

*Bottom Shelf Review*  
*2008*



*Editor*

*Meg Oldman*

*Co-Editor*

*Amanda Horn*

*Advisor*

*Michael G. Cornelius*

## *Table of Contents*

<b>Untitled</b>	Amy Weiland	
<b>All that I have written with an Accent</b>		Sami Winkler
<b>Allon Bacuth</b>	Madeline Newell	
<b>Being A Snowflake</b>	Sherri Peters	
<b>Poetry Set In Motion</b>	Kim Allen	
<b>A Good Girl</b>	Satoko Unno	
<b>Perfect</b>	K.D. Mertz	
<b>Tomorrow's Child</b>	Theresa Mrenna	
<b>Sincerely Yours – A Letter Home</b>		Rebecca Heston
<b>The Gift of the Horse</b>	Laura Graham	
<b>Laura</b>	Ashley J. Barner	
<b>The Bog</b>	Katelin Reeve	
<b>Three Tabloid Articles based on <i>The Tragedy of Mariam</i></b>		Kayla Chagnon
<b>Don Dickinson</b>	Ashley J. Barner	
<b>Simple Pleasures</b>	Sami Winkler	
<b>Carol of Joy</b>	Rebecca Heston	
<b>Israel loved her</b>	Madeline Newell	
<b>Elizabeth</b>	Michelle Sheely	
<b>Pieces of Sky</b>	Katelin Reeve	
<b>Water's Edge</b>	Amanda Skjeveland	
<b>Untitled</b>	Erin Hartin	
<b>Leisure Time</b>	Brenda S. Simmons	
<b>I Saw Her Soul</b>	Nancy Hoke	
<b>WASHING HARLEYS AIN'T ALWAYS GOOD</b>		Anonymous
<b>The Elucidate</b>	Rebecca S. Heston	
<b>Rain Drops, Ember Shards</b>	Katelin Reeve	
<b>Thoughts on World Hunger</b>	Nancy Hoke	
<b>Flower Bouquet</b>	Satoko Unno	
<b>Morals</b>	Amanda Skjeveland	
<b>So, East meets West</b>	Sami Winkler	
<b>THE QUEEN AND THE NINJA – A Modern Love Story</b>		Rebecca Cheek
<b>The Recrudescence of Tabitha</b>	Madeline Newell	

NOTE: To navigate the *Bottom Shelf Review*, please use the Cntrl-F function on your computer.

## Untitled

Amy Weiland

I.

i was born, of that i'm sure, on august 16, 1987, the last baby born in the hospital that is now closed, miner's hospital of barnesboro, pennsylvania. they asked to move my mother during labor, but she refused, and they called in a midwife. after they quit doing deliveries, they also quit accepting all patients, and moved people to hastings, the next closest town with a hospital. the town of barnesboro doesn't even exist anymore. it was combined with another, spangler, to create northern cambria. no wonder i feel so rootless - i have no place of beginning. that hospital is a parking lot.

when i was in early high school or late middle school, i can't remember, kids would go to the old hospital to have parties. one night, as my father picked me up at a pizza place within walking distance of that spot, a ghost got into the cab of his truck with me. it continues to haunt me. that night i vomited more than i had ever in my life, though i had vomited, and still continue to vomit, rather frequently. i've always suffered from problems with my stomach. in elementary school, i was known as the girl who threw up at everyone's house at sleep-overs. i guess i would just get too excited or something. soon, i was no longer invited to sleep-overs. my mother blamed it on age, but i think it was because word got around to people's moms that i was ill.

in the morning, my mom made me go to church and i cried. i cried because i couldn't believe in any of it. there was no way i could believe in it. the ghost was not holy. that ghost had stolen all that was holy. i was a walking piece of sacrilege, going down the aisle to receive my communion. i was still drunk from the night before, and thought i

might vomit again.

## II.

i remember as a child i would walk across the street every morning and my neighbor dolly would see to it that i would get a good breakfast and catch the bus on time, and dress appropriately. i went to catholic school, so it was easy to dress in uniform, but dolly always checked to make sure i was clean and polished, and my headband wasn't too tight. one morning my mom walked me to dolly's house, because she had the day off, and dolly said something about working hard, and my mom said: "emme always works hard. she loves to read, she's going to be a little bookworm." and that was the first time i remember feeling that very specific emotion called "proud." it filled me up like dolly's breakfast, and kept me satiated for the next week or so. i was surprised to hear that it was unusual for children of my age to enjoy books. i felt like they were something really special.

i spent almost every morning of my childhood in the care of dolly, or dolores, as my dad called her. she was like a second mother. its strange i don't think of her more often. i want to apologize to her, for not thinking of her, that is... there were also other kids in the neighborhood who would come occasionally to dolly's in the morning to catch the bus, but i felt strange around them, i didn't know what to say. they were my cousins or something, but they liked to eat their breakfast in front of the television and play video games before school. i liked to watch dolly cook, and watch her dog eat eggs. he would gobble them down, and literally gobble. his throat would wiggle all around... once benny had tried to bite me, and that was the first time i remember dolly ever raising her voice.

her voice was gurgly when she yelled, like she didn't raise it often, or she too had gobbled down too many eggs. she was never married, and her parents had died in a tragic car accident when she was young, i think. i remember she was always very attached to her dog, and was like the neighborhood extra mother. she had a large garden, which later in her life would just be condensed to a row of poppies that bloomed beautifully every spring. my mom would always say: "look at dolly's poppies!" when we drove past, and i would nod.

i don't recall dolly being particularly intelligent, though she was the town's tax collector. she was some relation to me, my cousin i think. her favorite board game was "boggle" and we would play it together sometimes after school. her house always had a musty smell, so most of the time i liked to sit outside with her on her porch swing, and watch the traffic. she'd always say: "slow down/you're moving too fast/going to miss the day goin' past" when someone would go by with a particularly quick pace.

### III.

i saw her recently at my grandmothers funeral. i was embarrassed because i had made a mistake doing the eulogy reading, so i wasn't eager to reintroduce myself, and i don't think she recognized me anyway. or did but didn't want to say. her face had become much more round and pale, her eyes still bright, and her shoes still orthopedic. she even had the same hairstyle - thinning, but now with more grey, short curls even around her head. i think she was wearing the same coat i remember she would wear to walk out and get her mail - it was one of the 1980's down coats that are long, padded with a puffy peter pan collar, and a strange periwinkle-esque blue, or maybe a periwinkle-esque purple,

either way it had a grey dingy look. i got into the back-seat of one of the funeral parade cars, and i think we both wondered why i didn't say hello.

this morning, i wake up and i'm already late for class. maybe today i just won't go. this isn't like me. i fill up the machine that keeps me breathing regularly while i sleep and there are dirty dishes filling the sink to the top, so i just put water in a cup and pour it into the machine. as i fill from the faucet, it says 'chhhhh' and as i pour it into the machine it says 'brrrrrrrrlublub' and it reminds me of the women from the altar rosary society saying the rosary for my grandmother when she died.

i was trying to maintain good posture and remember the words from my childhood and they way the woman praying put strange accents on certain words, like she'd said it so many times she had her own variety and then the people responding sounding like a layer of the static in my head. "to you we cry, oh banished children of eve, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears..." it was like the machine's language, i couldn't understand it no matter how much i wanted to accept the promises it was making.

## **All that I have written with an Accent**

Sami Winkler

I felt like writing; felt like pouring myself onto a sheet of paper.

I accomplished just that.

I have never written as much as I have in this passing.

Who or what is my muse that keeps my pen touching the paper?

What is alive in me that keeps the right words flowing out of my soul, making it  
therefore, effortless to express my sentiments?

The sun rises and sets on situations that appeal to me as the best motive for an  
explanation.

Elucidating these circumstances makes for the perfect theme of my vocation.

But I should never question my enlightenment!

Why question an absolute good if it means no harm?

No, no I shall never question!

For I may risk losing it all.

I realize now that there is no such "muse" as a rationale for my writings.

It was me all along.

Surely I believe that if you were to cut me open I would bleed words meant for future  
works.

All in the same; I can't take credit for my sudden realization.

Complete credit goes to God for opening my eyes to a world of phenomenas that just beg  
to be phrased.

**Allon Bacuth** (~derivative of Genesis 35:8)  
Madeline Newell

Allon Bacuth,  
place of Deb'rah's dying.  
Beneath the oaks  
her body is lying...  
Allon Bacuth,  
Rebekah is crying  
to lament the  
Loss of a maid retiring...

to sleep's...

...repose.



**Being A Snowflake**  
Sherri Peters

Being water sitting in sun -  
That is becoming.  
Falling up through the atmosphere,  
Forever here now  
On my way to there.  
Formless I rise about to take form,  
Collecting and condensing myself.  
Crystallized I emerge,  
My path is crystal clear.  
Forever is here – now  
I Am.  
Being a snowflake...  
Becoming water.

## Poetry Set In Motion

Kim Allen

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am the natural beauty that speaks truth,  
Which lovers use to express desires.  
I am the fire that burns in one's soul when extreme powers explode  
And strength is made available, grasped, then owned

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am the wheels turning in one's mind  
When one begins to understand the meaning of life.  
I am the innocence of a childhood no longer misguided by worldly lies.  
I am the light that shines at midnight eliminating fright from sacred eyes.

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am the wind felt as God releases breath.  
I am the calmness of nature.  
And the success that fights failure,  
I am the irresistible affection that fights off hatred and rejection.

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am the laughter from a child's heart.  
I am the glue that keeps pieces from falling apart.  
I am an example of the wonderful outcome  
Of where life has been, where life is going, and where life has come from.

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am everything from the heavens to the earth,  
From the shore to the sea;  
I am the blood pumping through one's veins allowing their lungs to breathe.  
I am the essence of what it means to really be free.

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am magnificence magnified when right overwrites wrong,  
And tears of happiness are a result from listening to inspirational songs.  
I am the smile that spreads across one's face  
When one has found that place that for them God creates.

I am poetry set in motion.  
I am the endurance of women birthing a nation,  
The voice of leaders fighting racism,  
The communication of a higher beings revelation,  
I am the faith that one accepts for what is to come after death.

**I AM POETRY SET IN MOTION!**

**A Good Girl**  
Satoko Unno

While it is still cold, and still sometimes snowing, I feel a breath of spring in the air in March. I like this ambiguous season, which leaves relics of winter and shows signs of spring. The cherry blossom is famous in my country as a national flower of Japan, and many of us love the splendid flowers. But I prefer plum blossoms, which have a sweet scent, and they are at their best in March. I have a theory: most people like the season they were born in best among the four. I will be sixteen this March.

