

Welcome to the 2006 *Labyrinth*, the literary magazine of the United States Naval Academy. Since the mid 1970's, the *Labyrinth* has regularly published the creative work of midshipmen. Whether in the form of short stories, poetry, visual art, or music, our magazine has dedicated itself to providing a space for midshipmen expression of the highest quality.

Not until last spring, however, through the generous donation of Mr. Larry Brady '66 and family, did we secure enough funding to ensure annual printing. Knowing we would eventually be able to hold a hard copy of the *Labyrinth* in our hands energized the staff all year long. We also found the Brigade more responsive than ever to our calls for submissions.

Our goal this year was to better illuminate the link between the words on these pages and the careers of the people who write them. LGEN Lennox, the Superintendent of West Point and holder of a Ph.D. in Literature from Princeton University, graciously agreed to introduce the *Labyrinth*. We have included the service selections for all of the first-class midshipmen, as well as the work of several alumni who have gone on to successful careers in the Navy and Marine Corps. The responses vary, but many of the issues remain the same.

- *Celidon Pitt '06 (USMC Pilot)*
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(*Cover Illustration*: Matt Guyton '07)



Adam Young '07

FOREWORD

Greetings from West Point. Regardless of what they know before arriving, young people matriculating at a military Academy are shocked by the new life far different from the field, from the fleet, from the farm, or from the street. For the most part, that's a good thing; we all need to have our perspectives adjusted every once in a while. In fact, thoughtful cadets and midshipmen with a creative bent may welcome that shock, for when romance and reality collide, art can result.

Over the past two centuries, our graduates have often left the "tranquility" of Academy life for the fury of war. Now is such a time. They need to be prepared technically and physically for the rigors of deployment, but they also need intellectual and emotional maturity to wrestle with the complexities of modern combat. The musings you will see signal that stretching process.

Annapolis has *The Labyrinth*, just as West Point publishes *The Circle in the Spiral*, to show a side of Academy life that might surprise many who think that structure and discipline stifle expression. Yet, anyone who has labored in conditions of unrelenting stress knows that humor and beauty and passionate outbursts relieve pressure and even produce work of enduring power and meaning.

Reservoirs of creativity that surface amid an ocean of papers, tests, parades, athletics, and military training are therefore not so unusual. But finding them can still be a challenge. In the end, the editorial staff has collected the work of peers who are polished, confident, brave, or foolish enough to put themselves on display.

Mundane issues at an Academy can have profound consequences at other times in other places. But for at least a few more months, anyway, there is time for lighthearted jabs, heavy-hearted reflections, and all the other shenanigans that flow among those who share confusion and confession, groans and growth, exasperation and exhilaration.

You will enjoy the submissions by your comrades who communicate those very things throughout the following pages. As you explore their personal answers to universal questions, unique approaches emerge to issues both simple and complex. This journal is important because it captures an enduring truth: much of your learning has not been academic, and some of the most memorable ideas don't come up in class.



William J. Lennox, Jr.
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Superintendent
United States Military Academy



Adam Young '07

The Singer Six Days After His Death In Memphis

Dave Smestuen '08

"He started Singing at the top of his Voice,
Then waded into the calm waters of the River."

—Mary Guibert

Walking through the bright lights' sorrow,
I hear Beale Street howl with Wolf River laughter.
I'm not afraid to go, but it goes so slow.

Blue sounds roll down the rough walls. But tomorrow,
The lily-wielding line of funeral mourners
Will walk beneath the bright light in sorrow.

They found some bones. A flea market fur coat,
Letters to Dylan, a played-out guitar.
The water goes so slow. I'm afraid to know

How Wolf River howled six days ago,
When the tug-boat growled and pulled me under.
So I walk through the Memphis lights in sorrow,

And I want the rain to come down and drown
The peal of the River's laughter. I'm never
Afraid to go, for life goes eternally slow.

Then the bells out in the church tower sound
Out my song, and then forget forever.
Walking to the bright lights in sorrow,
I'm not afraid to go, but it goes so slow.

In Memory of Jeff Buckley (1966-1997)

Echale un poco de Salsa

Steven Cuevas '09

The Conga drum sets the beat, 1—2—3—4—1—2—3... The steady clanging knock of the cow bell suddenly makes my foot tap a familiar rhythm. I start to clap my hands inviting the piano's and trumpet's intrusions with their uniformly asymmetrical harmonies. The sound of the Caribbean, el son del Caribé, stirs my soul with the sensual motions of "La Isla," "The Island" as I look into her eyes to indicate, "estoy listo." I'm ready to dance! I step forward as she steps back; my left hand is placed in the air so that she can wrap her fingers gently around my thumb. She steps forward as I step back; I place my right hand, open palm, firmly between her hip and the small of her back so I can control the seemingly uncontrollable motions of our dance. I turn her once, then she smiles at me as I run my hand tenderly down the edge of her rosy cheek. The surge of energy and passion rushes through us like a bright light breaking through the darkest room as we dance El Báile that had existed before we ever met; that will never end even when the music has long stopped.

I had been in the Navy for just under two years when I was ordered to my first deployment to the Sandbox. Being new to the military, I was anxious about the idea of going into harm's way for doing my part in preserving humanity. It was my job to go there and so I did it willingly, ready to fight for the freedom of a people who have been oppressed for many years by a merciless dictator. This was my chance to really make a difference. I spend months doing a terribly difficult job while those with hatred in their hearts try to, for the lack of a better word... kill us.

Standing my first watch post on a hot, dusty afternoon, I look around me and I am confused by the ease of my fellow soldiers. I am "Jocked up" in Desert Cammies, body armor, and Kevlar helmet. "UGH!!" My discomfort grows with each passing minute. I grip my weapon tighter and tighter to keep it from slipping from my sweaty nervous hands. "What AM I doing here?" This thought runs through my head, unable to escape from the weight of my Kevlar; over, and over, and over...again.

I get very little sleep the first month or so. Salsa alone is here to shove the rumbling sounds of enemy fire in the distance away from me. Far away. The birdlike whistle of the flute buries my deep dismay with this world - this ugly and harmful world. The trumpet conceals my helpless body with its blanket of golden

brass. I curl up in my rack after my nightly prayer and close my eyes tightly. I focus on the familiar sounds of my home, and although my body remains still as ice... I can feel my soul dancing to the melody of the island and my feet moving to the rhythm of each note in succession. Every night, when I am most vulnerable without my weapon in my hand, Salsa makes me feel like the safest person in Baghdad. Yet, the dance I crave lacks "something" I was afraid to add, in fear that too much or too little could destroy that golden brass blanket.

Months pass by; one month, two months, three months... and I'm on watch again. I am no longer the confused young sailor with the sweaty palms. I have become like every soldier. I am sturdy and vigilant, like a watchful lion - the protector of those around me. I carry Salsa with me wherever I go, always by my side and running through my blood like my most prized inheritance. It is *my* protector whenever things seem strange and foreign. Baghdad is no longer the odd place. Now it is my normal place. My Crew Chief always answers "another day in paradise" when I ask him how he is doing that day. He does not know how incredibly right he is. Along the way, new friendships and special bonds are built with those whom I fought alongside. It is a whole new world, but it soon becomes a home; not because of where I am, but who is with me.

The most significant bond made in Iraq was that between Salsa, Her, and me. For a long time Salsa was a part of me alone. No, it WAS me alone. It was mine. I kept it to myself; never sharing it with anyone. It protected me and no other. Salsa was for me. I was too afraid to share what not only was my greatest source of strength and protection, but was also my greatest weakness.

One of the calmest nights of Baghdad befell the tormented city. We had won it just in time, since I had been becoming weary of holding in my aching desire to dance again. I was surprised to discover I was not the only one that night being pursued by "The Crave to dance". She followed me into The Dictator's former Palace. The room was semi-dark, lit only by long streams of moonlight let in by shattered windows. One window in particular let in just enough light to be able to fully view the beauty of the Arabic architecture. The moonlight reflecting from the marble floor made it all seem like a dream. The marble floor led seamlessly into the magnificent wall decorated with patterns of golden script. The mirrored ceiling seemed untouched by the

human hand; the glistening chandelier stood majestically over the room. I set my CD player on the stairs, wondering if those stairs lead to heaven. Then, as instantaneously as when I fell in love with Salsa, I pushed the Play button. On the echo of the first strike of the Conga drum, She had become the passionate addition to my previously private dance. We danced as if our bodies were symmetrically configured. Every touch was the right one. Every turn was a swirl of excitement and beauty. The awkwardness of our uniforms dissolved quickly. Her snugly tied hair fell across her face as I dipped her for the first time. Then on the first turn her rigid garments transformed into a stunning knee length red dress. I look down at myself to discover an outfit perfectly complementing hers. My red shirt flawlessly matched the deep red color of the rose that appeared in her hair. The heavy batter of our boots had been silenced by the smoothness of our steps, as if we wore shoes of velvet dancing upon the clouds. Here, where a dictator once thrived, the harsh long days and nights of the war dissolved into nothingness as we danced.

She never missed a beat - of either the music or of my heart - in Salsa. The stairs did lead to heaven.

On February 7, 2004, I sat in the cold cabin of our flight home. Although I was uncomfortable, I was also very excited. While Salsa sat next to me on the plane, I caught myself thinking of all the great things I wanted to do when I got to The States. Things like watching a baseball game, driving my car, being amongst old friends and having an ice cold beer. The aircraft landed on the Airbase and my first taste of American air aroused my memories of good times with familiar faces. This "home" looked exactly as I left it, but it felt new. I could not put my finger on why, but it was as if I was craving for something that no longer existed. This made me feel vulnerable, but yet again, the protection of Salsa lived within me. I was soon dancing again.

The following day, after we both got back from deployment, She gave me a call inviting me to have lunch with her. We both agreed to bring two old friends each so that we could all get to know each other. My buddies agreed to come along and meet my new friend. My friends from home and I were almost inseparable before I left for Baghdad. That afternoon I walked into our favorite bar. She was already sitting at the table with her two friends, having what seemed to be a very involved conversation. She spotted me and immediately got up to embrace me as if we hadn't seen each other for ages.

"It's only been a day, calm down!" I reminded her. I saw relief in her eyes. I can't lie; I felt relief in seeing her as well.

We all sat down at the table after introductions. The waitress brought over a cold pitcher. As we had done since we met, she and I made a toast "to those we've loved...and to those we've lost in it."

The room is suddenly consumed with a grey silence as we lift our glasses. I close my eyes to see if I am just lost in my thoughts. She and I are suddenly at the Palace again. I wonder how it found us. All she and I can think of is that night of Salsa in Baghdad.

We brush it off like a daydream, yet still wondering why we both re-lived that thought at that same time. Our glasses touch, and we are once again at the bar. Time had become still and had abruptly started again. She looked at her friends and I looked at mine, both discovering the perplexed expressions on their faces as we made our toast. She and I were confused by their incomprehension, but we recognized her friends were no longer like her, and mine no longer like me. They noticed. She and I had our own little world now, and no matter how much we wanted to include others, it did not seem to work out. The world had changed around us. Yet every tap of the conga, every pluck of the string, and every swift twirl from my fingers to Hers has followed us with every moment that passed. Salsa was no longer only mine...but ours.

The stereo reverberates the resonance of my Latin Heritage. She smells the aroma of rice and beans cooking on the stove floating throughout the apartment, and she hears the hot oil crackle under the sound of the Afro-Cuban beat while the empanadas are frying. They make the apartment the perfect temperature to dance. I cannot help but move. When the music plays, my feet and my hips no longer belong to me, but to the music they crave to dance with. She cannot help but join me; she never could. My head is now spinning like an old vinyl record. Salsa has always made my head spin when she is around. The room seems to get hotter as we follow each other's rhythm. We no longer have control when the music takes over every step, every spin, every dip... every touch. Salsa touches me where no one else can. She places her right arm around me and her forehead on mine to get me closer. I can see the silhouette of a heart traced by our shadows on the wall. The brick streets and coffee-colored plastered walls of the island come alive in the room.

I smile at her while the living room starts to fade in again. We almost trip over each other from dancing when we realize the stereo has been off for the past five minutes. Laughing like a playful little girl she asks, "Can we dance again..." We never stop.

---Dedicated to Salsa.

Pinnacle Series #428942

Alex Bosenberg '96

She is my six-stringed opiate,
A product of the Ovation Guitar company.
I faithfully polish her high-gloss paint
and replace her worn strings.
I once took her to strangers
who could fix what I could not,
but I grew jealous of another man
working on her.
so I learned to take care of her needs myself.

She waits patiently while I wander off,
distracted with books, friends,
the shiny finish of some new toy,
until the 14k plate wears off.
She never complains
when I return with problems.
She feels my pain
through my fingertips on her fretboard
and then gently kneads the tension
from the small of my neck
with a massage in Pentatonic Minor.
Her sad, mellow notes smooth out my knotted brow.

She is my \$750 mood ring.
When I'm blue, she plays dark,
quiet notes from a minor scale.
When I'm happy, she plays
the high bright, and clear

open notes of a Major scale.
She can be a canvas of creativity
or a flatterer by which I emulate others,
as I play to the crowd behind my shut eyes.

She is my 'axe.'
She chops down the walls
of my prison of fear
aiding the escape of my true self.
She lets me lean on her
as a crutch when life becomes too much,
becoming my therapist on days I cannot cope.
She is my stress-study panacea.

She understands me because she knows me.
An old friend,
she never tells me to come back later.
She can sing extra sweet as I try to woo a brown-eyed
woman with a song.
She doesn't mind,
for she knows
I'll always come back to her.

A Casket with One End Open
Aaron Heil '06 (Navy Pilot)
Honorable Mention 2006 Pitt Poetry Prize

He looks just like himself in life,
Says the woman, maybe the wife
Of the man inside the wooden coffin.
With his fingers cold and face paraffin,

Eyes closed to the grave granite sky.
It leaves me, then, to wonder why,
I on my two warm-blooded feet
Should pause for any corpse I meet

To pay respects. To pay tribute.
Somehow all my protests are mute.
I don't know the man laid here at his end:
No relative or departed friend

Of mine, yet I mourn his absence.
Staring at the pale countenance,
Death foreign yet familiar traveler,
Sinister brother and benign stranger.

Long after this box is shelved in dirt,
I will walk, remembering, upon the earth
About bodies that below rot, lonely lay,
While I dream, love, wander, and *decay*.

This ignoble flesh demands that I rouse
Sickened unease at every grave, tomb, charnel house.
I know only that they are dead and nothing more,
Honoring their bones that merely dreamed before

Me while I trudge into autumn's twilight,
Knees creaking and eyes losing sight.
And as I clear my youth-filled head,
I think on a funeral for one long dead.

The Date

Brian Baker '97

Hushed...
In a mahogany car with training wheels.
They put the brakes on, parking me
Along the curb of Anticipation Street.
They sound my arrival with a bell,
Calling them down
From the roller desk dens,
The kitchen fields,
And the jungle gym playlots.
All queuing up in a parade to
Reacquaint themselves.

I hear the locust shells
Drop on my hood
With the unordered footsteps
Of ants.
Silencing the churns of my nervous,
Chemical stuffed stomach.
(I'm always jittery before a date)
Will she wear
The pale sequined dress I bought?
She looks so much younger in
White.

Through a haze of crushed velvet and wood,
I can see them all.
The tears that dance across her cheeks
In a frustrated waltz.
Stepping time, in time
To the rhythm of baritone sobs and
Handkerchief muffled orchestras.
(We will soon dance that way;
With me leading,
To the West)

I only wish to linger
Under the stagnant air.
With darkness propped under my rigid neck,
I will lie here
Dressed in a starch stiffened tuxedo,

Days of Life

Brent Kreckman '09

It never rains on these days. They have a consistent façade of the pleasant days belonging to spring or mid-autumn. But the beauty and elegance of the day is shattered by the emotional undertone of my destination, a place I know all too well.

The walls of the mansion that lie on Limestone Street shine a vibrant yellow, as that of a canary, with an immaculately manicured lawn and a sign out front reflecting the golden letters of "Littleton and Rue." Just beyond the yard on the border of the sidewalk stands the imposing wrought-iron fence, not less than 7 feet high, with concrete pillars anchoring the structure. This crisp architectural display stands amidst tired, old houses not less than 30 years old whose care reflects the lack of available funds of the residents. Posing in the sunlight, this mansion focuses the attention of the passersby as though to be proud of the care provided for it by its apparently well endowed owners, yet retains a subtle mystery of its purpose to anything shorter than a simple glance. Anyone who has lived in the town for any significant amount of time understands the implication of this building and works to their utmost effort to avoid it, for upon closer inspection of the premises, you see below the sign's elegant lettering of the names "Littleton and Rue" the purpose of its existence: "Littleton and Rue, Funeral Home."

Today is no different from those other days. Gazing silently through the backseat window of the car my friends and I are traveling in, the brilliant sun and green foliage seem ignorant of the turmoil existing within ourselves. No words spoken, no gestures made, no eye contact formed; we all understand who we are about to see and have an unspoken agreement not to disturb each other. Cautiously pulling in the drive and crawling toward the rear lot, I see more familiar and unfamiliar faces circled in their own little protective casing like the wagon trains of the old West, inhaling the nicotine of their cigarettes with sober intent while holding back their anxieties and tears. We climb out of the car, each grasping a single golden carnation, and make our way up to the rear entrance of the building once again.

Already, the line within is weaving around the multiple rooms near the foyer and through what, at some point, was a dining room, as personally selected music of Kara's dearest companion attempts to express that for which spoken words cannot do justice. My three friends immediately quicken their step

to greet and comfort those faces which dwell in the crowd outside as I fall back to a deliberate stroll toward the door, so as to hold a place in line for the four of us. Again, I do not speak as I pass others, merely nod to acknowledge them and continue my less than eager journey to join the bitter end of the line. Standing for over an hour, with my friends sporadically joining me to see the progress of the line as one of my good friend's hand selected songs saturated my every fiber, I reminisce of my first meetings with Kara.

Yet suddenly I find myself in a different line. I had seen all these people before; the photographs on the wall are not Kara. Instead hang pictures of Daniel, a fellow scout and friend lost three years prior in an automobile accident. I see his devout girlfriend greeting those who move silently through this procession of mourning, while holding back her tears. Are these tears out of anger for loss or out of grief soothed by the support of many? What is she concealing? Perhaps Daniel isn't the only one to have been lost. She, in her gallant attempt to remain a pillar of strength, is merely presenting a shell to hide what now lies with Daniel in the coffin. As I turn toward her, in my weak attempt to comfort her, she is replaced too by the Canarozzi family. The walls are still the same, but not quite. My friends again encircle the room, waiting for their chance to pay respects. Is this Sara's father's viewing? It must be, for I can see now the jolly man guarded by his wife and offspring, again in mourning. Yet something is absent from them. Their eyes - if only I could be near enough to see their gaze and to feel their sorrow, then I might possibly understand. Unfortunately, the ray of brilliant sunlight permeating the room and the distance between us is so great that I may as well be across the width of Erie from them. Wait. Is this the Canarozzi family I am attempting to see? For now stand in their place the Bodeys and the Blackwoods. How is it I can be so many places within only a few feet of travel? Where had Kara, Daniel, and Sara gone? I can feel them; are they still here? I spin around to view who surrounds me; the same people, they have not changed. "Sit," I tell myself.

Hunkering down in a large leather chair, my face buried in my palms, I try to understand. The images, are they images, or am I truly there? Abruptly I feel a hand on my shoulder, the hand of a friend, and I am pulled back into the room where the soft, personal music bathes Kara's viewing in memories gone by. I regain my place in line. All the walls are as they should be, the people still the same.

Words of days lost fill the speakers as the line inches forward, as though each tear bears a chain which anchors those who grieved to where they stand. The small, quiet, generous young woman I knew lies in the casket a mere twenty feet from where I stand; she may be asleep in the distance, her flowing, red hair resting on the pearl linen of the pillow. I can see her from here, even still, I can see those faces of Daniel, Sarah's father, and "Papa" Blackwood lying motionless as though in a deep slumber from a classic fairy tale. They were untouchable. Kara lies now in that space occupied by those three familiar souls, that single spot where in so little time had occurred so much sorrow.

My friends now linger just in front of the spot I had been reserving all evening, interacting with Kara's closest friends and, of course, Wudi, her soul mate. Wudi is the man who had selected the music. An honorable and gracious friend of mine, he now deals with the single most destructive blow of his life. He has that same void in him, though, that identical emptiness in his eyes that I am now close enough to view. This is not Wudi as I know him; part of his spirit, part of his being, has vanished just as it had in the others. I understand yet simultaneously stand ignorant of this change; I had felt this sensation in years past, but couldn't grasp the purpose or magnitude of this emotional upheaval. Perhaps, I would find the answer with Kara.

We finally reach Kara. Or is this Daniel? Who is in this bed? The casket holds them all, everyone to whom I have never been given the chance to say goodbye; Kara is simply the doorway by which their memory is kept alive. Her face and hands are pale, make-up applied in a poor attempt to give her skin tone, just as they all have. She no longer looks as peaceful as she had in the distance. Her face holds no real expression, just emptiness; the rope marks hidden beneath the collar of her final garments, the grief of the act resonating from the fact of her being in there, the note we all knew about, the pain we felt for being helpless to alter anything. At this point we are insignificant and useless at the unforeseen loss of a friend. Just as the marks would be buried with Kara and the scars covered with Daniel, we bury parts of ourselves when we place that coffin in the earth. There is more than just one person who dies at a funeral.

I offer my condolences and any assistance I can provide to Wudi and those close to Kara before embracing my friends, concealing the pain of their tears within my still shoulder. The heavy sobs and deep gasps for air as they try to restrain themselves is contrasted by my lack of any emotional display. I am

slightly disturbed by this, but even more deeply by the absence of any emotion within myself at an event such as Kara's funeral. This frigid hollowness isn't exhibited by any other person I've met. Why can't I feel anything anymore? I'm scared to be so numb, yet I don't want to feel any of the sorrow or pain that encompasses the room. Am I wrong for having developed this way? I see all these tears and don't want to make myself vulnerable to such internal weakness and damage; perhaps to be unfeeling is best for survival, or perhaps the clamming up is simply my way of dealing with loss. I can't make sense of this loss of self, of heart, of spirit. Is it better to feel pain than to feel nothing at all? My mind battles over itself in a perpetual game of tug-of-war.

"It's unnatural and unhealthy to be like a statue. You are meant to be a human with emotions."

