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COVER PHOTO BY CHRISTINE McCAUL

ONE AND THE SAME  
(FOR RENEE)  
AARON MORRIS  
WINNING PROSE

"Couldn't you just go without me?"

"I don't see why we just can't post --"

"You can postpone it till you're blue in the face, but that won't change the fact that I don't want to go."

"Everyone's looking forward to seeing you there."

After a brief pause, the young man responded.

"I've got a solution to this little catastrophe . . . you listening?"

"Yes."

"You can set up a place for me at the head of the table, like they do for the Holy Ghost."

"Don't be ridiculous, James."

"Just listen to me. Just set a place for me, and tell them I'm stuck in traffic. You can even go ahead and order for me. Then, after I don't show up, you can go outside and find some homeless guy to come in and pretend he's me. Just make sure he sits still, for Chrissake."

"*Jesus Christ.* You're impossible to talk to. I don't even know why I bother, for God's sake."

"Because you care, buddy. That's your fatal flaw. You care too much."

The woman couldn't find a suitable response for this last remark, and thus quickly changed the subject.

"How long does it take you to shave, anyway? You've been in there for nearly fifty minutes."

"Beautiful. I'm standing in here shaving, and you're out there timing me. How long did it take me to eat breakfast, anyway? It's been bothering me all morning."

Mrs. Sullivan rolled her eyes in concession and walked downstairs.

A rather halfhearted laugh suddenly came from the bathroom. Inside, James Sullivan stood, fully clothed, shaving. A stack of frayed loose leaf paper and a pen rested on the counter beside him. He gave them a cursory, suspicious glance, almost as if to suggest that they might, at any moment, take on a life of their own and walk straight out of the bathroom, surely not without a few unkind words for their creator.

James Sullivan's room, much like the rest of the Sullivan household, was impeccably clean. Mrs. Sullivan, despite James' protests, had cleaned the room daily, usually when he wasn't around. The room was dominated by an enormous oak desk, which occupied half of the wall opposite James' bed. The desk had been left in the room by the previous owners of the house, probably just to avoid having to move it.

James, having just left the bathroom, was seated at the desk, holding the stack of papers he had been working on, looking out his window. He placed the papers on the desktop and stared at them for a good twenty minutes. Then, suddenly, as if the spell had just been broken, he reached for a pack of cigarettes on the desk and selected one. He struck a match, and lit the cigarette (a simple task for most smokers, but a rather involved process for James. Rather than touching the flame to the cigarette, he would hold the flame one or two inches below the end of the cigarette, inhaling while the paper began to brown, smolder and, finally, catch fire). After taking a couple of drags, he rested the cigarette on an ashtray and turned his attention toward the stack of loose-leaf paper. He read, making corrections and notes, until he seemed satisfied. At this point, James reached down and opened the bottom-left desk drawer, retrieving a stack of composition paper and an envelope. He picked up his pen and began to copy what he had just completed editing. Once finished, he packed the letter into the envelope, lit another cigarette and sat, with his head buried in his hands, for over an hour before falling asleep.

It was around one o'clock in the afternoon when James was awakened, rather abruptly, by the obstreperous barking of the Sullivan's two bulldogs, celebrating the early return of James' father from work. James glanced at his watch and then quickly stood up to leave. He searched for the letter, inadvertently brushed off the desk while he was asleep, and found it at last wedged between the wastebasket and the wall. He opened his door and, after making his way through the house, walked outside to his car.

As it was a hot, cloudless day. The pool at the local country club was filled to capacity with swimmers and sunbathers, all trying either to cool off or to take advantage of the sun's rays. James Sullivan, having just arrived, passed by the pool without even so much as glancing at it. Instead, he made his way to the clubhouse, and sat at the bar. He smoked a cigarette and listened to a few of the regulars share stories of their recent golfing triumphs. He then stood up and made his way to the cooler where he filled a cup with ice water. He drank quickly, discarded the cup, and slowly made his way outside. James stood motionless for a few seconds, and then, finally, turned his attention toward the pool. He had only glanced at the crowd when he froze, his eyes fixed on a girl sitting poolside who, at least to him, transcended all description. He paused for a few seconds, and took a deep breath before walking over.

Lynne spotted him just as he made his way through the entrance to the pool. She smiled, and kept smiling, until James was within earshot. Aside from being unclassifiably beautiful, she happened to be a girl who knew how to greet somebody from the other side of a pool.

"James," she said enthusiastically. "Are you going to come swimming with me?"

James smiled. He loved those opening lines of hers.

"No, I'm afraid not. Not today," James said as he took a seat next to her.

"Are you going golfing today?"

"Well, I had planned on it, but it's too hot to walk the course."

"Why don't you rent a cart?"

"The game goes by too fast."

Lynne laughed, and then nothing was said for at least thirty seconds. These uncomfortable pauses seemed to be a trademark in their conversations, and they were almost always broken by Lynne.

"I want to go in and get something to eat, but I can't show myself in there today."

"Why not?"

"I look horrible today."

Right. And Helen of Troy was a bald woman with one eye and a harelip.

Lynne glanced at James, who had refused to dignify her last remark with a response, and resumed the conversation.

"Is something wrong? You don't seem very talkative today."

"No, I'm all right."

"But I guess that always was the way with you."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. It's just that you're very, you know, introverted."

"Just because I don't talk a lot doesn't mean I don't have a lot to say."

This last statement brought on another pause, as he knew it would. Lynne, as always, restarted the conversation.

"Well, I think I'm going to go in and get something to eat. Are you coming?"

"No, I think I'll head home," James said as he stood up to leave.

"Okay. Bye, James."

"Oh, I almost forgot. I have something for you."

"What's this? A letter?" She was smiling.

James nodded his head like a bumbling idiot.

"Bye, Lynne," James said, and made his way towards the parking lot. He looked back after a few steps and, sure enough, she was still smiling at him.

Lynne walked into the clubhouse and, as soon as James was out of her view, she took out the letter and started reading:

*Lynne,*

*I have, for quite some time, been meaning to say this to you, but I couldn't find the words. For reasons unknown by me, I have the vocabulary of a three year-old when I am around you, and any sentence consisting of more than five words tends to fall victim to episodes of profuse stuttering and babbling.*

*Suffice to say, I acted like a lunatic in high school (I'll be the first to admit that), and for that I am sorry. My only explanation is that, in all likelihood, it all hit me too fast, and I didn't quite know how to handle it. For some reason, I never took the traditional step back from the situation to see what a fool I was making of myself. Anyway, I'm not bitter, and I don't regret what I did. I'm glad I finally took a chance and let you know how I feel about you. I do, however, regret the way I went about doing it (to this day, I still haven't quite figured out what those anonymous roses were supposed to accomplish).*

*For what it's worth, Lynne, you're not just another gorgeous girl; they're everywhere. You're the most beautiful person I've ever met, and I hope that someday I might have the opportunity to meet another girl like you. Maybe I'll handle it differently.*

*I'm glad I got to see you this summer. I've missed you, Lynne, and I hope that I hear about what you're doing in a few years. I'm sure that, whatever it is, it'll be great.*

*Anyway, that's everything. I'm sure it sounds crazy but, as you know, I don't always think in straight lines.*

*Forever yours,  
James Sullivan*

*P.S. If, by chance, you want to talk to me about this, I'll be sitting out in the parking lot for the next five minutes.*

James sat on the trunk of his car in the parking lot, smoking and checking his watch fervently. Not more than three minutes after his departure from the pool, Lynne walked out of the clubhouse and started making her way to him, alternating between a jog and a walk, laughing.

"I just had to see if you were actually out here," Lynne said, still laughing.

She could have accomplished this merely by looking out the window of the clubhouse (it faced the parking lot), but James went along with it, and waited for her to continue.

"This is beautiful," she finally said.

"I'm glad you like it."

It should probably be noted that, although it would be proper to say something other than "I'm glad you like it" in this situation, James was shaking rather noticeably, and didn't have a proper handle on his speech at the time.

"I'm really glad you gave this to me, James."

"Well, I'm glad I gave it to you."

It was all he could do just to hold onto his cigarette, and he even let that go at this point.

"It was really sweet."

From the look on his face, one might have suspected that Lynne had just informed him that his dog had died. James had long despised this synonym for "thanks-but-no-thanks," and he hadn't quite expected Lynne to use it. Of course, however, he didn't fault her for it (she was perfectly entitled to use it in this situation), and his expression, which changed back to a smile almost instantly, had almost certainly gone unnoticed.

"Well, I just had to see if you were really out here. Bye James!"

She started to walk back to the pool.

"Goodbye, Aphrodite," James said, when he was sure she could no longer hear him.

James stood in the parking lot, seemingly unable to move, for another thirty seconds. Then, ostensibly after regaining control of his motor skills, he moved toward his car, started it, and drove back to his house.

Back inside the Sullivan household, James walked upstairs, entered his room, and sat down at his desk. He took several deep breaths and, after lighting a fresh cigarette, opened the bottom right desk drawer and pulled out a worn notebook (it seems fit to mention that, although he didn't keep a steady journal, James occasionally recorded certain occurrences or thoughts which he deemed important). He placed his cigarette on the ashtray, opened the notebook, and began to read the last few entries:

*Saw Lynne today at the country club. I nearly passed out when I first saw her, but I made a quick recovery and talked with her for about an hour. Same old beautiful Lynne, inside and out. She treated me like a dear old friend even though she would have been perfectly justified in giving me the cold shoulder. I had almost forgotten just how much I love her. I feel like I should explain some things to her, possibly in a letter.*

*Three years. Three years, and I'm still not over her. It really is sort of pitiful. I can admit it. What can I say? I love her. I know she doesn't feel the same way; I accepted that a long time ago. And yet, all I want out of life is to be with her. You can't just let go of something like that. You might find that there is nothing left to hold on to. I'm not bitter about it, but there are some things I can't figure out. Why I love Lynne is an easy question to answer. Why she apparently wanted me to fall in love with her is a question that may never be answered.*

*I think I've discovered a well-kept secret. True love is God. They are one and the same. Once you find it, everything else seems insignificant.*

*Just about finished writing the letter. I tried to throw in a fair amount of humor to dampen the seriousness of the subject matter. I think she'll enjoy it.*

James took one last drag on his cigarette, then rubbed it out in the ashtray. He grinned rather largely, reached for his pen, and inscribed one last, short entry. It was a haiku, in fact; seventeen syllables which he found to sum up his entire experience:

*The Beautiful Girl  
After Reading My Letter  
Ran Smiling To Me*

James closed his notebook for the last time. He then stood up, still grinning, and stumbled, as if drunk, to his bed. He laid smiling in bed with his eyes closed for at least an hour before falling into a deep sleep during which he did something he hadn't done in months: He dreamed. James had been asleep for more than an hour when his mother stopped in his doorway on her way downstairs. As she watched him, she could feel tears welling up in her eyes.

"Happy birthday, James," she whispered, walking away.