I am the middle child among three sisters. My oldest sister is the most intelligent and gets very good grades. My grades are not bad; however, she always gets better grades than me. My little sister is the most beautiful and cute, spoiled by everyone. She always catches a lot of attention. I am mediocre. When I was a little girl, I felt lonely and craved such attention, but now, I find it wonderful to be free from being watched.

Painting is my favorite pastime. I wanted to go to an art university to be an artist, but my father, a branch chief of a bank in the next town, and my mother, a pharmacist in a hospital near our house, only allowed us to go to a college which we could commute to from home. They believe that we will not become delinquent if we stay with them. So, to fulfill their expectations I am going to enter the same college as my sister.

So I am a good girl, so-so pretty and so-so intelligent, who bows to my parents' wishes. I do not fight anyone, nor do I have close friends. I always draw a borderline between everyone else and me. Outside of the line, I am a cheerful, modest, and obedient person, but I never allow anyone to enter the inside. Otherwise people may say false things, sometimes jokingly, but other times deceptively. I have often struggled with the

difficulties in distinguishing the true from the false. So I found a way to avoid worrying about such confusion; I have everyone stay outside. Whatever happens outside of the line, it makes no difference to me. Even liars and hypocrites are welcome there.

The only secret I have is that I take speed. I know that taking speed, or methamphetamine, is scary; it is prone to abuse and addiction, causing euphoria and excitement. But I am not stupid; I just use it less than five times a month and keep to a strictly limited dosage. I buy it with the money that my parents give me monthly and that I earn from my part-time job at the hamburger shop on weekends. I started six months ago, when one of my classmates, who regarded me as being as lonely as she was, asked if I would join her in taking speed. Just once, I did this with her, but afterwards, I bought it from her and enjoyed it more by myself.

Now, when I cannot stand my loneliness, I take speed at dawn. Then, wearing sports wear, I leave home as if to go jogging, keeping a telephone list in my pocket. When I started taking speed, I found it wonderful walking on the street at dawn. The dark sky, silent air, and dim light fascinated me. However, while walking, I suddenly found myself desperate for a conversation with someone. I came upon a telephone booth at about 4:00am. In a trance, I dialed a number listed on a small area residential phone book. After a few calls, a connection was made.

Shyly, I spoke to the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Aoki," said an old woman. Usually, elderly people took my phone calls right away, probably because they could not sleep well and woke up at very early times.

“Oh, I am sorry; I called a wrong number.” I quickly apologized and waited for a minute. Most men angrily hang up, but some women stay on the phone until I hang up.

After a while, I would hesitatingly ask such a woman in a slow and quiet voice, “May I talk with you for a while? Your voice is very similar to my grandmother’s.” I was pleased to say so in a sad voice in order to make her believe my lie. In fact, both of my grandmothers are still around and doing fine.

“Your grandmother? Oh, sure. Did she pass away?” There were many people who were starved for communication with others, even though it was at dawn. Sorrowfully, I made up my story, explaining how my grandmother loved me and how I missed her. If the woman felt sympathy and sounded happy to talk with me, I wrote down her name and phone number in my notebook and asked at the end, “May I call you again?”

When I finished talking with her, I would move to another phone and make a call to the next person in the phone book. Over a month or two, I created a telephone list of elderly people to talk with while I am high on speed. Now, they wait for my call. I usually make about seven to ten calls until I get sober up. My family believes that I am out refreshing myself with jogging between my studies.

Today, I enter a booth and called the first person on my list. After a few rings, Mrs. Ando takes my phone call. Taking a breath, I say, “Mrs. Ando? It’s Rie. Good morning.”

“Rie? Oh, good morning. How are you? How is your mother?” Mrs. Ando speaks fast with joy to hear my voice. Rie is not my real name; Rie is a good girl who lives with her often sick mother and works hard to earn her tuition by doing paper rounds

and working at the hamburger shop. I just borrow this name from my classmate who is selling me speed. I know she uses my name sometimes, too.

“I am okay and my mother feels better these days, thank you,” I politely answer.

“How are you doing? You started dating your classmate, didn’t you? If I remember right, his name is Ken.” Mrs. Ando has a good memory even though she is in her eighties. I usually hate to create close relationships with anyone, but I feel happy to have someone who cares about me when I am tripping.

Intimately, I speak my false worries to her. “Mrs. Ando, I told you about my close friend Naomi, didn’t I? We have been good friends, but since Ken gave me a Valentine’s Day gift, Naomi has become cold.” Rie has a close friend and a boyfriend; I have neither of them.

Thinking how to solve the situation, Mrs. Ando went slower, using her soft voice. “I can imagine it gives you trouble. So, Naomi likes him and feels jealous of you. Uh, what did he give to you? Do you really like him?”

“A key chain. It was pretty. Ken is sweet and I like talking with him. He asked me to go see the baseball game next Saturday, but I don’t want to hurt my close friend. Naomi is very important to me, so I don’t know what to do,” I lamented, pretending to be a girl who is considering her first love and friendships.

“How about conveying your honest feelings to Naomi? You really like her and want to keep a friendship with her. Communications are important, Rie. Do not send an email, talk with her in person.” Like a professional counselor, Mrs. Ando was explaining a solution. She might spend all day today thinking of other solutions, regarding this as a serious problem for my life. By doing this, she can keep as active as she wanted.

“Thank you, Mrs. Ando. I will try. I feel very comfortable talking with you,” I politely say, words suitable for a good girl trying to satisfy her.

“Call me anytime, Rie. Just talking with someone will relax you and help you find a solution,” said Mrs. Ando, pleased with her deed that helped a good girl. Hanging up the phone, I move to another phone booth. It is still dark and cold, but I feel warm with the feeling of quiet excitement. Crossing to the convenience store, I see the next phone booth, which is one of my favorites. It is always clean and quiet. I start dialing, while feeling a bit impaired.

“Hello, this is Ehara.” After just one ring, Mrs. Ehara received my call as if she were patiently waiting in front of the phone. She is always a bit hasty in answering me.

“Mrs. Ehara, it’s me, Rie. Good morning,” I say slowly and clearly, because her hearing is not good.

In contrast, Mrs. Ehara excitedly spouted, “Rie? Oh, good. I was waiting for your call. I told you that I would knit pretty leg warmers for you, didn’t I? Since you are kept standing all those hours in the hamburger shop, it is important to keep your ankles warm. I completed them last week. I knitted them with pink yarn. I should have asked your favorite color at the last call. Do you like pink?” As usual, she talked fast and furious. She seemed angry but it was not true; I think that worrying about me had become one of her reasons for living now.

“Yes, pink is my favorite color. Thank you, Mrs. Ehara,” I answer in clear voice.

“You told me that I should send them by general delivery.” Mrs. Ehara is still excited. Maybe she feels she could interact with me instead of just talk on the phone. She remember every single word that I told her before.

“Yes, I did; I am always out of the house and my mother is resting at home. I don’t want a mailman to bother her. Thank you so much. I look forward to receiving your handmade leg warmers,” I answer carefully, not wanting to let her know my desire to keep my address secret. I want to avoid a situation where she visits my house, burning with the ambition of helping me more.

“You are welcome. If you need help, call me anytime. I’d be happy to help you,” says Mrs. Ehara. Helping a good girl must be a sweet experience for her.

“I will. Have a good day.” I move to another phone.

Suddenly, I tumble over the curb and break the skin on my knees. When I see my knee bleeding, laugh wells up in me. “Ha ha ha.” My body works properly even though my mind is out of my body.

Actually, I am a good girl, but when taking speed, I play the role of another good girl, one who has good relationships with her mother, friends, and a boyfriend. I am wondering if I actually want such relationships instead of drawing a line between others and me. Do I want to be Rie? Maybe not. I am also wondering if Mrs. Ando and Mrs. Ehara play different people like I do. It is impossible to answer such questions in a trance. I just want to enjoy exciting feelings. Yes, I am a good girl. And I am lonely. So what?

By all means, I have to move onto another phone to make some calls before the day completely breaks.



## **Perfect**

K.D. Mertz

This dress is so tight on me. I can't believe that I chose this one. And my hair...my goodness! It looks like it belongs on a porcelain doll. I can't imagine what I was thinking. I've been to so many of these events in the past. They always make me feel like I am going to a fashion show. Everyone is always looking at you. They're always judging you on your appearance and on the way you carry yourself as you walk through the double doors. God, I'm a nervous wreck.

The phone is ringing again. Never a moment of peace in this house. "Mom, will you get that please? My nails aren't dry yet."

She looks at me and rolls her eyes. She's been doing that since I was a child. For some reason or another, my mother has never approved of the way that I handle things. She has told me in the past that she is proud of my accomplishments, at least once or twice. However, most of my life she has criticized the way I have chosen to live it. I suppose she has every right, being a mother. I am the embodiment of everything she once was and is now. At least, that is what is expected of me.

"Kathy, it's John. He wants to know if you're almost ready." She laughs.  
"Should I tell him to wait another week?"

Am I almost ready? That's a good one. "Tell him that perfection takes time. Can't rush it." That is all too true. "I'll be ready when Carrie gets herself moving and puts on my face."

In my life I have worn many faces. I think the majority of women do, especially in my family. To me, it's like hiding the truth behind the mask. You put on a show for others. You reflect what they expect, or what they want to see. Outside I am this calm

and pulled together twenty-five year old. I never freak out. I am poised and ready for anything that comes my way. But inside, I am a wreck. I hurt easily. I take things to heart way too much. Inside I am your average, ordinary girl who just wants to live her life without anyone's constructive, or rather destructive, criticism.

"Ouch!" I rub my brow. My sister just laughs. I'm so glad it's so easy for them to laugh right now. Honestly, I haven't had the time or the desire to laugh in a week.

For Carrie, beauty has always come easily with her long, blonde hair and soft features. Five minutes, and she was out the door looking completely finished and refined. My mother has always favored her in that respect. "She'll marry well. She'll do well in life," my mother was fond of saying about her other daughter.

"I'm just trying to make you beautiful, Katie. And sometimes beauty hurts." She continues to pluck my brow. "Hold still. Stop shaking."

Stop shaking? I might as well stop breathing. Thank you Lord for finally making her put down that Chinese torture device. "Mom, is Daddy gone yet?"

"Yes, honey. He said he will meet us there." She hands me a glass of champagne. "I figured you could use one of these." I could use one actually, and then a few more.

Carrie dusts powder on my face. "I honestly don't know what you are so worried about." She sweeps blush across my cheek, like I need it. I know I am flushed already. "I mean, it's not like you don't know John. Not like it's your first date or anything. And besides, he's so perfect."

"Do we ever truly know anyone completely?" I have pondered the thought many times.

"Katie, must you be so melodramatic? You've been this way all of your life. Don't you think it's time to grow up a bit?" I can always count on my mother to remind me of my tendency to overreact. Too bad I don't think she is justified at the moment.