"Don't allow this weakness to enter the foundation of your strength. You are only protecting yourself."

The argument rages on with ever-increasing intensity. I can't stop it because I don't know how; the sides just keep banging away at their opinions without a moment of respite. All I can do is be fearful for this loss of sense and its implications on me as a human. I wonder if I'm less of a person for having no emotion to contribute to an occasion that renders the very core of the firmest of souls tired and broken. Have my friends even noticed, in their wafting of guilt and tears, that I've been here at all, or are they just stirring in and out of memory as I have been? Are they simply part of this melding realm of grief?

As though each step away brings a new burden, my cluster of friends begins to travel toward the exit. Do they notice I'm still here? Am I nothing more than another figure in *their* memory that faded in and out of existence? Perhaps my perceptions are the realities of others who experience an overwhelming flood of sorrow at the loss of those close to them. Concernedly, one person turns her head.

"Are you alright?" she asks, interrupting my mental banter. The one friend here who notices I am not just a shadow in time, has she noticed this cold emptiness emulating from my silence? Am I no longer a shadow? Does her acknowledging I exist place me back in the reality of this cold, empty mansion? Has my drifting along without a word been my grieving? Is this obvious to her, yet I remain oblivious? Why can't I be allowed to understand myself or this *lack* of self? The constant battering of questions never ceases when I enter this building. Rather, the uncertainties of another's life - or, more commonly, my own life - increase in frequency and

complexity. Every time I step foot in this building, these questions dull my senses and chisel away at that young man who desires to feel something, anything. It is those pieces that are left in the casket with Tara and Daniel and all those who have been there. There is no doubt, I buried and continue to bury pieces of myself at this place and am unlikely to retrieve them again. This is who I have become; someday I hope to understand why. Just not today. Enough.

I nod confirmation. No words are necessary here. Sometimes silence is the best communication.

We leave this place now just as I have three times prior. While some people leave tears on the carpet, I leave shards of my soul. I don't cry; I can't cry anymore.



Paul Angelo '06

To Rest in Peace

Jason Hill '09

The moment I landed, the whole world became quiet,
Submerged in darkness with the last cold, soft kiss.
The relief that engulfed me could calm a crazed riot –
I sank lower and deeper into the blackened abyss.

Sinking away from Earth and life and the swaying of trees,
Sinking away from radiating warmth in the month of June,
Sinking away into pure emptiness, like a pod void of peas,
Sinking away with memories withering like an old prune.

Sunk to the bottom, the surrounding liquid freezes to crystal,
My brain roams wild while my body remains stiff as a bar –
My imagination flies quicker than the bullets from a pistol,
But even my mind stops at the bittersweet sound of the guitar.

Since before I had landed, the following moments I brooded.
My sleep, my dreams, my peace: the alarm clock concluded.

The Bird Flew in Asia

Allysia Hood '07

What makes a bird fall from the sky?
The air is harder to breathe as you near the ground.
Take your wings and fly away

From the troubles that plague you
For if they set in, you will be gassed and bagged.
What makes a bird fall from the sky?

Your wings may get numb and heavy
Their waxen beauty may melt in the feverish sun, but
Take your wings and fly away...

Up, up, up, into the sky so blue.
Though it is high, don't look down.
What makes a bird fall from the sky?

Some get clipped, some wear, and some evolve
Into arms that keep you where you are needed.
Use your wings before they fade away.

But when you leave, remember your way home.
If those birds eat your crumbs, I'll pave you a road.
What makes a bird fall from the sky?
Holy Father, take her in your arms, and fly away.

Lucky Girl

Melinda Parrish '07

I lay in bed trying to deny the inescapable truth; I was irreparably, unavoidably awake. *Maybe, maybe if I FELT something*, I thought, *if I could at least feel something, this wouldn't be so strange*. I almost died tonight. I remember lights. I remember the screaming tires and the car ricocheting off the van, but I don't remember *feeling* anything. Lindsey screamed in the passenger seat, and I sat there thinking *how am I not dead right now?* The man just kept talking . . . talking, talking, talking. *I tried so hard to brake* he said. *I didn't want to hit you and I almost didn't* he said. *Well almost doesn't fucking count, now does it?* I thought. I couldn't say that, because he loaned me a blanket. *Just shut the fuck up* I kept thinking as he kept reliving our near fatal experience again and again. Lindsey sobbed on the roadside into her rhinestone studded phone to her mother in Seattle. I could actually feel the hair on my legs growing in the cold. *What a night to wear a skirt* I thought. I made phone calls: my sponsor dad, for an auto body shop; a tow truck, to take the car to the auto body shop; Jamie, to tell her we wouldn't make it for dinner after all; my boyfriend, for a ride. My boyfriend. My boyfriend. . .my boyfriend.

Whenever something like this happens to a girl without a boyfriend, she laments *I just wish I had someone to take care of me*. I'm the luckiest girl in the world. But now that I finally am the lucky girl that has a boyfriend, what the fuck do I do with him? He shows up, clad in under armor ready to do battle. But I've already done the necessary footwork. He tries to warm me, but I don't feel the cold anyhow. He tries to talk to me and I bite his head off. I have become so fucking self-sufficient I've rendered him useless.

I roll the pillow into a pinwheel and wedge it in the crook of my neck. I close my eyes so tightly my head hurts, but I can't get the lights to go away. There is an unavoidable stream of reality that refuses to excuse itself for the night.

I can't remember a noise, I can't remember an impact. I only know it happened because I saw it; but the rest of my sensibilities shut down. I know I should be worried. I should be sad. I should be angry at the driver of the cable repair van. But I'm not; instead, I pity him. I'm not as sorry I hit the car as I am sorry that Lindsey is sobbing. If it had been me hitting a wall, I would have been fine. I would have dropped the car off at a repair shop and never told anyone anything except that the car was in for a tune-up. But it's not that simple. I have to look at the pain and fear in her face and know it's there because I put it there. I have to look at the guilt and the anguish in the eyes of the cable man as he tries desperately to fill the silence with something comforting. It's like watching someone without fingers try to put a puzzle together.

I roll on my side and hug my pillow. I close my eyes again, this time lightly, so a veil of red washes over my vision, and the only blackness I enjoy is from the dense streaks created by the veins in my eyelid. The red is worse than the light; I open them, and stare at the bad paint job around my bed. I mentally chip away the stray paint on the wood until in my mind's eye there is a crisp, even boundary between the wall and the wood perimeter for my mattress. It becomes a vessel of solidarity, a life raft for me to float away on. I try to relive the accident, this time with feeling. But I can't for the life of me remember how it felt to crash. The headlight was about even with my eyebrows when we hit.

An Elegy, A Tribute, to Innocence
Andrew Chess '08

This is a tribute,

To all that we were,
To all we could have
Become. To all those to whom
We owe our potential.

Alas, too small
Our hearts have shrunk—
reduced with wild desire,
withered with wicked misuse.
Like the sun of passion
Shining down on the fruit of love:
unbounded heat can ruin it,
Turn it sour, then black then mush.

This is a tribute,
To what we felt
as we stared, stared into
the limitless, starred sky;
the bright brilliant blue reaching forever,
thinking of the pure, the natural,
The good.
That unmarked splendor it is to be youth,
such beauty now spoiled it forces tears.

Is it all gone now?
Gone like the color from our eyes?
Wrinkled like the smoothness of our skin?
Hardened like our selfish-stone-hearts?
Once bountiful beauty ripped away,
Taken by the Current,
the Tides of self-fulfillment.

Innocence is shut out,
wrapped up and stored away,
all but forgotten, no doubt.

But His rivers flow and flow,
Collected by the sea,

And Innocence into the sky goes,
to return again and again. To turn
To rain, washing the
new-Born, who will be soaked,
soaked pure by His fresh morning dew.

Skates

Peter Halvorsen '98

Glide

The ice is cold, and my skates are sharp,
A parity of purity that leads to perfection.
And each time I sweep it is as if I fly.
The crowd's incessant hum is sweet and sensual
As is the feel of my hands inside the gloves
That she gave me before I had even thought to ask.

Spin

Like the top that I played with only so shortly
- before - as my legs fly in circles and axles
Like those that turned in my '93 Blazer.
Even as duality played its harmony
When sparks exploded both in
Technological wonder and the fiery delight
Of a back seat thrill.

Fold

And double over even as the dance ends
For the ice was cold, but the passion
That Stravinsky thought to bottle in a
Dream that played over arena speakers
Caressed my heart, and elsewhere –
I discovered Andy Warhol's meaning in full
Without cue cards or directors.

Grain

Travis Klempan '06

Simple. Wait, *tense*, then spring. No thought needed, not once the decision made itself. After the call, action-reaction-action. Step here, turn there, speed, now another turn. No thought.

The call went up again. Blood surged into his ears, and his vision narrowed. No need to look left, right – all right there for him to see, to hear, to *feel*. *Damn*, he would have thought, if he could have, *this is* alive. His senses rough, sharp, raw, like someone had taken a human-size sheet of sandpaper to his skin and rubbed his nerves red and bloody. He could feel the tightly patterned skin of the ball, the sweat not quite gather on his brow before the hit –

The hit knocked the sweat off his brow. He sprang to his feet, tossed the ball, and let his mind back in. He jogged to the huddle, listened intently over the roar of his classmates, his friends, his family, his whole town, and nodded just as intently once the decision made itself again.

Action.

He lined up right where he knew to, because he had to, because it was his place. Nowhere else on the field, in town, in the world right now could have felt as natural –

And the snap, the turn, the toss, and once again he grasped his purpose. He took it and leaped ahead of a shadow, a fleeting image of something trying to stop his inevitability. He was of another idea altogether. Smooth.

Another hit, just as natural. If he had been inclined to think at that exact moment, he would have realized that his team was ahead – another part of his brain would have noted that he was responsible. After the game, in the locker room, he would have blushed and shook his head, saying it was a team effort, but here, now, in the sweat of his uniform and the heat of the pile and the cold of the harvest moon, he would have known, admitted if only to himself that yes, it was he, *he* who lived this and loved it.

Pause in action. He remembered enough to breathe. He looked up, out, squinted. Beyond the giant lights, beyond the swarm of insects attracted to the stadium lights as surely as the crowd, beyond all of the noise and action a fat orange happy moon and bright sharp stars, all clear in the cold night sky, sat and watched.

Back to action. Thought translated into death – not dead, maybe, but certainly not awake. Hibernating, he would have thought right before the snap.

Fake left, run right, drive deep.

If he could've heard anything beyond the beat of his own heart, he could have heard the announcer over the roar of the mob. "Number five, Gary..., on the carry; number sev...teen, Todd..., number twelve...ber forty-six, Nate...the tackle." He could have heard his girlfriend, dressed warmly for the coldest of nights, screaming louder than anyone.

If he could've heard.

No time for hearing. Sight gone. Feeling was it. This was it. The lining up, the anticipation, the heat, the desire to put his body in another place where his mind couldn't catch up and where it was him against a shadow of himself –

Action. Snap, run, toss, run. Simple, terrible, especially when his mind strayed onto the field like –

The hit this time felt like something. Like waking up on a Sunday morning thinking it was Monday. Something between that and bright lights in his eyes –

His brain was shook awake by someone.

"Gary, Gary, boy!" Coach. "You all right?"

Why shouldn't I be? he could've thought, if his mind had let him. Instead, he propped himself up on one elbow, reminding himself to feel the pain later. A small part of his mind, the part that had wandered aimlessly onto the field, knew that he would spend all of the next day padding softly from bedroom to kitchen, asleep or half-asleep. His muscles would ache, and he would have bruises that had no story. But he knew this, accepted it, and told his brain to keep quiet and take a seat.

Line up, focus, lose yourself, wait for it, wait for it –

Action. Snap, long pass. Running, running, plant left foot and turn to the right –

The unexpected always had a way of interrupting his non-thoughts. A body, a suddenly lucid dream of mass and muscle and anger, slamming into his ankle. The odd sensation of hearing rather than feeling the bones pop. Slamming down to the grass, clutching the leather, his senses suddenly slammed open like a door to his girlfriend, the one time he had accidentally stumbled upon her while she was changing. No, worse than that. His brain was late in coming back. He tried to get up, collapsed on the ankle, and felt the action rush out of him. Whoosh, he could have

said, if he had the breath or humor for it. Like a balloon – not popped, but let go in that annoying way.

Inaction. Waiting. Where was the action? He was confused, scared. Inaction meant thought, and thought meant thinking.

He wished his mother could've been there to see him. Not the laying on the ground in pain part, but the whole action, running around part. Instead, she was gone. Surely as his ankle had been snapped, she was gone. Action ebbed away like her life had, each passing breath bringing him closer to waking up. He wished his dad wasn't here to see this.

He looked left, right, finally, and saw he was in the end-zone. The safety of the end-zone. Somehow, the grass smelled sweeter here.

Silent Escape Interrupted

Sara Miller '08

Honorable Mention 2006 Pitt Poetry Prize

I return to Maine—driving my mind's roads
with speed and a tank full of memory,
cruising the life that used to be close by,
while losing the life of the now and loud.
In Mustangs of thought (their engines so silent)
I pull off to my exit—my escape.

Tired thoughts spin to wide awake escapes.
They roll down Route Nine and our still, dirt road,
tumble through beauty that is soft, silent.
Long rides are everywhere in memory.
No city streets. No people. Nothing loud.
Just hours, watching pines and waves go by...

I don't stop for street lights and passersby.
I stop for ocean and breathtaking escapes,
for foxes and the loon's voice trilling loud,
for Cadillac's sunsets along the road,
and night sparkling on lakes. For memories
of a moment's beauty and things silent.

Passing fast, you crash into my silence.
Hit and run. Hard stun, as you speed by
breaking the windshield on my memory,
showering shards of the past I escaped.
You pierce my remembrance of quiet roads—
Long, quiet, inner retreats made loud.

and my emotions break—skidding squealing out loud—
and my thoughts get lost—motionless, silent—
I want to get back on my pine tree roads.
I kept the long drives. To you, I said goodbye.
I love the long drives. Just let me escape.
Just hide in the trunk of my memory.

I know you'll always sit in memory
with the quiet beauty, and you'll be loud.
And I can't think fast enough to escape
the pain: it's nothing I can silence.
But beauty, that I can live silently by.
I'll wear my seatbelt on all the mind's roads.

My memories will never be silenced.
I will swerve and honk loud, then pass you by
and get on with my escape down long roads.

J'aimais quelqu'un le jour avant demain

Davis George Moye '07

J'aimais quelqu'un le jour avant demain,
Maintenant le soleil se couche et cache l'aube.
Dans quelques heures le jour viendr'enfin
Mais c'est pendant la nuit que règnent les fauves.
Si la fenêtre me protège des ombres
Quel mal dois-je craindre pendant la nuit ?
Les étoiles nombreuses enchantent le ciel sombre
Et me font penser dans ma chambre vide.
Avant la naissance du nouveau matin
Écoute ce qui se passera, mon amie:
Hier j'ai aimé quelqu'un, mais pas encore ;
Hier je priais pour des choses en vain ;
Et encore je peux me tromper demain,
Mais cette belle nuit je reste tranquille, enfin.

I loved once the day before tomorrow

Davis George Moye '07

I loved once the day before tomorrow,
But now the sun sleeps and hides the morning.
In several hours the day will finally come
But listen, for at night the beasts are king.
The window guards against all dark spectres
So what is th'evil I must fear tonight ?
In my empty chamber I dream of her
And numerous stars enchant the sombre sky.
But before the morning is birthed once more
Beloved please listen to what comes with day :
Yesterday did I love, but no longer ;
Yesterday did I pray for things in vain ;
And although tomorrow may prove a waste,
Alone on this brilliant night I am safe.

The Other Side of the Border

William Jenkins '09

Winner of the Fall 2005 Plebe Essay Contest

The trip from Colwyn Bay had been, for the most part, relatively dry. Bryan was relieved – he'd been in the country for only three days, and he was still adjusting to the narrow, winding roads, fast speed limits, and driving on the wrong side of the road. "You'll get the hang of it – it really can't be all that difficult," Edward had chided as he gave his American friend the keys to his tiny, decrepit, gold-mustard Peugeot. The two friends hadn't seen each other in over two years, when a month earlier Edward finally convinced Bryan to visit him in London. The simple trip eventually evolved into a complicated tour of Bath, Shrewsbury, and Wales – a stunt Edward typically pulled when inviting visitors.

As they drove by fields and plots lined with ancient, slate walls, Bryan contemplated the incomprehensible consonants on the road signs. They were as intriguing and baffling as the Welsh people themselves, though at least with the signs, the consonants' English counterparts were printed neatly underneath the Welsh.

"They're so strange," Edward remarked casually after passing a congregation streaming out of a church service earlier that day.

"Who?" replied Bryan.

"Well, the Welsh."

Passing through Rhyd y Sarn, Bryan almost hit a dog. The sky had grown dark and harsh, and the rain began to increase steadily with the darkness. The dog was black and white, and its owner revealed himself as a young boy, quite content in a brown, wool coat. The two travelers found out after apologizing to the boy that he'd been walking back from the local apothecary.

After the scare, Bryan asked Edward if he minded stopping and finding a place to stay for the night. "Yes, yes, of course. Let's just make it down the coast a bit first – then we can start looking for a place." Bryan smiled to himself – Edward hadn't changed much; he was still arrogantly oblivious, and certainly hadn't lost a touch of his restless, impatient nature from college. What Bryan found even funnier was how "start" came out of Edward's mouth as "staht."

The Welsh countryside passed by quickly. Out the driver's window, Bryan couldn't take his eyes off the distant mountains shrouded in black clouds. He knew somewhere among

them was the famed Snowdon, and he wondered what it must be like to live in the shadow of such a mountain.

The closer they drove to the coast, the colder the car became. The wind outside was slowly driving away any warmth that the old Peugeot could produce. As Bryan rounded a corner lined with thick hedge, they happened upon the rough, stormy coast. The wind suddenly picked up, and the car shuddered. Bryan noticed the steering wheel stiffen. He looked into his rearview mirror – he hadn't seen headlights since the last town before the coast, nor could he see any up ahead. Dusk was now passing into night, though if the sun were out, the twilight wouldn't have concluded until an hour later.

"My God, this place is so ugly," muttered Edward, half to himself.

Bryan puzzled over Edward's comment for a few moments. "If this is so awful, why did you include it in our trip?" Bryan finally asked. Usually he could predict Edward's reply, or at least gauge his thoughts, but this time Bryan was truly curious.

"I'm not really sure. Last time I was here was as a kid." Edward brushed his fingers against his temple as he always did when he was deep in thought. The light from the dashboard glanced off his glasses, and Bryan couldn't tell if he was looking out at anything in particular. "I guess it's just one of these things you've got to show the outside world. I suppose it's equivalent to your South. We English like to parade our conquests over the rebels, prove our competence, slap the word 'tourism' on the whole thing, and get off a bit richer. Much the same as your – what do they call them, Civil War battlefields?"

The rain and wind seemed to blend into one unanimous liquid, intent on pushing the car off the road. Bryan began to feel apprehensive as the car grew more unsteady. He breathed out tensely after concentrating on negotiating a sharp curve.

"Good handling."

Several minutes passed as Bryan digested his friend's words. "You know, if you actually travel to the South, the tour guides there often make the North – the conquerors, as you put them – sound like the bad guys."

"Oh, yes, I know that. They do that here, too, the donkeys. They smile at you in their shops, from behind their rotten teeth, and recite their version of history as they've been taught." He brought his hand down and looked at Bryan. "But the point is still made – most outsiders who travel to Wales pass through

London eventually, and it is there that the images of the castles here all solidify into one heart-warming conclusion.”

Bryan braked suddenly as he banked into a curve much tighter than he thought. He could now see the lone headlight of a motorcycle a hundred meters back.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that once people are done visiting Wales, they’ve seen for themselves that the might and power of the English monarchy is, ultimately, undeniable. That we could stomp out so vicious a rebellion as the Welsh with our impenetrable castles and hold on to this desolate place, is incredibly – well, cool.”

“Cool, huh?” The motorcycle was closing quickly. “Heck of a word to describe world domination and the fates of men.”

“Perhaps.” Edward brushed off Bryan’s comment. “But what can I say – I’m a little biased. Wales beat England in quarterfinals last year.”

The motorcycle was dangerously close to the car. Bryan was about to say something to Edward when the motorcycle turned off onto a road leading down to the beach. They continued driving, passing an occasional homestead. The only lights to be seen were isolated villages miles away, or from the occasional trailer park along the beach. The road emptied out into a wide, flat valley; they were driving through the tidal flats. Ten minutes passed until they came upon the hillsides which lined the coast again. Several minutes more passed as Bryan piloted the car through unpredictable dips and turns.

“Ah, here we are. Let’s stop and find a place,” Edward suggested. Bryan was relieved to hear it. The rocky hillsides, which emptied onto the beach suddenly, gave way to what seemed to be steep farm fields and driveways leading up to stone. Plaster homes lined the road.

“Do you know what town this is?” Bryan asked sleepily.

“Yeah. There should be a sign coming up soon.” He pointed out the windshield. “Ah, there it is.” Edward started to sing the theme from “The Men of Harlech,” while Bryan slowed the car as they drove by a sign that read *Croeso! – Harlech*. Ahead, Bryan could see a dark, looming entity. He suddenly became more alert as they approached the formidable object.

“See there,” said Edward with a quiet tone of awe in his voice, “There is the famed castle of Harlech. It was there that the bloody Welsh held out for over a year against an entire English army.”

Bryan pulled the car off to the side of the road where there was a plaque for the more historically inclined tourists to ponder. Not more than a hundred yards away, the frigid waters of the Irish Sea seemed to unleash a fury upon the land as if the waves themselves were an advancing army, specters of a siege fought long ago. Every crash of the waves resounded through Bryan's chest – the pounding of war drums became apparent, beating to the cadence of the onslaught. Each new wave was a baleful rank in an eternal and implacable army. Bryan thought back to a fieldtrip he once took to Gettysburg with his high school history class. He hung back from the rest of his class as they walked along a forest path and sat down on a log along the path, imagining what the sounds of battle were like. As he sat there, he felt a similar pounding. He could hear the cannon shot pounding the ground, the horses of the cavalry pounding the soil with their hooves, the pounding of the fields underneath companies of soldiers. He became lost in the past and was awakened from his meditation only by two re-enactors speeding through the foliage on horseback on an adjacent trail.

