

DRUID'S CAVE, SPRING 1995

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Front cover: *Gavin* by Jeff Schwartz

CARRIE NELSON

I Am Not

The night is caught in my throat,
thistly and stark. Dear children,
keep dreaming, keep sleeping.

I am not
the mother who wrings
out hair and pulls socks
out of drains
and cuts dances
and potatoes, or a mother-once-danced.

I am not
sleeping and dreaming
of impossibly tall trees and Grandma's
backyard stretching out swallowing me
in, leaping into the green folds and
swimming down to consciousness.

Your mother never did this.
She was not sleeping, not
dreaming, just breathing as
long as she could around the night,
hoping someone would pull it
out of her like a rough tongue.

She waited, she waits
scribbling out cakes,
baking words, burning them to beautiful crisps,
cooling on the windowsill.

In My Kitchen

In my dream, there are hands.
The hands are breaking eggs.
The eggs fall into the darkness.
There is a splash, then an acrid smell.

Then the meat is cut,
is bleeding.
The hands place on my tongue
wine and bread.
The hands are a moment from
reaching inside, they are always
a moment from
reaching inside.

In this dream, God is
sitting in my kitchen.
He has toast crumbs in his beard
and is very polite. It is Sunday
morning, I am ten.
I put on my dress, my bows, my shiny feet.
God kisses the air
around my face.
I am startled to notice
God has no pupils.

I walk out the door, off the steps
and fall into darkness.
I clutch the cross between the breasts
that have not grown yet,
hoping to stop the fall.
Blessed, blessed holy.

In my dream, I love God,
though he has quietly, almost
accidentally, splintered my body
like a plate beneath his feet.
Excuse me
he whispers.

When I remember God,
I will remember him in my kitchen.
I will remember
the eggs slipping between his fingers
and my brothers and sister
sucking at the yolks as they fell.

I will remember
how I wished I was in bed

dreaming

instead of waiting at the door for a car,
waiting to be taken away,
still not full, never full,
waiting to awake.

KRISTA REED

Going Up

“Oh, hell.” She pushed every button, but none would light up. Trying to remember her trainer’s instructions, she opened the silver panel and pulled the green alarm knob, but there was no sound.

“Um, are we stuck?” asked the kid.

If she hadn’t been so anxious to sleep with the guy who’d trained her maybe she would have listened a little closer to emergency instructions. *How hard could this job be? Press the correct number, don’t turn around, have a nice day.* He turned out to be married and faithful...always an unfortunate combination. Perhaps she should have paid closer attention to the instructions. For that matter, perhaps she should have just walked out of the lavish personnel office when the oily administrator had first given her that disapproving frown.

“We don’t typically hire *women* for this type of job,” he began. He said the word “women” like most people said the word “cancer”—he sort of squinted up his face like he had a bad taste in his mouth. “However,” he soothed, “we do have a few openings in the kitchen for room service deliveries.” That was his mistake. She had not even really wanted the elevator job until he had said that.

“Well,” she said calmly, “the advertisement didn’t say anything about not wanting women, which is a good thing, because that would be sexual discrimination.” She smoothed the folded ad and placed it neatly on the desk between them. His unctuous

smile faded as his face paled. So now the Capital Plaza had their first honest-to-goodness elevator woman, and she was trapped like a rat between the 31st and 32nd floor. She could see the kid’s reflection in the mirrored walls as he eyed her nervously and shifted his weight.

“Are we stuck?” he asked again. His hands were shoved into his pockets.

For lack of anything better to say except ridiculing him for needless verification of the obvious, she took a deep breath and sighed. “Looks like it,” she said, and whirled around to face him. Startled, he quickly looked up with a slight expression of guilt on his fourteen-year-old face, probably because of what he’d been looking at. He brushed his blond bangs out of his eyes and tried to regain his composure. She was good looking from the back, but even better looking from the front. She was much older than he was. Her dark red uniform hugged her perfect curves and matched her dark red lipstick. Her thick auburn hair was pulled back but a few wisps fell across her face. He cleared his throat.

“Is there some sort of alarm we should sound?” he asked.

“Well, I think this knob is it, but hell if I know if it’s working or not.” He looked pretty nonchalant about the whole situation. *But then*, she reminded herself, *kids his age spend hours every day practicing how to look cool in any situation.*

“Has this ever happened to you before?” he asked calmly.

“Nope, first week on the job. Ain’t that a pisser!” she quipped. His smile revealed his braces, as well as his relief at her colloquialism. Her language was in sharp contrast to her smooth skin, perfect hair, and the elegant way she had requested his floor destination. Resigned to their plight, he dropped his backpack on the floor and sat down on the cushioned bench along the back wall of the dimly lit elevator.

“What’s your name, kid?” she asked, and kicked off her pumps. As she did so she realized it was the first time she had been the initiator of this question to a male in the elevator. She rarely made the first move, not in such obvious ways, anyway. She rarely had to.

“Stu,” he replied.

“As in beef?” She figured he would be too enamored of her to be annoyed with the remark.

“Ha ha. No, as in Stuart.” Hmmm...maybe she figured wrong.

Stuart, Stuart...she was sure she had been with a Stuart at one time or another. Accountant, insurance salesman...no, the archi-

fect that always bought her red things. What had his deal been with red, anyway? The red roses, red nightgown, ruby stud earrings. The crystal bowl of strawberries he had ordered that last morning from room service had made her break out in hives. She took that as a sign. She considered herself to be a very psychic person.

"Do you think we'll be in here for a while?" Stu asked. She was not, however, getting any vibes on how long they would be in there.

"I really couldn't say, Stu," she mused absentmindedly. Stu seemed to handle this information okay. Come to think of it, her trainer *had* mentioned emergency instructions.

He said, "Don't worry about emergency instructions, these things are brand new and never break down." Her only real special instructions had been, "In case of a heated argument or emm...well, entanglement between guests, it is best to hit the hold button for them and get off on the closest floor. Often the guests will need to settle their differences privately, and we are at their service." She had hit the hold button a few times in the last week, when she needed a little privacy to settle her own "differences" with a male guest. *At your service*, she smiled.

"Nobody does much around here when an elevator is stopped for a while," she conceded to Stu. *Thank God. The bellboys would get a show they'd never forget.* "This alarm could be a silent one, though. I guess we just sit and wait for them to get their thumbs out of their asses."

He moved toward the end of the bench as she sat down next to him and crossed her legs. He noticed her legs as she pulled up the skirt of the front desk attendant's uniform they had issued her. She noticed him noticing. She realized it had been a long time since she had been around an adolescent boy. The men she hung around when she was Stu's age were older. *Not too many prospective homecoming dates came through the truck stop, go figure.* She smiled at the absurd thought. *Hello Miss Hanion, this is my date tonight, Big Duke. We'd like to stay and dance a few but he has a load of pork bellies due in Iowa City by Monday.*

So here she was with good ol' Stu: the epitome of manhood in its earliest and most awkward stage of development. She supposed that even their worst of intentions at this age were relatively innocent. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see him turned toward the mirrored wall, grimacing with his mouth open, checking for food in his braces. He quickly glanced over to make

sure she wasn't looking.

"What's your name?" he croaked, and immediately cleared his throat to cover his embarrassment.

