributes or accomplishments; instead he told the story of their last night together and the stranger they picked up on the side of the road. Just as he was about to sit down, he said that he had received a letter from a woman in a nearby city who thanked him for the package containing her daughter's possessions and final words to her mother.

Standing in awe of her own grave she searched for justification of her death. Although she had allowed a daughter to say goodbye, she herself had no change in her untimely death. However, if it were not for Jenny that girl

would have never found peace.

Jenny looked over her tombstone for decades before she was finally ready to go down the road and join the girl she had helped so many years ago.

Signs of the Storm

Yesterday afternoon,
The low tide
Left a broad band
Of Sargasso on the
Beach, clumps of green
And brown brush
Dead by morning,
And there I lay
On the hammock,
Wondering if Macbeth
Had, at first, seen
The moving woods
And simply marveled
At the sight of it.

ANGEL ASHTON

Profound Relics

When the doctor signed the death certificate of Martin, Marilyn,
Malcolm, J.F.K.,
Did the ink weep? Did the doctor disclaim?

That the eternals are not as invincible as we thought them to be,
But can be crushed, cut down, shot, like any other human.
That the impossible is possible through death, and yet we thought
them to be above it.

Died, suicide, murdered, drug overdose—
Commoner words seem unsuitable for those who were heroes,
leaders, sex icons, gods.

How it seemed life would just stop... Without them.
The news went dumb in your ears and blunt in your heart.
How seemed the beginning of the dark, ice, medieval, age of
Aquarius.
When we felt we would all lose our minds, and never stop crying,
Until we found there was no reason to go on like this.

That their visions, principles, images, creations,
Would go to waste if we do not remember them.

Years passed, yet their deaths still weigh unbearable in our souls
That bodies so full of beauty, energy, wisdom, power
Could grow cold and rotten like unused fruits.

Unpleased with their advance to paradise or withdrawal to hell,
Only wanting to bring breath back into their broken lungs.
Humanity wanting to get back what fate has taken.

ANGELA ASHTON

Roaches

Roaches will inherit the Earth. They could possibly be rulers of this planet; crawling under our footsteps without much notice. Or maybe our world leaders have realized this and decided it's better we don't know. Either way, they will survive after we are gone, unless Raid or others in the roach killing business finally creates something that actually wipes roaches out (like they always tell us they do). And if we managed to almost kill them all, some bug-hugging group will complain and roaches will survive anyway. The roaches know how humans work, and in their waves of discussion (their wireless antennas) they are laughing at us.

One summer, I came home to find my house clean. Clean means I can see the floor and nothing is on it or crawling across it. I lived the next few weeks in bug-free bliss. Until one night, I decided to read a book on the floor next to my bedroom, a space at the top of the stairs, between the stairs and a computer desk. In my peripheral vision, I saw him. The roach strolled along the railing towards me. Disgusted, I moved to give him the right of way, and his shiny, streamlined, pinto body shot at me as if he had a motor in his derriere. I stood up quickly and moved to the other side of the room, but he followed my rail like I waved a glazed doughnut at him. I tried to step on him but he zipped around me like a crossover on the court. He went for my foot and I backed up against the wall. Impervious to my tactics, he zoomed in a lopsided circle in front of me. I grabbed the first spray in my reach, oil sheen, and sprayed him like a dull spot. It didn't kill him, of course, but he slowed down enough for me to stomp him to a sudden death.

Roaches are the bane of household living. There's no house, hut, project, mansion, and apartment they can't

shack in. They sneak into the cracks and one day you are laid back watching TV and they start having a party in the TV like it's Club MTV. Roaches collect crumbs from dust bunny colonies and work up to snatching food right in front of you. By the time you'll fully realize you've been invaded, they've made themselves at home like your in-laws.

Roaches have six legs, two antennas, and are related to termites (some even eat wood). They touch food and leave traces of excrement and foul odors, as if seeing a roach on food wasn't enough. Also, people can be allergic to them, which can become a problem because the allergens in their waste become as airborne as common dust. All roaches need to survive are water, food (food can be almost anything like paint, glue, wallpaper) and warmth. However, roaches can live for months without food as long as they have water to drink every few weeks. They also can hold their breath for forty minutes, and they spend seventy-five percent of their time resting. And if you were to cut off a few of their heads (morbidly nasty job) they would still live up to a week before dying.