“Hey, Bryan, do you think that we could keep moving?”

Bryan shifted back into gear. “Yeah, sure.”

They drove past the castle and turned off the road into the town. The only buildings with visible lights on were a pub and the local Church of Wales.

Edward remarked sardonically, “See, they’ve even got their own bloody Church of Wales. As if the Reformation weren’t good enough for them...”

Bryan parked the car and waited while Edward went inside the pub to ask if there were any accommodations available. He couldn’t see much through the rain, but the black silhouette of the castle was still very prominent. Its darkness was expanding through space towards him, swallowing the rain and wind. There was no more village, no road, no motorcycle, no pub, no church; just the castle, and its imposing gatehouse and parapets.

Edward opened the door, and the rain and wind forced the looming phantom of the castle to return to its regular size. It seemed much smaller to him now that Edward was in the car.

“Any luck?”

“Not here,” Edward replied, “but down south of here about a kilometer and a half is a village called Llandanwg. It’s along the surf, like those trailer parks we passed.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

Daffydd Glyndwr answered the phone in Welsh, as he usually did. "Daffydd!" the woman exclaimed on the other end; it was the owner's wife of the pub in Harlech. "Better start practicing your English – I've sent two foreigners towards your place for the night. Hope you've got room!"

"Thank you, Llani. I appreciate the business. *Hwyl.*"

"Good bye."

Daffydd's inn had been vacant for over two weeks. His work was a tradeoff. He hated dealing with outsiders – they were ungrateful, impatient, demanding – yet he needed the money, and his business was rare along the coast in North Wales.

Daffydd called out from the kitchen into the hall, "Eirwen, we've got guests staying on with us tonight. Could you ready a room quick?"

"Where are they from?" Her voice came floating sweetly down the stairwell.

"Never mind, just that they'll be here in just a minute." He got some papers out from a musty old cabinet for the guests to sign. "Is Gwyneira ready for bed?"

"She will be once she's through washing her feet."

"Good. See if you can't get her sleeping by the time the guests arrive?"

"Glyndwr, eh?" Edward looked up from his beer and sneered. An hour had passed since they'd arrived. The inn's tiny bar had a humble supply of local brews and liquors, and he was drinking one of the better selections. "Well, isn't that a hell of a name?"

Daffydd said nothing, but kept sweeping behind the counter.

"So, I suppose you're just as dumb stubborn as that damned namesake of yours?"

"I suppose you aren't much better yourself, namesake of the king of follies and what?" The words were hardly out of his mouth when Daffydd realized he shouldn't have said anything.

"Watch yourself!"

"My pardon, sir." He looked Edward directly in the eyes as he said this. "If you'll excuse me, I've got some tasks to be finishing. Should you care or be interested, there's a tavern five minutes away by foot at Llanfair; you drove through it right before you came here. Perhaps you could take your drinking interests there?"

“Well, that’s fine. Thank you,” replied Edward with a touch of mockery in his voice. He got up and started towards the door, turning to Bryan on the way out. “You coming?”

“No, that’s ok. I’m kind of tired.”

Edward mumbled something inaudible on his way out, slamming the door behind him.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t stay to entertain you,” said Daffydd monotonously, and he walked briskly out of the room with his broom into the hall. Bryan was left sitting on an old wooden stool at the bar to sort out the brief exchange between Edward and the innkeeper. He was just finishing his beer when a girl of about 18 walked in with a rag.

“Good evening, sir.” She smiled at him, and he returned the gesture. Her Welsh accent was thick, like nothing he’d ever heard before, and her voice was sweet and rich. It seemed lyrical, and he wanted to talk to her, ask her what she did, whom she knew, what she enjoyed in life, her favorite music. He knew the answers to all these questions, though, and he knew that if he’d asked her, she’d be insulted. Her sandy-blond hair was straight and pulled back into a tight ponytail. Her green eyes were accentuated by the light amount of makeup she wore. He thought it strange that a girl in this forsaken end of the earth would wear makeup. Before he knew it, she’d left the room. He went to bed thinking of the girl, wishing he had started a conversation. He thought how nice it would be to be Welsh; then he could feel welcome, and he would have been able to talk to her.

The door slamming startled Bryan out of his sleep. Edward was back; it was one in the morning. He heard Edward stumble in the foyer and rose out of bed to help him to his room. He almost stumbled into Eirwen on his way down the stairs. She was carrying a towel from the bathroom. Upon reaching the foyer, they could smell the sour throw-up that Edward had deposited on the stone floor. Eirwen immediately began to clean it up while Bryan tried to get Edward to stand up. As she was turning to go to the kitchen she stumbled over Edward’s shoes and fell into him. This caused him to begin heaving again. He was cursing between heaves, and Bryan thought he caught a trace of a story from his friend’s drunken words; he’d gotten thrown out of the pub, almost started a fight. Finally he gained control of the second bout of heaves. His face was red, his eyes bloodshot. He was exhausted.

Suddenly he threw his arms up in the air, shouting, "Why the hell can't you bastards ever get anything right? You're all a big waste of life. You're all good for coal, that's it! Focking coal is what you're good for, coal to pollute the fockin' atmosphere and heat my flat and make my computer run. Your buggered language is filthy stupid. And all ya do is build focking walls made of shit stone. To hell!" Edward's arms dropped to his sides, limp. His eyes were still fiery from his assaulting soliloquy when he collapsed on the floor, breathing heavily. The ruckus awoke little Gwyneira and Daffydd, who came speeding down the stairs right behind Gwyneira. When she saw the scene, she backed up; she was about to cry. Eirwen, too, had tears building up in her green eyes. Daffydd looked at them all, with a hurt look on his face.

"Gentleman, you're welcome to your rooms, if you please."

Bryan tried to apologize, but the words all came out wrong and sounded stupid and awkward. He helped Edward up to his room. In the foyer, Eirwen and her father stayed to clean up the mess.

Bryan arose early the next morning to get ready to leave. He felt sick and took some pain killers. As he was taking the bags out of the car, he saw Eirwen leading Gwyneira up to the road by the hand. Gwyneira was wearing a backpack and a flannel skirt, and her head was covered by a man's cap. Eirwen turned and looked at him, and their eyes locked. She wore a frown on her face, and it pained Bryan to be associated with what had happened. The wind lapped at her hair, blowing strands of sandy-blond hair into her face. She brushed it out of her face, and then turned around.

The sky was still overcast, though there was no more rain and the wind had settled on a steady, biting force. The dark gray sea was agitated with whitecaps, every bit as restless as the night before. The waves still crashed onto the beach, one after the other, though the light exposed them to be just as they were – waves. Rays of light poured out from openings in the cloud cover, illuminating patches of the sea. The effect looked like it was right out of an inspirational photograph calendar he'd once seen in a mall. Up and down the coast he could see the wide beach. The castle of Harlech was visible to the north; its gray hulk now looked more like a pathetic and neglected ruin. The surrounding village, too, looked quite pathetic. Farther up the coast he could see the mountains of North Wales, among them Snowdon, whose summit today was easy to identify.

Bryan went back inside and paid the bill while Edward stumbled to the car. He left an extra sum to account for the trouble they'd been. The innkeeper looked at the extra bills and said nothing. His face was cold and expressionless. As they drove away from the inn, he could see Eirwen and her father standing on their front step, watching them drive away.

Bryan looked over at Edward, who was dead asleep and snoring lightly. He continued on the motorway with the steady stream of English vacationers. He'd been thinking of the night's events throughout the entire drive. He came to the conclusion that England was perpetually at war with Wales. But it was a strange war; no guns, bombs, or armies – just people, in cars, with their luggage and backpacks. The battlefields weren't at the feet of the great castles, or the sites of great sieges; they were inside people's villages, shops, and homes.

On the other side of the border, all would be normal once again.



Adam Young '07

Learn Me Black
Garth Smessler '95

I sit White
They (sit) (look) (judge) Black

precise Chalk Words up on Blackboard broad
erasing blurs it grey and hazy.
crank the stereotypes
till speakers blow
old school rule

Learn me Black
feel me whip
water hose hate
back bus fate

Learn me Black
Sing me cotton
& shackled blood
gang bang bang
me till I learn

then stop
look me straight
Blue-eyed Pride
knows more

your story
than my own

Learn me Black
but sense me White
then...wipe clean slate purity
Learn Us Humanity

Angels

Casey Nelson '06 (USMC Pilot)

Neat columns covered and aligned, a sea of
White caps bobbing in unison, ebbing and flowing
To the heavy beat of the drum. 160 years of
Naval tradition now stands perfectly at attention.

To the left sits another mother. Identical,
Just like their jackets. The class number
Embroidered on their chests quickly turn
Strangers into friends. They mutually conclude
That their sons must be friends, too. And angels.

To the right sits the loving humble husband,
Proud of the accomplishments of the progeny. Of
His accomplishments. Of raising a patriot. Of being
A good American. Of his accomplished life. Of his
Ideals accomplished.

* * * * *

The rows are disheveled and lacking the discipline
and attention they are rumored to be entitled to, much
like the posture of each uniformed individual. Behind
the front wall and underneath the covered surface
the movement continues, at leisure, but carefully. Enough
to comfortably relieve the static pains, but not enough
to breach that visible plane, heaven forbid the truth
break the surface. Broken fragments of whispers creep
from the rear. Slowly at first, and then like a disease,
the fever spreads and the pitch becomes almost audible
enough for the crowd to be in on the secret, but this
disguise is practiced, and the dialogue is not concealed behind
loose lips. "I still don't see her." "Pink skirt! Two up and three
to the left of the vet in the wheelchair." "Above the
sombbrero?" "No! other vet. Wrong bleacher." To the left,
the unmistakable sound of a rifle buttstock dropped to the turf
echoes throughout the platoon and gives everyone just enough
time to watch consciousness evaporate as the sack of potatoes
dutifully joins his rifle. Falling over drunk at night means
falling over dehydrated during the day. One or two attempt to
help, but everyone laughs at the newest accomplishment.

One On Each Side

Erich Federschmidt '06 (Naval Flight Officer)

Some write.
Some talk.
Some sit quietly.
Some scream standing.
Some lounge.
Some slave.
Some smile.
Some frown.
Some create profiles.
Some create profiles.

Who stands apart from
Crutches?
One on each side.
Those who love us.
One on each side.

A Midshipman, To His Hair

Will Gifford '08

A spiky rebellion, a mischievous mane,
Glistening, golden, my snub to the snobs,
Let the barbers cringe as the LT's complain,
They'd best back away if they value their jobs,

Three inches long from tip to tip
And nary a strand that touches the ears,
Kept in check by my weekly clip,
So chief stays away from me with those shears,

I knew when I came I was giving up rights,
At the clothes, the parades, I heartily laugh.
But a dazzling coif shooting to such great heights,
That is the one thing they cannot have.

I'll give up my car, my favorite beer,
But give me liberty or give me my hair.

Dating

Gavin Whittle '06 (Surface Warfare: CG 58 Philippine Sea, Mayport, FL)

Dating is a little different at the United States Naval Academy. We wait like little boys after soccer practice near the gate for our Mommys - well that sounds gross, girlfriends - to come pick us up. I swear I don't know the motivation for a girl to put up with our schedule. I think they like it because they can have another boyfriend and we'll never find out. I like being the girl sometimes; it's awesome. I don't have a car. I'm a Youngster, no car. I have to wear this [SDBs] out all the time. A girl will pick me up, in her car, and drive me to dinner. This is the best part. I don't have any money, after I pay my cell-phone bill and my beer tab I'm talking negative amounts, credit cards and stuff. She'll buy me dinner. I mean, talk about awesome.

These girls have apartments, their own place with kitchens and things. And posters and things on the wall. I don't think there is anything more sexy or comfortable or beautiful than a couch. A soft couch with a television in front of it and a woman on it. And cheap beer in the fridge – you don't have to pay 5 dollars for it at the bar, she bought and put it in there and I get to drink it and she likes doing it. And her front door isn't at a 90 degree angle. It's just us – no mids, no taps, no officers. And you know what? If I feel like it, no pants. I can watch Sunday football with no pants, a beer, a couch, and a lady...just awesome. Being completely helpless, broke, and in the hands of someone else is the most liberating experience of my life.

There's nothing cooler than walking out the front gate by myself with a purpose. I feel like a man then. It's not like we have anything interesting to talk about. "What'd you do today?" I had a few formations. I threw a ball of cheese across the dining hall and hit a guy in the back of the head. It ended up being an officer. Uh...they're like your dad, when you were 8 years old. Yeah...I guess you could call it grounding. Nothing, I have nothing. But they keep coming back.

They need to have a girlfriend lane outside the front gate.

Over-thinking?

Leslie Vaughan '06 (Navy Pilot)

I wish I had stayed behind to ask the COL a few questions. I wanted to ask him what he meant when he described the best way to persevere against the challenges facing our generation. He said, "I don't know what to say to you ladies, but for the men: be men." He didn't offer anything beyond that. He said it was the best way he could describe it. But I was still confused.

Was he defining "man" as an officer? A dude? A guy? A soldier? A predator? I think being a man means having integrity.

I asked my friend what he thought it meant.

He said, "everyone knows it means to stand up for yourself. But why are you even thinking about that? You think too much." Maybe so.

But then I thought of another question.

I wish I had asked the COL why he didn't just say America needs you to stand up for yourselves, or America needs you to have integrity, or America needs you to be a predator. That way, there might be less confusion. I imagine his response might have been, "Well, I didn't really think about it."

[Gavin and Leslie performed these monologues as part of "Under Covers: Midshipmen's Perspectives on Gender", an annual forum for addressing gender issues at the Academy. By speaking on topics from love chitting and homosexuality to exercise attire and the International Ball, the midshipmen and faculty advisors behind "Under Covers" hope to make the Brigade more aware of the Academy's gender culture. Although attendance is not mandatory, the performance has filled Mahan Hall in just its second year on the stage.]

My Cover Has An Anchor On It

Justin Schulz '09

When I put on my cover, it covers a third of my world.
With my chin square to the ground and it secured as to satisfy a
naval officer I cannot see anything above my brow, and if pleasing
a marine, restricted to the 50 degrees from my body line outward.

When I put on my cover it covers half of my being. The half that
will say something witty, remember a song, pose an improper
proposition to a lady, feel best expressed through a little tap
dance, whistle, call out smile and be gay. It keeps me focused
ahead, locked on.

Anchors weigh you down.
My cover has an anchor on it.
Anchors hold you fast.
My cover has an anchor on it.
Anchors keep you firm.
My cover has an anchor on it.
Anchors ground you in shifting mediums.
My cover has an anchor on it.
Anchors drag you down.
My cover has an anchor on it.
My cover has an anchor on it.
My cover has an anchor on it.

When I put on my cover, I am five-sixths someone else not even
thinking about it.

When I put on my cover, I feel the masses: the huddled, the poor,
the sick, the misguided, the underrepresented, the oppressed, the
weak, the overindulged, the greedy, the good, the bad, the greats
who have gone before me, my peers with me, and those who will
come after me, and I am lost.

My cover is seven and contains volumes.

My cover has an anchor on it.

An American Soldier
Amanda Wiggins '09

“Yeah right, man. You... in medical school? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Joey smiled his crooked smile and shrugged his shoulders innocently.

“I knew you been trying to get in there for a long time, but I just can’t believe they actually let you in,” Second Lieutenant Kevin Howard joked as he began checking the equipment in his troops’ packs. “You know I’m just kidding man. But I’m really glad for you. When are you going?”

“As soon as we get back from here. Rachel wrote me yesterday and told me the good news. I just can’t believe it. Once I graduated I put in to go there and now I’m finally in. I’m going to live my dream. ‘Dr. Joseph Morse: leading surgeon in modern neurology.’ Sounds great, doesn’t it?” Joey looked at Kevin, waiting for him to show his approval. The glow in Joey’s eyes drowned as he noticed Kevin was now more focused on getting the men ready for the assault rather than Joey’s future in neurosurgery.

“Yeah, sounds great. Um... you ready for this?”

Lieutenant Howard said to Joey in a monotonous voice without taking his eyes off the equipment.

Joey gave Howard a confused look as he could tell something was bothering him.

“Something wrong?” Joey asked.

“No... I mean, I just want to get this mission over with, you know. I just don’t really feel right about this,” Kevin responded.

“Why? This is just like any other attack we’ve done. We move in, spot the target, open fire, secure the area, move out. You know what to do. Don’t worry about it. How ‘bout this? When we get done, I’ll get you a cold one or two and we’ll sit back, listen to some Cash and talk about all the great times we’re gonna have once we get back home. But for now, let’s just focus on getting this last mission over with. Everything’s going to be fine,” Joey reassured.

Lieutenant Howard looked at Joey with a hesitant yet trusting glare. He threw his pack on his back and slung his M-16 over his shoulder.

Joey turned to his men and gave the signal. “Let’s do it!”

* * * * *

It was a cold, mid-December morning and the snow was falling briskly. Snow was a rare occasion in Maperville; this was the first snowfall in 22 years. People would be talking about this for years to come, but that never crossed Rachel's mind. She sighed as her glazed eyes stared blankly out the window at the neighborhood families happily walking in the snow. One family with a boy and a girl passed by, both children about seven. The boy first threw a snowball at the girl, and then she returned fire. He began chasing her as she sprinted behind her dad. He lifted her up and smiled while she reached out to give him a hug. Seeing their smiling faces only worsened the lonely feeling Rachel had inside. She and Joey had planned to have children one day. All Joey talked about was how his son was going to be the star high school quarterback, honor student, country music singer, well-known surgeon... everything Joey had once hoped to be himself. Rachel could picture Joey's crooked smile now. "One day we're going to have the best son anyone could ever hope for. He's gonna save lives one day," he would say.

Rachel thought about what Joey must be doing now. She hadn't heard from him in three weeks. Rachel would tell herself it was nothing to worry about, but Joey normally contacted her at least every other week. Rachel cleared her mind and reassured herself that everything was okay. She glared back out the window at the boy laughing and playing in the snow. She and Joey were going to have one...one day. One day...

* * * * *

The sound of gunfire rang in Joey's pounding head. Four of his ten men had already been wounded. They could not stop now. They had to keep going and secure their target. Joey turned to signal to his men. That is when he felt it. His chest stung as though a hundred needles were piercing his flesh. He clinched his hand over the wound and fell to the ground.

* * * * *

Rachel sat up in bed, heart pounding, breathing hard. She reached over and turned on the lamp. Her head turned and she looked at the untouched place in the bed beside her. She ran her hand across Joey's pillow as a tear trickled down her cheek.

* * * * *

"Sir? Are you alive?"

Joey picked his face up off of the ground with all the might he had left in him and glared at the man standing over him.

"Are you an American?"

As Joey's vision became clear through his swollen eyes, he began to see that the man in front of him was a young American Marine, no more than 19 years old.

"You look hurt; don't move," the young Marine continued to speak, "Are you able to talk? I need to get some help. Just don't move."

Joey could hardly hold his eyes open. For the first time in three years he saw sunlight and what he considered a friendly face. He drew up the energy to utter a sound to the soldier, which sounded like nothing more than a groan to Private Walker. Joey kept trying to speak to the private but could manage no more than a few painful grumbles. The Marine looked at Joey with heartfelt pain and acted as though he was unsure of what his next move should be. Joey lifted his arm slightly and moved it to his chest as though he was trying to signal something to the private. Private Walker's initial courage to speak so calmly to Joey was quickly drowned by the growing seriousness of the situation. Joey dropped his head back to the ground as his strength left him. Private Walker dove to the ground beside Joey and hastily felt to see if Joey was still breathing. He reached inside the blood stained shreds of clothing covering Joey's chest and pulled out his dog tags. He began reading them as paleness rushed over his face.

"Y...you...you're Major Joseph M...Morse," he uttered with disbelief.

* * * * *

"Major Joseph Morse," the announcer on the television heartily said, "was amazingly found alive today by a young Marine of the name Isaac Walker."

Rachel's mind suddenly jumped back to reality, and she dashed in front of the television.

"Apparently Private Walker was making his morning rounds when he noticed a man lying in the sand. Walker stated that he could see Major Morse was badly injured and not a threat. He approached Major Morse and soon discovered that the man he found lying in the Iraqi sand was none other than Major Joseph Morse. Who would have thought a young recruit from Lee, NC, would end up saving world-renowned POW Joseph Morse? For those of you who do not know Marine Major Morse's story..." the announcer continued detailing the story to the viewers.

Rachel sat in disbelief. After three years, could her beloved husband finally be coming home? She had spent sleepless nights thinking about the torture he was enduring. She

felt as though she had experienced every ounce of pain he did. Suddenly, the thoughts of joy left and thoughts of worry came over her. "How bad is he injured? What if he has changed to a completely new person? Am I going to be able to take care of him if he cannot take care of himself? What is he going to do if he is not able to go to medical school?" Rachel dropped her head and sat motionless on the edge of the couch. She stared blankly at the floor, not knowing how to feel or what to think.

* * * * *

"You're going home Major," the corpsman said to Joey as he loaded him into the helicopter.

Joey opened his eyes and peered into the eyes of the corpsman as he uttered his last words, "This is where my men are, sir. This is my home."

Ryan, My Rascal, My Own Peter Pan

DeeDee Collins '07

Each night when stars alight,
And lashes kiss their cheek,
I fall apart inside;
And hidden, proceed to weep.

As Diana graces the ever-black,
And Wendys wander to Neverland,
I am haunted by my own Peter Pan.
My Ryan, I can't let go your hand.

Now happy thoughts of you, of us,
Make me smile while I cry.
Could you find me a pinch of pixie dust?
Please help me get back up to fly.

Dark puddles on my pillow
Are the traces of your stain on me.
I remember all I wanted to know,
All your future I can never see.

With no one do I share my hurt,
But a glimpse of tears I lose

To those who chance to wear a red shirt,
Or smirk with guilt in a harmless ruse.

As if hiding and never healing
Will keep you alive for me,
I cannot face your leaving,
Nor let your memories free.

So my window remains ever open,
That you may flood my dreams,
To never be forgotten
As you soar on angel wings.

