The Cauldron accepts submissions from any and all students attending Kalamazoo College. Submissions should be typed and please include an ID number, phone number, e-mail address, and box number with the piece. All submissions will be given a blind reading by our editors. Please place submissions in The Cauldron's mailbox in the basement of Hicks Center. No literary submissions will be returned, but all visual art is returned at the request of the artist. For more information, please contact Kalamazoo College's English Department at 616-337-7043.

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Cover artwork: On a Wagon in Russia by Rebekah Merkel.
**THE EDITORS**

Allison C. McGough  
Editor-in-Chief

Allison is preparing to leave Kalamazoo College and move back to Weezie-anu, her home state, where she hopes to take her shoes off and make herself a sandwich. Al is considering a career in law which surprises no one who knows her. This is because she has spent the past four years perfecting her ability to lie to large groups of people by steadfastly denying that she actually did the homework, finished her SIP, or is taking Oral Camps.

Antonio Boessenkool  
Art Editor/Literary Editor

Antonio is no stranger to editing. She was the Editor-in-Chief of last year’s The Atlas and her tough-as-nails reporting has often found a place on the front page of The Index. Antonio recently received a Peabody award for her investigative article exposing a ring of five-year old child laborers who were being forced to make office supplies for other and larger sweatshops.

Sara Quinn Rivara  
Literary Editor

You ain’t seen nothing like the Mighty Quinn and if you tell Sara that she’ll probably collapse your trachea. Aside from being an accomplished poet, Sara has long been considered one of the “darlings” of the English Department. In fact, Gail Griffin was recently quoted as saying, “Yes, Rivara . . . she’s one of the darlings of the English Department.” Sara handed in her 167 page SIP this quarter and told reporters that, “I really hope they enjoy that poem. Maybe one day, I’ll write another one.”

Tom Burns  
Literary Editor/Token Penis

Although he thinks quotas are dangerous, Tom would like to thank Allison for letting him be “The Guy” on staff this year. Tom’s duties as “The Guy” included defending his gender from any and all attacks, wincing at the mention of feminine hygiene products, and wistfully wondering what he’d look like with breasts. Tom is a Senior, an English major, and a D-cup in his dreams.

**EDITOR’S NOTE**

This magazine is for all of us who love art in any form. From all of us on the editorial staff, we thank everyone who found time to submit some of their art. We thank the infamous English Department for letting us advertise in class and on email, for gently “persuading” students in creative writing classes to submit, and Professor Ellen Caldwell for entrusting the magazine to our team. We thank everyone who reads, admires, and remembers the art of Kalamazoo College students. We also thank Professor Tricia Hennessy and Ben Block, student designer, from the Design Center at Western Michigan University for helping to design and publish our package.

And personally, I thank Antonio Boessenkool, Tom Burns, and Sara Rivara, the editors, for their time, brains, and objectivity.

To encourage submissions and to give students an extra incentive to submit really good work on time, we organized a contest divided into two categories: visual and literary art, and accepted all entries that fit within one or the other. The winner of each category would be awarded a whopping $50. Many wonderful pieces were submitted, including essays, poetry, speeches, creative imitations, photographs, sketches, and watercolors. After narrowing down the pile of entries, we then persuaded English and visual arts professors to help judge the “best” work from the separate categories. We especially thank Professors Gail Griffin, Bruce Mills, Diane Seuss, and Tricia Hennessy from Western Michigan University for taking the time to help decide the winners even though they all found it extremely difficult to select the “best” work from so many different visual mediums and literary forms. In any event, the votes are in and we are pleased to announce the winners of this year’s The Cauldron Visual and Literary Art Contest: Emily Crawford won for her personal essay entitled “The Shombaa,” and Rebekah Merkel won for her painting entitled “On a Wagon in Russia.” Both are examples of how well Kalamazoo College students can create.

We stretched the page limit to include as many entries as possible in this edition without going over our allocated budget. Without further interruption, please find a quiet space, read on, and recognize the brilliance of your classmates, friends, and students.

Happy Reading,

Allison C. McGough  
Editor-in-Chief
Editor-in-Chief
Allison C. McGough

Art Editor
Antoine Boessenkool

Literary Editors
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WHERE I COME FROM
In the small yellow-walled classroom, a roomful of antsy fifth graders are waiting for the clock to click to 2:30 PM. It is only 1:00 now, twenty minutes after recess. Now it’s time to settle in to social studies. There’s a war currently going on.

Facing the neatly lined square U of desks, the cheerful blonde teacher announces that currently, in the Middle East, American men and women are fighting Iraqi soldiers for oil wells. “They live in tents in the desert and get only 5 gallons of water a day to drink and wash with,” she tells the kids. The news announcers tell their parents, “Saddam Hussein is not retaliating; Saddam Hussein is firing more missiles on US base camps; Saddam Hussein is firing missiles into his own villages; The Iraqis under Saddam Hussein’s command are bombing Kuwaiti oil wells.”

The fifth graders do not understand this. They only notice the yellow ribbons around trees to welcome the soldiers home. At recess, they fight over the swings and monkey bars. They wrestle away the nerds from their favorite hangouts. But in the neat square U, they are there to learn about the war. The narrow windows provide a glance of a waving, shaking willow tree. One girl is thinking about the war. The narrow windows provide a glance of a waving, shaking willow tree. One girl is thinking about the war. Her mother grew up over there. Whenever the swirling script of Arabic appears on the TV screen, she asks her mother, “Read it.” Usually it is the phrase on an Arabic flag. The mother and her daughter are Middle Eastern, but not Arabic. The girl laughs at Saddam Hussein for throwing missiles with silly names.

But he also seemed scary. What if he threw a silly-named missile at her house? The girl and her sister had pretended to call Saddam Hussein on her Garfield phone. They called him dumb, and mean. He offered them candy. Candy? “Let’s give him poison candy, or some special nice-person candy,” offered the girl. When Saddam ate the candy, he realized what a big bully he was.

In the yellow room, the blonde teacher offers a proposal. “Do any of you guys have stories to share, anything you don’t understand, any questions?” One boy’s brother is a soldier. The girl really wants to share something, but she knows no soldiers. In the solid U, the teacher will be able to spot her. She will tell of how her sister and she put scary Saddam in his place. She raises her hand. “Yes?” The girl tells her story, but the words aren’t comforting her, just clunking on the tiled center of the U. Everyone can see her, everyone can hear her. The kids squirm in their seats, laughing and giggling. The teacher is trying to quiet the class, as the girl hunches in her seat and covers her reddening face. Her words are so stupid sometimes, she thinks. Now they are laying in the center of the U in a rocky pile, free for the
taking. She tries to pick up a few, but the floor has already been swept clean.
Soon they will drop in the night, like silent bombs.
It is 2:33 PM. She is walking out the deep black brown metal doors,
surrounded by backpack-laden children. They bound down concrete stairs, to
waiting yellow buses and parents. The girl sees her mother. “Hey! Saddam
Hussein lover!” a boy screams as she reaches for the car door handle.

He liked blood sausage—a throwback to his childhood—
and it nauseated me, which gave him one more reason to eat it.
On Sundays I woke up to the smell
of deep iron, the scent
that brings the carrion birds circling.
I stumbled into the kitchen, the greasy pan
in the sink already drying to a crust,
half of the fat curve already on his plate,
grains of dark muscle spilling out of the severed
end, the whole thing doused in blatant red catsup.
Sure you don’t want any, he asked, waving
his meaty hand in the direction of the turgid,
sodden leftovers and laughing at my expression.
He ate it, his mouth open as he chewed, breathing
only when the food was gone, and then left the dishes
for me. I did not eat for the rest of the day. No.
I swallowed myself in great burning gulps.
I walked through the airplane.
It was filled with tourists
And Puerto Ricans
On their way home.

As I took my place,
Row 26 seat c
I wondered which I was.

I heard Oscar the Grouch
Saying: Uno, Dos, Tres,
My native Spanish replaced
By Sesame Street.

I recited hola and adiós,
Even in my head I had a white accent.
Deceived by the color of my skin.

I walked towards my Grandma,
Waiting at Gate 34 C.
"Benedición" she said, "que dioses bendiga!"
I pressed my face against her stomach and was home.

Grandma always used to tell me I had mother's temper, father's smile, and
her webbed toes. As a little girl, I loved comparing our feet on hazy Saturday
afternoons when everything was closed for Shabbat, a luxury enhanced by
our afternoon nap. The two of us would lie side by side on her bed with
grandfather's scent within the sheets. Grandma would breathe quietly, melodically,
her reading glasses moving along to the hum of her breath. Her
wrinkled feet would peer at me through the comforter.

When I tired of imagining the past, I would watch the flickering
designs of the marmalade sun dance upon the walls. The rays cast themselves
upon barred windows installed when grandfather was no longer present to
lull the house to sleep. Sometimes, while Grandma slept, I would trace the
numbers on her arm with cautious fingers. I didn't understand the sorrow that
had stripped Grandma's childhood to bare bones piled in unmarked graves.
Sometimes, faint murmurs escaped her lips while she dreamt. I imagined that
she was wishing that Grandfather would come back to her. His sturdy shoes
would stain her waxed floors when he would step hurriedly through the door.

When I became particularly restless, I breathed along with Grandma as
I buried my sunburnt feet beneath her withered ones.

When Grandma would finally wake up, her smile would warm
me and fill the space between us. Ahh tireleh mummahleh, at rayevah! She
would ask quietly, as her fingers would carve melodies drowsily onto my
forehead. Her laughter over my funny faces wrapped itself tightly around my
waist. Grandma would then stand up to make dinner, leaving me to stare at
family photographs standing on her dresser, the sun's rays shining golden
crowns just above the frames.

I grew anxious for the days that trampled past us, when
afternoon naps were interrupted by the packing and preparations for my
family's departure. Grandma's sadness swept over my body during our
final embraces. The good-byes never came out just right when father, mother
and I were bundled within the steady hum of a taxicab. Grandma would stand next to the gate, holding onto a fence post tightly, her feet planted
firmly within a wilting rose garden. As we would drive down the street, her
figure would rise and fall as I watched her through the taxi's window, her
body becoming forlorn and distant.

"Oh honey, are you hungry?"
The sky is gray. When will I see the huge cloudless blue above me, gathering intensity as it bulges up and away from the earth?

The night is quiet. When will I hear the drums, the fear of the drums, the breath of the hot moist air in the throat of the wind, in the throat of the frogs, the crickets, the fear of the bush baby’s agonized screams?

The road is smooth. When will I feel the vibration of my bones and watch the tall red dust-stained grass through dirty washes of water, cling with both hands to the door handles?

The squirrel runs up the tree. When will I chase the soft ghostly owl of the building, wipe the mongoose’s urine off my shoe, beg my angry cat out of the mango tree before the storm?

The wind is cold. When will I ride in the back of the truck, feeling the furnace blast from the Sahara and licking the dust off my teeth?

This is Michigan, where I was born. When will I go home?

The room is just as I left it. I bite my lip, feeling the heaviness of the dark cherry wood and the presence of the girl who occupied this space. Familiar smells drift down the stairs from the kitchen, and the barking dogs signal the beginning of my stay. Upstairs, my family is waiting for me. “You cut your hair again, huh?” I nod and sit down at the dinner table, waiting for the evening to fall. A stranger has come to visit.

Alone in the dark of night, I pull down the soft floral-print comforter to expose pastel pink sheets and a matching bed ruffle. They all come off. The mahogany jewelry box on the nightstand finds a new home, and the stuffed horses and cat journey from the bed to the top of the bookshelf. The boy inside moves out of hiding. The others have gone to sleep, but I prowl around in the bathroom upstairs searching for something to dress my twin bed. I return to the room holding blue baseball sheets that were once my brother’s. They go on first, followed by a white cotton blanket and a forest green checkered throw. In bed, I lay my head on a clean white pillowcase.

I’m enjoying the boyhood I never lived—the soft nights under blue sheets dreaming in my longjohns. I look forward to growing up, from my voice changing to the very first razor I buy. I ache for the day when my body matches my gender. My chest will be flat and smooth with fine brown hairs. My muscles will be firm and strong, and my face will be angular and kind with eyes that are finally at peace.
Look both ways before you cross the street; don’t hide in the round clothes racks at Sears; make your bed before you leave the house; don’t play with the boys next door and if you do, come right home when one of you gets hurt; finish your homework before watching television; vacuum the carpet so that it leaves straight tracks; empty the dishwasher and don’t put the dishes back in the cupboard wet; dust under the nick-nacks not just around them; don’t hold your fork like a shovel; if you want to leave the table then eat everything on your plate; chew with your mouth closed; don’t point; don’t stare; high-top tennis shoes don’t go with dresses; keep the basketball away from the flower beds; don’t do gymnastics in the house; don’t sit with your legs apart; this is how to bait a hook; this is how to cast; this is how to hold a bat; this is how to catch a grounder; this is how to use a sewing machine; hem your pants with thread, not electrical tape; clean your room; don’t hit your sister; don’t annoy your sister; don’t talk back; don’t argue with your grandparents; wear your hair down; let your hair be curly; close the blinds before you get undressed; talk quieter; stop eating so much; don’t go out with a group of all guys because people will think bad of you; once you get a bad reputation, you can’t get rid of it; but I already have one and I don’t care; don’t drive alone late at night because someone will drive you off the road and rape you; be careful around two a.m. when all the bars close; don’t use the words freak’in, frick’in, or any other form of them; spend more time at home; don’t wash your whites and darks together; stop wearing those trashy looking jeans; if anyone gives you crap, let them have it; sometimes the world needs a bitch.

*inspired by Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl”*
I see them standing over a pool of ketchup
In the gray and empty-shelved grocery store.
At age 16 girls won't stand
For you spilling ketchup on the first date,
And he knows it.
Unfortunately, my mother is different.
She's shy and good-natured
In her woolen dress imported from Czechoslovakia.
She helps him clean it up with the dirty cloth
That the fat cashier throws at them.
She doesn't know that it is her last chance
To run away.
The last warning,
The last sign from Providence—
Never go out with men who spill ketchup on the first date!
They will leave you and your children and go away, to another country,
To another woman.
They will live in houses you could never dream of.
Their new wife will have the same name as you.
They will say that they have never loved you,
Not even that day when you helped them wipe the ketchup off the floor
In the grocery store, where all your friends came after school to buy donuts,
And were all watching
As you knelt with this filthy cloth in your hand
On your first date.
I wish she had been a bit more of a snob,
More concerned with appearance,
More self-confident.
She would have known better than to continue this relationship
With a boy who spills ketchup on the first date.
I wish it had been me then instead of her.
I would have known better
Than to marry my father.

---

Around 1998 I drive my best friend to her first gynecologist appointment. The office is two hours away. We jam to Janis Joplin and talk about cute boys. She cries the whole way home.

Around 1992 my sister burns her hand on the stove. Mom comes home late from work and tells me to go to my room. While I cried, Nina got ice cream.

