

SPRING 2008

Apogee



The Literary Journal of
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY



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THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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"Yes, I Have a Little Brother"

FIRST PLACE

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

You and I knew each other
like secrets, before
a secret was anything
other than childish rituals
when we believed in
our make-believe that we were the first
to discover, under elms and birches,
in rain boots, through muddy skunk cabbage,
Indian arrowheads and a fire circle
that marked the mystery
of ancient tribal dwelling.

Before we were more important
than cartoons and calories in pancakes.
Drifting down like the wing
of a bed sheet fort smelling of sleep,
time pulled us towards respective places,
to outside occupations.
"Oh you have a brother?" anyone asks.
The irony in this question;
compared to you, most are strangers
because I taught you how to slide
down a slide, and we both
blew too many bubbles in our milk.

"The Same Jar"

FIRST PLACE

High Point University Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The backyard smelled of the last dying bits of charcoal and the sharp, earthy smell of grass cooling after a day in July heat. Sammy was barefoot, lying on his stomach on the screened in porch watching Wheel of Fortune with his aunties and the dogs.

During commercial advertising beaches blue like sea glass and families that snorkeled together, Sammy heard the neighbor kids approach the yard with their nighttime skips and whoops. Through the screen windows he saw beginning twinkles of light.

Sammy told his mother he was going to go play with the neighbors, he wouldn't walk down the street on his own, and that he would put some shoes on, then scurried off the porch into the yard.

As the night smudged the sky in dark, Sammy could smell the coast a few blocks away as it changed tide. He squinted at the forsythia bushes at the far side of the yard and watched for the specks of light that appeared against them.

Last weekend, Sammy and the neighbor kids stayed out late, until the grass was cold on their bare feet, catching fireflies. Sammy fell asleep in the car on the way home that night as he tried to think of better things to catch the fireflies in. He had tried a coke bottle, but the neck was too narrow to get the bug down inside from his doubly cupped hands. A regular glass didn't work either, because there was no good way to cover the whole top.

Tonight, Sammy would find the best thing for catching fireflies. He wanted to get a good jarful, like having the tails of fireworks in your hands.

Next to his auntie's stooping, old house was a garage, big enough for one car, but filled with dusty stuff from when the house was new and tall. His granddad had been born there and his auntie who

lived there now did not throw old away things like broken vacuum cleaners and certain newspapers.

Sammy twisted the battered brass knob of the side door. His sneakers scuffed over the grainy cement and he pulled the string down to turn on a dangling light bulb.

The damp air felt cool on his summer skin and had a muddy, dark smell. An old bicycle with a cracked seat leaned against a wall next to wooden beach chairs that had not been unfolded for a very long time. On the far wall of the garage was a shelf of rusty coffee cans and dusty jars and mugs. Inside one mug was an assortment of screws and in a rusty coffee can were old, yellowing pictures. The picture on the top was of a boy with cheekbones like Sammy's, wearing a knit cap and mittens; the cold showed in his face. He was smiling and holding a sled in front of a white hill and skeleton trees. Every vessel on the shelf held tiny bits of other lives; shoelaces and comic books, stubby pencils and a hammer.

Sammy crouched down to look under the shelf. Towards the back, against a wall he saw a mason jar lying on its side, its top side coated in thick dust. Sammy reached his fingers back towards the jar and rolled it gently to him.

The jar was made of clear glass with a top that screwed on and off and the sides had a raised circle and letters on them. He could hear something rustle against the jar's sides when he moved it. Something small.

He unscrewed the lid and softly shook out the little thing inside onto the palm of his hand. He held it closer to the light bulb to see it better.

He held the remains of a fire fly. Its brittle wings and shell dried out after years of being in the jar. Sammy carefully placed the bug back inside of its jar and slid the lid into his back pocket.

"Proud"
FIRST PLACE
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

*you ve
made lightning for two hours
little bug I told him
but I don t hear
any claps of thunder*

—Don Marquis, "the flattered lightning bug"

"She's a sparkle-shoed star
With stage lights for eyes.
Soon the whole world will know her—
'That Broadway Girl.'
Everyone screams for autographs
As she floats down the streets and shines.
Hundreds of hits on her fan page so far;
My baby's the talk of the town.
Once a Pink Lady (at Union Pines High),
She was Sandy in Grease the next year.
Tevye was lucky with a daughter so lovely;
He might have married her himself!
Now, I don't mean to brag,
But her career's in the Biz,
And she's leaving behind a fairy-dust trail.
I'm proud to call her
My daughter, the actress."

[Her mother didn't mention her best-known role—
Asst. Manager at the Wal-Mart Photo Center.]

"Remnants"**FIRST PLACE****High School Fiction****Phoenix Literary Festival 2007**

On the corner of cracked concrete streets the house peers out from under ancient vines that grip it like memories. In the front an old willow weeps her stories to the weeds and wildflowers that smother the earth beneath. A child is growing here. Squatted in the garden her white dress stained with earth. Her small fingers like roots digging in the soil.

Inside, an old woman is sitting in a wheelchair wrapped in a gray-blue blanket, whispering to the sparks that linger in the fireplace. The child's mother, Rose, is in the kitchen boiling water.

"I spoke to the doctor," the child's mother says. She waits for a few seconds for a reply, but there is only silence. "He says that you can live here for a while, with me and Violet. . . . Do you remember Violet?" Silence saturates the space between them, and the mother releases a long sigh. She pours hard yellow noodles into the boiling water and watches as they slowly soften into a tangled blob, like skinny yellow worms.

She pours thick red sauce into a pan and stirs it absently. She checks the time, eight-thirty. "Time for your medicine," she says. The old woman purses her lips, hardening the wrinkles that tell the stories she doesn't remember.

Outside, the child is still in the garden. She is nestled in among the tangled growth, digging. She is looking for worms. When she finds one she lets it wriggle between her small fingers. It is cold, and soft and rope-like. She reaches for a jar and screws off the lid. Inside the jar worms are squirming and twisting against each other, a writhing knot of tangled bodies.

"Violet. . . Viollleeett!" Her mother calls from the front porch. The moon is high, and drips a soft glow on the velvety sky. Rose watches her daughter, a small white spot emerging from the depth of the garden. "Come inside and wash your hands, it's time for dinner." She regards the jar of worms with a tired sigh and ushers her daughter into the house.

When the child enters the house she sees her grandmother peering intently into the fire. She walks proudly over to her, presenting her with the jar. Its insides are writhing in the soft glow. The old woman squints at the child curiously, then examines the jar of worms. "Yes, dear, this will do just fine. Daddy will be very proud of his little rose, and we will have a big fish for dinner." Violet turns away, satisfied, and heads toward the bathroom to wash her hands.

The old woman cranes her neck to watch the child disappear, and when she is sure she is gone she unscrews the lid. She watches them for a minute twisting and squeezing, fighting blindly for a way out, then she tips the jar into the fire. Their writhing bodies are illuminated momentarily, a glowing knot, like a heart, beating and twisting out in all directions. Then they are black and cold. They crumple into ash and disappear into the flames.

The old woman turns her head, suddenly realizing that there is someone standing behind her. "He's not comin' back," she says in an attempt to explain. "He's gone and left me with no food. Rose doesn't know and she keeps bringin' me his bait. I just don't know what to tell her. I just don't know. . . ." Rose wheels her mother to the table and serves her spaghetti.

Violet comes out from the bathroom with clean hands and dress still stained dark with soil. She sits down at the table and smiles. "I saw Daddy today."

"Where? Where did you see Daddy?" Rose asks, worries

wrinkling subtlety in her forehead.

"In the garden." She smiles. "He told me to gather the worms."

"Really?" The old woman says ecstatically. "Oh, Rose, your daddy is coming home!"

Rose heaves a heavy sigh. "No, Mother, my father is not coming home. He's not coming home and neither is hers. Violet, darling, I'm sorry Daddy had gone to another place, beyond our eyes."

"Who are you?" The old woman cries. "Don't listen to her, honey. Daddy's out there, and he's going to bring us a great big fish with all those worms you've gathered!"

The old woman leaps suddenly out of her wheelchair, grabbing Violet's hand. "Come on, Rose, we're going to get Daddy!" She stumbles forward on stringy bones and weathered skin grasping at the walls and her granddaughter's small shoulders for strength. When they reach the door Violet flings it open, thrilled to finally show someone her glorious findings.

The air is still. The moon is high, dripping its glow on the velvety sky. The garden spirals darkly around them, and willow weeps in silence. The world feels utterly noiseless, utterly motionless, utterly empty. And there is nothing, nobody there.

Rose appears quietly behind them. She wraps her mother's arms around her shoulders and takes her daughter's hand. She guides them softly back to the table, and closes the door on the emptiness around them. She sits down quietly, and bows her head. She reaches out long arms like willow branches and grasps the hands of her daughter and mother. "Thank you for our lives."

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"Ellinore of Moor"

SECOND PLACE

High Point University Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Ellinore was born on a soggy moor to an ugly mother in the year 1750. When people first saw Ellinore, they gasped not only because she was so beautiful, but also because she was born of such a disfigured woman. No one had seen her mother before that day they stumbled onto in the middle of labor. Her forehead appeared as though it had premature horns sprouting out of it. Her eyes were lopsided, one leg was longer than the other. She scared the children. After Ellinore was born, the people drowned her mother in the lake. They said she was not human.

The townspeople raised Ellinore. Their admiration for her beauty and their pity upon her for having a monstrous mother made it effortless for them to care for her.

Because this tolerance took the place of love when she was raised, she had no expectations of love. No one cared about her apart from her beauty. When a man named Cliff, who brought her fresh lilacs everyday and owned a large piece of land, asked her to marry him, tolerance seemed good and well enough.

She became pregnant a month after they were married. Never had she thought about children before. She had no real family, only acquaintances that floated in and out of her life. Suddenly, there was a life growing inside of her that didn't float away. And she didn't want it to.

Her husband never stirred feelings inside of her the way the baby in her womb did. It was solid and it was hers. It was born a girl, and a red, bloody mess that, when she touched it, sent a small shock from the core of her chest to the tips of her fingers.

But it had the horns.

Its eyes were lopsided, and no one, not even her husband would go near it. Ellinore only gazed at it with amazement. She touched its face. "How could I have created such a beautiful person?" she asked herself.

People watched. Her husband stayed silent, never entering the room.

Ellinore took the baby into town with her one evening. She was smiling. No one else in town was smiling like her or had ever smiled like her. The children cried as she carried the baby past them, its deformed face looking back at them.

When Ellinore began to walk back to her home in the country, four men grabbed her and threw her to the dirt road. They took the baby and ran, but Ellinore chased after. She found them standing by the lake. In front of them, her baby's body floated face down in the gray water.

Her husband found her at the lake where she was howling in a horrific manner. He ignored the object in the lake and carried her back home. There was a storm cellar behind the house and, when her mouth refused to keep silent, he lay her in the bottom of it and shut the door.

The next morning, as he opened the door of the storm cellar, the same howl arose as if it had never stopped. He shut the door and proceeded to do his chores. When he looked in on his wife that afternoon, she was gone. He searched for her in town, but didn't find her until he returned home that night.

Ellinore was sitting at the kitchen table, touching her face. She had carved two, raw circles into her forehead. She had cut her eyelid and it hung heavily down. All over her face there were distortions, scratches, marks.

"If I had horns on my forehead, would you have married me?" she asked. "And if my face had looked like this, would you have tolerated me?"

He spat at her and walked out.

When she was sure he was gone, she walked out onto a soggy moor where she lay down, lying with her arms spread out. She still felt the love for her child, and, though her daughter was dead, she thought she would explode from loving and enjoying a thing so much. She touched the scars on her face that relieved her of her beauty.

She felt beautiful, though, as she rose and trudged across the empty moor.

"Cherry Blunt Band on Acid"
SECOND PLACE
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

I hear you say something
 But my attention is on the shiny button on your pants
 You walk off to the pancake house for scrambled eggs
 I run back to my trashcan where I think I threw away a dollar
 Later you ask my thoughts
 I say that my band needs to rehearse
 Ballerinas fly on purple wings on acid
 But mountain peaks are found in bed
 What happens when I turn left instead of right?
 Your wrist is covered by a new tattoo of an ugly rose
 Life isn't over till you change
 Resist change, don't say anything, find love, make love, lose in life
 Pay the price for losing poker, walk away without your wedding ring
 I love everything about you, I hate everything about him
 When will you see what I want you to?
 What do I have to prove to you to show it?
 We met in the bookstore by accident when you bumped into me
 Black wristbands accessorize a blue lace top
 Dragon jewelry is my favorite, I bought it when we were at the beach
 Wooden chairs with seats on fire and legs of water
 Flip backwards off a wall and fall into a pile of gold
 Cookies of ginger mix well with smoke from cherry blunts
 Milk tastes funny with ice cream but red wind hits the spot
 Straight Edge is under-rated, sex is over-rated, money is perfect
 Black pens are permanent, white flip-flops are made of memories
 The hat you wore yesterday is on my bed
 Nets on your arms, dye in your hair, color me perfect
 Fix it all by breaking the expensive glass vase
 End it all by kissing you

"Still Life with Chicken Acapulco"
SECOND PLACE
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Miriam is the secretary who eats York Peppermint Patties by sucking out the filling first. Barbara wears plaid three times a week on average and sits in the cubicle directly to my left, where she reads romance novels.