*In memory of Ryan Spencer Collins, who was hit by lighting on a
Boy Scout adventure July 28, 2005.*

Green Eyes

Elena Moss '07

Without fail, her gaze meets mine and Mozart
Rings in my head. My exhale waits for a reply
And I know that I never had a heart

Til I saw her smile wrapped around a quart
Of two percent milk at lunch. I tell mom I'm shy
Without fail. Her gaze meets mine, and Mozart

Cheers for lovers on the playground. I start
To note her glances, gravity I can defy
And I know that I never had a heart

Before this scab-kneed angel tried to thwart
My no-cooties pledge. I wrote her a poem. Aye,
Without fail her gaze meets mine. And Mozart

Reads over her shoulder. "You stand apart
From all others. Your green eyes stop my air supply
And I know that I never had a heart

That could fly.” She looks up at me with a start.
“I’ve got blue eyes.” Without so much as a goodbye,
Without fail, her gaze leaves mine and Mozart
And I know that I never had a heart.

MISS UNDERSTOOD

*Cassidy Rasmussen '06 (Surface Warfare: CG 17 USS Port
Royal, Pearl Harbor, HI)*

Winner of the 2006 Jasperson Playwriting Award

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

GIRL – A 12-year old American female on the brink of womanhood. She is tall for her age and very thin, with short, stringy hair and glasses. Her name is Amaryllis, but everyone calls her Missy.

MOM – Missy’s mother who is in a post-partum depression, elevated by the long absence of her husband.

BOY – Missy’s younger brother, Jake. He is much shorter than her and wears glasses, as well. He has the typical mischievous air of boys his age

BUBBA – The baby, played by a doll and a few sound effects

DAD – Missy’s father, a Navy Senior Chief, who is deployed on a submarine for six months

LEEANN – Missy’s best friend.

JOE – A scrawny, pimple-faced 12-year old who likes Leeann

CHASE – Another boy Missy and Leeann’s age

The set consists of a living room/dining room, set apart by two walls angling out of the stage at a diagonal. The room contains a kitchen table and chairs and an old sofa. A set of stairs stage right leads to a girl’s bedroom on a platform.

ACT I

GIRL is lying on a twin bed upstage on a platform, lit by a soft lamp on a nightstand. She is writing a letter.

GIRL: Dear Dad . . . How are you? I hate starting letters that way because it seems so *normal*. Dear Dad. My life sucks. No. I don't want to make him feel bad. Dear Dad . . . Something happened today. *She sets her pad of paper down.* What happened today? I told my mother that I hate her and I can't stand living here. I told her she's crazy and she's going to mess the boys up in their heads. Okay, I didn't tell her that. But I wish I did. What *actually* happened . . . I ran to my room and fell asleep with my face in my pillow and woke up two hours later with slobber all over the place. *Pause.* Dear Dad . . . I love you and I miss you. Come home safe. *GIRL switches off lamp and turns over to sleep. BUBBA starts screaming. GIRL moans. A soft light switches on behind the screen behind her; the audience sees a pajama'd silhouette of a woman cross backstage with heavy footsteps to a crib on the other side of the stage. She lifts a bundle from the crib, issuing soothing hushes and baby words. She sits in the rocking chair by the crib and begins to sing.*

MOM: *Singing* A, you're adorable, B, you're so beautiful, C, you're a cutie full of charm . . .

GIRL: *Switches on light and sits up in bed.* I remember when she used to sing that song to me. I thought she had the most beautiful voice in the world.

MOM: *Singing* . . . how much you mean to me. *She continues singing, but her voice becomes softer and begins to crack. She begins to sob quietly. Light dims and silhouette fades. Light comes up on girl in bed.*

GIRL: Times like that, I hate myself. I hear her crying – I think she thinks I'm asleep, but I hear her.

MOM: *Offstage, shouting.* MISSY! WAKE UP! YOU'LL MISS THE SCHOOL BUS!

GIRL: I can't stand the yelling! Come here and talk to me! Why can't we talk to each other? *Yelling* I'M UP, MOM!

A ten-year old BOY in flannel pajamas runs across stage to the bathroom and slams the door behind him. GIRL jumps out of bed and chases after him, then proceeds to pound on the door.

GIRL: JAKE! GET OUT! I HAVE TO GET READY FOR SCHOOL!

BOY: *Offstage, behind door* I HAVE TO POO!

GIRL: DISGUSTING!

BUBBA begins crying offstage

MOM: *Offstage* MISSY! JAKE! STOP YELLING!

GIRL: GAAAAAH! *Runs offstage*

Mom enters, carrying baby. She sets breakfast table with boxes of cereal and bowls. She sits down and drapes a towel over herself to begin breastfeeding. She looks tired and withered.

BOY: MAY I PLEASE HAVE SOME TOILET PAPER? *The bathroom door cracks open and Jake's hand reaches out. GIRL storms onto stage with toilet paper – she chucks it hard into the bathroom and then runs offstage. OOOOOOW! MO-O-OM! MISSY*
–

MOM: QUIET! *Slumps in chair, checks baby.* Hey Bubba, no rush on learning how to talk, okay?

GIRL enters breakfast nook in school clothes. She sits down at kitchen table to eat cereal.

GIRL: Seventy-two days.

MOM: Still keeping count?

GIRL: Yes. He'll be home in 72 days.

MOM: It'll go by fast. The past three months have been easy. I don't even know where time has gone. *GIRL rolls her eyes.* Hey, hey, we've had fun, right? We've been getting on all right.

GIRL: *To audience* Why does she have to do that? I miss him. What's wrong with that? Why can't she just say she misses him, too? *I'm not getting on all right. She looks disgustedly at her mother breastfeeding.* Do you *have* to do that at the table?

MOM: Do you *have* to talk to me with that tone of voice?

Toilet flushes. BOY emerges with bed head and disheveled clothes.

MOM: Brush your teeth?

BOY: Yeah

MOM: Wash your hands?

BOY walks over to GIRL and pretends to sneeze, flicking water from his hands in her face.

GIRL: JA-A-KE! Yeah, he washed them.

MOM: Jake, sit down and eat some breakfast.

JAKE: Not hungry.

MOM: Sit down.

JAKE: We're out of Applejacks. I want Applejacks.

MOM: SIT DOWN! *BOY and GIRL exchange WTH glances. Boy sits and starts playing with cereal.*

MOM: *Sweetly* Hey, I'm sorry, guys. I'm just sleepy and cranky, you know? The baby kept me awake all night – I hope yall were able to get some sleep, at least.

GIRL: Yeah.

BOY: Yeah.

MOM: Hey, Miss! Ten days!

GIRL: Ten?

MOM: 'Til my baby girl's birthday . . . aren't you excited? The big 1-3 . . . a real teenager!

GIRL: I guess.

MOM: So, I was thinking – a sleepover, maybe? We could pull out the sofa bed and rent some movies and get a bunch of junk food . . .

GIRL: No. I want to invite everyone in my class, including the boys, and I want a three-layer homemade ice cream cake with pink roses on it and I want balloons all over the ceiling and a real DJ and I want you to take me to the mall to go shopping for a new outfit for my party.

MOM slumps in her chair as her daughter talks. She looks like she's about to cry. At the word "party," she freezes. BOY freezes in process of licking cheerios and sticking them to his face.

GIRL: That's not what I really said. *She gets up and walks in front of the table.* What I really want to say – what I really want to say is that it's all okay. I don't need her to try so hard to make things up to me. She should take care of the boys. She doesn't have to worry about a stupid party. I know she's tired, even though she tries to hide it. She can't hide it from me. *She goes to her mother. She strokes her hair.* Look at her – she looks like she's shrinking. *She moves to sit back down in her chair but pauses. She leans over, spits in her brother's cereal bowl, then snickers and sits back down. The scene begins to move.* Um, that's okay. We can just do something small, just for the family . . . like a nice dinner or something. *To audience* That's what a good daughter would say.

MOM: *Seeming relieved* You sure? I mean, you could invite one or two best friends . . . why don't you bring Leeann over for dinner? *She begins to burp the baby over her shoulder.*

GIRL: Well, maybe. *Gets up from table*

MOM: Aren't you going to eat anymore? Come over here, Miss String Bean. You got to eat more . . . start packing on fat for those "certain" areas. *Smacks GIRL lightly on the rear.*

BOY: Yeah, like your head.

GIRL: Mom! *Getting up.* I gotta catch the bus. Bye.

GIRL crosses to middle of stage, carrying a full backpack on one shoulder. The light focuses on her homely form – MOM and BOY clear table from stage and exit)

GIRL: *To Audience* I don't need a DJ or a new dress or anything, but I *would* like a birthday party. A big one. Thirteen is kind of a big deal, you know. I asked Mom about it a few weeks ago and she said, "We'll see," and I started asking about details, like can I have an ice cream cake and how many friends can I invite and can I – and she got mad and told me to do my homework or something like that. She was sleepy and cranky that day, too. *Drops bookbag with a loud BAM.* I hate this! All this – all these *things!* The flat tire on Jake's bike, the burned-out light bulbs in the hall that none of the rest of us can reach, the broken porch swing, the broken bathroom shelf, the broken hinge on the garage door, broken birthday plans . . . everywhere I look I see things coming undone because *he's not here.* And then I look at *her* and *us* and we're all falling to pieces, too. *Pause. Voice becomes strained.* He counts on me, you know? "Be a big girl," he said. I didn't even cry. Well, I cried in my pillow, but that doesn't count. *Sniffing.* I'm his big girl.

Enter LEEANN, a scrawny-legged girl with glasses and a backpack. She is Missy's best friend.

LEEANN: Hey, when is your birthday party again? I hafta know because I've got soccer practice and debate practice and marching band practice and piano practice and my youth group is going bowling and I have – hey, what's the matter?

GIRL: My mom's driving me crazy.

LEEANN: What else is new?

MISSY: Hey, has that boy talked to you at all lately?

LEEANN: Joe? No . . . one of his stupid friends teased us for holding hands at the bus stop last week and now he won't even talk to me.

MISSY: He's stupid.

LEEANN: Yeah, had a brain fart or something.

MISSY: Nope. You gotta have a brain to have a brain fart.

The girls giggle obnoxiously, fades to silence.

MISSY: So, are you still going to the Fall Formal?

LEEANN: I guess not. It's okay. I think it's going to be pretty stupid anyways.

MISSY: Exactly!

LEEANN: Well, we could go together, as friends, you know?

MISSY: I mean, it is a completely ridiculous pretense. One more opportunity for a bunch of spoiled teenyboppers to wallow in the steaming vomit of pop culture. It is so pathetic -- their moms will drive them in the family minivan to the school "dance," where there will be no dancing, only wiggling and bumping and perhaps some swaying to the screeching harmonies of some prepubescent boy band.

LEEANN: Yeah. *Pause.* Missy, you're so weird.

MISSY: Is that all?

LEEANN: Don't you want to go out with anyone?

MISSY: Go out *where*?

LEEANN: You know what I mean.

MISSY: I'm going to be a nun.

LEEANN: I thought your family was Baptist.

MISSY: I'll start my own convent.

LEEANN: Sounds lonely to me.

MISSY: You can come visit.

JOE timidly approaches as the girls talk

JOE: *Nervously* Hi, Leeann

LEEANN: Joe!

JOE: I'll trade you your orange for this Butterfinger

LEEANN: *Looks sheepishly at GIRL.* Oh. Okay, Joe.

They bashfully exchange lunch items and walk offstage together, leaving GIRL alone.

MISSY: What was that? Am I completely alone in my principles?

She picks up her backpack and walks center stage – the light follows her and fills the living room. She drops her bag.

MISSY: MOM! I'M HOME!

The cordless phone rings. GIRL picks it up off the sofa. A light shines on CHASE, standing on the risers.

MISSY: *Sharply* Hello?

CHASE: H-h-hi? May I speak to Missy? Please? This is Chase from her science class –

GIRL abruptly hangs up and throws down the phone. CHASE pauses to wait for an answer, then keeps talking. GIRL is frozen, staring at the phone like it is a large insect.

CHASE: Hello? Hello? *He hangs up. Lights out.*

The light comes back on the BOY -- he enters, pushing kitchen table into middle of stage. He is still in school clothes, but his shirt is un-tucked and has juice stains down the front. He climbs on top of the table and stands up; the light focuses on him.

BOY: Ahem. *Burping*, A, B, C, D, E, F, G . . . (continues alphabet)

MOM: *Offstage* JAKE! GO DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

BOY: *To Audience* I feel so underappreciated. *Takes bow and runs offstage.*

Mom enters with the baby in a sling across her chest. She is carrying a full laundry basket on her hip and she is looking at a few pieces of mail in her other hand. She sets it down and begins to push the chairs back around the table as she hums "A, You're Adorable." She is wearing stained sweats and her hair is a mess. She sits down in a chair and begins to sort disinterestedly through the mail.

MOM: Bill. Junk. Junk. Hunh. Victoria's Secret Semi-Annual sale. What do you think, Bubba? A new nursing bra? Hmm. Oh! *She rips anxiously into an envelope. From Daddy.*

She sinks into a chair as she reads the letter. She looks in pain.

MOM: *Reading letter* He's okay. He's okay. *Smiling slightly* Food's run out on the boat and he's been eating jelly sandwiches for three days . . . he finished the book I sent him . . . he needs me to send new undershirts . . .

As MOM talks, DAD enters upstage on platform in khaki military uniform. He is standing in a shadow. He looks down lovingly on his wife and baby. MOM continues reading the letter to herself.

DAD: Babe, I know it is so hard for you, and I admire you so much for this thing that you're doing for me. I couldn't stand this – I couldn't live if I didn't know you were there, in our house, with our kids, loving them and loving me. I don't know how you do it. You are braver than me.

MOM: No, no, don't say that. I couldn't do anything without you . . . remember? That first time you went out to sea – we were just married and we had just moved all the way across country and I was pregnant and I was so scared. *Laughs softly.* We were so poor. I was making it on ten bucks a week, eating Spaghetti O's and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches . . . I wanted to go home to Mom. She told me you were no good and she had made me so mad I would have followed you anywhere just to make her mad.

But she confused me so much . . . I thought about going home. But, then you wrote me a letter and you sounded so lonely and miserable *laughs* and I knew then for certain that I couldn't leave you. I couldn't let you float around in that big empty ocean all alone. *I need you.* And I need you to need me. It's the only way I can be good person.

DAD: I hope you aren't crying, babe.

MOM puts letter down and sniffles softly. GIRL walks in with bookbag.

DAD: I love you.

MOM: *Into distance* I love you, too.

GIRL: Is that a letter from Dad?

DAD: Say hi to the kids for me. I bought Miss a new dress in Japan for her birthday, just like how all the pretty girls here wear. It's blue silk – the same color as her eyes.

MOM: Her attention suddenly snaps back into the scene. She folds up the letter and sticks it back into its envelope. Yes! He says hello and he loves you. She sticks the letter into the baby sling and rises from her chair. She hushes and rocks the baby. I have to go change Bubba. Put the laundry away. She exits. DAD watches her go, then tenderly turns his attention to his daughter.

DAD: Hey, Miss, we're more that halfway through!

GIRL: *Baffled.* What is her *problem?*

DAD: I know it's been pretty hard, lately. Mom says you've been such a big help with the baby – she couldn't do it without you. *He crouches down and folds his hands to listen to her.*

GIRL: *She sits down in a kitchen chair and talks into the audience as she folds laundry.* But why does she have to be like *that?* Guess what happened yesterday --

DAD: I want to be there so bad right now.

GIRL: Yesterday I came home from school and Bubba was screaming in his crib so I went upstairs to check on him and he was lying there naked with crap all over him and Mom was sitting on floor crying. I am not even joking. She's lost it. She's gone crazy.

DAD: I need to be there. She needs help --

GIRL: She needs help all right.

DAD: Take care of Mom and Bubba and Jake. You're my big girl. *He stands up.*

GIRL: *Her voice sounds strained.* Who takes care of me?

DAD: Be a big girl. Be brave. I love you, sweet pea. *He exits.*

GIRL: *Glumly* I love you, too. *She continues folding laundry.* See you in 72 days.

JAKE enters with clothespins stuck all over his hair like a strange wig.

BOY: Do we have any in-del-i-ble ink pens?

GIRL: Um, I don't know?

BOY: Okay, thanks. *Exits casually.* *BUBBA begins crying offstage.*

GIRL: *Holds up a pair of 10-year-old sized underwear with obvious skid marks.* *She makes a face.* If I had the choice between here and the bottom of the ocean, I think I'd choose the ocean, too.

END ACT I.

[Cassidy's play will be performed in its entirety next spring in Mahan Hall.]

**Running from a Train and Our Name
-for Sarah**

Anonymous

We were six and counting,
playing Who's fastest to one hundred?
I lost: you passed me by sixty, winning.

On the high school track, my feet and nerves were pounding.
While you were on the railroad track, as a train rounded.
We were sixteen and running

As fast as we could, we were moving.
Two races, two ends (yours dead) ahead.
We lost: the runner and a train passed us, winning.

At home, the late call, my uncle crying.
"There's been an accident," he said
"She's sixteen and dying."

Same name. Same age. Same dreams we were living.
Sarah, were your years and hopes grounded?
I'm lost in that impasse. Why am I winning?

Three years later my name hurts. Reminding
me and our family, making more tears shed.
Not to be nineteen and living...
This is loss: the past and pain winning.

Exiting Lake Shore Drive

John Gamble Keith '06 (Naval Flight Officer)

You don't come around here no more
To Belmont Ave. On this street
Lights always pave the way elsewhere.

For you it led to fields of corn
In Indiana. Some people
Say, "Don't come around here no more,"

Ranting in waterlogged board shorts.
For someone who always needed
Long lights to pave the way elsewhere,

You came upon south pointing rows
Away from this Chicago heat.
You don't come around here no more

To sail into the silent dark.
Fragmented city buildings lead
you, always to pave the way elsewhere.

Emerging from the bus with a tear,
Walking across the summer heat,
She came around here once more,
Lights still leading all paths elsewhere.

Waking Memories

Justin Clapper '09

Summer sun splash on tiny shoulders
Scales on skin that could be grains of sand, fall away.

Remember when I jumped in and my shorts fell down?
I laughed and just kept swimming anyway.

Now the waves break under trash
Those blue skies have faded grey.

Remember when we went back?
You cried on my shoulder as the tides rolled in- pulling
hope away.

The Idiot?

Denise Wolff '93

Ambling through the K-mart crowd
two thin-haired grannies bob with chatter
hunched with swollen packages
overcoats draped across fussy limbs

At their heels lags a third
a full-grown child pulled along by flannel granny arms
lugging its club feet; hair short (for efficiency)
eyes glazed in a different (simpler) world

The one in blue straightens and fills herself with hair
pecks away (chin, eyebrows raised), while
the urgency yanking at her sleeve goes ignored
"Did you see that hat Elsie wore to church?
Imagine – plastic fruit in the house of God!"

"Bet she bought it a yard sale...
I think she cheated at bingo too!"
the yellow one smirks
through tea-rose lipstick and popcorn breath

While from behind
a tongue too thick
booms:

“Anne, we’re going to die someday!”

“Anne, we’re going to die someday!”

Chapter One

Gen Studer '08

They had no idea she was awake. She could hear her parents talking in hushed tones, the monotonous beeping of the machines at her bedside giving a harsh underlying beat to their conversation.

“Why the hell do you always have to talk about her in such a degrading tone?” A cold whisper cut through the sterile hospital air. “She’s our daughter, for God’s sakes.”

“Ryan, don’t be an asshole. I’m not saying she’s a bad, evil person. I’m merely pointing out the obvious: that had she told us what was going on, we wouldn’t be here right now.” Ryleigh could hear her mother pacing across the dimly-lit room.

“You want to know why she didn’t say anything? I’ll tell you why. It’s because she knew if she said anything you’d freak out and watch her every move like a hawk. She can’t live like that. She can’t have you always breathing down her neck, Liz.”

“Don’t be naïve. You know it’s because she’s sixteen years old and thinks that she’s old enough to make decisions for herself. She thinks she knows what’s best for her. Well you know what? She’s not and she doesn’t.”

There was a strained silence in which Ryleigh tried to concentrate on the scratching of old sneakers against the sterile, cold, tile floors. She listened to the faintly accompanying crackling of anonymous medical charts and the murmuring voices in the hallways, anything to take her mind off of what she was hearing. But as much as she tried to push them from her mind, her mother’s biting words echoed in the groggy confines of her mind. There was an impulse growing in the bottom of her parched throat and she had to stiffen her legs under the crisp white sheet to not cry out in defense. *She doesn’t know anything about me. Why does she still think that I’m a baby who can’t think for herself?*

Ryleigh wanted her father to say something. She wanted him to tell her mother that she was wrong and that she should have faith in her daughter, but Ryleigh heard only the silence throbbing in her ears. She knew there was an IV in her left arm and could feel the heart monitor clipped gracelessly onto her fingertip. *How long have I been here?* From above her head came the occasional soft chime of the computer that monotonously maintained readings of her vital signs, and then there was the steady beep...beep...beep that was starting to engulf her remaining, clouded consciousness. She could feel her eyes relaxing under her softly closed lids. Her breathing was lighter and slower, and sleep had almost drawn its blanket over her when she was pulled back into the hospital bed by a harsh and tired voice.

"I love you, Liz, but I can't do this anymore. I can't sit here and watch you scowl about life. It's hard enough for me to watch you drown yourself in your own self-sympathy, pushing me away every time I try to throw you a buoy, but when you start to pull me and my children down with you...I'm just not going to let you. You have no right."

"But *you're* the one pushing me down! I can hardly look at my own kids any more because every time I do, all I see is you and your influence on them. I see your oily hair and quirky smile in Jeremy. I used to love that crooked smile; it was cute and now I hate it for reasons I can't even justify to myself. I just can't look at it without wanting to slap it away. I see your clumsiness and childishness in Caleb – "

"He's four! What do you – "

"Exactly! You never grew out of it, why should I expect him to? And I hate you for making him that way."

She stopped and Ryleigh could hear her father breathing heavily. She knew he was very angry.

"And Ryleigh," she sighed. "When I look at Ryleigh, I don't see your princess."

Ryleigh held her breath.

"Instead, all I see when I look at her are lies that I don't understand. I look into her eyes and see yours and I know that she sees me the same way you do. I can't talk to her without being reminded of all the pain and confusion you've put me through. And I hate it! I hate not being able to look at my beautiful little girl and see the princess you see. I hate the yearning I feel around her: like I don't know who she is, like I'm not part of her life. Like I'm not a part of yours, because you always make me the fucking bad guy. And I'm not the bad guy, I'm not!"

"I don't make you the bad guy."

"Yes you do. Every time – "

"No I don't! You do that all by yourself. You're the one who ignores them. You're the one who expects so much from them when you're never there to cheer them on. They're just kids, Liz."