Around 1996 I get home from Marcus's house at three o'clock in the morning. My mom storms out of the house swearing that she hates me. She doesn't come home for three days. I skip school and eat macaroni and cheese.

Around 1995 Sarah, Katie and I go to the Beastie Boys concert. I drink my first beer and wonder what the big deal is; Sarah sees her boyfriend kiss another girl; Katie sits in the bathroom and smokes a cigarette.

Around 1986 I ask Sister Pauline if I can go to the bathroom. She yells at me as I wet my pants in front of the entire class. I tell my mom what happened after school and wet my pants again.

Around 1991 it's my birthday on a Friday. My elementary school boyfriend, Dan, kisses me through his basement window. He asks me to prom as I start to run back to my house. I am laughing the whole way.

Around 1995 Tim picks me up for dinner. He tells me that my make up looks like shit. I go back into the house to wash my face and start to cry. When I get back into the car we listen to Ice Cube while he gets high.

Around 1989 I punch Sarah Canfield in the face and proceed to kick her in the stomach because she put my brand new leather Keds in the sink while the water was running. She never came back to my school.

Around 1990 I get the chicken pox on my birthday. I got extra presents and two birthday cakes.

Around 1997 I snuck over to Jen's house on a school night. Her basement was dark—it felt like a dungeon. We curled our hair, smoked pot and listened to Pink Floyd. Her dad was upstairs watching the Spanish channel while sipping on his tonic and gin.

Around 1998 I go to senior prom with Dan.

Around 1983 the peas that I shoved in my ears at dinner last night start oozing out during church. Mom yanks me with great force into the bathroom as the congregation sings the "Our Father."
I am eleven, and the other sixth-graders are mostly twelve. Today the expensive-looking invitation comes, announcing a bar-mitzvah. We’re not so sure what that is, but Mom says it’s Jewish, and aren’t I lucky for being invited—only I know the whole class must’ve been.

Later I hear that this is a ceremony for thirteen-year-old boys, symbolizing their entrance into adulthood. It includes an evening party: there is going to be a dance, they say. I’ve read about those from 1950’s teenage girl books, of the decorated gymnasiums, cashmere sweaters, knit separates, and pins. Sounds unfamiliar, fairly gallant, and not for us.

The carpool Mom calls up is with the jungle-gym clique, the girls who grow up fast and shave their legs and take purses—giggling—to the bathrooms, who can’t believe I could possibly like-like anyone. They all wear blush, shadowed eyes, and sophisticated smiles.

I refuse Mom’s offer of make-up, certain I am fancy enough in my new white synthetic-satin dress from Dillard’s girls’ section, matching headband, sleek white flats, and the crowning touch—a perfect petite drawstring purse, coordinating with three ribbon rosebuds in pink, yellow and blue. I see it all in the mirror, and practice different ways of holding the purse, playing I am older.

II.

We get dropped off at the Marriott hotel lobby, free and mature, ushered into the carnival of excessive balloons, 80’s tunes, unlimited pop, and air-brushed t-shirts that run out right before I get my turn in line. It’s all stuff we’re supposed to like.

Inside the ballroom—looming, electric—with soap-opera lights, an actual live band plays. I proceed with caution. Those girls weren’t lying, the ones who said they bought strapless evening gowns. They sit across from me, one in real satin peach, the other blue, with elegant earrings, hair twisted on top, and height-enhancing heels on the bottom.

The girl who was a gypsy for Halloween—the one who’s had four boyfriends since fourth grade—has on beige lace and a
Rower and
sil with her fifth boyfriend, beautifully, next to me.
I hardly recognize anything, except the hamburger and fries,
but even they are disguised on over-sized plates, served by
black-tie waiters.
The songs start behind me, kid stuff at first, like the
"Bunny Hop," and then slower KUDL 96-FM ones; the refined
young women at my table get up, without finishing their
fries or ordering another coke, and stroll with a knowing air
to the dance floor.

III.
My short frame turned away from them. I take off my tight
headband and clench my baby-fat hands into sweaty fists.
The star-of-the show's amused parents come up and casually
say, "What? No one to dance with? Here, dance with little
Justin." They laugh, and walk to the next table.
Unsettled, simmering—the suggestion, "Justin."
The four-year-old brother looks at me eye-level and has no
idea that my throat is a detonating volcano, ready to burst
out of my mouth; my stupid Sunday-school flock is changing
but rages to blast away EVERYTHING,
the waiters and relatives and sixth-graders and band playing
"You Make Me Wanna Shout!", with all their exclusive
giddiness and glitz and grief-making.
I find a kleenex, the only comforting thing on me, and flee.
A sneaky kid, a crafty escape, an exile out of Egypt, I run
and run and run to the pay phone and don't even tell my
carpool; I am anonymous, invisible, like ink, never really
there in the first place, unable to be traced.
In the car, only then, I erupt, with all the flaming lava
and igneous rock and burning cinders, plus molten love for
my mom, for coming right away and not asking questions.
She observes this reverse rite-of-passage, the foreign
language of cantering cries signaling my re-entrance into
color.
She can't fully apprehend the natural disaster, but only
sees her activated, red-eyed child—her recovering,
resuscitated daughter who has been lost in the wrong
landscape.

Kevin
Murphy | Reflection

1.
"There's black people and there's niggers. Willy's a dumb nigger,
" Mark said matter-of-factly. We were about twelve. Mark and I used to burn
things in his barn and he had a guitar in his house. His hair was white and
he made me nervous, but I didn't hate him. I didn't talk much then. I liked
Willy. I think Danielle liked Willy, too, and I think Mark liked Danielle.

II.
The day that Willy's mom brought him to register at school, every-
ting stopped. We didn't get new kids much and there were no black kids in
school, except Julian and Jordan, but most people didn't count them because
their mom was white and they weren't scary like real black people. Heads
poked out of the doorways along the seventh and eighth graders' hall; it was
on the side of the parking lot so there was a good view as two figures walked
a death sentence into the shiny, peach, gravel-facade building. Kids just got
right up in the middle of the class and walked out the classroom to see the
black kid. Mr. Munson told everyone to sit down, but it seems like Ms. BoVee
let her whole class out in the hall. The basketball coach wondered out loud if
the block kid would be eligible to play this season because black kids are
good at basketball. Mrs. Fisher in the office probably helped Willy and his
mom with the papers and her smile was probably not as real as it should
have been and her eyes probably moved in a way that she didn't want the
black folks to see. I didn't get up from my desk.
I sat there that day in Mr. Munson's class and tried to concentrate on
earth science. I kind of wished then that I could have gotten up and run
into the halls with the others. But even now I wish that I had gotten up. Not
because everyone else was doing it, or because I really wanted to be the first
to talk to the black kid—no, I wish I had gotten up from my desk that day so
I would have a picture of my home-town: a block and white snapshot of fear
reflecting fear in Climax, Michigan.
The night was very still
They always are, in the bush.
We were in the tent
I was sweating in my red and blue
Down sleeping bag.
The stars crowded through the net windows
And the darkness sat on my chest.

There was a noise now
From several meters away
In the grass hut.
Loud, desperate wheezing
Punctuated by long pauses
As the young boy gathered strength.

He had pneumonia and malaria
And refused the bitter medicine,
Even when mixed with sugar.
The sound of his stertorous breathing
Grew louder.

I lay in the dark
Listening with increasing tension
And horror.
Mom, I whispered, is he going to die?
Probably, she replied.
I was stiff, tears trickling
Smoothly from the corners of my hot eyes.

The roaring gasps
Continued for what seemed to be
Hours.
Then
Stopped.

The pause was not apparent at first
Seeming to be like the others
But it was not broken by
Another scream for air
But by a howl.
Do you know what maple smells like? I know you did the leaf collection in seventh grade, you can recognize the tree, but do you know what maple smells like? Or oak, or black walnut, or Chinese elm? When I work with my father we play this game; he picks up a handful of the chips and says, Can you guess? I say willow, maple, box elder, it’s all random, I’m never right. He knows. He lets the chips sift through his fingers and says, definitively, maple.

We cut trees, my father and I, and grind stumps and pull shrubs and prune hedges. I run chain saws and grinders and brush chippers. I shovel, and haul logs, and go for coffee on cold mornings and Pepsi on hot afternoons. I learned to change carbide teeth and replace air filters and use a pitchfork properly. I learned to run a chainsaw and then to start a chainsaw and then to maintain my own chainsaw: use the right combination of gas and oil, never let it touch the dirt.

I’ve watched climbers work at the top of a 70 foot willow tree, leaning out, running the saw with one hand, dropping the limbs just right. They’re the artists of the trade, the climbers, not expected to haul brush or run the grinder or shovel chips, paid by the hour more than I make in a day, paid to drop the branches just so, between the house and the power lines, only occasionally damaging the neighbor’s garden. They have their own lingo, carry their own gear, tie their own knots.

I learned to stack brush properly, neatly, and to curse people who call for a chipper and have been piling brush up for thirty years, old Christmas trees thrown in with that thorn bush they pulled out six years ago and the big limb that fell off the oak tree in the storm last winter. You know what it looks like; it’s all piled into a massive heap of tangled broken branches in your back yard, or your neighbor’s, and this man is offering me $25 to chip it. It will take me two days to sort and pile this. I’ve learned not to say, For twenty five dollars, sir, I can pour gasoline on it and light it for you.

I learned to keep my mouth shut when the customer looks at me, with my shovel or my saw and says, So it’s a family business? That’s your dad? Are you an only child? No brothers to help out your dad? And I want to say, actually, sir, my brothers decided to stay home today, drinking beer and shooting at squirrels, so they sent the girl out to work. But sarcasm is bad for business. I learned to start my saw with one impressive pull and walk away, smiling.

I learned to drive a truck, and then a truck and trailer, and then a truck and a
trailer filled with the remains of a 40 foot oak. I learned to start braking before you can see the traffic light. Then I learned to just pray that no one was in front of me because I slide through the intersection no matter what.

I learned not to laugh at the customers. I'm hosing down a stump on a dry August day, hoping to keep the grinder from kicking up dust, and the customer, a friendly older woman, starts to look a little worried. Is that so it doesn't catch on fire, she says? I want to say, yeah, lady, if I don't hose it down, when I start grinding it's going to go up in FLAMES and it'll probably take your whole damn house and yard with it, so you'd better stand back! I learned to smile and say, just trying to keep the dust down, ma'am.

I tried to learn the smells, to identify the tree while it's standing or from the leaves in the yard and then smell the chips, hoping to make connections, but I can't do it. Black willow smells like black walnut to me, Chinese elm isn't any different from American elm. I learned to recognize pine and cherry, those easy ones. My father laughs at me, tells me college isn't teaching me anything. They said the same thing when I stood under the bucket, they let the branch hit me on the head and then laughed at me, my father shaking his head and the crew saying, they must not teach common sense at that college you go to.

My father tells the customers he's so proud of me, I'm the smartest of his five kids, I'm going to go to law school, I'm going to be a lawyer, never going to be able to tell willow from oak.

Standing in a front yard with my father in East Grand Rapids, we're getting ready to guess. I've got my handful, he's got his. The customer pulls up in a BMW, he's a doctor. He's intrigued. Can you really tell, he says? Oh yeah, my father says. Maple. No, the doctor says, box elder. My father has never been wrong before. There's no evidence of the tree left, no stray leaves to document one or the other, prove someone right. I want to say, you don't know anything. I want to say, it's a fucking maple, my dad said so. I want to say, could you please back your goddamn BMW out of the driveway because we need to pull out the truck and trailer. I want to say, listen, Dad, I want to laugh, I want to be like you. I want to be like you.

My father is laughing, and the doctor is writing the check, and as I'm putting the shovels in the trailer, I see my dad pick up another handful of chips and let them sift through his fingers. We get in the truck, pull out of the driveway, and hit the first stoplight before he says, looking straight ahead, it still smells like maple to me.

Over and over again, I am told how good my speech is. "You talk so well for someone with a hearing loss like yours, I never would have guessed," they'll say. My voice sounds normal to me. It sounds strong, clear, and flawless. Occasionally I will mispronounce a word, leave out the s, slur my words, or even stutter. Sometimes I'll ask my mom for verification of my speech to make sure I'm not sounding weird like those deaf people who have so much trouble forming words and talking. Every once in awhile the questions "You have such a funny accent, where are you from?" and "Why do you talk like that?" hurt me back into the cold, puke-green vinyl chair that I sat in for speech lessons in elementary school.

Every week, three days a week, I was dragged out of class, sent down the hallway with a pass to spend a much-dreaded 45 minutes with Mr. Pallante, the school speech therapist. Every session was exactly the same as those before it. I would squirm into the chair next to his desk. This chair was inescapable, because there was a deep, smooth bowl-shaped sag in the middle of it, worn after years of kids like me coming in week after week. As soon as I sank into the chair, my butt firmly in place, I had to confront my worst enemy of all, the clicker. Mr. Pallante would put the cold, silver metal counter clicker in my left hand. The round case forced my hand to be working on for today and demonstrated to me how to make the sound. It was almost always the "s", the "r", the "sh", or the "ch" sounds. Each sound I made was one tally for the evil clicker.

Those 45 minutes would stretch into eons as I repeated the same sound for the entire session. "Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr...
pronounce the perfect “r.” “Look at me,” he would say, gritting his teeth and demonstrating to me very slowly how to pronounce the perfect “r.” Then I would get it right after several tries, and it was stored on my short-term hard drive again. Mr. Pallante resumed his paperwork. I looked down at the clicker again and its evil numbers told me I had roughly 100 more to go.

I started my daydreaming again. I looked down at the carpet; it was an awful orange-brown diarrhea color. I looked around in front of me at the fake wood panels covering the walls. Taped to the flimsy walls were the practice charts. They were actually calendars of the month that he gave to us to take home and decorate each day that we had practiced. I only had one of mine ever taped up there, and I had in fact made up all those days I had practiced. I never practiced at home. And never in front of the glaring digital numbers of the microwave timer like he suggested.

My hatred for the clicker and Mr. Pallante reached a boiling point as the clicker reached 253. I looked at him with slits in my eyes and started emitting my “r’s” more forcefully. “Arrr... click, Arrrr... Click, Arrrr... CLICK!” I stared at him from across the desk. He wore dress shirts buttoned all the way to the top. The top button constricted his neck, limiting it to short and forceful movements. I imagined what would happen if the shirt came to life and choked him. From time to time I would intentionally mess up one of my sounds to see if he even remembered that I was there. Sometimes he didn’t even look up and other times I watched his face slowly turn deep red like the mercury rising in a thermometer as he would very tensely say, “No Annie! That’s not it!” His fingers would curl into a fist and he glazed at me with his lips tightly covering his grated teeth. I delighted in this reaction though at the same time it scared the crap out of me. I used this fear to silently will his shirt to come to life.

Only 30 more to go. My thumb is getting numb and my hand is aching to drop the clicker. I had learned how to manipulate the clicker itself by the time I was in fourth grade. After pushing it all the way down I would hold it there and push it again quickly without emitting another click. This way I would get two clicks for each sound. Cut in half! Now about 1.5 more to go! Those 45 minutes have felt like years, and those six years I went to speech therapy felt like ages. I must have emitted over a million utterances of each sound.

