

Bottom Shelf Review

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Distinguishing the Ties that Bind

By Heather Burke

There I was, sitting in the empty physics lecture hall at the University of Maryland, listening to the muffled chatter from behind the roll away chalkboard, which if removed the whole way, revealed a doorway that led into what Clay called “the den”. The space around me seemed so large that it could swallow me whole, that I would somehow disappear amongst the rows of blue seats which seemed to stretch up for miles on either side of me. This room could probably hold two hundred people, or so it appeared, and it occurred to me that I wasn’t at small, little Wilson College anymore.

Part of me wished I could disappear, as I sat there in silence, my thoughts racing into a frenzy of questions: *Where could this be going? Forward, backward, towards a much deeper connection than I’ve had with any person before in my life? Was I a fool? Was I kidding myself into thinking things that weren’t true?*

I contemplated getting up, walking out, and hiding. This school was big, and there were many places to hide. And it seemed as soon as I registered this idea, I’d stood up and was mounting the stairs. Pushing back the heavy door, I moved down the hall to my right, until I found a place where the wall moved off to the left a little, next to two doors that led to the cold of the outside. There was a wooden bench to my right, but I didn’t sit on it. I took the floor instead, under a glass showcase box that hung on the wall. I could feel the cold air seeping through the cracks in the doors, but I didn’t care. A shiver was something, some sort of feeling in the absence of all those I knew existed. I wanted to cry sitting there, I wanted to be able to express some emotion, something real, but it refused

to come. I felt like an empty shell, knees pulled up to my chin, seeming able to do nothing but stare forward blankly, guessing, that if I could see myself, I'd look only half alive.

I heard people moving something down the hall to my right. I thought I heard Clay talking, and for a moment, I froze, wondering if he'd found me missing, got worried, and had come to look for me. Doors opened and shut, the voice died away, and I felt myself breathe again. Part of me wanted to be found, part of me dreaded it. Then I'd have to explain myself. I wasn't good or accurate whenever I described my impulses, and always ended up getting others, including Clay, confused. I closed my eyes and pictured that concerned look on his face that I knew would surely be there if he found me.

There it was. There came that pain as my heart tightened into a knot, that fear of losing everything, that feeling of *something* to let me know I was still alive.

Ever since I'd met Clay a few months before, I'd been stricken with an overwhelming feeling of compassion towards him. Our meeting was the classic "friend-of-a-friend" scenario. My friend Lauren had invited Clay up to a dance at our school in April, and after that, I always wanted to know more about him, always wanted to be closer to him, both as a friend or as something more than that. Something hit me that first day, when he reached out his hand to me and said "Hello, I'm Clay," in his soft and somewhat shy tone. What exactly that thing had been, I cannot be sure, but to this day it has not left me alone. While I have made strides in becoming his friend, this mysterious feeling inside my heart has refused to give up.

Opening my eyes, I pushed myself to my feet and wandered back to the door I'd exited. Pulling it open, I slowly made my way down the uneven staircase that was off to

the right side of the large room. There were people down below me on the main floor, but I cut across a few rows to avoid them, hoping no one noticed my reentrance. If anyone saw me, they didn't say anything, and I soon found myself back in my seat, trying to push my thoughts away, and waiting.

I heard people around me, as they began to fill the lecture hall at about seven o'clock. As they peered at the various contraptions set up on the tables in the front of the room, wondering what they did and how exactly they did what they did, the group from inside "the den" emerged; all dressed in the same turquoise t-shirts, with the words PHYSICS IS PHUN printed in black lettering on the front. A man in a sports jacket and tie, named Dr. Berg, was walking around greeting people and giving his various line of helpers and students (those in turquoise) instructions as to who was to go where and what they were supposed to be explaining about each experiment set out on the tables. Each member chose a post, prepared to pass along their knowledge to the young, as well as the older individuals who came to crowd around each item. The university had been putting on these shows for a while now, their aim to get the general public interested in the subject, but I found that some of the people present were teachers from other schools in the area, looking for new ways to present their material to their students.

I stayed where I was in the middle of the front row. My coat was hung up over the seat next to me, in hopes of saving it for Clay. My eyes casually glanced around the room, unable to see much except for the throng of people, hearing their "oohhs" and "ahhs" as they saw things they never understood before, or never thought could be possible. Again my mind raced back to those burning questions. *Was I really a fool? Was my heart lying to me about everything? How was I ever going to get over this?*

For a second he passed in front of me, and then I heard him to my left, as in his soft spoken and gentle way he asked “Are you alright?”

I looked up to see his five foot eleven frame standing there, his thin torso clad in one of those turquoise shirts. His long dark hair was tied back in a low ponytail as always, and his dark eyes peered at me somewhat questioningly through the wire frames of his glasses. For a moment my heart jumped, but I only uttered the few words I could think of: “Yeah, I’m fine. Just feeling a little strange.” I placed a few fingers on my forehead. “I feel like I’m floating or something.”

“Do you want anything for it?” he asked.

I smiled, taking my hand off my head, “No, I’m alright. It just feels weird.” I then smiled wider, reaching over to gently pull on his shirt, saying, “You owe me one of these.”

“Oh right,” he replied, a somewhat embarrassed smile coming over his face because he’d realized he’d forgotten it. “I’ll go get you one.”

“Can I come with you?” I asked in a more excited tone, knowing that for just a few precious seconds, we’d be by ourselves in the back room.

“Sure,” he replied, and as I got up to follow him, the thought came to me that I’d follow him to the ends of the world if he’d let me. I’d do anything he asked of me, whatever the risk. I was that attached to him.

I was only twenty, and Clay was twenty-nine. He was the physics major. I was centered on an English degree. I was legally blind, but still had vision off to my left side. He wore glasses for a stigmatism. Based on this, most believed we were polar opposites of each other, in two different realms, but that didn’t stop me from feeling what I did.

That didn't stop me from wondering and dreaming and hoping. We seemed to have hit it off when we'd met, and despite everything, I didn't see why it couldn't work out. He'd told me himself that if he'd not known my age beforehand, he would have pegged me as twenty-five, because of the way I spoke. I always thought I had a mature sounding voice, because of the way I could put words and phrase together. It probably helped that I read a lot and wrote constantly. Nonetheless, I always felt I sounded older from my experience with the English language, even though the way I acted didn't always go hand in hand with that. I've always been told I'm mature for my age, but I do still admit to being lost and confused most of the time. I don't know everything, and I haven't had enough life experience to even know half of everything.

As we stood there in "the den", Clay digging through a cardboard box of different size shirts, my mind raced back to a time a few months before. He'd come to visit me in Pennsylvania, after my return from New Jersey with my new Seeing Eye dog, Rafe. I went back to when he'd fallen asleep, head on my lap, in the warm sunshine up at Farmount Park. I thought back to his face at that moment, so calm, no hint of the constant worrying he always did, as I sat there Indian style in the grass, gently stroking the soft skin under his eye with the pad of my thumb. I thought back to the words that were spoken. "Do you let anyone else get this close to you?" I'd asked.

"No," he'd replied, with a somewhat confused look on his face.

"Then why me?" I'd pressed, a smile dancing across my lips.

There was a pause where he seemed to be considering the question, and then he answered in his soft manner, "I don't know."

That was one answer that haunted me. *What did he mean by that? How could he not know?*

I recalled how he'd leaned down to kiss my forehead when I'd been crying, upon his departure back to Maryland that same evening. Again the question: *Where was this going?*

Finally finding the smallest shirt, he held it out in front of me, saying, "Yep, that one's good," and handed it to me.

I smiled wide, "Thank you," I said, moving closer and wrapping my arms around him in a quick hug. "Is it okay for me to hug you in front of your friends?" I asked as I pulled away.

"Yeah," he replied, the small little smirk coming to his face. "It's okay."

We went back into the hussle and bussle of the room beyond, people still crowded in the front amongst the tables. Standing next to him in the middle of the crowd, clutching the shirt in my right hand, I looked up and asked, "Want to show me something?"

This time a wider smile spread across his face. "Yeah," he said, moving forward to one of the tables. I listened intently as he fell into one of his more comfortable modes of speech, the one he always used when he explained how things worked. The words came out in somewhat of a rhythmic tone, a tone that drew me in, where the nervous hint and the slight speech impediment he had vanished. I turned the handles, heard the bells ring, and saw the lights flash, seeming like a child of five in my curiosity about each and every thing present, pointing and asking, "What about this one? What does it do?"

I give credit to Clay for a lot of things, but the one in which I was most impressed was that he got me interested in physics, a subject I never in my life thought I'd be able to understand, let alone enjoy. I'd been fascinated by what him and I call the "tippy top" that he'd brought with him on our first meeting in April. It was a top that spun like any other, but then turned upside down, still while spinning, and while he (nor anyone else he'd said) could explain just how it worked, it had grabbed my attention; and when he'd mentioned these types of shows, I was more than pleased to attend. This was the second show in the line up, all about electricity and magnets.

After we'd gone around to all the tables, everyone was asked to take their seats so the more formal part of the event could start. Clay didn't sit next to me unfortunately, saying a little sadly, "Looks like I'm stuck on the other side," before he moved across to the right hand side of the room, guarding some of the equipment so that the little ones around wouldn't be tempted to play with it.

I sat there for the duration, learning all about magnets and electricity, picking up what I could understand and placing certain little facts into memory. Like that a lightening rod wasn't actually made to attract lightening, but instead, somehow changed the charge in the air around it so that lightening was less likely to occur. It was interesting to me, but I found myself every now and then making quick side glances to my right, trying in vain to not let Clay notice the turn of my head, because to see him at all, I had to look with my left eye, since the right no longer, or never had, functioned. I kept wishing he could sit with me, but I knew eventually, sometime on this trip, I'd get my chance to be alone with him again.

The show ended around 8:45 or so, and after Clay had finished making sure all the equipment was turned off, and the doors locked up, I was driven back to my hotel room by Dr. Berg., along with Clay and his roommate Will, who were also being driven home. Clay walked me to my door, my mind racing the entire time. *Should I ask? Is that right?* I was fiddling with my electronic key, trying to open the lock, as I uttered the few words I could. “I was gonna ask...” I started, “but I wasn’t sure if you’d—” I broke off, turning to him then with a slight look of disappointment. I knew he was going to turn me down even before he said it. I hugged him nonetheless, saying, “The company would be most appreciated.”

He returns the hug, but said in his gentle and not-trying-to-disappoint-you tone, “I have things to get home to.” I knew what he meant. He’d told me that this was the night when he hung out with his two roommates, and for a second, I felt angry at myself for even suggesting he stayed. I mean, how selfish can one person be? Reluctantly, I let him go, unlocked my door, and just as I was stepping through, I turned around. “Clay?” I said. He turned and looked at me. “Come here,” I said, beckoning with my hand for him to come closer. He did, and I reached up a hand to lie on the side of his face, before placing a small kiss on his forehead and saying good night.

Sunday morning I could hardly look at my own reflection. I was standing there in my hotel room, the turquoise shirt overtop of my burgundy one now. I’d slept in it the night before, somehow hoping it would calm me enough that I could sleep at all. I had been right and it had done the job, but now, as I stood in front of the sink, my eyes were pinned to the counter, fearful of my own expression.

I told myself over and over again that nothing I'd done had changed what was between us. Nothing I'd said had gotten any further or touched any place deeper inside.

Impossible....I thought, Never.....can't be....

My heart sank upon remembering those few fragmented words, all of which had come straight from Clay's own mouth at one time or another in the months that I'd known him. He knew all about how I felt. I'd told him more than once, in a variety of ways, but it had never made any difference. My numerous efforts had all been in vain, yet why did I always feel I needed to try harder? Clay had told me he didn't feel the same about me, so why did I always feel that I needed to keep trying in the first place?

It was then I looked into the mirror.

And there I saw it, just as I'd expected. Behind those two dark and somewhat dull eyes, was the inner most part of myself exposed, pushed to the forefront by my sadness and pain. The hurt expression covered my oval face, and it seemed to make me look even younger than I was. It was like staring at a seven year old whose just had their tiny heart ripped out for the first time, and who is on the verge of tears upon its disappearance. And I realized as I stared, that the corner of my good eye was beginning to blur the image, and before I could stop them, two clear drops of liquid salt ran to my chin.

Then I got angry. In a second's time my expression changed, my eyes narrowed, and I glared at myself, thinking *Heather, you're so pathetic! Get over it! You can't have him! Stop your crying!* For a moment I thought I'd heard my father telling me that, to stop crying. He'd always said that to me when I'd been young, instilling in me the notion that emotions were volatile things; things that the outside world should not see. A shiver ran up my spine, a coldness washed over me. I got angrier. Reaching up a hand, I swatted

away my tears, drove down the pain inside my chest, and went about my routine for the morning in a constant state of hate towards myself.

When he knocked on my door at about ten o'clock, I answered it with a smile on my face. I told myself that he didn't need to see me this way, that he'd seen it already too many times in a row. We were seated on the floor now, neither of us speaking at all, the silence seeming to cut into me somehow. What was he seeing in my face? Did I look as bad as I felt? No, I was sure there was still a warm smile on my face, and I could feel my cheeks burning.

Without speaking, I moved closer, wrapping my arms around him in a hug, lying my head against his chest, my ear pressed to the beat of his heart. This had happened before, this gesture, and I was pleased to feel the warm press of his arms as they encircled me. I closed my eyes and listened, lost for a moment or two in the rhythm from within, trying to lock this moment into my mind. Trying to lock every sound, every feeling, into the long string of memories I already had of our times together. And when I opened my eyes again, I felt that familiar aching around my heart, that familiar sense of loss even as he held me there, that familiar pain that was threatening to overtake me again right in front of him, with no regard for how he'd feel or react to it.

I pulled back, trying to force a smile at him, but it was already too late. His image was blurring and my eyes began to sting. *No! You stop it right now!* My mind was screaming at me. *Don't you dare!* But I wasn't listening. My ears had gone deaf, and all I could feel was the endless pressure building inside me. He could see it now, I knew it. There was no mistaking it. And as the tears fell once more, he looked at me, his

expression full of concern. He reached out his arms, pulling me close to him again saying in his soft way, “You must trust me when I say it will get better. It just takes time.”

“I don’t have time,” I blurted out, my voice catching in my throat before I could go on.

“Yes, you do,” he continued gently, “And it may take a long time. Much longer than you ever think it should, but it does get easier. You will heal.”

I heard everything he’d said. My mind had captured the words and was pressing them to my heart, but I didn’t understand them. I couldn’t make sense of anything except for what I was feeling inside. I was overcome with the fear that this was the last time I’d ever lay eyes on him. That somehow, somehow, he’d disappear forever, and to try and make sense of anything else was impossible. Holding tightly to him, again came the thought of the seven year old child. That’s what I felt like, the lost child, clinging in desperation to the only thing that made any sense at all.