"Oh, thanks for the insight, Mr. Perfect." The incredulity sank heavily into Ryleigh's ears. *He isn't?*

"Shut – "

"I could make you the bad guy, you know. I could change everything. All I'd have to do is set them down and tell them..."

"Liz..." There was a note of panic in his voice.

"But I haven't, you know. I haven't said a word to make you the enemy. You know why? Not because I don't think they should hate you -- because they should -- but because I know that it would hurt them. Their worlds would crumble around them like stale cake, and I can't do that to them."

There was a pause wherein Ryleigh could feel her father search for an answer. *What is she talking about?* When he spoke again, he was calmer and sorrowful. "I'm sorry. I know that's not enough, but I don't know what else to do. I tried to explain – "

"There's no explanation for it."

"There is an explanation, just not an excuse. You never wanted to hear what happened, so I let you make all of your goddamned assumptions."

"What is there to assume, Ryan? You slept with another woman. You cheated on me. I don't want the details; I just want the facts. I know the facts. Is there anything else?" The knot in Ryleigh's throat tightened and her breaths grew shorter and shallower.

"There's the Why," her father breathed.

"I don't care about the Why. You cheated on me. That's all there is to know."

"NO! It's not. You need to know the Why because it has a lot to do with you. No, the Why *is* you. I want you to listen. You ignore me; you never have cared what I needed or wanted. You only took and never gave anything back. Michelle would actually have a conversation with me. Do you have any idea how stimulating a good conversation can be? An argument that isn't a fight?"

"I don't want to hear this." Her mother's voice was full of loathing.

Desperately, her father continued. "You never wanted to hear it; you never want to hear about anything that has to do with me. That's the whole problem."

"No, the problem is your lies."

"What the hell – "

"Your fucking lies, Ryan. Going to the bar with your buddies after work, my ass. What about you telling me that you were going fishing for that weekend? All the time, Ryan. Lies, lies, just lies. And you were cunning, so cunning and sly. It took me forever to figure it out, but I did, and now I know what to look for and I see you've been teaching my daughter your dirty tricks, but just like with you, I can't prove it. I don't know where she is all the time, but she's not at home and she's not where she says she is. Not like you care, either, you bastard. If I weren't here, she'd have no structure. You'd probably give her your blessing to go out and screw every guy on the block as long as you thought it would make her happy. But you know, I don't like it when a friend of hers calls, one she's presumably with, asking to talk to her. How do I react to that when it's obvious that she's lied, again? What am I supposed to tell her friend? 'Oh, no honey, she's with you, don't you remember, or did she forget to tell you to cover for her again as she went out with that guy?' Did you know she was seeing someone, Ryan? The Simonsons saw them at *Garduños* last month. Did you know that? No, of course not. You have no time to pay attention to stuff like that."

I had to lie. You wouldn't have understood. You wouldn't have listened if I had tried to tell you.

"Yes, Liz, I did know. Of course I knew; I'm her father. She lies to me just as much as she does you, and yes, it does feel like she's twisting a knife in my heart, but I can't say anything to her because I know if I do she'll shut me out and just deny everything. She'll get closed off and defensive. Don't think for half a second that I don't love her. I can't believe you would imply something so...so, heinous and conceited. I love her so much that I *can't* confront her. I don't...I could never let myself ruin our relationship. Right now, she talks to me still, sometimes, about her feelings or about her life, and I couldn't bear to lose that. And I know you're jealous – "

"You dirty – "

"You know you are! Don't start with me. You can't stand the fact that she likes me more than you."

"How old are you, really? My God! How naïve and self-absorbed can you be? If she had any idea who you really were,

she'd never talk to you again! Maybe I *should* tell her about your escapades."

"Yeah? And what would that solve? She'd hate you and she'd hate me and she'd be all alone, and she'd tell Jeremy and we'd have a filial mutiny on our hands. You'd go from your minimal contact that you have now to having none at all because they'd take Caleb and leave us both to our pitiful existences."

"I don't think – " Her mother suddenly sounded as though she were trying to justify a falsehood in her own mind.

"You know it would –" her father interrupted, sounding as confident as he had yet.

"Well then, what exactly are you saying, Ryan? That we've raised our kids in such a way that now our lives revolve completely around their believing that we know nothing about them?"

"Yeah, I guess so. And there's only one solution I can think of to start to work things out."

"Oh really? And what's that, Einstein?"

"Liz," he drew a long and steady breath. Steady, but obviously aggrieved, "I want you to move out." Ryleigh's father sounded trodden and pained, but sure of his words.

"What?! You cocky asshole." Her voice resounded with contempt and horror.

"I think it'd be for the best."

Ryleigh was finding it harder and harder to breathe. *Who are these people?* It seemed to her that she was slipping in and out of a cruel reality that was clouded by the end effects of anesthesia. Her arm with the IV was beginning to ache because she was clenching her fists so hard. She could feel the tears welling up in her tightly closed eyes. Her parents' words swam through her groggy mind. The more she heard the hotter she became, trying to suppress her anguish and helplessness.

"Well...why don't *you* leave then? It was your idea. Are you asking me to divorce you? Are you trying to pin this all on me again? Having me be the one who deserts them so that they can blame me for everything? What are you trying to pull here?"

"I'm not trying to pull anything. I just want a divorce."

"*Just* a divorce? So our marriage means fucking nothing to you? Don't you have any – "

The hospital door opened loudly. "They didn't have anymore *Cheetos* in the vending machine," her older brother said, "so I got him *Funyons* instead. He wanted to get you a *Carmello*, mom. He said you liked them, so here you go."

“Oh Caleb, thank you. You’re very thoughtful.” The fake loving voice was one everyone in the room knew well. Liz forced herself to sound like a house-wife from the fifties, always chipper, her first priority her family. No one was convinced.

There was a soft exchange of plastic wrapping between hands.

“Um...” Jeremy broke the soupy silence. “Is everything okay? I mean, nothing with her condition has changed, has it?” Ryleigh held her breath. She heard her mother delicately clear her throat, “no honey, nothing. Still waiting.”

Tug-O-War

Katherine Gerhard '06 (Surface Warfare: CG 66 Hue City, Mayport, FL)

The rope stretches;
Opponents pick their stance;
The sweat of a face marred with concentration
Drips slowly down.

Feet dig in, hearts begin to race;
The uniformed man in stripes lifts the whistle,
Wait for it...now go!

Pull! And the strings of my mind
Are jostled by the decision at hand.
Is there a flag to determine the winner?
Is there a clear cut way to decide who wins?

My mom lurches back,
Her point to make very clear and adamant:
He will not come - it is your day.

Locking elbows and ankles,
My dad pulls in retort:
I graduated from there –
You bet I’ll come.

The flag waivers with decision.
Push and pull, back and forth;

Never gaining ground, never passing the lines of demarcation.

No winner, no loser,
Only the constant strain of hands,
Pulling in *their* direction...
 The way that *they* want me to go.

Checkers and Memories

Ben Jonah Koenig '87

Old streets, and toothless, bearded faces.
Rough, big carpenter's hands
moved checkers on the milkcrate board.

They sat on paint cans, and they laughed.

Their fingers were sticky from the oranges
that they ate at lunch. And they dreamed
individually about Her, and Wine, and Then.
Bright, deep black, shiny eyes dreamed.
And dreamed.

The dry air creased their crooked faces,
and stole their childhood.

No one ever won the game, because no one ever
really played it. Few boys watched – fewer wives.
No,
just the old Jewish men who hoped for
the Sabbath sunset and Jerusalem.

They did not work now.
There were new, younger men. And more
efficient machines. They had nothing now
but their memories and their checkers.
They aged gracefully (was it ever ungraceful?)
and they saw themselves in each other.

At dusk they left their places, but no one

took the milkcrate. It would be there tomorrow.

They moved away slowly, letting their soft, worn, cotton pants, in earthy shades of brown and green, drape over their sharp hips liberally. Their rough-bottomed sandals shuffled away, from a sandy, scraping noise into a Quiet reserved only for the Synagogue.

They'll be back, I guess. But not tomorrow. They won't play checkers on Saturday.



Genevieve Studer '08

Untitled

Matthew Falbo '07

He lay on the bed, watching the creation of formless shadows cast periodically on the wall by the headlights of passing cars. They came and went, constantly in motion, never stopping for anyone, like so many things in his life. He could not bear to look back across the bed and watch her get dressed yet again, that image already a permanent place among his bad dreams. He could feel the vibrations of the bed as she put on each article of clothing, and every one shook the foundation of his heart. After a few moments he gathered the strength to look at her. A sharp chill shot through his body, and he felt as though he would choke to death on his own emotions. He lifted his arm to reach out and caress her back but stopped just short of making contact, pulling back his clenched fist.

The smell of the room was like poison to his lungs. The stagnant odor of so many souls passing through in their hour long attempts at discovering love, the cheap, plastic mirror on the ceiling that had seen so many broken hearts and even more broken lives, and the solitary end table lamp complemented the lonely room, giving off a pale red glow much like the one he imagined his heart would emit if bestowed upon the world.

He sank deeper into the bed as she stood. She was fully dressed now, or at least as close to fully dressed as she ever came. She bent over to straighten her black fishnet stockings. Her tight leather shorts, which resembled underwear more than actual clothing, squeezed her buttocks and upper thighs, and he felt his blood rush to the lower extremities of his body. He took a deep breath to try to calm himself until she stood back up and continued. Picking his pants up from the chair at the edge of the room, she took his wallet from the back right pocket and extracted the sum they had agreed upon so long ago. She used to wait for him to get the money from his own wallet but that formality was long since unnecessary. The now nearly empty flap of leather was replaced and the pants dropped callously back to their upholstered sanctuary. He thought of every dollar he gave her as a grand expression of his love. But it didn't matter how many times they did this or how many of his paychecks went into her pockets, she would never love him.

She started the last leg of her journey from him for the night, casually walking to the door without even a glance his way. There was a subtle squeak as the door opened. The light from the

hallway stole away the details of her face and transformed her back into just another stranger. The swift click of the door shutting slowly faded through the room, and he was alone again.

A Confession to Saint Catherine

Patrick Kappel '07

Saint Catherine, there's a red house over yonder, baby
Gentlemen pass in and out her loose doors
With scarlet girls, their stockings torn and shabby.

Now and then they get a knock of shame; a rabbi, a priest, a
Jehovah, a nabi.
For one guilty hour the father tries to ignore
Saint Catherine. "There's a red house over yonder, baby."

A Wall Street broker whispers to a half-priced cabby.
While a Gentleman Jack sailor who washed ashore
Seeks scarlet girls, their stockings torn and shabby.

From the New York streets to the pews of Westminster Abbey
She sells her cheapened soul and then cries out for
Saint Catherine! There's a red house over yonder, baby.

Where after the playing of Butterfield's Lullaby
The Colonel leaves his family to go sleep and snore
With scarlet girls, their stockings torn and shabby.

These ladies receive the damnation of society, a lack of sanctity.
But whom do you see as worse, the *gentleman* or the *whore*,
Saint Catherine? There's a red house over yonder, baby,
With scarlet girls, their stockings torn and shabby.

Cannibalism

Cameron Wales '09

Deeply tanned people wearing furs, feathers, and fearsome masks moved to the beat of the same drum. The light from the Big Fire Pit between the witch-doctor's hut and the Sacred River washed over them and painted them orange and crimson as they twirled. The dance was easy; they had been doing it since longer than they could remember. Like their ancestors before them had done, they bobbed and pumped their arms, pretending to be full of Jungle Spirits.

The witch-doctor had a mask in the likeness of the legendary giant jungle rat, a fabled and holy creature not seen in these parts for at least a hundred generations. He fell on his face, and then to his side, writhing and chanting gibberish. It was time.

"Bring out the sacrifices!" Said the chief.

The people scattered. Each knew what to do without question. It was the way they had been taught since before they could stick a bone through their noses. They dragged their quarry from the darkness into the light. Four men together could carry a bamboo pole with a man strapped to its underside by vines quite comfortably. There were ten captives this time, but it didn't particularly matter; everyone would be able to get at least a bite in with as few as six men for dinner.

Sitting at the light's edge, a small boy watched. He was not yet old enough to stick a bone through his nose, and therefore could not participate in the ritual. Today his father had decided that he was man enough to learn about the vital need to eat the hearts of the people from the next village up the river. He abstained from carrying any prey in order to explain the ceremony.

"Now that the God of the Great Yellow Tree-Moss has filled the witch-doctor's body, we may begin to eat."

The boy had puzzled something over during the last hour's dancing, but he felt that his father might become upset if he asked. He could contain himself no longer.

"Why?"

The man recoiled as if poisoned by the giant blue spitting tree-frog. He had been in this village for a long time, and never had he heard such blasphemy. The ritual was necessary - without it the village's system would collapse. Everything he had been raised to believe centered around the carnivorous raids on the nearest village and the spirit dance. It was simply the way things were done; it was the right thing to do.

“Boy, I have done this to my neighbors since I was only a little bigger than you yourself. Before me, my father did this, and before him his father. Since before anyone can remember, we have eaten the hearts of these weak men.”

“But do you know why our ancestors did it?”

“It is for a reason that we are not wise enough to comprehend, I must assume, for if it were otherwise, surely they would have passed such knowledge down to us.” The man began to sweat.

“But what if they weren’t any wiser than us? What if they were just hungry, and felt awful after devouring their fellow man so they made up a dance to explain it? What if they just did it because they could get away with it and thought it would be fun to destroy people that they have power over, and they just told their descendants that it was okay to kill people and eat them later for some fake reason? What if -”

The man could take no more of this. He grabbed the boy by the ankles and hurled him into the fire. The remainder of the feast continued on without a hitch.

Untitled

Michael DeCarolis '07

The poetry of the fall is a candle
Burnt out; once red, now an extinguished brown,
A naked wick on a waxy handle.
Earth—of life and light no more, melted down,
Covered with ooze of white and lack of heat—
Shall shiver, shake, and hibernate, holding
The memory of warmth the sole receipt.
The question: can it be relit in spring?
Time answers yes. Doubt not authority,
But question motive. Why should every bud
Ripen, rot, and fall again wintery?
If candles melt snow, quench the flame with flood.
Create no more. Quit all candles with rain.
Let the season end this mutable pain.

Soap Man

Brian Sheckells '07

I could walk back into their life, walk right through their front door and be the man they need me to be, make love to my wife and toss the baseball around with the kids, but these germs are too unforgiving. The psychiatrist says take baby steps; take back control of your life. What does she know about this never-ending war? The only thing germs understand is Lysol and soap. They move and spread at lightning speed. So I clean, scrub, wipe, sweep, brush, wash, dust, mop, and clean at lightning speed, all day and all night. One day the world will understand, and I'll be their prophet. The hero covered in latex, with a tool belt full of bleach, ammonia, lye, disinfectants, and chlorine, a mop in one hand and a beautiful babe in the other, towering over my defeated bacteria. I'll have time for the rest of the world when I'm dead. Until then, time to clean.

Dogfight

Samuel Capps '08

The first time I got stabbed, I wasn't expecting it.

Me and Cofi, my big brown-and-black heavychested Rottweiler, stood in our corner of the old dogfighting ring, the floor gritty from dried blood. It was built from plywood siding and canvas for the floor; I was holding Cofi by the loose skin of his neck and shoulders and he was up on his hind feet, yelling and roaring for all he was worth, getting worked up into the blood-frenzy that drives him to tear other dogs' throats out. I had to lean back and let my weight do the job of holding him back; I'm two hundred and five pounds but I was having a hard time staying where I was.

The other dog was a dark brown Pit-Bull, raging and jerking and gnashing in his master's hands. I hate Pit-Bulls because they're bad news for fighting dogs and handlers alike; temperamental, quick to bite anyone, strong out of proportion to their size; they don't feel pain the way other dogs do. They're quick as hell but they have several structural weaknesses, which is lucky for me, and lucky for Cofi. They tend to be shorter than he is, and he usually can outlast them if they manage to go the distance. I had three-hundred dollars and my second-best friend riding on the outcome of the fight. Cofi better outlast him.

"Heat 'em up!" said the ringmaster, standing well out of the way- and we handlers carefully began to bring our dogs closer by increments across the small fighting ring, letting them get the smell of each other, the taste of each other's spittle with each bark- folks say dogs bark but it's really more of a roar, a battlecry. In a dogfight, the handlers have to let the dogs hear the other dog's voice without letting either of them go- one dog released inadvertently before the other would be a disaster, the match labeled unfair- most importantly, the reputation of any handler who let his dog go early would be trashed, completely gone.

So I did my best to hold Cofi back on his hind legs. He was surging with his whole body and landing on all four legs because of my constraint; surging again, trying to get in- just as quick as it is to tell it, I slipped on a patch of not-so-dried blood that the ringmaster's boys hadn't quite hosed out, and fell on my ass. Cofi bolted toward the other dog and the ringmaster called *GO!* at exactly the same instant, lucky for me. Maybe it doesn't matter. I think the ringmaster saw what was going to happen and was afraid I was going to blame him for not taking care of the ring properly.

Cofi hit the other dog and his handler with the speed of a cannonball. They were still upright because the ringmaster hadn't given any warning (no usual *one! Two! Three! GO!*) and the guy wasn't ready to let his dog go, completely caught -ass-naked surprised; Cofi caught the other dog by the muscles on the top of his neck and began to shake that Pit-Bull in a way I've never seen in a dogfight. I am completely sure it was because neither handler nor dog were ready, but what the hell; the Ringmaster had given his go, and the match was on.

Cofi was kicking the crap out of the other dog. Sometimes matches get stopped before one of the dogs die, but usually one of them has to be dragged out by the hind legs after the fight. Seeing the blood and shit and slick ripped-open muscle used to make me sick, but I got used to it after the third fight I went to. It's completely different when it's your dog, and when it's your money. You follow every move, every slash and fall, every second, like it was you out there with the huge incisors, as if you were whirling and ducking and singing the growling duet of someone's death out there on the canvas floor. It's completely addicting- animal combat at its finest- and truly a way to live beyond who you are. At once, you are more and less than human: you are giving your dog, the perfect extension of your will, the opportunity to go back to his wild roots and contend for his supremacy over others of his race. He gets to be a badass, the perfect killing machine, completely loyal

to you- there is nothing more sublime. As far as understanding the dog as the extension of your will, hearken to this: you pick him as a puppy, you love him, train him, feed him; you listen to his joys and complaints from the time he can scramble around on his huge paws and skinny legs, slipping on the linoleum; you make him happy or sad by the very fact of your presence or absence, goodwill or anger; you train him by hanging weights around his neck from the time he is tiny- he is yours, and to an extent, you are his. He's part of you- so partly, it's you out there in the ring, winning the fights as well as he is. I wrote a paper about this subject in English class and the professor recommended me for counseling to the school psychiatrist. I filled a paper bag full of Cofi's shit and put it on her office doorstep, lit the bag on fire, knocked on her door; laughed my butt off when she opened the door and began to stomp on it to put it out. I never went back to that class.

Some folks don't care about their fighting dogs, or like to get emotionally involved with them. I think that's a pretty stupid attitude to have, because there is no attitude that will motivate a man to take care of his dog such as love and genuine care will. It's the difference between having adequate obedience or consummate love back from your animal. I think Cofi fights harder because of the way I take care of him.

So I was in that ring, scrambling off my backside, watching Cofi rip this other dog to shreds, and the other guy was getting off his ass because he got knocked over with Cofi's initial charge, and two seconds later the fight was over. There was a darkbrown/lightbrown/black circular blur- many dogs will fight in a circular or spiral fashion- and suddenly the Pit-Bull jumped and Cofi caught him midair somehow by the throat and ripped that sucker out in a deft little snatch, nearly tore the underside of his neck completely out, and wrassled and shook him until his mouthful came free. Blood went everywhere, showering us ringside with red hot droplets. I was ecstatic and the other guy, still getting his balance, was dumbfounded.

'What the hell?' he said, his lip curled up in astonishment, and I didn't blame him. I had never seen a fight end so spectacularly or so quickly, but in the end it was irrelevant, so I didn't even reply. I've heard a lot of other exclamations to that effect- shock, disgust, anger- and in the end, I usually collect my money, pay my respects to the ringmaster (*Orale, cabron*. Hey dude. Next Saturday, you're going to have another fight for me? *Si, man, you can count on it*. Give me a call by Wednesday, talk to me about

this other dog? *Sure man, you know it.*) and I'm gone, out of the old high-ceiling dilapidated warehouse out in the wasteland of South Sacramento, where the predominant color is of the dried-weed brown fields bordering endless black faded asphalt parking lots, driving away in my brother's green pickup truck with Cofi in the cab, wrapped up in an old blanket he likes so we don't get blood all over the front seat- hose and soap him off in the back yard, get out the needle and suture thread if he got torn up-

'You let your fucking dog go early!' my opponent said, still in shock. I didn't even pay attention to him. I checked Cofi over, walked over to the ringmaster and shook his hand, took the money due me, and walked through the crowd of old Mexicans and white trash and whoever else was there- out through the huge tracked sliding door that emptied onto the old loading dock, Cofi trotting at my side. I heard someone running behind me and I turned around, in the zone, fearing no evil intent, euphoric with the quick win, and I saw that guy coming toward me with a blank set face. His right hand came up and I saw that it had a pretty big folding knife in it, but I still didn't really register that he meant to stab me with it, and besides it was just as fast as an unexpected hard punch to the stomach except it hurt so much worse. He left it sticking there in my belly and I halfway crumpled over around the knife, then sort of sank down onto the ground, and I could hear barking and growling and yelling but my face was pressed into the dark wood of the loading dock and I thought I was going to die- my face was down and my ass was up and my whole lower midsection was wet, and I passed out. They told me in the hospital that Cofi caught the guy who did it and pretty much ate him alive- tore off one of his hamstrings and really chewed up his forearms when he tried to protect his throat and face, and this only cemented my understanding that dogs are an extension of the souls of their owners.

For Sale

Travis Klempan '06

One heart, slightly used, good as new with right buyer.
Needs water, moderate sunshine, occasional smiles and kind words.
Opens with alcohol, grows with compliments and batted eyelashes,
Keep away from harsh looks and young children.
Loyal and durable – needs scant attention
And once planted roots go long. Handle with or without care,
Can be kicked, tricked, and not picked,
But needs some love to germinate.
Please include two proofs of purchase plus shipping and handling
–
Package may arrive broken, but otherwise all models serviceable.
Not to be redeemed lightly or in the State of Wisconsin.
For more details
Look my way.