Cockroaches are also creatures of the night, like rats, or city people. You can walk into a spotless kitchen in the daytime and find it looking like a back alley speakeasy at night. You switch the light on and they scatter like you're the FBI doing a raid (which just might include a bottle of Raid). But unlike rats, you'll see the old, crippled and young crawling along helplessly trying to avoid death. I like to spray them and let their poisoned bodies carry the plague home (or so I hope).

Another incident occurred that summer, when the roaches had eventually taken over my safe haven where my computer and TV sat. I had gotten fed up with roaches randomly popping in bothering my writing and surfing the net. So I decided to take action and remove everything and give the area a good coating of roach spray. I had removed everything but my surge protector and computer cords. I sprayed the area aside from my cords and waited for my computer desk and chair to dry. There wasn't a single roach to be found, but I thought the spray would send the

roaches a warning to stay away from my desk. On impulse, I pulled out my wall surge protector and roaches poured out of it and onto everything. They paid no heed to me as I sprayed at them and around. Horrified, I picked up my stuff and moved elsewhere.

Humans underestimated the power and intelligence of cockroaches. They have patterns, behaviors, fears, and mini-personalities. A roach can be taught to run a maze like a lab rat in only a week's time. They adapt to our behaviors; that's why it is so hard for us to kill them. They generally stay in their own territory—kitchen roaches stay in the kitchen, bathroom roaches stay in the bathroom, and city roaches stay in the city. You never see them fighting each other, and sometimes they will carry the bodies of the dead away with them (what they do with them I don't want to know). Some roaches stay in packs while others are lone adventurers (usually the ones most likely to be killed). There are normal roaches and those that are never quite right in the head. You'll notice them because they are always falling off something or moving in repeated circles. Roaches are just as disgusted with humans as we are disgusted with them; they will go clean themselves after touching one of us, just like we scrub hard when we touch one of them.

When roaches have been in your house too long they will begin to run it without you. They will put aside their fears of the light, roach spray, and footsteps. That's when a village of roaches becomes N.Y.C. for roaches, and they start appearing anywhere and everywhere, daring you to try to kill them. By that time, it might seem like moving would be your best option, but they will only move with you. That's when the battle lines become drawn and you go out and buy every roach killing substance known to man. I've seen it all: roach chalk (for drawing lines where roaches can't go), powder, motels, crack gels, sprays, foggers, and electronic things that scare them away but never work. Most of which win a battle, but never the war. I've seen the frontlines of a Filipino roach army blacken the floor with their bodies like a thick layer of volcanic ash, yet they still kept coming back strong the next day and the next battle.

They lived in a house my family rented when our house caught on fire. They were my first experience I had with killing them. I hated killing them because there always was a body to dispose of, and I didn't like getting my hands dirty with it. Yet after a while it was kill or be tortured by them. They would fall from the ceiling every time my family tried to eat in the house, so we would sit outside eating our food. They were the boldest roaches I had ever seen; they would try to crawl on anything to get to your food. You could knock them down and they'd come crawling up your arm. It took careful packing to get our stuff back to the house without taking them with us. I suppose those roaches are still running that house even with the new owners living in it.

Roaches are the humans of the bug world. They live off humans like we live off the world, messing over things without a care. They come in all sizes and shapes; some are as small as beans, while others, like the ones that live in Northwest Washington D.C. are as big as baby feet, and in South America there are plate-size versions of what we could have at home. They congregate in corners like they are in front of a liquor store and sneak around us like criminals. Roaches have their own suicides we find floating in drinks or standing water. I wonder, were they just too greedy, or drawn to it like people are drawn to razor blades and sleeping pills? Of course they can do things we can't do like climb walls or live after falling fifteen feet, but you don't see them playing on the computer or typing essays either. However, deep down in some politician's souls, they are roaches. Thinking single-mindedly how they are going to get that next piece of American pie, and often not bothering to cover their trail carelessly. They will call it a justified action or cover it up with new laws or start a war just so they can sneak behind our backs and steal pieces of the pie without us looking. One day, we'll realize human-size roaches are overrunning our world and we'll start stomping them out of our lives.

True Commitment

In a far away place, unknown to me, lived a childless couple. They had spent many years of testing, poking, prodding, and undergoing invasive procedures to have a child of their own. The extensive tests proved it was medically impossible for them to conceive a child. They were broken hearted, yet committed to each other and their dream.

Unaware of their situation, I found myself in a situation of my own; within a six month period, I found out my father had cancer and needed to have his bladder removed, my grandmother, while having exploratory surgery, had to have her stomach removed due to cancer, only to die a week later, and my aunt died shortly after her mother from liver cancer. I, too, was heart broken. Three beautiful children and a husband stood by my side to help me weather that storm but they were not enough. It was as if there was death and dying all around me. I was committed to find a way to give back life.