And as I sat there, my tears beginning to subside a little, I remember looking upwards, as if praying to Heaven itself, mouthing the silent word “Please....” For one more second my heart clamped shut tight inside me, but there were no more tears to accompany it. My eyes were burning now as the salt dried. *Is this going to go on forever?* I thought, *Will I ever be able to be around him without crying?*

As I laid my chin on his shoulder, I caught my reflection again in the full length mirror on the opposite wall. Brown eyes red, face seeming to have lost all expression. There was a slight wave of weariness from crying, and for a few seconds, I found myself slipping into that blank stare, my eyes glued to that mirror, but no longer comprehending what I saw. A strange feeling ran through me then. For a moment, I felt anger boil inside

me. The thought came once of pushing Clay away and screaming at the top of my voice. Screaming out the hollowness, screaming out the numbness, screaming until I had no voice left at all, until my body refused to hold itself up. I could almost picture myself doing it. Vaguely in my mind, I saw it, that horrifying image of me, fists clenched, body shaking violently with each wave of piercing sound that emerged from the depths of my soul. I could see myself falling then, barely able to breathe, my whole body seeming to have gone limp, lying there on the floor, eyes half open, all their glitter gone. And the more the blurry images came to me, the more I wanted to, and for a split second my lips began to twitch; but as fast as it'd come, the anger died away, leaving in its wake a deep void of nothing.

I had to snap myself back. This had to stop.

Blinking again, I pulled away with a small sigh. I wasn't able to look into his face, I couldn't bring myself to see the hurt in his eyes, see the pain he suffered on account of me. No, it was too awful, too painful. Collecting myself as much as I could, I stood up on somewhat wobbly legs, and moved past him to the sink, where I smeared the cold water around my eyes, washing off the salt. Wiping my face dry, I turned around to see that he had stood up now.

A smile broke out on my face then, as we stood there and stared at each other for a moment. Somewhere inside me, a flood of wonderful feelings came to drive out the sadness, came to fill that empty space. I was glad he was my friend, and despite everything that had transpired, I was very happy to have him with me now. This time when I looked up into his face, I saw he was smiling too. A warm, comforting smile. And somehow through the silence came a message that I was able to understand: *I'll be here*

for you. Through life's hardships and through its joys. I will help you when you fall. I care...I'm your friend. Nothing can take that away...

His smile widened. *You are never alone...*

The Approach
By Kathryn Welteroth

It's all in the approach.
In your desire to win.
In my determination.
It's how we face the obstacle,
That decides whether we fail,
Or if we succeed.

Steady waltzing beat,
In time with my racing heart
1, 2, 3
1, 2, 3
1, 2, 3
That's the tempo,
Now stretch it out as much as you can.
Lengthen the rhythm.

We turn onto the track
I we can see it from here
A gaily colored oxer
Blocking our path

The rhythm continues
The even pace
Not too fast
Not too slow
Your heart rate quickens
beneath my legs
as the adrenaline pumps
Through you and me.

And now the crucial moment,
Where everything breaks down.
The world goes quiet.
Labored breathing is all I can hear.
The oxer is all we can see.

It is time for me to let go
To trust your instincts
By allowing free-rein
The scariest part.
The hardest part.
To give up my guaranteed safety
And move into a point of no return.

I let go.
You switch gears beneath me.

4 strides
I
3 strides
I believe
2 strides
I believe in
1
Pegasus

The moment of flight,
Fleeting in itself,
Over all too soon.
We have come.
We have conquered.
And we hit the ground running.

Ahead I can see it,
A faux brick wall in our path.
That is how it is,
for those who play the game.
The obstacles never end.
But that's all right.
We are ready.

Remember...
It's all in the approach.

Nocturnal
By Stephanie Reeder

Dawn broke and could not be fixed.
Atleast, not by me.
The last shards of night burned down,
leaving a raw-skin sky,
and smoldering horizon.

Shadows settled down to sleep,
a murder of crows with nests to keep,
upon the branches of a Red Pine tree.

I sat on a rock, which sat by a stream,
watching the morning,
mourning the night.
Listening to Nature sing her lullaby,
the wind humming gently,
the water keeping time.

As shadows settled down to sleep,
a murder of crows with nests to keep,
upon the branches of a Red Pine tree.

The children of the sun began to stir.
Sparrows chattered,
Blue Jays cried.
The last of the night fades and I follow
and as I sleep, I dream of night,
when, once again, the earth will open up
and share her secrets with me.

And shadows settled down to sleep,
a murder of crows with nests to keep,
upon the branches of a Red Pine tree.

A Walk in the Patch
By Elizabeth Clever

Berries thrive in fields of green;
Seeded sights so rarely seen.
Some are pale and round and slight,
Whitish-blue in midmorn's light.
Others sour and tinted red
Decorate the garden bed.
Ripened, blackened berries gleam
Gushing forth their juicy stream.
Overwhelming sights and smells;
Hidden pleasures no one tells.
Sticky fingers, purplish blue:
Stained a pleasant, scrumptious hue.
Fields of black and green abound
Filled with buzzing insect's sound.
Pointed leaves hold drops of rain
Signs of summer's mighty strain.
Berries white and red and black
Tense the hedge-strings once so slack.
Telltale signs of berry mirth,
Graced by both the sun and earth.
Nature's realm of grand display:
A branch of fruits in sweet array.

Autumn

By Ashley Barner

I watch my feet go walking on,
I watch the ground go flitting by.
I hear the blades of amber grass,
Their breeze-blown rattle like a sigh.

I see the object of their gloom
Before my toes. All nature grieves
To see these bodies I pick up—
The summer's death in skeleton leaves.

Sensory Perceptions

By Ashley Barner

These wavelengths strike receptor cells,
Neurons fire within our brains,
It reaches to the farthest lobe,
And then we see the rain.

The complexity and the longitude
Recorded by three (3.00) bones inside:
It reaches to our listening cells
And then we hear the tide.

Action potential rises
Neurotransmitters flow
Dendrites catch them on the way
And then we feel the snow.

Science, you'll never learn it all!
You don't know where to start!
You'll never realized that life is more,
Much more, than the sum of its parts.

Cassandra and the Damned
By Ashley Barner

*"How terrible knowledge of the truth can be
When there's no help in truth!"
—Oedipus Rex, Sophocles*

Cassandra of the screaming mouth
The matted hair
The rolling eyes
Cassandra of the dirty cheeks
The blackened nails
The foaming lips
Cassandra of the rags and shreds
Cassandra of the dark and dank
Cassandra of the reek and filth
Pure glowing truth of the gods was gleaming from her.

Scream, Cassandra,
Scream, thou caged, wild prophetess,
Scream in the echoing Cells Below
Where no one hears your warnings but the already Damned.

Who can be mad who deals in truth?

And who in the madhouse will understand?

Preoperational Egocentrism—Piaget
By Ashley Barner

Teenager, writing a love poem:
I loved him! I loved him! (I think)
Heartbroken! Heartbroken! Sob!

Little child, toys on a table:
What do you see?
A house, three mountains, a teddy bear.
What does the teddy bear see?
...?

I loved him! Why didn't he love me?

What do you see?
A house, three mountains, a teddy bear.
What does the teddy bear see?
A house, three mountains, a teddy bear.

I am older now. And I think,
Maybe his view was different.

What do you see?
A house, three mountains, a teddy bear.
What does the teddy bear see?
Three mountains, a house, and me.

Friends

By Dorothy Malinowski

Times together
Lost in space
Fleeting moments
Never to replace
Having laughs
and sugar galore
Giggle fits
and so much more
Important you are
All of us the same
No longer lost
Without a name.

Lost on a shelf

By Dorothy Malinowski

Books on a shelf,
Forgotten with time.
The dust they collect can never be fine
The knowledge they hold
Stories they've told
Characters as faithful as friends
Never again to be read.

Nataniella
By Theresa May Yaukey

“She always stood in the exact same spot, her small thin arms tightly positioned at her sides, one of them clutching a wooden object that appeared to have been fashioned into a doll. Her too-small brown dress was bedraggled and stained, and the hastily-sewn star on her arm was tattered. Her long black hair must have once been the pride of her mother, but now it, too, as everything else, was unkempt and unwashed. It was pulled back into a braid and then wrapped around itself into a bun. Two strands clung to her face, unwilling to submit to strict enclosure.

The little girl always stood as straight as a rail, her face turned towards the ground, and she always clutched the wooden doll. She must have only been five or six. Only once as I walked by did I see dark eyes darting up to look around before settling back down in a passive gaze. That brief second of movement was the only indication of anything more than submissiveness as she stood, each day, waiting.

She stood near the entrance to the ghetto, just where the wall ended and the barbed wire began. The wire reached several feet over her head, but she was just the right height for her face to appear through a small section where the wire had been stretched apart. I would walk by as early as six, when the Gestapo grew tired and began wishing for warm beds and soft down pillows, and casually toss a small bite of cheese or crust of bread towards her. I would hold the piece up first, carefully inspecting it in the sunlight, before giving it a careless toss. It wouldn't have done for me to look as though I was feeding them. Instead, I preferred to look as though I was throwing an inedible morsel to the dogs.

To admit this now, I am embarrassed. I grimace at my cowardice. I wonder what would have happened if I had walked to the fence and simply handed over a week's worth of rations. But before I get carried away by sentimentality, I know the answer and convince myself I did the best I could. Before I am overcome by bravado with what could have been, I remember what had been.

It was during the afternoon. I was walking slowly past the entrance pretending to read a newspaper but actually looking at the little girl when I saw them up ahead. A young woman was standing on her toes trying to peer through a tiny crack in the wall. One hand braced her against it while the other rested on her hugely distended stomach. She seemed not aware of the two Gestapo who had just rounded the corner and stood watching her with amused expressions. 'Avraham,' she called softly. 'Avraham, I have bread.' She gave a furtive glance around and finally saw the Gestapo. Quickly, she backed away from the wall and shoved her bread-filled hand behind her back.

The Gestapo's prior amusement was no longer apparent on their faces as they approached the young woman. 'Papers, I have papers,' she cried, dropping the bread and reaching into her pocket. One of the Gestapo smirked as he reached out and stroked her belly. The other reached down to his side for the sub-machine gun that was slung over his shoulder. I stood, paralyzed, as he pointed the gun at her swollen stomach.

'You have lain with a Jew-pig,' he stated matter-of-factly, then began shooting. The sound of the fire cut through the crisp morning like a knife through fresh vegetables. Bits of shrapnel flew and empty cartridges scattered over the ground. The bullets punctured her stomach and blood began trickling out of her mouth before she even had time to open it and plead for her life. He fired his weapon for only a couple seconds, but

it was enough to tear the flesh into a huge, gaping hole. The force of the bullets held her in position, until, slowly, she dropped to the ground. She lay face up on the stones, her expression still one of panic, as blood flowed freely out her mouth and stomach. Her hand still clutched red-stained papers, and inches away lay bloodied crusts of bread.

I had stopped walking, horrified, when the Gestapo reached for his gun. Now as the woman lay dead only feet away, I resumed my walk and crossed to the other side of the street. I spread my paper into a larger section and again pretended to read, hoping my downward gaze would hide the tears streaming down my face. The Gestapo paid me no heed as I walked by the spreading pool of blood, shoving my other hand into my pocket to hide a shaking wedge of cheese.

It is memories like these that make me realize how lucky I am. It is memories like these that make me realize how selfish I had been.

I stayed away from the Ghetto for over two weeks after the woman was shot. I tried to tell myself that it was just because I had been busy. We were short-staffed at the hospital and nurses were expected to work sixty-hour weeks. The German soldiers expect only the best care. They want more medicine than we have and better food than we can prepare. But despite their demands, I knew that I was no busier than usual. I also knew that I couldn't stay away forever. With thoughts of the pregnant woman still fresh in my mind, I finally returned to the ghetto.

The entire city of Warsaw was filled with stench. It got on the clothes, in the hair, and even in the taste of the food. It was impossible to hang garments outside to dry; they would come in smelling worse than they had before they were washed. People whispered that the stench was from a resistance in the ghetto, but no one dared complain too loudly.

As I approached the outside boundary of the ghetto, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Mutilated, decomposing bodies were stacked like logs in piles along the street. A Jewish boy, probably eleven or twelve, had been caught in the barbed wire at the top of the wall. His severed arm lay on the ground, and an apparent fall had caused the wire to slice halfway through his lower abdomen and groin area. Intestines lay exposed, coiled on the wire, and his body was covered in tiny white maggots. His face was distorted and his mouth still frozen in a scream. His open eyes still haunt me.

I was to learn later that there was indeed a ghetto resistance. Hitler had ordered deportation of the remaining Jews in the ghetto, and the Jews apparently realized that deportation surely meant death. In response, the Jewish Fighting Organization, or ZOB, formed. Several hundred men, women, and children joined in an effort to combat the Germans. I also learned that the organization had somehow managed to send desperate appeals for help to anti-Nazi Poles outside the ghetto. With the guns they received from the sympathizers, they were able to successfully prevent their deportation. Unfortunately, it was not without casualties.

I continued walking towards the entrance, trying to ignore the signs of death around me. The little girl, as hard as I had tried to forget her, was on my mind. I wanted to know, I had to know, if she was alive. When I reached her spot, I barely recognized her. She was even thinner than before, a tiny skeleton of a girl whose face bled determination. Gruesome open sores covered her face and arms, and her head seemed grotesquely too big for her shrunken body. I almost stopped walking to stare when I saw her. Her dress was several inches above her bony knees, and I wondered how she could even stand on such birdlike legs. But stand she did, still in the same spot, still in the same

position, her hand still clutching the wooden toy. My heart wept for her as I gently tossed a handful of food her way. This time I did not bother to pretend that it was spoiled or moldy. I simply threw it. Part of me knew the danger; the rest of me did not care. The only thing that mattered at that particular moment was the little girl. Her eyes beseeched me and I could not fail her.

This routine continued for a couple more weeks. I don't know why the Gestapo never stopped me. Perhaps it was the nurse's uniform, perhaps it was God. All I know is that every day I would walk to the wall and toss bits of food to the child. Sometimes I would manage to go without dinner or supper, and this would enable me to drop for her a bit of roasted ox or a day-old potato. Despite my efforts, I could see that she was getting worse. The sores had turned into gaping lesions, blood and pus oozing down her delicate features. One day when I walked by she could barely stand. The next day she was not in her spot.

I walked back to the ghetto three times a day for the next five days looking for her. I would go before work, on my dinner break, and again just before sunset. I had gotten into the habit of walking briskly until I reached just outside the ghetto, then slowing down and calling and whistling. I called 'Adalhard,' the name of my dog as a child, and held bits of dried beef in my hand. On the second day the Gestapo stopped me. 'I'm looking for my dog,' I said after presenting my papers. 'His name is Adalhard. Have you seen a small brown and white spotted dog?' One of them laughed in a deep throaty voice.

'Ach,' he snickered. 'If your dog is around here, you had better find him before the pigs eat him.' I bowed my head as the two laughed and then motioned for me to pass.

I continued my pretend search for three more days until I saw another child, this one about ten or eleven, playing with the wooden doll. That was last time I looked for the little girl.

It was only a couple days later that I was approached by Tomasz. I never learned his last name; I knew him only as Tomasz. He approached me as I was leaving the hospital. It was a cold, rainy day at the end of January. As I hurried out the doors, a newspaper held over my head, Tomasz hurried up beside. He carried a tattered black umbrella which he held over my head, allowing droplets to drip down the side of it onto himself.

‘Bodgana?’ he questioned. I nodded. He smiled, relieved. ‘I am Tomasz.’ I nodded again, asserting that I recognized him from the hospital. He was an orderly, well-liked despite the fact that he was quiet and kept to himself. He was 31, five years older than I am. He had rich, auburn curls and penetrating green eyes. At almost six feet tall, he towered more than half a foot over me. ‘Bodgana is a beautiful name’ he continued. ‘It means “gift from God.”’ I nodded once more, feeling absurd for not talking, and blushed at the compliment.

‘Are you really a gift from God, Bodgana?’ I thought the question odd but said nothing to it. Tomasz said nothing more either, but continued walking beside me, holding the umbrella, until we reached my board half a mile away. Then with a bow, he said good night and turned and walked away. His jacket was soaked.