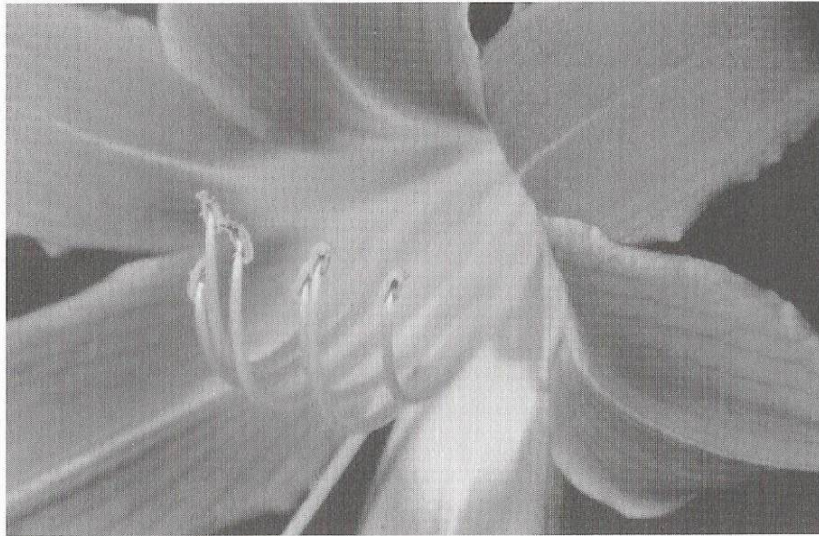
## ODE TO A STRAWBERRY

ASHLEY HOYE

WINNING POETRY

Strawberries, edible tidbits of earth,  
Summery jewels of magnificent worth.  
Covered in chocolate—a temptress indeed,  
Or crusted in sugar—my only real need,  
In a nest of gold pastry, piled up high,  
I cannot resist, nor would I dare try.  
Sliced into ice cream, or plucked from the vine,  
Young strawberry! strawberry! would you be mine?  
At Wimbledon, crimson shells bathed in pure white,  
Like poor sunburned tennis boys—both a fine sight.  
At Christmas, with summer a myth (so it seems),  
These berries, not sugarplums, dance in my dreams.  
I will not be sated—its charm spurs me on,  
It captivates me with its luscious aplomb.  
A fruit of true passion, a fruit with no match,  
A fruit of enchantment, a fruit with panache.  
But ravaged by winter, your leaves have expired,  
Destroying the seed they so tenderly sired—  
O nectar of goddesses! succulent sweet!  
Dear strawberry! strawberry! make me complete!

FLOWER  
JOHN WILLOCK  
WINNING PHOTO



THE FUTURE  
ELLEN MARTING

Who knows what the future will hold?  
It may be joy; it may be sorrow,  
But no matter what, the future is tomorrow.  
So let's cast our eyes upon today,  
And face what challenges come what may.  
Live each day as if it is your last,  
And take what you have learned from the past.  
Remember what is important . . . your family and friends.  
Leave no argument unsettled, you must make amends.  
The future is a secret, which we watch unfold,  
It will play a big part when we become old.  
The knowledge is shared with each generation  
So look to your elders for inspiration.  
Since only One knows what the future will hold,  
Keep your paths straight and your spirit bold.

THE DEATH OF BOHEMIA  
ASHLEY MARTIN

Guardians, Auxiliaries, Philosopher Kings,  
Justice of the "Ideal State,"  
These and other foolish things,  
Live by the light of the moon, yet are burned off by the waking day.  
While the man whose life these ideas plague,  
Awakens from his platonic fantasy,  
And the tears fall from his cheeks like so many droplets of rain,  
A memorial to his lost childhood dreams  
The glue which had once held his sanity together,  
Has slipped through his fingers like the wine that etched them into his brain

One Tylenol, Two, Three, Four,  
Sunlight shining through the window pane,  
They call for you to join the sophistic crowd and its intrinsic world of "reality,"  
While the bird sings of truth in the laughing willow trees  
That brush off its silly singsong way of yesteryear.  
And the wild rose which stretches its petals towards the life giving sun  
Stands as an ode to that truth, which lies under your nose,  
As it waits to be stepped on and crushed by the foot of man.  
While the truth may indeed set you free,  
Only through blatant arrogance can mankind come to grips with its existence.  
Herein lies the death of Bohemia. . .  
And the ensuing birth of Humanity.

UNTITLED  
CARRIE ROGERS

Our nation's son  
our hearts were won  
the day his salute was seen  
around the world  
and a song no longer sung.  
Often said this day  
he earned kept behavior  
from his mother's knee,  
his private life  
the public longed to see.  
We are now left to wade here,  
gone, too, Carolyn his wife,  
and Lauren, her sister.  
Oh, how her family will miss her  
too, though the souls were only one,  
Kennedy and Bessette,  
three years previous this September.  
how fondly we did not forget  
and oft remember  
this First Child beneath  
his father's desk  
and since then has become  
Our Prince, no less.  
Even those who knew them not—  
Kennedy and Bessette—  
heirs to Camelot,  
The nation grieves this day  
and ever since  
For her beauty, the princess  
And, of course, her prince.

July 17, 1999

DREAM KEEPER  
KATE GENRICH



I walk closer to her.  
I am in such reverence and respect.  
Slowly she becomes more and more  
beautiful -- more and more alive.

Is this what happens when you get  
close to someone?

With the wisp of the wind and the  
breath of an angel she says, "Tell me  
your dreams. Whisper them so only  
the angels can hear them, and I will  
watch over them and help you never  
to forget them."

FOR JOHN CASEY  
LAUREN BURDOLSKI

"You're so beautiful"  
still in my mind  
oh god, how stupid could I be?!  
To believe every word that flowed from  
your prison inside you that I was captured in?  
So, is everything over?  
I'm just a fling  
to use and leave behind  
so a commitment is near  
on your part  
and you've already confessed  
you want to leave her for me  
but in a state of drunkenness  
was it?  
I haven't stepped foot near you  
because I plan to wait  
But you left your mark  
I read between the lines  
I don't want a home inside anyone  
but you should NEVER lie  
So, what's the matter with you?



TRY THE MEPPS  
TY HAWKINS

An early morning breeze surrounds me as I step into the brisk water. It could almost be called cold, the water that is, although my father insists that it's only "chilly." The trees outline the stream, the dam is set to the far left, the water spilling over it, the other men and women off in the distance, their lures glistening from the rays of the sun at the end of a long, winding stretch of white cord. I notice his cigar, a smell to which I've become accustomed, but it seems fitting here, a smell that is musty, earthy against the smells of pine and the smell that is this place, fresh water. You can smell it driving up, over ten miles away; the anticipation truly begins with the initial smell. The day is set with that smell.

I look to him in fleeting glances, no words are needed. It is not a competition, but it is. Strange . . .

"What are you starting with?" he asks.

"Orange worm," I reply.

"You should start with the Mepps, you should always start with the Mepps," he replies shortly, but without being overtly critical. To him, the art is in the patience.

You see, if you start with the fly-like spinners, you might get lucky and "match the hatch" but I'm not in the mood today. My patience leaves something to be desired at times.

"I'll try a few later."

I think I've spotted a good hole to start the day with. It looks deep, and the water is not too fast to carry the bait too far downstream, thereby removing it from the hole too quickly. It's funny how far a two-hour drive can take a person, away from the bustle of city streets, gas stations, and a fast-food chain on every street corner. Not that I don't like the city, but sometimes . . .

"Lookie here," he whispers.

His line is suddenly taut, and begins to spool out of the reel. It must be a good fish.

"Look at him jump!" he whispers, slightly louder of course, as the excitement momentarily overtakes him.

"This could turn out to be a good day," I say, realizing that catch or no catch this day will be exceptional.

The fish is nice-sized, maybe two and a half, pushing three pounds. He removes the hook from the fish with a quick, concise movement perfected upon countless fish, taken from innumerable streams, ponds, and lakes over many years. Removing the hook carefully, he places the fish on his stringer. Although we do catch-and-release, we do so only after amassing enough for an enticing meal of lemon-peppered trout and wild rice back home. That's mom's area of expertise, she expects nothing less . . .

I continue to work my hole, skunked thus far, but it is still early.

"You ought to try the Mepps," says my father, hooking his second rainbow.

The fish is a deep gray on the top, buttressed by a line of pink, with speckles on its underside, speckles I first noticed as a child. He removes the hook with seamless efficiency, and places the fish on his stringer. That's two.

"Two, zip," I think, before catching myself. I'm a little disappointed at what I perceive to be a lapse in character. I guess I shouldn't think that way, but I think that's the way it always is between student and teacher.

A muskrat, or weasel, pokes his head out from a bush just a step from the shore facing me. I notice him, most likely seconds after he noticed me, but he is not deterred from his goal of finding an early morning treat. Wondering what it is that he sees, at first thinking maybe he is only looking for a drink of water, I look in the direction of my father. He has noticed our newfound partner, and gestures towards something floating in the stream. I realize, squinting, that the floating object is the remains of a trout that someone, possibly envisioning a lemon-peppered filet too, has discarded. The weasel will be rewarded for his effort.

"Too bad Rumble isn't here," says Dad.

Rumble is the family dog, a sizable black Chow who lumbers about, hence the name.

"He'd love to meet our new friend," I reply with a grin.

I think back to when we got Rumble. I can remember vaguely being eight years old that summer, Rumble still a puppy with a black mane encircling his neck like a lion cub. He sat on my lap with his paws around my neck the entire forty-five minute drive home from where we bought him, home to where Rumble has assumed the role of family protector and loyal friend for the last eleven years. He and my father spend a growing amount of time together, me being away at school, and my Dad having retired about five years ago. I'm sure Rumble does his best to fill the void, but . . .

I cast the brown spinner into the hole I've been fishing for the last hour and a half. It drifts downstream, deeper since I added a second splitshot on the line about a foot above the hook.

As I feel a sharp tap while retrieving the fly, I jerk the rod against the current. My first fish of the day, that is if I can retrieve it. He proves a worthy adversary, darting sharply towards the cover provided by a small cove to the right of the hole I've been working.

"Oh, no," I think to myself. "How could I have been so stupid? If the fish is able to maneuver its way into the cover I'll never land it."

I decide to risk losing what seems to be a sizable rainbow by fighting it head on and attempting to act upon its surprise before it realizes that the cover could be its savior.

"You've got to get him out of there, before he makes his way into the inlet," says my father. "You'll never get him if he gets into that cove."

I'm able to draw the fish out of the hole, about six feet, far enough to where it is unable to make its way into the cove. I then realize that by keeping my rod

pointed down toward the stream, I can let it run, keeping the fish deep, and it will probably run out of stamina before moving toward the surface where it is easier for the fish to throw the hook.

This must be done slowly, and without allowing the excitement of the catch to overtake you before focusing on the goal: lemon-peppered filets with a side of wild rice. One last unanticipated burst, a jump high into the air, water droplets dotting the shore, the surface of the water and myself, preludes my final push. I sweep the trout into my net, and place all six pounds of him on my stringer.