My sister breaks up the impending argument, turning me around to face my mother. "There. See that face, mom?" She smiles proudly. "Perfection."

There is a knock at the door. "That must be the driver. Good timing." My mother rushes to get the door, and I look into the mirror to examine Carrie's artistry.

I smile, giving her a sense of approval for her hard work. But as I take a deeper look into the face staring back at me in the mirror, I don't see perfection. I see the same scared, uncertain girl I have always been. No amount of makeup can hide the truth beaming from my eyes. "It's time," I say taking a deep breath.

As we arrive, my mind is racing back and forth. I have heard the saying that right before you die, you see your life flash before your eyes. I realize now that it's not that they are dying that brings the mind to manifest these things, but anxiety and frustration about what lies ahead.

I see my father standing at the double doors, looking at his pocket watch and pacing. He looks at me and smiles proudly. "You look beautiful, baby. Ready?" I give him a faint smile and take his arm in mine.

The crowd of people swarm around me, all telling me how perfect I look as they fluff my gown. They hand me my bouquet, and as the last of the crowd disperses into the building it is now my turn. The doors open, and I look down the long walkway. I see John, smiling from ear to ear at the sight of his perfect bride. I see my family and friends, all looking at me and whispering to one another their opinions of me.

As I approach the altar, I look to my mother. She gives me a reassuring smile. I can sense what she is saying as she looks at me with pride. "Just smile for the cameras, dear. Everything is perfect."

## **Tomorrow's Child**

Theresa Mrenna

FADE IN:

Newscaster JENNIFER WATSON, dressed in her business suit, is delivering the Science and Technology bulletin on the morning news for WHJI, Channel 7 News. She is sitting at a desk with a science backdrop behind her. Her news story this morning is about the Cherokee Rose Foundation's invention of android-like children. Jennifer is wide awake and chipper on this chilly September morning.

Camera: Straight on, close-up shot of Jennifer. In the frame should be Jennifer and the backdrop. Jennifer is centered in the frame.

Actor: Sitting at the desk, hands are out of sight, keep eye contact with the camera. Speak in a welcoming, chipper kind of way.

JENNIFER

Good morning Franklin County. As you know scientists have been testing the repercussions of Compound 1219, that was released into the public water systems all over the United States, three years ago this December. They have come to realize that no one in the United States has gotten pregnant or produced a full-term infant since the release of Compound 1219. In light of this discovery, the Cherokee Rose Foundation has created the Make a Child Program. They have discovered a way to create an Android-like child that will behave, think, act and grow like human children. They are calling this new technology LikeKid. LikeKid can even make your child the way you want. Parents can now select their child's IQ level, interests, looks, and even pick their age. If you want to skip diapers, you can start with a two and a half year old who is already potty trained. For those parents who feel that they do not want to select their next child, the Cherokee Rose Foundation has the ability to take

JENNIFER cont.

a genetic reading from both parents.

LikeKid can then create a random sample of genes from each parent and give the child their parent's genetic make up. The sky is the limit. This is JENNIFER WATSON for WHJI, Channel 7 News.

CUT TO:

SAMANTHA and MICHAEL YEAGER are sitting together on the couch in their meager family room. Samantha is watching the morning news. Michael is reading the comics from the newspaper.

Camera: Opening shot is going to be a establishing wide shot where we can see Samantha and Michael as well as the TV. At first we are going to see the backs of their heads, the TV and the newspaper.

Actors: Samantha is sitting on the couch watching the news on TV. Michael is facing the TV, but is reading the comics from the newspaper. Samantha turns the TV off, sets the remote back down, and pivots so that she is facing Michael.

SAMANTHA

Maybe we should do that.

MICHAEL

Actor: Without looking up from the paper.

Do what?

SAMANTHA

Actor: Slide over closer to Michael on the couch as you are talking.

Go to the Cherokee Rose foundation and make a baby. You know I've been wanting to have a baby.

MICHAEL

Actor: Close the newspaper and set it on your lap as you are talking. Annoyed.

Sure, [pause] I guess. [pause] If you really want to have one of those fake things.

Actor: Pivot so that you are facing Samantha and look at her as you are talking.

Personally I don't see why you would want one. It's just a stupid doll, Sam.

SAMANTHA

Actor: Upset and pleading like. A little whiney.

Michael! It's not just some stupid doll!  
Jennifer on Channel 7 said that it's  
practically human. This thing will grow  
and learn just like a real child. Oh  
come on Mike; what's it going to hurt to  
get one? At least go with me to check it  
out.

MICHAEL

Fine, [pause] I'll go. [pause] When?

SAMANTHA

Actor: Excited.

Thursday! We both have off; we'll go  
then.

CUT TO:

BARB MILLER is sitting at her desk in her large office at the Cherokee Rose Foundation. She is wearing a black business suit. On her desk is a computer, a phone, a pad of paper, a pen, and a cup of coffee. Across from her desk are two chairs for clients. She is working on her computer waiting for her next clients to arrive.

Camera: A medium shot of Barb working at her computer. We should be able to see Barb, the computer and some of the desk.

Actor: You are sitting at the desk typing on the computer. You hear a...

Knock Knock

Camera: Cut to the door.

BARB

Actor: Look up and over to the door as you talk.  
Come in.

The door opens, Samantha and Michael slowly walk in. Samantha is excited to be there, whereas Michael looks apprehensive and unsure. Samantha has a light, cheerful step. Michael is dragging his feet, showing that he really does not want to be there.

BARB

Actor: Talking with excitement. You are really happy that these people have come to see you today. You are cheery, and free. You move with lightness and ease, no stiffness. Stand up and say...

Come in, come in! You must be Samantha and Michael. I'm glad you could make it.

Camera: Cut to a three person, semi, over-the-shoulder shot from the corner of the room. We should be able to see the front of Samantha and Michael, and the side of Barb.

Samantha and Michael enter the office and stand facing Barb.

SAMANTHA

Actor: Shaking hands with Barb.

Yes, I am Samantha and this is my husband Michael.

Actor: Michael shakes hands with Barb.

I saw a segment on the news about LikeKid. I have been wanting a baby ever since we got married and found out we can't have one.

BARB

Have a seat. [Pause] You have definitely come to the right place. [Pause] Let me tell you a little about the process involved in making a child here at the Cherokee Rose Foundation. LikeKid is a wonderful piece of technology, I'm sure you'll agree. We have a couple of

BARB cont.

different options available.

First, are you more interested in creating a child from scratch, or are you looking for a child that shares your genetic makeup?

SAMANTHA

Umm... [pause] I think I would want a child that shares our genetic make up. That means that our child would look like us, right? It would really be a part of us, right?



Camera: Cut to a close up of Barb.

BARB

Correct. What we can do is this: I'll set you both up to have a genetic reading. We then have a computer program that will select components from both of your readings and put them into a child. It will be just as random as a biological conception. So, if someone in your family has a rare trait, your baby could have it. The blending of your genetic readings will not result in just the characteristics that the two of you have, but also the ones hiding in your DNA. If this works for you, I will start the ball in motion.

Camera: Cut to an over-the-shoulder shot of Michael and Samantha.

MICHAEL

(Annoyed and concerned)

So this child will be no different than any child we would have conceived on our own, if we would have been able to? And this child will think and act and grow like a real child would? He will be able to play sports and do well in school? What about when he gets a girlfriend? Will he be able to function like a man? Will he be able to get married and have his own children? I mean, just how

MICHAEL cont.

realistic is this doll?

Camera: Pans to a three person shot from the corner.

BARB

(to Michael)

If you have a son, he should be able to function like any other man. The only exception is that he will not be able to have children. He and his wife, which will likely be like him, will do the same thing you are here doing today.

He will have all the emotions you have. He will be able to fall in love and have his heart broken. Your child is going to look just as human as you do. There is no external, physical way to tell a human apart from our creation. After meeting your child, you will see what I mean.

Camera: Cut to a POV shot from Barb's perspective.

MICHAEL

(to Samantha)

You are sure this is what you want?

SAMANTHA

(Softly to Michael)

Actor: Reach out and touch Michael's arm.

Yes, I am.

MICHAEL

(to Barb)

[Long pause]

Then we will do it. What's the next step?

Camera: Cut to a three person shot from the corner of the room.

BARB

Actor: Pull the paper out of the desk and put it on the desk on front of Samantha and Michael. Grab a pen and hand it to Michael, showing them where to sign. Pause for Michael to sign before telling Samantha where to sign.

BARB cont.

I will have you sign the papers and get a cotton swab of the inside of your mouth to get a DNA sample. In about a week we should have the results for you. At our next meeting I will have the stats and picture of your top pick. The computer will also give me a couple other choices for you, if there is something you do not like about your top choice. Michael, I need you to sign and date here... And Samantha, I need you to sign and date here...

Actor: Take the pen from Samantha and take the paper and stick it in a folder that you take out of the desk. Close the folder, but leave it sitting on the desk.

Good, can you come in the same time next week?

SAMANTHA

Sure.

BARB

Congratulations! You have made a fine choice! I will get to work on your baby. It was nice meeting you both. I will see you next week.

SAMANTHA

Thank you. Bye.

Samantha and Michael exit the room.

CUT TO:

Samantha is sitting on the couch in the living room with a notebook and pen. On the notebook there is a long list of the items that they are going to have to buy for the new baby. As Michael walks in the room Samantha, is adding more items to the list.

Camera: A full shot of Samantha sitting on the couch. A wide enough shot to be able to see some of the room too, so that we can see Michael walk in.

MICHAEL

Actor: Walk in the room stop when you see Samantha in the room.  
What are you so intently working on over there?

SAMANTHA

(With excitement)

The list of things we need to get for the new baby. I was thinking that we can get some of your old things from your mother's attic. Like your old bedroom set. It's just wood, so we don't have to worry about if we are having a boy or a girl. I was also thinking that I would like to decorate the baby's room in light yellow with the original Winnie the Pooh characters. Do you want to go shopping

with me later tonight to help me pick out stuff?

MICHAEL

(Annoyed)

Do we really have to do that tonight. The game is on. I already told the guys I'd be over. Come on Sam, it's my last night before you tie me down with a kid. Can one of your girls go with you instead? I'm sure they would be a lot more fun than I would.

SAMANTHA

(Annoyed)

Yeah, I'm sure if I called Tonya she would go with me. It's okay for you to have fun your last night being childless. Having a child is not going to stop you from being able to have fun. I hope you understand that. Just stop in to see the baby's room before you come to bed tonight. Alright?

MICHAEL

Sure thing babe.

CUT TO:

Back in Barb's office at the Cherokee Rose Foundation. Again, Barb is sitting at her desk and the Yeager's are sitting on the other side. The office hasn't changed.