I do not like my job.

On Wednesdays we have productivity meetings where I sit on the side of the table nearest the windows, which are dingy and covered in fingerprints. Productivity meetings last long enough for me to do many productive things. First, I mentally make, check, and edit my grocery list for the week. Then, I think about how fat I feel and debate for approximately seven minutes on whether or not it is improper to discreetly unbutton my pants while I am sitting down. Next, I pretend I am working by rearranging words from the meeting notes into funny phrases. To stay awake, I rub the tip of my tongue against the roof of my mouth.

There is a man who always sits across from me, diagonally to my right. He is cute, but I think he has a problem with earwax, because people almost always have to repeat themselves whenever they speak to him. He is Hispanic, so at first I thought he had trouble understanding because of the language barrier. Later I found out that he was born in Connecticut where his biological grandmother raised him. She was Caucasian and didn't even speak Spanish, so neither does Lupe, which is okay, because I don't speak Spanish either.

Lupe and I are going to get married and have three children who we will name Emilio, Juan, and Clementine. Clementine will be born without any hair, but she will have perfect features for television, and she will star in commercials, just like the one for the Chex cereal brand where the kids eat big bowls of Chex on television and smile at you with missing teeth. She will have two missing teeth when she films her first commercial, and I will watch from somewhere behind the camera, and Emilio and Juan will still be little enough to hold my hands while they watch their little sister turn on like a light.

Lupe and I will have two pet beagles before we have children, and we will name them Bonnie and Clyde. We will give them away two weeks before Emilio is born, when I am rounder than a beach ball.

Sometimes in the productivity meetings I try to get Lupe to notice me. Once, he passed me a pen, and our hands touched for a second before we both resumed our previous slump-slouched state.

I do not like my job.

I do not like my job.

I do not like my job.

I do my job like not I do I do not I do like not do not like my mob I do my job I do my job I do not like I do not like I do my job I do not like.

"Rose Thicket"

HONORABLE MENTION

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The Fair Lady drums her slender fingers upon the Earth.
 Her lovely eyes hidden behind closed eyelids, she waits in doeful
 reverence.
 Yet there beneath the silk-smooth hand of the Fair Lady, life
 begins to grow.
 Immediately the eyes reveal themselves, and when the first rose
 doth bloom,
 The Fair Lady's heart beats wildly and soars,
 And yet more appear beside her hand, all pleading for her favor.
 In turn the patient Fair Lady only doth pick one,
 And that one be the rose that first offered its red petals.
 With a radiant smile, the dear Fair Lady pins her rose in her
 glorious tresses for all to see.
 However, soon her joy diminishes as her picked rose fades away.
 After the Fair Lady has watered the Earth with salty sadness,
 She chooses the next rose that attracts her, and plucks him to
 her breast.
 Yet the thorns on this rose prick her, and she must throw it
 away.
 Again and again the Lady repeats the cycle, choosing only the
 roses in full bloom,
 Looking over the smooth-stemmed roses,
 Until at last, she clasps in her weathered hands the last red
 rose.
 And when that rose had withered and gone, the Lady is left with
 only dull-brown roses.
 From this last choice, she turns about, abandoning the search,
 No longer fair.

"Sidewalk Chalk"

HONORABLE MENTION

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Mistakes with this medium are meager,
soon all work erased by the tread of bike
tires and rainwater. The freedom
of art on sidewalks and black asphalt.
A child scratches cryptic scribbles
(I LoVE yoU or a name with backwards R)
knelt over playground concrete or a driveway.
To an artist hunched over a sidewalk
scene on a sidewalk, maybe perfect enough
to earn some pennies dropped in a hat.
Kneeling, the stone scratching out onto itself,
deciding from the soft chalk. Today's work
unhindered by foresight, tomorrow,
or any time; flipped on a page and shelved.
Short life on a canvas just over earth.
One has to lean forward perhaps tilting
his head to really see the picture,
as he passes for a quick coffee
before presenting a presentation.
Then the art exists in memory,
malleable as its dusty colors
swirl and flatten to make the impression
one remembers after walking away.

"Chocolate Rose"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Chocolate rose on Valentine's Day
sits on the table unsent.
She couldn't use that way
to say what she had meant.

It sat alone and homeless
upon the kitchen floor
absolutely useless.
He wouldn't see what it was for.

Chocolate rose forsaken,
smashed into sharp bits.
She knew she was mistaken
to think of passing the limits.

It was supposed to be a message
to say there's someone else who
watches through the wreckage
of people and sees just you.

"The Difference Between Life and Death"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

A wandering soul
marches through the afterlife
leading each day with a blank heart
the days pass by unnoticed
the nights hold no mysterious beauty
the world is dead
as are they

To be alive
living with feeling
playfully galloping like a steed
in the meadows of youth
resting in the glamour
the colors of this world reflect

How different life and death seem
life filled with emptiness of death
death filled with happiness of life
in death we learn to live
we spend life dead
if the tables were turned
life and death may not exist separately
or maybe nothing would exist at all

"Legacy"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

My mother
emerges breathless
and sweating from the garden
Left over sunbeams glint on her skin
She wipes the sweat from her face
and flecks of rich compost
transfer to her cheek
Her hair flies in disorder
fresh-cut straw
Marianna, she says,
the caterpillars are here!
She pulls a sprig of parsley (cilantro?)—
I can never remember which—
from the ground
pushes it to my nose
At first all I smell
is the herb
but as the velvety
caterpillar skin
touches my nose
I smell something different
so other
and inexplicable
like an unborn baby
or a far away star
I smile
and bury my hands in the earth

"Solitude"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The night was still
but for the vivacious chirping
of the grasshoppers.
the sound purer than
the ringing
of a glockenspiel.
my field was illuminated
by the orb of the moon
as a chill, like the dark side of Pluto,
shivered through my bones
like the music in the night;
the liquefaction of the notes
caressing me
as I readied the teapot
to warm my soul.

"The Greater War"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The Dark Eagles of Germany seek power and wealth
 Few stand against their speed and might
 Their ruler guides them with unrivaled stealth
 They will surely destroy all those who threaten to fight

Yet they have not forgotten a unique alliance
 Formed from the days of the last war
 Between the Gryphons of France and the British Lions
 Who dare to face the destruction looming at their door

Alas, the Gryphons have fallen to the enemy's strength
 As the victorious march across the ruined land
 War with the world is only at arm's length
 The blood which will be shed will be as numerous as the sand

The Lions of Britain must stand alone in the face of death which they
 have delayed
 The striking fear can barely be contained by the diminishing hope
 That the American Eagles will finally come to their aid
 Will they come only with the sinking of another boat?

The deceiving Pheasants from Japan have attacked the Americans!
 Along with the Eagles comes the Soviet Tiger
 There is no use now in seeking peace and shaking hands
 Now we can hope that the French lands will be reacquired

The battle to liberate the world has ended in victory
 The Germans are retreating to their last stands
 The Allies repeat their final demands
 The heroes of the War for Peace finally enjoy the temporary glory

"Sunday Night in Early Summer"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The blinding blue has faded from the sky.
An orchestra of crickets welcomes night.
A black cat hunting in the fading light
Sits in the pale green clover carpet by
Some prey too small to catch my weary eye.
The fireflies look like lonely fairy light.
Insects called dragons take bejeweled flight.
I watch the evening trickle slowly by.
Worries smother in the night's embrace
Enfolding all that lives within its reach.
I smile and catch my first glimpse of a star.
Such evenings make living seem full of grace
Although more of this gentleness seems far
From the hard labor of the coming week.

"Lunar"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

The crescent grows, not as rich as the rays of day,
But throwing a cloak over secrets.

Though it's not full, you can still view
The faint circle completing the backwards "C."
If you look for a while, you might notice
The craters. Splotches of gray on silver silk.

Its light reflects off my skin.
A pale glow.
The air on my skin like water.
I felt like a ghost.

The rustling of the leaves on trees
Are the only ones with me,
Except for the occasional hooting owl and chirping crickets.

The sparkling stars don't notice people slipping
Into the shadows. They could commit a series of atrocious deeds
Spreading like a virus. The moon would not pry.

The sun's eyes observe everything, but the moon isn't as nosy.
Its eyes wander off
Into the distance.

"My Child"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Annie stands on a dirt path
Before a wooden fence
That is covered in green vines.
Her bare feet make
Gentle thuds against
The earth as she walks,
Her delight pulls me along
As I watch, the wind blows
Her dusty hair
And the gray kitten
With paws dipped in what
Looks like white paint
Is pressed against
The creamy apron, which I made
To go over her patched dark blue dress.
Just watching her makes
My weary bones smile as this
Day soaks onto my canvas.

Janeth
Valente

"The Dying Pacifist"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Extreme torture;
he voluntarily
takes a step out of his body.

Extreme happiness;
his heart stops
and his body becomes uninhabitable.

Extreme love;
he becomes an erupting volcano.
It is a pleasure to die for humanity.

"Great's Lesson"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

I looked at her intensely as she explained. Staring at her beautiful face that had been meticulously covered in powdery makeup, I wondered what lay beneath all the rouge. A sharp glance from her delightful eyes jolted me back to the moment.

"Now take the handkerchief and drape it over your little pointer finger. Here," she remarked as she gently grabbed my tiny hand, pulled my pointer finger into position until it stood erect and at command like a stiff soldier, and then proceeded to cover that soldier with the dainty handkerchief. My finger looked like a child dressed as a ghost for Halloween. I tried wiggling my finger, imagining what it would look like to bring this ghost to life, but another glance told me that there was still more to come.

"Yes, there. Now, gracefully stick your finger up your nostril." She demonstrated the action towards the side of her nose; I suppose it was for my benefit. I was captured by the soft tinkling of her proper Southern accent and the grace of her hands as they moved with elegance like those of a queen. I took note of her manicured, red nails. Never had I seen or heard of a day when those nails were dressed in polish. Even the wrinkles on her hands seemed to look like silk drapery. I was completely distracted, as any four-year-old would be.

Trying to focus again, I took my ghost finger and stuck it up my nose. I tried moving with the same grace but ended up just twisting and jamming my finger farther and farther up. She simply smiled at my effort. I looked up at her expectantly, finger and handkerchief still in one nostril, waiting for further explanation.

She smiled once again. The precisely arranged brown neck scarf around her throat tilted towards me along with her head of beautiful white, permed hair. The smell of her signature perfume, White Linen, permeated the bubble of air around me. I watched her hands as she offered the final demonstration. "Next, take your finger out of your nose and fold up the handkerchief like so." Delicately, she folded the handkerchief, and my instruction was complete.

"Of Men and Supermen"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Scrubbing his face over the bathroom sink, Dom notices the black bruises covering his left cheek, reminders of matches won and lost, of rising hopes and dashed opportunities. With his left hand, he presses against the affected area. It was still sore from the fight a week before, one in a long string of losing streaks that the featherweight boxer has suffered since going pro, but that is all about to change. With an air of reverence and ritual, Dom grabs the metal razor and starts shaving his head.

The contact of cold steel against his skull sends a chill up his spine. Goosebumps break out on his arm as the blades move up his crown, sending clumps of black hairs falling into the basin. In their place is a large patch of pepper-colored stubble. Dom chuckles. He thinks, I am Dom, the human pepper shaker.

Next, he turns his attention to the sides. Pinning his left ear back gently with his free hand, he carefully trims the surrounding area. The scraping sound reminds him of shearing sheep back home in the Old Country. For a minute Dom loses his focus and begins to daydream. When he snaps back to, he accidentally nicks himself, causing blood to trickle down his temple, which irritates the perfectionist.

Grabbing a wad of toilet tissue, Dom applies pressure to the cut. Examining the paper, he gazes at the concentrated spot of red. No pain, no gain. Satisfied that

he is no longer bleeding, he turns his attention to the other side of his head. This time, he accomplishes his task with no complications.

His metamorphosis nearly complete, the fair-complexioned athlete scrapes off the remaining hairs on his head.

Checking out his new appearance, he genuflects in front of the mirror. There is no trace of the shy Young Turk who once took hits in the ring. It is as though the pugilist has shed his skin to become a new being altogether—Superman reborn. Nietzsche would be proud.

Satisfied, Dom strips to his underwear, grabs a towel and heads for the shower. One thing is certain. Whatever happens, one thing is certain. There's no stopping this kid now.

"Breathing Under Water"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

Seth sat on the edge of his mother's bed, staring at the TV screen as the glow of flashing images lit up his face periodically. They made his eyes, dead and transfixed, seem eerily active and vibrant.

After an hour, he picked himself up and shuffled out of the room, leaving the TV blaring. The kitchen was cluttered, the table piled high with magazines, and a group of ants was gorging on a blob of jelly on the yellowing countertop. Seth walked over to it, methodically squishing them one by one. He watched the remaining ants, still frantically eating jelly, too stupid to realize that their friends were being killed. Seth made a fist and crushed the remaining insects with it, licking the sticky goo off the side of his small hand.