Thus began my friendship with Tomasz. He would seem to always be just leaving when I would finish my shift at the hospital, and then would accompany me home. ‘The streets are full of too many dangers tonight, Malushka,’ he would say, using an old Polish

endearment and ignoring my attempts to not inconvenience him. 'Besides, it is a pleasant walk.'

We continued this pattern for several weeks, and I began to think of him as a close friend. Once while walking in such a manner, I saw on the street a small girl about five or six years old. She had long chestnut hair braided and fastened at the back of her head. Her eyes were dark and piercing and caught mine for just an instant as she shook off rugs in the street. I must have stood and stared because Tomasz eventually took my hand and caressed it. 'Does she remind you of someone, Malushka?' he asked tenderly. At his gentle touch, I could not help but recount the story of the little girl and my daily traipses to the ghetto. 'Tsk,' he chided. 'That was very dangerous. Were you not concerned about the Gestapo?' I paused for a while before answering him.

'I was at first,' I answered slowly. 'But when I knew she was dying, when I saw how our beautiful country has been destroyed only to create such ugliness and to murder little girls, I began to not care.' Tomasz was silent for a long time after I had spoken. We had almost reached my home before he spoke again.

'Bodgana,' he said, 'I once asked you if you were a gift from God. It was not a casual question. You see,' he grabbed my hand and spoke in an urgent whisper, 'there are many, many more children like her. Thousands more. I help them, Bodgana. You can too.'

I was thunderstruck at his words. To toss bits of food at a dying child was one thing. To openly admit that you defied Hitler and assisted the Jews was something entirely else. Before I could open my mouth to reply, Tomasz spoke again. This time his voice was in his normal tone. 'Don't say anything, Bodgana. Nothing just now. You have

a tender heart and a giving soul. I do not need to tell you how dangerous what I'm asking you to do is. It must be your decision and it must be weighed carefully. You must be certain beyond the shadow of a doubt. Once you start, you will see there is no turning back.'

When I said goodbye to Tomasz and walked inside my house, my heart was heavy. I, like all over Polish citizens, had heard of the Jewish sympathizers. I knew that there were rumors of those who lobbied other countries to gain support against Hitler, as well as those who smuggled food and weapons into the ghettos. Publicly, Germany denied that there was any need for intervention and other countries generally treated such rumors skeptically.

There was even some talk about people hiding Jewish refugees in their homes. The idea of that would be unbelievable were it not for the occasional late night raids into homes of various Polish merchants. The nights would then change from the usual silent, peaceful serenity into a scream and gunshot-filled horror. Inevitably, the next day members of our community would be missing. Sure, we whispered about them, never too loudly of course, for fear the Gestapo should hear. But I had certainly never imagined that I might be one of them.

For the next several days at the hospital I successfully avoided Tomasz. I would sometimes catch him looking at me while I walked the halls, but he would simply nod his head and allow me to continue on my way. He realized that I needed time to consider his implied suggestion. But it did not take me long to decide. My days were filled with memories of the little girl, and my nights haunted me with the imagined tortures of the

ghetto. In the day, I could keep my imagination at bay. But at night, while I slept, the things that I had seen fed new horrors in my mind.

It was barely a week after Tomasz had approached me when I began helping to prepare bundles of foods and medicines to be smuggled inside the ghetto. At first I only helped in small ways. I would sneak supplies out of the hospital, things like iodine, aspirin, and rubbing alcohol, to be taken into the ghetto for those who were injured or ill. A couple times, I was fortunate and found the medicine room unlocked, and then I was able to send treasures such as morphine syrettes and Sulfadiazine tablets. I also began watching patients' meal trays for remaining scraps of food that could be sent to the prisoners. Food was scarce and precious, though, and I usually did not come across much that was left uneaten.

It was several weeks later until I again made a trip to the ghetto. It was April 9, 1943, and the eve of Pesah, the Jewish feast of Passover, was only ten days away. Tomasz had approached me at the hospital and told me he would like to take a walk with me. Together, when my shift ended that evening, we left the hospital and began walking towards the ghetto. When I asked where we were going, Tomasz only shook his head. 'You will see soon enough, Malushka.' As we neared the ghetto, Tomasz reached out and took my hand. I was surprised, but his touch felt nice. We had become very good friends over the past several months."

Bodgana paused and drank deeply from a glass of water. The clacking of the typewriter continued for several seconds more while the Priest caught up to Bodgana's

last words. Then he, too, paused, and the small room was quiet. “Do you wish to continue?” the Priest asked softly, finally interrupting the silence.

“Yes, Father Antoni,” Bodgana said softly. “I sometimes wonder, though, if it is fair of me to involve you in this. So many have already died . . .” Her voice caught in her throat and she raised a hand to her mouth.

“Hush. We have discussed this before.” Father Antoni’s words were harsh but his voice was gentle. “You must tell your story. And I promise you, I will do whatever it takes to make certain your story is heard.”

“But it is so dangerous for you.”

“My Child,” Father Antoni smiled sadly, “it is much more dangerous for everyone if the world does not soon learn of what has happened to our homeland, our Poland.”

Bodgana nodded as she resumed talking. Her voice faltered at first, but gained strength as she continued.

“As we neared the ghetto, I realized that we were headed towards the spot where the little girl had stood. I turned towards Tomasz questioningly and saw that he was watching me.

‘Her name was Nataniella Liszka,’ he said. ‘I inquired after you told me about her. It is difficult to trace the story of just one out of so many, but Nataniella’s story is fairly well-known. She was eight years old, though she looked much younger. Her father was a very great man in the Jewish community. He was a Rabbi, and Nataniella, his only child. His wife died giving birth to her. When this tragedy first began, Rabbi Liszka tried to protest it. He warned others to flee Poland when it seemed as though German

occupation was unavoidable. He tried to send Nataniella away with other families but she would not leave him. She would seem to know that she was being forced to leave her father and would run away until it was too late for them to wait any longer. Then she would return to her father. Rabbi Liszka wanted her to be safe but could not bear to leave his people.’ Tomasz paused and caressed my head. ‘Shall I continue, Malushka? Can you bear it?’

I nodded my head, still too surprised to speak.

‘In 1941, not long after the Warsaw ghetto was first constructed, Rabbi Liszka and his daughter were interrupted in their home in the middle of the night. The Gestapo knew that the Rabbi was very influential, and knew that he was urging other Jews to rebel against the Third Reich. While he stood, helpless, with a gun aimed at his precious daughter’s head, several Gestapo destroyed his home and everything in it. They spit on the Talmud and ripped the pages from it. Then they beat and kicked him until he lay bleeding, unable to move, on the floor. Even then they would not stop. They made him watch while they tortured the little girl, burning her with cigarettes and cutting swastikas into her skin. When she cried too much they would hit her and warn her that if she did not stop, they would kill her father. Rabbi Liszka could only watch, listening to her screams and sobs, and tell her that he loved her. It is said that his last words to her were that she should be strong, and that they would be together, happy, again. Finally, the Gestapo grew tired of the game and two of them dragged Nataniella from the room. As she was pulled through the street, a single gunshot was heard. Nataniella was delivered to the Warsaw ghetto and the Rabbi’s body was hung from a lamppost, as a testimony to all other “troublesome” Jews.’

Tomas finished speaking and I stood, tears streaming down my face. By now we had reached the spot in front of the wall where I had seen Nataniella day after day. ‘She stood here waiting for her father,’ Tomasz said softly. ‘She remembered he had said that he would see her again and that they would be happy together. She knew that he would not abandon her to such a wretched place, and stood here, waiting, each day for his return.’

A sob caught in my throat and I buried my face in my hands. For so long I had wondered about her, wanted to know her tale and why she stood so patiently every day. For so long I had wanted to know all about her. Now that I knew, I only wanted to forget. Tomasz reached out and removed my hands from my face. He gently tucked a stray strand of hair behind my ear, and lifted my chin with his finger. ‘Do you know what her name means, Bodgana? Do you know what “Nataniella” stands for?’

I shook my head. I could not speak. Not just yet.

‘It means “Gift of God” in Hebrew, just as your name means “Gift of God” in Polish. I researched that, too, Bodgana. I wanted to know. And she was a gift too, just as you are. You and Nataniella are connected; I feel it. It was Nataniella who prompted you to help others like her. It was her gift that gave the Jewish people your gift.’

‘But Tomasz,’ I stammered, ‘I have done so little. I have barely done anything.’

‘Shhh,’ he interrupted, placing his finger against my lips. ‘You have done more than you realize. And you will do more. I can feel that, too.’

We were silent as we left the little girl’s spot and continued walking past the ghetto. Tomasz never released my hand and I was grateful, for I needed his silent strength. I kept my head down as we walked. I knew that if I looked up, I would see the

little girl's haunted eyes in the stones of the ghetto wall. When we had neared the end of the ghetto, Tomasz spoke again. 'I brought you here for two reasons. One was to tell you the story of Nataniella. The other is because I want you to be aware of what is happening. Since the beginning of the year, the Germans have been trying to empty the Warsaw ghetto. The ZOB has been successful so far in thwarting their attempts. But the German soldiers keep coming and the number of Jews keeps diminishing. They need more help than we could ever provide. But I must try.'

I did not understand. 'Tomasz, you are helping. You do so much.'

He shook his head slowly. 'No, Malushka. A battle is coming. The Germans will not stand for being dishonored in this way. They will not stop until all of the Jews are dead. I have given them food, weapons, and medicine. Still, it is not enough. Now I can only offer them my life. I must stay with them and fight.'

I could not believe what I was hearing. My heart trembled for him yet I knew I could not dissuade him. I wondered why he would decide to take such a risk. Helping the resisters was already extreme; joining them to live in the ghetto permanently was unheard of. But Tomasz answered my unspoken question.

'I must help them, Bodgana. I could be them. You see, as a child, I was raised by a Jewish family. They cared for me when my own family would not. It is only because I am an adult now and do not live with that family any longer, that I was not treated as they are. With them is my place; with them my heart belongs.' Tomasz sighed deeply. 'My only regret is that I will be leaving you. I have few friends and few who care about me.'

He stopped my attempt to speak. 'No, please. Let me finish. I have grown to care very deeply for you, Malushka. I admire your warm heart and gentle spirit. To undertake

this task is not an easy decision. Yet you helped when thousands of others turned their backs. For that, Bodgana, for who you are and for who you will be, I love you.'

I stood silently, tears streaming down my face, as Tomasz spoke. Now I could restrain myself no longer. 'But Tomasz,' I cried. 'Then why must you go? Surely you can be of more help on the outside!' I spoke rapidly, urgently. 'We can work together and continue helping them. We can continue sending them food and medicine. This can not go on much longer. Please, you must stay and help me. I can not continue without ...' my voice broke and I tried to turn away, but Tomasz would not allow me. He reached out and drew me close, and I sobbed into his arms. We stood there, for what seemed like hours, in an embrace. We could hear the laughter and snickering of the Gestapo, but paid no heed. Those moments were too precious to be interrupted.

Finally, Tomasz stepped back. I could see his face was tear-stained; he had been crying too. 'We must part, Bodgana,' he whispered. 'To wait will make it only more difficult. I must do my duty. You must do yours.' Then, softly, he echoed the words of Rabbi Liszka. 'We will be together, happy, again.' Tomasz turned and walked slowly away, continuing along the path of the ghetto. His back was straight and he walked tall and proud, and my heart burst with love and pride. Just before he disappeared in a turn of the road, I opened my mouth, and in silent words, whispered 'I love you.' As if on cue, he turned one last time and raised his hand in a final farewell. That was the last I saw of Tomasz."

Bodgana paused again and breathed deeply. Her face was streaked with tears and her voice had faltered many times during the last passage. Her hands were shaking as she

tried to lift the large glass of water, and she changed her mind with the glass midway to her mouth. Soon after the typing stopped, she began speaking again. This time her voice was different. It was defiant and calm.

“That was eleven days ago. Today is April 20, 1943. Yesterday, in the early morning hours, the Germans began encircling the outer ghetto walls. After hundreds had assembled, they began infiltrating the seemingly deserted ghetto streets. They chose the intersection of Mila and Zamenhofa Streets to make their stance. The ZOB, however, had gained knowledge of the attack, and were ready for the soldiers. The ZOB surrounded the German soldiers and trapped their exits from the intersection. Then they began firing upon them. They had created their own homemade grenades and had the use of a machine-gun. They also had rifles that had been smuggled in by sympathizers. Other members of the ZOB remained at different entrances of the ghetto to prevent more soldiers from entering. Even a tank, sent to aid the soldiers, was caught on fire and rendered useless. Within a few hours, all of the German soldiers at Mila and Zamenhofa Streets were dead. By yesterday afternoon, almost all of the German Soldiers within the vicinity were dead. Very few had been able to escape. The ZOB had managed, with almost superhuman efforts and against all odds, to suppress the German attacks.

The Germans tried several more times to enter the ghetto and contain the uprising, all without success. Finally, in the late afternoon, they decided to set fire to all four sides of the ghetto at once. Almost instantly, the ghetto was engulfed in raging orange flames and thick black smoke. The pavement melted into a thick, black, goop, and broken glass, which had been everywhere, also melted in a sticky liquid. The fire succeeded where the

Germans had failed. Hundreds died as they jumped from buildings in order to escape the scorching inferno, and thousands more died as they fled from previously safe hiding places and were caught by German bullets. Children lay crying on their dead mothers' chests, and mothers tried to shelter their children by absorbing rapid fire from German machine guns. Today, the fire still rages and the scene is visible to all of Poland from Swietojska Street and from Krasinski Square. The dead, German and Jewish alike, litter the streets and the air is filled with the stench of charred bodies. No one pays heed to the father and son who will never again awaken, or the crying baby who suckles his dead mother's breast. All else is ignored as the Jews try desperately to survive, and the Germans try desperately to kill them.

And how long can this continue? Not just the fighting in the Warsaw ghetto, but the treatment of Jews all over Germany and Poland. When will someone come to their defense? When will someone answer the cries of the weak and defend the lives of the powerless?

I, Bodgana Mrozinski, send this plea through the capable hands of Father Antoni. I trust that, through him, it will reach eyes that will not ignore it, and hearts that will not be immune to the suffering it holds. I have told the story of just three people who have been affected by this holocaust, yet there are thousands, and possibly more, who are suffering. Please do not be deaf to their prayers."

The noise of the typewriter quieted once more as Bodgana finished speaking. Shouts and talking were heard from the street, but silence filled the tiny Catholic cathedral just outside Warsaw. "I appreciate your help, Father," Bodgana spoke at last.

“This has been a difficult story for me to tell. I only hope that it will bring some aid to the sufferers.”

“Yes, Child,” the Priest answered slowly, pulling the paper from the typewriter. “This will be distributed to sympathetic officials all over Europe. Eventually, we hope to have it sent to America. It is time for the world to act.”

The Holocaust was the almost complete annihilation of all Jews in Europe by the Nazis from 1939 – 1945. Over 5 million people of Jewish descent were killed during the time.

The Warsaw ghetto was only one of the many ghettos established during the Holocaust. The Warsaw ghetto is distinct, however, because of the degree to which it resisted deportation and extermination. In 1942, when they learned of the deaths of about 300,000 Jews after they were taken from the Warsaw ghetto to concentration camps, the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ZOB), or Jewish Fighting Organization formed. The ZOB was led by 23-year-old Mordecai Anielewicz, and the goal was to resist deportation which ultimately led to death.