Commitment is a heavy word. No matter how small or large the commitment, you need to be ready to see it though to the end. The most common commitment is made daily when couples take their marriage vows, "for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part." Those are very strong words. Look at the divorce rate, and you'll see that most people don't take them very seriously.

I had already made the marriage commitment and planned to see things through until the end. Now, it was time for a different kind of commitment, one not everyone could make, nor agree with. Through an agency, I was anonymously introduced to a childless couple and committed to giving birth to a child for them. This took commitments from many people. There was my commitment to give them my egg that, together with the father's sperm,

would create a new life, their child. My commitment included carrying this little person inside of me for nine months and then turning him over to this unknown couple the day he was born, with no questions and knowing I would never see him again. They were also committed to me, providing my medical expenses, travel, and $10,000 after the baby was born. My husband was committed to our family, to stand by my side, encourage me, and help with our three small children at home. My children, six, four, and three, were committed to giving this baby to a couple who could not have a baby of their own.

In the beginning, I didn't realize the magnitude of the commitment I had made. I thought it was between God, my husband, the childless couple, and me. I was wrong to think it would not affect anyone else. I quickly found out who would stand by me and respect my decision, even if they didn't agree. Many long time friends walked away, wondering how I could sell one of my children. That thought never across my mind. I was giving the egg, not my child. I was fully aware that from my egg and the father's sperm a child would grow. I would be the birth mother to that child, but I would never get up at night for his feeding or hold him when he was hurt. Daily, I talked to this little one telling him about his parents and how they had sacrificed in order that he would be born. He was their child.

The commitment was made. There was never a thought of changing my mind. I had done this as an act of love for mankind, to give life. I knew that this couple had struggled for more than ten years to have a child on their own; if I had changed my mind, they would have been devastated. We probably would have ended in court, as others have, tearing this little one to pieces. My own children would have received mixed messages; for months, they had been sharing with everyone how we were having a baby for a couple who couldn't. They were proud of what we were doing.

This all came at a time of much controversy regarding surrogacy. The court system was having heyday. One surrogate, Mary Beth Whitehead, was in the news daily.

She wanted her surrogate child back. She said she didn't realize what she had agreed to; therefore, she shouldn't held responsible for her commitment. Everyone was torn apart. They couldn't even settle on one name for the child. The court finally granted both families joint custody.

There I was as the turmoil swirled around me getting ready to give birth to another surrogate child. I was angered by the situation in the press along with the bad press that all the surrogates were getting because of one. My husband wrote a letter to the editor of the Greensboro *News & Record* defending surrogacy based on the fact he was married to a surrogate mother; within days, we were headline news. Everyone was asking me the same question, "How can you do this?" My simple answer was, "I have lost several family members recently to cancer. This childless couple should be entitled to a family of their own. I made a commitment to carry a child for them"

On November 28, 1986, a healthy baby was born. He was very special. I saw him briefly after the delivery and then for one hour the following afternoon.

When the nurse brought him to see me the day after he was born she asked the question again: "How can you do this?"

I asked if she had seen the parents and what they were like. She said they were finally going to get something to eat. They just couldn't put him down. This was the first time since birth eighteen hours before that he had been in the bassinet. They had held him, fed him, rocked him, and loved him the entire time.

"That's how," I told her.

TALIA SHELTON

The Long Road Home

"I don't understand why you insist on making this hard," he said. "You must want me to hit you! I told you to finish cleaning this house by 5:00 p.m. and it still looks like a tornado ran through it," he yelled violently.

"I've been working hard all day," I replied with a sob.

He raised his hand and hit me across he face.

I began to cry as he shouted, "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about!"

This is all that ran through my mind over and over again as I packed my bags. I was tired, tired of being wakened to my father almost every night...in the dark...alone. I was tired of being sore of the numerous times he struck me, and I was growing weary from not being able to attend school because I had a black eye or a swollen lip. He took my virginity when I was eleven. He threatened to kill me if I told anyone what he had been doing. I'd try to cry out at night, but nothing ever came out, or maybe it did and no one ever heard me...or maybe they were just ignoring me.

"I can't take it anymore!" I screamed, finally determined that this time I was going to do something about it.

I'm leaving. I'm only thirteen, and I don't know where I'll go, but I know wherever I end up, I'll be better off than I am here.