He kneeled and opened the cupboard, staring at the contents for a while, before reaching for a half-empty bag of potato chips. He put one in his mouth, decided that they were passably fresh, and headed back to the TV.

Before he got there, he heard a loud knock on the door, accompanied by some yelling that Seth couldn't understand. He set the chips on the bed, and walked back through the kitchen, dragging a chair behind him to the front door. He stood on it so he could see out of the peep hole. And angry looking white man stood outside, his eye level with Seth's, staring intensely. He shoved his fists into a black leather jacket, then took them out again, and gave the door a kick.

"Open up!" he yelled. "Open the damn door!" Seth watched him a little while longer, listening as he spat curses. He pulled the chair away from the door.

"I hear you in there!" The door began to shake, and the handle twisted back and forth. Seth stood back, gripping the back of the chair. There was a breaking noise and the door burst open. The man followed, his face red and breathless. Upon seeing Seth, his eyes squinted some, and his lips contorted oddly. He kneeled.

"Where's your mama, boy?" Seth didn't answer. The man's big hand came flying across his face. His head snapped back, but the man's grip kept him standing.

"Where's your mama?" The man's voice was low this time, and he hoisted Seth's skinny frame up, pinning him against the wall, his feet dangling above the ground. Seth couldn't speak.

"One more chance, kid," he said, blowing hot breath into Seth's face. Seth paused a moment and the man jammed his shoulders tighter against the wall. Seth whispered something.

"What, boy? What did you say?"

"She's not home," he whispered again. The man released him in disgust and he fell hard, his ribs hitting the hall radiator.

Seth stayed on the floor, listening to the man storm through the apartment, opening doors and yelling. His ribs hurt every time he breathed, so he tried not to. Seth heard something shatter in the kitchen, then footsteps coming toward him. He looked up and the man towered above him, a human skyscraper. The skyscraper picked up one of its feet and placed it on Seth's stomach.

"You tell your mama," the man said. "You tell your mama that I stopped by. You understand? You retarded or something?" Seth cringed as the man pulled back his boot as if to kick him, but changed his mind at the last second. He walked out the door, leaving Seth on the floor.

Seth stayed there for a while, staring at the edge of the tiny hall, where the linoleum curled up and dirt gathered.

Finally, he pulled himself up and limped to his mother's bedroom, lying back on the bed. He heard something crunch beneath him—the stale potato chips had been scattered all over the bed. The TV was still on, casting odd shadows on the gaping closet, scattered clothes, and the overturned bedside table. But Seth was staring at the TV, where a white woman was yelling at a white man in a kitchen. A sparkling counter with metal stools marked the space between them. Suddenly, the man pulled her towards him and they kissed passionately. Seth lay there, listening to the laughing machine and trying not to breathe.

"Porcelain"
HONORALE MENTION
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival

The wind whistled harshly through the brittle branches of the forest. The mast had gathered on the floor of the forest and creatures were preparing for the storm about to erupt. The wind had whipped the lake into a frenzy as it leapt about, snarling. People struggled through the streets bordering the forest and lake.

A lone house sat on a corner on the outskirts of the busy town. The wooden steps creaked as the rocking chairs swung violently upon the porch. The house was not particularly large, but rather small and comfortable. The furniture sprawled across the living room, well worn but taken good care of, and a fresh fire crackled to ward off the outside chill. A girl reading a book lounged on one of the upholstered armchairs in front of the flames. Her glasses glinted in the soft light, perched on her nose in front of her deep amber eyes.

The girl placed her book aside on the burnished coffee table, the deep red coloring of the hardback glowing in the delicate light. Making her way up the carpeted stairs, she walked into her room. The room was neat, a stack of clothes sat on a chair in the corner, waiting to be put away. A mahogany chest of drawers was simple but elegant, matching the double bed that rested at an angle, next to the door. The cream-colored drapes hung heavily, stark against the green walls.

The girl flounced into bed, wrapping the down comforter around her like a soft cocoon. Breathing in the scent of the night, she felt something scratch at her mind, like the sharp caress of a cat's tongue across a hand. It was a familiar feeling, for it had been happening ever since she had turned thirteen, trying to escape. To prevent the sensations from forcing themselves

out she gently opened her mind and allowed everything to come forth. The technique was not to let everything pour out at once so she could make sense of it.

The sensations pulsed at her, pleading, cajoling her to allow them to surface. Slowly imagining her body to be heavy, she allowed a tiny pinprick to pierce the walls of control in her mind. The images came quickly, but instead of the controlled flow, they thrashed viciously about. A girl in a white dress slid into a lake or pool or some sort, laughing giddily as she held her Victorian-looking doll out in front of her; a light flashed into the vision, blinding; a man with an arrow aimed and fired into woods, the arrow speeding off into the abyss of darkness; a portrait moved frantically, eyes shifting and widening as a shelf of stacked vinyl records was splashed with crimson, screams and pleas of a child splitting the air.

The girl came out of the visions with a strangled cry, running to the bathroom as she vomited into the toilet. The cool tile of the bathroom floor felt good against her still form as she tried to relax the spasms going through her. She began to shiver but felt too weak and unstable to return to her room.

The girl's visions always came true, and that was frightening. How could something so horrific occur in their small town, or even at all? Thoughts raced around, none of them cohering into any answers to the impending problems. Nothing could prevent what was destined to happen, but why?

Days passed and the thoughts of blood-stained records cut through the monotony of school life. Soon classes blurred until the day was no more than sleep, a dazed confusion sporadically broken by shouts of classmates.

The girl walked through life, a swan with no beak among the gorgeous creatures gliding around her, a broken person among the oblivious whole. The visions consumed every waking moment and haunted her dreams. Bright lights brought

flashbacks of the shining glow in her vision. The laughing of children on the playground made her shudder. She became a ghost of what she once was. The visions crushed at her mind, and that mind wasn't strong enough to withstand it. She was shattered, a blithering mess.

Waiting for the moment to pass when the child was murdered became a tumultuous road winding through bouts of hysteria to utter numbness. The girl receded into herself and was caught on the idea that she could stop it, but knew she couldn't. Her grandmother was the only other seer she had ever known, for the Gift ran maternally every other generation. The elderly woman told her of a story that beseeched and chided the girl never to try and change the visions, for to do so would result in an even more horrific occurrence. Her grandmother tragically disappeared one day when the girl was fourteen; rumors had it the Devil had finally come to collect her soul.

The abhorrence of the visions gnawed at her mind and affected her violently; the girl began to have hallucinations but attempted to hide them while around others. The images soon deteriorated her body and destroyed her mind to the point that functioning was not an option anymore.

Her funeral was a small one; few attended and the few who did were deeply grieved. The eulogy was short, filled with tears, and soon forgotten by the world.

Later there was a report of little girl gone missing. Search parties combed the woods near the lake, bright lights searching until they found the sash of a white dress. Everything led to a house with the TV on mute, playing a Wild West cartoon and Scooby Doo reruns. All along in the scarlet-soaked room was a shelf with spattered vinyl records and a now-ruby porcelain-faced doll.

"Fatigue Summer"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

We wasted time. Talking and flicking watermelon seeds at each other was usually how it went. Ya know how it is, pretending summer is endless, and ignoring the looming threat of school.

Pushing him into the pool was a bad idea, but what can ya do? Fish 'im out, pat his cheek and do it again the next day. Or strip down and tackle 'im right back in. You both end up cooler that way.

The whispering nights were one of the best parts of smothering summer. Secrets sounded like far off thunder, the only tell of a coming or leaving storm. Only, now we can't stop bein' friends, since I didn't want no one to know about Sammy Lucas and fourth grade. It was just retellings, since he was there, and helped me get away with half the crayons. Long story. Really. Takes half the supposed-to-sleep time to tell.

I guess we were happy. Sure, it could be our last JuneJulyAugust together. Come next sweltering hot break, neither of us could be here. Dad could die, or get shifted. That stuff happened on post all the time. Or, Mom could meet a Jody, and that was that.

But, like school, we acted like that wouldn't happen. Like we couldn't spend next vacation as pen pals, or no-pals. Instead, we focused on Tommy Lee, who got busted at a peace rally the last week of school. Honestly, if we hadn't had one last test that day, we woulda been there too. And we woulda been grounded till September just like him.

There was also Sara Kate, who ran away over spring break. All the kids know where she was, but we protect our own. She sent

a letter the last week of July. And it don't really matter any more. Her dad's jeep was hit, and he was a casualty. The funeral was closed casket, and no one's sure that there was really something in there. Her mom's been nowhere ten years. We never was sure if she died, or if she left him high and dry.

When the weather started cooling, we remembered the book list, and made a sort of a maybe effort to read at least one. I got 72 pages in, and he got 103. I mean, why read a book about war, ya know?

All in all, it was summer. We got through it. The Fourth picnic almost did us in, but we survived. I blame the sack races. He blames the custard, swearing up and down it was made with rotten eggs. But in the end I think Marie was right—it was the three-legged race that sent Claire and her partner into the mud. It would have been funnier if he hadn't been my then boyfriend. Summer romances, or maybe high school love, just ain't built to last.

Back-to-school shopping starts tomorrow. I'm goin' up-state to visit Grams. He's goin' to Georgia to visit his uncle. We'll meet up on the first day of school, and leave the shopping to Moms. His don't shop. She hates the PX.

Summer goes on. We suffered from the heat, took imaginary trips to Mexico and Paris with our non-existent fathers, and both got a year and an inch older. He's still taller. I lost 5 pounds when I cut my hair. Still got way too much, though.

We're all right, Leo and I, with our make-believe and swimming pools. We still haven't decided if we're best friends, or soul mates in a friend way. He's for the latter. And I'd never tell him, but so am I.

So am I.

"The Drawer"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2007

He looked down at the large drawer at the bottom of his armoire. It looked as empty and desolate as he felt. What had once been a nuisance had now become what he would give anything to have back. He stared at it for the longest time, as if he could mentally draw the images into life, and fill the drawer until it looked like it might burst.

The longer he stared at it, the more he could picture all of the things he missed. Her favorite red sweater, worn to death, a hole in one of the sleeves. He saw her purple sweatpants that she wore when her stay became longer than expected. He even missed the way she would never fold anything, just throw everything one on top of the other. Shirts, dresses, undershirts, jeans; as much as she could fit in.

But the things he missed most of all never went in the drawer. Her smile, the light in her eyes, the way her hair bounced as she walked, and the excited way she talked.

The drawer had always been hidden and hard to get to, because he had boxes of files from work blocking the way. He smiled ironically at how fitting it seemed that it was her drawer. He had always hidden her and his got in the way of their otherwise budding relationship. She had always complained that he wanted to keep her hidden, like that stupid drawer, stuffed behind his work, never seen by others.

She suggested that maybe if she cleared out that bottom drawer, he might finally have room for all those files. So she, she was gone, and the drawer was empty. What to fill it with next was the question. He wasn't so sure he wanted to fill it with anything. He didn't know if it was because he was clinging to the

hope that maybe the familiar objects would once again grace the presence of the red oak interior, or maybe he just didn't want to fill it with those files. Those dumb files that had ruined his life.

Without thinking, he slammed upon the window, and began throwing box after box out of it, and watching the mass of papers litter the street. He felt as though he were apart from his body, as if he were on the outside watching himself, but he couldn't stop there.

She was trying desperately to fight the urge to walk past his apartment. She felt good about the decision she had made, she felt like maybe she was finally getting through to him. As hard as she tried, she couldn't fight it anymore, and turned down his street briskly. She stopped short a few feet away from his apartment building. Thousands of papers covered the ground. She bent and picked one up. Although she didn't really understand the document, she knew it was his handwriting, his signature, his. She felt elated, this was exactly the sign she had been praying for; this was how he was showing her that he truly loved her, that he wanted to put her first.

Just as she was about to run up to his apartment, throw open the door, and wrap her arms around him, she saw something that stopped her. On the ground were pieces of red oak from a drawer that had just fallen from above.

"Lucid Nostalgia"

Jeremy Beauchamp walked out onto the balcony with a cup of coffee, hoping to remove the seal of a night's sleep from his eyelids. He pulled his robe together, sat down, and took a hazy look at the world around him. The apartment pool had been covered and the fence locked; the trees were bare and gangly; the air possessed a raw taste and smell. These were the same symptoms Jeremy had witnessed twenty-three times in Maine. Another brief autumn would shift into a long, unforgiving winter. Even in these days when the snow fell later and later as the debates on global warming became more and more omnipresent, the season still found its way of bringing a wealth of depression to the town. Jeremy was especially affected by the oppression packaged with winter.

Since graduation a little more than a year ago, Jeremy spent his days as a struggling poet, and his nights waiting at Sea Dog. Halfway through his time at UMO, his parents had moved to the city and urged him to come along, but his rebuttal was simply that he had everything he wanted in Maine. Eventually the campaign between he and his parents dwindled to a silent awkwardness and then dissipated when they set out with the last of the things from the house. He had stood behind with Lucille, his best friend since the eighth grade, and waived until the U-Haul rounded the corner and slipped out of sight.