The Warsaw ghetto uprising began on April 19, 1943, and lasted until May 16, 1943. By the end, more than 56,000 Jews had been captured. Of the captured, approximately 7,000 were shot and the rest were deported to concentration camps.

I am (no breathless woman)...

By Jamie McCauley

I am the
 weighted
woman.

I alone know the sound my bones make beneath an esoteric skin—
a solemn sound that exploits, embarrasses, intimidates.

I am an antagonized compulsion.

You cannot understand. You do not know. You never feel.
You see through glass. You believe in truth. You are boundless.

I am a number, a shape, a vision. I make alliances with an unruly body.
I cringe upon reflection.

I am an altered reality.

You cannot hear the laughter I hear, the constant ridicule, the imperfect hatred.
That's an impossible feat.

I am the
 collapsible
woman.

I break through walls. The lies unfold. Thoughts crumble in my palms.
Head, arms, and legs retreat.

I am the woman with the breathless flaws.

Maybe
By Stephanie L. Lingle

She had not the slightest clue that she'd just offended me. Suddenly, I was taken hostage by strong impulses to simultaneously scream at her, punch her in the head, and laugh in her face. But how could I rebuke this simple woman who had only the very best intentions and was completely without knowledge of how deeply *the statement* she just made had cut into me?

Mrs. Green was my mother's best friend, a member of the same church, and renowned pianist for their choir. For as long as I can remember, this sweet mild-natured woman, forever preserved in that awkward age between retirement and actually being classifiable as elderly, had been inquiring after me. How were my grades? Were there any new men in my life? Did I have any new tattoos? When would I finally be coming back to the church?

What strikes my fancy for irony most was the conversation leading up to *the statement* that burned my senses so much that it has incited me to sit down and write the first personal non-academic essay I've written in at least four years.

We were gathered in the basement of my mother's tiny stereotypical country-side church surrounded by all those kitschy portraits of white Jesus – always knocking on doors or pushing a bunch of fluffy sheep around with a big stick. Somehow, despite my best efforts to avoid this situation, I'd been roped into posing for a family photograph for the directory of a church I would have rather burned down than attend. But, it made peace with my turbulent mother, and I had grudgingly acquiesced to her guilt-laced pleas.

I was sitting uncomfortably strait in one of the chairs along the wall designated for the waiting family members. My mother looked at me with more pride than I'd seen in years. I was thinking to myself, "In some parts of this backward state, red-necks have outdoor wedding receptions involving a 'hog roast,' of which the centerpiece is a twine-tied roasting pig turning on a spit with an apple in its mouth."

Mrs. Green was so genuinely happy to see me after all this time back in the church. We caught up on the usual polite discussion topics about her daughter's recent wedding and I was asking her how she was enjoying retirement from her office job.

"You know, some days, I just love it. I can do anything I want, anytime I want. But usually, I don't know what I want and it seems like I have nothing to do with all this time. The other day, I walked into the living room and looked at my husband sleeping in the recliner. He was just laying there in front of the TV with his mouth hanging open and snoring real loud. I thought, 'Is this all I have left to look forward to?'" She intended to make a joke and, on cue, we both chuckled good-naturedly.

"Your mother said that you're going to study in Europe?"

My eyes widened with excitement. "Yeah! I was accepted to a program of study in Prague with one of the best schools in Europe. I leave in January!"

"You know, if you really want to see the world, you should think about being a flight attendant after you graduate."

That was *the statement*.

It just hung there in the open space between her sweet smile and my blank expression. "I had a cousin who did that and she loved it. You know, you're young and single and it would be a great chance for you to travel before you settle down."

Settle down? Young and single? Ohmigod!

How could I possibly explain it to this woman? How could I tell her that I wanted so much more out of life? A million thoughts and images flooded my mind at the speed of light, far too quickly for articulation. Was the sonic boom actually audible or do I just remember it that way?

Instantaneously, I could see myself voicing objections before a jury, intimidating a boardroom full of fat balding men wearing matching dumbass costumes, and explaining the rules of courtroom procedure a nervous convict in a jailhouse consultation. I was giving testimony before the U.N. General Assembly and drafting the next groundbreaking Supreme Court ruling. I was smiling charmingly at my book signing in Manhattan and schmoozing sophisticatedly at a beltway exclusive fundraising party in DC. I was running to a motion hearing in black spike heels, red leather briefcase in hand, snag in my pantyhose, and trademark lipstick just a little seductively smudged.

Toss out the damn oyster; all the world was a tiny pearl glistening in my own hand!

How could I explain in terms Mrs. Green could grasp that I plan to do greater things in my lifetime than distribute little baggies of salted peanuts to the sweaty drunks in business class and steal quick glimpses of the great big world through tiny square windows on the side of the plane, thankyouverymuch!?

In a jungle clearing a motley group appeared to me. Simone de Beauvoir, Susan B. Anthony, Alex Olson, Betty Friedan, Hilary Clinton, Jill Scott, Marge Piercy, and Madeline Albright were at the forefront of the gathering. For the first time I can recall, these women were no longer my heroes, unattainable goddesses of mythology seated on

thrones made of the clouds. For the first time, I saw these women as my predecessors, a foreshadowing of my own accomplishments. In one smooth, stealth, breathless motion, they passed me their machetes and it became my turn to clear the path just a little further into the bush. With the rhythm of primitive tribal drums, I could hear them all behind me, some whispering and others shouting with pounding fists, but all of them together pushing at my back.

The church basement room began to swirl, all the colors of Christ and concerned faces and hymnals blurred together. And, just as suddenly as the whirl of shock swept over me, it had gone and I sat there left only with a thud in my soul. Was I still holding my breath? Were my palms sticky with cold sweat?

I looked down at my own hands, softly folded together in my lap, and I politely mumbled my response. "Maybe."

Water
By Erika Raines

She sits and stares
Mundane existence slipping by
What does it all mean?
What point is there to her life?
She wants the truth
But all they ever do is
Feed her lies

Sick of wanting
Sick of needing
Sick of unfeeling
She lays down
And gives up life

Her eyes close

She slips into a dream
Within it she knows love

She stands alone
Looking across an endlessly
Barren desert
She is parched
Water is nowhere to be found

She walks out, searching

She thinks she will find
Life renewing water
But cannot be sure
After all, there is no water
In sight

She treads onward
Knowing that she must
Drink or die
Feet falling mechanically
Existence passes with no meaning

She walks out, aimless

She cannot remember why
She stepped out at first

Vaguely she feels
Something is missing

A need deep inside
An ache for something
For what she knows not
But without it
She cannot live

She walks out, hopeless

Her need intensified
She remembers
Water
Where has it gone?
Why can't she find it?

Wasn't she told
That it was here?
Yes, Someone told her
Water lay just
Over the next dune

She walks out, pleading

She cries out to Someone
She knows not who
Someone who knows the desert
Better than she can ever
Hope to

Water!
She cries
Which dune am I to climb?
She falls to her knees
Begs an answer

She lays down, sobbing

Betrayal

That Someone told her
Water was near
Yet no longer will
The Someone speak
She is too weak to move

She crawls on, bitter

Someone left her lying
That Someone left
Promises unfulfilled
Left her dying
No water

Crawling on my own
Is better than following
Someone who does not speak
When I want them to
Thoughts stroll across her mind

She lies near death, wasted

Her strength gone
She cries to the Someone
In a last effort
No strength of her own left

I cannot walk
She cries
I have not found the water
You spoke of
And now, because of you
I die

Someone hears her
Says
It's beyond the next dune
That life giving water lies

I have tried
She whispers
My strength is gone
You must take me
I surrender

Someone steps up from behind
Where she was all along
She lifts the dying girl
Carries her quietly
Across the northern dune

Sets her gently near the water
Offers it to the girl

To the North?
She asks
All this time I
Traveled West.

She awakes, troubled
But feels that Someone is there

She is Dead
By Erika Raines

A spear clatters to the ground,
Pain filled eyes search mine own.
Thou look'st, but no reason there is found,
For why the spear from mine hand was thrown.
Mine hand, which claimed to love thee.

I gasp in fear.
Withdrawn the spear thou hast.
Thou canst not even hear
My cries of lament for the past.
I try to stop thy wound, but I cannot see.

Our eyes with tears now filled
I brush thy cheek.
We mourn for blood spilled.
Alack, for my wounds I cannot speak.
I weep, but thou art far from me.

Survivor
By Erika Raines

She walks along the creek
Dabbling her toes in the crystal water
Thinking back to a time
She wasn't this whole
A time she had to survive

She still has the scars
Her healing left her with
Bittersweet memories
Memories of something she thought
Was love

The scars are huge
They are not pretty
The infection they once harbored
Left them puckery and pink
But they are healed

They make moving a little harder
Love a little more precious
Lovers harder to come by
Pain a little more real
But they are healed

She wears a sword now
She knows how to fight
The attacks that before
Slipped under her defenses
Are well known

She will not go back
Her Mother saved her
She knows her worth
And will accept no less
She can never turn around

She sits and hums
Back to a tree
Feet in the water
Eyes closed to feel the breeze
Waiting for her precious Love

Memory
By Erika Raines

My memories are strong
Slowly fading moments
Frozen in my mind
Recalled to me

Memories of lovers
Swirling like leaves
In the breeze

The breeze
A form of a memory
Wind caressing my cheeks
Reminded me of my
Old lover
In the past

Now the wind is
Removed to the
Divine Breath
No more memories of
Old lovers
Blow with the rain

The rain
A form of a memory
Rain falling on my shoulders
Refreshing cool drops
Big drops blur my glasses
Reminding me of her

I become a flower
Earth
She is my rain
Water

Why is it so?
I cannot say
Memory lies far beyond
Grips of conscious thinking

Truth
By Erika Raines

She walks from the shadows
Coming from the lair
Of the unholy
The center of
The Dark One's power

Her raiment bloodied
Not of herself
Not of you

She steps closer
One moment
Protective Mother
One moment
Conquering Father

One moment
Sister-Friend
One moment
Passionate Lover

Come to claim
Her own
Touches your hand
Your eyes flutter

Your sacrifice recognized
Your blood avenged
Your friends safe
From the Dark One
Your dream fulfilled

Leave the glade
As the sun rises
Bid farewell the tall trees
Feel the presence of

God.

Chasing My Tail
By Alexandria Wilson

Running through the corridor,
No longer seeing the light;
Shadows are surrounding me,
Pulling me towards the night.

Your face begins to dim,
Your breath I can scarcely hear;
But your laughter rolling like thunder,
Rumbles through my ear.

Touch me and I cringe,
Move away and I fear.
Envelop me and I cry,
Release me and I die.

Running through the corridor,
Chasing after you;
Running through the corridor,
Running from the truth.

Moving in circles,
Living a hypocrite's life;
For with or without you,
I can no longer survive.

Something here is missing,
Something needs to go.
I see you everyday,
But know you, I don't.

Running through the corridor,
Vanquished is the light.
Shadows now are tentacles,
And have pulled me into the night.

Hunger
By Ali Wilson

As the thunder crashed in the sky all around,
I looked out my window, I stared at the ground.
Never before had I felt such a feeling;
Never before had I seen such truth;
Never before had I longed for more;
For more of His knowledge, for more of Him.

This hunger devoured my soul, an unquenchable thirst within me.
The more He gave, the more I required to survive another day.
My heart and soul belonged to Him,
My body His temple forever would remain.
He alone I would eternally worship.

The peace I require only He can bring.
Flood my soul with Your supplement;
Lest I should wither and die.
Birth in me Your hunger; Burn in me Your fire.
Fill me till I'm overflowing with You.

You are Special to Me

By Susana A.F. Gore

When I saw you
Your face resembled that of an angel.
You brought peace
Into my suffering heart

Your friendship is like no other
And is full of love.
Even though I have been away too long
That love remained with you

Love no body can rub
Because is just between you and me.
It is so special to me,
Because if I lose you, I lose part of me.

You mean the world to me
You are my faithful companion,
My playmate, my friend and my love.

Your love is so true, so pure
And is something that I treasure
On the bottom of my heart.

Reflections of my Past
By Heather Layman

I remember the days of my childhood as though they were a vivid dream. Somewhere in my mind, these memories are stored away, locked in a Pandora kind of box until some sort of trigger is toggled and releases them. Today it was the tire swing hanging from a tree. I saw it, blinked my eyes, and for that instant, I was nine years old again, soaring through the air, the wind tangling my hair; but I didn't care. I was nine.

My eyes opened and there I was sitting in the driver's seat of my VW Jetta. I put my car in gear and pulled out of driveway at Wilson College. I wasn't nine anymore. I was twenty-two, and a year away from being a college graduate. I took a deep breath and shifted into second, giving the car a little extra acceleration to vent my frustrations. I don't know why I was so frustrated, not really. My life was good, nothing spectacular so far, but I had control, and responsibility. I felt like an adult. But somewhere it just wasn't sitting right in my mind. I felt uneasy, even anxious, and I longed for the days of my childhood when life seemed simpler.

I can remember being a kid and pretending to be an adult. It seemed so glamorous, every aspect of it, even paying the bills or washing the dishes. I was always excited to be thirteen for some reason, not because it was the first age of the teen years, but because I preferred that number over the others. It was considered unlucky, therefore, I liked it best. And I wondered what I would look forward to once I finally reached thirteen. There has never been another age I wanted so desperately to be. Now I want to

turn the hands of time back ten or fifteen years, live those childhood years just one more time so I can really appreciate them and stop trying to grow up so fast.

I wondered if I was happier now or then. I spent my childhood wanting to grow up, and my short existence as an adult wishing it were simpler, more like childhood. When I was a kid, the most important thing was playing outside with my friends, the kids on my block, in my small Pennsylvania town (which consisted of a traffic light and at least a half dozen or so churches. When McDonald's came, it was a big deal. Littlestown was that small.)

I was in fifth grade when Jess moved into the middle house on our block of five houses. I lived with my grandparents on one corner in a Full House style setting. My great grandma, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, Mom, and me, all together under one roof. I was the only child in the whole family, the only grandchild, the only niece. It was crazy, and I always sought solace outside with my friends.

Virginia lived at the other end of the block. We had met and become friends just two years earlier. My best childhood friend, Nikki, and her sister Crissy, often stayed on my block at their grandparents house, which was next to my house. And in the other house on the block was a little boy named Matt, who was younger than the rest of us, but he had the best part of the hill for sledding in the winter, so we kept him around.

My middle school career consisted of school and my block of friends. Everyday after school, we'd walk home and end up back at one or another of our houses for snacks before racing outside until the last drop of light was sucked out of the sky by night fall, and even then we'd squint our eyes to see so we could keep on playing. I can't tell you the number of times I'd pull my watch pin out so time would stop, that way I'd never be

late for dinner. Of course my grandparents hated it when I was late and gave me a new watch for Christmas that had a digital reading to end my bad habits. It never really did work though, because then I'd just purposely come home late saying I'd lost all track of time. I'm still always late, even to this day. I blame them.

In fact, I blame my family for most of my problems. Growing up as the only kid in a house full of adults is not an easy task. My aunt worked late as a nurse and would creep into the house between midnight and one. She would turn on the Atari and sit up playing Pac Man, or some other ancient video game. I would listen for her car to pull up and tiptoe downstairs for a midnight snack and Atari session with her. Of course this is the same aunt who would also guilt trip me into cleaning up the house.

"It would make me so proud," she'd say, "if you would pick up your toys without me even asking." Or "I'd be tickled pink if you vacuumed this Saturday."