259, hold down double-click, 300! I am only seconds away from freedom now as I put the clicker on his desk and tell him I have done the 300 he asked for. “Okay Annie,” He would say glancing up at me. With a fake smile, he also told me not to forget to practice at home and that he would see me the next time. With that I bolted out the door and ran skipping back down the hall to class.

I remember many Minnelli birthday celebrations, and at each, cake I absolutely hated.

Gra, my father’s mother, always insisted on baking the birthday cake. If you looked at it and didn’t go blind, you would see nauseating pink frosting, carelessly slopped onto the deflated cake. Hunks had fallen off onto the gaudy platter and were dry and sometimes burnt.

This was the kind of dessert that flies would not go near. Nevertheless we all had to touch it out.

I found it hard to even fake a smile.

As I chewed it, I wished for multiple anvils to drop from the sky.

As random as it is, I am positive that I wasn’t the only one wishing for that random act of violence.

After eating the cake for so many years it has permanently distorted my aunt’s and uncle’s lives.

As a direct result of the cake, my Aunt Andi recently changed her name to Marian. Still hasn’t found the correct medication for her distinct paranoia.

As a direct result of the cake, Marian’s husband has a monotone voice, and still chooses to live in the past.

As a direct result of the cake, my Uncle Jeff has fallen off the edge of the earth.

According to him, who said that the earth was round?

Then there is my father.

Great Man!

But as a direct result of the cake, he is slowly losing everything.

Hunks of hair, and common sense.
WHAT I KNOW
Lips stained with red wine,
he has a bit of broccoli
stuck in his front teeth.
His too-big smile makes his upper lip disappear
and his laugh sends ice chips surfing on the undulating
waves of water in his untouched glass.
Like white rolls of uncooked pastry,
his fingers reach out for a spoon,
or a knife, or another piece of hot, crusty bread.
He wipes his lips with the corner of his napkin
and says "excuse me" when he belches;
so polite. He never curses and he always remembers his p's and q's.
He combs his hair with a fine-toothed comb
and says his prayers each night before going to bed.

He says his prayers each night before going to bed,
he's such a good boy,
A Momma's boy,
Grandma's little darling.
He runs his foot up the length of my leg
and smiles across the table at me,
the broccoli nestled between his front teeth, a jewel.
He smirks like a bum pissing on the outside
of a church after 10 o'clock mass—
his stare brushing like a clammy hand
across my skin above the low neckline of my dress.
I begin to feel a hot blush clawing
its way from the pit of my stomach
to my face, where it will spread its bright, pink wings.

The blush will spread its bright, pink wings and he will ask
if I need to step outside into the cool night air.
My mother won't let me refuse and we take a walk together
in the silver moonlight; how romantic.
His heavy cologne wraps its hideous, smoky hands around my neck.
I begin to choke on the smell as he puts his doughy hand on my ass.
I turn then, and push him down into the dirt.
I twist my heel into his white-shirted chest and I love
the dark smudges left by my shoe; I think he is crying.
Do you always treat guys this way? he whines, no wonder you're alone.
I spit in his face and in the moonlight, the phlegm runs down his face like a pearl.
I leave him whimpering in the dirt and when they ask where he had gone I say, he's puking behind a tree, too much red wine poor boy. I pour another glass and smile a secret smile, the crickets have begun to chirp an evening song.

So much depends
upon
the car keys
still
in the ignition
while
you're inside shopping
alone.

SARAH LaBEAU | CAR KEYS
Thomas Moore slept soundly that night, soft snores quietly escaping his mouth while his arms encompassed me like a heavy winter shawl. When I awoke the early morning sun had stealthily found its way through the silver-like gaps in the blinds, and light beams danced and spun like whirling dervishes around the curls of his hair. The chilled October air welcomed me as I escaped from the stifling warmth of the covers and my lover's embrace. He moaned quietly and turned on his side, continuing in his repertoire of sounds that indicated deep and peaceful sleep.

Peaceful. It is a word to describe early weekday mornings of young couples, mornings spent together in a twin bed, mornings with nothing to do but procrastinate in accomplishing the menial tasks of the day. We had spent many Saturdays in this way—relishing the privacy that comes with a vacationing roommate in slumber.

But the usual tranquility was broken as I made my way to the closet, futilely searching for my bathrobe, and my vision was instantly clouded by a million red-hot needles that stabbed my brain from behind my eyes. Trying to eliminate the pain of this seemingly unsolicited attack, I pressed and rubbed my temples as I surveyed the room. What I saw was a homeless person’s paradise. The floor was hidden from view, oppressed of presence underneath an array of empty beer cans: Budweiser, Michelob, and Red Dog. In one corner a tequila bottle had lost its footing and collapsed to its side, allowing the yellow poison to escape and fuse in a sticky mess to the floor. The ashtrays were overflowing; the odor of stale smoke prevailed. Suddenly, the transition between last night and this morning revealed itself in my memory.

The soirée had been well attended, the room filled to capacity with sweaty students. Each were eager to celebrate—rejoice at the end of a tumultuous week, their success with the worst midterm of the year, or the foolheatedness of a youth without consequences—by swaying hips and bobbing heads to the loud beat of popular dance music. They knocked down beer after beer and flirted shamelessly with everyone they could. They said things and did things without thinking or caring. And then, once all the fun had been had, they raced to bathrooms, cupping hands over mouths in an attempt to delay the inevitable until the sanctity of a toilet stall had been reached. Once their business had been done, they crawled weakly off to dorm rooms and to beds.

I had only been sleeping for a few hours when Thomas Moore showed up. The alcohol was still running its course and had created a lead-like heaviness in my eyelids. From behind narrow slits I half-consciously watched the blur of my lover lock the door and begin to undress. My mind was swimmy, fuzzy in its thought process. The pollution of intoxicants
created confusion as I took in the blurred surroundings and tried to
distinguish between reality and the pseudo-reality formed by my inebriation.
Thomas Moore said nothing as he discarded his clothes on the floor
and threw back the covers. His naked body was cold and heavy on top
of me, feeling much more like an ice sculpture than a warm-blooded human
being. I tried to speak, tried to move, but the ten shots of tequila and four
beers combined into a formidable pair, which forced me unwillingly back
into unconsciousness.

Grunting was heard in the back of my mind along with the sound of
dancing bedsprings. For a minute it brought me back to consciousness,
where I felt the pain of his weight on my stomach. The movement of the bed
was like a roller coaster, and I felt nauseous—up and down, up and down.
Moisture from his sweat had amassed in a pool in my navel, but his body
felt uncommonly cold. This force, this movement, this iciness increased my
discomfort and made my thoughts frantic. I tried to lift my arms to push
him aside and roll over to vomit in the garbage can, but my soul merely
watched from inside a lifeless and immobile body. I was a prisoner in a
shell that would not function the way I had ordered it to. My brain sent
messages to my arms, begging them to move, but all its requests were
lost somewhere along the way. Mania took over inside, and my soul was
screaming in discomfort, but its voice could not be heard above his grunt-
ing and moaning. As soon as the panic reached its peak, the undertow
of unconsciousness returned and pulled me back into the depths of sleep.

The air chilled me as I stood there watching my sleeping lover. My
mind was a battle zone for feelings of anger and helplessness, and the
stabbing pain from behind my eyes increased with the growing whirlwind
of these thoughts. Confusion. Why did I feel so much animosity towards
him? We had done that many times before, so why was this time different?
Was I wrong to feel uncomfortable with this? My head was pounding and
there was a ringing in my ears. It was too early to think about this, too
early on such a beautiful day to feel like this.

I succumbed to the usual peacefulness of this Saturday morning,
abandoning my search for the bathrobe, forcing the debate of right and
wrong into the storeroom of my mind. Sleep was vying for domination in
my body, and my limbs began to feel like dead weights. Gently, I pulled
back the covers and accepted the warmth of my lover's arms with gratitude.
My breathing regulated itself to match his—slow and regular, in . . . out.
I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep, rocked by the waves of the soft
and melodic snoring of the sleeping Thomas Moore.
He played chess like he played basketball: right up the middle. He brought his queen out early in the game, and parked her in the middle of the board with the same outright confidence he showed on the basketball court. His queen could run havoc herself or provide cover for her fellow pieces. He had the same brilliance in devising an offense around her as he had in finding open teammates to whom to pass the ball. But he was quick and agile, even in fifth grade, and his talent improved my own points-per-game average after he joined my team. I always knew that if I took a piece of his, his queen was right behind it, ready to exact vengeance. Dave Barnes and I played chess nearly everyday at lunch. Dave took the black pieces, I took the white, not because of our respective races, but because we played the standard chess rule that white plays first, and he relished playing from behind. Even if it was only one move behind. The day of the fifth grade chess championship, we followed our typical lunchtime chess protocol.

As the students returned from lunch, a virus of giggles and shouts infected us. Seeing the room in disarray told us that an afternoon of long division was being put on hold. Mr. Green had rearranged the classroom, pushing all of the desks up against the walls, clearing the center of the room for the championship showdown. Only Dave’s desk and my own remained in the center, facing each other, front hinges touching. I had been held up on the way back from lunch just long enough for a short pep talk from some of the other kids on the basketball team. I took my seat and said nothing when Dave wished me good luck. Instead, I stared at the chessboard covering the team between our desks. Sixty-four squares. Thirty-two black, thirty-two white. White squares only touched each other at the corners, the same corners where black squares touched. Mr. Green poured the pieces from the box. The plastic pieces rattled loudly in the unsettled silence of students crowded around us. It was the anxious silence of a gambler watching the race on which he bet his own house. The pieces finally settled into confusion, like static on a television set. Dave and I made order from the chaos with our fingers, segregating black from white. Directly above my right shoulder, I heard Don Delaney whisper, “Man I wish I was playing this match.”

Don did wish he, and not I, was squaring off with Dave for the championship. But I beat him in the semi-finals. I watched his name drop below mine on the large diagram covering the bulletin board. A month ago, the diagram was empty. It looked like a barren tree had fallen over in the snow. The double brackets of single elimination started out crowded and gradually thinned out into one final line: supremacy. To tell the truth, I crushed Don in the semi-finals. I took his queen three moves into the game, and he begged for a stalemate so he could start over. He said he wasn't concentrating. I checkmated him two moves later. I was outside for recess before they had even finished choosing teams for basketball.

“Queen goes on her color, Mike.” Dave’s voice brought me out of my reverie. “Huh?” I said. “Queen goes on her color,” he repeated, this time pointing his slender finger at my queen. She was on the black square where the king was supposed to go. I was so nervous, I hadn’t noticed I’d arranged them backwards. I moved her to the white square where she belonged. I glanced at my pathetic army. General Robert E. Lee would’ve been ashamed at how they came to attention, disheveled and out of line, but my hands were shaking when I set them up. Dave’s pieces were trained perfectly, each one waited in the bull’s-eye center of its square in rapt attention. “Begin,” Mr. Green said. Around me, the students held their breath. I moved the pawn in front of my king. I saw a flash of surprise on Dave’s face. I had never started with that move before, but he’d been beating me pretty consistently at lunch. It was time to change my strategy. He mirrored my move, his black pawn face to face with my white one, directly in the center of the board. We volleyed moves for awhile, just getting our pieces out, not trying to attack yet. He brought his queen out four moves into the game. I kept mine in the back row, hidden behind a pawn. I set my offense up, each piece protected by another piece, using my scattered pawns for protection as often as possible. Dave set his pieces up in a wedge around his queen that pointed like knife ready to stab through my line of soldiers right into my king. Ready to stab beyond it into the chest that slouched over the board. Every move I practiced in my head ended with his queen taking one of my pieces. I heard Don behind me whispering gravely to a neighbor, “Mike’s in big trouble.”

Don was the one who actually gave me the pre-game pep talk. The other boys came along for emphasis. “So you’re gonna beat Dave today, right Mike?” I shrugged, trying to understand what was happening. Don Delaney never talked to me, if he could help it. “It’s like this, Mike. Dave is the only black kid in school, and chess is all about brains.” He trailed off with a nod that rustled the sandy blond hair on his forehead. My uncomprehending stare compelled him to continue, “So you can’t let him beat you, or else everyone will think the black kid is smarter than all us white kids.” The other boys nodded earnestly as his voice trailed again. “Look, Don, just because he’s better than you at basketball,” I started to say angrily, before he cut me off. “He’s not better, he’s just taller. Look, just beat him, okay?” I was formulating my response when one of the bathroom stalls opened. Dave walked out and stared at me, his deep eyes, defined cheekbones, and slender chin all pointed at me like an infantry line, rifles at the ready. He washed his hands and walked out. Don gave me a meaningful
glance. It was a long walk back to the classroom, listening to Don talk strategy and getting patted on the back by his friends.

The class groaned as Dave took one of my white pawns. First blood, as we called it, belonged to him. Painfully, I realized all his pieces were protected, and I bounced my knight closer to my side of the board, providing cover for my rook. Dave pressured my knight with his pawn. I decided to sacrifice it, and took Dave’s forward-most pawn. The resulting battle in which one at a time pieces alternately fell on top of the black hole square, each one taking the piece that previously occupied it, left us both short two pawns, a knight, and a bishop. It was a perfect trade-off; the closest chess ever comes to compromise. Dave took another pawn with his queen, bringing her safely onto my half of the board. I pushed my queen forward two spaces, right in line with Dave’s. Only, I left her unprotected. Excitedly, Dave ran her over with his own queen, and the class groaned loudly. There was no question for who they were rooting, and the dark expression on Dave’s face told me he knew what was going on.

I was glad Dave took my queen. Part of me wanted to lose, but if I threw the game, Dave would know. We’d played too many times together. Mostly I was glad because I hated my queen. She was so big, so overwhelming. Standing on a chessboard, she radiated possibility like the sun radiates light, every direction at once. Without her there to complicate things, chess became simple, like math. I was good at math. Besides, by forcing Dave’s move I pulled apart the protective umbrella he had set up. Six of his pieces were unprotected, and I had taken three of them before he re-established his shield. Don patted my back. White was winning. He whispered, very quietly, just a breath really, “Atta boy, Mike, you’ve got the nigger now.” Dave’s face went dark with anger. But he couldn’t have heard Don’s whisper. It was too quiet, the students’ cheers too loud. Mr. Green hadn’t heard it, and he was much closer than Dave was. So why was he glaring at me like that?

He snatched his queen and thrust her forward. He knew he was outnumbered, and he abandoned his umbrella attack and started using his queen to flush my king out of hiding. “Check,” he hissed. I moved my king one space to safety. He moved his queen again. “Check.” Again. “Check.”