"Zelda," she replied, and watched for his reaction. This had always been her first instinctive test for men. Usually the revelation of her name brought a glint of excitement into suburban eyes used to names like Deborah or Jane: names that wore mud masks at night and talked about begonias and PTA meetings. *Really*, the look would say, *Kinky. Are you as exciting as your name?*

"Wow!" Stu laughed as his smile flooded his face again. "Cool name." Zelda liked his reaction. She had not been a teenager for over two decades now, but still knew that having "coolness" bestowed upon you by an adolescent was greatest accolade an adult could receive. She decided she really liked him. Zelda always decided about a person within the first ten seconds she was with them whether she really liked them, could like them for a while, or didn't at all like them. After those first ten seconds she never changed her mind. It had been the same way with the men at the truck stop her mama had worked at. Zelda started working there when she turned thirteen (but looked eighteen), and could always tell the big tippers from the losers before their coffee cup was full. She knew who to treat right. That was probably how she had made enough money in two years to get the hell out of there.

She noticed he was picking at a string on his backpack, probably afraid he had offended her with his reaction to her name. She winked at him, "I guess my mama thought it was pretty cool, too." Mama had named her after a fortune teller that used to come through the stop with the same traveling carnival year after year. She predicted mamma would become pregnant soon. *That was a tough call.*

Stuart offered, "My mom didn't like the name Stuart, but she got to name my three older sisters and it was my Dad's turn." *Three to one*, Zelda mused. *Tough odds for a kid going through puberty.*

"Do you like having older sisters?" Zelda inquired to make conversation.

"Probably better than younger." That made sense. "The sleepovers have been interesting," Stu added.

"You probably know a little bit about women," Zelda teased.

"Well, a little bit. I know not to touch their stuff. I know to be really nice to them when they're in bad moods. And anything they cook, I know to say it tastes good no matter if it does or not."

Zelda was dumbfounded.

"Stu, you are a wise man. Very few men ever learn the lessons that you already know."

"Maybe they just forget," offered Stu. "Why, what do you know about men?" Zelda almost laughed out loud at the question.

"Honey, what *don't* I know about men." Stu looked intrigued. She then added, "Most of them are a lot different than you. They like to put on a show."

"Everyone acts a little different if you want somebody to like you," said Stu. Zelda thought about this for a minute.

"Well, I get 'feelings' about people. I can tell if they're being themselves or not."

"Like a psychic?" whispered Stu.

"Sort of ."

"Cool! My sister Jen has those Time-Life *Mysteries of the Unknown* books about Stonehenge and stuff like that. I really believe in that stuff. Have you ever predicted an earthquake or anything?"

"Sorry, babe." Stu looked slightly disappointed. *Deal with it, Stu.* He began fidgeting with his backpack again. Zelda tried to think of something to say.

"Got a girlfriend, Stu?" she asked. It was part of her routine, but she felt silly going through it with a fourteen-year-old.

"Yah."

Of course, *that* was not an answer she was used to hearing.

"Her name's Charlotte. We just started going out last week.

"Did you pick her up at school?"

"In band. She plays trumpet next to me. I'm second chair and she's first."

"That bug you?"

"No."

"Good. Where do you go?"

"What do you mean?" Stu looked confused.

"You said you and Charlotte go out. Where do you go?"

"Well, we don't really go anywhere, we just *go out*, ya know?"

Stu looked at her questioningly. Zelda didn't know, but nodded her head.

"So Stu," Zelda began, "what do you do for fun? Play video games like those morons in the arcades?"

"No. I'd rather read."

"*Playboy*?"

"No! Geez," Stu looked sheepish. "Right now I'm reading *Lord*

of the Flies for English class. We just finished *The Scarlet Letter*."

"What's that about?"

"Well, this woman slept with someone she wasn't supposed to and had to wear an 'A' on her chest as punishment."

There aren't enough letters in the alphabet, kid.

"Well, I just can't even remember the last time I've discussed literature with a man," said Zelda. She supposed menus and road maps didn't count. Stu beamed at her remark.

"Do you read?" he asked.

"Only when it says 'Final Notice' on the front."

She took a deep breath and looked around. There was still a distinct disinfectant odor lingering from the morning cleaning, intermixed with the remainder of expensive cigarette smoke. It was leftover from a prominent guest who was a regular exception to the hotel's "no smoking" policy, which she had made the mistake of trying to enforce on her first day.

He generously overlooked her ignorance by replying, "Honey, the smoke from this cigarette costs more than you make in an hour; you should enjoy breathing it."

She continued looking around, remembering that the tiny white lights running around the edges of the ceiling had reminded her of Christmas the first time she had seen them. The lights in the ceiling panel seemed dimmer than usual.

"Think the power might be out?" she thought out loud.

"No, the music's still playing," Stu noted. She was surprised to hear he was right. She had tuned out the Plaza's all purpose muzak the second day of the job and really had not heard it since.

"Some people might consider being trapped with music like this torture," Stu joked.

Zelda shot him a glance, "Yah Stu, you're doing time for all of the three bad things you've done in your life."

"I've done some pretty bad things," insisted Stu.

"Like what?"

"Like..." Stu searched his memory to impress her with his rampant deviance. "I cheated on a test once."

"Ooooh," teased Zelda, "and they let you back on the streets!"

"I...took a baseball bat to my sister's psycho ex-boyfriend's Camaro."

"No shit! Did you really do that?"

"Well, no. But I thought about it." Stu decided to change the subject. "So do you like your job?" he inquired. Zelda thought for a moment.

"It pays the bills," she replied. *Or will anyway.* Then she frowned, trying to remember which bills it had yet to pay for this month. Her variety of jobs always covered the basics: food, rent, utilities, laundry, and the nasty Clinique cosmetics habit she had picked up in her late 20s. Usually she could pick up an extra shift to afford her weekly skin, nail, and hair conditioning treatment. These were the necessities.

The extras were always taken care of. They gave her the clothes and jewelry they wanted to see her in, took her places she wanted to go. Having her on their arm was worth it to them and she knew it. She was usually treated with respect because she demanded it. If she didn't get it, she was gone even faster than usual. That was the main reason prostitution was not an option: the lack of respect. *Men hand you money and they think they own you.* The gifts were given because they *wanted* her, and she called the shots. Yes, she paid the bills, but it was about all she had to pay.

"I like jobs where I can meet...people," she smiled.

"What kind of jobs have you had?" he asked.

"Well, when I first started working in the city, I wasn't much older than you." The city had been a whole different world for her, but she loved it. She learned to fit in quickly. She learned how to talk and act in order to get what she wanted.

"Did your parents move here?" Stu asked.

"No, I split on my own."

"Wow, your mom must have really freaked." Stu looked concerned for her.

She smiled when he said this, remembering the face she saw after she had unlatched the five chains and opened up the crusty hotel room door. It had been eight days since she had hitched a ride with a new guy on his way west. Her mother's face showed neither relief nor anger, just exhaustion. It had aged fifteen years since the week before, and Zelda knew it was because of her. It was probably at that minute that she decided never to have children. It was a one way ride to becoming old, not even stopping on the floors in between.

"So what jobs have you had?" pried Stu.

She instinctively began to give her standard story. "Well, you know, I've done a lot of modeling. I've spent a lot of time with children nannying. I've taught aerobics." *Who am I trying to impress?* Zelda sighed, "Actually, I've had more jobs than I could probably even begin to remember."

"Really? What was the worst?"

That was an easy pick. "Well, one year I had been working in housecleaning for Marriot hotels and I got laid off." *Actually, the maid job had been a pretty good one.* She smiled to herself as she remembered the "people" she had met. *Do not disturb.* "They transferred any of us that were willing up to a big amusement park they owned up on the north side. I spent the better part of that summer hauling little shits in and out a big pool of plastic balls. It took me two months to get transferred over to the log ride, and by then it was getting cold."

"Wow," said Stuart.

"I've tended bar, worked at a men's clothing store. I even drove a taxi for a while." *Everything but waitress.* She would intoxicate them, measure their inseam or drive them to their hotel, but she was always in control. She would not serve them. Not the way her mama had.