She always tried to sweet talk me into something; tried to make it sound like I'd be an absolute angel if I took the initiative to do something around the house that didn't require any one of the adults to ask me. I'd always try to hide out somewhere and quietly play with my toys, desperately wanting to get out of any chores. And once they found me, it was, "Heather, whoever gets the most dust on the rag wins. Go!" Cleaning became a contest that I just didn't understand.

Another thing I didn't understand is why I couldn't have any siblings to play with. My best friend had two sisters that she could play with. And when, say, Mom's vase broke, they could arrange a story and form a pact as to exactly what happened to avoid a possible spanking or grounding sentence. Not me. I was the only kid in a house of five adults. When something went awry, it was always "Blame the kid."

As I reached my glorious teen years, Mom and I moved out from my grandparent's house and I discovered "Blame the cat." It was easy. Any time something got broken, I'd scheme out a story that intricately involved the cat that I was finally able to have, now that we lived in our own house. I decided later I was glad I didn't have any siblings to fight with when I could easily get a cat that could be blamed and would never protest back.

It's really hard to say when my life began the drastic change from childhood into adulthood. By the time I reached seventh grade, I had moved across town with my mom to a house of our own. It was a really big deal. We really didn't have a lot of money, so my mom bought this house knowing she would be working every possible hour until retirement and beyond just to pay it off. I was told not to expect as much because there were more bills, more responsibilities.

Honestly, the hardest thing for me was leaving my friends on the block. I had a bike that I used to transport myself the mile across town from my new house to my old block. Each day I'd go to school and follow my friends to their homes until dusk, and then race nightfall to my front door. When winter came I spent more time alone at my own house than with my friends. I could already feel the emptiness setting in. Winter tends to do that to me, I think because of the many long days I've sat home alone because it was too cold to go outside.

The overall biggest change that entered my life was men, but at fifteen I think they are still called boys. Boys have played a large role in my life so far. If as a child I could map my life by whom my friends were at which intervals, then my teen years would be segmented by boyfriends. It all started when I was fourteen, on a cold March

day. I went to play baseball with my best friend Jen and one of her male interests, who was bringing along one of his guy pals. I don't know how I stumbled into the trap, but I'd managed to successfully avoid boys for the previous year or two, and now suddenly there I was, face to face with the guy I'd date for the next two years.

When I was a kid growing up, I never really felt understood. Sure I knew my family loved me, but they never actually got me. My friends understood me, but when I moved away our bonds started growing apart. And then one day there was Andy. He was my first kiss, my first "I love you"- a whole lot of firsts. We lived in neighboring towns and went to different school districts. Neither of us had our license yet. We spent as much time talking on the phone as possible. I thought I had found someone who understood me, and he did, reasonably well. We spent as much time together as possible despite his evil mother wishing we'd break up.

That time came, though, the summer going into my senior year of high school. I took it hard, but I took it well. I ran away the best that I could for two weeks. I spent some time away with my grandparents and some time away mowing lawns for my dad's business. I even got my very first car that summer. Finally I had the thing I desired most: freedom.

For as long as I can remember, it has been a dream of mine to run away. I don't know if it's because I like to take the easy way out, or my obsession with adventure, but I remember being a little kid and pretending to run away. I'd be angry or hurt about something and I'd storm out of my grandparent's backdoor. Off of their porch was another enclosed room that had a huge freezer inside. I'd climb up on the freezer and curl up in a little ball waiting for one of the adults to come find me. They never would. I'd

contemplate writing a note saying “I ran away and don’t know when I’ll be back,” and then finding a stick and tying up a handkerchief with a change of clothes onto the end with some crackers so I wouldn’t starve. But I never actually did it. Leaving town for those two weeks after my first break up was the closest I’ve ever came to actually running away.

But with a car, I could escape. I didn’t have to run away- I could drive there, wherever it may be. It was so liberating. I thought about this as I drove my Jetta down some winding back roads. I wasn’t sure how I had gotten here. I tried to remember where I was going, where I had been. I was lost somewhere in my mind, somewhere in my past. I wanted to run away now. The pressures of being single, of graduating in a year, of trying to find out where I was, or who I am. All of these thoughts placed heavy weights on my shoulders. I felt the tightness in my lungs, the pain forming in my back. I wriggled in my seat, trying to stretch my aching back.

Minutes before I didn’t have these heavy thoughts. I was back somewhere in my childhood before things started to get so complicated. My breathing felt short, and I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. Tears stung my eyes. I didn’t know how I ended up this awful mess of my life. I didn’t know how I ended up lost on some winding country road. The walls were closing in. I needed to escape from my nightmarish reality.

And then I saw it. A welcoming little playground, complete with a black, rubber tire swing. I slammed on the breaks and pulled into the stone lot. The playground belonged to some Mennonite church or something. I doubted anyone would mind if I took a few minutes to play. I left the keys in the ignition and practically skipped over to the swing. The warm sun made the tire hot and burnt smelling. I wasn’t sure if I’d fit, but

I grabbed the rope and lifted my right leg, then my left. It was definitely a tight fit. Time and maturity had blessed me with hips, so I was squished. I didn't care though. I pushed off of the ground with my sandals, felt myself move through the air. I kicked at the ground harder, pushing myself faster. I stretched out my legs and threw my head back, gleeful. Finally I felt free, liberated from my daily labors and pains. I soared through the air, a young woman this time. It was going to be ok; I knew it. I felt it. And as I swung so freely in the swing, I felt my hair tangling around my face, and I didn't mind. I wasn't nine anymore, but in my heart I still felt the same way.

For Love of a Brother
By Kathryn Welteroth

“Hey,” the White wolf said to his black mate. “Do you smell that? It’s coming from the west.”

“Of course I can smell it Yuma, it stinks,” Aiyana growled back after she inhaled deeply to better differentiate the mixture of scents. “Blood, carrion and humans.” Aiyana’s lips pulled back and she wrinkled her nose. “Wolf’s blood. We should go, Yuma.”

“Ok, we’ll check it out Aiy.” Yuma rose from his bed in the snow and shook his coat before bolting west, sending the powder snow in a great wave behind him. Aiyana followed and moved to run next to him, she thrilled at her mate’s handsome form in full run. This was their third winter leading their own small yet sturdy pack. They had been the best three years of her life since she had abandoned her mother’s pack to run with Yuma. She barked back over her shoulder to the others.

“Come on everyone, we’re checking something out.”

The pack, five wolves strong, poked their heads up from the snow where they had been curled up for the afternoon. They bounded up from the drifts to follow their leaders west through the stark trees of the forest. Each fell into a designated running pattern according to their place in the pack’s hierarchy, Betas first and the Omega bringing up the rear.

“Where are they taking us?” Angeni a young female, white with silver markings, who had joined the pack in the autumn asked one of the gray, Beta wolves; Manaba. “We just got here a few moments ago.”

“Can’t you smell it?” She asked her as they dodged among the trees in order to keep up with their Alphas. “Wolf’s blood, metal and a smell like that piece of junk around your neck.”

“Oh,” Angeni inhaled deeply but was unable to differentiate the smell of humans, as it had been a part of her life for nearly a year. “I can smell the blood now.”

“Good,” Cheveyo, the other Beta wolf growled to her. “Now, less talk and more running small one.” Angeni put on an extra burst of speed to keep up with the betas.

“May this one respectfully ask a question?” Chogan the tawny-colored, Omega whined softly from the back. He was always careful to never incur the wrath of the higher ranking wolves. He often groveled, submitted to the whims of the others and only referred to himself as “this one” rather than by his own name.

“Yes you may Chogan.” Cheveyo gave him permission through puffs of condensed breath.

“Is this human scent the same as the humans who always follow us?” Chogan asked. “This one cannot tell.”

“I don’t think so, Chogan.” Cheveyo answered him. “This only smells like one human, not two.”

“I don’t think its *Jane* or *Eric*, they’ve been gone for many days now” Angeni said.

“Wait, you named them?” Huyana asked with a chuckle. “And what kind of names are *Jane* and *Eric* anyway?”

“I didn’t name them,” Angeni answered as her fur ruffled with embarrassment. “That’s what they call themselves. Haven’t you ever tired listening to them before? *Jane*

and *Eric* are the most common sounds each one makes when addressing the other. It has to be their names”

“Huh,” Huyana snorted. “I have better things to do than listen to the humans bark at each other and play with their annoying boxes.”

“Like licking yourself?” Angeni teased.

“Shush you!” Huyana retorted.

“Be quiet back there!” Aiyana woofed softly to the others. “The smell is heavier, we must be getting closer.”

The pack immediately went silent. They slowed down to a careful creep that rendered them nearly invisible among the snow and the foliage. They were coming towards an open area in the forest, a meadow once coated in tall grass now blanketed in pure white. Except for one spot near the center where the landscape was disrupted. The smell was very strong now. Angeni felt her hackles rising and pressed against Manaba for comfort. The Beta, though shaken herself, swallowed her fear enough to comfort the younger wolf pressed against her.

Aiyana took a step forward and inhaled deeply once more. She didn’t like this. The smell was some how familiar to her. The scent seemed to flow through her nose and straight to her heart, touching old memories as it went. Mother’s pack. Father’s heavy scent. She shook her head to clear the shades away and licked her lips nervously. No, she didn’t like this at all. Yuma bobbed once and approached her side. He pressed his head under hers.

“I don’t like this at all either.” He murmured softly. “I want to go check it out. Stay here and protect the others, if anything happens, just take them to safety. I will catch up.” Aiyana nuzzled him affectionately.

“Just be careful, Yuma.” She whispered. “That’s all I ask.”

“Then it’s all I will do.” He smiled at her before creeping silently through the snowy meadow, leaving a trail of tracks in his wake.

As Yuma approached the strange object, the scene became clearer to him. Now he could see that it was a dead wolf lying on its belly near the bones and scattered fur of a dead fox. Blood stained the snow in red and brown splotches.

“Who’s there?” The other wolf suddenly began to stir and raised its head stiffly, startling Yuma.

“So you aren’t dead then.” Yuma stepped closer and sniffed at the stranger’s black coat. Yuma knew that the blood on the snow more than likely belonged to the stranger, but he couldn’t see any open or visible wounds. Yuma didn’t recognize the young male wolf but his scent reminded him of someone. He smelled faintly like Aiyana. It was very strange. “Where are you bleeding from?” He asked.

“I came down here because I smelled the fox,” The stranger began. “I hadn’t eaten in a few days and I have traveled very far. I was really hungry so I began to eat it but then, I found myself caught in this thing.” He rolled onto his side exposing his hind paws. Yuma flinched when he saw the mangled paw caught within the jaws of the steel leg trap. “Can you help me get this off?”

“Just hang on,” Yuma answered him nervously as he turned back to his pack.

“Aiy! Get everyone over here quickly!” He turned back to the injured wolf. It was one

of the few times that Yuma was unsure of himself. He knew full well that the laws of the pack had strict rules regarding sick, injured or old wolves. However, in his heart, he felt otherwise to those rules. They hardly seemed fair in this situation.

“But still,” he thought to himself as the pack drew closer. *“I don’t know what to do.”*

Aiyana trotted to his side and started morbidly at the stranger’s injury without even looking into his face. She couldn’t help herself; his mangled leg both frightened and fascinated her. She could see the bones and where the fresh blood oozed slowly into the snow and matted the stranger’s fur. The smells were worse now, heavy with blood, metal and...the smell of her home.

“Aiy?” The stranger questioned softly. “Is that you sister?”

“Yahto.” She placed the smell now. He was from her mother’s second litter, born when Aiyana was nearly a year old. She had played with him and the other pups constantly since they were old enough to totter from the den onto the grass. Yahto had been the biggest and most adventurous of the litter, and for a long time before Yuma came into her life, he was her best friend. She remembered the way he had howled after her when she chose to run with Yuma and leave the pack of her mother. He wanted to follow her desperately, but he was still too young to survive on his own and the Alphas had forbidden him from leaving the safety of the pack. But now, here he was, so much older and so far from home.

Yahto struggled to stand on his three good paws. He whimpered as he hefted the caught paw with his hind leg. The metal jaws swung slightly and the tail of the metal thing rattled and clinked like the tail of a coiled diamondback.

“I finally found you!” He opened his mouth in a toothy grin and began to pant.
“Lucky you found me first, huh?”

Aiyana looked over to Yuma without answering her brother. He gave her a concerned look back.

“We have to get you out of the open,” Aiyana told him. “Can you walk with that thing on your paw?”

“I can’t.” Yahto answered his sister. “I already tried but its tail is stuck in the ground and I can’t dig it out.”

“Let me try,” Yuma offered, approaching the tail end of the trap. His forepaws easily kicked away the snow revealing the round top of the bolt that the trap was attached to. Yuma scratched furiously at the ground around the bolt, ripping up tufts of dead grass, but to no avail. The Earth had already been frozen into a solid layer of permafrost. “I can’t get it out and I don’t think we can wait for spring either.” He reported to Aiyana.

“Well there has to be something else we can try.” Aiyana said as she sniffed at the jaws of the trap. It was then that Manaba stepped forward.

“I think you know what should be done, Alpha.” She told Aiyana in a flat tone that still managed to carry menace. Aiyana shot her a furious glare.

“I know full well the laws of the pack, Beta.” She growled softly.

“Wait, what law am I breaking?” Yahto asked, puzzled. “What have I done wrong?”

“Nothing,” Aiyana told him, silently wishing that Manaba had just kept her muzzle shut instead of bringing the fear in Aiyana’s heart to the attention of the whole pack.

“I’m referring to the law concerning weak wolves,” Manaba informed Yahto.

“Wolves that are sick or hurt so that they cannot hunt or run.” Cheveyo stepped forward to finish her explanation.

“Wolves that cannot keep up with the pack endanger the pack itself.” He spoke quickly and nervously. “They eat meat without hunting putting the pack at risk for starvation.”

“Right now,” Manaba picked up again. “You have made us vulnerable to predators like a bear or a lion because not only are we in the open but you reek with the scent of carrion and blood. We can’t stay near you, we have to move on before we get killed too.”

Yahto put his ears back and tucked his tail between his hind legs.

“I didn’t mean to put anyone in danger.” He whimpered.

“Well you’ve managed to put yourself and this pack at risk all the same!”

Manaba snapped.

“Enough of this!” Aiyana snapped, showing her teeth. She darted between Manaba and her brother throwing her body against the Beta wolf’s shoulder, pushing her off her feet. Aiyana pounced on Manaba barking furiously before she could recover. In a matter of seconds she was biting and scratching like a mad beast while Manaba could only whimper and yelp. Behind them, the other wolves cowered in the snow, shocked at their Alpha’s aggression. Yuma looked on impassionedly; if Aiyana hadn’t punished Manaba first, he would have. Finally Aiyana was finished. She still held Manaba pinned in the snow as she growled into her face.

“I may not make the laws, but I am the one who enforces them.” She then stepped off and allowed Manaba to rise. Manaba got shakily to her feet, tucked her tail and slinked away from Aiyana. Aiyana turned her attention back to the pack.

“Does anyone else have an opinion?” She snarled.

“Actually Aiyana,” Yuma had stepped forward to offer his thoughts calmly. “As disrespectful as Manaba was, she did have a valid point. Night is falling, and soon other will be attracted to the blood, just as we were.”