His tall, aggressive queen chased my king from white square to black square. He kept his slender finger on her the whole time, no secret where he’d move next. Her sleek curves continued up his slender. Together, they hunted down my king, the piece with the white cross on his head. The white cross, rising out of the fire of his crown. Despite his dodging and hiding, Dave never stopped hunting him. Even after my rooks, bishops, and knights had demolished the rest of his forces. Even after his queen had ground through the defenses I’d left. He brought his queen in at my king along a black diagonal. “Check.” I moved my king behind my last pawn. He slid his queen up a line, onto a white square. He needed to get position. I moved a rook just short of his baseline. He moved his queen in at my king, this time down a white diagonal. “Check.” I moved my bishop, the one that travels only on white diagonals, between his queen and my king. He moved his queen, violently knocking over my bishop. It fell off the table and rattled on the floor. “Check.” I moved my king diagonally back, behind a knight. He moved his queen back towards his end, looking for position. No one had even whispered for minutes. I slid my other rook down onto his baseline. “Checkmate.” I said. The classroom erupted with cheers of my name. I reached my hand over the chessboard. He lifted his own arm, and wrapped his long fingers, without passion, around my hand. Neither of us spoke any congratulations. “Great game, Mike. You did it,” Don belted out above me. He slapped high fives with his friends.

I left school late that day. Mr. Green wanted to give me the gift certificate for winning and let me sign my name in marker on the line for the champion. I had to climb on the register to reach it. I spelled my name carefully in cursive, putting my signature on the deed. I didn’t even look at it, even as I wrote it. Instead, I looked out at the desks. From up on the register, they looked like chess board squares, arranged perfectly over the masking tape X’s regimenting their positions. It was strange having a chessboard with only one black square, I thought as I looked at Dave’s desk. It was right in the middle of the room, right where he’d put his queen. No one else in the class understood just how difficult it was to win a game of chess without that queen.
I could write anything
And make it sound good, like these words belong here
On this page.
Sugary sweet
Oozing over the raw, exposed
Concealing it.
Not really saying what I mean to say.
What are good words anyway?
Words are only actors
Playing our emotions.
The critics are confused.
And a little disappointed with the performance.
Craving labels for our thoughts.
Give me a word with 5 syllables. Now.
So that this will be a good poem.
Discombobulate.
There. Ha.
Is it good now?
Frantically searching, frustrated, reaching for words
A replacement for “love”
Searching for meaning
And waiting for you, although I know
You are somewhere else.
But I still wish you were here
And part of me thinks
You’ll slip quietly into my room at 2:45
Discombobulated,
But drawn
Like a magnet
To my heart.
I see my mother sitting on a stool, reading "The Hobbit," with a cash box at her feet. My mother is supervising a sidewalk sale in front of the "Sparkle Market." I see my father casually browsing around the sidewalk sale. Suddenly, I see my father's pupils dilate as he takes notice of my mother, the beautiful yet mysterious cashier. I would like to go up to my father and say "Stop." I know what he is thinking. By no means would I try to intervene. I would like to go up to my father and say, "Take another approach." "Think about it first." However, part of me would just rather watch him make a fool of himself. I see my father moving in for the kill. "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" The bomb hits. As the mushroom cloud disperses, I see my mother laughing out of pity. Despite his corny opening line, my father decides not to give up. I see my father moving in for round two.

shake
wiggle
move
groove your bodies together in rhythm
back and forth
back and forth—
remove your lips
find
the secret garden
feel
for that sound,
that flower
lost and found
lost and found
Grooving
Moving
Wiggling
Shaking those vibrations loose
Those Brave Altos
Altos
Sing.
cool jazz could not slow
people passing from
in or out
nor the locked door
nor the open smile
still they move
instances
faces
captured then gone
dissipated
with the dying note.

"They're losing."
"What?"
"The Yankees? They're losing. I bet you don't sell many peanuts
when they lose." The little girl looked at Peter, expecting a reply.
"Well, I guess I don't." He reopened his worn copy of Moby Dick
and watched the girl would go away. She was right, though. When the
Yankees lost, the people heading home didn't stop to buy peanuts.
"Did you know they're putting up a new statue in Central Park? It's
my Daddy. He's going to be standing on an alligator, because that's what
he does, kills alligators."
"Killing alligators. That sure would be something, wouldn't it? Listen,
is your dad around here, because it's not really a good idea for you to be
wandering around by yourself," he said. And it's not really a good idea to
bug me. Peter leaned back in his chair and squinted against the sun. She
was about ten, had dirty blond hair and clothes that didn't fit quite right.
Peter felt sorry for the kid, but she was rather annoying. He checked on the
peanuts and went back to his book.
"You should stop by sometime and see my daddy's statue."
"Well, I guess I don't go to Central Park much, I have lots of other
things to do."
"Oh, you have a girlfriend."
"No, but I live with some friends and we like to go out a lot. And I
have this job, which keeps me pretty busy."
"Why don't you have a girlfriend?"
"I don't know. My last one dumped me for a guy with more ambi-
tion. But I suppose you don't even know what that means."

The sun was beating down on the pavement and the roasting
peanuts gave off a salty smell. Mixed with the asphalt, the aroma was
less than appealing. Peter took off his outer shirt and looped it over the
peanut warmer.
"I know what it means, I'm in 5th grade now. I even know what
petulant means, and nobody else in the whole class did." She pushed her
hands against the cart and started jumping side to side. "So if you don't
have a girlfriend, you can go with my daddy. He'd love to take you, but he
can't take girls because the alligators really like girl skin. And then you
could have a statue in Central Park, too."
"A real-life statue in Central Park, that sure would be something. I
don't think I'd really like to be standing on an alligator. I think maybe I'd
have my hands in a bag of peanuts."
"You want to be remembered for selling peanuts? I would have a
statue right next to my daddy, and I'd be standing on twelve alligators!"
She was done dancing now and plunkered down on the pavement, the heat looked her in the face.

"Honey, there's nothing wrong with selling peanuts."

"But why would you sell peanuts when you can go with Daddy and kill alligators? That's what I would do, if I were a boy. And when I grow up I'm going to go cook the alligators for him."

"Well, not everyone can kill alligators; I'm selling peanuts. I like selling peanuts, and I like my life. " So there, he thought.

"But you're not selling any peanuts now, the Yankees are losing," Peter just looked at her. Really, killing alligators. And a statue in Central Park. He'd just stay on his side of reality, and catch up with the new guys together and he didn't go home. Peter found himself on a bus to Central Park. He started walking around, the trees a nice change from steaming pavement. "No, I'm not looking for a statue of a man on an alligator," he said out loud.

I am on a mission. Believe it or not, my German buddies forced me to report all major distinctions between the U.S. and Germany before I left in August 1998. O.K., I could write about cross-cultural differences in general, focusing on academic challenges, Michigan weather and the spirit of our community in particular. YAWN! Instead, let's write about something that is more controversial; something fun. In the last couple of months, I was able to find out that there are two major forces that determine our life at K (especially on the weekends): alcohol and sex. Wait a second... alcohol at K? I don't think so. Although it is a liberal arts college, and we know from Hemingway that alcohol and artistic ability can work well together, there are still some restrictions at K. As everybody knows, only seniors and international students drink occasionally. However, there was an article in The Index during winter quarter that informed me that over 90% of K students consume alcohol. The article pointed out the disastrous consequences of binge drinking and depicted alcohol as a terrible drug. This made me think of some "people" that get busted because of a keg in their dorm, others that have to be taken to the hospital because of alcohol poisoning, or persons that simply won't vomit regularly on Friday and Saturday nights. These are the events that students want to put in their portfolio or curriculum vitae, huh? For me, it is a pretty simple story. Know where your limits are and act accordingly. I was glad that somebody pointed out the bad influence that alcohol can doubtlessly have on one's personal wellbeing.

With these thoughts on my mind I turned the page of our student newspaper in order to find out what was "on" around K. One headline in the inside of the issue caught my eye: "How do I get my brew around K?" Aham, excuse me?? Talking about the harmful use of alcohol on the front page and giving students advice about where to get plastered in the same issue does not seem to be such a very good combination. Well, before you think that I am a moralizer I will come out of the closet and confess: I like beer. I drink beer. I love beer. However, you guys probably don't see my dilemma in the States because the stuff that you drink out of bottles or cans here is only what American breweries want us to believe is beer. Nevertheless, it gets the job done after a while. To be honest, some of the funniest and most bizarre things that have happened to me took place under the influence of alcohol. Can you imagine streaking the quad, running around naked in hallways banging at people's doors, or making random phone calls claiming to be Boris Black from Mount Sinai when you are completely sober? I am sorry, I can't.

There seems to be something true about the slogan: Beer is good, sex is great—we're the class of '98. This motto seems to suggest that there is a close relation between alcohol and sex at K, and from my observations
and personal studies on these subjects I would have to agree. I’ll give you a simple example. During the first couple of weeks I came across a term that I did not understand: RDH. I had no clue what these three letters were supposed to mean. From other peoples’ discussions, however, I eventually figured out that it is an event most likely to happen on a weekend at a typical K party. Somebody told me all about it and I was shocked to find out that people talk about members of our community in such a devaluing manner, referring to K students as potential “Random Drunken Hookups.” What a terrible thing to do. Who are these people? O.K., let’s take a short break here and let me make two comments about this. First, I believe that all of us are more or less at one point in our lives focused on the genitals of members of the opposite sex. This is a tragedy, as an elbow or an ear can be of immaculate beauty, but we will never recognize it in the same manner as a penis or vagina. This is especially disturbing because these parts of the human body look like radioactive garbage in most cases. Second, I have been to a couple of K parties, which normally take place off-campus. Being a non-native speaker, I often lack the perfect expression for some events that take place. Honestly, however, what would you call a drunken person stumbling around the room, trying to stick his/her tongue into the first accepting mouth? For some reason, I can’t believe that this person aims at having a long-term relationship, a house in the nice suburbs of a small city like Kalamazoo, and eventually have kids with his/her victim. Don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with letting everybody know that you are money and that you want to party. And beside that: Sex is good. Sex is natural. It’s evolution, baby! Normally you think of sex as an act of passion, a time whereby animal instinct takes control in order to satisfy one’s carnal desires. Think twice. How can that be possible with a roommate who is always around? Sex needs to be carefully and almost strategically planned and prepared at K. That’s why you find weird messages on notebooks such as “Went to Meijers—buying some sausage” or simply, “Grapefruit juice,” that hint with great subtlety for one’s buddy to spend the next couple of hours, minutes, seconds (time is relative) in the library.

After the deed is done, the real fun stuff starts. In most cases, both partners desperately try to attach a certain word to their newfound relationship. I must admit I am completely lost in this kind of terminology: seeing each other, hanging out, dating, hooking up, making out, “lovers for one night—tomorrow go back to being friends.” (Yeah right, Dave.) Obviously, we are facing a problem here, which is reinforced by our “large” college community. If you do anything beyond talking with a member of the opposite sex on Friday night, you can be sure that everybody in the college knows it the next morning. That helps you a lot, doesn’t it? Well, it isn’t that bad at all
as long as you keep the following motto in mind: Go forth, but don't multiply. I am eager to find out more about this revered area of American culture. I will always remember what a good friend of mine told me about these issues and I think you, the alcohol-abusing and passionate reader, can benefit from his advice as well (not only in your time at K): It's life—absorb it!
She's standing on the fringe of the crowd, arms folded, shirt tied loosely around her waist and falling off her hips. Short, jagged layers of her hair adhere to the sides of her face, her pale skin, a stark contrast to her dark hair. I drift towards the drinking fountain, making my way through the couples and back again. One after the other they fall. I float towards her.

Her glasses are foggy. She must have bought them at a trendy shop on Clark. Or maybe the purple contact lenses that she wears fall into Lake Michigan when she leaned over her, not a terrace to catch a glimpse of the moon. I formed this vision of her on the edge of a building, overlooking the water, searching for two translucent circles.

Should I jump in? I've known how to swim since I was three; grandpa taught me at Half Moon Beach. A couple summers after, he taught me to dance. Long before, he gave me lessons on the planks of wood that lined our living room floor. He'd float across the marble ballroom in the Fischer Theater. Detroit socialites came just to see him. For each one, two, three, a woman swooned. Each Friday night was the same. On a full-moon night at two-thirty a.m., he encountered a lady he'd tangoed with before but never more than twice. They flagged a cab to a corner café. Hazelnut coffee gave her the jitters. Wedding bells three months later. I do.

She pulls her arms away from her chest and sways them side to side. Her pointed frames are tinted sky blue. I do, I do, I do want to dance. I push my way through a sea of rover boys, tripping over their baggy pants. Dance I shall. I open my mouth and muster up the courage to speak. An introduction: she goes to the University of Illinois, she's here with friends, and she doesn't know the words to Blue Monday. Three songs are spun. She tells me she'll be right back and I wait. This will be the last time I see her glasses.

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I am thirteen and I am making a snack in the kitchen after school. I am home alone. The kitchen is at the back of the house. It's a long walk down the hallway to reach it from the front door where you let yourself in, quite unexpected, quite unwelcome. I hear a noise, and my instinct, more acute than my conscious mind, says that I should hide under the counter in the dining room so that if someone walks in he won't be able to see me and will just turn around and walk out again forever and I can lock myself in the bathroom next to the kitchen until he leaves. I am thirteen. I don't listen to my instinct and there you are in the front in front of me and instinctively my hands fly to the sides of my face in surprise, in fear. I don't know how, but we make it down the long hallway to the living room. Maybe you chase me. I pick up the phone to call Grandma, Mr. Ferguson, the police, anyone, anyone, but you slam it down. You are only fourteen, but you are huge and I am a skinny, skinny girl. I am a tiny girl, and I am on the living room floor of my own house and you are on top of me and I am screaming. I am screaming and I am thirteen thirteen thirteen. You pull my sweater and my t-shirt up and your hand is on my breast, nice tit, you snort. I am screaming, are you going to beat me up, are you going to rape me, oh my God, I'm only thirteen. And now we're across the hall in the den and you're sitting on me, unbuckling my belt, and I am screaming. I am screaming as loud as I can and pleading with you to stop and where are the neighbors, where is my mom, where is God? You hurt me too you spit at me and I don't know what happens next, but somehow I am flying back down the hall and the bathroom door is safely locked behind me. I am hysterical and my mom comes home and I pull her into the bathroom with me. She has arthritis and you could hurt her even worse. I am shaking and sobbing. Hadley! What's wrong? Are you having a seizure? No, no, no, oh Mommy, Mommy, I'm only thirteen.