With his newfound freedom he got the part time job at Sea Dog, moved into an apartment, and completed the remaining two years of college. Lucille also graduated, but with a degree in Computer Engineering as opposed to Jeremy's degree in Literature. When she would ask him why he got a degree in the liberal arts, he would retort with something like: "Because I didn't want to major in being a geek." She would give him a weak punch on the arm and they would both laugh.

Jeremy was beginning to feel the mystical powers from his coffee when his roommate Justin stepped outside.

"Mornin', champ."

"Ah-yeah, good mornin'," Jeremy answered, tipping his mug in Justin's direction.

Justin stepped out onto the cold balcony and folded his arms across his chest.

"Jeez, I guess old man winter is ready to share the wealth, eh?"

"Heh. Yeah, I suppose you're right."

Jeremy took another sip of coffee and straightened up in his chair. That coffee was mystical stuff indeed.

"How about those Black Bears last night? Takin' care of business on Providence."

"I'm just glad the refs finally started letting them play some hockey. The one ref—Broccias, I think his name is—that guy calls roughing like he gets commission for it or something."

Justin laughed and lit a du Maurier.

"I don't know how you do that in the morning," said Jeremy. "Or anytime for that matter."

"Something's gotta kill me, no?" They both laughed and Justin abruptly changed the subject. "So how about the elections? Are you voting for experience or change?"

Now they really laughed.

"Topic for a different day, Justin."

After a short silence: "You feeling all right?"

Jeremy took a deep breath, sighed, and then: "It's just this time of year. You know."

Justin took a long drag while nodding his head in agreement.

"I was wondering about that last night while Michelle was over. We were talking about our favorite seasons and all. Then, she went into this spill about how summertime brings back these memories for her that are so bittersweet because they're of her father, but in these memories he doesn't beat her."

Jeremy nodded. He understood bittersweet. He understood memories. He understood pain, though not physical.

"So anyhow," Justin continued. "I told her about how you kinda go through the same stuff with Scott and all."

And there it was. Like a knife. The spoken name of his little brother cut deep into Jeremy. The blade of his memory was tangible and cruel.

"Do you think it will be any easier this year?" asked Justin.

Jeremy considered this for a moment and felt the train of thought rushing through his head. Finally, he took a sip of his coffee and nodded.

Neither Jeremy nor Justin knew what that nod meant.

* * *

Jeremy put on his coat and left for work. By the time he reached the Sea Dog, the sun was down and the lights along the Brewer-Bangor Bridge were glistening against water and steel. When he reached the back door he caught the aroma from the wood fireplace inside. The smell produced an olfactory sensation that sent his emotions into brief hysterics.

The night was full of hustle and bustle, which was good. He needed to be busy after the realization earlier that morning that he was still unable to cope with, and accept, the death of his little brother Scott. There were only two moments throughout the night filled with taking orders, running back and forth between the kitchen, and laughing at corny jokes, when his mind uncovered the bleakness he was trying so hard to ignore.

In truth, the five-hour night seemed to come and go within minutes and he was walking back home. As he walked, his mind raced and his stomach tightened against the mental velocity. His mind seemed to reach out and grab a thousand beautiful memories of Scott.

Scott sitting on the couch in their parent's house watching sports and drinking hot cocoa. Scott whooping and hollering and cheering for the Patriots to score. Jeremy and their father in tears laughing at Scott's outrageous display of passionate sports addiction. Scott's prized stack of GQ magazines, which he read from and followed diligently. Scott's passion for discovering great bands, mostly in western Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Scott running into Jeremy's room to tell him big news even before telling their parents.

As Jeremy ascended the stairs of the apartment complex, he continued to dwell on Scott. He could feel tears on his cheeks and his eyes burned.

He needed to call Lucille.

* * *

She left the office at once to be with him. By the time she got to the apartment, Justin's girlfriend Michelle had come over as well. After discussing the events of their day, they all decided to watch a horror movie, Jeremy's pick.

The feature was yet another cliché slasher flick, but still entertaining. They all agreed that the movies were terrible, despicable even, but they couldn't help but love watching. Michelle had brought her adorable, but mischievous, Corgi named Wellington, and after the movie was over they all sat around talking while Wellington herded ice cubes around the living room. Lucille and Jeremy sat on the adjacent recliners while Michelle and Justin lounged on the sofa.

Above the sofa was a framed mock of the Periodic Table of Elements entitled The Periodic Table of Mixology. Michelle had purchased this for Justin when he changed his major to Chemistry and became serious about school for the first time in his life. Jeremy didn't care much for the poster in the living room now that dorm days were over, but like being married, he picked his battles with Justin.

As the conversation about the movie faded, Michelle and Justin went into the computer room. Lucille and Jeremy watched in amusement as Wellington cornered a piece of ice and pawed at it like a cat might paw a dead mouse. He crouched in front of the ice and then pounced like some sort of jungle animal, sending the ice cube skidding across the linoleum of the kitchen floor.

"That is the cutest pup I've ever seen," said Lucille.

"Those big ears kill me," Jeremy added. "And that white bib that looks like some sort of miniature lion's mane!"

"So tell me the truth." Lucille turned toward him in her chair and became very serious. "Do you think this winter will be any better?"

Immediately, Jeremy felt deflated. He realized that he hadn't escaped the tomb of his life, and even though Scott would have wanted him happy, life just wasn't an ideal situation most of the time.

"I don't know. The feelings seem the same as always. It's so strange how I can go through summer without really dwelling on it and then it all comes flooding back with the first burst of cold air. I mean, as long as I'm busy it stays in the shadows, but I can't live like that forever."

"Have you ever considered therapy?"

It was a question that had been burning inside of her for a while, but she didn't want to be the one to bring it up. As predicted, Jeremy raised an eyebrow. He was as stubborn as gravity.

"Well, if I wanted to pay someone to pump me full of pills and tell me everything will be better, I'd skip the therapist and run to the nearest coke dealer."

"I'm sorry, I just...well...I don't know..."

"It's alright. You're just trying to help, I know."

They sat in silence for a moment and then Michelle walked in smiling.

"Why don't you try lucid dreaming Jeremy?"

They both looked up at her, bewildered.

"Excuse me?" Jeremy questioned.

"Lucid dreaming is something I studied a lot in psychology. You've probably even had plenty of lucid dreams already and don't know it."

Lucille and Jeremy exchanged quizzical glances.

"Okay." Michelle cleared her throat. "Have you ever been dreaming and all of a sudden you realize that you're dreaming?"

"Ohhhh," they exclaimed simultaneously.

"There you go," Michelle continued. "Well you can take lucid dreaming a step further and take control of your dream. There's a whole community of people out there who study this and practice at it to get it right. They can call up people and places and it's so real because that's how dreams are. There are even reports of people being able to talk in their lucid dreams without waking up!"

"Are you suggesting that I try to reach Scott's ghost through some cult rite?"

"No, no, no," said Michelle. "That's not what I'm suggesting at all. I've been doing it for a while now and I have a method that works every time."

From the doorway Justin shrugged his shoulders and shot Jeremy an I-don't-know-what-the-woman-does-in-her-spare-time glance.

The thought of seeing and even talking to his little brother again, a figment of his imagination or not, excited him more than anything had in a very long time. Jeremy pictured giving Scott a hug and talking to him about music, about sports, about girls, about everything under the sun. It seemed too good to be true, but then again so are the best and worst things in this life.

"Okay Michelle, let's hear about it."

* * *

Five years later Jeremy got his first book of poetry published and landed a job at a local publishing company in Lewiston as an editor. He never got to hug his brother in his dreams, but he did experience things that he would never tell anyone. Over and over he had tried to call up his brother in a lucid dream, but only hideous images appeared and touched him with clammy, distorted hands. What began as a desperate attempt to see a loved one again turned into night terrors.

Jeremy would awaken in cold sweats, screaming his brother's name and crying. Leftover images from a dream would be swirling in his room and then

disappear eerily before his eyes. Eventually, the night terrors turned into daytime hallucinations from his lack of sleep. In one moment he would be sitting in his office and in the next moment he would look down and his feet would be gone. Before he could scream, something would jeer at him right before his eyes, causing him to choke on the scream.

Soon after, Jeremy began taking medication.

Lucille moved to Saskatchewan and married a physician. Though she and Jeremy had parted ways and didn't speak anymore, she thought of him often. There were times when her husband was working late and she would hold the phone with her finger poised over the TALK button, tears streaming down her face at the loss of the best friend she would ever know. The digits on the cell phone display would stare back at her in agony, as if they didn't belong there.

Justin and Michelle got married, but had problems. Justin silently blamed her for all of Jeremy's problems and let it eat at him. Michelle, on the other hand, had not been ready for the birth of their child Tessa, but Jeremy wouldn't let her get an abortion. Even being the pro-choice democrat that he was, something urged him to assume responsibility for this new life.

Jeremy finally visited Scott's grave for the first time since the funeral. He left GQ's latest edition by the headstone and wept on the snow-laden ground until he hadn't any tears left. Then, he parted ways with his brother and with the nostalgia that had haunted him for too long and realized that he would see Scott again, dreams aside.

Lucille eventually broke down and found it within herself to send a letter to Jeremy behind her husband's back. The letter contained her soul. It spoke of emotions she could barely put into words. The strokes from the Waterman fountain pen she had used spoke of the life she envisioned for her future, but it sat unopened beside a Rolodex on an editor's desk in Lewiston for years.

"Finding Humanity"

A short man sets up a hotdog stand at the corner of 57th and Broadway; he swears as the worn umbrella that he hastily tries to place on top of the stand won't stand straight. Another man, distracted, walks past me with his lab on a leash. There are meaningless loud car horns, as usual, off in the distance. The weather is bleak today, with no promise for sun. A woman disciplines her child, who is playing in the field, for taking too long to come to her. A bunch of teenagers walk by in their pimped up clothing carrying their jukebox, which plays music unrecognizable to any culture; their heads bob to the non existent rhythm as if they were having severe spasms in their necks. The most intriguing sight is the man and woman who enter the park and walk directly in front of me. They seem to be in their late thirties, both wearing black clothing [as most do in the city nowadays]. The man's facial expression is priceless. His eyes ask, "What am I doing here?" The woman responds to the unspoken situation by the way she holds her companion's hand—like a foreign piece of food that she is unwilling to try, but curious nonetheless. I can tell that they won't be together much longer; the fact that they haven't looked at each other since entering and exiting the park gave it away. Perhaps I'll do better when I come back tomorrow. . . .

I put the cap on my pen and stuffed my journal into my pack; it was routine. Everyday during my lunch break the same routine. Spend an hour at the park and hope. I had been hoping for a while now. The idea of hope always fascinated me. It was my greatest motivator, but usually led towards great disappointment in my life. I felt like Annie, always waiting for tomorrow, always waiting for something greater.

Since beginning of my journaling ritual, I found the optimal place in the park to watch the machines pass through the park. They would come and go right by the bench situated under one of the newer trees planted. Every other tree in the park had been dropping its leaves as the season commanded it to do so. My tree was different. It still kept a tight grasp on its green leaves, unwilling to conform to the rest in the changing park. I

think that it was hoping, too, just as I was.

Again as custom for me, it was time for lunch. So, I gathered my belongings and went to the nearest fast food restaurant where I spent the remainder of my hour long lunch break. I would usually take different routes to the same location, attempting to the same systematic life that everyone else in the world was victim of. I was afraid of become like them, cold and emotionless. As I entered the building and gazed at the glowing pictures of the perfectly arranged hot and fresh fried potatoes, I became disturbed. When I entered the building, I noticed that there were at least a half dozen cars in the drive through lane, but there was not a single customer in the restaurant itself. I continued to place my order for my ever so delightful hamburger; two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onion, all on a sesame seed bun. This delicate combination of vibrant flavors compiled with my nice hot tasty fried potatoes triggered a glorious sensation in me. But they were not nice hot and tasty fries, and I was immediately let down by the high expectation the picture brought forth. I ate my bland and soggy fries which filled my stomach, but I was still hungry for something more satisfying.

The routine continues: I walk back to work, smiling at everyone that passed, for no good reason, intentionally making eye contact rather than letting my eyes gaze at flashy banner ads.

Do I have the right to frown? Am I allowed to be unhappy?

This time was different. A lone woman, wearing the brightest red dress, smiled back for no good reason, intentionally making eye contact with me.

Does she understand? Or is she a machine like the rest of them?

The next day I continue the ritual. I make my way to my bench in the optimal place in the park, but there is a machine there, and I notice the leaves had begun to turn on that tree. My hope for the day had been lost.

I have no where left to go.

The woman in red comes into the park directly opposite me, as if she was expecting me. She intentionally makes eye contact with me, and smiles for no good reason. She couldn't be a machine. Perhaps there are still humans in the world.

"The Loss"

Sandbox: a low box filled with sand in which children play. Who would have thought something so simple could bring such happiness to a small child? As I stand where it once lay, the ground rests alone. The dead grass that once covered the earth replaced my green turtle sandbox, and produced its own jade-like color. The Little Tike sandbox captured me for hours during the spring and summer months, holding my innocence and keeping me without worry.