“But it isn’t fair!” Angeni blurted out suddenly. Then realizing her tone, she lowered it respectfully. “I mean we can’t just leave one of our own people here in the open to be eaten by another. If it were any one of you, even Chogan, I wouldn’t just leave them to die alone. It isn’t right, or at least that’s how I feel in my heart.”

“No,” Yahto had slumped dejectedly back into the snow. “Manaba and Yuma are right. I’m only putting everyone in danger. That isn’t fair to the pack.” Aiyana stepped nearer to Yahto and nuzzled his ears gently.

“Don’t talk like that,” She said. “We’ll think of something.”

“I agree with Angeni,” Cheveyo was offering his thoughts. “It isn’t his fault that he was bitten by that thing.”

“Yes,” Huyana spoke up. “But we need to act now, because the danger is real, like Yuma and Manaba said. And as of now, we still don’t have any ideas.”

“Then we’ll have to be quick,” Aiyana told them. “Everyone think. Share any ideas you have, even if they are really odd.”

“We can’t dig out the tail.” Yuma reminded them. “So we can’t try that again.”

“Can we try to bite through the jaws of the metal thing?” Huyana suggested.

“No,” Yahto answered her. “I tried it and my teeth did not even scratch its skin let alone pry it off of my paw.”

“I guess that means we can’t scratch it off with our paws either.” Huyana sighed.

“Let me try to bite through the tail.” Aiyana took the chain in her teeth and began to chew. She could only do it a few times before spitting it out. “No good.”

“Wait, Alpha, wait.” Chogan spoke up excitedly. “This one has an idea.”

“Good, Chogan!” Aiyana praised him. “Please tell us your idea.”

“Ok,” Chogan sat back on his haunches. “Before this one joined your pack, he ran with another larger pack. This one was a middle wolf but above him a Beta wolf walked with only three legs. He was a remarkable Beta who could still catch small animals to share and could keep up with the pack. One day, this one found great courage to ask him why his front leg was missing.” Here Chogan broke off and pointed at his the knee of his own foreleg with his nose.

“It was as if it had been cut from here, Alpha.” He said. Aiyana nodded.

“Go on, Chogan, be quick though.” She told him. Chogan wasted no time and swung back into the story.

“He said that many full moons ago, his leg had been bitten by a metal animal. He had dragged it with him for many days until the paw was dead hung limply. It was then that he decided to free himself, and he chewed through the bad part of his leg, releasing the metal thing. After that, he was free. He licked the wound, where his leg was, many times after that until it had healed over. That is all, Alpha.” Chogan finished his tale.

Aiyana was quiet as she turned Chogan’s idea over in her mind. Yuma pressed his head against her, pulling her back to reality.

“I think that Chogan’s idea is our only real option.” Yuma told her. “If you want, I can do it.”

“No Yuma,” She sighed as she turned and nuzzled her mate. “I should do it. He’s my brother and I refuse to leave him out here.” She turned to Chogan next. “Your quick thinking has given my brother a chance and for this, I owe you. From now on, our pack has no Omega. You may call yourself by your given name.” Aiyana then directed orders to the other pack members.

“Manaba, Huyana, Angeni and Cheveyo,” She barked. “You will stand guard around this area while we work. Alert us if anything big comes this way.

“You can’t be serious! Yahto exclaimed. “I can’t live with three paws!”

Yuma was immediately in Yahto’s face, growling low.

“If an old wolf can live without his leg, then you can live without a paw.” He stared the younger wolf down. “And you know full well that you won’t live long with that thing attached to you.” Yahto backed down from Yuma’s stare and tucked his tail back between his legs.

“Ok,” He whimpered softly with his eyes downcast. “Just do it then.”

“Yuma, I want you to keep my brother from watching what we are doing.”

Aiyana told him as she moved back towards the entrapped hind paw. “And Chogan, you come help me here.”

“Are you ready?” Yuma asked Yahto. He nodded but said nothing. His eyes were tightly shut. “Ok, Aiyana.” Aiyana paused for a moment before swinging quickly into her grizzly work as Chogan waited obediently beside her.

“Aiyana!” Yahto cried out and writhed in pain. “Aiyana, stop! Stop! It Hurts!”

“Stop that!” Yuma growled as he grabbed Yahto by the scruff with his teeth. He still managed to growl to him through a mouthful of fur. “I know it hurts, just calm down!”

“Keep him from moving Yuma!” Aiyana had paused only to snap at her mate.

“I’m trying!” He barked back at her. Aiyana lowered her head back to Yahto’s paw.

From the circle surrounding their Alphas, the other wolves stood close guard, eyes on the surrounding forest. Angeni jumped and turned to look back at the others when Yahto began to cry. Huyana stepped towards her and nuzzled her face away from the scene.

“Don’t look, little one,” she told her. “It’ll be over soon. Right now, we need to keep our eyes on the trees to keep the others safe. Watch closely now, it’s almost dark.”

Angeni licked her lips nervously and returned her gaze to the trees, but no matter how hard she tried, she could not block out the cries from the wolf behind her.

Alpha: Yuma: Son of a Chief (m) (Brutus)

Alpha: Aiyana: Eternal Blossom (f) (Boudicca)

Beta: Manaba: Return to war – Navajo (f) (Betty)

Beta: Cheveyo: Spirit Warrior – Hopi (m) (Bart)

Middle: Angeni: Spirit (f) (Bijou)

Middle: Huyana: Falling rain (f) (Bella)

Omega: Chogan: Blackbird – Hopi (m) (Benjamin)

Brother: Yahto: Sioux Blue (m) (Brandon)

Mimi

By Adrienne Deitch

Braces now hold her once dancing legs,
Defined marks in the carpet,
A trail leading down the hallway,
Chair to bed; bed to the chair,
Her movements are slow

She sits,
Smoke from her Salem Lights clog the air
She watches,
The squirrel dancing behind her window
She waits,
For the telephone beside her to ring
Voices from the outside; voices from the past

Lines on her face
She is not the same,
Her body works against her,
No feeling left in her feet,
Only pain in her legs

I watch her closely from the kitchen,
She does not see me yet.
She looks old.
I follow the marked trail into the room,
She smiles and lights another cigarette

Pure Country
By Nikki Gundel

Restless
I think about you
For the last time

It's all about to change
Time marches on
Everywhere

You were born to fly
so fly
to wide open spaces

See if I care
You're killin' time
I'm movin' on
How do you like me now?

This poem is a found poem. Each line is an album title from a famous country album.

The only added words are in the third verse – so and to because I wanted it to be a little more forceful there. I got the idea from looking at my CD's and I was going to use the ones just on my desk, but I would have had to change a song title to a different tense and I didn't want to change any song titles or have any tenses be mixed up.

Gabriel
By Amanda Horn

I dream of you during the day, while light labors on creation and continuation.
I saw a death far more real than life, knowing even then I would feel happiness only
once.

A new view on a familiar soul.
Above seasons catching lost breaths, upon reaching me they end as a breeze.
A balancing act perfected by a timber-slept child.
Blue proven real by eccentric colored eyes, hidden in a texture of trees.
To my lost child, I send your heart a happy note.
You know that I still lay smiling beside you, shivering from the cold.

Tears of the Lion
By Heather M. Burke
(In Memory of Dr. Segro and to all the students and staff at Red Lion Area Junior High)

The lion stands outside the place,
Tears running down his gentle face,
For what happened yesterday,
Can never be erased.

He saw the students come,
Well on their way,
To a bright new future,
On that sunny April day.

He heard shots ring forth,
The panic as children ran away,
He saw the youth with a gun,
His mind seeming to have gone astray

He witnessed the child's end,
And a brave leader's fall,
He saw the pain and sadness,
Brought to us all.

He saw a community,
Come together as one,
To weep, to grieve,
To try and heal the damage done.

His mighty roar now silenced,
As his tears form a pool,
Innocence was lost that day,
At the Red Lion Middle School.

He knows it will get better,
That the children will come back,
But the sense of school safety,
The students will forever lack.

He now stands guard,
With his watchful eyes,
But a strong heart is broken,
As the brave lion cries.

Impossible Questions
By Heather M. Burke

What does one do as the light fades away,
As the shadows creep across the ground,
Once again signaling the end of another day?

When the memories of the past come back to cloud your mind,
When there seems to be no barrier in space and time,
And as you witness all your dreams come undone
With nobody there to listen, save only one.

The now long time companion who lies at your feet,
To whom you can neither sob nor speak,
For while he looks at you with those concern brown eyes
He cannot help the pain that lies deep inside.

And from the torment of one's heart comes the demons again,
Both new and old,
To ravage once more on the troubled soul,
Leaving in their wake the sadness and bitter, hallow cold.

When all one can think of are the dreams that died,
And the ones that linger dangerously close,
That there seems to be no way to stop the destruction
And all you have left now are their ghosts.

As you sit there splitting in half,
Pinned between hope and despair,
Somewhere between life and death,
And even though you are alive,
It always seems hard to catch your breath.

What does one do when the darkness closes in,
When the veil of your heart slips away,
And the daily façade wears thin?
How does one deal with what lies inside,
With the stinging of salt in the eyes?
How does one fight back against the confusion?
Against the fears, against all the lies?

When even in sleep one finds no solace
When even then you battle the dreams,
And upon waking you realize
Nothing in life is ever as it seems.

What does one do when stuck between the world of the living,
And the hideous, yet inviting, world of the dead?
When you cannot think, speak, or reason,
All the racing thoughts in one's head?

How does one get by,
When the light draws back behind the blackened sky,
And one is most alone,
Left to crumble,
Left to battle the monsters all on their own?

Lost
By Jen Markley

It was a beautiful, hot, steamy day when I gazed upon crowded Virginia Beach. The gritty beige colored sand felt so scalding against my feet I could barely walk without tearing up. The shoreline seemed to go on for miles and appeared to me to be never-ending. The grayish blue waves crashed against the shore with such a melodic sound that I almost wanted to close my eyes and pretend I was the only person worthy enough to hear this harmonious noise. The sky looked like a scene in an oil painting: pale blue with gently rolling clouds and rays of sunlight peeking through the cracks. It had a tiny black dot in the distance. As it drew nearer, I could recognize that it was a tiny plane with an advertisement floating at the back of it that read "Al's Pizzeria; The Most Delicious Pizza on the Beach". It leisurely fluttered across the sky, enticing customers with its eye-catching statement. I was there with my family; the people who cared for me the most. That day, I would realize just how much they meant to me, and how valuable they were.

The patrons of the beach seemed to be relaxed and nonchalantly proceeding with their day. Sweat dripped off people's heads, as if they were being cooked alive like a lobster. The appearance of brightly red, burned bodies reminded me to apply sun block to my skin. Hundreds and hundreds of crisply tanned individuals were scattered about the beach, equipped with their brightly colored fluorescent towels and plastic water bottles filled to the brim with ice cold water. Nearby, an intense game of volleyball was being played with five girls versus five guys. Spike after spike, hit after hit, miss after miss, this went on for about twenty minutes until both teams decided to call it quits. The girls had won.

This was our vacation spot. The very paradise my family chose to get away from it all and just spend quality time doing a whole lot of nothing. I was there with my mom and step-dad, who graciously took turns driving the purple Dodge Minivan that took us from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to Virginia Beach. All in all, it was a good four hour drive. My little brother Kris, who was four years old at the time, could hardly wait to see what this overly-talked about location was like. He stood there, beside me on the beach, with his tiny blue swimming trunks that were covered with sharks and skateboards. On his upper arms he wore orange poofy floatation devices that almost every child has worn at some point. He could barely stand still as my mom blanketed him from head to toe with SPF 45 sun - screen. This kid was ready for a fun-filled day at the beach. Or so he thought.

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon, and the waves seemed to be calling out to me. The sun was at its brightest and the heat made me feel as though someone was holding a gigantic magnifying glass over my head. The beach was so packed with tourists that it almost seemed impossible to find a decent area to set up a small beach towel and radio. Small children scurried about the place like it was a Fun Land where rules and regulations did not exist. I decided to head toward the water that was crawling up on the shore bearing gifts from the sea, such as shells, seaweed, rocks, and an occasional piece of trash or two. The icy feel of the Atlantic Ocean made my muscles tense up and a rugged chill ease its way down my tiny spine. I have never been a strong swimmer, so I figured it would be best if I did not venture out too far. God only knows where those powerful gripping waves could carry my petite nine year old body.

Taking a much - needed break from the sea, I decided to draw designs in the sand with my index finger. After all, the sand happened to be my favorite part of the beach. Especially, the really soft and light kind that felt like pure baby powder. At the time, I thought drawing figures in the sand and seeing them wiped clean by the ocean's tide was the coolest thing to do at the beach. So I started out by writing my name in big block letters, followed by a dozen exclamation points. After that was erased, I produced an ocean scene with miniature fish swimming through long strands of seaweed. I am not quite sure why, but I suddenly looked up from my creation with a sneaky suspicion I had wandered a little too far down the beach. As I gazed down the shore, the territory I was in did not seem familiar to me. Not at all, in fact. I did not see my little brother scampering around in his blue trunks or my mom and step-dad. I did not even see the familiar faces of people who surrounded us when we sat our beach equipment down. My heart suddenly began to palpitate as I repeated the words "I'm lost" in my head.

I stood there for a moment trying desperately to gather my thoughts and come up with a plan of action.

"Maybe if I just turn left and go straight I will bump into them. I can't be that far from them," I said to myself as I started to walk.

I clearly did not know where I was going. Every part of the beach looked the same to me; tons of people were just laying there in their swimsuits, baking in the blistering sun. There were so many people that I could not even begin to search for my family. Onward I went, frustrated and trembling, as I paraded down the shoreline, hoping that someone would tap me from behind and it would be my mom standing there wondering where I was off to. But that was only wishful thinking. I continued pounding

my way through the deep heavy sand. Only unbeknownst to me, I was traveling further away from my family.

This aimless wandering continued for about twenty minutes. That may not seem like a long time to be lost, but when you are nine years old it feels like four hours. At this point in time I was a wreck. Other beach-goers gazed at me with concern but no one stopped to question me. It was not until I gave up all hope of seeing my family when a stranger in back of me said:

“Little girl, do you know where you are going?”

Shocked, I turned around to see a tall brunette woman who appeared to be in her late twenties or early thirties. She was wearing the classic red life guard bathing suit with mesh shorts. Her hair was pulled back in a low pony tail and big dark sunglasses covered her eyes. I stood there dumbfounded, as if someone had just asked me a rocket science-type question that required deep intellectual thought to answer. So, initially, I said no. She then grabbed a small black walkie talkie that was clipped to the back of her shorts and notified another life guard that she had found me. Just then, her bony hand reached out for mine and together we migrated to the area where she was stationed. I waited there patiently next to the tall wooden white chair that lifeguards sat upon in order to receive a good range of sight. The only thing I wanted was to be united with my beloved family again.

After waiting for about ten minutes, I unexpectedly saw my mom, step-dad, and little brother charging up the shore. I was so happy to see them that I immediately ran over to my mom and hugged her. Her eyes were glazed over with tears, and I could tell by the strength of her hug that she was equally overjoyed to see me. My step dad was

also relieved that I was in good hands and was thankful I was not whisked away by the ocean tide. My brother Kris was not so happy because his first trip to the beach was now cut short due to my missing in action. My parents insisted that we all go back home to compose ourselves and grab something to eat. That night, I laid in my bed thinking about how thankful I was to be together with my family again.

From this experience, I learned that family is a very important asset to a person's life. Without it, one can feel lost and unguided. I never knew that being lost for twenty minutes could make me feel so alone and vulnerable. It was a scary situation to be in: separated from my family in a strange place, panicking, having to talk to a lifeguard. In the end, everything was fine once I reunited with my family. Family is what makes us a stronger individual.