Camera: Medium shot of Barb.

BARB

(Cheerful)

Here we are again. I hope you had a fun week picking out all of your baby supplies. Here is your top choice. She is a beautiful little girl. She has blue eyes and strawberry blonde hair. She will grow up to be about five-five and be a little on the plump side of average. She has perfect vision and hearing. Her total possible IQ level is 125. This means that it is possible for her to be a little under 125, depending

on her environment and her education.  
And that is about all I can tell you  
about her; the rest will be shaped by  
the way you raise her. Do you want to  
look at the LikeKid's next pick? Or  
stick with her?

Camera: Cut to a POV shot from Barb's perspective.

SAMANTHA

(to Michael)

Oh Michael! She's so beautiful! I think  
she's the one. Do you like her?

MICHAEL

(to Samantha)

Yeah, I guess.

(to Barb)

Can we see her now?

BARB

Let's first pick a name for her. Have  
you been thinking about any good names  
this past week?

SAMANTHA

(to Michael)

How about Ashley Marie? Ashley for your grandmother and Marie for  
mine?

MICHAEL

(to Samantha)

(Kind of indifferent)

Yeah, that will work.

Camera: Cut to a three person shot from the corner of the room so we can see the front of  
Samantha and Michael.

BARB

That's such a pretty name. Here is her  
birth certificate. All I need you to do  
is write her name on this line...

Actor: Point out the place on the paper for them to write the child's name.

BARB Cont.

And sign and date here and here, where  
it says mother and father.

Actor: Barb: Show where they are to sign and date on the paper.

Samantha: Write the child's name in the place pointed out for her name. Then sign and date under mother, then hand the pen to Michael.

Michael: Take the pen from Samantha and sign and date under father. Then hand the paper back to Barb.

BARB

Actor: Typing on the computer.

I'll just send a message to the lab and  
Ashley Marie will be brought in any  
moment.

Samantha and Michael share excited looks. There is a light knock at the door. Barb gets up to answer it.

Camera: Follows Barb.

A mystery person hands the infant over to Barb, who then turns, shuts the door with her foot, and slowly walks over to the now standing Yeager's.

BARB

Samantha and Michael, may I introduce  
you to your new baby, Ashley Marie.

Camera: Cut to an over the shoulder shot of Samantha and Michael.

Samantha reaches out for the baby. Barb ever so gently hands Ashley Marie over to her mother, and steps back out of the shot. Samantha looks down into the ball of blankets and smiles. Michael moves to stand behind her. He wraps both Samantha and Ashley in his arms. Samantha looks up at him with affection and he smiles back to her. Both of them look back at the baby, forgetting that Barb is in the room.

SAMANTHA

Oh Mike, she so beautiful!

MICHAEL

(In disbelief)

Wow! You really can't tell she was made  
by a machine. [Pause] She looks like a  
real child.

SAMANTHA

She really does! [Pause] I love you Mike!

MICHAEL

I love you too Sammy! Thank you for  
making me do this.

CUT TO:

Michael and Samantha are leaving the Cherokee Rose foundation with Ashley.

Camera: Positioned in a hallway, a full shot of Michael and Samantha walking down the hallway, away from the camera.

Actor: Michael, have your arm around Samantha. Everyone walks down the hall.

FADE TO BLACK

**Sincerely Yours – A Letter Home**  
Rebecca Heston

Dear Mom,

Missin' you a lot again tonight. I wonder now why last year was difficult at all. Hindsight, I know.

I've been keeping busy here. Lots of papers and tests due soon. You know how the profs always try to cram in so much before spring break. I should be studying for that PSY test Tuesday, tonight, but I think my brain is full enough. Been studying since 6 this morning! I could do more, I know. But I also know you'd tell me to take a break. And you'd also tell me how sure you'd be that I'll do well. I miss that faith.

I was reading a friend's blog again tonight. She's still sick. So many of my friends are always sick anymore. Jill has been sick since Thanksgiving, Josie since White Dinner. They've been talking about all their medications again, and how they need higher doses because they're feeling anxious. I never tell them, but I feel like most of them don't need the drugs at all. I didn't. And you're right, I don't know the whole story, and I don't know what it's like to be them. Funny how I still hear you saying that. Still... I miss them is all.

Do you think there will ever be a time when we'll be happy? I mean, this world is such a terrible place lately. Yeah, I was happy in Mississippi and when I do Red Cross stuff. But I can't do that for a living. And once I get a teaching job, I'll hardly ever have time. Summer Camp is good. But I worry it was only good last summer. What if I get there next summer and hate it? There'll only be a few people there I'll know. What if the next group of people doesn't care? Some didn't care this summer. It's possible. Look at how many teachers out there don't give a damn about what they're doing.

I remember when I sat on the bed next to you one night, and I asked you if we were different, and you said yes. I thought it was some kind of magic, but it's just that we care. And so few do. That's what Dad was talking about—when we were in the hospital, I think. He said that you could awaken people's souls, and that I would be able to next, once you left. But it's not magic—it's simply getting people to care.

Oh, I made Dean's List again. I don't know what semester it's for this time; I lost track. But I have the paper...somewhere. I don't really have anyone to show it to, so I don't think I opened it and all. I got sidetracked trying to remember your voice. I hope you're not mad at me for forgetting. I do remember how to write a proper purposive statement, though. We're all ready for the presentation on Thursday. The other day, I got one hundred percent on a paper. You'd be so proud.

So please don't worry—I'm safe and sound here at school, and doing really well. I figure it'll be no time at all before I see you and Poppy again. Much Love.



## **The Gift of the Horse**

Laura Graham

The Lord of the Sea, Poseidon  
Sat in his palace of coral and pearl  
And considered the potent serenity  
Of his watery undersea world.  
The dusky sun shafts filtered down,  
Illuminating the world of whale and fish.  
The currents flowed roundabout him,  
And Poseidon made a great wish.  
“Few among men know the joy of the sea  
And none have lived beneath the waves.  
I wish that some of the sea could be on land  
To bring deeper beauty into their lives.”  
So the god took himself to a sandy shore  
Where land and sea mingle and meet.  
He sat in the water and contemplated  
How best to accomplish this feat.  
“The waves,” said he, “are all that is  
Of sea that tries to venture on land.  
The waves shall be the medium.”  
And he raised his trident in his hand.  
The largest wave reared up its head  
And tossed the sea foam at its crest.  
Then it landed on the shore  
And remained on the spot where it came to rest.  
Poseidon formed this splendid creature.  
“This first I shall name Arion.”  
Never before had been seen a glory  
Like this first magnificent stallion.  
His coat was fine and white as the sea foam.  
His eyes were sparkling dark as the deeps.  
His seashell hoofs pound the sand  
As like the wild wave he leaps.  
Yet it was not long that he stood alone;  
Poseidon, so joyful, made others.  
All the waves that fell on the sand that day  
Became his sisters and brothers.  
Together they took off across the land  
Fulfilling Poseidon’s glorious desire.  
Sea foam manes tossing from the crests of their necks  
As though water had turned to fire.  
Their canter held the rhythm of the surging waves  
From which they had been made.  
Their speed was that of the ocean wind

As it blows unopposed, unallayed.  
They broke into groups and ran in herds,  
Just as schools by the fish are formed.  
And as fish freely swim wherever they will,  
So all over the land they roamed.  
These were creatures of beauty and power  
And is it any wonder then,  
To think of the joy that they inspired  
When first they were beheld by men?  
As humans saw these creatures  
Great wanting filled their hearts;  
The wish to own the horses  
Crafted by Poseidon's arts.  
They tried to catch the horses,  
But it seemed this could not be  
For they were as wild and reckless  
And as untamable as the sea.  
Oh, how they prayed and wished and tried  
To make these beauties theirs,  
And yet they met with no success  
'Till Athena heard their prayers.  
She was the Lady of Wisdom,  
And with every good intention  
She helped bring about greater knowledge  
By crafting a clever invention.  
Take leather and metal buckle and rein,  
Now give this tool a title,  
And as she presented it to humankind  
She called her creation a bridle.  
And she taught men how to tame a horse  
Developing a special art  
So that through work, understanding, and care  
Man and beast need never be apart.  
And that is how it came to pass  
Handed down through the ages, of course.  
From the sea they were born and by wisdom tamed,  
We received the divine gift of the horse.

## Laura

Ashley J. Barner

When we were children,  
We made believe we were thirteen or eighteen or nineteen  
And thought that was so old.  
We'd play that we were twin sisters:  
Miraculously the exact same age, down to the second,  
So that neither could lord it over the other.  
(You were eleven months older, in actuality—not a year, as I was quick to point out.)

We twin sisters lived in your playhouse and were gymnasts on the rings  
Or in your bedroom and made each other up  
Or in our back field, and ran rock shops on my uncle's drive,  
And married our make-believe boyfriends  
In solemn ceremonies on the sand mound.  
I remember you stuffing a pillow up your shirt  
And “giving birth” on the floor in the basement of your old house.  
I remember the time you told me  
That people could only have children by having sex.  
I refused to believe you.

Once we were duchesses in my mother's silk nightgowns.  
For a year we wrote secret notes  
And left them on each other's porches in milk-jug mailboxes.

When you slept over,  
We played “Barbie, Queen of the Prom” with my mother.  
She always chose “Tom” as her boyfriend card  
Because he looked like my father.  
(You and I rolled our eyes.)  
I always chose “Poindexter”: he wrote poetry.  
You always chose “Ken”.  
Your lipstick mark is still on the card  
From where you pretended to make out with him.  
I thought it was funny.  
My mother wasn't amused.

One summer, we picked raspberries by the lane  
And ate them with sugar  
While my mom read us Lucy Maud Montgomery in the air conditioned cool.  
And that summer, in the evenings,  
We declared we were wild children of the jungle,  
And we climbed a tree in the woods and consulted the wise jaguar who lived there.

The evening light was golden in the dark green shadows of the wood.

Neither of us were embarrassed by our make-believe,  
Hanging on the last edge of childhood.

We rode the school bus together.  
It was different than when we played and pretended.  
You had a new boyfriend every two weeks.  
I never had one.

You were a year older.  
We had very different friends.  
Blood and proximity didn't hold us together.

I am twenty-one this year.  
You are twenty-two.  
This weekend, you had your first child,  
A son.  
And you are married,  
While I am writing poetry in a classroom.  
How far our lives have drifted  
From the days when we were twins,  
Born the exact same second.

**The Bog**  
Katelin Reeve

The blackness overwhelms me,  
the ravens fly low above.  
My robes of silk encase me,  
the bog sucks down the hems.  
The trees sway and brush against me,  
tempting me to rest.  
A pair of eyes watches my struggle,  
but remains hidden, seemingly immune to my tears.