I am twenty and living in France. This is not my culture, this is not my language, these are not my people, but I know most of the really important rules, and one of them is les filles ne sortent pas seules. Translation: girls don't go out alone. Translation: without boys. But I am not a girl, and I don't need to be protected and my host family will never know, so I walk the twenty minutes home from the bar by myself at 1:00 in the morning. A few blocks from my house I notice there is a man walking several steps ahead of me. He keeps turning around; the streets are deserted, I know he is looking at me and oh my God I feel so conspicuous but so small. So I slow down, hoping to lose him, but he knows I'm still there. I pass payphones, but whom would I call? Brian? He's still at the bar. Gilles and Marie
are sleeping no doubt, and I've been such a good americaine so far; I don't want to worry them. And what would I say — that there's a man walking in front of me and he keeps looking at me and I'm scared so come get me in the car right now even though I'm only a few blocks from home? I keep walking, chanting in my head Guardian Angel, be my guide, and always be right by my side. The man turns right on Rue du Pont St. Jacques. My street, and I have to turn right too. I start walking in the middle of the street in case he is waiting for me on the sidewalk. Guardian Angel, be my guide, and always be right by my side. My heart and my steps match the rhythm of my mantra, and everything gets faster, faster. Then I turn the corner and he is standing there with his pants down. I am twenty, I am a woman, I am an adult and I know an erect penis can be a weapon. I catch my breath, and he sees me see him and I practice screaming laissez-moi, laissez-moi in my head, but he takes off running the other way. I breathe, and the world slows down, and the fear breaks and runs through my body. I pick up the pace, but I am slogging through Mississippi mud and I am so dizzy. There is another man walking toward me from the other way, and I eye him, suspicious. He looks at me too but says nothing, and I feel like a little girl, like a little tiny speck of a woman-sized girl.

Now I'm back in Kalamazoo where everything makes sense, but fear has followed me across the Atlantic and back again. Tuesday and Thursday nights I walk home from work alone at 11:00. My roommate offers to pick me up in her car, but it's only a five-minute walk and I feel silly. So rather than feel silly and disempowered for ten minutes a week, I choose to feel terrified as though I have a modicum of mobility in this world. I know how to do it: pray, wear shoes you can run in, don't carry anything too heavy, wedge keys between your fingers, walk purposely with your head up, hug the street side of the sidewalk unless a car passes, then move closer to the houses—don't make it easy for someone to grab you. You must practice this walk; in fact, you must never walk any other way but defensively. Every Tuesday and Thursday, for those few minutes, I hold my breath and open my eyes wide. I try to slow my heartbeat and my imagination with my now-automatic mantra. I hope that I give off don't fuck with me vibes, and if not, I hope that because I pass a church on my way home I will be granted a little extra protection. In daylight, under normal circumstances, I never feel particularly short, but alone in the dark I am reminded of how small I really am and it makes me walk faster, so that I must look ridiculous: this petite woman, who, from a distance, can pass as being in
I am afraid that fear coagulates and becomes matter and that it will harden into the shape of an ugly, angry man. I am afraid that what I fear most I will draw to myself, that my thoughts will become manifest and send a message out to the universe that this woman is vulnerable, this one will be easy to turn back into a little girl. I am afraid that even as I write these words I am helping to crucify myself. What I fear most, even more than death, is the loss of my spirit and my will through the conquest of my body. I am afraid that what I put into misogyny is what I will get out, and perhaps I have spoken too loudly and too often for my own good. I know I am not paranoid; the number of my female friends who have not been touched by sexual violence is a single digit. I know that underneath the fear and the caution that the fear engenders is a very strong will to survive and flourish. I know that I sing forth this message every day, every moment, not just in scared minutes, and that therefore it is stronger. I know that the opposite of fear is love. But I also know that the statistics do not bode well for my friends and me, I know that most of us have already become statistics, and I know that when I look out the window the dark and those who make it so frightening and unfamiliar will still be there. I wish I could write about hope and survival or even anger, but I think that through honesty is the only way to expel the Rape Monster from my psyche, and all I feel right now is profoundly scared.

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Coach Vickery taught driver's ed and coached the golf team at our high school. He was from a small town in lower Alabama and the accent still hung thick from his lips. His most prominent feature was his hair—course, black, and long—obviously a wig despite his protests that his hair just grew that way. Kids always said that he looked like Elvis Presley. I always thought he looked more like Wayne Newton.

The first day of driver's ed was on a Tuesday, immediately after school. I remember walking in and immediately noticing how timidly Coach Vickery stood in front of the classroom as we all filtered in. He didn't seem to know what to do with his hands which he kept clasping and unclasping. His elbows were too close to his body, making his shoulders hunch up and his neck seem gigantic. His whole upper body looked like it consisted of slabs of beef sewn together, big and inflexible. But what shocked me the most was his hair, resting on top of his head like a helmet, its blackness impenetrable against his tiny white face. I sat in my desk and listened to Coach Vickery's quiet, stumbling lecture about safety on the highway.

My first driving lesson happened a few days later. The car I had to drive used to be a police cruiser and still had the Plexiglas divider in between the front and back seats. I was dimly aware of the clear barrier behind my neck, pushing me forward further into the windshield. I let him direct me, telling me where to turn, when to brake. We drove through the leafy suburbs of Atlanta in silence. I felt suddenly shy at his physical intimacy.

We drove through manicured streets, treeless lawns like giant breasts swelling on either side of us, topped by four-bedroom, two-and-half bathroom houses. But even though it was past school hours and the air was warm and wet, the kind of air that caresses your skin and curls your hair, I didn't see a soul. A few women in jogging suits walking with foam covered dumbbells in their hands, one cat. No children anywhere, even though I saw in almost every driveway a parked minivan or stationwagon, sure symbols of a family unit. I felt sleepy, brick and aluminum sidling blurring my vision. Suddenly, a dog ran in front of the car. I braked suddenly, feeling the brakes lift out from under me as Coach Vickery slammed on the brakes on his side of the car. He made a small noise in the back of his throat, impatient and put out. My heart beat faster.

We drove further. He had me turn down Old Tucker Road heading toward Stone Mountain Village. The streets became narrower, the houses smaller, crouching behind forests of trees. We drove down back roads, through tunnels of pine trees hidden by kudzu. Birds lined telephone wires, leaves chattered in the warm wind. We drove by the Confederate cemetery, the enclosing stone wall sloping away from us.

Just before Silver Road and the borders of the Village, Coach Vickery told me to turn. The street I was now on was wider, and the tree looked new. It felt like a small highway, not a house in sight. A giant cut in the middle of a forest. I cruised up around a hill and upon reaching the top of it caught a glimpse of Stone Mountain, its barren top and the figures of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson visible above the trees. I rounded another curve and suddenly the trees broke, revealing rows upon rows of new houses, their lawns treeless and uniformly green. We turned down one of the streets of the neighborhood, heading toward a place where Coach Vickery said we could see the mountain.

The neighborhood was identical to the ones that surrounded my school: large, new houses, yards with carpeted grass, and wide, uncracked streets. But what struck me was that in almost every single yard, there were children playing, people talking to each other across driveways, women walking and talking to each other, and every single person I saw was black. I drove slowly, cautiously after speeding down the empty streets before. A little boy on a bicycle rode out in front of us, not looking, and I had to slam on the brakes. I once again felt the tug of Coach Vickery's foot on his set of brakes, seizing control of the car.

They're cute when they're little, but watch out when they grow up.

I turned and stared at him, unsure of what to say, uncomfortable, scared suddenly that all these black faces I drove past might have heard him. I was scared they would see how little and white I was, trapped next to this strange-haired man glaring at all of them. I was conscious that I was driving a police cruiser and that no one, absolutely no one in this safe little suburb was going to fuck with a little white girl driving a police cruiser.

A couple of weeks later, we had our final driving lesson. This time, he wanted to take me out on the highway. We picked up Lawrenceville Highway and took it north, out of the suburbs, past Dacula, into the farm land of the northern counties. I drove down the two-lane highway for a couple of hours, heading straight up the foothills of the Appalachians. We passed fields of soybeans interrupted by stands of loblollies. The earth rolled beneath us.

We talked some. I couldn't find words easy enough for conversation. He talked about growing up in Alabama, how he was valedictorian of his class and how he worked as a photographer's assistant in the local portrait shop. He told me how hot it was in his home town and how this was his country we were driving through. I kept my thoughts to myself,
what thoughts I had. Faced with his stories, I felt myself too blank to say anything.

We started leaving the farmland behind us and moved into the forest. The space between the trees thickened with ferns. He told me to slow down, that he wanted to show me something. We crept along what was now a one lane road. He pointed to a dirt track off to the right. I turned down it, driving past a log cabin and broken picnic table. The track dead ended there; a wall of scrub blocked the cor. He told me this is where they filmed one of the Friday the 13th movies. He then got out of the cor, telling me to follow him. Looking back once and motioning with his hand for me to come on, he disappeared into the scrub.

I sat in the car, watching the scrub move as he plowed through it. My stomach hurt and I couldn't catch my breath. I reached for the door and opened it. I stepped into a puddle of mud, my loose shoes struggling against its sucking grasp. I fought my way through the scrub, my bare arms and legs scratching and bleeding against the tiny burrs. I finally emerged out of the scrub and I saw him standing, his back to me. Spread before us, was a golf course, her slopes rolling gently away from us, one tiny flag fluttering on a twig thin pole. He turned toward me and smiled, Isn't it beautiful?

Shirtless, he's a fragile brown bird boy all jagged shoulder blades longing mouth large brown glazed eyes "My aunt fucked me when I was six" he tells me.
On the corner of my bed he licks a large swirly lollipop knobby knees drawn into his chest cherubic Latino lips part in ecstasy
HEALING

MATTHEW HAMMOND

The friends I love still joke with their mother, who is lean, ferocious as a street cat. They have two small houses in Richland without a garage or a father. He is somewhere out West, drinking. He forgets to send cards on birthdays.

I visit only in the daylight, an hour's drive, twangy country music blaring to keep me awake. Inside, the house is never quiet. The dogs get into everything. The oldest sister watches "Buns of Steel" on the television, cries.

Welfare paid for everything. The other house is their grandmother's, or theirs, depending on the circumstances, a family disturbed by broken wedding vows. The piglets squeal from the back yard. We watch the dogs sneaking up on them from the forest, mischief apparent in their faces, even for dogs, the ensuing chaos of filth and muck rises into the air like a hurricane of waste.

All day the sister yells in her hand-me-down blue jeans. Their grandmother, an introverted woman who's never left for work, watches from her window.

The twins are fraternal but their smiles are shaded with each other's happiness. We drive to the city in search of ice cream to help forget the summer's heat. We lick the stains off our shirts. Food never spoils in their refrigerator. The back yard separates into patchwork squares, colored and woven with different vegetables. The dogs reek of pig feces.

The aunt visits, her face half hidden by glasses. Everyone crowds against her stomach, heavy with someone's child. The closest they come to religion is screaming "Goddamnit!" when both young cousins are found rolling with the dogs.

Sun bears down in the afternoon, we're jumping on the trampoline. The twins laugh as I turn myself upside-down and beg me to teach them. They both learn quickly and we all tear ourselves away from the earth, one at a time because that's all there's room for. I suggest more ice cream. Vetoed.

We grab the hose and take turns spraying each other with it. The older sister swears she will kill us if we get her wet.

At dinner we lie out on the warped wooden porch and stare at the escaping clouds. We dance to the music of the ducks penned at the bottom of the stairs. "What'll we eat?" we ask, juggling questions, our laughter bouncing back to us from the dusty walls of the unfinished basement. My eyes water from the dust. I could cry. A rhythm threatens to shake apart the house; we're sliding down the circle staircase, our butts raw as the pork in the freezer, our screamed delight chopped and shaky, like a voice sliced clean by the fan. Out on the porch, we're eating tacos, over-spiced and runny. All around us, dogs and crickets, ducks and pigs, threaten to drown out our horrible singing. Only the sounds of our laughter.
I love
The man I love says swear to his mother.
The bird does too.
Petie learned to say, "Oh Shit!"
Petie makes me laugh.
He tells the girl to go home and he says that tomorrow is coming.
The man I love hates Petie. He was Petie's teacher.

The teacher and I lay in his bed all day-
we talk about stars, abortions,
birth control,
and our ideas for going out west.
The man I love thinks I should ride side-saddle so that I have to wear a skirt.
He whispers that no underwear would be a fantasy too.
We always decide we need a trailer hitch.
Our kids will grow up behind a truck
by the sand and the sea.
He says I have to teach them about sex.

The T.V. always blares.
The bird asks, "Where is California?"
Screens flash breasts and info-mercials.
Brother talks about mechanics
and money all day.
I'm always giggling slightly.
I squirm away from his torturous tickling hands.
He pokes and kisses me with the tongue
in the same room as mother and brother.

I lie below his dark shadow.
His thick wavy hair looks separated from the rest of him-
the parts that are busy kissing open my buttons.
When I complain about the bedposts banging the wall
He hits the bed even harder.
It's a game he always wins.

Their house is small.
The man I love proudly calls it "The Shack."
The garage is crammed with 2nd grade glitter art,
cages for runaway wildlife,
and broken appliances that father will fix someday.
The grass grows tall enough.
My feet can disappear into the damp dirt.
The mower comes out of the dust cover only occasionally, like when father bought a fountain on clearance.
He mowed one singular straight line down the middle of the field—so that the hose could stretch and fill the pond.
The cherubs began their incessant spitting of stale water.
Over and over and over.
Naked chubby stones using the same old water to make beautiful saliva.
THE FISH, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE (A SONNET)  

ANDREW MILLER

If only to escape street umbrella vendors, who always appear with the first clap of thunder and disappear just before cops resume their beats, we push our way into another cheap Chinese restaurant, sitting beneath a row of plastic trees. Soon, a pair of elderly couples are seated next to us. They have brought in their own transistor radio, which they have pre-set to a station playing big band jazz standards. Quickly, all four place their orders and hand their menus to the waiter.

"Harold always orders vegetable plates," one woman starts, "but never eats the vegetables: He should order the fish, for Christ's sake." Harold seems to not hear her from his wheelchair. Their appetizers are served, then the other couple starts to argue. The heavyweight, over-mascara'd woman spills her hot and sour soup and ribs down her paper napkin bib, and shouts, "I didn't want to sit next to you anyway," at her husband. "You need," he sneers back, "to take your pills, you crazy bitch." As they fight, Harold wheels toward the Men's Room while his wife absently steals broccoli from his plate. After paying the bill, we finish eating chicken lo mein and sipping orange pop through straws, and leave before Harold returns. Outside we laugh, rather than kidding ourselves with words. Only when I point out a broken umbrella, flipped inside-out and discarded where the curb meets the pavement, do you slip your hand into mine and fall silent.

ANDREW MILLER  

LOVE POEM (A SONNET)

So difficult to love in the city, where dimestore poets sneer beneath their gray berets, and cable cars turn the wrong way down single-lane streets drenched in whiskey perfume. How much easier to remember late country afternoons spent fingering taut lines, our sweat as trout would strike, then jump and fight, and wine flasks hidden in the cool river water? But sometimes—when the hum of car stereos is faint, when the plastic dice and bourbon are pocketed, and steam rises after a rain—we love until dawn, when parkway trees stir like a lazy river, the sky a scarlet fish lured by the fly on the city's line.
Last night you and I determined to ride
the local subway until I had written a poem.
At two-thirty you refused to go home alone,
and fell asleep when three homeless guys tried
to sing you their best rendition of a few verses
from The Dead Milkmen’s “Bitchin’ Camera.” If only
I could make out the words of the graffiti
stenciled into the windows—even if they’re curses,
perhaps there’s a line or two to lift. Another bum
wanders by again, calling out the same refrain,
“I could get a sandwich if you could spare a little change. . . .”
At seven, you’re still asleep on my arm as we come
up next to an uptown express. The trains take off together, side
by side, still searching for some way to push up into the light.
1. If I had something to say to you, I'd be breathing.