When the weather permitted, Mom could find me in a bright pair of OshKosh B'Gosh shorts and a Barney t-shirt going down the back porch steps to my plastic turtle. As the sun bore down on my face, I walked over to my dear friend and removed his shell, which not only helped to protect him but also kept my sand dry. I slipped off my pink jelly sandals and they buried themselves in the freshly cut green grass. The sand shone white as I placed my feet in the box while the grainy sand squished underneath and seeped up through my toes. I sat down on the cool heap of sand and spotted, partly hidden, the bright red shovel I had used the previous day. With the shovel I outlined a large square in front of me and smoothed the surface inside the perimeter. With a bucket I spent the day forming one sand castle after another. I made some small and some tall, but as the sun began to set, I rose, brushed off my shorts, slipped on my sandals, and covered my sandbox.

Whenever I step onto the deck today, I peer into the

distance and notice where my good friend once rested. As time has passed, having outgrown the sandbox, my imagination has decreased, and a part of my little-girl purity has left me. When Mom and Dad realized I had lost interest in my comrade they removed him from the backyard, and a circle of dead brown grass replaced him. They put lawn furniture in his place, and a swing that hangs from our huge oak tree. Where the sandbox once sat, a flower garden, which my Mom worked so hard one spring to create, has replaced it. Mom and Dad even put in a swimming pool, which became the neighborhood's main social gathering place. The backyard has turned into a more mature atmosphere. A place that once represented childhood now represents adulthood. I no longer wanted to play in something so simple as a pile of sand. As I grew older, the slight sorrow I felt when I looked out slowly disappeared.

Remembering the green turtle sandbox and the way the backyard has changed has helped me realize that my childhood has passed. While our backyard still has some of the same things, the changes have allowed me to accept my loss of childhood innocence. As time passed and changed occurred, I abandoned a part of myself, but found another part.

"I Looked Under My Bed"

Oh, why? WHY did I have to do it? I yelled in thought as I dropped to the stone floor below me. I closed my eyes tightly with my face against the floor. I had to have been at least twenty minutes that I lay there, cold, wet, and sobbing uncontrollably. At last I managed to drag myself into the worst predicament of all my adventures put together, and that's saying a lot. I did not look up, for I knew what I would see: a darkened room enclosed with stone on some sides and metal bars on others. I didn't even know where to begin to guess in what part of the land I was in, if I was still in the same land that I remembered. The last thing I did remember, in fact, was standing at the edge of a cliff, taking a quick breath before I would start my descent, and then my vision went black.

I forced myself to my knees, but I still did not open my eyes. I was too disgusted with myself to look at anything other than the back of my eyelids. *What was I thinking letting my guard down for even one second?* I felt ashamed. *I knew that the knights were right behind me! Why didn't I keep going?* I slammed my fist against the floor in anger, but then recoiled in pain.

Suddenly a voice spoke from the darkness. I opened my eyes for the first time.

"That won't help, you know." A shadowed figure stood on the other side of the cell.

"What do you mean?"

"Pounding your fist into a cobblestone floor will only bruise your hand. It won't break through the floor, it won't get you out of here, and it definitely won't solve your problem."

"How do you know that I wasn't just hitting it to let my anger out?" I was snarling at the silhouette.

"Well, then you chose a rough target."

I glared at him as I stood. "Why don't you be my target, then? Perhaps then I could shut up your smart mouth."

The man laughed softly. "I think you'd have better chances with the floor."

"What makes you say that?" I naively asked.

The man strode out of the shadows and stepped into the light before me. I nearly fell back in shock. My long dark hair fell over my face as I struggled to gain balance. I didn't know what to say. Sadly, the only thing that came out of my mouth was, "Oh." I stuttered that brilliant comment and then couldn't say anything else.

He was enormous! At least six foot five. His sculpted build made me which that I hadn't spoken anything at all. He laughed quietly. He made me wonder how he could have gotten captured. He laughed again at my expression and then walked back into the shadows.

"Who are you?" he asked politely.

I was still in a stage of shock, or fear, so I answered without hesitation. "My name is Bridgette . . . of Lockley."

"Well met, Bridgette of Lockley. I am Akron."

My eyes widened at the man's reply. "Akron?" I stammered. "Lord Akron, the governor of Kent? Is it really you?"

"Yes, unfortunately," he sighed. "Though I wish I weren't."

The sound of Akron's voice hinted that he did not want to consider the subject further, so I remained silent. I sat down once again on the cold floor and curled my legs beneath the skirt of my pale yellow dress. I smoothed the dress to its hem and wrung out its dampness as much as I could. I thought about smoothing it once more, but my focus was drawn away. Glancing up, I noticed that Akron was staring straight at me. I glanced down and then back up, but Akron did not move.

"What?" I said cheekily, forgetting whose presence I was in.

Akron paused. "I was just wondering," he said, standing to his feet. He began to walk out of the shadow, but he stopped some feet away and leaned against the barred wall.

"Look at you," he continued. "Your fancy dress and well-groomed hair—or it would be if it were not wet. You look so prim and proper, and, being from Lockley, I can see why. In fact, the only threatening thing about you is your insolent attitude. So I was thinking . . . why would a girl brought up in such a high-class manner be imprisoned in this God-forsaken dungeon?"

"I should be asking you the same thing, Lord Akron. I thought you were away on business in France."

"All in good time, m'lady. But I asked you first."

I sat silent for a moment, wondering if I should tell him. Of course, as a noble himself, he might be able to relieve me of my distress.

"Well," I said nervously, "it all started one day when I was looking under my bed for a trinket that I had dropped, and I saw a few loose boards in the floor. I moved the bed to the side. Indeed, there were loose boards. In fact, there was a tiny trap door. When I forced it open I found there in the dust a scroll and a large golden ring beside it. I picked them both up, curious of course, and discovered the most amazing thing. The ring bore an oddly familiar crest. The scroll was just as strange. You see, an English priest lived in the manor before we did, and I knew that the items belonged to him."

"You found the ring of Egbert, King of England, and, and the papers that. . . ."

"I'm not done, Lord Akron. Now then, I was still reading over the papers, the ring in hand, when my father pranced through with a few of his knight friends from France. They saw me with the papers, and they quickly took them from my hands. I was not dim, I knew what the papers were, and I had to escape before they found out. While they were looking at the papers, greatly admiring their details, I slipped out of the room unnoticed. I fled. I ran to the courtyard and straight to the stables for a horse. That is, I was almost to the stables when I heard the French knights coming up behind. Frightened, I ran, and I kept running as fast as I could. They, of course, were on horseback, but I was fast through the forest. I ran so fast that I lost them at one point.

"At what seemed a shallow river I stopped to rest, but my rest was brief, for I soon heard the horses nearby. I ran into the river, finding that it was not so shallow indeed, and that is why I am still damp. I swam across the river and reached the shore just as the knights discovered a bridge. I kept running and kept running, dodging every which way possible to escape them. Eventually I did. That is when I let my guard down. I paused for one moment at the edge of a cliff, which I should have climbed over, but I stopped. I stopped! The last thing I remember is looking out over the cliff, and then my vision turning black. I awoke when I hit this dungeon floor."

Akron stared at me. To me, it seemed that a thousand thoughts were filling his mind all at the same moment. Suddenly he spoke and lifted his eyes as if a brilliant thought had broken through the chaos in his mind.

"That's why the knights were chasing you!" he said quickly, stepping forward from the bars. He paused a moment and smiled.

"You still have the ring."

I nodded shyly. "The papers were those that handed the kingdom of England over to France's rule. All they needed was the stamp of the King's crest, which was etched into the ring. I had heard sometime that the priest had dealings with the matter of the lost ring and documents, but he died suddenly, leaving his estate to his father. No one ever found the lost articles."

"Until you," added Akron. "May I . . . see the ring?"

I pulled the ring from its secret place in my belt. I handed it to Lord Akron. He looked at it carefully. He closed his fist around it.

He looked at me with a terrible smile.

"Thank you, Lady Bridgette," he said. "Your father, the Duke of Lockley, will be quite proud of you. You have done more good than you are aware."

I smiled, but my smile soon faded when I saw Lord Akron bring a set of keys from a pocket. He reached through the bars and unlocked the door behind which we were held. He slipped out narrowly, before I had a chance to think, and shut the door behind him, locking it back.

I ran to the bars in anguish.

"Lord Akron, you knew I was Lady Bridgette, and who my parents were?"

"Yes," he said in a much more French-sounding voice. "You have done a lot of good for France, m'lady. Oh, and my name is not Akron. I am Lord Fernand, second in command of the King of France. I am much obliged to bid you farewell, Lady Bridgette."

He disappeared into the shadows of the corridor. I couldn't scream, nor could I even breathe. *What have I done? Why did I have to look under my bed?*

I slipped to the cold cobblestone floor once again and wept bitterly.

Never again have I seen the man from the shadows.

"Go In High Spirits"

Sometimes alone we take this lengthy walk,
Contemplative of our existence
As time ticks by on the pendulum clock—
Hopelessly unable to go distance.
Torn down by thunderstorms of hateful tongue,
We struggle to fight back yet still succumb.
Our voices go quiet and our hands wrung,
Critically seeing the failure we have become.
Sometimes we march together side by side,
Built up by the words and camaraderie.
Gentle and comforting words often replied,
As we view life ever so happily.
How natural it comes to see the bad
When just as easily we can be glad.

"Lift Off"

Dark of night, vision sparse
A sudden spark, the fuel ignites
Explosions—a rush of motion
Wings spread, momentum builds

Full of life inside, tensions high
Nerves are racing—the runway ends
Stomachs drop...then it's all smiles
The plane roars, and everyone notices—

Lift off

She's all alone, one person notices
A sudden spark, the fuel ignites
She's inspired—a rush of motion
She spreads her wings, momentum builds

Full of life inside, her tension's high
Her nerves are racing—the runway ends
Her stomach drops...then it's all smiles
The girl roars, and everyone notices—

Lift off

"The Cycle of a Family Affair"

Dee pulled into the driveway of the two-story brick house she had considered a prison for the majority of her childhood. She had come to try to talk some sense into her mother one final time before the cycling race tomorrow. The summer heat swarmed over her as she stepped out of her air-conditioned Lexus, and the tick-tock sound of her high-heeled shoes on the sidewalk imitated a clock counting down the seconds to another mother and daughter clash. Dee took the steps up to the front porch and there it sat in all of its glory, the ten-speed bicycle that her father had considered his most prized possession. It was still in pristine condition and its yellow color gleamed like a golden idol in the summer sun. Dee gazed at the bicycle for a moment and was about to smile, but then scowled, ground her teeth and proceeded into the house.

Dee's momma, Tillie Decker, was dressed in her cleaning clothes mopping the kitchen floor with such focus, that she did not even notice that Dee had entered the house.

"Hi Momma," Dee said.

Tillie looked up, still pushing and pulling the mop back and forth, and replied, "Hello Dee."

They both stared at each other for a moment, and finally, Tillie said, "If you've come to argue with me or Paul over that bike again, just turn around and walk out. Nothing has changed since the last time, and the race is tomorrow. The last thing that boy needs is drama going on in this house."

"Well, that's why I've come," Dee replied. "The race is tomorrow and I had hoped you had finally come to your senses. Paul does not need to use Daddy's bicycle to compete in that race. That was Daddy's bike and it should be preserved in its original condition...the way it was and still is since the day he died. Paul is too caught up in his own world to understand the sentimental value of that bike to this family or Daddy, whether you care or not."

"I raised the two of you by myself after *your Daddy* walked out on me, and if you think I care about the way he would feel about Paul using

that bike tomorrow, you are sadly mistaken," Tillie retorted. "I had to work long hours to put you through college, all the while neglecting Paul the attention he deserved. Cycling is the one thing he is good at and enjoys doing and if he chooses to use your daddy's bicycle in the race, so be it."

"Momma, please let me take it with me," Dee pleaded.

"For what? You are not going to use it. I don't believe I've ever even seen you on a bike."

"You're right, I am not going to use it. I would like to mount it on the wall. God knows how many races he won on that bike and..."

"*And* did we see any of that extra money?" Tillie interrupted. "No. Not a dime. Yet you still worship him and care about the way *he* would feel", and with that, she set the mop in its bucket.

Tillie had spent the last couple of years trying to mend the relationship between her and her son. When Dee left for college, it was just Paul and Tillie. She realized that she had not given him the attention he deserved. Now she practically babied him, whether he wanted her affection or not. She drove him to pursue his interest in his father's career and now cycling had become an obsession for him, a need. Her intense work ethic and will to raise her two children as a single mother had taken a toll on her relationship with both of them.

"Well, where is Paul?" asked Dee.

"He is upstairs training on the stationary bike. Just leave him be, Dee."

Dee sighed, "Momma..."

"End of discussion", Tillie interrupted again as she continued her house cleaning chores.

Dee grunted and left, slamming the front door behind her.