The little water which covers my knees  
shines a rainbow sheen.  
My boots threaten to leave my soles  
to tread alone through unknown wastes.

I give in to the raven's cackling,  
their amusement at my clumsy progress.  
Raising my skirts, I feel the murky water  
envelop my flesh.  
Ivory skin, now layered in leaves and  
soaked earth, is greened and blackened.

My gaze rises to the level of my soaring ravens.  
They protect and provide, but I alone  
must trudge ahead through the stillness of the bog.  
The eyes, different from my soaring companions,  
follow my every shudder, every step.  
Safe on a hidden path, they watch my  
exhausted body falter, almost fall, almost.

I grasp a fallen limb and pull myself to  
the surface, only to sink again to my knees.

**Three Tabloid Articles based on *The Tragedy of Mariam* by Elizabeth Cary**  
Kayla Chagnon

**KING HEROD SENTENCES WIFE TO DEATH!**

Herod's wife Mariam has been sentenced to death after Herod's triumphant return from the dead, the Judea Inquisitor has learned exclusively.

The drama began when Herod was believed to be dead at the hands of the Egyptian emperor. The Inquisitor was informed that Mariam was very distraught about her husband's downfall, but now with Herod alive and well, insiders claim that it was all a show. Upset about Herod's past deeds, Mariam planned to get justice against the man that ruined her life. She began a torrid affair with Sohemus, one of Herod's closest confidants. But according to our source, Mariam wanted to rid herself of Herod altogether and decided to poison him. Herod, discovering the plot, became enraged with Mariam who denied her role. Reportedly, when asked if she had any part in the scheme, she responded by saying "Did I? Some hateful plot this will prove." But insiders claim that Mariam indeed tried to poison Herod.

This revelation came as a crushing blow to Herod, who had married Mariam after his first marriage failed. But how could Herod, who had once called Mariam "my best and dearest half," sentence her suddenly to death? As the Inquisitor previously reported, Mariam has never been a faithful wife. Not long ago, Mariam had also engaged in an affair with Herod's own uncle, Josephus.irate about both affairs, Herod confronted Mariam, who neither confirmed nor denied her alleged infidelity.

Inside sources also reveal that Herod at first only sentenced Mariam to life in prison, but later, with urging from his sister Salome, changed her punishment to death. Herod was still unconvinced that Mariam should die and postponed her execution, but it

was too late she had already been executed. When reached for comment all Herod said was “Death welcome comes to him whose grief is such.”

### **DORIS AND MARIAM JAILHOUSE SHOWDOWN!**

The meeting of Doris and Mariam, the now disposed wives of Herod, turned into a vicious jailhouse catfight, and only the Judea Inquisitor can bring you the whole story.

While Mariam was awaiting her execution, Doris came to seek revenge on the woman who stole her husband almost nine years ago. Our jailhouse insider reported that Mariam was shaken by Doris’s brutal claims and at first tried to defend herself against the other woman’s slander.

Doris seemed fanatical while cursing Mariam, Herod, and their children, for the adultery that Mariam and Herod engaged in. Doris reportedly asked God to “thrust forth thy hand and plague the mother much: the children worse.” The insider claimed she ended her diatribe by saying “And, Mariam, I do hope this boy of mine shall one day come to be the death of thine.” Mariam seemed distraught and begged Doris to forgive her, but Doris turned a blind eye towards Mariam’s suffering.

Mariam was said to be inconsolable according to our insider. After Doris had left Mariam uttered her last words before her death. “Now, earth, farewell, though I be yet but young, yet I, methinks, have known thee too too long”.

### **SALOME CHEATING ON NEW HUSBAND!**

Salome has found new love with a new man and only the Judea Inquisitor has the full story. After her first husband’s death at the hands of her own brother, Salome seemingly found love with Constabarus, but an insider reports that she has found a new man.

Silleus, who is reportedly an Arabian prince, has swept Salome off her feet. Our insider reports that Salome wishes to take her third husband. Knowing that her brother will not allow her to divorce Constabarus, Salome is scheming to make sure that she gets rid of Constabarus, once and for all.

Our source reports that Salome has been planning to reveal to her brother Constabarus's lies. According to our source, Constabarus has hidden something from Herod for a long time, and Salome believes this information will give her the opportunity to marry Silleus.

Will Salome get her new man? What will happen to Constabarus when Herod finds out his secret? If anything happens you know to turn to the Judea Inquisitor to find out!



**Don Dickinson**

Ashley J. Barner

Being sick for three months is never a good experience. And it's even worse when you're sick during your student teaching. The evening stomachaches that I got occasionally throughout the month of December blossomed the week after Christmas into full-fledged digestive agony, and after more visits to the doctor than I would care to count, it was decided that I had gastritis, and that with a stomach acid inhibitor I would return to normal in four to six weeks.

The only problem was, my stomach pain was aggravated by stress. Being so very sick that week after Christmas was probably the most frightening and stressful experience of my life—there were times when I really wondered if what I had was terminal. Add this to the fact that I had to get well, and get well quickly, to start student teaching, and I had more stomach acid churning around than my poor body knew what to do with. Anxiety about student teaching upset my stomach, having an upset stomach made me anxious about my student teaching, and in the last two months I have become a big ball of stress with arms and legs. The pressures of student teaching, made a much bigger deal by my stress-triggered illness, seem at times insupportable, and I begin to wonder if I was ever meant to be a teacher at all, and if I should just throw in the towel.

This afternoon was a tough one for me: it was my second supervisor observation. Now mentally, I knew that this was no big deal and that I was prepared for the class. But knowing this didn't make me feel any less anxious. So although the lesson went well and I got a decent number of positive comments from the supervisor, when I began to drive out of the parking lot after school, I was trying hard to make my shoulders return to their natural, relaxed position, and attempting to ignore the churning in my much-abused

stomach. Then, I suddenly saw someone that made me forget all about my present troubles: Don Dickinson.

Now, let me tell you something about Don. He was the father of my high school choir director, and as such, he was one of the chaperones on a field trip that the show choir took to New York. A few of us, my two particular friends and I included, got dibs on riding in his van—jumped on the chance, really, since Don is a favorite of ours. He’s a very funny and kind man, always cracking jokes and being careful to involve people in the conversation. On the way up to New York, he began asking all of us in the car about our plans for the future. Where were we thinking of applying for college? What were we going to major in?

I was in eleventh grade at the time, and all I wanted to do with my life was write. Every class, I had a notebook and a pen amongst my textbooks, and when I got my classwork done early, I was jotting down the next few lines of my current story. Some of my teachers—my English teacher, Mrs. Bazner, in particular—didn’t care for my constant jotting and, worse, doodling while I was supposed to be listening. Nevertheless, writing was the thing that brought me the most joy. And despite my having asked God a few times if there was some job in particular that he wanted me to do, I had had no clear answers, and so I continued with my plan of becoming a writer. I thought I’d work as a proofreader or something at a publishing company, have a foot in the door, and get myself published.

“What about you, Ashley?” Don asked when it was my turn. “Where are you planning to go?”

“Well, I don’t know where I want to go to school yet,” I answered him readily, “but I know what I want to major in: English.”

“Ah!” This interested Don very much, as he himself had been an English teacher. “Do you plan to teach?”

I have to admit that I made a face. “Nah,” I answered dismissively—almost disdainfully. “I’m not interested in teaching. I just want to write.”

“Oh, okay,” he responded easily, and moved on to my friend Diane, who wanted to be an archaeologist.

A few days later, we somehow got onto the topic of majors, and I made the comment again that I wanted to be an English major. Don must have momentarily forgotten the conversation we had had before, because he said, “Oh, do you want to teach?”

I responded with the same disdain I had before, and informed him that I only wanted to write. “Oh, right, you told me that,” he said, and that was that.

Only it wasn’t. A few days later, *another* person asked me about my plans for the future, and when I mentioned that I wanted to be an English major, the same question, in the same words fell from her lips: “Oh, are you going to teach?”

And then I picked up the book that had been sitting on my shelf for awhile: *Up the Down Staircase*. My mom mentioned that it was a funny book, so I read it. And it was about—guess what?—a high school English teacher.

Finally one evening I was reading my devotions as usual. I had gotten to Proverbs chapter 3 that evening, and I was reading at a pretty good speed down the page, when suddenly my eyes jumped, almost without my will, back up to verses five and six:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

It was a verse I had had memorized for years, but tonight it really stood out to me. All this talk of being an English teacher... Could it be a sign? Or was I just imagining things?

Now, when some people pray, they say they can feel the presence of God. I generally can't. I feel more like I'm talking to myself. And I mean, it's not like God really answers people out loud or anything. But I figured, Hey, I told him I'd go into whatever career he wanted to call me to, so I suppose I should at least ask.

Somehow, I must've known this was momentous, because I moved my Bible aside and stared down at the blank lavender of my pillowcase, and then asked God very simply if he wanted me to be a high school English teacher.

Have you ever been watching a parade when the bass drum goes down the street, and you can feel it pounding in your chest? Well, think of that sensation. And then imagine that you're in the stands at a very exciting football game, and someone has just made an incredible pass, and everybody is on their feet, shouting and stomping on the bleachers. Or, imagine that you're at a great concert, and the orchestra has gotten to the most emotional part of the music, and the sound swells, and you can feel your heart swelling with it, as if it's going to burst. Put all three of those together, and that's what it felt like. As if God leaned down, very close to me, put his quiet lips next to my ear... and bellowed, "YES!"

Like that emotional swell of music, the feeling grew and grew until I felt like it was a wave of the sea that was going to crash over my head and drown me. They say in *Dogma* that human beings can't hear the voice of God or their hearts explode in their chests: well, I think they've got it right, because I believed for that split second that if it went on for any longer, I was actually going to die. I remember panting out in a whisper, "Stop! Okay! Okay! I'll be an English teacher!" And then I sat there and laughed and cried for a good quarter of an hour.

When I thought about it later, I still didn't *want* to be an English teacher. I mean, people tell you that if you're supposed to be a teacher, you just know it: it just feels right. Well, it didn't feel *right*. But the experience of being called to be a teacher was so awesome, I couldn't really feel bad about my decision.

About a month later we had a choir concert, and I happened to be handing out programs at the door when Don Dickinson walked in. I stepped aside to talk to him.

"So, Don, remember on the New York trip when you asked me if I wanted to be an English teacher, and I said, 'Ew, no'?" I said quickly. With a laugh, Don nodded. I swallowed back the tears in my throat. "Well—God called me to be an English teacher. So I *am* going to be one. And thank you, because God used your suggestion to plant the idea in my head."

Don smiled at me—the kind of smile you wish you could see all the time on people's faces. "That's great," he said. "That's really great." And coming from his mouth, it didn't sound trite.