Just passing through Verna, you know that...but oooh, sugar, you make the stop worth it every time...Mind if I take a piece of that blueberry pie in the fridge with me?

Zelda always did the leaving before they could, because she knew they would. Her father had been the first to prove that.

Stu interrupted her thoughts, "So why aren't you still modeling? You're so, well...beautiful." He cleared his throat and kicked his backpack. It was obvious he had not meant to continue his thought out loud, and she was deeply touched by his sincerity. He really believed she had modeled. He hadn't accepted it as just a line.

"Actually, I've never modeled," she said softly.

"Really?" He looked shocked. "Why not?"

"Don't know." *Yes you do.* "Okay, I guess I've never really felt that comfortable working around other women." She motioned above and below to the floors they were trapped between, "I can handle the competition here, yah know?"

"You should do it. I bet you'd be great at it."

It had been so long since anyone had encouraged her to do something for herself she didn't quite know what to say. What happened to the Stus in the world? Where did they go? *They grow up. They grow up and become Stuarts and pick you up with their Armani suits when their alterations are done. Then they feed you strawberries that make you break out. Stuarts didn't want you to model because then you wouldn't be theirs.* Not that she was ever theirs to begin with. *Stuarts left when you needed them. But I did*

the leaving, she thought as her smile faded. *I do the leaving.*

"I'm too old for that anyway." It was something she had never said in her life. And in the reflection of the twinkling white lights, perhaps she did look a bit older than she had when she first walked on the elevator that morning. She turned to face him. "How old do you think I am?" It was the first time she had really wanted to know. Perhaps the first time in a while she had the opportunity to hear the truth, because she knew he would tell her.

"Um, I'm not very good at guessing ages."

"That's okay."

"I've heard that women really get upset about this."

"It's okay," she whispered, and put her hand on his shoulder. She noticed he began breathing faster, and took her hand away.

Stu swallowed hard, "Well, my mom is forty-three, but you look a lot closer to my oldest sister, who is twenty-two. So I would say maybe...thirty?"

So she looked thirty. She was the same age as Stu's mom but still looked thirty. That was what she had been shooting for, wasn't it? Men wanted youth and beauty. So she looked as if over a decade of her life had never occurred. Which decade would that be? She had certainly lived every day of it. Which men had she not actually been with? Every person she had been with made her into who she was, sitting in that little box between the thirty-first and thirty-second floors. Maybe she had put too much effort into trying to look like life had been soft for her.

"Am I close?" asked Stu. He had picked up his backpack and began to pull at the string again. *He told me the truth*, she thought. *And he is really worried about hurting my feelings. They probably all start out this way. Do some of them stay like this?* She was startled by the thought. She looked over at Stu, still tugging anxiously, and smiled.

"Stu," Zelda replied, "you are pretty damn close."

At that moment, they heard a faint voice from above call, "Hey, hello...can anybody hear me?" They both jumped up.

"Hell yes we can hear you!" screamed Zelda. "And it's about goddamned time somebody showed up! Now will you please get this thing moving?"

"Just calm down, ma'am," the faint voice replied. "We'll have you out soon enough. The elevator attendant in there knows what to do so just follow his instructions."

They smiled at each other.

Cotton-Sturdy Sister

I stood and watched you browse the racks at Feline's Basement yesterday.

Tossing your silky bobbed hair, chattering about philosophy and business classes, you considered paying more for a linen blouse than I spend on food in a week.

A little girl with long dark pigtails skipped down the aisle behind you, humming a tune, reminding me of a girl I once knew.

I remember her sprawled on her tummy on hardwood floors, choosing tiny furniture for tiny people's houses. She could turn cartwheels without stopping all the way around the house, and once rode all the way to New York standing on her head in the back of a station wagon.

I met her every year at 3:00 a.m. on Christmas Eve, I on the big couch and she on the love seat. Her slender face peeked out from under blankets, bathed in the glow of colored lights. We held early Saturday morning vigils together, worshipping Smurfs and Pop-Tarts.

On the bow of the sailboat, we sang commercials in full voice. I watched her spiral across countless living rooms, then stages, bathed in a singular perfect light. I always wished I could float on my toes.

She conquered the swing set.
Later, standing by my new
hospital bed home and holding my hand,
I didn't have to ask her to be strong for Mom.

She conquered high school.
And even our bathroom brawls over
curling irons did not prepare her
for when he kicked in her car door and threatened her life.
So she clenched her teeth and left for college.

She stands before me now, an elegant woman
in leather boots and wool blazer,
contemplating Master Card or Visa.
"What do you think, should I buy it?
Dry clean only," you notice,
"Anything this delicate and beautiful
would never hold up in the wash."

JENNY REDFIELD

A Longing for Jell-O

I long to drop out of school and go where
I belong, home with friends and family,
Who listen and nod and smile just for me.
Nobody makes me any Jell-O here.
I'm fond of Jell-O; cherry is quite good.
Even the hospitals have it in pale
Shades of brown and gray (though it smells of snails)
And I hardly think it counts as a food.
But even though I long to run home to
All I know and dance among the crimson
Bananas, clouds and frowns and piccolos,
I won't. My home can be horrible, too.
My family yells and thinks it is fun
To deny me Jell-O, with marshmallows.

The Chris Summer

That summer
last summer
I stood outside
a semi-slutty
sorta-greasy
fast food joint
with heavy pools
in my shoes and
dirty spray on
my ankles and
my knees and
tried to look up

but you
were in
my way
as always
and you

were tall
so tall
that I ground
one hand
deeper and harder
into my jacket
pocket and
stood higher
still on
tippy-toed
grimy feet
grasping your
shoulder and
looking up
past lazy-cashed
eyes

looking up

but all I could
see was you
not god
but you

and you

Always said I was the smart one.

FRANK MARQUARDT

Totally

I spit out the
window
and then:
Girls, let me tell you
some something.
"Your animal self is involved."
She responds, "that's
really cool," and
looks directly at her.
"It's intellectual, really,"
she says with her hand
smoothing back her hair
"That's more like
notoriety," with her hand
on her cheek.
(this is Ann, this is Jennifer,
this is Jim)

DAMON DORSEY

*Three Years After Wishing Me Dead,
My Ex-Lover Asks Me Out For Drinks*

Sitting at a table on the patio at
Gino's, she orders two more beers and
threatens to dance naked if I don't
crack a smile. I smile, jump a
little as someone squeals to a stop

in traffic, and ask her if she's still
got the ring I gave her five years
ago. "Yeah, you still got yours?"
I can't tell her I hocked it in West
Texas for gas and cigarettes. "Yeah,
tucked away in a safe place," and I

can't say it isn't. It might be on a
hand that's being held or running soft
across a pale shoulder. She gives the
waitress her Visa card and tells me
bill collectors ring her phone off
the hook, says she just moved to a

smaller place, needs time to catch up.
I take a drink and hope the ring's not
on a hand shaking with worry over where
the rent money's gonna come from or
how to get the cat spayed before it
drops another litter. Maybe it's spending

time with someone who won't strike
matches on it or throw a bag of tacos
through the screen door. "Wanna come
see my new apartment?" she asks.

"There's a twelve-pack in the fridge
and I get HBO for free this weekend."
I say sure. She smiles, picks up her

bottle and puts her hand on my leg.
I force a weak smile and for a second,
hope that ring got melted down and
made into part of a silver tea service
on a shelf somewhere, out of
the business of hands forever.

WILLIAM GILLESPIE

Nice Police

O.

Nice police are
Sneaking down on
Mice through woodwork
Creaking in the night

I.