The next day, Paul set up his stationary bike beside the starting line of the race and began to warm-up for about an hour before the race was to start. He had been waiting for this day a long time and needed to win the coveted prize of two thousand dollars. He hoped this would make his mother proud and the winning purse would provide him with enough money to buy all new training equipment. With better equipment came a greater chance of winning future races, which

would mean more money. He hated to see his mother work so hard and never have any fun. He began to pedal the stationary bike at a medium pace, while staring at the adored, yellow ten-speed bike, his ticket to love, attention and money that was propped on its kickstand. Surprised that there were no other contestants warming up, Paul became invigorated by the prospect that he must be the participant who trained the hardest. He squinted his blue eyes and accelerated his pedaling pace. *Swoosh, Swoosh, Swoosh, Swoosh.* The stationary bike sounded as if it really might be helicopter propellers just beginning to spin, and at any moment, take off and fly Paul to the finish line.

Other contestants had walked their bicycles to the starting line and had begun to stretch. They looked with astonishment at the intensity and drive on Paul's face as he pedaled the stationary bike in a heated frenzy. One of the other riders approached Paul. He bore the number "4" on his chest and back.

"You keep pedaling like that, you won't have enough to make it through the race", he said.

Paul did not even turn his head towards "number 4" and said, "Oh, don't you worry. I aim to win this race handily."

Just as Paul was about to slow his pace, he saw Dee approaching him from the corner of his eye. "Great", he muttered to himself.

SWOOSH, SWOOSH, SWOOSH, SWOOSH. Paul took his pedaling up another notch.

Dee looked at Paul and asked, "Can I talk to you a sec?"

SWOOSH, SWOOSH. He did not reply.

Dee walked around to the front of the bike and glared at Paul face-to-face. She was about to try reasoning with him one more time, but stopped, when she saw a look of insanity in his big blue eyes. The perspiration from his brow was seeping into his eyes, and he squinted from what must have been the burning sensation of the salty discharge. However, Paul did not cease. Instead, he pedaled faster in a zombie-like state. Dee realized that no matter what she said, his decision had been made. She turned and looked at their daddy's yellow bicycle and rubbed one of the handlebars.

"I'll be with Momma near the finish line", she said, and began to walk away.

"Dee", Paul said without looking in her direction while pedaling ferociously. "I *will* win, and *everyone* will be proud."

Dee rolled her eyes and said, "Paul, you should try making something of yourself, instead of ruining the family treasure", and walked away.

Paul was sweating furiously as the treasured yellow bike flew like the wind. While coming down the homestretch, Paul looked back and saw that he was a good one hundred fifty yards ahead of the pack. The last stretch of the race was downhill and he would not lose any momentum. However, Paul pedaled faster, riding down the meandering road when he should have been coasting through the turns. He pumped his legs harder each time than he had before, and felt a burning sensation in his thighs. Still, he pedaled harder and faster and began to laugh wildly when he could see the finish line about two hundred yards away.

Tillie could see her baby boy rounding the final curve, and saw the enormous gap he had put between him and the other competitors. She was befuddled as to why he was pedaling the yellow bicycle in such a crazed and rapid way. Granted, this was the final stretch of the race, but he was coming down the hill at such a rapid pace, and with such fury, he was almost unrecognizable to her. She shoved her concerns aside and grabbed Dee's hand. Dee looked at her with disgust and rolled her eyes.

One hundred fifty yards.

One hundred yards.

Seventy-five yards.

Suddenly, Paul lost his footing on one of the pedals and his foot slammed down hard on the paved road. He lost his grip on the handlebars and the front wheel made a sudden right turn, which brought the bike to a terrifying halt. Paul was flung forward over the bike and he slammed head first into the concrete, forcing his neck to contort in a manner that only owls can accomplish.

After the funeral, Tillie gazed at the mangled yellow bicycle lying on her front porch. She realized, that in all of its glory, it had received the most attention to maintain its pristine look throughout the years. Softly, she began to weep, and went inside to mop the kitchen floor, for there were many chores to be accomplished before returning to work in the morning.

"The Library of 2107: An Imagination from Becky's Notebook"

At the oh-so-ancient age of twenty-two, Becky has witnessed many changes in her world – particularly regarding her favorite corner of the universe: the library. When she was a little girl, her books had pockets holding due-date-stamped cards – cards that made really good bookmarks. As she got older, the cards were replaced by printed receipts, the same kind as the grocery store or Wal-Mart offered, only instead of prices there were due dates. Though her schools had card catalogs, the public library had a computerized version – that was a lot of fun! Once she entered high school, Becky began to notice a lot of things were changing about the library. It was becoming more ... modern, and 'hip' – almost mainstream. The emphasis was no longer just on the books inside, but on the programs and other things the library had to offer. CDs and DVDs began to show up in massive quantities, and all of a sudden the library was a moderately cool place to hang out. In college, this was even truer – people were coming to the library not to roam the stacks and peruse the books, but to use the free Internet or video editing software, or to meet their friends for a coffee and some chatting. This was most unusual, and Becky started to think: What if this keeps up? What will happen to the library? ...

The year is 2107. The location a rose-colored moon somewhere west of Tomorrow. On this moon, called Ambrosia, is an emerald-tinted structure made of glass. Its roof is domed and faceted, there are turrets at every corner. Situated in the center of a hexagonal meadow, a platinum fence traces the border – from the air it's a stunning sight, looking much like an ancient medallion of sorts. The door, a gleaming sliver of starshine, is always open, beckoning weary traveler and enamored devotee alike. This emerald building on the rose-colored moon of Ambrosia is a library. The Stardancer Memorial Library (SML), to be exact.

To habitants of other moons and planets, especially Earth, SML is

an anomaly – it fails to match up with any other library in regards to appearance, structure or even purpose! Other libraries had given in to evolution and become merely warehouses of computer chips and programs, featuring row upon row of unintelligible codes and drab little silver cases. Most people went to the library only when they needed an upgrade of their personal information system, or decided to try a new program.

The Ambrosians were different. They had stumbled upon records of old Earth's libraries – some of them dating as far back as Alexander's time! The founding librarians of SML had gone through all the old files, tracing the development and sophistication of libraries as technology advanced. They saw how libraries incorporated technology, trying to fuse it with their tradition of printed materials, and how the library became a gathering place of sorts. They read about the struggle to maintain the integrity of the institution, and how everything fell apart when the Celestial Move began. And the founding librarians read about Stardancer and how he led an army to save the last of the book-libraries. And they decided, then and there, to create a library based on the idea their predecessors had died trying to save.

Stardancer Memorial Library's first collection featured the remnants of the library Stardancer almost saved, uncovered during an exploration of the moon's interior. The books felt strange in the librarians' hands – they were used to pushing a button and seeing images slide through their subconscious. The act of reading felt both foreign, and intimately familiar. After working through the complexities of the Dewey Decimal System of Classification, and recreating their existing library into a place beautiful and inviting, the librarians held a grand festival to introduce the Stardancer Memorial Library.

At first, the Ambrosians were not sure what to make of the strange arrangement. But as the librarians shared the history and tradition of libraries with them, they began to get excited – Stardancer was a national hero, after all – and threw themselves whole-heartedly into reinstating A Library. Despite the fact that most new novels and information were 'published' via cyberspace, the Ambrosians found a way to also provide the newest information in printed

form. Their library was mostly print materials, but there was also a section of the 'normal' computerized variations – music and movies were all on little chips because nobody wanted to go back to having to have special equipment to listen to Beethoven or watch the latest romantic comedy.

Computing stations were discreetly placed, allowing those so inclined to enjoy the atmosphere of the library while perusing information. The library also began to offer programs – language courses to introduce newcomers to the art of reading, book discussions where they revisited original manuscripts, and the occasional 'heritage celebration' (those were when guests put in a special chip and revisited a particular time or place to experience their past).

The librarians liked to think SML was the perfect library: a blend of the traditional library from ages past and the advanced technology available. They had worked hard trying to recreate the libraries they read about, but recognized that some of the new 'improvements' could be used to supplement the library's offerings and educational experiences. Not only was the library a source of limitless information – ancient and current – but it was a welcoming location that begged people to spend time in its comfortable and inviting space.

Becky reread what she'd written, and laughed softly to herself. Her imaginings echoed the romantic fantasies she was constantly scribbling – only instead of the focus being on a girl learning her way among Saturn's rings, she'd written about a library. Whether what she wrote would ever come true, or remain an idealistic imagining, would depend on what Time had to offer – and in one hundred years, a lot can happen.

“My Life in Words: Being a Scribe’s Perspective on Moveable Type *A Discovery, Translated into English*”

Rachel still couldn’t believe her discovery. Fifteen months ago, she’d stumbled across the musty volume tucked in the corner of a quiet bookstore during her tour of Europe. A lover of all things written, she’d quickly purchased the book, thinking to find someone to translate it for her. Once she’d returned to her Appalachian home, she was surprised to discover she could read the text for herself – though the intricate Gothic font encouraged slower reading than she was accustomed to, Rachel’s years of German allowed her to read the words. The book she’d picked up by chance was far more valuable than she’d ever dreamed: no ordinary text, it was the diary-like record of a 15th century scribe. In beautiful script, Rachel read about the advent of moveable type, and the impact the discovery had on those who wrote for a living. Determined to share this gem, Rachel began to painstakingly translate the diary into English – updating it somewhat to allow for greater ease-of-reading. Here is the story of Rachel’s scribe ...

I am old, and have seen much. I have been a scribe for twenty years now, and my name is known among the booksellers as one to be trusted. My hand is steady: my letters clear, my mistakes few. I say this not to boast, but to lay the facts down.

I heard it said in the market that a man had found a way to write without writing. He called it “printing,” and used a series of letters. Nothing new, I thought to myself, *we’ve used woodblocks for making multiple pages and illustrations for years*. What the market gossip left unsaid was the way this man was printing.

Instead of carving a page’s text into the wood, this man made each letter. And the letters were made of metal, so they would last. I can’t imagine what kind of patience it took to make them—I know about forming letters.

He has a different kind of ink, too, somehow using oil as a base. And a press not unlike a winepress. I should like to see the contraption, to watch it work. The market gossip has spread, and you can hear about this “printing press” all over. It’s said that he’s put forty-two lines on one page.

Other scribes are unhappy—they say this man and his machine will leave us unemployed and penniless in a matter of time. Maybe so, but I think it will take longer than they say.

Gloomy lot, the scribes are; it just happens—they start their job with the satisfaction of a well-fed cat. Copy too many manuscripts, not your own words, and you lose the joy. Your own thoughts get lost, trapped behind the need to write someone else's words – a perfect replica.

I used to feel that way myself, then I realized that my writing was my mark on the word. Without scribes there are no books. The words we write might not be our own, but they became ours. No printing press or moveable type will change that.

If this man wanted to do away with scribes altogether, he wouldn't have used our script for his letters. Oh sure, he made some modifications – I've seen an edition of his Genesis this day – but they made the letters more beautiful. It's easy to read, too. I surely would like to see one work ... I wonder if it makes a ferocious racket? Can his ink be used with a pen?

No, scribes will still be valued for a time yet – there aren't enough printing presses yet to meet all the demand. There are many who still want a handwrote book, say it adds 'character' – them are mostly the uppity folk. The ones I like to copy for are the ones who love the book for the book itself, for the words and ideas therein, not for the prestige of a grandly scripted text.

And someone has to be there to put all those letters in order. I wonder how many separate pieces he had to make? Just the other day one of my former apprentices was offered a job 'setting the type' – the man who hired him said they wanted somebody familiar with copying manuscripts, to cut down on mistakes.

There are some beautiful things they're doing with that printing press. Honest, I think that Bible rivals the illuminated one in the Great Cathedral – there's every bit as much reverence in the printed page as in the one my brother scribes wrote out. And the illuminations are still there, all purple and red and green and gold. They must have put that in by hand – surely there's no machine as can lay down gold so finely. If there is, I want to see it with mine own eyes.

Aye, the world is changing and I am blessed to see it. I'm an old man, I've worked faithfully many years – the ink stains on my fingers and the furrow b'tween my eyes prove my diligence. I say the man who made the moveable type and can print many pages should be recognized. All he's done is improve what scribes and others have tried to do for ages: preserve the book, the word ... I would so like to see him at work.

Rachel's work was finished at last: fifteen long months of careful translation were ended. Her nameless scribe – she wondered why he never signed his name – was 'write' when he said scribes would never be forgotten, that they'd gained immortality for their mark on the word.

"this was your life"

you loved the hidden—
 a scraggly abelia, to most eyes ordinary,
 whose tiny trumpet-shaped petals
 concealed a streak of sienna;
 you loved home pleasures—
 a mutt, a quart of beer, a Zippo's clink, a Camel
 as you strode the porch under the stars,
 captain of a ship lit by turquoise Christmas bulbs;
 you loved the softball diamond—
 during the seething weeks
 when the sirening neighborhood burst your sleep
 you cooled your head by envisioning
 the Wednesday game and the chance at short
 to flash into the hole, snare the sizzling grounder,
 and throw out the stunned runner by a hair;
 hence you crouched, read the batter's feet,
 saw the floating pitch, and fell asleep;
 nirvana the pocket of your fielder's mitt
 neat's-foot oiled, perfectly broken in,
 bound by a rawhide strip
 with you replacing the ball
 beneath the Amaretto-shaded fingers;
 you loved a slice of life
 and here's one from your file:
 dinner for two at your apartment
 with you as aristocrat and waiter
 exchanging warm regards
 but observing the distance—
 "yes, I believe I'll have the raspberry tort";
 "very good, Mr. Keene"—
 not your name, but a name you liked.