"Look at him," I say to my father, without arrogance, but emitting a sense of accomplishment.

"Patience," he replies with a doting smile.

"Mom's really gonna be surprised."

"She'll get a kick out of that," says my father. "Let's have lunch early, I'm starving," he continues, stealing my usual line.

"Great minds must think alike."

"I guess."

After lunch at the quaint restaurant where someone who had a nickel for every time someone asked "Whaddya catch" would be rich, we returned to the stream, in a new spot that proved more successful in terms of numbers of fish than the first. While eating, I thought briefly about returning to school the next day, and making up the work for the classes I missed playing hookie that day (no true fisherman fishes on the weekend at a semi-public stream, shoulder to shoulder with some yokel who comes once a year), but my mind focuses upon the morning.

I wonder how many more fishing trips we'll share. I wonder how many more years I'll be able to return home for winter break and the summer. Soon, I'll be moved out permanently, maybe even starting my own family. Things will be different, but then again, things are already different.

I can remember the day I graduated high school, my friends' parents smiling and talking nervously amongst themselves, but my Dad curiously quiet, focused. I can remember our last fishing trip before I left for school, the same strange quiet contemplation exuding from him, the same sense I felt from him the day we moved my things into the dorm room that oppressive August day last year. As the future rushes towards me, in waves of uncertainty, our goals for my life occasionally clash, but he remains a buttress, upon which I may lean for support. I think that's the way it always is, or should be, between father and son.

## THE TEMPTATION OF NICKEL NIGHTS BRAD SHEPPARD

I wanted to call  
but I was afraid  
that after we caught up  
on common acquaintances  
there would be nothing left to say

If we shared silence on a park bench  
while watching children play  
or on a subway train  
as we rumbled along beneath New York City  
it might bring us closer together

If we sat in a sanctuary  
in a monastery that overlooked the world  
and prayed  
we might find something in common

But on the phone we will only be reminded of our separation  
different lives and different interests  
and the bond we once shared

So I won't call  
I'll let memories suffice

HAIRY COO  
AMBER SCHUBERT



SESTINA: OLD SUMMER  
ASHLEY HOYE

We spoke of ourselves and defined each other as “girlfriend,”  
two youthful women entering the flush of summer.  
We shared years of confidences and camaraderie that had touched  
us deeply, although in the end it only took one broken  
loyalty to bring about, in a painful maneuver, twilight  
on a relationship that would not be renewed.

With the spring a solitary flame came back into my life, renewed  
by the sight and sound of a longtime but long-gone girlfriend,  
catching me by surprise as he and I waited in the twilight  
of another life, another place but not now, not this summer,  
eyes held frozen in space and time, seeing a man broken  
by the same spirit his grief had once touched.

And soon two opposite ends of my life stumbled into each other, touched  
by dying embers that in desperation were renewed,  
joined by some nothingness in an indistinct romance that left me broken,  
tripping over thoughts churned up by the wake of a new girlfriend—  
she would spin the carousel of a troubled and disturbing summer  
that took place entirely in the haze of imminent twilight.

Then a forgotten character stepped forward to bring me into twilight  
days, smoothed by shadows, caressed by uneasiness, touched  
by hands that would know me only for a turnabout summer  
while the inevitable separation of sunlight and shade renewed  
me, gave me illusions of solace that comforted me, an ex-girlfriend  
who knew that only such a man could understand that she was broken.

Yet I felt that too many beckoning hands had been broken,  
crushed under the weight of an asphyxiating twilight,  
a twilight that would soon become a substitute for a girlfriend  
that neither puppet nor puppeteer could accept, having been touched  
by a tenderness so startling it nearly renewed  
us, in some ways rebuilding an obliterated summer.

But with the gravity of affection also came the end of summer,  
blistered by bitterness and sadness, toys broken  
beyond repair, locked away from salt-swollen eyes, not to be renewed  
by anyone who could not bring the closure of twilight  
to three blurry months, confusing days that would go untouched  
by memory, abandoned by a convenient girlfriend.

Soon enough the summer spiraled away for me, a forgotten girlfriend,  
leaving behind broken hands that healed slowly but that touched  
upon a newness sweeter than remembered love, renewed by August twilight.

## DYNAMITE DESIGNS

RICHIE CROSS

A jungle of people ignite the rooms  
Because tonight is the night of the ultra-booms.  
Dino's in the kitchen with his sparkling eyes  
Trying to get Isabelle to believe all his lies.  
Tony's on the roof thinking through the dare  
While his pretty Stephanie digs Jerry Bear.  
Roxy's on the dance floor showing off all her moves  
Decadently swinging to the graffiti grooves.  
Miles watches over the melodies made.  
The eclectic rhythm of the speakers fade,  
And jam right into a dynamite dance  
That gets Luther lucky and another chance  
With Lucy his honey who accepts his moons  
While licking the ends of her chocolate spoons.  
Billy Beer takes a sip from his quasi glass  
Then beautifully falls to his bed in the grass.  
And I am wandering in this strange design  
Bouncing around and feeling just fine.

DANNY BOY I  
TODD BROWNLIE

Give me a star  
Now it's in his pocket  
Politely.  
You'd say I'm a fair deal  
But there's a thorn in my side.

Danny Boy  
I ran through your fingers like water;  
A puddle on the floor.  
Danny Boy  
A bard to sing to you a secret diary;  
You heard.  
    You smiled.

Promises, promises.  
This was that  
    And more.  
Promises, promises.  
Then your book said  
Friend, Good Friend  
    Nothing more . . .

There's a thorn in my side,  
Oh, Danny Boy.  
A dried-up well . . .

STRING POETRY  
CARRIE ROGERS

Ever wonder what makes poetry *poetry* I mean can anybody write poetry because I remember once reading a poem that in appearance looked something like a string dangling down a page one word to each line now it seems to me that anyone can write poetry if that's all it takes is lining up your words one right under the other down a blank page now that's what I call string poetry and it requires no talent nor thought just stringing along one word after another I mean who would do that and have the nerve to credit themselves with being called a poet certainly not me because I like to put thought into my poems not just throw them out and expect others to derive some complicated or abstract meaning when really I was just stacking words like boxes in the back of a grocery store because I was too lazy to find a better use for them and throw them out to make room for words I mean boxes that are worth something because it seems to me that stacking boxes is about as useful as stacking words except when you're stacking boxes you're at least saving space now I know nobody's going to go and tell me that those string poets are just trying to save space on the paper because then I'd have to go and tell them that I've got better things to do than to be strung along.

UNTITLED  
GABRIELA PUERTO



MY LIFE IN SONGS  
ANGEL WEEHUNT

My most vivid childhood memory is getting on my hands and knees and scrubbing the bed of "The Gray Pony," my dad's silver car hauler, as "Night Moves," by Bob Seger, came out of the eight-track player. I would spend hours out there working as Dad "supervised" me. It was the only time I was allowed to go near it. It was also the only time I had my dad's complete attention. I cleaned it every day for a dollar. That was also when my dad first started calling me princess.

Before we left the house, I ate a donut and took a drink of what looked like milk. It tasted really bitter and left my stomach feeling hot and unsettled. My hung-over dad helped me get dressed, while complaining about white Russians. I had a new sister and she and my mom were coming home today. The car lopped back and forth as we drove on a flat tire to the hospital. "Turn the Page," by Bob Seger was playing in the car. Walking down the hospital hall my unzipped pants, untied shoes, and inside-out, backwards shirt drew looks from everyone.

My sister and I were both dressed up as punk rockers. We had several trick-or-treat bags ready. Our system for getting the most candy possible was perfect. We would go to a house, get candy, then dump it into the master bag in the car. That way the person you were visiting would think you didn't have any candy yet, and therefore give you more. As we rode in the back of the station wagon with the door open and our feet hanging off, "Every Breath You Take," by The Police came out of the cassette player. The next house was Justin and Mike's. We begged mom and dad not to make us go there.

I had perfect attendance in Sunday school. Rachel, the preacher's daughter, was my best friend. Every week, after the service, we ate lunch at her house. Jen's Pizza French fries dipped in mayonnaise were our favorite. Rachel only ate the crust, so I always had double toppings on mine. Next, we watched Dirty Dancing. During the "last dance," we would dance around her living room to "The Time Of My Life," by Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes. Then we would go into her dad's study and play Frogger on the Atari.

As I was walking along the gravel path from the bus stop to my house, I anticipated sharing the event of the day with my mother. Once I opened the front door, I could smell that evening's dinner cooking in the kitchen. "Unchained Melody," by the Righteous Brothers was always playing. Stepping in the dining room, I could see my mom washing the dishes as her hips swayed back and forth to the music. When she realized that I was in the room she would stop, give me a

hug, and ask how my day was.

I was grounded for leaving my radio on all night. For punishment, my parents took it out of my room, but, they forgot about my headphones. I couldn't miss the Top Ten at Ten on 92.7 FM. I had followed the countdown since summer break began and had to know if the same song was number one again. I hid the head band of the headphones below my chin. Despite the heat and no air conditioning, I covered myself with the fuzzy blanket that was my grandma's before she died. Every time we visited her she let me sleep with it. As the sweat rolled down my forehead, "High Enough," by the Damn Yankees broke the record by being the #1 song for the 34th night in a row.

The bus ride home was no different than usual. Y107 was fuzzy through the speakers, but you could still hear "Cherry Pie," by Warrant. The boys in the back of the bus were hocking loogies up and spitting them on the ceiling. As the bus went over the gravel roads, it would shake, causing the loogies to start to come back down, where the guys caught them in their mouths. Just like every other time, Heidi would see it and run to the front of the bus holding her mouth. Knowing what that meant, the bus driver stopped and let her off the bus to puke. Bored by the repetition of the events, I lay down to go to sleep. Justin took my shoe and told the bus driver he had to go to the bathroom. He returned my shoe soaked with pee. I cried as the shoe squished as I walked the block home from the bus stop.

Shannon and I had been best friends since the fourth grade. In junior high, she, Lindsay, and I were like sisters. By the summer before the ninth grade we were inseparable. As we illegally drove to her cousin's--my boyfriend's-- house, we would play the same song over and over. Matt made fun of us because he said the song was by a gay woman, but we didn't believe him until we saw Sophie B. Hawkins perform "Damn I Wish I Was Your Lover" on Leno that night. The summer after graduation, I found out that Shannon was gay. I was hurt because in all that time, she didn't feel comfortable telling me. But to this day, that song brings a smile to my face as it reminds me of the summer we spent getting ready for high school.

After the intermission, Justin walks me back into the gym. He heads for the front row of the bleachers and I go to the sidelines. A feeling of anticipation twinges through my body as the music starts. The basketball players are waiting at the doorway of the locker room. They are behind a large banner. As "Thunderstruck," by AC/DC, starts, they begin to jump up and down. At the part in the song where it takes off, they do too. The banner is ripped apart and the team takes the floor. The crowd is on their feet cheering and the sound of stomping on the bleachers echoes in the gym. And all I can think about is how much I feel like I belong -- finally.