He was exquisite in tone and technique
I burrowed lonely broke hungry and freaked
Under this glacier grey icicles leaked
Nothing I squeaked was in tune with the creak

I was atypical he was unique
He was my intellect me his physique
Systemic structure we elements tweak
Gazing now upwards now fixedly weak

I am composing sweet havoc to wreak.
Now I illuminate formerly bleak

II.

I am obtuse whereas she is oblique
Singing invoking a welcome critique
Basic relief mapped in chocolate batik
Palette of tactile timbres we seek

Silence we generate feeds our mystique
White squares we speak in black circles we creak
Tuning the creak to community speak
Gazing now upwards now fixedly meek

We are composing sweet havoc to wreak
Now i irradiate formerly weak

III.

Artfully the
Creak fell up to
Harmonize the
Creak and thus enabled me to
speak the word relationship again

with shoes like these

i will walk over buildings of arches and gilding in shoes
like these like these. i will stalk through the mist with my
doctors assisting with shoes like these with shoes. i will
run like a thunderstorm rend streets asunder with shoes like
these with these. i'm preparing for anarchy barnstorm the
lock key with shoes like these with like. testdrive survival
for culture's revival with shoes like these shoes like.
get so much stronger with legs so much longer with shoes like
these shoes these.



REUNION TOUR

DAMON DORSEY

DON GLASS

December

I watched the sun retire today,
ease down to scorch the ember sky,
and melt into the earth that in morning
gave it birth...the ruler of the azure dome
ethereal, the clockwork god, the holy eye.

And there the mighty star dissolved
and mingled liquid fire with cold stone.
The rocky bones of the planet
caged the light, the divine heart,
and all was blurred and bent...
amusement park fun-house distortion.

A burning tongue of hopeful flame
had swelled the tear in my eye...
I saw your face and spoke your name,
and wondered, wished only to know
if somewhere, somehow, away from here
your shadow grew like mine
and did you bid the same moon welcome?

JAMES "IVY" RICHARDSON

Retro: the 40s

From Kunta to Alex, from slave to superstar.
Our nation, our great nation has come so far.
We came to this land with our hands filled with cotton.
Now we're dancin' away Broadway, with our feet non-stoppin'
Everyone is joyous, because the war is finally over,
So now we work for our infants, instead of our dogs named Rover.
What am I talking about? I'm talking about the baby boom!
All across the nation a child bears the mother's womb.
In the meantime we listen to the blues and jazz,
And we court the women with all the class.
In Church we praise the Lord while sitting in the pews.
In concerts we honor the great Langston Hughes.
Listen to the beat, listen to the horn blow,
But hey, we can't disregard the bass and the cello.
The dance, the music, the African soul.
In my heart, these things take a great toll.
The 40s: By far this is the best generation,
And I'll say it again with no hesitation.
You can't stop this love, you can't break this bond!
Even though we have the Uncle brothers: Sam and Tom.
I love the forties, and I always will,
But I'm through playing my hand, so now it's your deal.

Black woman, Black man: walk proud, stand tall!
For if we don't walk by faith, we don't walk at all.

RYAN McRAE

D-A-N-I-E-L's tunes

"Hey" or "Daniel!" never got his attention,
Instead, you'd have to throw a crumpled
piece of paper or snowball.
His voice sang in an unintentional key.
When he started his car, the oldies station
blasted away.
Timeless classics...all the time—
Daniel never learned the words to "Hound Dog."

We walked downtown in late September. He
looked quizzically at the whistling man passing us by.
Daniel asked me who the man wanted to kiss.

For me, a sunset's symphony drowned in the
dissonance between trucks, trains, jackhammers,
rock-n-roll, car horns in the key of F,
shouts, cries, complaints,
and thunder; the word "quiet" always meant
solitary or alone.

We drank coffee in my apartment.
I noticed his titan hands that
enveloped the mug. He somehow wore my
grandfather's knuckles; they were worn and strong.
Daniel walked over to my roommate's closet,
pulled out the guitar,
and played an out of tune version of "Fire and Rain."
I set the coffee down before I spilled it. (Wave of a hand),
"How did you learn that song?"
He shrugged his shoulders, continued to the chorus
and said, "Practice."

"Hey" or "Daniel!" never got his attention,
Instead, you'd have to throw a crumpled
piece of paper or snowball.
His voice sang in an unintentional key.
When he started his car, the oldies station
Daniel danced to the vibrations on walls
and the soles of his feet. He appreciated
the bass control more than anything,
but always had to ask me the style.
If you asked his name,
he spelled it out because his voice didn't
serve him well. And when society screamed in his face,
he didn't turn his head;
he simply closed his eyes.

*Called Home for Lunch On a
Saturday in July*

Down the street,
my father mowed his precious lawn.
His skin, nearly amusing,
bright cherry like an escaped
circus clown's nose.
Farther into the swelter,
his flesh
seared, glared, boiled.
It brought tears to my eyes
and sweat to his face.
The lawn, a cathedral: holy, meticulous, alive.
My father, its sexton,
never left its side.
And on Sunday he sat in a lawn chair,
beside it; this was his time for worship.
My father's flesh, a deep scorch crimson,
made him hard to stand next to
and his touch—painful.

ERICK B. KANDL

Hot Dogs

finding a bandage
in a hot dog,
muddy football practices
with my white pants
and Nike spikes on,
my car's not starting
because the starter didn't work,
the smell of soap
as I wash my dog,
checking under the bed
after seeing a scary movie,
ice skating on the pond
waiting for the ice to break,
sitting in the corner
trying to remember what I did wrong,
the knife-like edge of a seat-belt
digging into my sunburned chest,
slicing my five-year-old hand
on the rim of a broken cookie jar,
winning homecoming
for once in two years,
stepping barefoot through the grass
onto a slyly-hidden bumble bee,
the boogie man
in charge of the basement
but only at night,
the glorious gridiron
smelling like manure
after three days of rain,
making snow angels outside
after it snowed in '79,
driving home late at night
the streets almost barren,
walking to first hour
feeling as if I were still in bed

begging just for five more minutes of sleep,
playing with my fire truck
as little chief for a week,
rappelling down Castle Rock
God was I scared,
the back seat of my car
with Amy after the movie,
last time I cried
Only a few tears though,
the grave sight of my grandfather
on New Year's Day,
I remember the hot dogs grandpa and I ate
at Wrigley Field.

PETER BIRK

Weekend in Chicago

The stormy smell of stew hissing and rising off the stove. Red and rancid, unholy in the least. Second night here on our journey through Chicago and I'm already broke. Mike is cooking something, garlic and dried tomatoes bubbling over gas, which is metered so carefully here. ComEd has his way and the Windy City looms silently over us, pressing unseen fingers to the walls of my heart. Mike is mincing the garlic on a plate, carefully, like he's cutting coke.

Day—Loose on the streets of Chicago. Don't look up; they've covered the sky here, fenced it in with concrete and steel. Concrete and steel all around, concrete and steel for miles, everything whirls about here, cogs in some fantastic machine, I grew up in green fields under the everpresent eye of the sun, and there was a playground nearby, and on the merry-go-round, I got stoned for the first time at the ancient age of fourteen, and someone started the merry-go-round a-spinnin', and I watched the shadows of the handlebars rotate with clockwork precision in tiny circles while the big blue and yellow merry-go-round whirled on and on, and now in the face of Chicago, the face of this man-made monster, my merry-go-round broke down, and I'm trembling, naked and excited amid these cogs of steel, as Chicago roars its challenge to me amid the nervous bleating of the squad cars and the squealing of the El.