2. Breathing is one of the few body functions that are alternately controlled by both the conscious and sub-conscious mind. You always laughed when I said this, but sometimes my body knows something my brain doesn't. I can figure out what it is if I breathe in and listen to what my breath has to tell me.

3. Tell me I'm smart. Tell me I'm brave. Tell me I'm handsome. Tell me I'm funny. Tell me our friendship means something to you. For some reason, I don't hear these things said very often.

4. There are a lot of things I don't hear very often. I don't always hear when people tell me to do stuff like mail letters for them or to pick them up on Wednesday. Or maybe I do hear it, but I just forget it immediately: the right hand writes with chalk while the left hand writes with an eraser. Maybe my brain always works like that. I hope so. That might explain why I don't remember you saying "I love you."

5. I still love you, I think. It's been almost a year since we've spoken. Almost a year since I opened the letter you wrapped a bomb in. Almost a year since your mother read the letter I sent first. The one where I talked about your boyfriend. Your attitude. All the kisses you never gave me. I never heard what she had to say about it.

6. About those kisses, I want them back. I want back every Saturday night I spent holding you in my lap watching TV thinking if only he wasn't so ill and you weren't so obligated, you'd be mine. I want back all those strolls around campus, arm in arm, unafraid that anyone might see us together. I want back all those whispers, the ones that you breathed into my ear, the ones that made me feel brave, and smart, and handsome, and funny. They're out there, now. The universe has heard them already and laughed.

7. I laughed when I read your letter. I didn't know what else to do. Actually, I stared at it for awhile, breathing. Wondering who wrote it. Was it really you?
I didn't think so. You wouldn't have been so devastating, so forceful. Your style was always more subtle, more calculated, cold. You killed with paper cuts and pin pricks, not stab wounds. So who helped you write it? Your mom? No. She's too much of a flake.

8.
You called your mom a flake long before I ever did. But you were still angry that I said it. Or so you pouted. Breathing in, I don't really believe you. You were just looking for a reason to be mad. A reason to pretend that I had broken your confidence, told too many secrets. It's no secret your mom's a flake. Even people who've never met her know she's a flake: it runs in the family.

9.
Cystic fibrosis runs in my family. So does baldness, alcoholism, and diabetes.

10.
Cystic fibrosis runs in his family, too. His little sister, who was our age, died from it in seventh grade. Everyone came to school that day wearing black jeans and T-shirts out of respect. But no one respected her. She drooled when she talked, her hair was never combed, and she wheeled herself to classes on an electric cart that reminded us all far too much of the frumpy looking carts haggard old ladies drive around at Meijer's. You wouldn't remember that, though. You didn't go to our middle school.

11.
You did go to my elementary school. Way back in first grade. Back then, when every girl I had ever seen had shoulder-length hair, you had hair all the way down your back. You had an attitude even then. Your name sounded like a Crayola crayon color, and I loved you for it. When I talked to you for the first time, in high school, you felt like destiny.

12.
A fortune teller read your destiny once. She foretold a Spanish lover, sickness, marriage, death. Him. And you believed her. You believed her more than pain, more than love. Well, you were wrong. I changed your destiny. I can do that. Go back and ask her now what life will hold for you. How will love happen?

13.
Remember when love could happen without having to be naked? Remember when Christmas presents didn't make you feel dirty? Remember when laughter came without lying? Remember friendship? No, you don't. I do, though. I remember all these things, only they were never real. That's what happens when you lie about who you are.

14.
That's what happens when you lie about who you are.
How can I translate flesh into words?

Streaming ribbons of sensuality dance.

How words can dance, streaming sensuality.

I translate into ribbons of flesh.

Must I maintain the clean façade of virginity?

The clean façade of a church is virginity.

Remain encased in desire, is to maintain.

A thousand baptisms on a Friday night.

Vodka drowned in the depth of my stomach.

How must I remain drowned in baptisms?

Can I desire to translate a thousand words into
Clean virginity to maintain the sensuality of a dance.

I held my sister’s hand, both of us shaking, picking our way through the cemetery snow.

1. That cliff rose, sheer and sandy, pulling away from the water abruptly, head thrown back in defiance, from the top, bashed in rough grass, my eyes and veins still pounding with tropical color, I watch the water dancing mischievous, around an old jack pine.

11. At one time this land was covered with jack pines, their gruff and sticky voices chortling in the nights of September, October subdued by the cold of November.

I was here then, in the siren song of my Aunt Kate, wearing a hat to church on Sunday, writing each of Andrew’s visits, each winter sleigh ride, into a little book made from the scraps of her brother’s lessons.

111. Our cheeks grew thin then, at winter’s hardest month, the sap flowing at its slowest in the heart of the maple stand.

I held my sister’s hand, both of us shaking, picking our way through the cemetery snow.

IV. The clear nights are always the coldest, and the stars seem even farther away. On Sundays after choir rehearsal, Kate
and Andrew disappear, arm in arm into the frost. The pines crackle against each other in the wind, their twigs like the fingers of snowflakes.

We began our journey after Dadi returned from his office at the University of Nairobi. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in late February and, as El Niño had not been sighted yet that day, I spent the early morning hours attempting to wash the mud from my one pair of threadbare jeans. Hanging them on the clothesline that stretched across the driveway I searched for clouds over the rough brick wall that surrounded our small compound.

My eyes traveled down our street with its identical houses and white Peugeot cars to the wall that surrounded our estate. Beyond the wall lay the slum of Kibera, its tin roofs glinting in the morning sun. Further, lay distant hills of green rising from the grassy valley. I stood for a moment, memorizing the lay of the land in my head, enjoying the sun as it shone down, the clouds gone for the day. After a minute or so I hurried into the house to clean up the rest of the laundry.

Wambui and Margaret soon returned from the market on the corner with goods to bring to the shamba. As I cleaned the breakfast dishes, they packed the gifts in cloth bags. Dadi arrived soon after, rushing as usual, asking if we were ready to go. Margaret told him to go upstairs and change out of his clothes while we packed the car. Wambui and I sat in the backseat, the gifts for the grandparents piled on the seat between us and nestled on the floor between our legs. The bags were filled with city goods: cloth, spices, candy, refined sugar and loose tea. Once the house was locked, we were on our way, through the traffic of the city, our windows rolled up against the commotion.

I watched the tall buildings of Nairobi diminish in size as the hills, at first gently rolling, rose in height as we continued north and into the central highlands, the home of the Kikuyu people. As we drove I kept my eyes on the countryside, constantly gazing into the distance for a glimpse of the mountain. Mt. Kenya, the sacred mountain of the Kikuyu religion, and one of the world’s largest free-standing volcanic cones, has twin peaks that are usually shrouded by clouds. Its presence dominates the highlands, drawing worshippers of all types, both traditional and modern. I wondered what it would be like growing up near the mountain, how its personality influenced those that tilled the rich earth of its great slopes.

We were visiting my host father’s parents, called simply Chuchu (“grandmother” in Kikuyu language) and Grandpa. Married for over sixty years, the couple survived Mau Mau, the anti-colonial resistance movement in the early to mid 1950’s during which 13,000 men, women and children, mainly Kikuyu, were killed by British troops. After independence was achieved in 1963, much of the prized farmland of the highlands, previously advertised as “White Man’s Country” to British settlers, was slowly redistributed to its proper owners over several decades. The couple, along with
thousands of other Kikuyus, reestablished shambaas and homes in the high-
land region, in the foothills of Mt. Kenya, and indeed, on the mountain itself.

Dodi pulled off from the main road onto a narrow dirt road. Either
side of the road was thick with brush and large coniferous trees. We bumped
along the road for several minutes until Dodi turned right, onto an even nor-
rower two track path. Uphill we went, Wambui and I holding onto the bags
of gifts to prevent them from spilling. At the top of the hill was a shady clear-
ing, and Dodi slowed the car to a stop. I slowly emerged from the car, trying
to take in my new surroundings. There were several buildings: the main house
and other smaller structures made of dark wood, including two sheds and a
chicken coop. Under a large tree two people napped, escaping from the sun
that seemed to be burning even brighter than in Nairobi.

The house was made with large rectangular bricks of an earthy sandy
brown. A path led up to the door, green grass hovering on either side of the
dry earth. A bright blue trim was painted around the entrance, windows and
roof of the house, giving it a welcome presence. Stone tiles hung above the
doors and windows that faced the clearing. From where I was standing I could
make out their design, a small black cross centered in the blue trim.

An old woman emerged from the dark doorway of the house, and
following her from behind the house, a man who I assumed was her hus-
band. I wanted to stand there and watch them approach but Wambui
was already unloading the car. I heard greetings being exchanged as I
removed the cloth socks from the backseat of Margaret's Peugeot. I felt a
hand on my arm and straightened up from the car. Dodi led me to the old
man and woman, introducing me in English and Kikuyu. They both hugged
me, my flesh seeming soft and malleable in their arms, the strength in their
embrace surprising me.

We walked towards the main house, Margaret and Chuchu exchange-
ing more news, Grandpa and Dodi walking more slowly, heading toward
the chicken coop. I walked with Wambui, our arms filled with presents. But
before I reached the house, Dodi called to me. Margaret took the bags from
me and I walked over to where Dodi and Grandpa were talking.

Grandpa gestured to me, waving me closer. He stood under a giant
tree that shaded his small house from the noonday sun. I approached him
shyly. He spoke to me, his eyes, hands, feet, voice, telling me more than his
words, which I did not understand. He took my hand in his: a hand that had
tilled the earth for over 75 years, a bony hand, but solid as the ground on
which we stood. My hand, small, smooth, and light, seemed lost in his, yet
lost in the most comforting way.

He said something to Dodi, and then led me down a gently sloping
hill, just behind the house, through the banana and mango trees. We walked,
hand in hand, with Wambui trailing after us, holding the hand of a small cousin, a boy of four named Kamau, who smiled like the sun. Ducking under branches, shading our eyes from the sun, and sighing again in the shade, we walked through the shamba.

As we progressed, Grandpa occasionally pointed out a specific tree or bush, perhaps a favorite or an especially fruitful specimen. As we walked past a mango tree, he picked an overripe fruit from the plant and after opening it he placed it in my hand like a gift. In Kikuyu, Grandpa described the contents of the fruit, his voice rumbling in my ears. I explored the seeds and the pod, asking questions as my fingers smoothed the skin of the fruit. He answered me, looking into my eyes, telling me of the farm, of the fruit I held in my hand. I smiled and nodded, understanding at least that the land was precious, above all else. We continued to walk, out of the shady grove, and into the green rows of maize.

Through the maize we walked, Grandpa easily maneuvering between the rows of plants. The stalks were a brilliant green, and I looked up through them at the diamond sky. The earth was reddish brown, and as I bent down to hold it in my palm, I glanced at Grandpa’s feet as he inspected a stalk of maize. They were thick, and unblemished by any shoe. The skin was wrinkled and cracked on the surface, reminding me of a stream bed dry of water. Lines like tributaries fanned out from the creases, filled with the dust and soil of the shamba. His nails were long and slightly curved toward the earth, like stones carved by an endless flow of water. We walked on, the soil in my palm sinking through my fingers and drifting back to the earth.

Dadi, Wambui, and Kamau met us at the stream that irrigated the rice fields. Dadi explained that the water came from a spring that was born from the earth many years ago, during a great rainy season. The spring provided fresh water for the shamba and eventually grew into a stream. We all jumped over the stream, careful not to slip on the wet rocks. I held my hand out to Grandpa as he reached the other side, and we walked on, the house behind us, the fields of rice to our right and the stream on our left.

In the distance, cattle and goats grazed in a pasture, also belonging to the shamba. The hills rolled on in the distance, each cut into a brilliant patchwork of cultivated fields.

Dadi and Grandpa talked about the shamba, with Wambui or Dadi occasionally updating me on the conversation in English. Apparently, Dadi thought that Grandpa and Chuchu were no longer able to manage the shamba properly. "Like this!" he said uprooting a bean plant and pulling it from the earth. "This should have been dug up long ago, but now, it has gone bad and must be replanted." He gestured to Wambui, asking her if she knew how to transplant the roots of the plant. I sensed her hesitation, but not wanting to admit she did not know how to do a basic planting technique, and with her usual plucky attitude, she shrugged and began to search for a stick.

The Kikuyu people are known throughout the country for their skill and perseverance in tilling the earth. Many young Kikuyu, however, like my sister, have inherited this legacy but not the technique of the craft itself. Wambui had often expressed her desire to live on the shamba with Grandpa and Chuchu, but with the opportunity of attending the university, it was out of the question.

With some confidence she found a sharp stick and attempted to dig a hole for the plant, bending over at the waist, the hem of her skirt just touching the water flowing into the rice paddy. Like a piston, her arms went up and down, but the earth was stubborn, and would not yield to her efforts. She hid her disappointment and my heart went out to her. Wambui identified herself with Dadi, more than Margaret, and hated to let him down. At 22 years old, Wambui was a fourth-year business major at a private college in Nairobi. We often talked of college, and after getting to know her as a sister and friend, I was surprised to find her studying business. She admitted to me one night, as we readied for bed, that she was really interested in theatre and history, but that Dadi had pushed for the business college instead. It made sense, she told me, in that with a business degree, she would be more likely to find a job after college that could both support her and contribute to the family’s needs.

We turned around and headed back towards the house, for lunch, Dadi and Grandpa still discussing the shamba, Grandpa disagreeing with Dadi’s opinions. As we walked, Dadi occasionally paused to inspect a husk and point out other fruits or vegetables my inexperienced eye had failed to notice. Besides the maize, mango, rice and beans, there were bananas, potatoes, cassava, squash, tomatoes, cabbages, carrots, coffee, tea. I never dreamed so many varieties of fruits and vegetables could grow in one place. I began to understand why the land of the central highlands was so prized by the British settlers and why the Kikuyu people gave up so much to take it back.

It was a relief to enter the cool shade of the house. Inside, the floor was cool against my feet as I slipped off my sandals, leaving them at the entrance which had no door barring the entryway. I found Margaret and Chuchu having tea on the couch in the common room near a large window that allowed the shaded sunlight to enter the room. A whispery breeze flowed through the windows and the doorway cooling the sweat on the back of my neck. On the far wall hung a cheap print of the baby Jesus that was hugely popular to the Christian Kenyans. A small crucifix hung on the opposite wall and I wondered if the grandparents had willingly given up their god, Ngai,
for a while one, or, if that was taken away as well, along with their ancestral land. Chuchu patted the seat next to her and I gladly sat between my host mother and her mother-in-law.