In the seventh grade, Crystal's mother -- my former fifth grade teacher -- died of cancer. She drove a peach Fleetwood Cadillac that Denny, Crystal's dad, was saving for her. So, when she was old enough, she got her license and the car. She, Nikki, and I would cruise around in it and listen to "Freak Me," by Silk. As we pulled into the drive of Scriv's, the most popular hangout, we caught everyone's attention. Especially when Crystal dented in the whole driver side of the car with a tree while trying to parallel park.

I always made Justin listen to his Journey CD when we were in his Monte Carlo. Every time I played it he would roll his eyes and let out a deep sigh. Once, after we had a huge fight, he called me and I could hear "Faithfully" playing in the background. When I asked about it he turned it off and told me he wasn't listening to it, the song was just on the radio. The next day when I got into the car, the CD was still in the player. He had forgotten to return it to the case.

As I took my place in the slow moving line, I didn't know what to think. Step by step, I crept my way to the beginning. "No Place Like Home," by Randy Travis was the only thing I heard as I saw, for the first time, the swollen face of my best friend, Lindsay, lying in the coffin. She was wearing her favorite pair of Rocky Mountain jeans and a red Roper shirt. That I could understand, they were her favorite, but Jason's necklace and class ring?

Two days after my sixteenth birthday, I was headed for my second home, the place I stayed a lot since Lindsay died, for the rest of the week. Jennifer was waiting at the door when I pulled into the drive. I walked to her room to set my bags down. When I opened the door, her whole family was in there and her sister played "Happy Birthday Baby," by Conway Twitty, on a cassette player. They handed me gifts. The first was odor eaters, because they told me my feet stink after cheerleading practice. The second was a box of Band-Aids, just in case I almost cut my finger off in their house again with scissors. The third was an ID bracelet, so if I ever got too drunk, I would still know my name. As I noticed the cake in the middle of the room, I heard a knock at the door. Justin, holding a dozen roses, handed me two CDs. The Bodyguard, which had our song, "I Will Always Love You," on it and Dwight Yoakam's "This Time." He also brought Bryan and several movies.

Homecoming my sophomore year was on New Year's Eve -- what would have been Lindsay's 16th birthday. In remembrance, we requested "Forever and Ever Amen," by Randy Travis. We gathered in the middle of the floor and sang as loud as we could. Justin and I had been fighting all day, so I spent the entire day with the girls. We did our nails, listened to music, and talked about all the guys in our high school. I had been with Justin for over a year and started to get attention from Chas. Amy, Jennifer, and I raided Crystal's closet to decide what we were going to wear. At the game, Justin talked to Jennifer about our "problems." After

the game, we went to the dance. I saw Chas watching me while I danced. When the next slow song, "Desperado," by Clint Black, came on, he asked me to dance. I said yes.

As I drove down a deserted country road, "Open Arms," by Journey, came on the radio. I had spent the last two years practically living at Jennifer's house and now I wasn't even welcome there. Not that I wanted to go. Jennifer had completely taken advantage of a bad situation. All the time she and Justin spent talking about me had suddenly developed, for Jennifer, into a crush. She told him that if she was going to lose her virginity to anyone, it was going to be with him. Justin and my two-year relationship was in turmoil, so she moved in for the kill. Knowing that I was dating someone else, he took the opportunity, fully aware of what it would do to me. Little did he know that by doing so he had just trapped himself into her life because of her family (two protective, older brothers). Her family didn't like me because I "upset" her when I called and asked her if she knew where he was. I knew he was in the bed with me, but did she?

Crystal and Amy were the ones who stood by me during the hardest time of my life. In less than six months, I had lost the three things that meant more to me in the world than anything else -- my boyfriend and two best friends. At school, almost on a weekly basis, Jennifer would threaten to beat me up. For what, I have no idea. She was the one who moved in on my boyfriend. After school, to cheer me up, Crystal would do a comedy routine in the corner of the room and Amy would sing her version of "Seven," by Prince.

Working the gas dock at Rebel Harbor Marina was hardly the way I had planned on spending the summer before my junior year. My dad made me eat salt every day before I went to work. He was convinced that it would help me retain water and prevent the heat strokes that the hundred degree weather caused. He was wrong. As I sat on the bench under the tin roofed dock, I would listen to my headphones, which weren't allowed. I'd listen to "Slow Hand," by Conway Twitty. As a boat bumped into the side of the dock I would wake up and realize where I was. After six hours of this, I was ready for my mom to get there. As walking up from the dock, I noticed all the black marks left behind by the hose of the gas pump. I didn't even bother with makeup any more and left my glasses at home to avoid dropping them into the Lake. When I got in the car, my mom said we were going to Sna-Fu, a local bar, for a pig roast. Chris, a guy I had known of for six years, but hadn't seen in two, was going to be there. I can't let him see me like this.

The first two weeks of school came and went. It was the weekend and my mom and dad and Chris's dad and stepmom were meeting at Sna-Fu for drinks. Chris and I had hung out every day. Tracy Bird's "Fallin never felt so good," was coming out of the juke box. Chris listened to the song and told me that it was true.

After that comment, our eyes locked and we both knew. To our surprise, parents did not like the idea of us being together.

On perfect fall nights, the air always smelled a certain way. As the wind rustled the leaves above us, Chris and I would lie in the backyard and stare into the clear sky. Van Morrison's, "Into the Mystic" slowly drifted out through the basement window and filled our ears and heads. At the same moment we turned and looked at each other. Without saying a word, he leaned over and reached his arms around me, pulling me closer to him.

After eight months together, Chris and I split up. He needed more freedom, so he said. Unfortunately, this was three weeks before the prom. I was in a mad rush to find a date. Chris had his, a girl that could offer him more freedom I suppose. Jason, a past interest, was available. He wasn't very smart, but he looked good, and that beat walking in to the dance by myself. The juniors, in honor of the seniors, coordinate the dinner and dance. My class was in charge of the arrangements, but I wasn't in the mood for being on the committee, so you can imagine my surprise and disappointment when I sat down at the dinner and saw a booklet with Chris and my song printed on the cover, "I'll Stand By You."

Crystal, Homecoming Queen candidate, still needed earrings, a bracelet, and barrettes to go with her dress. There was a blizzard outside, but against the odds, we got in her car and headed for Jeff City. As we were singing "Always On My Mind," by Willie Nelson, her car lost its traction. We spun around a couple of times and ended up on the other side of the road facing the wrong direction. Two inches from the back of her car was a stop sign and about six inches from the side of her car was a ten foot drop off.

Jennifer and I were soaked from head to toe. The ponchos we bought for \$5 were apparently a rip off. It had been raining for two hours and the opening act was just taking the stage. The time we spent on our hair and makeup was down the drain. Not worrying about our looks allowed us to thoroughly enjoy the concert. The woman to the left of us was drunk and half naked and the woman on the right was smoking marijuana. Dwight Yoakam took the stage and "Nothing" came through the microphone.

"Much Too Young," by Garth Brooks came out of the truck windows as Jenny, Sarah, and I ate ice cream and sang as loud as we could down I-70. Her dad, to spite her stepmom, installed a \$5000 system. That Christmas, Jenny and I were able to put aside our differences for the sake of the family's holiday. To celebrate, we took our other cousin, Sarah, and went for a drive. When we returned from our "journey" we were closer than ever and on top of the world, until our parents woke us up at 6:00 a.m. to go get orange juice for breakfast. When we walked outside, we found the truck had a shattered back window, but not a system.



My mouth tasted like blood and my ears vibrated as "Gold Dust Woman," by Sister Hazel vibrated through the speakers. The girl with blonde hair and the silver halter top had just pulled my hair. When I turned around to see who it was, she came at me. Knowing how drunk she was, I tried to just hold her off, but it didn't work. A fight broke out and the bouncers for the Blue Note were more interested in watching than stopping what was happening, so we were separated by a crew member of the band.

As I heard "I see no reason to take me home, I'm old enough to face the dawn," tears welled up in my eyes, blurring my vision as I drove along the street. A night of drinking beer and taking shots had ended the next morning with a one night stand. The good people were on their way to church, but I was just now headed home. The DJ identified the song as "Angel of the Morning," by Merrilee Rush & The Turnabouts. The song hit too close to home when I was feeling especially disappointed in myself.

I push the glass door open with my hip and slowly ease my way out, as I balance the two large trays full of food between my hands and shoulder. The sun hits my face and a breeze drifts by bringing a mixture of barbecue and the Lake to my nose. Usually this would be pleasant, but after last night's kegger, it was less than appealing. Walking across the deck, I realize I can still taste the onion rings I tried to eat for lunch. I set the trays on the jacks and hear the Zombies singing "Time of the Season." I smile.

Jennifer and Justin's wedding invitation arrived in the mail. Not only was I invited, but Jennifer needed my help to decorate. She never was good at that kind of stuff. I agree to do what I can. After all, it's been four years, and I miss her family. I don't feel as bad when I hear that Justin is doing the same thing he was when I was with him. At the reception, their song, "Still The One," by Shania Twain, is the first dance. Later in the evening, they have a dollar dance. Apparently, Jennifer is also a fan of Journey. Do I have enough nerve to pay a dollar to dance with Jennifer's new husband?