Animal Burger

Aaron Heil '06

“The number 13 Yukon Bear Trap,” Art Bateman began, “is an example of a trap that works too well.”

“How can a trap work too well, especially for this place? We eat everything here, and the tighter the trap the better, I thought. You could catch a pickup truck in that thing, Mr. Bateman.” Reggie pointed to the fearsome looking trap hanging on the wall nearby, one of the many pieces of kitsch and hunting paraphernalia hanging on the walls.

“It’s a good trap, to be sure. But it snaps shut too hard. Products can get away if the thing snaps shut too hard. It might make it easier for them to leave a...a little short,” said Art. He lovingly adjusted the slightly crooked trap on the wall, like one might adjust a Picasso. “I prefer this one over here,” he said, pointing to another trap propped on the wall. “The product goes in to get some delicious morsel, and the gate snaps shut.” Inside the trap, a stuffed large-mouth bass looked forlornly through the tiny bars, a touch Art thought was hilarious. “You’ve got to trap, but not be too forceful about it,” Art said, “Trap too hard, and you can’t

sell what you take.” He peeked through the curtains towards an empty parking lot.

“Oh,” said Reggie, struggling to get into the ponderous mascot costume, with its giant bobbling head. “This is a pretty weak turnout, Mr. Bateman. Aren’t you worried nobody’s going to show? I mean this is opening day,” Reggie inquired.

Bateman might have been disappointed if this was an ordinary restaurant, with an ordinary opening day, but no open-mouthed expression of surprise corrupted his slightly mischievous grin. He walked with a large stride, and dressed with the aesthetic sensibilities of a used-car salesman. Outside, the jersey barriers were all in place along the sidewalks, as were the tents and water coolers. There were even neat stacks of posters and markers. However, it was still early in the day. Art glanced at his watch, and turned around to face the interior of his restaurant. Not a bead of nervous sweat rolled down his neck, and no anxious raking with his hands had disturbed his immaculately gelled jet-black hair. His complexion was pale, but not unhealthily so.

He did frown slightly as he switched on the neon lights of his new restaurant. He had always had a problem with the term *burger-joint*, and was still bothered by his choice in nomenclature for his place: Animal Burger. To him, it evoked images of all of the other, visionless burger joints. All of their dull beef products just sit there and chew their cud in a field, waiting for their number to come up. Finally, one day, *ding!*, gentle Bessie’s number is up. She’s wheeled into a whirring, clanking, slicing, slashing, skewering Great Beyond, and comes out the other side with an FDA stamp and a truck ride to Sheboygan. Art found the uniformity ghastly...what’s to differentiate one chain from another? It’s all a variation on a bovine theme. There’s no new way to sell that. Art was a man from the P.T. Barnum school of business: a dollar isn’t worth being spent unless it’s for a spectacle. He understood that it was all about seizing a new and exciting product, and exploiting it.

Art was always careful to make it clear that Animal Burger still had beef. Of course, however, there was so much more on Animal Burger’s menu. Why not try the chicken? The venison is good, but the bison is better. You’ve had duck before, but a duck-billed *platypus*? Art still maintained that customers would prefer the more adventurous sound of *Brazilian basted bull-shark* over just *bull shark*. Llama, lamb, loon, lab, doe, dove, donkey, dingo, chinchilla, chipmunk, chimp – simply put, Art was confident that customers would have no shortage of options. Art hoped he could

finally milk his cash-cow on the opening day of his restaurant...and the road to its opening was anything but easy.

It took several bribes to a local Indian chief and extensive political glad-handing to finally zone his restaurant on a Native American reservation in Oklahoma. The hard part was spelunking into state public records to find an oft-overlooked law that afforded the Indian reserve a certain amount of laxness with the sale and consumption of wildlife. After Bateman brushed the cobwebs off of the anachronistic law, it was only a matter of clearing space next to the casino in order to build his business. With any luck at all, advertising would take care of itself.

Art wasn't even surprised when the first brick flew through the window. "Jesus!" said Reggie, his head still poking out of the folds of the suit. He thoughtfully pushed on the foam padding on his costume, imagining being pelted with bricks that were similarly as heavy and as large.

A small crowd of protesters had started to gather outside. "Boycott Bateman!" they chanted emphatically. Several were delving into the arts and crafts supplies to make signs, apparently thinking they were left by sympathizers for general use. They were the usual vegetarian, tree hugging freaky-freakies – but so far, they were the only people at the restaurant. Art looked over at a framed newspaper with a devious smile, the sounds of the kitchen stirring to life behind him. "Massive Protests Planned for Restaurant Opening!" bellowed the headline. The proud article was mixed in with the rest of the decorations adorning the walls of the restaurant. To the assembling protesters outside, Animal Burger's interior decorating was the stuff of white-knuckle nightmares; to the Great White Hunter, it might have been a wet dream. Animal heads stared listlessly from all directions, and hunting paraphernalia filled in between. Art chuckled every time he thought about the surprised look the taxidermist had left on the face of the moose head that arched its massive antlers over the cash registers. Art suddenly heard the distinctive sound of skidding sneakers, and a body hitting the faux-cobblestone floor behind him. "Hurry up, Reggie. I'm putting you in," he said without turning around.

Reggie had been trying to maneuver his way to the front of the restaurant, but the gigantic Animal Burger mascot costume afforded him the dexterity of a grizzly bear. As a matter of fact, Reggie had *hit* the grizzly bear on his way to the front, clothes-lined by the outstretched paws of the stuffed brute that held up menus in an offertory fashion. Art watched as Reggie struggled to

get up in the ridiculous costume. Finally, Reggie pulled himself up, the green head and googly eyes of Ted the Tasty Turtle bobbing absurdly as he toddled over to where his boss was standing expectantly.

Art had come up with Ted while watching one of his chefs force a struggling turtle back into a pot one day. Why not take the shells off of each side, and replace them with hamburger buns? Art also thought it would also be cheeky fun if Ted had a fork and knife in hand, as if ready to eat. The blood-spattered bib was added to complement the utensils. Art gestured towards the chanting crowd outside. Even under three inches of foam and cotton, Reggie seemed startled. “Derrr grunna gruggin gill me,” he blurted out through the muffled acoustics of the ludicrous turtle costume. Outside, the protester three-ring circus was in full swing. Picket signs festively bobbed and swayed, and several beatniks were struggling with a lighter next to an effigy of Bateman. There had to be hundreds of them out there. It was now nearly ten o’clock, and no actual customers had approached the restaurant on its inaugural day. Art handed Reggie a tray of samples, and held the door for him.

Reggie looked down at the tray of Weasel Weenies, and at the opened door in front of him. He hesitantly began to waddle towards the door, and craned his neck out to get a better look at the mob in front of him through the mesh view hole. He ducked the head back into the hamburger-bun shell as a bottle sailed past him and hit the chinking between the log walls of the building. The exterior of the building had been made to resemble an Alaskan hunting lodge, and the cedar shingles were already caked with broken glass and red paint. Reggie edged out through the door, and reluctantly approached one of the concrete barriers that were holding the shouting masses at bay.

“You’ll burn in hell for this place, Bateman,” shouted one man. He looked and dressed a little like Jesus – except sans bathing and with an abundance of tie dye. Art simply waved, but was becoming increasingly aware that his plans were in danger of backfiring. Art watched as Reggie started to work the crowd. As expected, the Weasel Weenies were knocked out of his hands as soon as he approached the edge of the protest. Red paint sailed at the hapless Reggie as he was shoved away from the barriers. He fell onto his back, and his legs and arms clawed at the air as he tried to roll off of his back. Art felt a far-off sensation of panic – paying customers *still* had not arrived. It was then that he saw what he wanted through the forest of picket signs towards the road

that led to the Minnetonkchinookchinook Casino/Animal Burger complex.

In the Oklahoma midday heat, the distant fleet of news vans might as well have been like glittering diamonds to Art. The media had been running coverage of the growing protest all day. The plan may have worked. Art Bateman turned and walked towards a cardboard cutout advertising the patriotic Bald Eagle Burger behind him. He reached over the picture of the massive burger, with its toothpick and American flag proudly erected in the middle of its sesame seed bun. Art grabbed the t-shirt launcher that resided behind the advertisement, and looked back at his cashiers, with hope twinkling in their eyes. Art kicked the door open dramatically. *Damn that'll look good in the paper*, he thought. He hoped someone had snapped a picture.

He had seen this thing used at baseball games before, but had never operated one himself. Hell, he was just planning on making Reggie use it until now. Art had intended it to be used to distribute Animal Burger swag to waiting customers during the grand opening, but plans had changed. Art loaded a shrink-wrapped Animal Burger 100% cotton t-shirt into the muzzle, and took aim. "We did it, Bateman, you corporate pig," bellowed the tie-dyed messiah Art had seen before. "No one's going to come now that we've exposed you. You thought this would work. Are you ready to eat crow?"

"No, but my customers are," Bateman yelled whilst squeezing the trigger. Three tie-dyed hippies, who had swarmed Reggie, were felled in the first shot. Art sent several shirts screaming down the center of the mob. With surgeon-like precision, Art cracked the rabble open down the center. Bateman leaned triumphantly on the t-shirt launcher, and pointed towards the back of the sprawling protest with an outstretched finger and a pose that conjured up the image of Washington crossing the Delaware. A hush descended on the ranks of the raucous protesters, and they all turned to look towards the rear.

They came timidly at first. They came in their high school football t-shirts, their NASCAR jerseys, their "World's Best Grandpa" ballcaps; with their pickup trucks, with their flip-flops and swim-trunks. People began a hungry procession towards the restaurant, through the dumbstruck rows of activists. Without a second thought, they walked to the doorstep of Animal Burger, past the droves of protesters. Sullen looks of realization cropped up across the board: by protesting, the protesters had actually piqued the public curiosity. Animal Burger was controversial, and

everyone wanted to see it for themselves, maybe even find out exactly *how* a baby seal tasted on a Kaiser roll.

Art Bateman straightened his garish plaid tie, and took a deep breath. He noticed that the bear trap on the wall had become crooked once again. He brushed past an excited customer with a sampler bucket, fondly referred to as a Noah's Ark. He walked over to the trap, and straightened it. Reggie staggered in, Tasty Ted in tatters. "I can't believe this worked, boss," he said.

"It was simple Reggie," said Art Bateman. "It's all about presentation, all about the spectacle. People are as easy to trap as the food we sell," he added. "Now get changed and start passing out the free t-shirts. No one can resist those."

Sketch 1: Ristorante

Jaci Hanna '06

If this were a movie, Maria would have been totally different.

And I wouldn't be eating alone.

Of course, Maria—the eponymous matron of the restaurant I patronized this evening—does not utterly disappoint. She does sit alone in the center of her Sicilian restaurant, with a glass of red wine, a full meal, and a boisterous voice giving advice and thanks to those regulars whom she knows. She does pull a young waiter aside to review the day's business.

But Maria is not fat, nor is she thin. She is not exhausted, nor is she uniformly cheerful.

If this were a movie, Maria would approach my table with her supper and her wine and say in a thick Italian accent, "It is boring to sit alone." Not only would she plop (if fat) or perch (if thin) before me, she would also magically impart the wisdom necessary for a tasty kitchen in our hour together. I would have the chance, when she noticed my ring and queried as to why I was dining alone, to use my line: "My fiancé is on a train from Venice to Rome. He goes to Italy, I go to an Italian restaurant."

One must admit this phraseology is masterful. But Maria stays in her corner, talking on an impossibly large cordless phone (circa 1995) about (what else?) *la familia*.

Furthermore, if this were a movie, the couple sitting in my direct line of sight would surely be more attractive, and perhaps foreign. Spare that—my own driver's license would surely be from somewhere more exotic than North Dakota, and moreover, I would not have unbeknowingly spilled marinara all over my new green sweater, only to discover it when I walked into the bookstore down the street. I would be older, and wear a large, elegant hat.

But back to this couple. I could forgive him for his neo-Nazi crewcut looks and her for her frizzy hair and unstylish boots. I'm simply angry that they stole my waiter. A picturesque, balding, white-haired dwarfish man with a New York City accent, for whom every aspect of the meal relates coyly to sex, who by rights should have been mine. He would make the director's cut. But no, I was stuck with a hulking, dark-haired blandish thirty-year-old on his last night *in restauro*. Let's just say his performance as wait staff was average-to-high while his performance as entertainer was somewhat less so. Nothing worse when dining alone than a waiter almost scared to approach your table or strike up a small bit of conversation. If this were a movie, I probably wouldn't have opted for the lobster, dessert or second drink—but if I wasn't to be alone I had to be with food. A lot of food. If I'd wanted to eat alone, buddy, I'd have stuck to the rich but cold and standoffish pomegranate in my fridge. Lord knows it didn't cost me seventy bucks.

The staging was generally all off. For example, the outdoor lighting was much too dim, obscuring my view of passersby. The lack of good inside lighting also ensured that I would not be discovered while eating my crustacean, or better yet my cheesecake, behind the plate glass window. Credit where credit is due—the music was about right. I heard "That's Amore" and the one that goes BUMPA BUMPA BUMPA BUM, bumpa-bum bumBUMbumbumbum. Points must be deducted, however, for the rather large, soundless television somehow floating over the unattractive couple's heads. Nothing to ruin a meal like one of those Geico commercials on mute.

If this were a movie, I would have left to great fanfare. Maria would have stood up, kissed the ends of her fingertips in the Italian sign every American knows as "that's tasty," and shouted "Bravo!" as I walked coolly out the door. I would have said, "Say hello to

your family!" and the waiter would have said, "Bella, your meal is on the house tonight." (That is, the white-haired waiter, not the last-night waiter.) But then, it seems, life does not imitate art.

Techno

Michael Dubocq '06 (Naval Flight Officer)

Glasses lost in heat
Now blind to her still beauty
Iced motion and salt



Nicholas Mararac '07

Life in a Blender

Ron Brown '06 (Naval Flight Officer)

The other day I was reading through my roommate's magazines. There was an article about strange pieces of art in it. One of the pieces depicted in the magazine consisted of 10 blenders, each filled with water and each containing one goldfish. This exhibit was housed in a museum. Animal rights groups had become enraged and tried to shut the exhibit down when a few of the *cultured museum-goers* inevitably pushed the buttons on the blenders, liquefying a few of the defenseless goldfish. An agreement was eventually reached for the cords to be unplugged and removed from the blenders to prevent further goldfish liquefactions. Dozens of the museum's patrons have undoubtedly pressed the buttons since then, intending to do what the others had done before. These people don't even realize that they, through their actions, are more a part of the work of art than the goldfish and blenders will ever be.

Soldiers of Fortune

Ron Brown '06

My father sometimes gives leadership courses at the naval training center in Orlando. Sometimes he opens the meetings by asking everyone who they think is the best leader ever, dead or alive. As they go around in a circle, someone eventually says Jesus, and everyone after that person says Jesus. Then he asks everyone what they do now and where they see themselves in 5 years. As they continue around the circle for the second time, this time telling of the type of work they think they will be doing 5 years from now, some person says that they won't be doing any work 5 years from now because they see themselves winning the lottery in the next 5 years. Everyone after that person decides that they too will win the lottery in the next five years.

twisted twine and empty cans

Matt Guyton '07

i fancy myself the foolish type,
enhancing all i read and write
with a mix of made up lies despite
the drought that drains these lands.

i sent the letter with a kiss enclosed,
contented by my doubts disclosed
in a package meant to be disposed of
by suns and sinking sands.

i've taken all that i was given,
mistaken dreams, though i was driven
to hinder mended holes with hidden
agendas and caring hands.

i figured others would know the fall
configured in rhyming schemes and stalls,
arranging arguments and calls
through twisted twine and empty cans.

[Editor's Note: This song, and several more by Matt, can be heard
at his website: <http://www.myspace.com/mathematicsmusic>]



Adam Young '07

Untitled

Michael DeCarolis '07

We have not the wisdom to fill pages,
Although volumes lie before us, empty.
We have no words that will endure ages,
Yet fools fill the world with their words daily.
An island, against whom the sea rages,
Shall outlast our noblest thoughts. Even stars,
Whose too brief lives every dawn presages,
Write more each night than we, in endless hours.
We cannot liberate truths from cages,
But still we try. In this brief life, we know
Too little to earn the title "Sages."
Thus, we'll let the truths rest, and we shall go.
 There is too much to know before we dry;
 Yet strive in vain to learn, my ink and I.

Through His Eyes

Wayne Cheney '08

It's going to be a long night was all he could think as he sat on the cold sidewalk. It was late December, and the chill of winter had long since set in. Granted, Phoenix, Arizona never got very cold compared to some other parts of the country, but when all you have to wear is an old pair of jeans, a ratty t-shirt, and a worn out pair of sneakers, it got plenty cold enough. The fact that no one was feeling generous enough to give him a couple of dollars for a warm meal didn't help matters much. It wasn't that these people passing him by couldn't give, they simply wouldn't. Most couldn't even bring themselves to look him in the eye when he asked. As he sat shivering, staring at an empty cup in front of him, realizing no one really even cared about him, Jesus wept.

Please, someone help me! he wanted to scream as the man's fist came down again, landing squarely on her cheek, knocking her to the ground. This was a familiar scene. He had been in this apartment many times before. What started as a dream wedding was now a nightmare marriage. It started like it always does, with yelling and insulting. Dinner was too cold. She spent too much on a new shirt, even though she needed it and as it always does, it just got worse. Tonight, he was beating her for staying out with her sister half an hour longer than expected. It

wasn't the physical abuse that hurt the most. He had been through that before. What hurt more was knowing that the neighbors knew what was happening and chose to do nothing about it. They decided it wasn't their business. The man next door had actually found the nerve a couple of times to knock on their door, but the man's wife had talked him out of it. So Jesus lay there on the floor, unable to move from the pain, with no one willing to help. The husband had left to drink himself stupid. He would likely return later to pick up where he left off, and the neighbors would again do their best to ignore the violent scene.

Since she was in kindergarten, she had been bullied. She was never the prettiest, the most athletic, or the trendiest. She was a good student—a point that generally didn't help her social standing—and she was friendly to everyone she met. That made little difference to the “popular” girls here in freshman year, who often went out of their way to make her miserable. As she took her seat in math class, she cringed just slightly when she heard a harsh voice bark from behind. “That's *my* seat.” The command came from the tall, thin, “popular” girl who decided she wanted to sit next to her latest crush. It wasn't her seat, and hadn't been all year, but by now she knew better than to argue about it. “That's a pretty necklace,” she commented on the pretty girl's diamond studded cross pendant as she collected her books. “What?” the other girl replied indignantly. “Why are you still here?” As he took her things and quietly sank into the back row, Jesus fought back tears. *What's happened to everyone?* He asked himself.

It was another cold night as Jesus sat alone on a park bench under the moonlight. *What's gone wrong, Dad?* he pondered. *What do they not understand? How did it get so bad?* As he sat with his thoughts, he had an idea. He knew that even he couldn't fix all of it overnight, but he had to do something.

No one could quite put a finger on it, but something seemed different about the pastor tonight. Maybe it was just excitement because it was the Christmas Eve midnight mass, but the old priest had just a little extra gleam in his eye this evening. Everyone filed in and found their pews, which were rather crowded compared to the typically spare gathering on Sundays, and the celebration began. The mass proceeded as usual, with the normal readings about the birth of the Messiah. Everyone took their seats following the Gospel reading, and the pastor stood up to deliver

his homily. He proceeded to the center of the altar and bowed his head in prayer for just a moment. *Just let them hear me...* He took a breath, and looked up at his people.

“Good evening everyone. I’m glad to see the big crowd here. I realize that for many of you, this is one of maybe two times you will set foot in this building all year. If you are one of those people, I cannot express how happy I am that you are here tonight. Thank you for coming. And if you are one of those people who are here every week, whether out of interest or out of habit, I am equally happy to see you. Your devotion will not be forgotten.” He paused for a moment before continuing. “I simply want to ask you all one question: What is happening? What is wrong? You are in here tonight to celebrate the birth of the Christ, the Savior, the greatest gift God could ever give you, yet in your day to day life, you refuse to live what you profess to believe. There is a world out there that is dying, and every time you, as the believers, choose to ignore someone’s needs, put someone down, or allow someone to be subjected to injury, you simply help kill it. The leading cause of atheism today is Christians who profess faith with their lips in here, then walk out the door and deny faith by their lives. That is what this unbelieving world finds so unbelievable. Yet that is what you do. You have a roof over your head and warm clothes on your back, but you can’t give a dollar to the man on the street that doesn’t even have anything to eat? You turn up the TV so you can’t hear the man next door beating his wife and are still able to look her in her blackened eye and say it’s not your business? You tear down someone’s spirit because you don’t think they’re pretty enough to be treated with dignity?” The priest’s eyes were ablaze. He forcefully pointed to the crucifix hanging on the front wall of the church. “I did that...” he looked back at the depiction of the ultimate love, and his shoulders dropped. “I did that for you. I did that so I could bring you home, because I love you that much.” His voice was quiet, but still powerful. “And all I ever asked of you was to love my Father, and love each other. Love each other as I loved you. Is that too much? Just to take care of each other? Please? I showed myself to you, so you could show me to the world. Go from here tonight and be changed. Go be what you tell me you are in here. Go show the world the love it so desperately needs.” There were tears streaming down his face. “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

After the mass, the pastor stood in the lobby of the church shaking hands with the parishioners as they left. They all gave him puzzled looks as they wished him a merry Christmas, wondering

where the passionate homily had come from. Some seemed almost afraid to speak to him. One young man in particular stood out to the priest. "I'm not sure what happened in there, Father, but I have the strangest feeling right now that some things are going to change for me," he said. *Prove it to me. I'll see you soon.*

Shaping up to be another long night. He found himself again tonight on the same cold sidewalk, in the same shabby clothes, looking into the same empty cup. No one had anything to spare this Christmas apparently. He stood up to pack it in for the evening, and as he started to walk down the street, he bumped into a crowd of young men. "Watch where you're going, old man!" one chastised him. As he passed them, all he could do was shake his head. "Wait up a second," said one of the young men. He turned around to see the same young man he saw the night before at church, the one who had told him about the impact of the homily. *You told me things were going to change for you!* The young man reached into his pocket. "I know it's not much, but it's all the cash I have on me right now. I hope it helps." Without another word, the young man turned and walked away with his dumbfounded friends. *Thank you.* Standing and looking down at the twenty dollar bill the young man had given him, Jesus wept.