No one lives in that old house now except my father. Well, he's not really my father. My mother married him when I was seven and she died when I was ten. I never knew my real father. I always wanted my mother to tell me about him but all she ever told me was his name, Eric Paine. I wonder why she never talked about him. My older sister was twenty-one and lived on her own. I haven't seen her since I was seven. She ran away when she was fifteen, just after my mother died.

The last thing she said to me was, "I refuse to live in this house with that man. He is not my father and never will be."

I begged her to take me with her but she said she couldn't take care of a little kid and herself. It was a cold night so I gave her my favorite blanket, told her I loved her and watched her run down the street and fade into the dark night.

Before my mother died, the three of us spent a lot of time together. Even though mom struggled to make ends meet, we always went on a vacation in the summertime and we went to church every Sunday. I don't remember exactly when he came, but I believe it was when we took a trip to the mountains one summer. I thought it was okay when they became a couple. I saw that my mother was happy with him, and whatever made mom happy made me happy as well. The more he came around the less time we spent together. All mom wanted to do was stay home with Albert. I began to resent him because he was taking her away from me.

One evening at dinner mom and Albert announced they were getting married. I don't remember what I felt, but I do remember thinking, "We'll have a real family now. I'll have both a mommy and a daddy!"

After they were married for about a year, my mom became very irritable and never wanted to spend time with us. Sometimes she would spend up to two days locked away in her room. When she came out, she had pale bruises covered with make-up. She always made up a story as to why she had the bruises, or either said that she was sick. At first I believed her, but after a while, I found it hard to believe that she was suddenly so clumsy.

It was the day after Thanksgiving that mom and dad went out to eat for their third wedding anniversary. They promised that they would be home by 10:00 p.m., but it was almost 12:45 a.m. and they weren't back yet. At approximately 2:00 a.m. the neighbors came by and explained what had happened.

They took us to the hospital. Dad was okay; he only had a few scratches on his face, a couple of broken ribs

and both legs were shattered. But mom was badly injured. We visited with her for about fifteen minutes. She was not conscious, but I told her how much I loved her anyway and I gave her a kiss. I had to leave soon after because the machines started to shriek. A few hours later a doctor came and told us she had died.

I ran away on a warm evening in June. I slept under bridges and in alleys for about six months until I found a shelter where I could stay. Every morning a minister came from a church a few blocks away and preached or just prayed with the homeless for hours at a time. At first, I didn't want to hear anything he had to say. I believed that if God were real, He wouldn't have put me through all that He did. I believed I couldn't live my life for Christ, and I wasn't good enough to be received into the kingdom of heaven. Why would God take in someone as dirty and used as I? However, I knew I didn't belong to Satan. I started attending the services the minister gave because for the few hours he was preaching, I felt like I was back home with my mother and sister in church.

After I had been attending the service for about three months, he preached a sermon that changed my life, a sermon about the common man, and how most people believe that they and everyone around them are too good for hell but too bad for heaven. He explained to the people that if you lived your life according to God's will, you would not be stuck in between two worlds. You can be the worst person in the world yet decide to turn your life around, repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and you will no longer be lost in the darkness. I could feel that sermon touching me in the pit of my stomach. I felt the minister had written the sermon just for me. That sermon changed my perspective and I was saved because of it. I finally came to the point in my life where I could forgive my father for all the wrong he had done to mother and me.

It's been about four years since I first went to the shelter. I'm out now and I have a job and a home of my own. I realize now that I was foolish to think that man is the only judge of another man and that we were created "half to rise and half to fall," for we were all created to rise.

WE just have to find our path. I still search for my sister every day with no luck, but I will not give up.

One day I decided to go back to the shelter to see if I could find the minister who saved my life. The woman at the shelter gave me directions to the pastor's church. When I got there he explained to me how any man could turn his life to Jesus and how God will forgive men of all their sins. He had done many things that have been forgiven by God, but not by the people he had hurt. We sat and talked for about two hours. As I was about to leave, I realized after all these years I didn't even know his name.

I asked him and he looked up into my eyes with a warm smile, held out his hand to shake mine and replied, "Bishop Eric Paine."

MARISA DESANTO

April Flowers

> A European flower, the Canterbury Bell lives for only two springs.

On the street of Rue Mouffetard
I reach and feel the white Canterbury bells.
Last Spring, I drank cappuccino with them.
They began their day with David and me.
Our first morning as husband and wife
we ate at this table. Café Place Monge
serves fresh orange juice with two sugar cubes.
But I like it because of my David.
This fall, two towers collapsed atop him.
They never found him—just his wedding band.
We came to Paris for the honeymoon.
Today I stare at this table. I came
once more to see the Canterbury bells.
They won't be here next spring for me to feel.