## 63RD STREET ZAC IMEL

Separated by lanes of both difference and distance that younger lads could not cross  
To be eventually tied together as boys by games and grade school  
Strengthened by the struggles that shaped our lives to be

First times in cars and first times with girls  
Late conversation lit by faded black lights with felted neon posters  
and Nirvana

A wonderfully raspy "Nothing on top but a bucket and a mop and an illustrated  
book about birds"  
Played religiously on Brian's Sony shaking his Plymouth Sundance that reeked  
of patchouli  
In the back seat I had my first real kiss, semi-drunk from cheap beer bought  
from some shady gas station  
Over the south side of town, where they'd sell beer to a pregnant 12-year old

We were young then  
But then again I guess we're young now  
Still, it's different  
I know stuff now, like how to do my taxes and what fork to use first  
I have to use long distance to talk to my next door neighbor

I miss nights in a smoke shot warehouse one fall and winter to pay for a church ski trip  
And met Bob who smelled of the docks and grassy lawnmowers  
He believed Speed Stick was concocted by the government to be addictive  
And therefore kept his underarms disturbingly organic  
Like a decomposing cow radiating in the summer's heat  
I quit that job

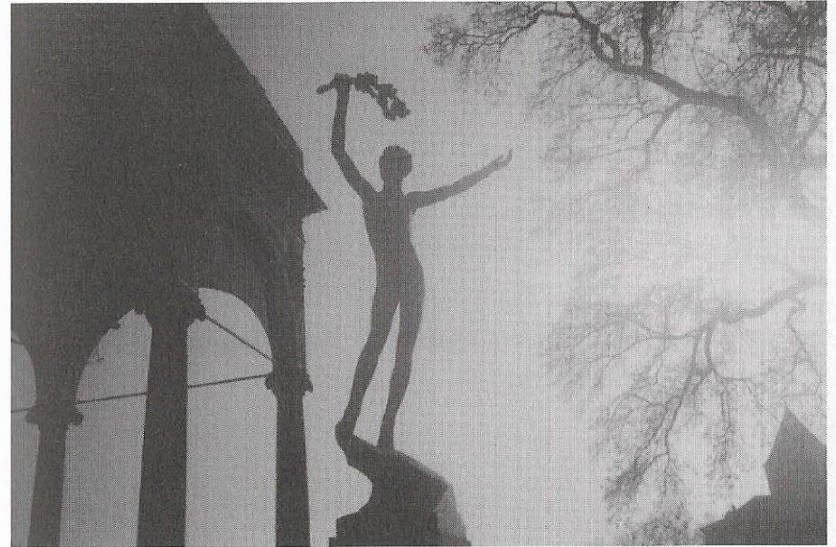
We moved on from 63rd street amazingly  
And ventured out in the world, some farther than others  
To a small conservative college in Missouri, Steve to some hippie school in  
North California,  
The smartest became a Sooner, the hunter a future mechanic, and now Brian  
manages a cleaners  
(Or at least he was last I heard)  
He always was weird about wearing shoes in the house and touching the walls

We reunite periodically to jaw of old times  
Of little league baseball victories and girls that we can't stand anymore, mostly  
because they can't stand us  
We talk of utopic future plans to live together in some drunken bachelor's commune  
With kegs as coffee tables and cushy high paying summer jobs that start at noon  
and end at eight  
Hopefully allowing us to soak in some sun during the daylight hours

Fantasies aside our lives are different now  
Moving in adjacent directions all over the world of geography and interests  
If indeed our last attempt at togetherness and childhood bliss fails  
And memories of bikes and beer all we'll have, I'll find contentment still

Because in the course of late nights stealing street signs and other things illegal  
I stumbled up on true friendship and loyalty, the stuff that makes this life worth  
living

FOR MAOZ  
MELISSA BOX



ONE DAY I MET A MAN  
DOTTIE ALLEN

One day I met a man, home from the war.  
He was so full of pain my heart just tore.  
He carried his burdens wrapped up in a sack  
and stumbled around with them tied to his back.  
I asked him why he didn't set them aside  
He said, "I fought for you and I did it with pride."

But I wasn't there so how could I know  
the pain he went through unless he told me so . . .

He said pain can be a light that's too bright,  
like a bomb exploding deep in the night.  
Pain can be a heartbreaking sight,  
like a best friend dying in terror and fright.  
Pain can be strong, it can make you feel weak,  
Fumbling, stumbling, shelter you seek.  
It can steal your breath away, it can bring you to your knees.  
I begged him stop -- please, mister please.

If you want to go on down life's winding road  
you have to find a way to lighten your load.  
In honor of them, let go of the pain  
So the life they gave wasn't given in vain..  
Remind your sons and daughters, so they appreciate  
all the sacrifices made, to make this country great.  
Tell them you went over, to defend democracy  
You were once a soldier and fought for liberty.

But they were not there, so how could they know  
That if it weren't for you, they would never know.

That love can be a light that's so bright  
like the light in your love's eyes when you're holding her tight.  
Love can be a heartbreaking sight  
like a baby's first breath, when he enters this life.  
Love can be strong, it can make you feel weak  
Pulsing, throbbing, yet ever so sweet.  
For those who didn't make it, will ever mourn  
but you're here with us, friend, you have weathered the storm.

If your buddies were here, they would want you to know, you should laugh  
for them, live for them and let love grow.  
So in all our tomorrows we will hear no more . . .  
One day I met a man, home from the war.

ON THE SITE OF ST. MARY ALDERMANBURY  
ANDREW MATISZIW

Time sees this site as a place as old as London.  
Londoners such as Shakespeare's close friends prayed here,  
Hearing the word in the days before London's Great Fire,  
Fired up and destroyed this magnificent square,  
Squarely in the middle of this great city.  
Cities are rebuilt however, and this church was too.

To the Second World War it lasted,  
Lastly to be ruined by roaring fire;  
Firebombed from the sky, it again burned.  
Burnt to the ground, it was still saved.  
Safe and sound, it was then transferred,  
Transported across the ocean, piece by piece.

Pieced carefully back together, it was again as when  
Wren reconstructed the church with grandeur.  
Grand as the previous London incarnation,  
Incarnated now at a different Westminster,  
The 'Minster now stands proud as a memorial  
Remembering Churchill, who is worth its wear.

Where miniature greatness once stood  
Stands a narrow park in its shadow.  
Shady, grassy, and green, this place is warming.  
Warm yellow light hits the ground as it falls,  
Falling through the overhanging trees' abundant leaves,  
Leaving a glimmer of hope for the relics in the future ages.

Age has seen the toll of time as the site became older.  
Old white stones stand in the site as little guards,  
Guarding what upon the church was founded.  
Foundation of the church is all that is left in place,  
Placed now between two towering modern constructions,  
Constructed without the beauty or care of the past.

Passing time here in the shade, I feel complete.  
Completed in both body and soul as I sit,  
Sitting down on a white chunk of stone.  
Stones that are thousands of miles away,  
Always at the place that I call home,  
Homes connected at one place and time.

UNTITLED  
LIZ MOORE



1985  
ASHLEY HOYE

Behind the camera,  
Mom said, "Smile, sweetheart,  
do you know how much I love you?"

My mother's green eyes opened and closed,  
moved like her finger pushing the shutter,  
and when a single piece of film revealed itself  
to the wild heat of a midwestern July,  
to four people sweating through the Kansas City Zoo,  
1985 stopped moving  
and Mom's sweetheart scrunched her green eyes  
for the camera.

\* \* \*

I don't remember 1985.  
Maybe my brother does;  
he might recall his pert smile,  
caused by the white-painted train,  
or my cherry-Popsicle-stained lips  
that might be mistaken for a blush  
except I never blushed.  
I probably ate a lot of dirt that summer,  
long curly tendrils probably got caught  
in my mouth a lot because I was too indolent  
to care about it  
in 1985.

On the train,  
Mom's sweetheart grinned and said,  
"I smiled, Mom, because I love you."

Tell me about 1985, Mom,  
tell me how I grew up too fast  
and tell me why people keep pictures  
of 1985  
stuck in the corners of their mirrors.  
Your green eyes saw it  
but mine didn't understand

and the camera sneaked up on 1985  
and swallowed it and smeared it  
on 35 millimeter film.  
Five years old and not  
old enough to remember.

The train at the Kansas City Zoo  
held four people a long time ago.  
The train carried them through 1985,  
and the camera winked back  
at Mom's sweetheart  
and snared 1985 in two dimensions,  
and I flip 1985 over to face my mirror  
and it blossoms in a tunnel of glass  
for a girl who lost five years old—  
am I still your sweetheart, Mom?  
How did I grow up so fast?

\* \* \*

I look at my brother now,  
tall and lean and solemn,  
the evolution of a year lost  
to me long ago,  
and I think that I should maybe ask him  
about 1985  
but I know I never will.  
Yet through him I'll see 1985—  
the year that evaporated from  
the calendar in our kitchen,  
the year with five birthday candles  
poking their waxy necks  
out of a chocolate cake  
in a sticky, swollen July—  
and I'll never really know that small strip of time  
in the lifeline laid out before me.  
1985 is still smashed flat behind a telephoto lens  
and now there is no room  
for me to live  
in 1985.

Last year I saw the white train at the Kansas City Zoo.  
I stood in the hot sunlight  
and took pictures of my past.

IN MEMORIAM: RHC 27.5.1964 - 19.11.1982  
PETER CATTERALL

The pious words carved on the bare stone  
'I thank my God of every remembrance of thee'  
Say Amen to a life that was lived  
Not always wisely or too well. These bones  
So senselessly broken seem to mock  
Our certain hopes of resurrection  
Depriving life of any meaning  
And leaving Christians clinging to their rock  
Of faith: a faith that love can transcend  
The narrow solipsisms of our lives,  
The love of God, who always seeks  
To guide and forgive us to the end,  
And that in life and death the human race  
Are suffused in God's eternal grace.

VERSION 1  
LAUREN BURDOLSKI

Shadows run through my mind  
life has never been so kind  
waiting for that peace of mind  
for something so divine  
cracking bones since a child  
eyes of influence oh so wild  
what are you trying to say?  
Heart aching with desire  
erotic flesh is so on fire  
you were my only liar  
but it began to tire  
mind so destroyed by your smile  
please go away for miles  
you took my seed and sowed  
dandelion's winds will blow

UNTITLED  
MEGAN SWAIM

Toenails clicking on metal overpowered the hum of the engine and the crunching gravel below us. I craned my neck out the passenger window in time to see Honker's sleek body disappear into the shadows. As his paws slapped against the dusty road, I began to feel the thrill of pursuit taking over despite the intense humidity. I wriggled with anticipation in "frog-legs" twice my size, boots big enough for my feet to slide around in, and a baggy T-shirt that engulfed my slight frame. I couldn't help grinning when I glanced over at John. He had gone all out this evening putting on his high tech gear to ensure a clean capture once the coon was treed. His red plastic helmet had a head light attached and his belt had a holster to hold an additional spotlight in case things got too hairy.

John slammed on the brakes only seconds after Honker's disappearance, and we bailed out of the truck. Ann sat anxiously in the back, engaged in a full body wag. Her tongue lolled out one side of her mouth and her droopy brown ears were already damp with saliva. Though she was supposed to be a champion dog, descending from a long line of excellent hunting blood, she still wasn't much out in the field. John found her at a swap meet and gave her to me, so I'd have my own hound when we went on our coon hunting "dates." Considering I was still green to the sport myself, we made quite a team.

"Why don't you get that hound of yours out of the truck so we can get going. As slow as y'all Honker's gonna have everything treed before you even start." John had his helmet turned on so all I could see was a glowing yellow ball floating on the other side of the vehicle. I impulsively stuck my tongue out at the sarcasm and untangled Ann's lead from the spare tire. We'd chained her in for fear she would bail out before we got where we were going. I couldn't help inwardly gloating that it was John's "well trained" hound that foiled our original plans.

Once Ann's oversized paws hit the dirt they developed a mind of their own. She loped across the road ditch and headed out across a stunted bean field. My arms bobbed in their sockets as she pulled me towards the draw where Honker had vanished. No matter how hard I dug in my oversized heels, I couldn't slow her down. John silently watched my clumsy struggles. Though the darkness hid his face, I could feel his cocky grin and the inevitable humor flitting in his eyes. He took great pleasure in the fact that I was unable to wrestle the dog into submission. Being quite the hard head, I was unwilling to admit defeat and simply continued to lurch around like a buffoon. I figured Ann would eventually wear out if I could just hang on long enough.