So this afternoon, after a trying day of student teaching, I saw Don in the parking lot, and I just had to stop.

I rolled down the window. “Don!”

He looked up from where he was loading up his car. “Oh, hi! How’s it going?”

“Pretty well.” The appropriateness of this situation suddenly struck me, and I had to stop myself from laughing. “I’m student teaching.”

“I was going to ask if you were,” he said, and I knew that he remembered our conversations four years ago. “So you’re going to be a teacher?”

“Yep,” I said cheerfully.

“Well…” He shook his head with mock doubt. “If that’s *really* what you want to do…”

I laughed.

“What subject?”

“English.”

“Are you *crazy*?” We laughed together. “Who are you working with?”

“Mrs. Bazner,” I answered.

“Oh good, she’s good. She’ll have a lot to teach you,” he commented.

I agreed, and Don flashed me that genuine smile again. “Well, good,” he said.

“I’m glad. I wish you the best of luck.” And when he said it like that, I knew he meant it.

I smiled, and rolled the window up, and drove on—headed out of the parking lot and down the straight road of my future.

## Simple Pleasures

Sami Winkler

I find that the most beautiful things in the world are the most simple.

I take pleasure in wind-blown hair; a gentle touch of golden curls on my cheek.

I take pleasure in the moment when I relieve my feet from the claustrophobia of shoes  
then stand on the different textures that this world creates.

The simple noise of the wind brushing the tall grass in a meadow plays like a symphony  
in my ears.

I take pleasure in searching for the best place to be alone; under a tree, on the sand, or  
lying in the grass all seem so perfect in the right moment.

The sun's glorious rays peeking through a polluted sky; I take pleasure in that.

I take pleasure in the peacefulness of a garden, of which, I may even take envy.

I take pleasure in the gentle sound and smell of a summer rain. The refreshing beating of  
the raindrops sends a calm feeling that pulses through me.

A flower growing out of the cracks of the cement teases me with its tranquility and I take  
pleasure in it.

I take pleasure in a smile; no matter how the look, guessing the sentiment behind it  
appeals to me.

I take pleasure in gazing at the starry night sky and wondering what lies beyond those  
countless beads of light.

I take pleasure in a song; any kind of tune hypnotizes me into thinking that life would be  
so much easier to drift through if it was lived in lyrics.

Laughter, I take pleasure in this simply because I believe that it can heal the worst of  
pain.

I take pleasure in dancing; the rhythmical movement of bodies I find so fascinating.

I take pleasure in mere candlelight; just something about the soft flicker of its flame  
sensualizes everything it touches.

And mostly I take pleasure in love. Love is the utmost pleasurable thing in my life. Not  
merely because it's free, but because it is undoubtedly the best feeling in the world. And  
once you love, you can truly understand why the most beautiful things in the world are  
the most simple.

## **Carol of Joy**

Rebecca Heston

Last night it snowed  
    Hark how the bells  
Cotton was thrown  
    Sweet silver bells  
Lying on ground  
    All seem to say  
Magic abounds  
    Throw cares away

My heart was white  
    Christmas is here  
It seemed so right  
    Bringing good cheer  
I ran outside  
    To young and old  
Playing a dance  
    Meek and the bold

Winter has come  
    Ding dong ding dong  
Feeling the change  
    That is their song  
Come with me now  
    With joyful ring  
Look all around  
    All caroling

What do you see?  
    One seems to hear  
By that green tree?  
    Words of good cheer  
Closing your eyes  
    From everywhere  
Feel it inside  
    Filling the air

This was my wish  
    Oh how they pound  
To share a gift  
    Raising the sound  
Rise and believe  
    O'er hill and dale  
Now you can see



Telling their tale

Standing on hill  
Gaily they ring  
Dreams to fulfil  
While people sing  
Afraid, not alone  
Songs of good cheer  
Whe'er I roam  
Christmas is here

Sing of your Joy  
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas  
A girl like the Boy  
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas

Tomorrow comes  
On on they send  
Hymnals are hummed  
On without end  
Season of hope  
Their joyful tone  
This was all wrote  
To every home

Ding dong, ding dong

**Israel loved her**  
Madeline Newell

Israel,  
Seeking one---  
Lost fourteen.  
He loved her.

**Elizabeth**

Michelle Sheely

i'm begging the question  
fallacious or not  
even atlas couldn't bear the weight  
of these loaded words  
with whom i've grown famished;  
this delicate dance  
which only circles the truth  
{for i am not delicate}  
because i have one chance  
to fuck this up  
before i implode  
before i liberate sanity

and SCREAM  
SCREAMING DECIBELS  
ABOVE NORMALITY  
spitting inferiorities  
and vanquishing all the oxygen  
that i've got the capacity to hold  
and as i writhe the truth  
ring it dry  
& empty out  
every.  
last.  
bleeding.  
thought.  
a decadent nuclear war  
releases into my atrium  
and the orchestra echoes  
their alarming grand finale  
and the cymbals crash  
to the back of my cerebellum  
as i clutch a fistful of chest  
and i fall face forward  
onto blood shaken palms

*Please Elizabeth,  
tell me another story?*

**Pieces of Sky**  
Katelin Reeve

It is remarkable that such a vast and marvelous space above our heads is defined by a word of such simplicity... sky.

It is chilling that such an immeasurable space is the source of joy, sadness, fear, awe, and jealousy...sky.

It is indescribable to feel the matter of one's soul and body brake and splinter... pieces.

It is the most fulfilling and breathtaking moment when two souls touch and realize that they are no longer...pieces.

Pieces of Sky: tears of joy, tears of loss, tears of love, tears of hate, tears of longing, tears of satisfaction, tears of desire,

such a drop of soul is seen so often but so rarely seen for what it truly is...a piece of the vast expanse of my soul, the source of all life in my body as it brakes into the piece that will fit next to yours.

## **Water's Edge**

Amanda Skjeveland

Ten months after our daughter Emily drowned in a clean, blue swimming pool overlooking the Chesapeake Bay, John stood at the door to Emily's bedroom. His shoulders slumped forward, his gaze clinging to the balloons I'd painted on the yellow walls, the single four-poster bed with the pink and yellow flowered comforter and matching lace bed ruffle, the pair of teddy bears sitting at the small tea table. I was sitting in the window seat and he had come in to tell me his mother was coming to stay with us.

"I don't want her here," I said, but he was already walking down the hallway to the spare bedroom, and as I followed him I saw him assess it in the same slow, pained way he'd looked at the nursery. He began to strip the bed, gaining the cherished momentum that can only be found in routine chores.

"No." My voice sounded too tired for a fight. He turned toward me and put his hands, open-palmed, against my arms, like that was all the contact he could bear. He was close-shaven as usual, still in his work shirt and loosened tie, but his face was stern and his honey-colored eyes dull as he looked at me.

"This will help. We need this. You need this," he said. He let his hands hover close to my arms and I felt the tiny hairs on my arms rise to make further contact with him. But then he dropped his arms and finished removing the sheet from the bed, exposing the bare, shiny white of the mattress.

The following afternoon, I separated the bedroom curtains and watched John's Lexus pull into our circular cobblestone driveway. He hurried out of the car and rushed to the passenger side. Beverly's thin arm reached out of the open door and she put her

small withered hand on top of his. As she stood to her full, hunched height, his other hand supported her back. John, with his powerful, square shoulders and ruddy complexion, was made so differently than Beverly. He gestured with his head toward the landscaping and fountain in the middle of the circular driveway, talking excitedly while she nodded in approval. The richer of her sons showing off his empire. The landscaping seemed of more importance today than his dead daughter.

I closed the curtain and flopped onto our water bed. A few minutes later, John called to me from downstairs to come down and greet his mother. I ignored him and buried my face in the pillow.

Then he was hissing at me from the doorway, "Tara, get your ass down here and play nice. I'm not putting up with this today." Then he stomped back down the stairs.

Beverly sat next to the breakfast bar in a high-backed chair with throw pillows stuffed under and behind her to support her fragile bones. I perched on a stool at the bar, feeling self-conscious as my knees mashed into the smooth wood of the center island. John chopped onions on a board beside the stove, his University of Maryland Terps apron stretched across his broad abs.

"Oh, Tara, honey, you're as thin as a rail," Beverly said from her pillow-encased seat.

I forced a smile and let my eyes run over her high cheekbones, sharply pronounced jaw, and the smooth, shiny skin that stretched between them. She wore the colors of a sailor-- bright whites and formal navy, and the low, square neck of her striped top exposed a liver-spotted throat and upper chest. Her eyes, the color of fallen acorns,

stared from underneath heavy lids at my legs and the section of my waist showing around my shorts. She was anything but plump and healthy, but I didn't feel like arguing.

"I've been worried about you, Tara." She reached out and patted my hand. "We'll see if we can get you back to normal."

As if anything would ever be normal again. I bristled and looked out the window above the sink. I wished I could see the Whitmore's pool from here, longed to feel Emily's spirit here with me.

"Well, we're certainly glad to have you here," John said with a genuine smile that looked suspiciously like gratitude. John sliced the chicken breasts with long, slow movements. The onions and peppers, sizzling in the frying pan, enveloped him in steam. Everyday cooking was my responsibility, but John loved to cook for guests. He flipped the frying pan ceremoniously, adding dabs of different marinades and spices as the chicken and vegetables performed circus tricks in the air. Emily hated vegetables. If she were here, I'd be preparing spaghetti for her, fighting John for room at the stove as he warned me that she would grow up to be picky and unhappy.

John looked over at us, his audience, and his gaze stopped on Beverly. She had nodded off suddenly, her head turned slightly toward me as it rested against the pillow, her mouth open in a crescent. Soft, gentle wheezes marked her breathing. John smiled at my concern. "It's okay. My brother said she's been doing that a lot lately. She just gets too tired to fight it."

I looked out the window again without responding, feeling like he'd just described me. *Too tired to fight it.* I never wanted to be old. I couldn't even handle being young.

Beverly woke up with a start when John nudged her. I helped her into the dining room and set her up with another pillow-padded chair as John set the table and carried in the steaming plates. He sat at the head of the table with Beverly and me at either side. "To my girls," he said. He toasted the two of us then lifted his glass up and stared at the ceiling. His eyes glistened like he might cry. If he had, I could have rushed to him, comforted him. But no, he just smiled, an acceptance that allowed him to make gestures like that and then go on, a control that had forced me to grieve alone these many months, watching him casually slip in and out of grief as if it were a garment.

After dinner, John made Beverly comfortable in the living room so she could watch "Wheel of Fortune" and then he retired to the study under the guise of getting some work done.