"The Voice of Arkansas"

"You rule the airwaves,"

The sportswriter said to the football announcer.

"Saturdays, they listen to you. Sundays, Jesus."

"I wouldn't go that far, but thank you."

The announcer had an oracular tone.

"What's the secret?" the scribe inquired.

"Down and distance, my friend."

"Do you have a favorite motto?"

"Remember where you are."

Next night outside Little Rock

The announcer, drunk, wheeled east

On the west side of the interstate

And lost consciousness.

Then, as in a cartoon,

His lights sought sympathetic beams,

And he died in the crash.

The sportswriter was listening to Johnny Cash

When his editor called with the news.

He opened another quart of Blatz,

Slung his notes in the trash and typed:

"Who else could ever say

'From the Mississippi to the Ozarks,

my voice was a season'?"

After further inspiration

He sent his column.

Next day at the office his editor said,

"Tell us, Big Fellow, have you gotten a refund

on the engagement ring?" And not for the first time,

The scribe was wed to laughter.

"SunSations"

Jennifer opened the door to SunSations and entered the tanning salon. Good, they weren't busy this afternoon. Still too early for the regulars, she guessed. That suited her just fine.

The receptionist recognized Jennifer and pulled her membership card. She recorded date and time and said, "Let's go on back." After consulting her clipboard for an empty room, she offered, "You won't have to wait today. Our Bermuda Reef Room is available." Coming from behind her desk and leading Jennifer to the second room on the left, she engaged in chit-chat. "Haven't seen you for a couple of weeks," she said. "Been busy at school?"

Jennifer followed the receptionist. "Trying to get through those last weeks," she said. "Exams start in a few days."

The attendant opened the door to Bermuda Reef. "Enjoy," she instructed as Jennifer went inside.

Jennifer locked herself inside Bermuda Reef. She quickly stripped all her clothes. Snapping the protective goggles over her eyes, she lay in the tanning bed and gently closed the outside lid. She pressed the Start button. Ah, time for a little relaxation.

Lying there, Jennifer felt all tension drain away as piped music and fan-like noises from the tanning bed lulled her into a calm she had not experienced in weeks. She was going to have to come here more often. This felt so good. With trip to the coast coming up in June, she really needed to get a head start on her rays. After all, she couldn't go to the beach pale as a ghost, now could she? How would that look?

Just as she felt herself dozing, all lights in the booth went off. Could it have been twenty minutes? Jennifer didn't think she had been there for more than five, maybe six, minutes. She'd just lie there a few minutes longer. Maybe there was some kind of power outage, a temporary circuit break. The bed would light up again. Shortly. She'd wait.

Nothing happened. After a few minutes, Jennifer decided she'd have to do something. She guessed she'd have to get out of the tanning bed, wrap a towel around her, and open the door just far enough to ask the attendant what the trouble was. Rats! She removed her goggles. Why couldn't something go

right for her? Just when she had gotten comfortable, so settled.

The second that Jennifer pushed the lid back, she sensed a movement from the ceiling. Shadows danced above her where there should have been no light. She heard a slight rustle, like the wadding of paper, the rubbing together of something. Still lying in the tanning bed and staring, Jennifer attempted to focus on the soft crinkling sound. Her eyes fixed on the ceiling blur. The soft rustle and rainbow-like shadows had no meaning for her. Then she saw it. A small jagged hole. Part of a ceiling tile was missing.

Someone was up there. Above the ceiling. Navigating quietly, slowly, but nevertheless, moving. Someone was spying on her. A Peeping Tom.

Jennifer could feel her insides pounding like a woodpecker against a tree trunk. Not just her heart, but every organ in her body. She was afraid she was going to vomit. She didn't know what to do. If she screamed for help, she might not be heard.

If she pressed the "ready" button, the attendant might come in. Check on her. That's what she'd do. Push the button. Again.

Within seconds Jennifer heard someone turning the outer knob, trying to open the door that Jennifer had so carefully latched when she first entered.

"Honey," she heard the attendant's familiar voice from the outside, "the door's locked. Are you okay in there?"

"Wait there," Jennifer called. "I'll unlock it. Stay there. Just a minute. Don't leave. Please!" Jennifer released the top lid just enough to reach out and grab a towel. She partially covered herself as she rushed to unlock the door.

The attendant was standing there, still holding her clipboard.

"We've had a few electrical problems," she quickly said before Jennifer had a chance to explain her situation, "but everything is going to be up and going in a few minutes."

Jennifer nodded her head quickly, and at the same time she put her forefinger over her lips. *Shu-u*, she mouthed. Then she motioned for the woman to come inside. She secured the towel more tightly around her body. Come over this way, Jennifer motioned.

When Jennifer thought the attendant looked like she might utter something, Jennifer signaled quiet. Quiet. Jennifer walked to the head of the tanning bed. The woman followed.

Jennifer pointed to the irregular hole in the ceiling tile. "Look," she whispered, "there's somebody up there."

For only a moment, the woman's face turned paler than bleached cotton and her eyes shone with fear. She began shaking her head and her eyelids fluttered. "Oh, Honey," she finally said loudly, "there's nobody there. What makes you think that?"

"I saw somebody move."

"Who?"

"I don't know who," Jennifer said loudly. "How would I know who? It was somebody. Somebody up there watching me. . . spying on me while I got undressed." She began crying. "How could you let somebody ramble around up there? That's terrible!"

The woman opened a cabinet and withdrew an over-sized towel. "Wrap yourself in this, and we'll get you another room to get dressed in. It's nothing. . . really, nothing. . . nobody's up there. You must believe me. It's just a little rain-sogged ceiling tile that's rotted. Decayed and crumbling." She wrapped the towel around Jennifer's shoulders. "That's all, Honey," she insisted, "now try to calm yourself."

"Calm myself!" Jennifer shouted. "I come in here, pay my good money, expect to leave with a tan. And what do I get instead? A pervert. Calm down. No, I won't calm down." She grabbed her clothes and sandals and wadded them into a bunch.

The woman attempted to help. "You don't understand what you're accusing. . . you're just upset!"

"Don't tell me what I know and what I don't know," Jennifer insisted, storming from Bermuda Reef, her belongings flying like kites beside her.

Following two steps behind, the woman trailed as Jennifer fled to the bathroom. "You're mistaken, Honey," she kept insisting. "You're dead wrong."

Jennifer ducked into the bathroom and slammed the door. She quickly dropped the two towels she had wrapped, mummy-like, around her torso. Within minutes, she had dressed and was ready to flee.

As she tore through the lobby, the attendant and a man were guarding the area between the reception desk and front door.

"Jennifer," the woman said, "we want to talk to you before you leave. Convince you how mistaken you really are."

The man was dressed in khakis and a butterscotch pocket-tee. He was small,

only about five feet four, five. Wiry. And his face. Jennifer saw scorn and distrust in his little gopher-like eyes. He smirked. "Yeah," he said as he shifted his stare to his sneakers. "We don't want no bad reports going out of here."

The woman glanced at him with disdain and turned her attention to Jennifer. "What we're saying, Honey, is there's no sense trying to stir up trouble when there's no trouble around. We're prepared to offer you free bonus visits. To make up for you getting so scared."

"Yeah," echoed the man. Jennifer thought he looked like a chicken embryo. He gestured towards the woman. "She's right, you-know." He shook his little gourd-like head. "We don't want no trouble over a little rain-soaked ceiling tile."

Jennifer wondered if she had imagined the entire ordeal. It had happened so quickly.

"-and with the lights and motor noises," the woman interrupted her musings, "we can kind of, half-way, understand why you thought you saw something. Heard something." She tapped her pencil on the clipboard. "So, we're prepared to offer you ten free trips for your trouble."

I DON'T WANT TEN FREE TRIPS TO THIS GYP JOINT, Jennifer thought. *I just want to get out of here. Now. You people are crazy. Both of you!* But suddenly she calmed enough to realize she could not verbally express herself. No telling what the two weird-o's would do if she lost it. So, she said-with as much sincerity as she could muster-what she knew they both wanted to hear. "Okay. . .you're probably right. I freaked out. I'll come back tomorrow. Try again."

The scrawny little man laughed. "That's good," he said. "You got ten free trips. You can come every day if you want to." Both he and the woman sidestepped to allow Jennifer an exit.

Jennifer forced a smile and uttered another polite "okay" as she sauntered towards the front door. She overheard the woman tell the scrawny man, "See, I've been telling you all long-customer satisfaction is what this business is all about."

"Out of the Dark"

As darkness takes a soul,
Daylight bears a soul.

Glistening slick silvers,
A boy long elsewhere
Heaving upstream
Emerges below a falls.

In the far past, the day before,
Ballplayers called from the field,
But sad he walked on, away,
To meanings piled on mountainside,
Principles stiff in stone, wild on wind.

He rises one of the splashes,
One of the waterdrops wobbling,
One of the surface's ripples.

Under the palm of his hand,
Beside the sun, the green-toothed leaf,
Beside the purple berry,
A space station swims,
A tender fingerling.
Its children ships away
To the dazzling star-cliffs,
In the cascade, galaxy-falls.

"Relief in the Form of Ink"

Here I was. I would be spending the next hour or so in Monsters Ink getting a tattoo. I don't do these things, I play it safe. But it seemed so right, so *necessary*. I've been through some tough times during my life, but I always remained level-headed, responsible. Yet here I was, a place I never thought I'd be, doing something I'd never thought I'd do.

The tattoo parlor was clean, but filled with dirty little secrets barely-legal teenagers hoped their parents would never find out about, littered with memories that came to life in the form of body art, and run by ink-stained individuals. I took a deep breath as I walked up to Shane, the artist that would forever alter my appearance by staining my left wrist with the phrase "no lies, just love." Was I ready? Had I thought it through? My clammy hands contradicted the determination that was building inside of me. Shane and I agreed on a font size and layout, I signed some forms, and the room preparation for my tattoo had begun. I was nervous. I was pacing.. I was fighting with myself, telling myself that it wasn't too late to bail; I could still say no. The internal battle between heart and mind was a vigorous one in that moment, and I was still unsure which would be the victor.

Despite all of the planning and consideration before I stepped into Monsters Ink, nothing could have prepared me for how I felt at this particular moment. I was in emotional chaos. Sure, I had been hurt before, emotionally devastated, but I was healing. Was a tattoo completely necessary? Would it make a difference in how quickly I was healing? *Was it going to be worth it?* I argued with myself, whether the phrase "no lies, just love" would be a constant reminder of the pain I had endured for so long or more of a feeling of freedom.

"All right, Holly, are you ready?" Shane asked. I responded with a nod that had resulted from pure determination and courage I wasn't even aware I possessed.

I walked into the room, feeling as though I was being pushed by an emotional force of inner strength and hope for some kind of closure. I took a seat on a stool, and placed my left wrist, palm facing up, on the cool, sterile tabletop. My breathing got heavier as he put together the tattoo gun, and my body felt incredibly light as he dipped the needle that would be staining my wrist into the black ink. The world had stopped spinning, time had ceased, my heart had slowed, and the needle pierced my skin.

After that first line, I realized I would be all right. My heart and mind had stopped feuding; I was okay with what was going on. The tattoo became an outlet for me; the emotional pain was escaping with each new line of ink. The loud, almost obnoxious buzzing of the tattoo gun drowned out the physical pain that had manifested itself on my wrist. My body lost its weightlessness feeling, I was regaining composure. My hands were now cool and calm, no longer shaky and clammy. My breathing steadied as I focused on the needle penetrating my skin. My skin had held in the negative feelings of resentment and anger for too long. I am the daughter of a liar, the flesh and blood of a cheat, but the chills that ran up and down my arm from the pain seemed to somehow make things okay.

The lines turned into letters which turned into words, and these words ultimately healed the emotional scars. I felt empowered, I finally felt relief. It *was* worth it, I needed this scar to heal others. I learned that pain is truly temporary and relief can be found in uncommon ways. My relief came in the form of ink.

"The Foolishness of Youth"

When I was young
 I knew everything:
 the what the how and the why
 the who the when and the where;
 I regarded others as somewhat dull by comparison,
 for how could they possibly know as much as I?
 Authority figures just didn't get it;
 "experienced" people were just too tired from it;
 peers weren't up to par
 and youth were at best immature.

When I was young
 I was ignorant of everything:
 the what the how and the why
 the who the when and the where;
 I began to look up to those who had greater knowledge than myself,
 for how could I compare with the IQs of the greats?
 Authority figures kept me safe;
 experienced people could find even the smallest flaw;
 peers offered support
 and youth had the innocence of being young.

When I was older
 I realized the foolishness of being ignorant:
 the necessity of the what the how and the why
 not always so much the who the when and the where;
 I began to be mentored and to mentor,
 for how else will we avoid the mistakes of others if we do not learn
 from them?
 I learned maturity from authority figures,
 gained experience and skill from the experienced,
 collaborated with peers
 and helped teach the next generation.

Now that I am older,
I realize that I don't know everything:
the what the how and the why,
but I want to learn.
I gain and seek for knowledge where ever I can,
for what better time to learn than the present?
I have in my own right gained authority
experience
respect
admiration...