"Honey, just whop her a good one with the leash and she'll quit ya all over the place." John's "voice of reason" was hard to swallow considering it was

highly laced with laughter. Always quick to find the humor in the situation, he couldn't contain his amusement at my "compromised" position. I glanced hesitantly over in his general direction, unsure if he was serious or merely giving me a hard time. It would probably make his evening if he could con me into whipping my hound for no reason. My arms hurt too bad for me to analyze the situation very long, so I finally gave in and whalloped her a good one. I jerked the lead up and popped my wrist down in one fluid motion. A ripple of leather meeting hide vibrated through my lanky arms and down Ann's unsuspecting spine. Much to John's delight the results were as instantaneous as nails scraping a blackboard. All four paws lurched out from under the hound as she assumed the fetal position. Then . . . well, then there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Lying amidst the dust and chiggers, Ann refused to move. Not a single twitch or even a halfhearted wag could be detected from her inanimate form.

Startled at the sudden change in her temperament, I gave the lead a gentle tug and hoped the movement would rekindle her enthusiasm. Her collar raised up along her neck and forced furry wrinkles to pooch out on her fore head but she was locked into a standstill.

Some masterful advice that was, oh wise 'Rabboni.' Just look at her, would 'ya? Thanks to that little wallop, she's not even twitching now. Jeesh!! Now what am I supposed to do? At least she was *moving* before." I flouted in mock disdain, my laughter gurgling silently behind every word. Even though my hound had been rendered immobile, I was reveling in the comedy of the situation.: Several weeks ago, we'd listened to a sermon based upon the gospel of Luke where Jesus was called 'Rabboni' or master. Later on after the service, John put his arm around me, pulled me close, and informed me since I was his "woman" I could just refer to him as Rabboni from now on. Seeing the good natured smirk on his face, I bowed gracefully and managed a dramatic "as you wish oh wise Rabboni." We had been bantering about it relentlessly ever since. I would feign dutiful servility and he would assume the grace of the master as the occasion arose.

He cocked his head regally to the side and the helmet-induced light brought his features into focus. The whites of his blue-green eyes glowed strangely as he widened them in feigned astonishment John leaned towards me in the shadows with both hands wagging for emphasis and firmly announced, "I can't help it if your dog's retarded!!!"

His profound diagnosis hung heavily in the humid air. My jaw dropped at the atrocity, and John seized the opportunity to snatch the lead from my hand. Once he set Ann free, it took her a moment to adjust to her renewed freedom. When the reality hit, her original spunk returned, causing her to run relentless circles around me. Round and round, only occasionally did the hound veer off track into the darkness to test her sniffing skills.

The minutes marched by slowly and it wasn't long before Ann flopped herself disgracefully at my feet. She'd finally tired of waiting for Honker's return, seeing as how I wasn't too impressed with her antics. After watching her

in action, I was beginning to wonder if old Rabboni's prognosis wasn't right after all.

Overwhelming silence soon took over our tiny party as we strained to hear which direction Honker went. His last yelp sounded off in the distance several minutes earlier, but now all I could hear was Ann's labored breathing. Staring off into the shadowy draw in front of us, I concentrated every muscle in the hopes of hearing the hound. The longer I stood the more acute my senses became. A thin stream of sweat trickled down my spine and nestled in the waist band of my jeans. From the dampened condition of the material, I could tell many had followed the same path. Glancing over at John, I could see his muscular frame silhouetted against the night sky. Contentment stole over me as I realized just how lucky I was to have him in my life. We'd started dating the day after Christmas, and our relationship grew stronger with the passage of time. I had never been so close to another human being before. . . or so vulnerable.

"AROOO!!!!!" Honker's distant bay snapped me out of my musings and brought me back to the reality of the hunt. John cocked his head to the side, and with excited confidence informed me that his location was further back in the direction we had originally come.

"We can catch him faster if we go back around by the road."

With that, we both high-tailed it back to the truck and proceeded up the dusty gravel road Dukes of Hazard style. Gravel crunched this way and my loose kept hair flying that, we sped towards Honker's animated bellows. John gripped the wheel nonchalantly, with one hand draped over the side mirror. I, on the other hand, was an eager wreck. Leaning out the window, I had both hands resting impatiently on the sill. My gaze wandered from the illuminated road to the darkened fields beyond, since I was unable to hold still.

John slowed the truck to a crawl, as we attempted to pick up Honker's alarm. His efforts were met with a slap of absolute silence. I shifted uneasily in my seat, willing the dog to open his mouth and disclose his position. Seconds turned to minutes and still the

stuffy quiet was unbroken. Being unaccustomed to the baying habits of his dog, I expectantly asked John if this was normal procedure.

"No . . ." he replied hesitantly. "Honker never closes up, unless..."

Before he could finish his sentence, a loud rustling came from the weeds in the ditch. Honker came slinking out of the dried grass, and glanced cautiously around as if afraid he was being observed. When he caught sight of us, he promptly tucked his tail between his legs, lowered his head and began loping off in the opposite direction.

"Why that no good \*@!?\*#@! He's went and treed a possum again and he's trying to get away before he's caught in the act!" John's agitation permeated the truck cab. Apparently, his "professional" hound had been known to veer off the beaten path and chase possum instead of coon. He'd been trying to break him of it using everything from a severe tongue lashing to a healthy backhand. I judged from tonight's results they hadn't been too successful.

"Honker, you get your sorry a--, back here before I have to run you down! You know better than to run when I call you! !" As if the words lit fire under his paws, Honker merely continued his retreat with an occasional glance over his shoulder to see if we followed.

John slammed the truck into gear, and to my astonishment took out after him. He came up alongside Honker, and kept pace with the hound trying to talk some sense into him. When his efforts to curb the dog proved worthless, he jerked the driver's door open and tapped him in the rear-end. From where I sat, I couldn't see anything but only heard the startled hound yelp in surprise. Instantly, John had the truck in park and his feet on the ground before the truck had even come to a complete stop.

I turned bodily in my seat, to gain a better view. Though only seconds had passed, John had already managed to get the dog in the back of the truck. No worse from the door's wallop, Honker cowered, shamefaced as John berated him for his disobedience.

In the darkness of the cab, I wrestled with mixed emotions. I had never seen my mellow, easy going John provoked to anger before, so the suddenness of his outburst startled me. Yet, as I had time to get used to the situation, I couldn't help feeling amused at the sudden turn of events. After all the talk of my hound being retarded, it was the auspicious Honker who expended his energy chasing after a worthless possum.

My amused reflections were cut short, when John jumped back into the driver's seat. The door slammed shut as he calmly informed me, "He's a good hound but he's gonna learn to mind whether he wants to or not."

I hurriedly swallowed my smile, but the remnants of its deliciousness still lingered on the corners of my mouth.



PRAGUE CASTLE  
LIBBY MURRIE



DEATH AND THE ARKANSAS RIVER  
CARRIE ROGERS

Boots and death,  
Cadillacs and regret.  
Uncle Frankie's morbidity  
We would not soon forget.

He wrote of light bills and loafers  
And thunder coming like a train on the tracks  
But what we all wouldn't give  
To somehow wish him back.

If you try to forget  
Death ties a string around your finger  
But Frankie put three bullets through his heart  
And that will *always* linger.

BARBIE  
ASHLEY MARTIN

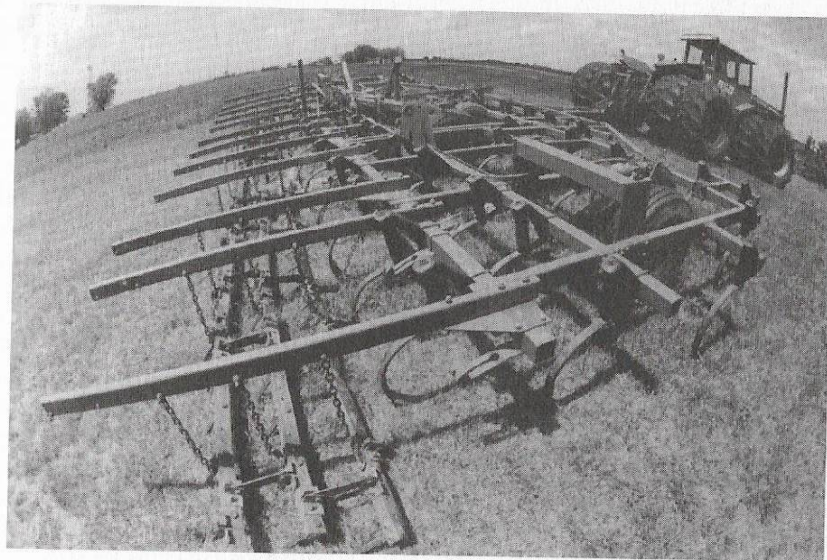
Is there anything behind that mask of plastic that Barbie wears?  
Is there anything behind the girly pink that dons her body?  
Or is she simply a little bundle of perfection?  
A model for poor girls everywhere to live up to . . .

To be sure, Barbie comes from an un-cracked mould,  
No room for imperfection there . . .  
But no room for evolution either,  
For Barbie is already everything that she can ever hope to be.

Condemned to monotonous existence,  
Barbie leads a boring life,  
This is why she needs Ken . . .  
For Ken makes her life interesting where she cannot.

But to all the Midges of the world,  
That live in Barbie's shadow,  
Emerge from the corners of this plastic world of pinkfection,  
Crack the mould with your rainbow of imperfection.

HEARTLAND  
JOHN WILLOCK



## DANGEROUS PLAYGROUNDS RICHIE CROSS

Randy sat at his desk, ignoring Ms. Hardin's important lecture on state capitols. Instead, Randy had his eyes pointed at Laura Birch who sat three rows away. Laura had her full attention on Ms. Hardin and was taking notes using her perfect penmanship. She was smiling as she wrote as if she were enjoying just the act of writing, and occasionally she would brush her long blonde hair out of her face and Randy would get a good glimpse of her dimpled cheeks. She was the perfect student. She was the teacher's pet, a straight O student, and respected crossing guard. Whenever the school had a fire drill, she got to hold the stopwatch. That's how important she was. And best of all, she was single.

After a short stint with Craig Hawkins, captain of the kick ball team, she recently had become a single young lady -- on the prowl for her next love interest. A few guys had attempted a move but they never got anywhere. Most guys didn't make it past the swing set to get to her usual hang out by the jungle gym. Luckily, Randy didn't care about the other guys. If Craig Hawkins could go steady with Laura Birch, then Randy believed he could too.

Behind Randy sat his best friend, Adam. Adam was frantically trying to write down everything Ms. Hardin said but finally gave up when he caught a quick glance of Bethany in the corner of his eye. She was giving him a dirty look from across the room and Adam returned the hateful look. Adam and Bethany had recently broken up and were strictly on a "no talking" basis. The relationship had only been a week long anyway, but the thought of not having a girlfriend seemed uncool to Adam. He liked girls but he was afraid of them. He had to actually talk Randy into asking out Bethany for him. The world of the woman was new to Adam but luckily he had Randy there to help him out.