Mike is carefully taking the tomatoes out of the pan and placing them on a plate with the garlic. He licks his fingers tenuously. June is bustling around him, touching him lightly on the hips and back, sending tremors through my shiftless nervous soul, as she slides by, washing the dishes in the sink. June won't eat what we're having; she exists on a fat-free diet or something. She's reading the directions on a box and clanging pots on a gas stove. Mike and June are fascinated by food; I can care less.

Night—First night here, been in the city for two, maybe three hours. Mike and I drove up here so Mike could see June and so I could get a taste of Big City life. I've had three beers, two Anchor Steams with a great head and a glass of Double Diamond (?) I'm beginning to forget. The bar is Ten Cat, pool tables and an ancient Space Invaders game nestle among retro 50s furniture and Mexican lounge act music.

Mike has broken up some Gorgonzola cheese amid the tomato and garlic. He's put the pasta in the pan and sprinkled some olive oil on top of it, and there's that gleam in his eye, like the way he looks when he's really getting into some history or commentary for his latest paper. June is on the phone. Mike takes a bite from a pecan loaf we bought this morning at a Caribbean bakery a few blocks over after having coffee (at a dollar for two cups!) at a little place around the corner. He turns and smiles at me, his teeth gnawing and gnashing the bread.

Night—The Artful Dodger. Girl in leather checks our cards at the door. A Simpsons pinball game flashes a baneful warning before it tilts. 4th beer now, something German on tap. Money is trickling out fast. The Bartender mixes a drink, drops a glo-stick inside then slides it down the bar. My mind's tripping, flipping, spinning, just the whole concept of being trapped in this endless maze of concrete and steel who can love you like I do? trapped with no one but Mike to lead me out, and sure we're friends, he's the best friend I got, there's some fine line I'm just not able to find, but he's up here with June now, he's stopped smoking just for this weekend so he wouldn't smoke around her, fucking dedication, man, lying on the floor of her apartment, trying to sleep, tracing my fingers along the lines of the beautiful polished hardwood

beneath me, listening to the creaks and giggles from their room next to me, chewing my fist to keep from crying out, I got some stories to tell as I learn to walk a tight-rope called fidelity and dark bars with meaningless graffiti scrawled on the walls the more expensive the bar the more meaningless it gets, like now we're at Phyllis's, five bucks at the door, \$2.75 for a fuckin' Miller, Jesus, man, that's a domestic! And then there's twenty million people crowded into this little 2x2 bar and the band we came to see we can't because we're packed in like cattle and I'm just looking at the tombstones on the T-shirt of the guy in front of me, if I move my head slightly I can see one of the members of the band, just his head and he's playing a sax and the music is good but stupid and this insane girl next to me is dancing and bouncing and rubbing up against Mr. Tombstone who doesn't seem to mind and I'm laughing, it hits me how stupid this all is, so stupid it's funny, which is the latest trend in City Art.

Day—Buying sausage in a Mexican grocery. There is this dinner at school that Mike is going to cook something for. He is speaking to the butcher in Spanish. The butcher in Spanish shakes his head left or right as he agrees/disagrees with what Mike is saying. I'm tapping my foot the Mexicana radio coming over the PA and trying to clear nightmares of Phyllis's out of my head. Mike buys 15 pounds of sausage and 16 dozen tortillas and we leave.

June stands on the street corner as we come out. Traffic whirls by, blue and yellow merry-go-round, cogs in a fantastic machine. We walk down to where we parked. I'm feeling slow, stupid, and afraid; I'm careful not to look up at the sky.

Where I come from the sky is so wide open. I've never realized how enormous it is until now. I'll be sure to kiss it when I get home.

A little Asian kid on a red Schwinn darts out in front of us, I slam on the brakes, screaming inside dear Jesus! Is my insurance up to date? The tires shriek in time to my heart which has popped up my throat to see this outrageous spectacle and the car stops beautifully like a dancer on a dime. The kid gives us the bird and a look that reads, You gotta problem?

"Stupid lump," Mike mutters.

"Loopid sump," June echoes, and they both look at each other

smile and chuckle. I rest my forehead against the steering wheel and groan. The cogs come whirling closer, each tooth razor-sharp, you don't fit in, they spit you back out, battered bloody bruised, none the worse for wear.

There's a building I can see from June's apartment as we eat the tomatoes and noodles. The way it's lit reminds me of the towers I lived in at Southern Illinois University, tallest buildings in the entire area, weighing in at an impressive 17 stories. Well, I hate to tell you, baby, but 17 stories ain't shit anymore. Tallest building in the world sits huddled in the clouds, a lonely giant, peering out west, deep in thought with his head in his hand, a concrete and steel Atlas absent-mindedly holding up the sky, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Day—Name of the place is Uncle Fun's. All of the useless junk in the world heaped up in one big pile, then someone goes through and puts price tags on it. Hysterical. A rubber Mickey Mouse head that squeaks when you squeeze it is eight bucks, while a funny printed pack of cards was a quarter. I laughed my head off in that place as Mike and I perused the junk, each pulling up the stupidest things we could find and laughing at 'em. Spent six bucks there.

We started to get broke so I decided to sell a bag of old books I had in the backseat to get some money. After circling the block for an hour, I found a tiny place to park, and I had to squeeze in while the traffic whirled by, parallel parking under fire, mortar shells pounding all around, and I'm screaming, muttering curses under my breath at the cars coming tearing at me as I struggle to get a 10 foot car in a 10 and 1/2 foot space.

June went off to a boutique as Mike and I walked to the bookstore. "This is just Clark Street," Mike said. I said, "I'd like to see a Gran Prix here." Then we passed a trashcan and emptied our pockets of all the junk we had accumulated that morning.

Inside the bookstore, I cornered a man with a white beard and a blue cap behind the counter. Thrusting the bag of books in his face, I told him I'd like to sell. He motioned to another part of the counter where I set the books down and disappeared into the stacks. Mike had disappeared already, looking for some dead philosopher. I fiddled with some books I might buy if they had been a couple dollars cheaper. Then I went back up to the counter to see how much he was gonna give me, and he just shakes his

head and says, "No, you have nothing that I want," so I snatch up the bag and grab Mike who's reading a book of Hitler quotes and giggling, and we head back out onto the street head towards the car.

That's when I make my fatal mistake and look up. Everything is crowded around, this part here could be the main street of my hometown, you take that and place it in front and behind and next to it and keep going *ad infinitum* and it was like someone had kicked me in the gut, my mouth fell open. Mike bought a birthday party game at Uncle Fun's where you punch out little holes with enclosed metal punch and a little slip pops out and you either do what it says or you give a one minute speech except Mike planned to use it as a drinking game and make the person do a shot if he refused, and he pulled it out to show me, and the enclosed metal punch popped out and skittered away. I watched it as it rolled into the muddy gutter, bouncing and hopping and then it just disappeared! The sucker just vanished! Absorbed by the City, slipping into concrete and steel like steam into the air, clouds in the rolling sky back home, and I just threw the books into the trunk and we went off to find his girlfriend and the City whirled big blue and yellow around us.

One of June's roommates has a rodent in a cage, and it happily bobs around rubbing against the metal, I'll let you guess what I'm thinking of....