Black & White

You sauntered into the Princeton classroom.
The Austrian teacher questioned your late,
Grand entrance with a sturdy, strict voice,
"Where have you been?" You smiled through the crowd;
I wondered where you were from. Attention
shifted, my intrigue propelled initiative.
After the screen writing lecture, our plot
began to develop, like a classic.

We cut in between tall gothic towers.
The eerie ivy matched my senses, as
if our scene went as far back as Princeton's
history. It felt familiar, like a favorite
childhood movie. Did we
know then that the story line would end?
The serendipity proved only to be another
great flick. The suspension of disbelief
erased; the credit released. And all of our
memories became a shot list filed away.

CATHY ROBERTS

On Happiness at Home

It is only possible to live happily ever after on a day-to-day basis.
--Margaret Bonnano

"I'm from Tim-Buck-Too, in the state of B.F. Egypt," the guy sitting next to me in class said.

Well, that's not exactly what he said. Actually, I'm pretty certain that's not what he said at all. It's just what it sounded like to me, which was the glorification of a minute geographic point on a map the guy was claiming as his hometown.

I just sat, smiled, and nodded as the guy rambled on about why his place of birth was so important to him. His mumbling monotone voice carried on with the speed of a professional telemarketer, with about as much enthusiasm as any courtesy caller has ever had describing how many different deals are available when purchasing a long distance phone service, and with the perfect strategy of never breathing, thus never pausing long enough to allow any intelligent interventions or questions on the part of the now lethargic listener who is lulled into apathy by the telemarketer to the extent that their voice is heard only as the annoying sound of a buzzing bee.

I used the only defense any listener has, which was to disengage myself from the pest, and hope the bee didn't hover around me in the bee-like movement that bees do. I turned to speak to the student next to me as soon as I thought there was a slight break in the guy's buzzing.

What annoyed me about the bee wasn't the fact that he had rambled, but that in his rambling he had only named places and objects he valued. There hadn't been a single person's name anywhere in the monologue. Places and objects aren't special because they exist. They're special because of the people that act upon those places

and objects. He shouldn't want to go home to see materials, but to see people.

I grew up in a number of places, but that doesn't mean I consider all of them home. What made them home was that my parents and sisters were with me.

As a little girl, I imagined my family resembled Swiss Family Robinson because of all the new places we went. We didn't get stranded on an island with quicksand or anything, but moving from Michigan to North Carolina gave enough of a culture shock I thought we had gone to another country. Even the language was different. In the first conversation I actually understood a southerner talking to me, I think my facial expression resembled those of the apes in the original Planet of the Apes movie when they heard a human talk for the first time. I didn't think they could speak English.

The point is, I moved away from a familiar geographic point, but I was still at home because my family was with me.

Ten years later, I still live in North Carolina, but I'm not home most of the time. With my parents in Raleigh, my sister Sheila in Cary, my sister Michelle in Pinehurst, and me in High Point, it's difficult to go home.

One day, I actually went home for the first time in nearly three years. Everyone in my family was getting together at Michelle's new property in Pinehurst for dinner. I drove to Raleigh on an early Friday afternoon to meet my parents and Sheila before heading to Michelle's place.

We paced ourselves into the car, and headed out. Halfway there, my sister asked me what I was smiling about. "No reason," I replied. I didn't want to admit to her I had a tune running through my head. With the car riding into the sunset of a late afternoon, I couldn't explain why the chorus of "We're On Our Way Home" by the Beatles was playing in my head over and over again. The moment was just like the end of a movie where the heroes are riding on their horses into the sunset after overcoming a challenge. All that was needed to complete the scene was for the credits to start rolling.

That night, my family gathered around a bonfire on

the property as we shared memories from when my sisters and I were children. I sat with my family and knew at that moment, I was home. I had never been on the property before, but for just one night, in one instance, I was happy to be home.

ANDREA GRIFFITH

Coping with the Past

Being the restless people that they are, my parents decided this summer to move away after living in the home that they built for only five years. Considering that I attend school and live away from home eight months out of the year, I had to accept this and allow my folks to take this new path which includes a new house and new jobs, among other things. As the moving date approached, I did my part packing boxes.