Randy finally turned his attention back to Ms. Hardin who was just finishing up her lecture. Recess was coming up next and Randy was anxiously awaiting his opportunity to ask Laura to go steady. Finally, Ms. Hardin summed up her points and dismissed the class for recess. Randy jumped up out of his desk and ran for the doors that led out to the playground.

He ran to his usual spot, which was the giant tire that stood at the top of the hill. The tire had come from some bulldozer and was put on top of the hill that overlooked the playground. When Randy and Adam were in first grade, they could never climb to the top of the tire because it was so big. Last year, when he was a fourth grader, Randy and Adam had worked on taking over the giant tire from the fifth grade boys. It was a long and strenuous battle, but Randy and Adam finally pulled through before summertime. Ever since then, Randy and Adam ran to the giant tire in order to claim the tire for the whole recess. Occasionally, Randy and Adam let other friends come up to the giant tire but no girl had ever dared to go up to the giant tire for any reason. But today, Randy was

willing to make an exception . . . for Laura.

Adam finally ran up to the tire and climbed on top to catch his breath. He was the tallest of all the guys in the fifth grade. He kept his hair short at all times to keep from seeming too tall and freakish. Randy on the other hand was abnormally short and made up for it in attitude. He had always had a short-man's complex because he was always an inch shorter than anyone else in his grade. However, he found peace in his height whenever Laura first moved to Woods Elementary because he discovered that he and Laura were exactly the same height. From that moment on, he knew they were meant to be together and he couldn't wait to tell Adam that the time had come.

"All right, you listening?" asked Randy, anxiously awaiting to see what his best friend thought of the courageous act that he was about to perform.

"Yeah I'm listening," said Adam still gasping for air.

"I'm about to ask Laura Birch to go with me. I think she likes me."

Adam jumped off the tire and grabbed Randy by the arms and said "Are you kidding me? You're actually going to ask her out? Randy, she's too good for you. You're not captain of anything."

"It doesn't matter. What's the worst thing she could say? No? I don't care if she says no. But she might say yes," said Randy with confidence. "I'm going to invite her up here and ask her."

"Why you bringing her up here? This isn't a place for girls."

"That's why I'm doing it. She'll feel privileged. Plus, if she says no I don't want anyone to see," said Randy as he began walking toward the jungle gym.

Randy began his walk over slowly but picked up his pace once he got past the swings. He had Laura in sight. She was hanging upside down from the jungle gym and chatting with her other friends who were also hanging upside down. Randy approached the jungle gym and noticed the looks that the other girls were giving him. They knew what he was here for and didn't like it. They were probably jealous, thought Randy. Randy made his way through the forest of girls hanging upside down and found himself face to face with Laura Birch.

"Hey, Randy, what are you doing over here today," said Laura in her sweet voice.

"Yes, well, I just wanted to know if you would possibly want to come up with me to my tire up on the hill," said Randy trying to maintain his stability as the other girls snickered at his proposal.

"Me? I thought the tire was only for boys."

"It is, but I'd like you to be the first girl to take a tour of the tire. It's got a great view from up there," said Randy, this time a little more confident.

"All right then, let's go," said Laura as she pulled her legs out of their hanging position and acrobatically swung around to land on her feet. Randy took Laura's hand and led the way up to the tire. Randy noticed that as the two walked up the hill, Laura looked over her shoulder to give some sign to the other girls on the jungle gym. They all seemed to wave back and giggle and Randy knew that it was a good sign. They reached the top of the hill and Randy

climbed up on top of the big tire. He reached his arms down and asked Laura for her hand.

"You want me to come up there with you?" she asked.

"Yeah, it's a great view I promise," said Randy as he looked around to see where Adam had gone.

Laura lifted her hand and Randy gently pulled her on top of the tire. Once she was on top she slightly lost her balance until Randy grabbed her and helped her to her feet. She glanced into Randy's eyes for only a second until turning her attention to the playground below. What she saw was more beautiful than she had expected. Everything was in sight and she was at the top. Laura felt like the queen of the playground. While Laura stood on the tire speechless, Randy decided that it would be a good time to pop the question.

"So, Laura. I brought you up here because I wanted to ask you a question," said Randy trying to meet Laura's eyes.

"Yes, what is it Randy?" she said finally looking up at him.

"I was wondering if, since you're not going with anybody, I thought maybe you and I could go steady," said Randy. His heart sank as he said the words but he remained confident.

"Well," she said, "I don't know, let me think about it." Laura closed her eyes and began to think. Randy became anxious and was afraid that recess was going to end without an answer until she finally looked up and said "Randy, I would be happy to go steady with you."

Randy's face began to shine. He could now officially call Laura Birch his girlfriend. He couldn't wait to tell Adam. Randy jumped down from the tire and reached up to help Laura down. Instead of easily climbing down Laura jumped off the tire and landed in Randy's arms. Randy wanted to say something but before he could, Laura slowly put her mouth up to Randy's ear. At first, Randy didn't understand what was going on. He didn't want their first kiss to be on the ear. But she didn't kiss him. Instead, Laura gently whispered "Do you want to call me tonight?"

Randy hadn't expected the relationship to move so fast, but he gladly accepted. "Of course. Six o'clock all right with you?" he asked.

"Perfect. Thank you for bringing me up here to the tire. It was unforgettable," said Laura as she spun around and headed down to the jungle gym to spread the good news. Randy watched her every move as she climbed up on the jungle gym and told the other girls. She pointed up to the tire and then spread her hands apart as to show the girls the view from atop of the giant tire. Randy was proud of himself and couldn't wait to tell Adam. Then, from behind the tire, Adam jumped up to the top and pulled Randy into the center of the tire.

"Hey, watch it!" yelled Randy as he landed on his back in the middle of the tire.

"Way to go!" said Adam in excitement. "Wait until the other guys find out, Dude, they're going to flip out. You actually did it. You're actually going steady with Laura Birch," said Adam who seemed almost as excited as Randy.

"Can you believe it? She wants me to call her at six tonight," said Randy climbing up on top of the tire.

"Six? We're supposed to go pick out some possible fort locations at six. I can't go out any other time this week," said Adam, now distressed.

"We can go this weekend. I promise this will be the last time we change it," said Randy, ignoring the problem. Suddenly, the recess whistle blew and all the children playing on the playground began running inside. Randy and Adam ran together back inside; however, this time they didn't speak. Each of them had their own thoughts. Randy was as happy as ever and couldn't wait to call his new girlfriend. Perhaps his mom would even let them go to dinner together. Adam's thoughts were also on Laura. But he saw trouble up ahead. Randy and Adam had been best friends since the first grade and now there was someone between them.

When the two got inside, they sat down in their desks and remained silent. It was Monday which meant that it was time for announcements. Every Monday, any student in the class could stand up and share with everyone what they did over the weekend. When Ms. Hardin said it was time, Randy quickly raised his hand. Ms. Hardin called on Randy who quickly jumped out of his seat and headed to the front of the class. He was excited and wanted everyone to know why.

"I just wanted to tell everyone," said Randy swinging his arms back and forth. "I invited a girl up to the big tire today. We didn't kiss or anything, but I did ask her to go steady with me. So I'd just like to tell all you guys out there that Laura Birch and I are now going steady!"

The room exploded with whispers and Ms. Hardin started laughing. From the front of the classroom, Randy saw Laura covering her face in embarrassment. Randy felt as if he had blown it. She will never speak to me again, thought Randy. Then, Randy looked at Adam who stood up and began clapping at his friend's announcement. The rest of the class suddenly began clapping along, though not sure exactly why. With the sudden burst of excitement in the crowd, Randy's confidence was quickly built back and he returned to his seat, shaking hands with Adam as he sat down. For the rest of the day, Randy's stomach was exploding with butterflies. He couldn't wait until six o'clock.

Randy concentrated on the clock from about three thirty up until six o'clock. He had been very giddy since leaving school and couldn't wait to talk to his girlfriend. To pass the time, Randy prepared for the conversation. He had a notepad next to him with things to say in case the conversation ever stopped. He had written things like "so, what'd you make on your division test?" and "did you catch Buffy last night?" He wanted the conversation to be perfect. He even had a few excuses lined up just in case the conversation got disastrous. If things weren't looking good, he would either say that his grandma was over and he had to go or that he felt sick to his stomach and had to take some medicine. Whatever happened, he was prepared.

Five fifty-nine finally rolled around and Randy picked up the phone. He

had the number memorized so he quickly dialed the number. The phone rang twice and then an unfamiliar voice answered the phone.

"Hello," said the voice.

"Uhhh, yeah can I speak with Laura please," said Randy who suddenly began sweating because in all of his preparations, he had forgotten to plan out what to do if her parents answered.

"Who may I ask is calling," said the male voice.

"Her boyfriend," Randy replied.

"Oh really? Laura never told me she has a boyfriend."

"Well we just decided it today. She probably hasn't had time to discuss with you but I'll tell you right now that I'm definitely someone you can trust. My best friend Adam and I have a tire that we rule over so she's pretty much becoming a princess by being my girlfriend. Now you can really call her princess," said Randy trying to figure out what he had just said.

"That's great, hold on, let me get her," said the voice showing no real interest.

Randy flipped through his notes to get a quick glance at his first words. After a short wait, Randy heard her voice.

"Hi, Randy," she said. Even from the other end of the phone, Randy could tell she was smiling and he held that picture of her in his mind.

"Hey Laura, this is Randy."

"I know," she replied sounding confused.

"Oh, well, how was dinner?"

"We haven't eaten yet."

"Oh," said Randy, scrolling down the page to the next question. Before he could ask it, Laura jumped in.

"Listen, Randy. I want to ask you a serious question and I want you to give me a serious answer. OK?" she said. She sounded real serious this time. She was definitely not smiling now.

"OK."

"Listen. I like you a lot. I think we make a great couple and everything. But, something has come between us."

Randy waited patiently. It was probably the first serious conversation he had ever had with a girl so he didn't know when it was his turn to speak. He sat in his big chair in his room and waited for the "something" to be told.

"Well," she continued. "You know Adam, right?"

"Adam Stanley? Yeah, he's my best friend."

"Right. Well, before you asked me to go steady, I really liked you and Adam at the same time. In fact, I was waiting for one of you to ask me out. You were the first and that's great. . . Couldn't be happier. But the problem is that I still like you both."

Randy waited again. He tried to think how Adam fit into the whole picture. He didn't understand what she was trying to say and then Randy began to get frustrated. Not with Laura, but with school. He couldn't see why he was taught

crap like multiplication, penmanship, and coloring in school when the most important things in life, like girls, were not taught. The subject of girls is a confusing subject and Randy didn't understand. But he was about to.

"I was wondering, if it's OK with you," said Laura sounding hesitant. "I was wondering if we could all go steady with each other at the same time. You, me, and Adam."