CHECKS CASHED MONEY ORDERS screaming from buildings by the El. Soldiers—don't stare, they probably have their arms with 'em CHECKS CASHED the guy in the gorilla suit and some hipsonic youths screaming at him the old guy with two dogs and a cane on the corner mumbling to himself MONEY ORDERS the squealing brakes of buses, albino dinosaurs wading through a primordial morass of cars, bikes, and pedestrians the sullen look of Lake Michigan with its hungry seagreen eyes watching the children of the playground, laughing on green grass the ashtray CHECKS CASHED MONEY ORDERS in the back seat of my car is missing This El stop MONEY ORDERS was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright This one has a giant red CHECKS CASHED pagoda, 'cause we're in the middle of Little China Town June is a nice person CHECKS she reminds me a lot of the Yoons, second CASHED generation Koreans back home, the faith June professes as car horns blare in my ear and beatbox music is echoing from somewhere SE

CAMBIAN CHEQUES But what would June say OPEN if I told her about the other June HOTEL TRANSIENTS WELCOME the other June I saw Mike with the past couple of weeks MONEY ORDERS the new girl he had been holding the same way these weeks while we were at school and he was away from this machine and Wrigley Field is on Addison SE CAMBIAN I see Mike and June together now holding each other in the kitchen DA CUBS I see the look in their eyes CASHED a simple beat of rhythm between the two DA potholes are big in the Big City too I see the look MONEY and it reads CHECKS CASHED MONEY ORDERS SE CAMBIAN CHEQUES OPEN who can love you like I do?

I was here once before, Standing on a corner with my hands in the empty pockets of my coat, looking up and down the street and the houses parked side by side with military precision and the people whirling by everywhere and the power lines crossing in chain-link patterns above my head, waiting for Mike to settle an account inside, smoking a last cigarette for the road, I realize that I have been in this very spot sometime before, and I looked up and down this street. The memory strains, the whirling engine inside kicks into a higher gear, my eyes search frantically for another clue the piece that finishes the puzzle, and my hands clench 'til the knuckles gleam white inside my pockets. Without Mike, I am alone, and the city crowds me even closer against the side of the building, away from the street that beats with the rapid rabid pulsing of some dark heart, jets of people, cogs, rushing in and out, day and night. I see Mike and June together, holding each other, giggling, and I put my hand to my mouth to stifle a cry of terror, as I look frantically up and down the street, trying to place myself somewhere, find footing on the bleached bones of the concrete sidewalk. I wonder if without Mike if I would be alive to experience this, this heart-stopping vertigo as everything moves with a purpose and a reason, except me, except the racing pounding of my heart, he means that much to me, and I want to run but there's not even a fence that I can climb, when I was a kid there was always a fence to climb, to get away, it was one of the first skills I learned, climbing chain-link, gripping it with small fingers, the toes of little sneakers fitting perfectly as you made your escape, but the hands are too clumsy now, the feet too large for a pup that's still growing, and the fence is too high, you can't get away from it. The main axle broken, the merry-go-round sits cocked to one side, like a huge paper plate some giant has eaten off of

and then forgotten. Without Mike I am alone, and I have been here before and I will be again.

I'm sitting in the coffee shop on the corner, smoking cigarettes and sipping black coffee, waiting for Mike and June to buy groceries for dinner, tomatoes and pasta. As long as I don't look out the window where a drizzle falls and cars whiz past against the city backdrop of grey and black, as long as I look inward at the coffee shop, at the tables and chairs, mugs and cigarette haze, I'll be caught in the familiar and things will be calm for a while.

I'm trying to trace it back, nail my finger on what went wrong while the lucidity still holds. They told me there's something wrong with my mind, the way it connects and organizes data. Mine skips and makes horrifying jumps, juggles past and present like a vaudeville performer. I can remember being young and the wrong words would come out of my mouth, turning the names of friends into baby talk. So I grew quiet and watched, watched my friends and their easy lives, communicating and relating.

Slowly I built a life I could lead, found roles I could play, until some part of me tore it down, tore it all down, urban renewal in the deep furrowed ghettos of my mind, leaving me to sit slack jawed in the ashes of what I was. I'd slowly rebuild, only to have it fall apart again. The older I became, the more destructive it got.

When they told me that they had drugs, little brown pills I could take, I threw my head back and laughed; curled in the easy chair of the doctor's office, holding the tattered sleeves of my shirt, I laughed and laughed, then told them no, because that was what they taught me to say.

When I thought I could handle it no more, when I thought it would be wonderful to evaporate into pure color and sound and the voices, the huge creaking wheel, a rest, Mike stumbled into my life.

Actually stumbled into our room at school, where I sat at my desk, pulling the razor blade out of its paper sheath. I had no note; anyone I cared about would understand.

Mike talked to me. I can't honestly remember what we said, but that night we stopped being roommates and became friends.

He's hard to describe, Mike is. He's probably the most stable and upbeat person I know. His humor is contagious, and when he talks, people listen, and when he talks, he makes sense. I started trying to emulate him, learn how he thought and order my

mind in that way.

I rebuilt again, and managed to stay intact long enough to fall in love. My Love, she's so full of light and life, her warmth fills me and she became another pillar for my life, making the balancing act a little less difficult.

Now the picture shatters, the shards sticking into the souls of my bare feet, my own soiled hands as I watch with open mouthed horror Mike's infidelity, the simple ease and grace at which he goes about it, the world begins to spin and crack apart as I understand all too well, all too easy my hidden shame My Love will never know, as a taxi goes by, a pale bus and people laughing crying singing people all moving to that famous dance called the Chicago and I rub my eyes I'm outta coffee and can't afford anymore when Mike's hand is on my shoulder.

"C'mon," he smiles, perfect white teeth, "Let's go eat."

I can't read the graffiti on the corner of Belmont and Sheffield must be written in something loosely based on English Maybe we'll get someone up here to translate and I look down at my own soiled hands and a pair of sleekly clad bikers whiz past and then we pass them as the light turns green I've tried to look every single person in the face there's so many of them cogs in a fantastic machine teeth nobody shows you any teeth smiles are for friends Demon Dogs and DePaul students Democrats and Gap kids saw Mike in his natural environment when we went to a restaurant and sat at the bar drinking with the owner looking up at tall buildings concrete and steel through the sunroof of the car where's that ashtray? You can't even see the top of that one from the back seat They fenced in the sky, keeping it from touching the soil there's a submarine in the canal, amid the driftwood I look down at my own soiled hands as I sit at the bar waiting for Mike and June to say goodbye I open my mouth to speak to say the words that will snap them apart like when a coyote will chew through a paw that's been caught in a trap and June's seen me she's turned to me with an eyebrow raised waiting like a child who's unaware of the train that's about to fly down the tracks she's standing on and my palms itch horror grows in Mike's eyes behind his wire rimmed glasses while the buzz saw rush of a thousand whirling teeth builds to an insane chorus, a fevered pitch pulsing behind my eyes and his are locked when I hear in the distance of his baby-blues fenced in behind metal and glass the same reverberations and shrieks of love and betrayal, of youth,

life, experience and guilt you love your brother always and the insane dispatcher in the back of my mind frantically throws a switch and that juggernaut of a coal train flies past my mouth to hit my gut so I draw the breath and say, "I had a wonderful time, June, thanks for letting us crash at your place," and Mike is oddly quiet as he threads our way through traffic and out of town and I turn and lean my face against the glass masts against a red brick factory I can feel the merry-go-round whirl about inside me concrete and steel MENTENGASE ALEJADO DE LA PUERTA cogs in some fantastic machine.

KELLI EASTMAN, SR.

I'm at the Bar

I'm at the bar
waiting for my drink
Amaretto Stone Sour
without the cherry
the straw is thin
the ice is cold
the glass is sweating
beads of crystal clear
wetness trickle down
you are near me
near enough to touch
and so I do
with my body
I press against you
your crooked smile
and see-through stare
give me an invitation
to dance
we move, entangled
like the smoke from my
cigarette
I can feel your heart
beating while mine
I feel breaking
like the glass
that holds my drink
I'm shattered in pieces
left on the floor
for you to collect and
repair.