Fire of Love and Hell

Frank Robinson '07

Fire of love and fire of Hell
Are one, as now I see them well

The warmth which bade me to her hearth
And banished solitary cold
Has made me now regret my birth
And brought perdition to my soul

I came to her for warmth alone
She begged me lay beside her
She warmed my body with her own,
'Til when, abandoning my mind's restraint,
I deftly leapt inside her

And on her sacrilegious bed
The praying mantis lost his head, and lost his head.

Can treachery of spikes in side
E'er make the fragrant rose loved less?
Despite its fiery petaled head?
Despite its satin skin's caress?

Beneath the tickling curls of red
That fell and softly kissed my chest,
I forgot, in effervescent zest,
Forgot that thorns could pierce my hide.

I ran down to the river Styx
And brought back one to beat you with

You are poison!

In one the widow and the widow maker
Who, when once had had her fill of me, had her fill of me.

Yet would I who spurned the cup of Lethe,
And never died to you in death,
Trade eternity, now and then,
To tip once more that crimson hourglass
And drink of you again?

Latent smile, my curbside angel,
There will soon be time to talk,
And time to sit and sketch with chalk
Our dreams upon the sidewalk

Drink now the hemlock of your love

Lose your breath for scopeless sight
Leave this world of mode and fashion
One once more, we'll reunite
Flames of Hell with tongues of passion.

Happy Noir Year
Benjamin Smith '07

My final cry was an exclamation point to everything that had come before it. Children were weeping and I was ushered into isolation at the far end of the room. Like any tale of tragedy or deceit, it started and ended with a woman. But let me step back.

The cold December air pierced my winter clothing like a thousand icy pitchforks—the devil’s hand grenades. I stepped into the building and walked the lonely halls until I found the right door. The stench of sugar cookies and Yule log hung in the air like a man on the gallows. It was 8:30 and the sun was peeking through the window, a resurrected corpse back to haunt us at the start of each inglorious day. I was seven, and it was time for school.

Miss Watson had us gather around her for story time. The kids scrambled from their seats, eager to get to the floor, squealing and tittering about this and that. Her sweet voice caught our ears and the children collectively quieted until the class was as still as a funeral home on Tuesday night. Today’s story would be about Christmas. This should be a thrill.

“The Elves had been working feverishly all year in anticipation of the upcoming holiday season.” Miss Watson smiled enormously as she waved the picture of thousands of little drones hunched over tiny desks, hammering and clinking away on cheap wooden toys. Roger giggled in delight at the miniature men and their monstrous moccasins with golden bells at their pointy tips. He said he wanted to be just like them. A still image entered my mind of a child, soot-covered from head to toe, rags draped over an outturned ribcage and protruding shoulders, as he hunched over a vat of toxic dyes coughing violently and stirring ceaselessly. I would have laughed if I could have remembered how. Oh Roger. Samantha saw the picture as an opportunity to interject her exciting experience last night in the mall. Stuttering and stammering for close to thirty seconds, she tripped over consonants and rolled over vowels, her tongue suddenly some impediment to comprehensible English, trying desperately to spew out something, anything to make herself understood. Miss Watson was gentle with the poor girl. Calm down, she urged. Take a deep breath. Samantha began anew with her story of how she met a real elf in Santa’s bungalow across from KB Toys. Miss Watson smiled and said that was wonderful dear. I explained to Samantha that what she saw was a middle-aged man with dwarfism. What she saw was a man with a genetic mutation, pigeonholed into a

dead end job because the Americans With Disabilities Act was a farce. He probably lived in a trailer. She stared at me blankly for a few moments, a little globule of drool gathering in the corner of her lips. She started to add something else, but I wasn't interested and raised the fist.

"Lock it up." I said quietly, blinking slowly, sighing, and shaking my head in an imperceptible arc all at the same time.

But Miss Watson continued the tale of the tireless elves. Despite their hard work there was a shortage of toys! What would Santa do!? The only solution was for the elves to work extra hard all day and night for the next month. How would the children feel if there were no toys under the tree on Christmas day? He pleaded. The elves understood. The children around me nodded sagely in unison—they understood. Lacey said it would be a tragedy. I mumbled something to myself about a union representative. Always listening when no one was talking to her, Lacey overheard and wanted to know what I'd just said. I shook my head—it doesn't matter. But she poked and prodded my ribs, her index finger a tool of torture wielded by a clumsy and dimwitted executioner. She whispered quietly in my ear, asking me to tell her. Her breath smelled like cheese popcorn and red koolaid. Tell me, tell me. I imagined her lurking around the water cooler on the far end of the cubicle farm, eager to pick up the latest gossip and pass it along, a worker bee buzzing and bumbling all the time but never producing the sweet honey that justified its existence. Tell me, I want to know, she pleaded. I squirmed, then in a harsh whisper told her a union rep was the warrior that kept men with their wives rather than at your father's plant for sixteen hours a day. The union rep kept little Timmy out of his big brother's hand-me-downs and baby Jessica in clean diapers. My voice was gruff and gravelly as it rose with gathering strength, building on each word. The union rep made sure your pop paid folks enough money to feed their kids! I put my face close to hers; I could feel her halting breath on my cheek.

"He keeps alive the American Dream, Lacey! The American Dream your heartless father would consume and combust, spewing from the smokestack of his greed the exhaust of shattered hope!" My last sentence ended with a hiss. I was standing up now, waving my arms in fervent passion, my gaze burning into poor Lacey's rapidly dilating pupils.

She let out an almost inaudible, "Oo-oo." She stuttered, half gasping, half whispering. She began to cry. My conversations

with other children usually ended in such a manner, my face red and heated, the other's streaked with tears.

"Now that's just awful. Why would you say something like that to Lacey?" Miss Watson pleaded with her southern hospitality. "Was that a 6-inch voice?"

"It wasn't!" Lacey croaked from the distance. She had run to the far corner of the room, weeping into the time-out chair.

"B-b-b-besides," Samantha began, the spittle now cleaned from her lower lip, but her speech still as abrupt and painful as ever, "Santa isn't like Lacey's daddy anyway! He, he, he loves kids!"

"Yeah! He delivers presents!" Another child yelled.

"That's right!" Another said. Soon a chorus of renewed faith rose up from the small, downtrodden mass of children at my feet. Thirty kindergarteners united in their love for Saint Nicholas. I was still standing, now turning on each new face that proclaimed their adoration, each heart finding new courage in the exultant hope of the classmate beside him. I whirled, this way and that, the attacks coming from all sides now, too numerous to combat. My eyes burned and sweat broke over my brow.

I screamed. "Santa isn't even real! No one lives at the north pole! Don't you realize how ridiculous the idea is! A fat, jolly man, and a million enslaved midgets toiling away in a barren wasteland!" My face contorted hideously in rage.

"Then where do the presents come f--."

"Your parents! Is it that difficult to figure out?" I snapped

"But mommy said that Sant--...the sleigh, with... rein--."

"One man delivering gifts to five billion people! Did you ever wonder if something like that was actually possible!? The speeds alone! Mommy and Daddy liieeddd!!" My final anguished taunt echoed through the classroom.

That last sentence hung in the air, an intense gravity that bore these youngsters to the ground. One child alone attempted to stand, but his back remained hunched, his head still hung low.

"Take it back," he pleaded.

"Take what back?" I mocked, "The myth perpetuated by your parents. The lie you lived every December?"

"Take it back!" He screamed, "Take it back..." his voice died to a whisper and trailed off into the ether. Big crocodile tears welled up in the corner of his eyes, then burst onto his face, tiny salted rivulets of dying dreams that coalesced at the bottom of his chin then dripped to the floor, his bravado now a puddle at his feet.

Miss Watson put me in time out. She told me I'd destroyed enough today. As she walked back to the sniffing children, she dipped her head briefly and made the sign of the cross over her breast.

The phone rang frequently that night. One scared parent after another, falling to pieces over this new development in their child's lives. My mom walked into my room late that evening.

"You can't do things like that, honey."

"Things like what?"

"You can't just tear out people's beliefs from under them. Samantha's mom said she won't even leave her room. She says her eyes are empty and lifeless. She is a husk"

My expression clouded, and I stared fixedly at a point on the ground a few feet in front of me. "That's what happens when you live a lie, when you build your house upon the sand." I growled.

"That's not it at all. It makes them happy. Kids all over the world look forward to Christmas and Santa Claus every year. They put out the milk and the cookies. They listen for the pitter-patter of reindeer hooves on the roof of the house." She sighed deeply, a smile playing at the corners of her lips, a little sparkle in her own eye.

"Fools..." I scoffed, throwing my head back in a slightly exaggerated mannerism of disgust.

"Why are you like this? This, this, this petulant, cynical little child."

"Could I be anything else?" I asked ominously. I brooded darkly, wallowing in my feelings of woe.

"Yeah. You could be a normal goddamned child for 10 minutes." My mother threw her arms in the air and gestured at the walls of my bedroom. Covering every bare space hung hundreds of silhouettes cut out of black poster board. Looking closer one could make out these shapes: a bearded face, adorned with a floppy triangular shaped hat. A small deer like creature with antlers. Coniferous trees and large sleighs with fancily adorned runners.

"What would you expect of one who has gone through such tragedy!" I yelled "I am in mourning! Few have held such close communion with calamity as I—" the slap of flesh across flesh cut short my outpouring of radically pre-pubescent angst. As the sound ended, my mother's shrill voice picked up where it faded.

“Would you get the hell over it already!” She screamed, legitimately angry. “Kids don’t mourn! They don’t brood! Especially if you’re five when it happens! Why do you even remember!?”

“Can one forget— ” I began anew, mustering a much deeper and ominous voice than is normal for a child my age. I was again cut short by a slap across my cheek.

“Somewhere, always, a child is being beaten.” I whispered, sounding like the anti-Christ. My mother yanked her hand away and placed it behind her back. A moment later though her resolve hardened and she continued on undeterred.

“And would you stop talking in the third person! For Chrissake, let’s be five years old and go into mourning for two years. Let’s be bitter and cynical about the world and ask for black poster board every Christmas so you can continue your neurotic, OCD display of anti-holiday cheer! Let’s tell all the other children so they can share in your misery!” Her long index finger thrust into my face, and I jerked back as if poked. It hung motionless for a few moments, suspended in front of my crossed eyes. She let it down slowly to her side as I leaned against the wall. I pressed back and let the wall hold my weight as I slid down its smooth surface and slumped to the floor.

I remembered back to that night so many years ago. I sang Jingle Bells as I ran out of the mall, my long scarf fluttering in the wind. My cheeks were a festive red, like two plump cherries on an ice cream sundae. My mother chased after me as I jumped off the sidewalk.

“Don’t go too far,” she warned. Her voice was still sweet then, honey from the lips of an angel. Suddenly I saw him.

“Santa, Santa, Santa!” I screamed and giggled like a little schoolgirl. He was about to cross the street and enter the parking lot. I briefly pondered the logistics necessary to get a sleigh into a parking space. Was there a barn over there too? For the reindeer? He stepped onto the busy thoroughfare then, simultaneously turning towards me. His hand went into the air doing that thing Daddy did when someone cut him off while he was driving. I smiled and waved anyway. Santa never saw the truck as it collided with his jolly body; he would never know another Christmas as he was launched through the air and into a light pole twenty feet away. I screamed then, and I still scream today, my mind host to the plaintive cry of the banshee echoing through my memories.

My mother walked out of the room and went upstairs. I turned off the lights and got into bed, pulling the covers close

around my body. I drifted to sleep that night, the soft tunes and anti-establishment rhetoric of The Clash pulling me into haunted dreams.

A soft rap on my door awoke me from a light and fitful slumber. Wraithlike and silent, a figure floated into my room on the whisper of death. The man was clothed in a too-white garment that covered his face and flowed over his feet. He began...

"I am the ghost of Christmas Past. I have come—"

"Dad," I cut in abruptly, "Seriously, this didn't work two years ago after that incident. I will not be party to your manipulative mind games!" My voice had risen to its normal passionate fervor. The ghost looked nervously around, his ears attuned to any sounds from upstairs, apparently afraid that I had woken someone up.

"Would you shut up!" He yelled in a forced whisper, hissing and spitting all over my blanket. I shrank back in surprise. "For Chissakes," he continued through clenched teeth, kicking the wooden frame of my bed in anger, then turning his back to me and seething silently. "Just come here!" he said, turning back and grabbing my arm. I bit him. "Holy shit!" he yelped as I tore a piece of wrinkled, musty flesh from his arm. It tasted like mold. This wasn't my father. He cursed silently, muttering to himself and holding his arm. He stomped his feet on the ground, then brushed something off my end table. It was an alarm clock and it crashed to the floor and broke. The old man was throwing a tantrum right here in front of me.

I got from underneath the blankets and stepped to the cold hardwood floor, careful to put my bed between me and this madness occupying my room. He lunged in one direction and I jerked in the other. We juked back and forth for a few moments before he gave up and I sprinted in one direction around the bed. I giggled for the first time in years as this old decrepit man gave chase. Light and sprightly, I flitted from his arthritic fingers. I had just made my 23rd trip around the room when I saw his foot stay planted firmly behind one leg of the bed as the rest of his body went hurtling forward into my hardwood floor. His knee hit first, cracking and crumbling into the ground, his head smashing violently soon after, his skull joining the ranks of broken bones and ruptured organs piled at my floor. I stopped my gleeful banter and rushed to the broken body. He tried vainly to shove me away, but I crouched before his body and touched the mass of red that used to be his face. There was a hole somewhere in the dark mush and I could feel the light brush of fetid breath on my hand as it grew

weaker and fainter. He gently reached up his hand and touched my forehead. I gasped and then faded into blackness.

I woke up in a small pile of broken wood. Looking to my left and right were lines of hundreds of tiny beds that ran into the horizon, small bodies in each one. I heard the faint clinging and thumping of large machinery, muffled by walls and distance. A cloud of soot and grime clung to everything—the bed, my clothes, the inside of my lungs. I coughed violently. A whistle blew and the tiny bodies around me stirred to life. As one, they got out of their beds and donned their uniforms of floppy hats and pointy shoes. I sat up from the pile of wood that was my own bed; my oversize body had broken it. The tiny bodies with tiny pointed ears and expressionless eyes filed past me in a long line. I tried to stand, but was forced to bend over at the back to avoid hitting the low ceiling. I sprinted forward, knocking the zombie elves out of my path, coming now into an oppressive heat and a monstrous factory with little men at every station, manning the buttons and control boards, their souls sucked out and deposited in the toys they made. I tried to scream but my chest tightened to the point where I could barely breathe and my head jerked back and forth violently. It was like a vice, and it squeezed tighter and tighter until I thought my body would crumble. Then, suddenly, the tension on my chest eased, and my face went slack; my eyes widened into expressionless globes. I fell into line with the elves and went to my own station, somehow knowing where to go without being told. I pushed the green button and the machinery around me leapt to life.

A Dream's Remembrance

John S. McCain '09

The flame of beacon's eye.
Lids open towards Lux Aeterna
Lost, closed listless in solemn prayer.
A heart, standing stone against the sands
Of slumber's bold embrace,
The heart of a lucid dreamer
Slipping softly into nothingness.
A muse harkened closer still.
Vindicated darkness settles,
Seen only upon soulless features,
With staggering wit and fancy.
The truth of it steals between fingers
Whose grasp falters in futility
To closed eyes once more.

Imagine

Patrick Kruse '06 (Surface Warfare: LSD 50 USS Carter Hall, Little Creek, VA)

slow, halting footsteps that finally cease, followed by a collapse
then imagine trembling fingers pressing softly upon piano keys
keys that whisper forth song
keys that unlock the passion already present in the silence of the
air
imagine the sound of a rising figure now curious
imagine the sound
of footsteps moving, unhesitating, natural, beautiful, and
purposeful
imagine the sound of walking
suddenly turning into an abandoned run
a run that slowly and surely slips into symmetry
finally blending with the sound of the music
and the sound of keys unlocking doors all around
imagine the sound
of your own footsteps
responding to the music that sings around your heart
imagine
if you forgot who you were and followed.

Untitled 2

Matt Falbo '07

I am sitting on the floor in my room. The tiles are cold as I first sit down, and they chill the skin on my legs. The floor is hard and uncomfortable, and the wall my back is leaning against is no better. I have unintentionally placed myself directly in the path of the air conditioning, and a cool breeze is blowing over my body. The light above my desk is the only one on, and it causes elongated shadows to be cast throughout the rest of the room. A candle on the windowsill above my head creates a dim, flickering light that I can see from the corner of my eye and vaguely in the reflection of a mirror across the room from me. The air smells like apples. The scent is emitted from the candle as it burns; it mixes with the smell of fresh brewed coffee coming from the machine sitting on the floor right beside me. At least I can enjoy the smell. Unfortunately, the cup I made is weak and tastes more like dirty, hot water than anything resembling coffee. The clock on the coffee machine begins to blink. It is stuck at two AM and looks like the clock on a VCR after a power outage. So far my new coffee machine has failed to do anything but aggravate and disappoint. The screen saver on my computer comes on and the monitor goes from a dull blue to a dead black. The tiles beneath my legs have warmed up and are now a comfortable temperature as long as I keep my body perfectly still. The tiles may have warmed but my coffee has gotten cold; it's now more disgusting than ever. Someone in the hallway walks past my room and the shadow of their feet breaks up the small strip of light beneath my doorway. A few seconds later, whoever it was enters a room down the hall, and I hear the door close behind them. There is a mild thumping on the wall of my room. It is the familiar sound of the bass from my neighbor's music. It is quieter than usual but still too loud for half past two in the morning. There is a loud click as the air conditioning shuts off; the cool breeze is gone. With the hum of the air conditioner gone, I am left with the heavy breathing and snoring of my roommate. They are the long, slow breaths of a deep sleep. His mouth is wide open for him to suck in air, causing the snore as his chest rises. The air is forced from his body as his chest falls back down. The snoring is interrupted only by his intermittent, indecipherable mumblings as he speaks to himself throughout the night. For a long time this is the only sound I hear. Then the air-conditioning clicks back on, and I am granted a reprieve from my roommate's minor nighttime annoyances. The

thumping next door is gone as well. I think I am now probably one of the few people still awake.

A Rose is a Rose is a Navel

Daniel B. Widdis '91

My psychologist
mentioned to me the
other day that I should
stop to contemplate my navel.
My doctor ordered me to relax and
smell the roses. My travel
agent told me to take a
break and get away
from it all.

So

I

took

a break. I sat

there

away from

it all,

contemplating

a rose

and smelling

my navel.

The narrow petals

on the rose

were huddling

together

like bunches of

skin resembling

a navel.

And

the

wrinkled

little spot

in the

middle of my

stomach had
the subtle
fragrance
of
a
rose.

Slow Death Three

Aaron Heil '06

I hear the muffled sound of car doors slamming outside, and look out the window. Dad had just gotten home after being out of it for three weeks. I hear the faint hum of the elevator coming up to the third floor of the apartments, and some soft laughter from my parents in the hallway. I get up and walk to the door, wondering how my old man was doing. He must be in a wheelchair still – I heard my mother's labored footsteps and the rubber sliding along the hard wood. Right before I turn the lock, I pause. While still out in the hallway, the arguing starts, echoing made worse in the Sunday afternoon quiet. I pop the door, and open it a crack, going back to my lair before either of them notice me. With a pillow over my face on my bed, I wait until the clash of the titans subsides, and an eerie silence falls in the apartment. Wanting to lay low for a while, I begin to tidy up my small back room. It's an odd habit I've developed over the years – as if my neat-freak tendencies could somehow repair the damage of each thermonuclear encounter. I pick up laundry, box up an old photo album of a family vacation, and notice a large photo sitting on my dresser. I couldn't immediately remember why I'd put it there, so I pick it up.

Dad gave me this one the day he got back from the hospital. The black Mercedes-Benz is on fire, which kind of hides the bullet holes on the back doors. The grill is missing, and the headlights were smashed out earlier with bats or something, I guess, judging by the dents on the front fenders. Probably not a collision, those usually leave streaks of paint or grooves during the high speed chases. I pushed tacks through the corners of the glossy photo, pressing the curling edges towards the drywall to make sure it is flush with my room's wall. I stand back, to look at it: it's straight. A spider web of cracks in the glass hides half of my dad's face – a trick of the camera angles – so no one will know for sure it's him. It's easy to tell, though, once you look at his burly

hand slung out the window, grasping the .45 caliber handgun. The gun itself is slightly blurred, recoiling or maybe being aimed at the villain's vehicle.

It wasn't long after a cameraman had snapped this production photo from "Slow Death 3," that the car went out of control. Funny, right? Worrying about keeping a car that's on fire on the road. Then again, so is dad's whole job. He's been thrown through glass, jumped out of airplanes, and lit on fire – but it brings home a salary. In L.A. more than anywhere, it's good to have job security. But after this one, the docs say he shouldn't go back to work. Me and mom went to visit him in the hospital for the third time, and the doc put the x-rays up on the light-wall thing. I may not be out of high school yet, but I could tell it was *bad*. Dad's ribs looked more like the twisted shell of one of those cars he drives, after they go up. I knew what ribs should look like, from pictures of skeletons and stuff I've seen around the hospital during our visits, and those weren't it. And most of that was just all the old stuff that had healed back. The little Asian doctor pointed out the shrapnel they still had to take out from his lower back. What was so bad is that it was all so close to his spine. He was almost paralyzed by this job. Mom just stood there, arms loosely folded across her thin frame, emotionless. She didn't even try to brush her long hair from her face. She was only in her thirties, but I could see her graying hairs really well in the light of the x-ray thing's light. She put her hand into her purse, and asked where the bathroom was.

Dad waited for the door to shut behind her, let his gaze linger on the door for a second, distracted. He turned, then stuck out his stubby chin towards the doctor. "I'm gonna keep workin', you hear me? I'm stayin' on. Just fix me up."

The doctor's expression turned from kind of concerned to annoyed. "Mr. Grebinski, you won't be walking away from another stunt if this," he pointed a finger to the center of a section of spine "is stressed because of any more rough stuff." He explained that the nerves in his spine were protected by a thin sheath – that is, they were, until this latest accident. Surgery was too risky, and it healing on its own was out of the question.

"I'm staying in. I have to. I have a family to support," dad shot back.