Chuchu, much like Grandpa, took my hand in hers and squeezed it heartily. I smiled and squeezed back, greeting her in Swahili. She answered in Kikuyu, my mom translating for me. Chuchu wanted to know why I was so skinny and asked Margaret if she was feeding me. We laughed and began talking, Chuchu sharing news of the farm and stories of past mzungu visitors.

While she talked I looked into her face, the face of a woman who had, for most of her life, worked physically, and would continue to do so until she died. She was very tiny, by American standards, her head reaching for the ceiling, her legs, bent forward, toward the ground. I guessed she was about four and a half feet tall. To demonstrate her points as she talked, Chuchu squeezed my hand or slapped my thigh as she shook her finger either at me or Margaret, all the while laughing, as if the world were about to end. Her hands were powerful, and I felt the strength in them as they touched my body. Her arms, floating in her short-sleeved white blouse, were sinewy and much tougher than mine. Her scarf covered her head but tufts of gray hair poked out from the side just above her ears. Her feet, I noticed, did not touch the floor as she sat on the couch, her bare feet hung down, her tiny feet crossed at the ankle.

I left Margaret and Chuchu on the couch to assist Wambui with lunch. Margaret instructed me to follow a short hallway and turn right at the first doorway. The hallway was dim as the sun was too high in the sky for the light to slant into the house. I trailed the cool walls with my fingers until I found Wambui in the kitchen, a spacious room with two windows. The kitchen was simple with a single light and a small, portable gas stove with two burners. Wooden shelves and cabinets held the dishes and a long table served as a counter. Wambui prepared irio, a staple Kikuyu dish consisting of mashed maize, beans, milk and potatoes, while I prepared the tea and the place settings.

When lunch was ready, everyone sat down on the two couches and Dadi said a small prayer thanking God for the food and the opportunity to spend time with family. After we all cleaned our hands with water from the small pitcher standing on the table, Wambui served the irio. Everyone ate heartily, and I, finding the maize kernels incredibly tough to chew, did the best I could. Chuchu and Margaret took turns dumping more food on my plate, but I knew better than to protest. The conversation lulled on while I gazed around at the circle of faces: Grandpa teasing Kamau; Wambui, talking to her grandma; Margaret and Dadi discussing the shamba. Wambui looked very happy, happier than I had seen her in several days.

I often got confused in the first weeks in Nairobi when I would hear people discussing going home for the weekend or for any period of time. "But isn’t home here?" I asked myself. Finally, it was explained in one of my classes at the University: most Kenyans in Nairobi are not originally from the city; they are from villages, towns or communities in the countryside. The city functions as a center of commerce and industry; it’s a place to make a living. As the movement for independence escalated, and Mau Mau became a threat to the colonists, the city became the center for intelligence and progress. As members of Dadi’s and Margaret’s generation grew up and independence was achieved, the city expanded as people flooded into Nairobi searching for new opportunities and employment. The village, however, where the ancestors are buried, where older relatives and extended family live, where one owns land, remains first in the hearts of the city dwellers and is often visited.

While we prepared dinner one evening at home in the city Wambui expressed her frustration at her position as a modern African woman. "I’m caught in the middle," she said unhappily. She said she wished she could live at the shamba, wearing the traditional Kikuyu dress instead of hand-me-down clothes from wealthier western countries. We both knew, however, that she would not be happy farming her whole life, the doors of education open too long to now be shut.

That day at the shamba I saw a glimpse of what life was like out of the city, and I saw how Wambui craved it, how we all enjoyed the clear vitality of it. It seemed simple from the exterior: the rows of maize, the fields of rice, the pasture, the chickens providing fresh eggs every day. In the back of my mind I knew it was not easy, that farming was incredibly tough, the earth, the weather, and insects at times forming insurmountable obstacles. The shamba had magic to it, however, and it was this feeling of wonder that pulled me back into its dense foliage after the lunch dishes were washed and dried.

I walked alone, pushing the leaves out of the way, hiding under a tree whose branches wrapped around me. I searched for a sign of the mountain but only saw blue sky and hills everywhere I looked. Running through the corn I knew that if Ngai was watching, he would see only the movement of the corn as it waved over my head. My hands brushed the plants as I ran, their leaves silky on my palms. At the bottom of the hill I stopped and painting, looked up to where I began. I saw a figure in the rows of maize and recognized Grandpa’s beige and brown shirt. He stood and waved, his face stretched into a smile. He must have followed me out and watched as I played and ran, abandoning my guest manners. I waved back, laughing, my eyes
moving up from his face, past the house and into the sky. The sun glinted
and I thought I saw something shining in the clouds. Putting my hand over
my eyes to shade them I squinted and looked again. Rising above my grand-
father and the shamba was a tall peak, far in the distance, its icy point a
white swirl in the sky. I waved again, this time saluting the mountain.

Once again Grandpa and I walked through the mango trees, my
hand comfortably in his. I heard the car door shut and assumed the family
was preparing for our departure. The afternoon was fading and I knew
Margaret would be anxious to arrive at the house before dark. I wanted
to remain, to stay in the hills with Grandpa and Chuchu, to hide beneath
the trees and plants, listening to the fruit and vegetables grow deep in the
earth. We said goodbye in the clearing, hugs going all around. I whispered
thank you to Chuchu as I bent down to encircle her with my long arms. She
squeezed me tight and told Margaret to send me up for a weekend. Grandpa
patted my hand and I looked into his face. The mountain was there, in the
lines around his mouth and eyes, in the snowiness of his hair. In his eyes
I saw wisdom and secrets, secrets of the mountain and the earth, and how
to make it grow. Holding my hand in his he bent toward me and whispered
in my ear, his voice telling me everything.

%ibid.
WHAT I BELIEVE
He waits, his eyes slammed shut, until the lights burn out; or the noises stop; or that fucking boiler stops belching heat. The malignant fucks upstairs have bled the humanity out of him—out with humanity, out with god, out with that damned stuffed animal he had when he was three and lost somewhere before now. Lying in bed touching his safe parts. Feeling his godless body—godless mouth, godless hand, godless fingers, godless birthmark above his belly button and the one on his leg (the girl noticed). She noticed he was godless. She isn't. She has god; she has grades; she has the validation required to call oneself a human being. She won't masturbate. She should. He told her to go home and make herself feel human.

"That wouldn't be right," someone said, "no empowerment with pleasure. That's shallow." Fuck it. He's shallow. "I want pleasure; I want money; I want fame; I want sex; I want soap operas at dinner time! I want to eat Twinkies. I want walk-in closets!" he shouts. He tries to get by without them and gets hung up with his clothes. When he hangs there he looks at the full-length mirror on the door and says: "God, take me back. I've been on adulterous whore. Putting things where they don't belong—impure thoughts in the bookstore, impure thoughts in church, shit mad little fantasies calling to mind what a friend does with the top of his foot in the bathroom. "I'm cheating on God with the academy and cheating on them with God." He is whores himself to the pseudo-intellectual dribble that slithers off maple leaves into his easy brain. Constantly fucked by phallic ideas and the hot cunt of academia. The pussy of learning tasting like pounds of sugar dumped in the gallons of spoiled milk he's been drinking for years. He won't swallow that sacred cum or where it come from. He won't call that secular mouth home. He shuts his eyes harder to block out the images of the dehumanizing people that live upstairs, who've forced him to an unfinished basement with spider webs and children's toys. He just lies there, grasping at redemption and it is only masturbation—self-gratification, self-denial. He is just groping at cocks and breasts in the middle of the night; beating off to copies of "On the Road" and "Kaddish," begging for penetration with alcohol and nicotine. He's just a junkie shooting up with jabs of Christianity (knowing full well that shit will fuck him up). He recalls hiding under a once-wood bridge at the river walk where he once felt the lips of validation wrapped around his own. They prayed for the metal to fall. They searched for the intellectual orgasm of original thought. Now, the best he can do is original sin, and that is not that original. He thinks about "self-reliance." All it is, self-denial. "Jesus, I believe in masturbation; just let me go blind."
Death can happen to anyone.
Some people are better left dead.
He died, jumped off the face of the earth
For all I knew.
He came home one Christmas and I had a plan
To finally conquer this lyrical ego,
This perfectly stereotypical rock star.
There he was, hair and all, standing in the bar.
I strutted up to him, a smile grew on his face. He
Said hello, the eye contact, the understanding.
Plan set into action.
Arriving at his house.
His ego was soaring, but I had him pinned
down.
Sweating, stripped bare, he lay
Next to me, still playing with his own hair.

What did you learn on your trip to sacred ground?
I found God, he tells me coyly.
Where was he hiding?
In the breast of young girls.
I also found Jesus, he says to me.
Where was he escaping to?
Inside the rich goodness of Marlboro Reds.

When I was five, my mother dragged me to
a big, looming building filled with old people
who smiled at me and asked me
my name.
I never smiled back. I never answered
their prying.
I disliked church from the start.
Once I told the old bag sitting in front of me
who persisted in asking me how old I was
that I was the anti-Christ.
Her gaping hole with yellow monsters
turned toward my mother.
My mother looked at me.
Save it for later, I heard.
Stand up when we sing,
sit with your legs crossed in front of the
congregation, go
to Sunday school when dismissed, not
outside.
But Mommy, I would clamber,
Jesus exists in all things of nature.
We stayed at home the next week,
as well as the years that followed.

So he’s found God, I ponder.
I look at my breasts.
Nope, no religion here.
Wish I was home
Here, lying under the sky
Clouds blowing by

A time to reflect
But I'm too cold

I want a bed
A nice warm bed
My own sleeping bag
My stuffed puppy to hold

Wind through the trees
Breaks on me

I believe I've had enough

Ditch this crap
Eat real food
Fuck being positive
The praying wall is red and gray, drenched with rain water from late August. I knew once, in my core, the sound of a tropical rain flecking the leaves of the mango and the banana trees, pounding over our heads there, under the stairs.

I. The praying wall is not really a wall at all. In fact, I have never prayed there. Women walk by daily at sunrise, their gold heels and short dresses barely disguising the hope that remains only in their eyes.

II. I have never prayed there, against the red wall drenched with water from a late August rain. Eyes closed, I seek nothing to replace a genuine kiss.

III. The way the floor floats up sometimes, exactly how the word sacrosanct separates and rises above the rest of the page, this is the way I have kissed him until the dawn almost breaks, holding his hair in my fingers.
The dead are not dead, he said, but of course it was not in English. Yes, I answered him, we hear their voices sometimes, but what I really meant was yes, they are dead, but perhaps they are not gone, and saying this, I see the earth as it must look from heaven, all of the bodies laid out in rows, under the feet of bodies walking in lines.

Two syllables,

Gold-berg.

Gold—the purity of his heart.

Berg—as in ice berg.

As in if you and him were to collide

Your ship would sink faster then the Edmond Fitzgerald.

The World Champion.

172-0

Something that has never been accomplished before in professional wrestling.

You re-awoke the child that was put to sleep by Hemingway, Blake and Shelly.

You gave me hope again.

Starcade,

December 27, 1998.

You faced your biggest challenge yet,

Kevin Nash.

I was nervous.

It was hard for me to watch.

15 minutes pass

And you finally get an opportunity.

You are able to spear him,

You give the sign for the Jackhammer.

I was on my feet, chanting your name,

"Goldberg! Goldberg! Goldberg!"

Until you Scott Hall.

You shattered my dreams,

My hopes.

You came in from behind

And shocked him with a cattle prong.

You knocked him out.

Nash put him in the power bomb

And it was all over.

The winning streak was over.

A part of me died.

A month later,

Souled Out.

Hall vs. Goldberg in a ladder match,

No disqualifications.
To win was to shock the other with the cattle prong.
I waited a month for his redemption.
I waited a month for my redemption.
Twenty minutes before Souled Out began;
The picture went out on the TV.
I called the Cablevision operator.
I begged to her,
"Please help me. Goldberg is going to be on. I can't miss this."
I don't think she cared.
I don't think she understood.
She told me that the chip in the box must have died.
It wasn't going to come back to life.
I wasn't going to see Goldberg.

The phone rang as if God was telling me,
"I will fix everything."
I picked up the phone.
It wasn't God.
It was only Lindsey.
"Don, I'm sick. I need to go to the hospital. Will you come with me?"
Damn you God!!!
Why are you doing this to me?
And then it dawned upon me.
"Yes, I will. But only if Matt and Brett can come over and watch Souled Out
at your house."
She didn't care.

As we were driving down the highway I had an epiphany.
Jesus died for our sins.
He died so all our souls will be allowed into Heaven.
He sacrificed his body and spirit for us.
I went with Lindsey to the Hospital.
I went to the hospital, so Matt and Brett could watch Souled Out.
I sacrificed my body and my soul so they could watch Souled Out.
Which led me to my next thought.
What Would Jesus Do?

Jesus had long hair, a beard, and wore sandals.
Jesus was a Hippie.
I don't think he would be into sports.
But this match was more than winning, or losing, or even getting revenge.
It was about redemption.
It was about making the wrongs right.
He knew what that was like.
Turning the tables over in the temple of Jerusalem.
I'm sure Goldberg understood what Jesus had to do.
I'm sure Jesus understands what Goldberg has to do.

Lindsey went into the hospital while I waited.
Two hours until Goldberg.
I waited patiently.
She came out an hour and a half later.
It takes twenty minutes to get back,
Five to get into the house,
Which leaves me with five minutes.
It was as if God was testing my faith in Goldberg
Or that I was really really lucky.

The match was about to begin.
His music filled the air
And his name soon followed,
"Goldberg! Goldberg! Goldberg!"
He entered the ring.
His eyes fixed on his prey.
The hunted now became the hunter.
The bell rang.
Death was in the air.
Ten minutes went by.
Scott Hall close-lined Goldberg.
He was down.
Scott Hall attempts to climb the ladder.
But Goldberg makes a gallant effort to stop him.
It is now Goldberg's time to rise.
His arm reached,
He was so close,
But from nowhere the Disco Inferno runs down the aisle
And knocks him off.
He has betrayed Goldberg.
Goldberg falls from the Heavens
And crashes to the ground.
When he rises, blood falls from his eyes
And drops to the mat.

The immortal man is human,
But Goldberg refuses to quit.

He makes his second attempt;
The ladder once again knocked out from under him.
He crashes to the Earth once again
But on the third time he rose again in fulfillment of the WCW script.
Scott Hall had gotten the cattle prong while Goldberg was recovering.
He came at Goldberg once and missed.
He attempted a second try
And missed again,
And on the third try Goldberg managed to take it from him.
He raised it in the air to show his Disciples.
A thunderous roar filled the stadium.
He went for Hall—shocked him,
And then The Disco Inferno.
The match was over.
Goldberg had won.

But The Disco Inferno snuck Scott Hall a second cattle prong
And when Goldberg wasn't looking,
"ZAP!!!"
Right in his back.
Goldberg fell to the ground.
Scott Hall stands over Goldberg as if he had won the match.
The screen fades to black.