I waited a few minutes until I knew he was situated in the study, and then I walked out into the kitchen, quietly stepped through the French doors, and crossed our deck. The moon was big and low in the sky, an open mouth of mournful light. The summer air settled still and soft against my skin as I padded barefoot down the stairs and out onto our rich, green lawn. Past the row of budding hydrangea, a new generation of poison ivy had already claimed its place in the garden, its evil, shiny leaves a reminder of my heartache.

Our property was one of the few in the Water's Edge community that didn't have a good water view. The banks of the Bay twisted and curved, and our little triangular yard was nestled into a bend so that the yard came to a point at the edge of the water. Tall hedges lined the sides of both neighbors' yards, blocking our view. Our house was well-known as the cheapest in the neighborhood and they were going to make sure it showed



in every way possible. But John hated it when I said this. He had been ecstatic to move into Water's Edge two years ago, finally feeling like he could live again in the way he was raised. He hadn't realized that moving into the smallest of the Water's Edge houses, less than 5000 square feet of living space, with its little triangular lot purposefully hidden from the water by the neighbor's high hedges, would make us the poor people again. Poor like he was in his late twenties when Beverly and Fred cut off his funds, poor like I'd been my whole life.

I squeezed through the hedge. The Whitmores' pool beckoned from the other side of the Stephenson's yard. I crossed the grass, the moonlit Bay to my right. The masts of the Stephenson's two large sailboats dipped slightly up and down in welcome. I quietly approached the pool and lifted the latch of the decorative wrought-iron gate, wondering like I always did when I came here why someone hadn't taken the time to close the gate that day. It would have only taken a few seconds. Somebody could have spared a few seconds.

I sat down on the smooth, cool tiles and immersed my legs into the chlorinated water. There was probably little trace of Emily left here now. From the edge of our property, I had watched the men drain and refill the pool two days after the accident. They saw me there watching, and I knew that people were talking about Emily's death. And about me, the one who failed at everything. Why wouldn't I also fail at raising a child?

It was different being in the pool with no one else around. There'd been so many people in the pool the afternoon of the party. The neighborhood kids, almost all older than Emily by at least five years, were jumping off the diving board, cannon-balling and

sending waves of water slopping over the sides of the pool. Emily, in her yellow two-piece suit and bright pink swimmy, played with a little toy boat at the shallow end, away from the commotion of the older kids.

The sun burnt bright orange in the sky that day. I sat on the side of the pool, by myself as usual, watching Emily play and eyeing the group of other mothers gathered around the pool bar. They were all older than me, sun-wrinkled and richer than me. Even with calamine-coated patches of poison ivy bubbling on my cheek and my legs, I was still by far the prettiest woman in Water's Edge. Still the youngest. Still the one who didn't fit in.

Bobby Whitmore ran up to the fence, red-faced from sprinting across the yard in the summer heat. He announced that Kara would be opening her presents and then we'd cut the cake. He was a heavier kid who took after his mother, Evelyn. Even at ten, he seemed to know that this was his, this pool, this house, this right to be better than everyone. I wondered if that was how John looked when he was that age, before he realized that wealth belonged to his parents, to dole out or keep as they chose.

I pulled Emily out of the water and removed the bright pink bubbles of air from her arms, bubbles that I would later wish I'd glued on. Together we gathered her toys into my bag.

As we walked up to the house, I tried not to listen to the women in front of us flirting with the men playing volleyball. Mrs. Barton, a tall, sun-baked woman with huge breasts and dyed-blond hair, was in the midst of a divorce, and openly looking. Mrs. Whitmore, the hostess of the party, was married, but almost equally as openly in the midst of looking for a new affair. They called to the men as they walked across the lawn

in their brightly colored sarongs and lawn hats. John served the ball, and then said something that made Mrs. Whitmore blush and Mrs. Barton squeal enthusiastically.

Emily and I took our time crossing the bright green manicured lawn. I held her small hand with its wrinkled, prune-like skin and we talked about Barbies and suntans. I'd been selfish about Emily. I wouldn't let John send her to daycare, never hired a babysitter, rarely even invited friends over for her to play with. She was mine. My best friend, and I had made her in my image, small and quiet and introspective. At four years old, she often seemed smarter than me, more creative than me. I wanted her to stay that way, even after she realized how beautiful she was, even after men started giving her large houses she didn't care about and country club memberships she had to maintain. I wanted her to stay true to herself, and to me. To turn her back on this world that allowed us to hang here unnoticed at its fringes.

By the time Emily and I got up to the large deck with the brightly covered picnic tables, everyone was already crowded around the biggest table to watch Kara Whitmore open her presents. Emily asked me to pick her up so she could see. She was getting a little heavy for me, but I wasn't ready to give up the feel of holding her on my shoulders. I dropped to one knee and hoisted her up. When I stood up, the Velcro of her small pink sandal raked against my face. I could feel the thin skin that covered the pustules of poison ivy break open. The syrupy pus hit the open air and oozed slowly down my cheek.

"No, no, no, baby. I have to let you down," I told Emily as I dropped back down to one knee, quickly helping her dismount from my shoulders.

"What's the matter?" she asked. She had never understood my battle against poison ivy. Never understood the huge bubbles that formed on my skin, the horrible itch, the inability to sleep, the steroid shots I got at the doctors that never seemed to help as much as they were supposed to. She had gotten John's skin, and she was immune to poison ivy; and for that I was glad.

I looked around for John, feeling my skin crawl with the pus. John and the other men had stopped playing volleyball. They stood about a hundred feet away, gathered around the Whitmore's new Jag, which was parked at the side of the house. They were as excited about the car as the children beside us were about the toys.

"Go to Daddy, baby. I have to go get cleaned up." The syrup was oozing down to my jawbone and I knew it would drip onto my chest soon.

Emily nodded and took off toward the group of men. With her little legs bare from her bathing suit to her sandals, she looked so comfortable running. She was starting to lose the bobbly gait of a toddler. I turned quickly to go to the bathroom. I couldn't wait to clean my face and reapply calamine.

The only bathroom I'd been to in the Whitmore's huge house was situated right off the large marble foyer with its dramatic winding double staircase. The half bath itself was also marble with a huge ornate silver mirror filling almost an entire wall. Dozens of individual travel-sized quantities of everything filled the cabinet.

I grabbed a washcloth from a neat pile in the medicine cabinet, wet it with the hottest water I could stand, and began to dab at my cheek, which itched so severely that touching it felt like a forbidden pleasure. Pieces of partially dried, partially gooey calamine lotion swirled around in the marble basin as I rinsed out the washcloth again

and again between dabbing. Using my fingernails, I removed a few pieces of loose and broken skin from the area, then washed it again and patted it dry with a spare towel. I scanned past the aspirin, cold medicine, band-aids, Q-tips and finally found a package containing two cotton balls.

My eyes watered as I applied several thick layers of calamine onto my cheek, letting each layer dry in between. Finally I threw the cloths into the ornate lacquer hamper and left the bathroom.

I wasn't surprised that the women and kids were still huddled, watching presents being opened. Kara was tearing into them as quickly as her little fingers would let her, but there were still many presents to be opened and many mandatory hugs and thank you's to be given out. I wondered if Mrs. Whitmore would make Kara hug me with my huge calamine-pink cheek. Kara would probably start crying. Hopefully Mrs. Whitmore would just let her get away with hugging only Emily instead.

As I got a little closer to the garage, I saw John, still in the group of men, still gawking at the car. There was no Emily. I picked up my pace a little, and then I was running. And screaming at him, asking him where she was. He turned around, and then I knew he hadn't seen her. She had never gone over to him. I stopped running immediately, and we both stared at each other for what seemed like a long moment, before I bolted and raced toward the pool. I could hear others running behind me, following my hysterics, but I won the race. I was the one to see her first, head down, long dark hair floating up from her body like seaweed. And I'd been finding her that way over and over again in my mind for the past ten months.

Under the moonlit sky, I swung my hips into the pool, hardly making any ripples, so different from the splashes and commotion of that day. I separated the water with my hands and submerged my head, letting all the air out of my chest and sinking slowly until I was still, hovering at the bottom of the pool. My T-shirt billowed up, the wet cotton rough against my face. The water cradled me, gently rocked me. Was this how Emily felt? Had she been scared? Had she panicked or had she just gotten tired and fell into a trance. I hoped it felt like this, calm and quiet.

Then my body started to fight it and I couldn't stop my arms and legs from propelling me upward. As I surfaced, John ran through the gate, yelling my name. Breathing hard, he paced around in a small awkward circle with his hands clenched in his black curly hair. But I wasn't really looking at him. I was staring at the gate he had just run through. Had I left it open tonight? Was it me who had left it open that day too? Was I the last one out, the one who couldn't take the extra few seconds to push it and latch it? As John sat down on a pool lounger, breathing hard and staring at me, I stood in the pool, up to my neck in water. I couldn't remember.

\*\*\*

The next day, I stared out toward the pool as I loaded the dishwasher and scrubbed the pan John used for dinner the night before. I finished up, longing for the water, the uncontrollable sinking feeling of letting everything go. On my way to our bedroom, I paused when I heard John's voice in the study.

"Please," he said. "Just please drain the pool. Yes, I know. I know it's a lot to ask." There was only silence for a few minutes. "I don't know. A few weeks. Maybe a month." I moved closer to the door, my steps silenced by the springy carpet. "I've tried. I

know. I thought this year would be easier too," he said. The pitch of his voice rose, like it was about to crack. "Of course. Of course. Thank you for your understanding."

From inside the study, Beverly said, "That's smart. That was a good thing to do."

John sighed deeply. "I don't know what to do with her."

"She'll get better. But it'll take a while. This must be tremendously hard."

"It's hard on me too. Very hard. But she needs to pull herself together and start looking forward. We can never take that day back. Not ever."

"No. Not ever," Beverly said quietly.

John paced the room, his footsteps loud and angry.

"Well, I can't do this," his voice rose before he cut it off into a whisper again. "I can't even look at her right now. I need to get out of here for a few days. The pool will be drained tomorrow. She can have her time to mope, or pout, or whatever we're calling it. And I'll have time to clear my mind. And get on to things that need to be done."

"It's not her fault, you know," Beverly said.

I held my breath in the silence that followed. Finally John said very quietly, "I know."

I was in the bedroom when John told me he would be going to London for business the following day. I nodded at him from my fetal position on the bed, still angry that he'd had the pool emptied.

I stayed in bed the entire night, listening to the sounds of Beverly watching TV and John occasionally leaving his study to smoke a cigarette out on the porch or get a new beer. At nine o'clock, I got out of bed and took two Valiums. When John shook me awake, it was morning. His face was close to mine, his gaze traveling my face.

"I'll just be gone a few days, okay? Try to relax, get on with your life."