As I was going through a file cabinet in my room, I found some old letters. Some were from my former best friend. She and I were close in junior high until she moved to Delaware, and we basically lost touch slowly until our contact with each other became non-existent. Other letters were from a pen-pal that I signed up for in elementary school and wrote to for a couple of years. She was from Australia and I was fascinated about her culture.

My mother urged me to minimize my belongings if at all possible to ease the move. And so I battled with the question: Do I dispose of these letters? This led to the even greater questions: At what point does one let go of the past?

Part of me said to "take the plunge" by trashing the letters. The authors of these are people that I don't think of on a daily basis. They are no longer a huge part of my life. However, this does not change the fact that at one time, they were. All of this led me to the greater realization that our lives are pieced together, like a quilt, by important people and big events. Like it or not, our past is always there and will forever be part of us.

I would love to forget some of my former tacky outfits or haircuts, but pictures hanging on the walls of my parents' house remind me. I would love to forget that horrible bike wreck that sent me to the emergency room, but I have

a scar that reminds me. I would love to forget about that awful speeding ticket, but my driving record (not to mention my increased insurance rate) reminds me.

Of course I have only mentioned less pleasant things. Let's not forget my numerous photos that remind me of fun vacations, weddings, and holidays. But either way, the past is always there. It somehow makes today even more important, for soon it will be the yesterday that we either scorn or reminisce about.

I decided to keep the letters.

If nothing else, maybe twenty years from now I will read them and laugh at the immaturity of middle-schoolers. Or maybe we can use them to wrap the dishes up when we move again. It's bound to happen. Like I said, my parents are restless.

The Complexity of Breath

I know you. You do not do one thing
The same way all the time, or things
In only either good ways or bad.
You do, you are. Doing and being
Float and drift, clouds that only look
Like a dragon, a chariot, grizzly bear
On hind legs, each for seconds at a time.
I know you as dragon, chariot, bear,
Angel, hobo with a walking stick
And a cardboard sign, baby sleeping,
Curious giant in the shadows. When you say,
"I'm sorry," I always hope you're listening,
Aware of the complexity of breath
And voice, and of their sweetness.

GENA SMITH

Endurance

She stares with determination
Painted across her face
As the mountain approaches, she quivers not
Running beside me in this weary race
She sees the goal in her mind
And continues strong towards it
There is a comfort in the silence we share
Without saying a word
We know how determined the other is
Our bodies are weak
But we know God is our strength
Sometimes she's two steps behind
Other times she's three ahead
When obstacles arise she may go to the right
While I run to the left
But in the end we see the goal together
We run toward it together
As the distance closes in
Smiles peek though our serious faces
The journey comes to an end,
Silence vanishes but the comfort remains
Praising each other for the work we've done
Tomorrow is another race to be run,
another mountain to climb,
And she'll still be there running next to me.

For Nature

"Many eyes go through the meadow, but few see the flowers in it.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many eyes go through the meadow, but few see the flowers in it. Many are exiled within their lives, unaware of the flowers. How it burns me to the deepest embers within my soul to see the art of nature ignored.

What is nature? Nature is the tiniest flick of dead skin that falls far beneath the topsoil, spilling over into the long-lost fruits of the earth, ever to be forgotten. Nature is the tiniest of images and the largest of thoughts. Nature is created, oh no, nature is not.

To be nature is not to exist. An indefinable *thing* cannot be described through thoughtless accounts but through partial moments in which the body and the soul become one by touching a freshly fallen autumn leaf. Nature exists only when you say to yourself, "*I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars!*" nature has then been created, or perhaps not.

How strange that Nature does not knock, and yet does not intrude! Yes, Emily, nature is blind to our emotions, yet shrewder to the underlining soul within the deepest wave of blood to conquer the darkest, black forest of fear. Nature is insightful to our posture, and most certainly our prose; nature creates us. Oh no, we created nature.

We created the heavenly beauty of the illustrious clouds, and the towering old oaks that own the key to history within their rings of life. Who better to be one with the earth than I. Mother earth, Mother Nature? Explore the personality of the life of this great planet, full of nature. *Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?*

The bickering, hatred over the word NATURE. The word itself is as fake as you or I. How could we protest nature, no more than we protest breathing for one day. "I refuse to breathe today because it is a forged idea." I die. Without nature, you die. The triumph of life lies within scenery. What does the wind rolling across the plains into a twisting storm mean, sent to demolish the triumph of an ant hill and all its inhabitants? Compared to that of your own home, the irony of the situation is that it never existed, no more such than a figment of your own psyche, it is not real. Wonderfully fake. The idea is fake; yes, we know that, Oates, what isn't?