...but I am still far from the youth who knows everything.

"The Men in Life"

Secure. Reliable. Warm. Caring. Funny. Safe. Overprotective. Controlling. Indecisive. Immature. Conceited. Deceitful. Whether it is a father, uncle, brother, boss, or even a boyfriend, all of the men in a woman's life can have these qualities. We love them, we hate them, and sometimes we just don't know what to do with them. Men make up one half of the world's population, but they exist to do more than help carry on the human race. There are three main types of men that reside on this earth: the "Businessman", the "Fatherly-figure", and the "Player". While they may be a challenge to handle, these three are able to teach a woman a lot of lessons throughout the course of her life.

Number one: the "Businessman". He is the one who is always there to tell the truth. Whether he is really a business professional or not, he is able to tell someone anything straightforward and to the point. At times he may have a total lack of regard for the feelings of another. Sometimes the truth can hurt, but if it needs to be said he's the one that will say it aloud.

Number two: the "Fatherly-figure". Many females in the world consider themselves to be "Daddy's girls" because a father is often loving, caring and nurturing to his daughter. However, a man does not have to bear children to be so. A "Fatherly-figure" is the type of man who is always there to protect, love, help, make sure that a woman is happy, and if necessary keep her out of any trouble. He is the sensitive

but balanced man that every girl wants to grow up and marry, because she wants a man just like her daddy.

Last, and least on many lists, number three: the "Player". He's the cocky jock walking down the hallway, he's the hot guy sitting at the bar winking, he's the guy who has a different flavor every week. He's broken every girl's heart across the world, time and again. We can't resist him, even though we know better. He lies, he cheats, yet he's perfect on the surface. But he's more than just a past mistake. He has made women stronger and more aware in relationships. He may not last long, but the lessons he leaves last forever.

These three types may not be able to classify every single being with the XY chromosome, but the majority fall right into place. As women, we may love or hate men but we can't live without them. The "Businessman" is able to help us see the truth in life and make decisions, the "Fatherly-figure" comforts us, helps us learn to love ourselves and be happy with who we are, and the "Player" teaches us strength as well as patience and caution in life. The lessons that these three types of men give to women are irreplaceable. The men may not realize that this is what they are teaching us, but let's just keep that among the girls...

"The Playground"

FADE IN, AERIAL SHOT:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PLAYGROUND/FIELD, MID-AFTERNOON - FALL
1997

TIERNEY GALLAGHER, seven or eight years old, energetic and free spirited, with long brown hair in pigtails, is running around the asphalt on the school's playground with other eight year olds playing tag and screaming. She is wearing jeans and sneakers with a bright blue classic 90's jacket.

VO- [voice over] while children are playing, narration of grown up Tierney

NARRATOR

Playing on the playground in the younger years of my life at Burrowes Elementary had to have been among the best years. Running around screaming and laughing with my friends, inventing games like planet tag, I was carefree and full of energy. The playground was my world to explore, and I was Magellan. I could have more fun in those 45 minutes than anyone could in a full day. Recess was always the best part of school, until one afternoon in which scarred that sweet short period of freedom for me. [end VO]

AERIAL SHOT/CUT TO MEDIUM SHOT:

TIERNEY runs around from small blond girl, circles twice around yellow circle on asphalt, and gets tagged. She stops for breath, laughs/giggles. In the distance a lunch lady blows her whistle and off screen is heard to say "no climbing up the slide!" Tierney steps into the large yellow circle, takes a deep breath, and explodes into a sprint after a group of 9 or 10 children. After tagging someone else, she runs away quickly and after losing her breath, stands still for a minute.

She puts her hands on her knees to steady herself while breathing, then warily stands up taking deep breaths, and puts her hands on her flushed cheeks. Her hands move up to her forehead and circle to her ears, where

she checks for her earrings. Her jaw drops as she notices the right one is missing.

CLOSE UP

TIERNEY

(to herself, whispering)

Oh no... no, no, no...

(getting louder)

No, no... no! It was just here!

(frantically searching around near her feet, still clutching ear)

It has to be here! It... it... I... I had it a second ago! Oh nooo!

She lets go of her ear, and starts walking quickly around the area. She breaks out into a run.

LONG SHOT

She runs around asphalt playground area searching ground.

CUT TO:

PLAYSET - SLIDE AREA

She searches under slide and monkey bars, while children play around her.

CUT TO:

FIELD

Older boys are playing football, she continues to frantically search for her earring, and runs between them, messing up the game. A few collide, others trip and fall.

FOOTBALL BOYS

(at random to TIERNEY, who ignores them) (not in unison)

YO! Little girl!... Get out of the way!... Hey! Watch it!... What the heck!... We're trying to play football here!

TIERNEY continues running around the playground searching frantically for earring. She loses hope, and slows down, eventually collapsing on the curb with her head in her hands, and begins to cry.

CUT TO/CLOSE UP

TIERNEY

(crying... sniffles)

Oh no... It was my fa-fa-favorite! Eh! I'm never gonna find it!

(continues crying)

CUT TO:

Far side of asphalt on playground.

A LUNCH LADY spots TIERNEY sitting on the curb crying, and with a concerned look on her face, turns and walks toward her, and kneels down next to her on the curb.

CUT TO/MEDIUM SHOT

The curb with TIERNEY and LUNCH LADY side by side.

LUNCH LADY places a hand on TIERNEY's shoulder, and with teary eyes, TIERNEY looks up and sniffles.

LUNCH LADY

[in a sympathetic voice]

Oh, hunny, what's troubling you?

TIERNEY

[wipes her tears with hands, then crosses arms]

I... I... I lost my earring. My favorite earring, it's gone!

CUT TO/Over T's shoulder shot

LUNCH LADY

Oh, now, well maybe we can find it...

CUT TO/Over L's shoulder shot

TIERNEY

No! We can't! I looked EVERYWHERE! It's gone!

[puts her head back into hands and cries]

LUNCH LADY

[gently lift up TIERNEY's head]

Well, what does it look like?

CUT TO/CLOSE UP

TIERNEY points to her left ear, which still contains an earring with a gold X and a plastic red heart dangling from it.

CUT TO/MED SHOT

LUNCH LADY

[smiles]

Okay, well that's a start. Now, let's try something. How about a prayer?... St. Anthony, please help us to...

LUNCH LADY continues to pray, turns into background VO.

CUT TO/TIERNEY's POV shot

TIERNEY/camera pans around playground scanning the area. She sees children playing tag and laughing, things seem to be in slow motion. Kids are going down the slide and piling up playing watermelon, the older kids are still playing football. The main noise comes from the laughs, squeals and shouts of children. The LUNCH LADY finishes praying and says...

CUT TO/MED SHOT

TIERNEY AND LUNCH LADY ON CURB

LUNCH LADY

(looks her in the eye)

Okay. Let's start looking and hope for the best!

They both stand up and begin searching the ground around them.

FADE OUT/AERIAL SHOT

During aerial fade out shot of playground, narration occurs as VO, cue background music - acapella piano.

NARRATOR

I never really did end up finding my earring that day, but I did learn an important lesson. As Ms. Shelby sat there praying and I watched all the children around me playing and enjoying themselves, I realized something. The earring really had no sentimental value to me, and I didn't know why I was so worried about it. The important things in life weren't objects, but enjoying yourself and living life. My seven year old brain had somehow come to this miraculous conception that life would be so much more valuable if humans would become less materialistic. It was a long shot to hope for, but I figured, well, it could start with me.

CUT TO/ END CREDITS

"Canal Street"

One of the best days to go shopping, Black Friday, allows you to receive the best prices of the year. It just so happened that I dragged my whole family to New York City on Black Friday for our annual city trip. I had huge plans for the day. First, I wanted to go to the new Abercrombie and Fitch on Fifth Avenue. This extravagant four story building took my breath away. Then I wanted to travel to another exclusive store, Ruehl, this time located in the middle of nowhere. Finally I wanted to go to Canal Street, the knock-off capital of the world. For the longest time I had hoped for a Louis Vuitton wallet, yet I did not want to spend three hundred dollars. So why not get the next best thing, a knock-off.

After hitting all of the major stores and getting a lot of my Christmas shopping out of the way, we hit our last stop, Canal Street. As soon as we got on the street I immediately went on the lookout for the shop that would have my wallet. I walked through loads and loads of them, all a bit too pricy or the wallet looked nothing like the real thing. About to give up my wish to have a fake wallet, a five-foot Chinese lady, paper in her hand, approached me. We made eye contact and she knew as well as I did that she had the wallet I wanted. She slipped the paper into my hand and walked away from me as if staging a drug deal. I couldn't blame her for her careful tactics, for selling knock-offs would get her into trouble. I glanced down at the piece of paper she handed me which contained a picture of the wallet. Excitement shot through my body. I went to the lady and told her I wanted the wallet, but I only had thirty dollars.

She said, "That's fine." She turned and walked away.

I did not know what to do. I wanted the wallet, but she did not say to follow her. So I grabbed my mom and we walked in her wake anyway. My mother and I followed her forever, taking turns into alleyways far away from civilization. We walked and walked, and then finally just before we wanted to give up, she slowed down, and stopped in front of a mangy old rundown apartment building. It had boarded up windows on the first floor and barred ones on the higher windows. I looked at

my mom and she looked at me as if to say "I'm not going in there." But we had come too far to not go in the rundown building. The Chinese lady proceeded up the concrete stairs and to the door, locked with a chain and padlock. She pulled out some keys and found the one that fit the hole, unlocked it, and opened the door.

At this point I thought the cameras would pop out and say, "You're on Candid Camera." But that did not happen. Stupidly my mother and I still followed. Inside the building we came to a staircase that the Chinese lady had already started to climb. We walked up them and came to another locked door; she opened it and we went inside. Now definitely perceiving this moment as one from a movie, Saw, I knew I could not turn around now, and even if she had planned to kill us, we had the advantage, two against one. So my mother and I proceeded into the room. The large open floor where we stood had about twenty cubicles all with locked door just like the one outside, each one locking a person's knock-offs inside, hopefully. Again we followed the Chinese lady, and she led us to her cubical and we went in.

Awestruck when I entered the room, I saw purses, belts, clothes, sunglasses - you name it and she had it. Every square inch of space contained something. My mom saw a Burberry trench coat and pointed it out to me. I saw Dolce and Gabbana sunglasses, the exact style as mine, but a lot cheaper. I could not believe my eyes. It seemed as if Fifth Avenue had exploded all over this four-by-six cubical, a different boutique on each shelf. I wanted to buy all of it, but I had only thirty dollars. I contemplated whether or not I should buy the wallet or get one of the many other designer ones. She had Coach Channel Prada Fendi and so many more. But I had risked my life for the Louis Vuitton wallet, and I stuck to my instincts. I picked up the wallet and paid the lady. She told me not to let anyone see it until I got home because if an undercover policeman saw me with it, he would arrest me.

Sad to leave the room filled with all my dream accessories, my mother and I turned and left the building without asking how to get back to Canal Street. We got to the front steps, peered up and down the street, but nothing looked familiar. So we wandered aimlessly in one direction trying to find the rest of the group.

"The Passionate HPU Student to His Love: A Parody"

Come be with me and I will give you everything.
I will give you all the diamonds and pearls you want
I will lead you by all the splendid fountains and take you walking
everyday through the glorious promenade.

We will sit on the top steps of the amphitheater and talk late
into the night about our hopes and dreams
Seeing all other colleges boys fleeing when they hear the word
"commitment."

I like no other will come running to you with open arms, wanting
to devote myself to you.

I will spend every waking moment thinking of ways to please you,
Maybe roses waiting for you in your seat of your 8am class,
Or treating you to Subway or Chik-Fil-A,
Or maybe even a Starbucks.

I will dress you in the finest of HPU gear,
The luscious purple color, illuminating your flawless beauty.
Anything, from the bookstore you want will be yours,
All you must do is ask and you shall receive.

I make you this offer you cannot refuse.
For my love is real and true.
I have loved you since the first day of freshman orientation,
And have never stopped.

If you come and be with me, we shall be forever happy.
We will dance and sing together each day,
Rejoicing that we have become one with one another.
So I say come be with me and you shall be delighted forever.

"Existentialism on the Internet"

They write in their dull books like martyrs while
searching for some obtuse figure—some god
to place their faith in. Bibles fill their eyes.
The new, they find it easier to type;
they Google lives. They trade their minds as they
right click, left click, and double click and shift.
A caps lock diety to not worship,
a Kierkegaard ctrl and alt delete.

My HTML religion never
condemns for sins, it seeks an existence,
a place to know I am and I can be.
I am the newest generation and
the absurd. They say "theology saves."
I say "to whom shall I make my complaint?"
Are we not all the Sisyphus today?

I'm free from reality in role play,
in instant messaging. Still they tell me
to pick up Bibles, pray. I can't work out
the lingo and the slang. OMG, n00b!
We symbolize life now with signs instead
of crosses, blood, bodies, and rosaries.

Now, less than three is more than religion—
more than anything and everything yet
still they tell me Jesus walked on water
but not across my key board. lol

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