The doctor started to get pissed. "Look, you're here *because* you stayed on. If you're in a wheelchair, they are going to have to do a hell of a lot of supporting *you*. Your set medics told me – that they told you – to jump out after the flames started. Is that true?"

Dad looked at the ground. He shifted his weight and nodded, before tightening up his expression again and looking back at the doctor. Though his jaw jutted out defiantly, he winced slightly in the glare of the machine.

“Well, then, what possessed you to try to put the car back onto the road after you lost control? Wouldn’t it have been easier to roll out, like they show you to do?” There was a beat of silence, and doc crossed his arms, standing between the glow of the x-ray thing and dad.

“There were crew on the side that I would’ve hit...”

“It was so you could get the shot. Don’t lie to me, Ralph, you insult me. There was no one in your way. You hung on, because you always hang on too long.”

Dad had come out to the West Coast to make it big the year before I was born. He wanted to act, dropping out of college after his freshman year. He was like a claim jumper in a modern day gold rush...looking to strike fame like you would strike a vein of gold or silver. He always said to me it was because his name didn’t have hard consonants. Ralph Grebinski: It lacked the firmness of names like *Brad*, *George*, *Arnold*, or *Tom*. “Ralph,” he would say. “It just makes me sound like some down-on-his-luck schlub.” He gained work as an extra, and from there took small jobs until he fell into the stunt thing. He was proud to have done double work for Steven Seagal and Chuck Norris. I thought it was pretty cool, although friends giving me a hard time were always sure to point out my dad only worked with B-listers.

Dad met mom on the set of one of the slam-bang action movies he worked on. He told me about it years later. He was preparing to do a shot where he was going to get lit on fire and thrown through a revolving glass door, and she was there as another one of the starry-eyed extras. With a cigarette dangling out of his mouth, standing in the fire-retardant suit, he struck up conversation. “I’ve even got a line,” mom bragged.

“Yeah, me too: ‘Aaaaaaaggh!’” dad joked, flailing his arms.

She laughed. “No...I’m supposed to say ‘Is he *available*?’ when the hero swoops in, delivers his one-liner, and detonates the explosives.”

Now I often wonder if she’s married to her hero or an explosive. They were both cut out of the picture, but they started going out anyways. I love it when dad talks about the way they used to be, because it distracts me from the way things are now. The first time I saw that arm of his – that massive arm with the

long scar across it – swing at her, I half thought it was going to be like the work he does from the movies. As if he were going to pull it at the last second. Instead, mom was on the ground crying and he was cradling her in his arms a moment later, crying too.

Then, as if it was some sort of security blanket, mom had her purse. It's a little red shiny purse, slightly tacky. In a place like this where being incessantly in vogue is critical, it seemed strange to me that mom had this purse of hers on more and more. Most women around here seem to have a million of the things. She was especially careful to take it with her to the restroom, even in our own home. The day I found out exactly what was in it was the day I got home and found her face down with blood oozing from her nose, a compact filled with powder on the coffee table.

The low rumble of my dad's voice in the kitchen returns my attention to the drywall and my minor redecorating job. He's probably setting the terms for the next uneasy truce. The picture is curling up again now, pulling out the tacks from the wall. Dad must have rolled this thing tight. I've got a lot of pictures of my dad doing a lot of cool stuff from work, but somehow this new one was the best. Not my favorite, but the most...appropriate. I try to look through the cracks in the glass, to see exactly what my dad's face looked like at that moment. I think his teeth are clenched. His teeth are clenched, and his right arm grips the steering wheel, driving a burning Mercedes.

Those Hands

Pius Tang '07

I recognize those hands, aching familiar all at once,
Those hands. Working through the sting of soap on cracked skin,
The unyielding stiffness of fabric, weighing heavy like sin
On those hands. Wiping sweat off her brow, they tell of
Burdened stories, each line a weather-beaten tale.
From behind bus windows on foggy mornings, so soft they looked!
Waving morning goodbyes, face pressed on glass, that usual grin-
Standing out in the cold, hand raised, she a mannequin.

One night, soaked,
I awake to images of veins choked with morphine,
Fingers clawing crumpling sheets, sudden
Slices of memory fighting upwards like a suppressed cough.
I recognize those hands – they belong to my only kin.
Never had a chance for a final goodbye, those hands.

There you are

Patricia A. Cooke '09

Soft sand between my toes
Gentle waves rolling behind a dark curtain
Simple words between simple friends
Old times relived while new memories made
Torn denims wet with mist
Sunburned shoulders draped with thin straps
Buttered popcorn and vinegar with fries
Insincere screams and accurate smiles
Cracking wood nailed in rows with fading lines
Blinding shadows and budget relics
Priceless hallucinations that echo our desires
We shall lie, as we did before
None will face the truth
And so we will continue to stroll down the boardwalk
Pretending our desires are counterfeit
And that we are simply mistaken

The Magic of Love

Crystal Piraino '08

In a tiny Cincinnati apartment, 24-year-old John Piraino sat pensively watching the autumn leaves fall past his bedroom window. A rat scurried in the corner of the room, momentarily breaking his concentration. He had been formulating a plan to visit his mother, Rose Marie, in Cleveland that week. Short on cash, he decided to advertise his journey in the paper: "*Seeking Travelers: Offering ride to Cleveland. Will split cost of gas.*" After two days he had received two replies. The first was from a brawny 27-year-old sailor who went by the name of Popeye. Popeye had planned on traveling to Cleveland to visit his girlfriend, Janise. The other reply came from 23-year-old Joy Robertson. Having the face of an angel, Joy was on her way to Cleveland to meet with her fiancé to make arrangements for their wedding. With the passengers established and the final destination set, the three made plans to meet at the Esso on the corner of Franklin and Elm to begin the four hour drive to Cleveland, Ohio.

On the morning of September 12, 1942, the three strangers all loaded into John's '38 Plymouth and began their journey. John was first to drive, while Popeye and Joy took the backseat. Popeye talked boisterously, and smelled of stale cigars. "This here's a good deal, John," he shouted as he turned to watch the city of Cincinnati fade into the distance. "Any other means of transportation would have cost me a fortune!" He looked at Joy with an overbearing grin, and she quickly shifted her gaze to the road ahead. To help pass the time, they all took turns sharing anecdotes about their lives. John shared a story about his mother, Rose, whom he was on the way to visit. She was born with a veil of skin over her face, a condition known as a cull. In ancient days a cull signaled psychic abilities. She did indeed exhibit some supernatural knowledge, for by the age of 17, she was making decent wages as a card reader. "She can really tell the future?" piped Joy. John caught her inquisitive gaze through the rear view mirror. "They say 'mother knows best,'" said John with a cheerful smile.

After an hour, Popeye offered to drive. John pulled over to the side of the road and gladly turned over the wheel to Popeye to join Joy in the backseat. Joy was glad to trade Popeye's stale scent for that of John's Old Spice. As Popeye drove, John and Joy began to talk amongst themselves. They must have shared at least twenty stories with each other. John made her laugh with

every smart remark. There was an apparent attraction between the two...and an inexplicable force was beginning to tug at both of their souls. Sometime after the twentieth story and somewhere near the hundredth smile, John's eyes locked on to Joy's, and in a single enchanted moment, they leaned in for a kiss. Their sudden silence had led Popeye to suspicion; he glanced back in the rearview mirror to find the newfound lovers in full embrace.

"Whoa! Slow down you two...ain't you on your way to get married, Joy?" he inquired wildly. Joy pulled away from John and blushed.

"Keep driving, Popeye!" shouted back John.

Joy had indeed been on her way to meet with her fiancé in Cleveland. There was something about John, however, that Joy felt was meant to be. John felt it too. John and Joy knew that some mystical force had brought them together. Unsure of what to do, both felt that what was about to occur between them was predestined and out of their hands.

John declared, "Joy, I'm not sure what is going on here, but if we are meant to be, we will be married and we won't even have to lift a finger to make it happen. It will just happen!" Joy agreed, and they continued to talk and embrace in affection. In the back of their minds, they were both thinking of what a silly notion that was...that it would just happen without having to arrange it. The odds of such a thing happening were slim to none, but fate had already made up its mind.

The trio had made it halfway to Cleveland when hunger set in, and it was time to stop for lunch. They saw a sign for the Homestyle Diner ½ mile ahead at the next exit, and decided that was to be their next destination. They took the next exit, and found the diner right around the corner. It was an older style brick building with a red shingled roof. A large neon sign was propped up in the window announcing a lunch special. "Looks good to me!" bellowed Popeye, as he parked the car in front of the restaurant. John and Joy got out of the car, and followed Popeye into the diner hand in hand.

Once inside, they were greeted by the sweet aromas of food being prepared. They all headed over to a booth by the window, and started looking at the appetizers on the menu.

"I wonder if they're still serving breakfast?" asked Popeye to himself, "I could really go for some eggs."

John and Joy exchanged a glance and continued to look over the possibilities. Within a few minutes, an elderly waitress approached the booth to take their order. She looked up from her

notepad, and at the moment her eyes caught sight of John and Joy, her face lit up in great delight.

Looking at the two, she happily declared, "You must be the two that want to get married?!"

Upon hearing this, Joy's heart stopped, and John's skipped two beats. Their minds traveled back to the conversation they had just been sharing in the car. They both looked at each other, nodding and smiling and acknowledging the fact that they had been considering such a thing. "Let me call the driver," said the waitress, "he'll take you to the courthouse, and everything will be taken care of. You won't even have to lift a finger!" Her words struck the young couple like lightning. Could this really be happening? This was exactly what John had said would happen... 'If it was meant to be, it would just happen, and they wouldn't have to lift a finger.' After a moment of contemplation, and a little more prodding from the waitress, John and Joy agreed to have the waitress call the driver.

In the excitement, the two had nearly forgotten about Popeye. "What about my eggs?" he asked hungrily.

John went over to Popeye, and tried his best to explain the unexplainable. "Man, I don't know what is happening...but I'm supposed to marry this girl. Take the car to Cleveland. Joy and I are staying here for today, and we'll catch up with you tomorrow." Popeye agreed, slightly puzzled but understanding.

The driver arrived in a black Cadillac sedan, and drove the young couple to the courthouse. Within 20 minutes, John and Joy were saying their vows before God. A marriage undoubtedly arranged by God, it had all taken place without them having to lift a finger. Their marriage was nothing short of miraculous. The newlyweds left that small town and caught a ride the rest of the way to Cleveland. Joy's former fiancé would never hear from his beloved again, and John's mother was about to receive an extra visitor. John was nervous about Joy meeting his mom. He didn't know how to explain to her what had happened on the way there.

The next day, John was supposed to meet with his mother sometime in the afternoon. She was working at the Mystic Lounge that morning, and was busy with customers. John started thinking about what would be a good way to introduce Joy to his mother. He wondered if he should wait a while before telling her he had gotten married. He wanted Joy to see her, though, and in a sudden stroke of genius he came up with a way for them to meet without having any strings attached. He was going to book an appointment for Joy to get a psychic reading at his mother's

lounge. Joy reluctantly agreed. Although she thought the idea was a little strange, John was able to talk her into it. He booked a 12:15 appointment for her, and said he would wait for her at a café across the street from the Lounge.

When it was time for the appointment, Joy walked into the Lounge, and asked for Madam Rose. She was led down a shallow corridor and directed into a dark room in the back of the building. Rose was sitting on a red velvet cushion in the center of the room. She sat before a black table that was scattered with Tarot cards and scented candles. Madam Rose's hair looked as if it was pure silver, and her eyes were as deeply green as emeralds. She looked at Joy with a foreboding premonition and motioned for her to come sit at the table. She began by asking Joy a series of questions about who she was and what she was interested in knowing about her future. Joy made up the story that she was there on business and was interested in knowing where her career path would take her. Rose looked through the cards and hummed curiously.

"That's interesting," she paused, "what you are saying is not in the cards..." Joy's heart sunk. Suddenly, Madam Rose's meditative countenance had transformed into a motherly smile. She paused for a moment, and then leaning across the table with her eyes locked on Joy, she announced with absolute certainty, "You married my son!"

Joy was astonished. "How do you know?" she gasped in amazement.

"Mother knows best," replied Rose with a grin. Once the cat was out of the bag, the two began a legitimate conversation, explaining how it all had come to be. They shared some laughs and then went to meet John at the café across the street. John was surprised to see them together. "Look who I found!" said Rose to her son. "Haven't you figured out that you can't put anything past me?"

The predetermined nature of this couple's matrimony was made evident through the miraculous events that led to its arrangement. I take pity on those who live their lives without regard for the power of destiny. A life without magical intervention is a life without mystery, a life unfulfilled. We can choose who we interact with, we may choose our friends and lovers; but when it comes to finding true love, only God can determine our fate. Joy and John would remain married for 42 years. The legacy they leave behind includes seven children, and thirteen grandchildren. I

am their oldest granddaughter, a product of their destiny, and a living testimony that the everyday world is profoundly affected by the supernatural realm.

Written on Saint Valentine's Day

Michael DeCarolis '07

I envy Romeo and Juliet.
Innocent guilt, virgin love, one pure breast
Made their premature death most fortunate.
Unbroken, they lie in entombed rest.
Never will they grow old, nor grow apart.
Never will she wake to his wrinkled brow,
Nor he awake to her confused heart.
Forever will they share the love shared now.
No mornings more; that eternal ev'ning
When lovers, one hour married, await—
What joy is waiting, forever wanting!
No sun will rise to ripen them to fate.
 My sun has risen, cross'd the sky, and set.
 I envy Romeo and Juliet.

Puppy Love

Mary B Wootan '07

The folded golden ears of my heart,
Soft without years of stress,
Childbirth, fear, pain,
Pick up your voice and

PerK,

The nose, as soft
and pink
as a mother's heartbeat,
Smells you from behind the front door.
She knows you are home, and
As my heart catches your scent,
She yelps,

LEAPS,

spins.

She knows before that key
Scrapes against the lock
You are home!
You know I know, and
My heart is racing, under
Chairs, tables, around futons
And piano legs,
Skidding across wooden floors.
Finally! You conquer
the lock and step inside
my heart
Yearns for a pat on the head, a
Smile, a treat, to place its paws
On your wide shoulders and do the
awkward
Dance of a bipedal.
My heart welcomes you here
with a festival, continuously
Watching, always watching
Ready to be your man's best friend,
Your confidant, your lover, your everything,
Because you are hers.

Forgotten

Sara Nadal '06 (Surface Warfare: DDG 53 USS John Paul Jones, San Diego, CA)

She dressed up for her dreams. Her favorite dreaming dress was the red one with soft frills, because she liked the way it rested on her bleached white sheets. It had small sparkles, as if shiny sand had been sprinkled across it. The straps, nearly nonexistent, fell down to meet a straight, satin neckline that shimmered when exposed to light. Straight red ribbons circled the dress from the waist down, evenly spaced precisely three inches from each other. The ribbons were satin as well and soft and smooth to the touch. The fabric of the dress was soft and wrinkly, resembling crinkled tissue paper.

It was the same routine every night. Her worn, tired feet tip-toed her body across the shaggy carpet to the edge of the bed. She slowly undressed. The sparkles on her dress glimmered in the soft moonlight that streamed through her open window and fell into her room. Standing unclothed before her bed, she glanced out the window. There was always the beam of hope that someday he would return, and she would see the headlights, rather than the moonlight, stream into her empty room. But for now, she remained alone with her dress and her dreams. Her wrinkled fingers fumbled with the straps on her dress. The stroke she had suffered six years ago still caused her to shake, and her head bobbed slightly back and forth as she slipped the dress over her head and onto her weary body. The red frills lapped at her ankles, and she briefly reminisced on those days at the beach long ago. Back when she was young and happy and the water slipped over their feet as they strolled through the sunrise. Her soft, faded lips curved into a brief, small smile, her only smile of the day. Her smile quickly fading, she slowly raised her foot from the carpet and crawled into her bed. She arranged her red dress on the sheets, spreading it out so that she formed a small Y. Her bare arms lay in line beside her torso, and her straight, graying hair draped across the pillow, framing her head. She never used a blanket, simply the bedspread and her pillow. There was no need for a blanket when she wore her dress.

She vividly remembers her first dream. She awoke in the middle of the night, and abruptly sat up in bed. Her cotton nightgown was damp with sweat, and her face was streaked with dried, salty tears. The air in her room had become moist and heavy with thick, searing humidity. She had padded over to the

window and opened it, letting in the soft, icy cool moonlight. The window never closed again and she never again wore her cotton nightgown to bed.

That first dream was far too much for her to bear. Well, at least she couldn't bear it alone. She knew she would need the dresses to protect her. They reminded her of happiness: the flowing cloth, the flowery print, the cool, airy fabric. The dresses would allow her to release her fears into the night sky and welcome the soft moonlight into her heart. They would protect her from her dark dreams. The dreams were not quite nightmares, but they were enough for her to be afraid of them. She was always running. Not fast, but she wouldn't stop running until she reached the edge of the sun. She charged through the night until she was behind the moon, standing right before the sun. Her arms reached up, and her hands formed a point, as if she were to dive into its searing hot surface. She did dive in, and as the heat engulfed her, she slowly felt her loneliness as she called out to nothing but the stars. She needed the dress to keep her from diving. She didn't mind the running, and she enjoyed her trip to the moon every night. She did mind the sun, though, and her dresses saved her from the loneliness of the sun. Just as the sun was alone in bearing the light of the world, she was alone in bearing the darkness of her lost heart.

She remembers clearly the day she went shopping for her dreaming dresses. She remembers taking only the ones without zippers off the rack, for she no longer had someone to zip them up. She remembers the peeling walls in the dressing room and the door with the broken lock. The saleswomen didn't seem to care for her. They were too concerned with the young, beautiful teenagers with smooth skin and dazzling red sugar-coated smiles who were looking for prom dresses. She emerged from the dressing room with the dresses draped over her wrinkled, bony arm, and tottered to the register, where no fewer than four of these glossed-over teens horded around the saleswomen. She patiently and painfully waited her turn. Relieved to finally leave the store, she walked home as fast as her arthritic bones could manage.

As her head rested on her tear-stained pillow, she prayed for another safe night in her dreaming dress even though she knew God never answered her prayers. Slowly crossing herself, she let her withering arms fall back to her side and rest against the cool, white sheets. A soft breeze drifted through the window, and made its way to her bed, where it lightly tousled the frills at her ankles. She thought again of the beach, but this time she did not

smile. Though she fought against it, a small tear slipped down the wrinkles in her face and fell to the pillow, spreading out to touch the other salty stains.

ELEGY

Dave Smestuen '08

Winner of the 2006 Pitt Poetry Prize

I

It's raining again, and in the soft light
Of the thunderstorm that cascades through my
Windows, casting shadows made by burglar
Bars, I find myself listening to storms far

Away. There's the cheap Formica counters
And the old grandfather clock that answered
Every childhood prank with a stern tick-tock;
The swinging doors that smack so loud, like

The doors of a saloon, so odd and out of place
In a house that knew God and Chinese checkers.
My great grandmother stands at the broken back door.
The glass acts as a kind of cheap mirror,

Yet I cannot make out her face at all.
She did not mention me in her will
Because she was too old to remember me.
I was too young to remember her name.

She's just standing there, facing away,
Her palms pressed against the glass as if to pray.
Her husband is gone—I remember that—
Yet I don't remember her mourning it.

I don't remember her at the glass door,
But that's all I ever see any more.
I can't see her face; there's only her back
And the faded blue of the dress I liked.
I still have the singing angel she gave
To me. I remember the dark winter day
It fell from the arms of the blue spruce tree
That became so empty without the angel there.

I imagine, at times, where she bought the thing;
The glaze of afternoon on pent streets
Busy with the bodies of peddlers
And the songs of Mexican carolers:

With trumpets, tambourines, flamenco guitars,
And worn down maracas, the sequined mariachis
Pass the busted old cart where an old woman
Fishes an angel from a hot dog oven.

II

I saw her in the nursing home. There were
Different burglar bars, more sinister
Than grave, splitting our gray bodies with lines
As black as death. She had forgotten my

Name. I was too young, and she was out of life
Long before I was even old enough
To know what death was. Now she looks away,
And only the glass has a guess of her memory.

The stopped voice lies in a wood box
Among reliquary toys and children's books,
Covered by years of useless gray dust.
Every year, in the gloom before Christmas,

I fear that same forgetfulness in me
That forgot the song in blue spruce trees.
So I rouse that box from its haunted place
And set it on the space where the tree once was,

Gather loose batteries from a drawer
And a knife—or better, a screwdriver—
And set to the task of setting that song
Right again. Every year, I give it one

Try. For a moment, sometimes, a song will come.

The Oneironaut Awakes

Cassidy Rasmussen '06

Honorable Mention 2006 Pitt Poetry Prize

*What if you slept? And what if, in your sleep, you dreamed? And
what if, in your dream, you went to heaven and there plucked a
strange and beautiful flower? And, what if, when you awoke, you
had the flower in your hand? Ah, what then?*

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Something happened which I don't understand –
I rub soft sleep from my swollen eyes,
Blink at the flower glowing in my hand.

I dreamed last night I visited a land –
Strange and beautiful colors flashed in the skies.
Birds sang golden words I couldn't understand

But that I knew I'd heard before. I began
To see brilliant bodies materialize –
I saw a flower growing, and I took it in my hand.

Lavender clouds wreathed the crowns of distant mountains
As the azure breath of sparkle-winged butterflies
Whispered a language I did not understand.

Crimson stained the stem and hurt my head
And then I woke. Sharply. Now I realize
I have a flower in my glowing hand.

I take a paring knife to remove the thorns
While humming a golden, wordless tune.
Some things we just can't understand.
The flower was growing in my bloodied hand.

Untitled

Caitlyn Harrington '07

If there comes a time
When I can no longer write you poems
Because the words burn your eyes and
The themes sting your nostrils with a
Pungent, unwelcome smell,
I would hope to write you one more
Anyway.
I would pluck a phrase from the ground
And blow gently on its petals
Sending words floating and scattering to the wind
Like the down on a dandelion.
Perhaps a word would take root
And grow and blossom into
A flower of its own,
Circularly brown and bursting with yellow
That you might happen upon while walking, and
Half-enchanted, half-indifferent,
You might bend down to breathe that flower in.
Then at last, a phrase,
Which at one time you did not care for,
Would, in its rebirth,
Smell sweet once again.

(Cover Illustration: Graham Van Hook '08)