ANGELLA SOROKINA

Parting

Move slow, hurt me slow, let me cry.

Tell me a story about some girl in the woods
fallen apart into several pieces,
each headed to eternity,
describe me her eyes, in colors,
how her red tears froze on her cheeks.
I want to cry like that.

September's yellow pain and broken benches.
My hands fall on your shoulders, empty,
and skin peels from my body
the color of leaves
and disappears in the autumn rivers.

I see their water run through the woods
full of pieces of broken girls and broken trees.
Tell me you walk on this water like Christ,
back to me. Fish
fin into your feet, bare decayed teeth,
and medusa's burns remind you of kisses.

I wish to explode,
burst out in tears
echoing the girls' cries in the woods,

I wish I'd become a river,

but I fall apart like a dry autumn tree
when a storm separates
its sore roots.

KIMBERLY M. SWARTS

The Tiny World of a Fish Bowl

The eyes of the little black fish
look rapidly over
the colored rocks and
plastic plants
without noticing my hand
pressed against the glass.

As I Walk

As I walk
A black bird slowly hops away
dragging its broken wing.

New Hat Limp with Rain

new hat limp with rain
folds itself into my hand
shedding weathered tears

WILLIAM HICKEY

Touching The Beads

She wanted to touch the beads:
Sunday morning, after rain.

Feeling the cold and quiet,
Palming these symbolic coirts.

Like a Polish wanderer,
Forgiving the things not said.

She knew that every daybreak
Was a birthday

Which settled numbly into your spine
Like mercury.

Leading only back to Sunday mornings'
Grey emptiness,

Forgiving the things not said.

MICHAEL CIANFRANI

the wife

she moved
and pulled her hips
around the kitchen
full with child.

dabbing her face
with a dishcloth
she fell into her chair
and breathed full
holding her stomach.

the night before
she dreamed
of school
and of the paints
and canvas
somewhere downstairs.

she played
and moved the tulips
back and forth
in the vase
on the kitchen table
and breathed full
in their petals.

that morning
she had cut the stems
low toward their base
kneeling in their bed.

she moved
down the stairs
taking a step
at a time

and reached
to turn on the light.

she sat
again to rest
and realized
she still held
the dishcloth
in her hand.



HOW I CAME TO FEAR POLKA-DOTS

DAMON DORSEY

MIMI BAILEY

Rhuembatism

I have ten mini castanets
(my momma says don't)
sewed inside my fingers
(crack your knuckles you'll get)
one by one I flutter and clack them
(big ugly manhands your fingers)
like ten poised cha-cha cantina
(will swell up like beestings)
dancers flirting and swirling petaled skirts
(you'll get arthritis)
arch my hands out like a stretching cat
(or rheumatism)
my knuckles clip clop together my metal discs
(like me)
I suffer from
rhythm of the joints.

Your Mother's Friends

Some are dry
tart and flinty
heady with tropical citrus flavors
trailing floral scents.

The others
rich and buttery
laced with herbs and smoke
tinged with damp earth and plums.

ROMAYNE C. RUBINAS

The Man I Love Holds Another Woman's Newborn

Twelve hundred miles away, a baby
in his arms, the man I love stands in sunlight.
He says: *It's just an ordinary star, considered*

special because it's closer to us than the others.
Held rapt by his face, her infant memory
attaches a new dimension to his voice—

a voice that cradles like the liquid warmth
she was cut from hours before. *That's right,
Little One, play with your feet while you can;*

they only get farther and farther away. Her
mother lies laughing on a hospital bed, begs
the man I love to stop threatening her stitches. Later,

on the phone, he says he wants his own child one day—
when he's done everything else. Occasionally,
he believes me to be the eventual mother.

DIANNA HYDE

Submerging Possible

(you do know that old joke, don't you?)

Some time ago, when I was younger
and less pungent,
I slept over at a friend's house
for the first time.
It took all my nerve
to spend the night
with her.
I was scared
of her mama.

Miss Jones wasn't
as young as
all the other mothers I knew.
She had the
cast-iron air
of skillets and old folks.
She often joked
that my friend was her
change-of-life daughter,
but I didn't know
whether to laugh
at the joke
or not.

Time to bathe,
she told us.
No nasty women on
my clean sheets.
So, I stepped in the bathroom
that smelled of Pine Sol
and yesterday,
looking at the nozzle
that promised cleanliness,

which is next to godliness.
No nozzle...
just a once-shiny faucet
presiding over
a peeling tub.

Hey, I asked my friend,
where's the shower?

My mama don't believe
in showers, she said.
She says that in a house
fulla girls,
you gotta have something
that lets 'em soak.
She says
a woman's got parts
that need to be
submerged
in water,
not just sprinkled
with water.

What could I say?
I ran my bath,
scrubbed myself
to an Ivory innocence,
and sat in the tub
'til long after
I thought
I was clean,
what with me
being a girl
and all.

BLAKE J. ZWEIG

Tickle Me

Will someone tickle me?

Big Wheels
 can you hear me?
Hotrods always flew
 faster than fast could fast it
Little boy
 take me with you

Tell my Gijoes not to shoot me
Watch me kiss a girl
 tippitoed
 on the cheek
Let's build together a Lego kingdom
And juice me up with Flintstone Vitamins

STEVEN THEODORE ZYDEK

Sixth Grade

We played football on the pavement.
The cool kids were the captains.
The cool kids got picked first.
Eleven kids got picked.
I got picked sixth.

The ball went up up and away through the wind and the clouds.
The sun caught my eyes.
My arms met the sky.
My hand touched the ball.
The ball hit the pavement.

I was picked last the next day.

The ball went through the smog and smoke of the shit stained sky
The cloud blocked my eyes.
My arms fell in shit.
My hand grabbed the ball.
The ball kissed my chest.

I was picked first the next day.

After today's game, I went home.
My mother spoke loudly to my father.

She said she got demoted because she forgot to
double check her payroll department.
Some anonymous person of the 18,768,456 people working there
got overpaid 4,000 dollars.
She told me I have it easy at school
and she told me to be popular,
so I get a good job.

but i can't play
football

KAM LIE

Perspective

The child of hippie parents
Kicked out of brownies
Just wanted to be invisible
Dreamed of conformity
Could barely talk to people
Attracted to despair
A hint of gothic
Obsessed about other people's pain
She stares into space
Wicked guarded, wearing her reticence
Looking for ways to transcend the restraints of her reality

WILLIAM R. WEAKLEY, JR.

Skullduggery

In the history of the Kampsville, Illinois, archaeological dig site, no one had ever found a human skull, intact and preserved. And no one deserved to find it more than little Annie Lucas, an eighth-grader visiting from Cincinnati with her classmates on a week-long field trip. For Annie, it was the biggest day of her life, especially since her parents had almost missed the deposit deadline, which would have made her the only girl in the entire class not going on the trip. The endless ridicule of not going would have just killed her.

For days prior to Annie's momentous skull discovery, Mr. Sanstête had been coach and mentor, guiding Annie and the class on proper excavation etiquette and technique. She had been his favorite. He showed her the best places to dig, guiding her hands with his big fat fingers. But by Sunday he was gone. Annie and I went to look for him at his cabin near the dig site. In fact, it was behind the cabin that I convinced her to set up a one-yard-square plot ten paces South of the back door and trowel the soil. She used a shovel for the first few feet, until the ground began to turn grey, then she crouched with her trowel and began scraping away layers of shale. Having not paid attention to the lecture on troweling, I watched Annie skillfully separate layers of clay, searching for clues which might indicate a fertile site. Watching her work, squatting in her baby-blue jeans, my mouth became a dry pâté again, and made me think of third grade.