How can we define the term *plagiarism*, specifically pointing to the idea? No idea has been created to resemble the flawless and faultless. Go about your day and contemplate the meaning of the beauty of nature. Many pebbles placed in the path resemble the aging of the rings in the mighty oaks. The mighty oak already possesses your wisdom, for you cannot tell Him something genuinely novel.

The phenomenal design of nature does not resemble a miracle because the layout survives everywhere. One must witness the blooming of a dandelion first hand for the splendor of the most to be splendorous. The design is a copyright of the creator. Few truly possess the rights, yet all seem to own them.

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in the stones, and good in everything.
—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 1599

Just take a moment to ask Aldous Huxley of his thoughts on nature, for he would surely know. Live a lifetime of imaging no nature, no freedom, and the perception of what nature honestly means will still remain. *"The investigation of nature is an infinite pasture-ground where all may gaze, and where the more bite, the longer the grass grows, the sweeter is its flavor, and the more it nourishes."* You see, nature exists everywhere, even in the blemishes of

the mind where few would have thought to first glance.

Lying on a tree, bent by the sturdy hand of time to grow out of a small hill sideways, winding beside the bank until no ground further exists, then taking Darwin's theory to mind, grows toward heaven like all others, I am searching for nature. The ants scatter across the old bark, while I remain mesmerized by their knack to climb a tree without having to ascend, search for treasures that may spare their death from their authoritative queen. The leaves rustle against the embankment as they drift from flight into the soundly creek below, encountering a new journey of which no one may know the outcome. Staring out from the small wooded path onto the freshly cut fields of wheat, harvested just today I can smell the barley and clover, and thought runs across my mind: I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't take notice. Or yellow, green, blue, red...undoubtedly red, the most mysterious color. No thought of mine covers the path of the unknown, but still...I have discovered nature. No indecency has occurred due to my most un-original thought, yet everyone must experience this gratitude for one's self at sometime in a short life. No wonder everyone hates clichés, "that is so cliché"; ideas must be only partially new...never worn out. Is it perhaps the idea of nature that has been hackneyed? Combined with as many different terms as possible, nature's existence is on its "last leg" (to adorn you with another cliché). Perhaps, but oh no.

How could anyone witness the tree with a sour limp in its spine that can no longer reach fully for the sky, and has to rest itself upon its maker, the earth? Surely that thought is true to no one other than myself, however unfashionable the idea may seem.

We still do not know one-thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us. Yet, in nature's defense, allow me to propose a new idea: perhaps a new term. No longer nature, but life. Nature is no longer known as nature, but *life.* Life surely continues to be in the elite subsistence. Nature can no longer falter due to its uniting with life. If Oates does not like life, has no more to say about life, and its mysterio-so, then perhaps she has no more to

write about.

All of nature cries aloud that it continues to exist, whether to be thought of as original, or as fake. *Many eyes will forever go through the meadow, but few will see the flowers in it.*

Tear

His deep brown eyes gazed into her soft blue eyes. No words were spoken as she lay beside him.

He saw the smile upon her face but it was the tear dropping from her eye that he watched. It started slow, small and then dripped down her cheek leaving a trail of glistening light.

He felt safe but there was the tear. A shiver ran down his back and he started to protest. Her finger to his lips calmed him and he protested not. Her smile was still there but now a second tear dropped from her eye.

He lay still because it was peaceful now. Not like before when horrible things happened. In a flash he had gone from peaceful dark to harshest light where pain ensued. That was over and now there was peace.

Her face loomed larger, this creature with the soft blue eyes, as she came close to whisper to his face. "Good-bye, my son, I love you."

The words floated above him. He was no longer by her side. The space around him was empty. He felt alone and started to protest.

A finger again was placed upon his lips and a new face came into view. The face had large green eyes and a smile.

"I love you, my adopted baby son."

He gazed into the large green eyes. He felt secure as he watched this face. But in his heart were the other's tears.

FOCUS

JUSTIN MARTIN

On rare occasions a talent appears
who seems to be naturally creative,
who seems to have taught himself
what a young poet needs to know.

Justin Martin wrote the following
series of poems last summer
during a visit to Europe.

Make Alfred So Proud

Time, force, action, space, matter.
You with the Nobel Prize say all
Things are one of these five.

But what about the feel this morning,
This lashing out, this fistful swing?
Mixed in me is something unclear in the semantics
Of YOUR tongue. I'll opt out of the finite, discrete,
And utilize lucid lead departing my head
To arrive, to explain how I feel on this sheet.