Loop Holes – A Play In One Act
By Kathryn Welteroth

Characters:

Anubis: Egyptian God of the dead, wears pressed slacks, suspenders, a clean shirt with the sleeves rolled to the elbows. No tie, unbuttoned collar. His suit jacket is hanging over the back of his chair. He has a jackal headdress (be creative) and a tail.

Fredrick: A soul. He shows us how it's done; he is dressed in a business suit and a trench coat. Trench coat conceals a bottle of Schnapps (or whatever).

Cindy: A soul who has been sent to Anubis for judgment, like every other soul that comes to him. She wears jeans, hair in a pony tail and a ripped, white button down shirt that has blood stains. She has several cuts and dirt smudges on her face.

Ms. Patton: Anubis's secretary. She wears a business suit, skirt and heels. Glasses preferred. She has a no nonsense look to her and is always carrying files. Likes to poke fun at him occasionally.

The Monster: His job is to eat the impure who have been damned. He is dressed like a bouncer and has a crocodile mask.

Setting and props: The hall of judgment.

Anubis's desk sits stage left at an angle. The desk is large and has two large drawers (file cabinets) on either side. The one closest to the audience is filled with bottles of various alcoholic beverages. The other has fun beach or vacation items (beach ball, towel, glasses). A desk top computer is on the desk. Next to the computer is a set of scales (either ornate scale or a balance scale) with a large fluffy feather on one end. Swivel chair. Small intercom. Small notebook in top desk drawer.

****KP PLAYERS: LANCE BASS OF N'SYNC BOBBLEHEAD DOLL**

The back of the stage empties into darkness so that people can enter the afterlife.

Fredrick and Cindy carry pretend hearts (accurate or silly)

Biohazard box labeled “Organ Donation” behind desk to put hearts into.

Briefcase at side of desk hidden from audience

(Opening)

(Anubis is sprawled in his chair typing listlessly. He stops, cracks his knuckles and stretches before opening the bottle drawer, carefully selecting a bottle of vodka and tipping back in his chair to drink it. The intercom crackles to life startling him and nearly sending him out of his chair. As Ms. Patton speaks, he hastily caps the bottle, wipes his muzzle and puts the bottle back.)

Ms Patton: A client here to see you sir. Shall I send him in?

Anubis: *(getting his act together)* What? Uh...oh yes, please send him in.

(Fredrick shuffles in slightly bewildered from stage right)

Fredrick: Hello, sir. So ummm...this is what's at the end of the line?

Anubis: Well what did you expect?

Fredrick: Well, I thought I was going to reincarnate and come back as someone or something else...

Anubis: *(laughs loudly cutting him off)* Oh man, that's a good one, here wait, I'll add it to the book *(gets out notebook and quickly adds it)*. Oh yeah, that's right up there with “Clouds and Angels” and “A lifetime of virgins”. No, I'm sorry and afraid that it is much more mundane than that.

Fredrick: Oh?

Anubis: Yes, all that happens is, I weigh your heart against that feather on those scales and the outcome decides if you get to the afterlife...or devoured and damned by The Monster.

Fredrick: But doesn't a heart already outweigh a feather?

Anubis: Only if it is filled with sin. If you have lead a life of virtue, then your heart will become lighter than a feather and I will allow you to pass into the afterlife.

Fredrick: *(shrugs)* It's a fair cop I suppose.

Anubis: Good, because failure to comply with the standard test results in automatic and immediate devouring and damnation. So, let's put your heart right up here and see how you measure up.

(Fredrick places his heart on the empty side of the scale. It moves before settling and is completely even).

Anubis: *(leans down on desk and stares carefully)* Huh, that rarely happens. Now I'll have to make an executive decision.

Fredrick: *(wrings hands nervously)* Is there anything I can do?

Anubis: *(stares up seriously at Fredrick from behind the desk)* Of course! There's always a loop hole.

Fredrick: Well, I do have this bottle of Schnapps with me. *(Removes the bottle from his coat and shows it to Anubis)*

Anubis: *(Stares at bottle for a beat then places one finger on the feather side of the scales causing it to drop and raise the heart up)* Oh look, what just happened! Looks like you're ready for the After-life.

Fredrick: *(Ecstatic)* Oh thank you sir...er...your majesty...er...your deity...

Anubis: Just give me the bottle and get to the After-life kid *(smirks and takes bottle, checking the label before adding it to the collection in the drawer)*.

Fredrick: Ummmm, what should I do with my heart?

Anubis: That old thing? Just leave it here on the desk. Now you go have fun in the great beyond. *(Fredrick exits back of stage)*

Fredrick: Thank you! Thank you! *(Anubis waves him away. After Fredrick leave he leans over the desk and looks after the place where Fredrick exits before taking the bio-hazard/recycling box labeled "Organ donation" and drops the heart in and closes it)*

Anubis: Another one for the hospital... *(Runs a hand through his hair and sighs before hitting the intercom button)*. Ms. Patton, could you please see me in my office?

Ms. Patton: Yes sir.

Anubis: Thank you. *(Ms. Patton enters from stage right)*. Ms. Patton, exactly how long have I been doing my job?

Ms. Patton: *(rustles paper in her hands and pulls up a figure)* Approximately three millennia sir.

Anubis: Just as I thought. Ms. Patton, clear my books. Reroute the mortals to limbo. Take The Monster to the kennels. I am taking a vacation!

Ms. Patton: Right away sir! *(Exit stage right)*

Anubis: Everyone needs a bit of vacation now and again, so why not a jackal god of the dead and embalming? *(As he speaks he opens the other drawer and packs a towel, glasses, and sunscreen. His is the middle of packing an inflated beach ball when the intercom buzzes again).*

Ms. Patton: Sir? We have one last soul for today before you can leave.

Anubis: *(Sigh and gets whiney)* Do I have to?

Ms. Patton: *(Same no nonsense tone as always)* Would you like some cheese with that wine sir?

Anubis: Oh yeah? Well why don't you have a nice tall glass of Shut the hell up!

Ms. Patton: Sir, I'm rubber, you're glue. Whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks back to you.

Anubis: *(fumes)* Well my dad's an astronaut and he'll come and run you over with his spaceship for being so *(Cindy stumbles in from stage right)* Hello there...

Cindy: What were you doing?

Anubis: Well, I was trying to go on vacation until you showed up. *(Snaps fingers)* Come on, come on. Let's get this over with. Place your heart on the scale, blah, blah, blah you know the rest.

(Cindy steps up to the desk and places her heart on the scale. The heart side falls to the desk immediately with a thump. Anubis is shocked)

Anubis: Whoa...that's a lot of sin. *(He tries to tip the feather side down but after several tries and putting all of his weight against it, the scales won't budge. He sits back in the chair, opens the bottle drawer and opens a bottle and begins to drink).* What...did you do?

Cindy: Well you see...my college loans were a little expensive...soooo my friend and I kind of robbed a bank...

Anubis: And?

Cindy: And took hostages.

Anubis: And?

Cindy: *(deep breath before rapidly explaining)* And then we shook the police, got into the getaway car, made a mad dash for the border and I think we were in a car accident and then I was here...

Anubis: *(Pauses, takes a deep drink)* Now that is quite a load of sin young lady. I'm afraid there's only one thing we can do for your type *(buzzes intercom)* The Monster, I need you in my office right away, please. *(Loud stomping as The Monster approaches and enters from stage right).*

The Monster: You called Boss? *(Nods at Cindy)*

Anubis: Yes, please take her away for immediate devouring and damnation. *(The Monster grabs Cindy who is now terrified but still tries to appeal to Anubis who is dropping her heart into the biohazard box).*

Cindy: Wait! This isn't fair!

Anubis: It seems very fair to me *(looks up at Cindy).*

Cindy: But it isn't! I was desperate! I had to pay off my college loans and I didn't know what else to do! And, and, and (*stuttering*) I didn't know when I was going to die so I didn't even get a chance to repent!

Anubis: Hmmm, (*thinks*) I see your point. However, I can't just let you go into the After-life with such a heavy heart.

Cindy: Well, what should I do?

Anubis: You need a loop hole.

Cindy: A loop hole?

Anubis: (*Stands and comes around desk in front of Cindy*) Yes. I can see it was something you didn't learn about in your past life given your...hasty actions in the face of college loans. Basically a loop hole is a way out that doesn't always present itself. It needs to be found.

Cindy: Where can I get a loop hole? Where should I look?

Anubis: I don't know! It's one of those things that you need to find for yourself. Release her The Monster and let her think for a moment. (*The Monster lets Cindy go and looks a little sad*). Ok, ok, if she can't think of one in the next few minutes, *then* you can devour and damn her (*The Monster smiles and big toothy smile*).

Cindy: (*ponders for moment*) Ok, what were loopholes that were done before?

Anubis: Oh I have a whole drawer full of old loopholes. (*Opens liquor drawer to show her*).

Cindy: Liquor? I don't have any alcohol with me!

Anubis: I guess that isn't your loop hole then.

Cindy: Clean your desk?

Anubis: It's already clean.

Cindy: What if I gave you my watch and my ring?

Anubis: I'm a god. I don't require mortal trinkets...and I have several temples full of gold and lapis anyway.

Cindy: Well, there's still one more thing I can offer you. *(Looks down as if self-conscious)*.

Anubis: *(Steps closer to hear her better)* Oh? And what might that be?

Cindy: I...I...I can give you my...my virginity (looks up appealingly at Anubis)

Anubis: *(Pauses a beat before take a big step back)* Cindy, I really don't like girls.

Especially human ones what with being all hairless and spongy and...ugh The Monster, take her away, she's run out of options.

(The Monster begins to drag Cindy away she fights him and gives one more desperate appeal)

Cindy: Wait! You said you were going on vacation right? Well, I can go with you! I'll be your personal assistant. I'll book the hotels, get the airline tickets, arrange for tours...anything you need me to do!

Anubis: *(Turns back to Cindy)* Set up my bar tabs?

Cindy: I can do that too!

Anubis: Arrange for my “escorts” (*finger quotations*)?

Cindy: Yes!

Anubis: Do you think you can do all of it without failing me once?

Cindy: I know I can! Just give me the chance to redeem myself, please!

Anubis: Well...ok. Release her The Monster, you are dismissed.

(Cindy is thrilled as The Monster puts her down. He glares at her once before leaving)

Anubis: (*pushes intercom button as Cindy continues victory dances behind him*) Good day Ms. Patton, you are dismissed. I am going on vacation.

Ms. Patton: Have a nice time sir! How long do you think you will be gone?

Anubis: Oh I don't know, three months, a few thousand years (*Cindy freezes and turns to him in shock*) whatever I feel like really. (*Turns to Cindy*) Now then, don't just stand there, carry my suitcase, we've got to get going! (*Exits stage right*).

Cindy: (*Walks over to suitcase and tries to shut it with beach ball but eventually gives up and throws it out into the audience and shuts the suitcase*). Well, at least this is much better than devouring and damnation. Thank God for loop holes!

Anubis: (*from off stage*) And God is getting impatient!

Cindy: Coming sir! (*Exits stage right*)

Innocence and *Esperance*
By Michael Cornelius

Mark Twain may have written about *Innocents Abroad*, but when many people write or talk about their times abroad, they often discuss losing their innocence, their sense of naiveté that accompanies an American citizenship. When I was preparing to go abroad, a good friend of mine, Richard, told me of his own travels in Europe. He spoke of coming home with a new cultural awareness and a vast spiritual awakening -- as well as a nasty case of crabs. Innocence lost! Richard advised me to bring to France a journal to record all of my experiences, as well as a couple of boxes of Rid.

But I had no innocence to lose. Why this is, well, frankly, I'm not sure I can say. Perhaps it was the product of my upbringing; in a small, rural town, no one has secrets, and one learns to recognize the petty side of life quickly. Perhaps it was my parents, who always told my siblings and I the truth and taught us the world is a wonderful and cruel place, who killed my innocence. Maybe it was growing up queer in a world where the hatred of gays is a political platform, or the basis of a tent revival. Maybe it was genetic. Who can say? Excitement, exuberance, awe -- these are things I know. But not innocence, never innocence.

So, journal in hand (the Rid I went without, determined it would not be an issue, if you know what I mean,) I boarded Canadian Airlines flight 595 from Toronto to Paris. In Paris, I took a train to Caen, a small but historic French city on the Norman coast. I had left Toronto at 9:00 in the evening, and arrived at the University of Caen at 3:00 the following afternoon, prepared to spend the next several weeks studying the French language, culture, and history.

The university was an enormous series of buildings that housed over 36,000 students. As I walked past the large bronze phoenix that stands vigil at the university gates, I could not help but be awed and amazed by everything I saw. Thousands of young students milled around the courtyard, talking quietly and smoking (The French smoke as much as some nationalities breathe; as an ardent non-smoker, I found it disgusting, but wisely refrained from saying so, since the French find American attitudes about smoking ridiculous. One Frenchman laughed at me, waving a cigarette in my face, saying, “You Americans are so stupid! You think this is a drug! You think this is bad!” I said nothing. My mother always taught me to be gracious to my hosts; besides, lung cancer in France has risen over 400% in the last fifteen years; I surmised he would figure it out sooner or later.)

After a healthy one-mile walk uphill to my residence hall, attractively called Building H in Lot 3, I unpacked, fell into bed, and slept straight on to morning. I spent the better part of the next day trying to familiarize myself with the huge campus, ferreting out food, and meeting people in my dorm. I was staying in the International Students dorm. It felt very, very strange to be considered an international student. I was the only American amongst many Irish, English, Welsh, Belgian, German, Australian, Congolese, Chinese, Pakistani, Afghani, Russian, Moroccan, plus seventy-nine other nationalities. I was so used to simply being an American, that becoming *the* American was, in its own powerful way, quite a learning experience. For once, I was in the minority; my culture and my way of life were no longer dominant. I’d been in the minority before; growing up gay had assured me of that. But never had it so profoundly hit me then the moment I arrived in Caen, alone. I could not say to someone, “You know where I’m coming from,”

because these people simply did not know where I was coming from. I had to learn to communicate my ideas, my beliefs, my thoughts, and my desires more clearly and distinctly than ever before, and I had to do it all in a foreign language. What I learned about the human desire to connect to others and the overwhelming need to communicate (not to mention improvisational sign language,) despite all obstacles, could fill a book of mass communications theory and practice.

I explored the city of Caen that night, enjoying the sense of timelessness that I found in every street and sidewalk cafe. Caen has a history three times as ancient as European America, and this history fascinated me. Though much of the city had been decimated in World War II, the castle of *Guillaume le Conquerant* -- William the Conqueror -- lay right across the street from the university. I explored every battlement and parapet of that castle, and to this day I don't think I have ever had a better time by myself then when I wandered through the turrets of William's enormous castle, constantly pondering what it must have been like to have lived all those centuries ago.

I ended my first evening in Caen by going into the small *bar du faculte* and ordering a sweet-tasting beer that had the same name as my college (Fisher beer, St. John Fisher College.) About two minutes after my arrival, a man my own age came up to me. He smiled, sat next to me, ordered a beer, looked at me out of the corner of his eye. I smiled back, smoothed my hair, and discreetly checked my breath. Finally, he turned towards me, and said in flawless English, "Are you an American?"

"*Oui*," I responded, eager to talk to someone in French.

"Good," he continued in English. "I hate Americans." With this, he left.