Annie was a reclusive young girl, but somehow found a way of being in the middle of huge scandals. As a seven-year-old, she constantly had dreams of being in class with no clothes on, giving

an oral presentation of the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving. This particular dream did not visit reality for Annie until the following year, when she indeed gave a speech in Mrs. Nau's third grade class regarding the Pilgrims. She had made a detailed drawing from a picture in the *World Book Encyclopedia* representing the first Thanksgiving Dinner, which she had left by her desk in the third row.

Her report was really rolling until Annie realized her visual aid was not present. I wanted very much to get it for her. Fearing that she had left it at home, Annie ran to her desk, finding the beautifully-rendered crayon and construction paper drawing beside her desk, a corner of it beneath her chair. Relieved, she snatched the paper from under the chair. Much to her surprise, Annie heard a loud, tearing scream from the paper, as the chair decided to yield only half the drawing.

Immediately, tears burst from her sockets and laughter burst from some of the less evolved of her classmates. She retrieved the lacerated segment of paper and walked gingerly to the front of the class, cradling the pieces, to show the sympathetic and half-blind Mrs. Nau what would have been the first Thanksgiving Dinner. Impervious to her pain, young Sean Muldano stuck his Hush-Puppied foot in front of her. She cascaded in slow motion, tears and all, crashing to the industrial carpeted floor.

But this was not enough for the judges of Fate. As she fell, her uniform-plaid skirt caught on the edge of Sean's desk, ripping from her body like a snake hurriedly shedding its skin, so that as her face smacked against the carpeted concrete, every boy and girl in Mrs. Nau's third grade class got a good, long look at the pink bunnies pulled halfway down Annie's immaculately-underpanted bottom.

Laughter gushed forth and echoed around Annie's upturned right ear as she lay on her stomach, still crying but quite dazed. Her left cheek burned against the rough carpet, an occasional tear trickling down and stinging the raw skin. Mrs. Nau had risen from her chair rather slowly, unaware of the severity of the situation. Annie could see her navy-blue, tasseled shoes emerging from behind the big oak desk.

Sean, afraid of repercussions, tossed Annie's skirt over her half-bare ass, then resumed laughing with the others. The coarse wool landed warm and chafing on Annie's exposed skin. She let out a hoarse moan as the heckling died down, ostensibly aware of her position before the class. Her eyes, though, limited by her

recumbent head, began to search for sympathetic souls.

I had always watched from outside the classroom, hoping to gaze undetected. But Annie had blue eyes, eyes that could make your skin melt and your tongue taste like pâté. Sound corny? Hey, I was like any precocious eight-year-old, despite my being twenty-one—and vaguely aware of a male-female companionship which could somehow transcend Sean's contention that girls had cooties—though I am to date the only male to taste pâté in the presence of a young potential love-interest.

At any rate, when her eyes pierced mine, I felt a dry, meaty taste in my mouth and was compelled to act on it. I dropped my dustbroom, sprinted into the classroom, pushed past Mrs. Nau, and gently scooped Annie up, careful not to hurt her face or reveal her little pink bunnies to anyone else. I ran out of the room so fast that we couldn't hear the jeers of "Wedgie Woman!" or the taunts of "Retard Janitor!" and gasps of disbelief that anyone would venture to touch the creature which had provided the morning's entertainment. It was not until I approached the nurse's office that I noticed Annie had put her arms around my waist and was hugging tightly. She healed quickly from her unfortunate debut in public speaking, but I stayed close, just in case.

Annie's next encounter with unwanted publicity occurred in sixth grade, with the arrival of two fleshy protuberances and a most unwanted "friend" who visited every four weeks. While I have nothing more to say about it, the humiliation of starting her cycle before everyone else took several months to live down. And for some inexplicable reason the nickname "Wedgie" mysteriously resurfaced during this period. But Annie could not possibly have known that all of this was a mere warm-up for her big role in the Kampsville Murders.

Back behind Sanstête's bungalow, Annie had been laboring incessantly in a corner of her illegal plot. She didn't want to dig at the main site because nobody ever found anything, other than a couple of arrowheads and shards of clay pottery. Her mentor's backyard, however, was virgin territory, ripe for discovery. The thought of finding something new caused Annie's aching knuckles and stiff fingers to scrape with ardent tempo. Suddenly, her trowel blade made a hollow clink against what happened to be a piece of stone. With vague interest, she maneuvered the blade around the creamy fragment, removing the moist, ashen clay.

Within five minutes, Annie had cleared enough shale to reveal two hollow caverns cut away into the stone. Although she

could not specifically understand why, her fossil was giving her the creeps. With each successive layer cleared from around the remnant, Annie's fear crystallized like precipitate in a petri dish. This was a human skull!

By this time, I had snuck up behind her and yelled "Boo!" and Annie responded by troweling me over the head. I held the skull in place while she continued to dig around it, using her fingernails to dig around the four fragile vertebrae which had remained with the head. As she loosened the final intact piece of bone, she pointed out that the clay was an unusual brown color in the area immediately beneath where the skull had been, while the rest of the soil was a dull gray.

This find was too big to keep secret, but that didn't bother me. While Annie used a soft-bristled artist's paintbrush to clean all the dirt off her prize, I ran the one-hundred yards to the official dig site like a "madolescent" boy: my eyes wide and staring, my arms flapping as though preparing for flight, and my lungs yelling for the whole town to come and see the head that Annie had dug up.

The flock crowded around their new leader as she explained how she'd found the skull. Sean Muldano said he thought it was from the Pélé Terrific Period, which yielded him a tremendous drubbing with wads of clay, and grunts of ridicule. Thank God Annie had no interest in little boys.

What she didn't know was that a concerned custodian killed two birds with one stone to keep her safe and happy. I was very careful, too. No traces.

I have regrets. I have an abnormally large vocabulary. I can read and retain volumes of information. I make bad choices. I see things that aren't there, sometimes. But I did see Sanstête touching Annie, alone in his cabin, with jasmine-scented candles stinking and Barry White on the phonograph. I try not to talk about myself much, but I'm not dumb like everyone keeps saying. A good actor, that's what I am. Nobody knows. I'm just the dumb janitor who drove a busload of kids, and Annie Lucas, to Kampsville, Illinois. The retard who gave Annie her life back.

J. MICHAEL COOK

Changes

Hopping onto a warm bus on a chilly afternoon,
Sitting by your buddy,
Comparing science notes.
Laughing at the class clown,
Spitting at him in jest,
Enjoying the freedom at the end of the day.
Gazing fondly at the girl of your dreams,
Not worrying that she has little inkling of your existence.
Arriving home—
No homework but you have to clean your room.

Crawling into an ancient Pontiac with a broken heater on a
chilly afternoon,
Sitting alone,
Observing traffic, ceaseless and ongoing.
Bitching about the clown in front of you,
Waving the finger at him in anger,
Enduring the dread of tomorrow's responsibilities.
Glaring at the snapshot of the woman you married,
Worrying that she has little inkling of your existence.
Arriving home—
The kids are fighting but at least the house is clean.

RICHARD BLANKENSHIP

Monologuic

i met a traveler from an antique land
who said: one fucking bunch of silos stand
hieroglyphed
by shining silver cobweb and
tiny hairline crack; stand
stark where wood and wallpaper have
kissed and devolved
together—silos stand scattered with
snowflake insouciance
across the fenced and
bounded prairie all the way
one mountain spine to another
stand in the sunlight while green weed
sprout fat and raucous in
their hearts. on wind comes the
grumble. of bug yellow dozers.