Siphoned

I do not feel strong today as a man
Should. A full night's rest offers little
To me. Nothing brings me pain
Because something is gone.
I'm too bereft for tears, too languid to yawn.
I do not feel strong today as a man
Should. A torpid man sits where a bastion
Once stood. Weathermen report it's sunny
Out. I rather prefer it referred as the drought
That will slowly sap the vim and the verve
From a man who can't feel as he should.

In Lieu of the Coffee Break

I like going through the arboretum with you,
Past topiaries, close up
To the palatial Oak
Which urges you and me toward foliage in the city.

The roof rejects the smog while a canopy
Of shields cools the stroll of two
Imaginations.

Breakfast at Nuremberg

I have consumed it all and there is nothing
On my plate. Three busy servers wipe remnants
Of the meal I ate. Growing obese with sin,
I have rubber fleece beneath my skin.
You will not force me to recount all I had;
The resolution to this meal was trial enough.
Each Nuremberg Breakfast I look ahead
To less invasive mornings.

Ambitious Feet on Me

I tried to noose a continent
With a rope of cement nine feet thick.
Your Congress is frequently accused
Of a protruding
Nose, but my slaves serenaded rooftops
When a Great Communicator spoke
His battering ram through Checkpoint Charlie's chest,
Shattering his sternum, taking his breath.
You razed me and raised Berliners.
My stony eyes glower up at them now,
And they walk over me
To unadulterated waters of the western Spree.

Disgust at Cobblestone Bistro

I am at the college age of beer
And quixotic ambition and yet you
Disgust me. There was a time
When I thought you were strong,
But here in a cobblestone bistro
You're revealed as a pathetic, stumbling subject
Of a pungent
Crown. Royal he is, but not deserving.
My father is strong; I am enough company for him.
You are feeble from the revelry
With just an Irish song to sing to an inorganic king--
All alone--while I quietly count cold cobblestones.

Obscuring Umbrella of Bavarian Green

Is there anything this morning
To talk about at all? Perhaps we'll walk with three hands
Through a verdant Bavarian summer, forget
The imminent shiver of fall. BMW's are made
Up ahead. I say we drive
To the factory, drop off our phones,
Leave them and the car both for dead with Jones.
We may run into the Suisse and find them hoarding the
gold
Of the dead or the canes of the blind.

If we then go to the smallest country
We'll see small Suisse men guarding
A very large Pontiff. Go to the Black Forest
And we'll have an earful of how peaceful, neutral
Are the land and the men. But honest?
Something shines from Lake Zurich's bottom.
Many men die and neglect to spend what served
To show what others can't have.
For two generations the Gold of the Chosen
Lay without a Pope blessing, but sealed by his men.

Cuckoo

I bought a Cuckoo clock in Tittisee
Today. It's too rococo for my eyes,
Although the Bird is a curious one;
It will not build a personal nest,
But fly into that of Bluebirds or Sparrows,
Push out the parents, devour the rest.
Are clocks here a tribute to Cuckoo bravado?
There's little for which to feel so, at least for long.
Eagle's Talons slice and kill the imposer
And use branches from its own private stock
To rebuild a nest it both ravaged, rebuilt.

Augsburg Confession of Gulfcoast Depression

Augsburg streets are down below and I
Can hear techno music in tiny cars. This is good
Because our shouting seems less discordant.
Why do we pay the Germans to fight on their land?
Surely you can poison yourself
To slurs and staggers at home. And I can hate you
There for free, curse the worthless therapy
Where we rub our eyes, then look down at our hands.
I deplore you and love you in tandem inside,
And we begin a session of Augsburg confessions.

Duplicitous Shrapnel

I saw a cross made of a bomb
Fragments from Dresden and Coventry.
In American eyes, half were bad,
The other not so. The sentiments in this Geneva museum
Are obvious, however, of critics of the war endeavors;
One side was wrong, the other was wrong.
But the converse of what's wrong
We should deduce to be good. The Suisse
Can stay at the road's center with painted lines
And passive possum.

To Western Homes

Trans-continental turbulence
And I shift in economy seating.
Air pockets the size of small countries
Can't make flight attendants flinch.
Should we dive beneath right now
Obscuring midnight clouds, the cold
Atlantic Sea would spread tides wide
And welcome me. Turbulence would end
If we fell, but anonymity
In the salty scrap would estrange
Surviving memories.

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