Now Randy understood. He had seen something like this on Jerry Springer or HBO before and it never ended happily. Before he said no, he thought of Adam for a second. He wondered if she had spoken to him about it before or what he would think. Maybe it never worked out on Springer because the couples involved weren't friends, thought Randy. Since Randy and Adam were best friends, maybe the whole idea would work.

"I've talked to Adam," she said. "And he said that he would do it if it was OK with you. So what do you think?"

"I don't know," said Randy thinking out loud. "I guess that's fine with me if it's fine with Adam."

"Great! I'll call him and tell him that we're all one big couple. Maybe we can all play together on the playground tomorrow. Just the three of us," she said now smiling again.

"Wait, I don't know if this is such a good idea," said Randy thinking about the situation more. He wanted to call Adam and talk to him about it. He wanted to keep Laura but he didn't know if he could share her with another guy. That would mean that Laura would have to talk on the phone with Randy less to make time for Adam, thought Randy. The idea began to lose its spark as Randy thought about it more and more.

"Listen, Laura," said Randy. "I don't know if this is going. . ."

"Well Randy, I've got to go. My grandma is here and I have to go. It was nice talking to you. See you tomorrow at school, boyfriend." And with that, she hung up the phone.

Randy sat in amazement with the phone still at his ear. She had used his own excuse to end the conversation. She had planned out everything as he did. And now he was in a nasty love triangle. A love triangle that would surely end in disaster. Randy quickly picked up the phone and dialed Adam's number. After a short pause, a busy signal rang out into Randy's ears.

SUMMER AND AUTUMN  
TODD BROWNLIE

And walking away  
From Mephisto's smoking grasp,  
I allowed Summer's velvet arms  
To surround my milky skin.  
A gentle smile  
Broke across my thin face  
As he took my hand in his,  
Strolling through moonlit streets.  
His warm touch  
Flowed all over me,  
Sinking into the burrows  
Of my lonely heart.  
Summer gives way  
To Fall's seductive caress,  
And only cool breezes swim around us  
Like silk across our cheeks  
Leaving behind a glowing red.  
In the cab on our way away  
From the hollow confines of the city,  
The back of his head  
Cradled in my lap  
Like a newborn dream.  
He floats like a water lily  
Upon a Chinese lagoon  
Never disturbing a sleeping fear,  
Although he doesn't know  
How deep the water runs.  
No worries tonight, though,  
As we huddle close to one another,  
Naked skin melding together  
Much like the harmony and melody  
Of a piano's serenade.  
Passion and intensity rest  
Right beside us,  
Reflections of Summer and Autumn  
Sleeping . . .

SPIKE  
LAUREN BURDOLSKI

he's wandering some street right now, I am sure of it  
a sleek, highly sensual being  
the cold night against his dead flesh  
yet I feel his warmth  
and smell the liquor on his breath  
taste his hunger  
his eyes shifting to find his prey  
dark-clothed  
out of the darkness and fog he'll come  
tongue draping my neck in doom  
waiting for the dark metallic must to arise from my veins

INSIDE THE HOUSE OF POWER  
ANDREW MATISZIW

"I see that you have the 'Toby Bowl' out," Mel observed as she walked into the kitchen.

The "Toby Bowl," a phrase coined by my best friend, Mark, was a large plastic mixing bowl out of which I ate my meals because I was too cheap to purchase separate dishes and cooking ware for my three-month stay in England. Everyone laughed at his joke until he explained what he meant by "Toby Bowl." He said it looked like a large bowl full of food that someone would give a retarded boy named Toby to keep him busy by eating. After he explained this, Mel chastised him for making fun of the handicapped.

We were different from Melanie in many ways, but from the first day we were close friends. She told us later that on first meeting Mark and I, she thought we were lovers. She said that she always makes that conclusion about people because she herself is a lesbian. By the second day she knew us, she thought we were evil, fascist pigs. She never changed that opinion, but she loved us anyway. We found it only natural that she thought we were evil Americans. She was, after all, a Canadian. A devoted Communist (we assumed), she would constantly argue with us about the evils of capitalism and anything that conservatives love.

She sat down next to me at our table and started making herself a tuna sandwich. "Hey, this Thursday, October 8th, there's an International Students Poetry Convention in Newcastle. Holly, Lana, and I are going to go to it and then we're going to have some dinner and listen to jazz at a great cafe there. You want to come, too?"

"Sure. It sounds like a lot of fun," I said. I hadn't been to a reading in a long time. Even though I am not a poetry person, I still enjoy going to the readings. "We should invite Raquel, too," I added. "She is a really great poet. She's going to translate some of her stuff for me to read." Raquel was another block mate of ours. She was from Spain and we quickly bonded during several late night talks.

"Yeah. We should see if she wants to go too," Melanie agreed.

Raquel quickly agreed to go and we five went off to Newcastle by train. Besides being home to its world famous Brown Ale, Newcastle is one of the largest cities in England and only about thirty minutes from Sunderland with all the stops between the two cities. We arrived in Newcastle and looked for the place at which the reading was located. Nobody had heard of the street or the building. We were lost, and it wasn't long before complaints and dissidence threatened to tear our group apart.

We went to a little takeout kabob place. They are all over England. Someone asked, "Do we want to eat here?" I quickly vetoed that idea. I refuse to

eat from a large chunk of unrecognizable meat called a "donner." Don't people in England read about American history? I guess they wouldn't, but you would think that a story about a whole bunch of helpless Americans trapped in the west and forced to eat each other would match the dry English sense of humor.

We used the phone in the restaurant and called about the reading. It was in Hexum, about twenty miles outside of Newcastle. Everyone agreed, since we were there, we would have dinner, go to a pub, and then go listen to some jazz. After dinner, we went off to look for the jazz club. We walked forever until we found it, and it wasn't open yet. Nobody except Raquel and I seemed upset. "Oh well," they all said. "Let's go back and find a pub."

We walked back from where we came and there was a selection of pubs all around the area. We were right next to a really nice-looking pub with its beautiful stained wood and polished brass railing. It had my vote as it was the obvious choice. However, Lana had her mind set on a tacky pub across the road. This seemed ridiculous to me. The road was very busy and the cross was going to be a pain in the ass. Newcastle is a large city. It was like crossing a road in London, which occasionally leaves hapless tourists splattered as road-kill.

Everyone agreed to follow her, so we went into the pub. Upstairs, they were holding a drag show."

How odd," I thought, "for a pub to have a drag show." We entered, got our pints, and sat down. This pub was very different. They had loud, techno music blaring out of speakers all over the walls. Pubs were always quiet places, for discussion among mates. "It must be for the drag show above," I thought.

We had several pints and we tried to talk under the speaker pounding above our heads. Melanie was sitting next to Raquel and they were talking. I could only hear a little bit of what they were saying. "Have you ever been . . ." Melanie asked.

"No, but . . ." Raquel responded, trailing off under the music, ". . . it is great -- very natural."

"We're . . . going . . . tonight," Melanie finished.

"What the hell were they talking about?" I thought. Oh well, it was none of my business, so I continued my own conversation with Lana and Holly.

Melanie leaned over to me. "We are thinking about going to a club since nothing else here has panned out. Let's go find one," she decided. We all got up and started our search for a club.

We found an area that had a bunch of clubs all together. The first one we came across wasn't open yet. Too bad. The second one had a line wrapping around the building. Strike two. The third one was just right. It was open, had no line, and the outside was finished very nicely. A large flashing neon star told us its name: "The Powerhouse."

Melanie decided that we would go to that club. As we entered, the huge skinhead bouncer asked us a question. What the hell did he say? I couldn't understand a damn word. With his thick accent, it was like he was speaking another language. Nobody understood him. "What?" we asked together. Just as

he was about to say it again with a big smile on his face, Melanie comprehended what he had asked. "Oh, yes, we all are," she responded quickly, and he let us in.

"What did he ask?" I questioned her.

"Oh, he asked if we were all . . . eighteen," she replied.

"That's weird," I thought. "I've never been asked if I was eighteen before entering any pub or club." Eighteen is the legal drinking and (generally unenforced) entrance age at pubs and clubs in England.

We entered and paid at the ticket booth. Behind the coat check area, there was a large photograph of a muscular naked man holding his erect phallus. "A little tasteless," I thought. Some clubs have pictures of men and women in various states of undress, but nothing like that.

I turned to walk down the hall and more pictures of naked males bombarded me. "This seems kind of one-sided with these pictures," I thought.

Then, it hit me. I experienced an epiphany of epic proportions. "Oh shit," was the only thought that went through my head. Melanie, Holly, and Lana had just made their way through the door and onto the dance floor. As they passed through the entrance, they revealed a drag queen who stood blocking the door with a sheet of numbers.

"Do you want a number?" he asked after tagging the others like cattle.

"What?" Raquel questioned because her understanding of English wasn't perfect.

"No," I responded to him. "No, you don't want any," I said to Raquel.

We passed through the door and met with the three others at a table on the side of the dance floor. The place had just opened, so nobody was dancing yet. Everyone was sitting at tables, all except for one guy dancing by himself on the floor and sniffing something out of a little jar under his nose.

The other four were nodding heads, their bodies beginning to move with the music. I sat down next to Melanie under a picture of two naked men joined together in, well, harmony. "Why didn't you tell me this is what we were doing?" I asked.

"I thought it was better if you didn't know."

We sat there as the place slowly started to fill and people started dancing. "Let's dance," Melanie said. Nobody got up. I sat mortified in my seat. Lana and Holly complained that there weren't enough people there yet and Raquel simply didn't like to go dancing.

Mel stood up and looked down at us. "I go with you guys to the straight clubs all the time and have fun. I just wanted to go where I belong for a change."

I looked up at my friend and felt sorry for her. This was something that she really wanted to do, and we were ruining it for her. I looked around at the club and decided that no matter what, I wouldn't hurt Mel. I stood up and replied, "Okay, let's dance."

She gave me a big hug and said, "Don't worry, I'll protect you."

We went out and started to dance. The disco floor started to fill up. Holly, Lana, and Raquel soon arrived to join us. Melanie went her own way to meet

people, so I grabbed Raquel. "Don't leave me," I pleaded.

We danced for hours and we had a great time. Raquel and I got thirsty, so I ordered us a pint of lager and we shared it while talking about the evening. Melanie came down to the table. "Lana and Holly are leaving. We have to go too."

"Where are they?" I asked looking through the packed dance floor as some guy in drag lip-synched to Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" with a mop as his microphone.

"They're getting their coats," she replied as we finished the pint and got up. We left the place and caught a taxi that we took back home to Sunderland.

Back at our student residential housing, everyone went to bed. I was hungry again so I fixed some spaghetti and ate it from my "Toby Bowl." Mark came in the kitchen on his way back from a pub. "Hey, Toby!" he yelled a little too drunkenly loud. "How was the poetry reading?"

"There was no poetry reading, and you won't believe where they took me!"

"Yeah. I know," Mark laughed. "Mel asked me to go, but I told her to take you instead!"