If Jesus had been watching this I'm sure he would have had been in a drunken rage,
After turning all that water to wine,
And would have turned Scott Hall inside out
And have crows peck at his guts.
Well,
I wish he would have.
But after what has happened to Goldberg he has gotten up every time.
He has never lowered his head in shame.
He has never quit.
Even though it says in the record book that Goldberg won,
Scott Hall got the better of Goldberg
And may have won a battle
But he hasn't won the war.
Jesus was the King of Jews
But Goldberg is the King of Wrestlers.
I would drink the blood
And eat the body of Goldberg every Sunday.
And I would never use Goldberg in vain.

I am a Catholic
But I would convert to Goldbergism in a minute.
It doesn't matter if it isn't real
Because what religion is?
Or even the right one?

There is none
And if I find peace
And if I find faith in worshiping Goldberg,
Then who cares?

And if Jesus does have something to say about it
Then the two of them can settle it
In a steel cage match
At the next pay-per-view.

"Never Mind."
"Oh, it was nothing."

These two phrases totally tick me off. They constrict my chest and
make me want to scream at you that you don't understand. I silently wish
that for a second you were me and that you could feel the isolating chill of
those six words. People have said them to me repeatedly all my life. They
make me feel like I'm invisible and not worth repeating something to. It
shatters me on the inside and reminds me that I have a hearing loss. If I
could hear normally I wouldn't have had to ask you to repeat what you
said. When you say those things to me I feel shut out. I visualize myself
inside a coffin and you slamming the cold marble cover over my face with
a cold, empty, loud, and clear bang. It's like a deep heavy slap across the
face in slow motion. It takes me a second as I move through shock, then
anger, confusion, and finally by the time I realize one of those phrases was
spoken, you have already turned away from me. And then I can't react. I
am frozen and can't speak. I feel violated and see red, the red on a stop
sign. I stop for a second and churn it over and over in my head. OH, it was
nothing. Never Mind. Oh, it was NOTHING. Never MIND. Oh, it was
nothing. NEVER Mind. Oh, it WAS nothing. It was something and I missed
it. I missed it because of the simple fact that I can't hear very well.
Some of you that I love dearly do this to me. Some of you do it
unintentionally. For some of you it just slips out. Some of you don't know
that each time you say it to me it chips away at my trust for you. Some of
you don't know that I remember who has said this to me and who hasn't.
Some of you I have confronted. Some of you I haven't, because I figured
you weren't worth my time or energy. Some of you I have reminded over
and over again. For some of you I have lost my patience and respect. Some
of you are still my friends. Some of you know what it feels like and promise
to do better. Some of you really go out of your way for me and help me
out. Some of you really understand. Some of you never will.

So where am I in between all of you? I am here. I am listening. I am
trying hard to understand. I am trying my best to keep reminding you that I
cannot catch everything being said all the time. I know that you can't either,
but you at least can hear it. I get very tired very fast, since I expend so
much energy trying to keep up with your mouth. Why is it so hard for you
to repeat things for me sometimes? Believe me, I would get everything if I
could hear fine, and I would be twice as talkative. My vocabulary would be
twice as big and I would have even more stories to tell. If I could hear fine
you wouldn't be saying those two little nasty phrases to me. Sometimes I am
quiet, crying on the inside because one of those phrases came my way
and worked its way into my heart. Like tapeworms they suck away at the
inside, drilling small holes into my trust for you. They're insulting to me and hurt me. I am sick of them. Need I say more or do I need to start screaming now?

I once saw an angel in my Grandma's House. He was a misty outline of a man. I saw him in the early Morning light, staring at a clock.

I used to lie in bed and wish for death. Or rest in rough branches and wish to fly. But I never jumped, never slashed. I suppose faith wouldn't have caught me anyway.

Hell doesn't scare me. Not the way the idea of sitting in church does. Every time I step into a place of worship I wonder that the walls don't crumble.

Cornflower God, you are immense. You are the sky, the sea, and the periwinkle blooming on the edge of the road. Is that what you want me to see? When I look at the world should I see your hand, far above and untouchable?

What I see is myself, in a stained-glass cupola close to you, reaching for your tip. I think if I dream enough, or believe enough I might just see your face.
This is for the one who hung himself in the closet.
Collin was only twelve.
Citing imperfection,
He tied the knot
With beautiful death,
And marched in a white gown
to perfection.

This is for Megan who died in another's death.
She was seventeen,
Spreading her legs,
Letting them in.
Her baby slipped out
And she remained in the stirrups
In her imagination, forever.

This is for Chi who was constantly dying,
a murder of his self-respect
Tapping his foot,
The executioner came
A suicidal kiss
Not on the lips
His life blowing away.

This is for Jeff who died like most.
He was hardly born
When he started not to live.
He tried to work for the next,
Never happy,
Always alone,
Emotion never his.

This is for Ryan,
Only 20 years old
He's asleep in a laundry basket
Smelling the fat man's clothes
Always pushed on the floor
Suffocating himself
to distraction.

What happens after I find God?
After my dream of walking up the rise on the prairie
Comes true, grass the color of sunset, tractor tracks

Wider than my waist, and the sky spread wide,
The wind swift? Lately, I have been wearing
Amber on a silver chain around my neck that my best friend

Bought me while in Clermont-Ferrand,
There must be something different about those trees,
That their sap petrifies so perfectly, in such mass quantities.

And best friend—isn't that term charged with so much more
Than watching each other piss while singing show tunes?
Or the dull slam of a bedroom door when I don't want to live here

Anymore, don't want to see the snowy hills of west
Michigan, the sticky fluorescent Burger King sign
That keeps my bedroom twilight-lit all night?

But what happens after I find God, after I tell my boyfriend
That he is also my best friend, more dangerous than saying I love you
For the first time, after he forgets that my birthday
Is May 17th, and he says he'll go golfing with his friends
That day, as I sit behind him on the couch—silent, of course
I'm silent—my hand cupping his chest like a teacup,

Fragile, precious, aching to be filled—what happens?
Cupped as if to catch the words
I know are rattling against my teeth like bones,

And am afraid might fall out
And say I want too much.
I don't want to want

Too much. Wanting something only pushes it away from you,
And all you are left with is the feeling of wanting something—
Dyed yellow Easter eggs, love, my head on his chest,

Little resurrections—
But not the thing itself. It is always about God, Sara. About the ways in which I try and fail to grasp his coattails.

As they drag in the dirt along the tractor tracks,
The fabric coarse and rough-woven.
How fragile the skin covering a penis is,
How tough a body can be to take such battering.
Such crucifixions. The silence that means I want, I need, I feel, I taste, but says nothing at all is not new to me;

I am a master crafter. So I find God someday
Alone in the prairie of northern Illinois where I was a girl once,
And what? I feel whole again? I understand that the human

Heart is not meant for breaking but for expansion,
But the occasional tear is to be expected when you don't love yourself
Enough? That I will believe in God, believe when he says

He loves me, believe in dinners at his brother's house? Believe
That when my best friend says to me that this line has to go,
It explains too much, that amber is only the outside of the story,

What counts is what is buried inside?
That I will be telling this story for the rest of my life,
That I can never explain enough?
My father, on the telephone, asks me if I scream when I do it. He has been drinking, Mom says that he had a worse than usual day at the hangar. Do you really want to know, Dad? I ask. No, he says. I'm just giving you a hard time. My mother says that she is going to Milwaukee with my aunt and her friends for a quilting trip. She has just turned fifty, she is making almost seven hundred dollars a week babysitting for someone else's children. At the library, I picked up a copy of the Chicago Tribune, and scanned the front page for news about home. Daley elected again. Someone shot and killed in the suburbs. The Bulls and their awful start to the basketball season. Nobody says anything about my family, what it means when everyone leaves, and only the bones are left in the yard.

What does it mean when everyone has left only bones? Cow skulls in between the oak trees, eye sockets the size of a child's fist. My grandfather comes to my mother now for a haircut, even though it is only three dollars at K-Mart for senior citizens. With my mother, it is free. I think it is different for women when they turn fifty, she says on the phone. Men seem to react more strongly. But I guess it depends on which man you are talking about. I suggest that a can of turtle wax might benefit Grandpa more than a haircut, but she runs the clippers over his scalp anyway, sweeps hairs from the linoleum, and brews a cup of coffee for him. He probably doesn't thank her. He probably asks why she and my father are never at church. Talks about all his friends who are dying and laid out in fine wakses. But he is a good man, he is my grandfather. He has known things. He has seen things. He will slide into the Saturn, drive slowly back to Northbrook, and go to evening Mass at St. Norbert's, the collection plate always full.

Evening mass at Saint Norbert's must be filled with grandparents. Who else believes in this anymore? Sometimes I forget religion is not just for old people.

I forget that Catholics are not just old people. The pope draws crowds that can be only fit into football stadiums, and not just in Mexico. St. Louis,

America, teenagers with t-shirts with his picture on the front, who came all the way from west Michigan to sit in the cold morning air and listen to John Paul recite the Mass. I saw him once, in Rome on New Year's Eve, and he was incredibly small. More of a crumpled tissue than a man. In Santo Fe a few years ago, behind the church of Cimayo, there was a field bordered by cyclone fence, and far back in the tall grass was a marble cross. Palm leaves were woven into the links. I thought there must be something back there, something other than long desert grass and marble gods.

There must be something in it, religion, that so many people believe. I don't see it. God, for me, is me. Churches make me claustrophobic. When I was thirteen and my friends were being bar and bat mitzvah-ed, I wanted to be Jewish because they had a language that was different. The language of God was different. I asked Mrs. Cross, in CCD, why we didn't speak Hebrew, or Aramaic, why God spoke to Catholics in English. She said that we didn't need a special language for God. I later learned that my parents heard Mass in Latin when they were young. The pope says Mass in Latin. That language has little to do with the words, but everything to do with the limits we put on them.

Language is about the limits of words. I went to St. Mary's, a town over, for CCD for almost 4 years, because there were other deaf children in that parish, and there was an interpreter there for my sister. St. Mary's was in a town of old Catholic money, estates set back from the road at an acre's length, and tall stone walls between the road and the long, undulating lawns. The only differences between St. Mary's and Holy Cross, that I remember, were that the services at St. Mary's were interpreted, that the priest knew a few words in sign language, and that my sister didn't have to wear white at her first communion, but wore pink, with a wreath of pink rosebuds in her hair. That, and the kids in my CCD class threw candy at me and said Jump, Jew-lover. Jump. Jump, poor girl. Do you want some candy?

Do you want some candy, poor girl? Do you want some religion, do you want a slice of God? When I lost my virginity at twenty-one, the night
before Halloween, my thought was not I'm a woman now, or oh god, I'm
go to hell, but that the only difference between me and God was this:
breathing. Living. Being here, now.

8.

The only difference between God and me is that I cannot fly, and I perform
no miracles. Other than that, we're the same damn thing. Every year
around easter time, I went out into my mother's flower garden and looked
for crocuses cracking open the earth, unfolding their purple and yellow
arms. For the silver of an earthworm working its way back into the dark-
ness. Easter was black jelly beans and electric blue marshmallow bunnies,
watching the sun rise with my sister in the dining room, bare feet on the
cold tile floor, and the snow in the yard mottled with piles of dog shit.
Easter was a stomach ache and patches of psoriasis on the backs of my
thighs from the dry heat of winter.

9.

Recently, I have found patches of psoriasis on the backs of my thighs, like
cigarette burns. Nothing a little God won't cure.

10.

There is nothing that God can't cure. Provided that my language is the right
one. Provided I am a good girl, and I find God nowhere on my body, pro-
vided I am always what I say I am. Except what I say I am is God, and this
is a sure ticket for damnation. What my father would have me believe is
that he is at once shocked and blasé about everything. When I got the bill
for the gonorrhea tests, that shocked me, Sara. But you're twenty two—his
speech is slurred, my mother takes the phone and I ask, did you hear what
dad is talking about?

He is so strange, Sara, she says, and I know she loves him. And I also
know that I do not know either of them at all.

11.

I know that I do not know them. At all. What did my mother think, those
first days when my father came to her door, and took her out to dinner, when she first moved in, when the first pregnancy was discovered, then the miscarriage? Did she dream about the dark-eyed Rivara boy with the dog, the Rivara boy who came from a good family, who hung around at the gas station, who was in Vietnam and came home, who fixed airplanes for a living?

12.

She won't fly, my mother who married a man who fixes airplanes for a living. Only twice has she been on an airplane: once, we went to St. Louis to visit my father's sister, without my father, and we flew, and then she and my father went to the Bahamas, on a business trip. One summer he went to Paris for three months. He came home missing a beer belly, with easter-egg yellow t-shirts for my sisters and I that said Sorbonne, silver pendants of the Eiffel tower, and a secretary named Isabel who sent me French magazines because I was taking French in junior high. I do not want to imply that he was having an affair, but I wonder about the separation, why he went, what my mother was thinking. She says on the phone, I'm going to let you go, I don't want the phone bill to be so high, I'll send you money, I love you.

13.

I love you. This is what I mean when I say, I don't understand. When I say that I have no idea who this man and woman are who made me, why the skin folds the way it does around their eyes. This is what I mean when I am standing in my bedroom in Kalamazoo and I come up to the middle of your chest, and my hands smell like you. My father interrupts me on the phone, when are you coming home, when are you coming home, when are you coming home. Soon, Dad, I say. St. Patrick's day. I am supposed to give something up for Lent, and I always say that I have given up religion. I'm giving up God for Lent, is my line. I'll drink a green beer for you on St. Patrick's day, God, I'll get laid Saturday night for you, God, I'll watch for the veiny heads of crocuses to spear through the soil, and unfold into the cold March air for you, God. But I won't give you up.

14.

But what I won't do, is this:
I won't give you up.
What a Read! Tell me more about The Cauldron!

The Cauldron Literary and Visual Arts Organization is an independent, self-governed student organization that is dedicated to promoting and supporting the arts and the diverse voices of the artists on Kalamazoo College's campus. Through the publication of literature and sponsorship of events, The Cauldron participates actively in the campus public life.

Throughout the course of the year, The Cauldron collects artistic and literary works from Kalamazoo College students and reviews them for publication in the annual Cauldron Literary and Visual Arts Magazine (which you're holding).

In addition to this annual volume, The Cauldron makes exemplary student poetry, prose, and artwork available to the campus community through additional periodic publication that are distributed free of charge. These publications include additional information on local artistic events and resources.

The Cauldron also upholds and promotes the arts on campus by sponsoring numerous public artistic events and activities such as readings, expositions, and discussion groups.

We love to talk about ourselves, so if you have any questions or comments on the magazine, please give us a call at (616) 552-5000. Also, get in touch if you would like us to advertise your literary or artistic organization or if you'd like to bring an artistic event to Kalamazoo College's campus. Finally, if you're a thoughtful, sensitive, and far-sighted philanthropist who would like to reenergize a group of students working ceaselessly to keep the flame of human creativity alive, please keep that thought in your head and run straight to your phone. We promise you a near-endless gratitude, b) your name in print under a big thank you in our next issue, and of course c) an extremely worthwhile and productive use of your generous donation.
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