I was stunned. Why had he bothered to tell me this? What was wrong with Americans? What was wrong with *me*? Ashamed, I downed my beer and quickly left the bar.

I puzzled over the young man's statement all the way home. Did all French people hate Americans? Shouldn't they have been grateful for our saving them in World War II? Will everyone react to me the same way? Did I make a big mistake coming here?

I had, however, precious little time to think about it. The next day classes started and I immediately found myself in trouble. The guttural Norman accent, so different from the mellifluous French I was used to, made comprehension a nightmare. The teaching style was vastly different as well: no one dared to interrupt the professor; no one asked questions; no one even left to go to the bathroom. My classroom was on the seventh floor of a building, but only the faculty were allowed to use the elevator. And everything seemed to move so fast; for the first time in my life, I felt academically impotent, not that I couldn't do it but that I didn't even now how to begin.

Still, I was determined to learn and enjoy my time in France to the utmost. I studied like I had never studied before (thankfully, in my composition class there was native English speaker who was big help; my independent study professor proved very patient with me; and my third class, the history of the D-Day invasion, was taught by a British colonel who had been there, and since he spoke no French, and I was the only native-English speaker in the class, I was his prize pupil.) It is customary in France for students to go out every night, to drink and relax, but, my homework having been done before I went out, I came home almost every night at 10:00 for extra study time. Still, I managed to meet lots of people and became quite popular with the natives. Everyone was

fascinated with, or at least highly amused by, the American from upstate New York. I would talk for hours about my life in the United States, and every night a different audience would sit, enraptured. I had never felt damn special before, but sitting on a tall, rickety bar stool, with four or five different people listening to my yarns and tales of New York life (most of them true,) I felt like the only American left in the world, and to be honest, it felt good.

I also took time out to explore the Northern coastal regions of France. I saw the famous Bayeux tapestry and convinced a monk to take me into the eerie crypts of the Bayeux cathedral; I saw famous monuments to Jeanne d'Arc and Charles de Gaulle, saw the infamous battlefields of Agincourt and St. Mere Eglise, the pirate city of St. Malo, and walked the beaches of Normandy where the six armies of D-Day landed. Every turn was a history lesson, every house or inn had a tale to tell.

In New York State, we have battlefields. They date from the Revolution or from the French and Indian War. Seeing them always reminded me of schoolchildren, of patriotism, or of those starched red uniforms, hot and uncomfortable, that the British used to wear. French battlefields always reeked of blood. World War II. World War I. The Hundred Years War. The Revolution. The invasions of William and Henry V. The revered Charles Martel, Charlemagne, Joan of Arc and Napoleon, the hated British sovereigns and German fuhrers. It slowly dawned on me that this country had been shaped by blood and violence, conquest and defeat, that France's boundaries had been drawn in bold crimson.

It made me sad to realize this. America teems with hope and friendliness, a general equanimity that goes hand in hand with the cynicism. In America, we always

know that things are going to be all right -- not necessarily great, but okay. France was grim, tinged with loss, every monument and building named for some dead hero or heroine.

The World War II cemeteries are the most indescribable sights in all of France. At St. Laurent, ten thousand crosses spread in every direction, dotted with busy tourists and Stars of David. "Silence and Respect" say the signs at the gate, and "Watch for Pickpockets." And underneath those signs are ten thousand rotting corpses, all men, all American, less than half of the men who died on Omaha Beach, soldiers fighting for now seemingly archaic ideals, for hopes lost, for dreams devoured, all of it incomprehensible to modern people. Even the German cemetery, the enemy, with its Panzer-like crosses, moved me.

It was in this frame of mind - maudlin, depressed, stormy with sighs - that I went to *Le Memorial*, a museum in Caen that had been constructed fifty years after the invasion. I remember being ushered in to a dark room with about thirty other people. We were French, American, British, Italian, German, Egyptian, Brazilian, and Japanese together. We were to watch three silent films. For once, language was not a barrier.

The first film detailed the preparations and the events of D-Day itself. The second showed the course of the invasion throughout France, as Caen fell to the allies after six long weeks, and finally, the re-taking of Paris herself. Both films were based on documentary footage, and I think that for the first time in my life I saw a film where real people were really killed.

The final film was called *Esperance* - Hope. This film detailed the end of the war, the dropping of the bomb, and then depicted what has happened in the subsequent fifty

years. There was no sound, only the background strains of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." On the screen I saw the Korean conflict, the Vietnam War, the struggle for Civil Rights, the hippie movement, the European student riots, and the Persian Gulf War. I saw the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bobby Kennedy, Medgar Evers, and Harvey Milk. Great luminaries such as Kennedy, King, Mother Theresa, Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill, Benazir Bhutto, Tito, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton spoke to us from ten translations splayed across the screen.

When the three films were over, no one moved or talked. I heard several sniffles; an elderly Englishman behind me smacked his lips, quite a show of emotion for a Brit; an American, a World War II veteran, just nodded and whispered, over and over, "That's how it was." But whether he was talking about the war, or the century, I wasn't sure.

Beside me sat a small Italian boy. When the film was over, he turned to his mother and spoke a few quiet words. The woman had been silent the entire time we had been in the room, but after hearing her little boy's words, she burst into tears. She grabbed my hand and in halting French, she told me what her boy had said. I looked down at the boy, at his big brown eyes and his messy hair, at his face sticky from some confectionery, and I, too, began to cry. I turned, and in English and French, repeated what the boy had said. Someone else translated it into German, another into Japanese. Soon the room rang with the little boy's words:

"Mama, in my eight years, there has never been a day of peace."

The lights came on and the door was opened. Sunlight flooded the small dark room. As we stood up to leave, I looked around. A small, representative group of nations, of people, had that day learned what the world was like through the eyes of an eight-year-

old, that eight-year-olds no longer lived in a world of toys and cookies, of joy and simple pleasure, of saying your prayers and being tucked in at night. Perhaps no eight-year-old has truly ever lived in a world like this; but this small boy, this one eight-year-old, he already knew that. As we left, the Englishman clutched at my arm, looked into my eyes, and said “We must change that.”

I agreed.

And for one small moment, there was peace.

Outside, in the world, I knew wars raged in Bosnia and Rwanda and Liberia and Kosovo, that people suffered and starved and died just at the moment that little boy had said those words. I knew that we still had race riots, and gang wars, and religious persecution. I knew that I would go home to America and gays and lesbians -- me -- would still not be accepted. Yet in that little room, for one moment, nothing like that mattered. Through those little boy’s simple words, we all learned a new meaning for the French word *esperance* -- child.

I wish I could say that this tale has a happy ending, that the little boy’s words were no longer true. And yet, a year to the day I came home from France, a jet bound for Paris - one carrying several students just like me - fell from the sky. Violence wasn’t suspected - it was assumed. Though the plane exploded due to mechanical reasons, the old wounds, the old fears, surfaced everywhere. Another piece of everyone’s innocence fell into the Atlantic with that plane. And yet - I could not help but think of that boy, and that dark room full of people, and the promises that were made. Some of those people may now be dead, but not all of them are; I’m not. And I know, thanks to that boy, that this place, this country, this earth, could be made better, and should be made better, and

somehow, for some reason I can not explain, I feel it will be made better. I really feel that now, whereas I have never felt that way before. And this - this is innocence.

The Deer
By Michael Cornelius

I want to dance in Arcady...

I want to run the verdant slopes of the Artemisius...

I want to wade, pell mell and uncaring, through the churning Ladon...

I want to sing of Ceryneia...

I want to catch the golden hind...

I see you.
In my mind's eye,
I see you.
Golden haired and bronzed wing,
I see you, and I watch,
I watch as you leap and fro,
your forelegs and muscular back arch in perfected orchestration.
You are the chase,
the quest,
my task and my labor,
and I perform willingly the
orders of my fate.
I need to catch the hind;
it is my destiny to catch the hind.

I hope I never catch the hind.

The land here is barren, these greasy-green gray mountains strewn with the ash of nobility and intentions. You rest beside a cool river bank, the stern steel color of the water a stark and ill-mannered contrast to your lovely golden horns. You thirst; you thirst for relief, for replenishment, the release of the chase. You drink, and I fear for you.

I want to run with you
Run and feel the stinging grass
On bare foot and cloven hoof
The wind that whips our face
And stings our smile as we

Without care
Chase endless suns
Of Arcadian days.

The ancient Greeks told the story of mighty Hercules and his twelve miraculous labors. The third: The capture – alive - of the hind of Ceryneia. The deer, beloved to Diane, was taken by the hero after a year's chase, struck down on the shores of the River Ladon, deep in Arcadia. Angered, the chaste goddess appeared before the hero, ready to punish the defiler of her sacred nature. But Hercules told her that he only obeyed the oracle of his labors, and the reluctant goddess healed the hind and let them both go.

Tales of Arcady are verdant pastures
of golden bows
and golden horns
and curious, golden gods.

Tales of Arcady are languid murmurs
of happy endings and
moon-dipped eves and
plaintive, starry sighs.

Tales of Arcady are
no more

The fields of Elysium are now polluted with man. Choked, ravaged, dazed, the day has come when sustenance is not enough. The chase is not over; the chase is not yet begun. The spoils of victory are nothing but spoilt. If we cannot be a hind for wishing, then we must be men for killing.

I want to dance in Arcady, beautiful Arcady, boundless Arcady...

I want to dance...

but I have forgotten how.

Concrete Poem
No Man Snow Man
By Wilson Alum: Marigrace Talbot

Shit
falling
every-where
and here
I am.
I was
born today,
to be knocked down
by some pack of fiends
making my mother cry.
Her hat and scarf
are stuck on
my head.
And, She
takes pride
in how fat I am.
She rolled me all over
the yard, avoiding the yellow
spots made by the neighbors dogs.
She created me with care and then left.
Now, she peers through her window,
while she sips hot chocolate
wishing I was a real man
and that she was
not alone.

Early Morning Musings in Tskuji, Central Fish Market, Tokyo, Japan
By Lorna Duphiney Edmundson

Emerging from the Tskuji Metro Station at 4:30am, I find myself in traditional Japan. Sidewalks are lined with tiny food shops selling soba noodles in broth, grilled meat and fish on skewers, and hot coffee, tea and cakes. Soon the fragrances of miso and tea wane, and household goods spill out onto the sidewalk - piles of ceramic tea cups, sake sets, dishes of every shape, size and color, rice paper and cords of hemp for gift wrapping. A turn into a narrow crowded lane reveals stacks of wooden bowls, chopsticks, baskets, paper goods - all just a prelude for the main event.

By now the noise level has risen to a fever pitch, and the narrow lanes are dizzyingly crowded with pedestrians and cyclists, all rushing about as if their lives depended on their ability to get there first. Where?

Men and women, young and old, the latter with torsos tilting at a forward angle from years of rushing and anticipating the need to stoop or bow. Crossing the street takes great courage, given the chaotic jumble of people on vehicles. I needn't worry about finding my destination, for all the while I am being sucked into the vortex of Tskuji - the Tokyo Central Market, vast, noisy, covered halls through which 90% of the seafood and vegetables consumed in Tokyo pass each morning.

At 5 am, the boats and trucks arrive along Saitama River which marks the eastern edge of the market, disgorging coffin-size wooden crates of giant tuna, long, narrow cardboard boxes of salmon, and styrofoam containers of every size and shape, holding untold varieties of frozen, dried, and live sea life. "Norway", "Sweden", "Alaska", "Hoikaido" read the labels on the containers. They are quickly cracked open by waiting workers and loaded onto long wooden hand carts pulled by old men and a few old

women; while young men pile their goods onto motorized carts equipped with steering sections shaped like oil barrels. Blocks of ice are hoisted onto the loads.

In fast moving, crisscrossing patterns, workers press their carts forward, shouting to gain advantage in reaching their 6' x 20' stands in the market's interior. Frozen logs of tuna are quickly handed to waiting young men who split them in two on electric table saws, trim the interior bony spinal column with small, sharp axes, and split the tuna halves into 10" sections for sale.

Meanwhile, waiting men and boys in rubber boots, standing in fishy pools of water, artistically arrange displays of endless varieties of whole live fish, including salmon, sole, red snapper, fluke. Entrails are extracted and displayed at the center of each, to demonstrate freshness. Just beyond lie rounded piles of rose-colored octopi - tentacles tucked snugly underneath, vats of inky black water holding long silvery squid, and crabs of all sizes each tied neatly in hemp to prevent escape.

Nearby, entangled eels, darting sardines and ever circling smelt struggle about in deep tubs of salt water and ice designed to keep -them vigorous and fresh until sold. Barrels of sea snails, oysters, clams, and pots of fish roe complete the fishy scene. Periodically, merchants splash iced salt water over their wares, shouting to call attention to the freshness and quality of their display.

By 8:30 am, all is ready, and customers with baskets and string bags stream into the scores of alleys that thread through the rows of stands run by thousands of merchants. Now the show begins, as warrior-size blades -- some 3 feet long -- are wielded with great artistry and finesse -- cutting, chopping, slicing, dicing, filleting at the customer's request.

Whole fish and perfect morels are wrapped carefully and ceremoniously in paper

for sale; less desirable fish parts are tossed into waiting barrels. Prices are shouted to the wife of the merchant, who sits in a telephone-booth size space at the interior of the stand, keeping the accounts and making change.

For the less adventurous, there are stands that offer only smoked, dried, pickled, or table ready items. Smelts, sardines and other small fishes are speared and strung on sticks, ready for hanging, frying, or being eaten as is. Thinly sliced fish of all kinds are table-ready for sushi and sashimi dishes. Plastic sacks of seaweed, roe, and rice cakes can also be easily had.

By 9:30 am, the din has lessened and gradually more and more merchants can be found standing in the middle of their shops slurping large bowls of broth and noodles, enjoying the, quiet, steamy warmth of a morning meal after a noisy, damp, raw beginning. Customers begin to gather their bulging, heavy loads, many topped by plastic sacks with writhing interiors, and pile into waiting taxis or flood into the subway, returning with their prized goods to home kitchens and waiting restaurant cooks throughout Tokyo.

By 10:00 am, cleanup begins in earnest. Debris of all kinds - barrels of fish waste, empty containers and broken boxes are once again stacked on the long narrow hand and motorized carts and brought for disposal to the market's perimeter. The bustling, intersecting lines of carts and pedestrian resume jockeying for position, as they press their way to unload their trash. Buckets of fresh water are splashed on working surfaces and floors that are then vigorously wiped or swept. Unsold fish is carefully packed for home in iced containers or kept in frozen cases for another day. Cash boxes are emptied; stands are tightly wrapped with tarps of all colors. Merchants and workers stream into the tiny

noodle, sushi, and grilled meat shops that line the edge of the central fish market for what will be their mid-day meal.

I have been so slow in tearing my eyes and ears away from the scene, that all of the shops are already crowded with customers. It is only several blocks later, as the hungry and tired crowds thinned, that the fragrances of warm tea, hot coffee and baked goods lure me in to a small peaceful shop with tiny round tables. I smile as I realize that I have stumbled upon a Starbucks complete with latte, rich coffees, and Japanese “ocha-of-the-day”—short, tall and grande...

Postscript: The sea and sea life have always fascinated me, partly because I love to sail, but perhaps also because as a child I heard often about my Greek ancestors who ranged from sea sponge divers to owners of wholesale and retail seafood establishments in Athens, Texas, New York, and Newport, RI Perhaps one of the many reasons I am so drawn to Japanese life and culture is because of its dependence on and reverence for the sea.