I turned away from him and dosed back to sleep. Then Beverly was beside my bed, opening the curtains and chattering in her high-pitched throaty voice. Her arms were so skinny they barely made a silhouette against the bright lights. I peered at her angrily.

"You can't sleep all day," she said. Her eyebrows were thin and grey. They blended in with her face entirely, and I could only tell she was raising them by the collection of wrinkles that accumulated above them. I turned to face the window.

"It's not your fault." She sat on the bed and rubbed her fingernails against my back in light, slow circles. "And at least she probably didn't feel any pain."

At this I sat up and turned to look at her. She gazed at me intently. "People say that drowning is a very peaceful way to go." Her liver-spotted skin shone like parchment paper and she squinted against the sunlight. "Look at my husband. Fred was in pain for months and months after that heart attack. Drowning is one of the easier ways. Or so they say."

"But she was so young. It shouldn't have happened."

"Well, honey, there are a lot of things that shouldn't happen. It doesn't mean they don't."

She brought over the plate of eggs and toast she had laid on my vanity table. I didn't stop her from setting it in my lap and curling my fingers around the fork.

"How long are you staying here?" I asked without looking at her.

She sat beside me on the bed and stroked my back again a few times before she answered. "Until you get back to normal."

I turned to face her. "Stop saying that. Nothing will ever be normal again."



She sighed. "No, not in the way it was. But life will go on. It's the nature of time. If you keep fighting it, you'll lose. Over and over again."

I stuffed a piece of scrambled egg in my mouth.

"I didn't want Fred to die," she said. "Or my brother and sisters. But that didn't stop them from doing it."

I glared at her. "That's different. Old people are supposed to die."

She drew back from me, her eyes sadder than I'd ever seen. Part of me wanted to take it back, but I seemed unable to do anything but watch her leave.

I dragged myself out of bed, my body still in slow motion from the valium. I showered and dressed, knowing she was downstairs waiting for me to apologize. Until I did, I would be a prisoner, hiding up here in my room.

When I finally went downstairs, she was lying in the recliner, her eyes closed.

"Come sit with me. You don't have to say anything. Just sit with me," she said without opening her eyes. I sat on the couch, listening to the grandfather clock in the hall and the rhythmic breathing from the recliner, my hands fidgeting in my lap. Dusk settled into the room-- I'd slept away almost the entire day. I wished the Whitmore's pool was still a shiny, liquid surface instead of a concrete hole. I longed to go float in the pool with my hair flowing around me, the calm blue water cradling me.

I stood up, thinking she was asleep.

"Are you going to the pool?" she asked, opening her eyes.

I nodded. "I know it's been drained. I can't help it."

She stood up too and hugged me. Her vertebrae jaunted out so abruptly they were almost sharp against my fingers. The pieces of hair that escaped her bun collected my tears. When I could stand her kindness no longer, I pulled away.

I climbed the stairs to my bedroom. Dropping to my hands and knees, I bent to look under the dresser and found my bathing suit, crumpled into a sour handful. Since there was no water in the pool now, I had to find a way to connect, a way to feel her there. I pulled on the bathing suit, the acidic bacteria making me cough.

In Emily's room, I grabbed her mermaid dolls and then padded down to her bathroom to put her spongy alphabet letters and rubber frogs into my bag.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, a slice of bright light streamed into the dark hallway from Beverly's bathroom. I peered in. Beverly was in the bathtub, eyes closed, body wrinkled and thin underneath the clear water. She had taken her hair out of its usual bun and it fanned out in wisps against the porcelain edge of the tub where she rested her head. I watched her, mesmerized, thinking about the feeling I had in the pool as I sunk down, thinking of Emily's face, innocent, expressionless.

Beverly's head bobbed gently on top of the water. Her lips turned up a little at the corners, like she was being told a precious secret. I leaned back against the wall. My body remembered the water in the pool engulfing me last night, making everything quiet and peaceful. The water consumed me, cradled me, the same way it cradled Beverly's delicate bones. Her chest expanded gracefully, an inhale so small and yet so confident, before her head slipped into the water. Painless. Just a relaxation, a letting go. My back slid down the wall as my legs grew weak. I lost sight of Beverly as I slid to sitting, but I could feel her peace inside the large claw-foot tub. Feel the water soothing and taking

over and slowing everything down. From the floor of the hall, I felt the release. And I envied her.

**Untitled**

Erin Hartin

INT – DORM ROOM

MICHELLE and JENNY, carrying numerous shopping bags, enter a moderately-sized dorm room. The camera pans left to right, from a shot of the girls entering the room to show the rest of the room; sun is filtering into the room through three large windows on the back wall. Laughing and giggling over a previously-told story, Michelle sets her bags down on a black couch as Jenny exits the room through a side door. Michelle looks down at her phone and realizes she has received a new voice mail.

MICHELLE

(calling to Jenny in the next room)

Hey, I've got a voice mail, so I'm gonna listen to it real quick before we head to dinner.

Camera zooms in to a close-up of Michelle dialing her voice mail, then zooms further to a close-up of her face.

JOHN O.S.

Hey JULIE, it's JOHN. I know when we parted ways last year, we promised we wouldn't try and contact each other again, but I haven't been able to get you off of my mind. Where ever I go, whoever I'm with, there's always something there to remind me of you; your smell, your touch, your taste... And that always leads me to more memories, like the way your eyes would light up when you got excited, the way you used to laugh at my stupid jokes...

John pauses for a moment, consumed by his emotions. Michelle's face has softened, and she has become invested in the message.

JOHN (Cont.)

(beginning slowly)

I went to the coffee shop where we met. You ordered a decaf chai latte. We sat and talked for what seemed

(Continued)

JONH (Cont.)

like just a few minutes, but in reality was a few hours. I knew I shouldn't have gone back there, but I needed to feel close to you again and that was the best place I could think of.

John pauses once again. The camera zooms out to show Jenny re-entering the room, ready to head to dinner. She pauses upon seeing the intrigued look on Michelle's face.

JOHN (Cont.)

Listen Julie, if you don't call me back, I'll understand. But I just had to hear your voice one more time.

An audible click is heard as John hangs up the phone.

MICHELLE

Wow!

JENNY

What was that all about?

MICHELLE

A wrong number. But you have to listen to this! It's from some guy named John, who's looking for somebody named Julie.

Michelle hands her phone to Jenny, and Jenny hits a button on the phone to replay the message. This time, while the message is being played, we do not hear it. We watch Jenny's facial expressions go through several changes as she listens to the message. When the message ends, Jenny hands the phone back to Michelle.

JENNY

Wow, is right! Do you think this is a joke?

MICHELLE

I doubt it. There was too much emotion in his voice... He sounds real sweet and sensitive. Why would  
(Continued)

somebody ever want to leave a guy

like that?

JENNY

Who knows? But I'm starving, let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT – COLLEGE CAMPUS – NIGHT

A long establishing shot shows Michelle exiting an old stone building. As she walks down the steps, the camera zooms in to a full shot of Michelle. She pulls her phone out of her multi-colored backpack and turns it on to check it for messages. Realizing she has received a message while in class, she dials her voice mail. She listens to her voice mail as she walks back to her dorm room. The camera travels with her.

JOHN O.S.

Julie, it's John. I'm sorry to bother you again. Truth is, ever since I called you two weeks ago, a new excitement has taken me over. Every time I hear the phone ring, I rush over to it in hopes that when I answer the phone, I'll hear your voice on the other end. So I just had to try you again. I want you to know that I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. So much reminds me of our beautiful relationship, it's hard not to think about us; you... Just a few minutes ago, that song that described us so well came on the radio. You know the one, "Meet In The Middle." It seemed like we were always meeting in the middle, usually due to the distance that separated us, or in some kind of compromise. I really wish things could have worked out between us. I have realized all of my stupid mistakes and decisions. Please forgive me.

Having reached her room, Michelle slides her key into the lock.

CUT TO:

The Camera shows a full shot of Michelle as she enters the room, hangs her keys up, and walks over to her desk chair to sit in front of her computer. Her motions are slow and deliberate, as if she is contemplating her next action. The camera then focuses on a close-up shot of the computer screen. Since Jenny is not home, Michelle decides to write an account of what happened on her computer.

MICHELLE V.O.

I received another voice mail from John today. I know he's a total stranger, but I just can't help but feel drawn to him...

The camera fades out as Michelle continues to type.

CUT TO:

INT – MICHELLE'S DORM ROOM

A high-angle, establishing shot shows Michelle asleep in her bed. The sound of the alarm clock wakes her and she sits up and shuts the alarm clock off. The camera draws back and pans to follow Michelle as she rises from her bed and walks over to her desk. Turning on her phone, she realizes she has received a voice mail. An excited look crosses Michelle's face as she dials her voice mail.

JOHN O.S.

Hi Julie, I'm sure you know who this is by now, but I'm still thinking about you.

Michelle sits at her desk, already engrossed in the message.

JOHN (Cont.)

The other day, I was remembering that weekend we went away to Maine. It was all planned out to be the perfect weekend. A horseback trail

(Continued)

JOHN (Cont.)

ride and a couple of days away together. Although the rain canceled the trail ride, we still made the best of the weekend by driving around the area, seeing the sights, and spending lots of time together. We got to do a lot of talking that

weekend and we learned so much about each other. It was the first time we had gone away together, and I'll never forget the way I felt. And I know you felt the same way; that weekend was the first time we said we loved each other.

John pauses for a moment. Michelle seems to be hanging on John's every word.

JOHN (Cont.)

In case you've lost it, my number is (519) 377-6671. *Please* call me back when you have a chance.

A big smile crosses Michelle's face.

CUT TO:

INT – COLLEGE DINING HALL

A table-wide, establishing shot shows Michelle and Jenny sitting at a table eating lunch, engrossed in conversation. The camera zooms some as if to become part of the conversation.

JENNY

You're really going to call him?

MICHELLE

Yeah, I think so. I mean, I can't seem to get him off of my mind lately. And, I'll be doing him a favor since he still thinks he's calling his ex-girlfriend. Besides, I'd kind of like to see what the guy's *really* like. He sounds almost

(Continued)

MICHELLE (Cont.)

too good to be true. I mean, if he really is all that he seems to be, why would Julie have kicked him to the curb?

JENNY

Yeah, I guess you're right. You'll have to let me know how it goes,



and be careful!

CUT TO:

INT – MICHELLE'S DORM ROOM

The camera shows a medium shot of Michelle sitting on a black couch looking down at the cell phone she holds in her hands. It's dark outside and the room is dimly lit with a floor lamp. Shadows play across her face. After a brief moment, Michelle opens her phone and dials John's number. The ringing of the phone can be heard; one ring, two rings, three rings, then finally...

JOHN O.S.

(sounding out of breath)

Hello?

MICHELLE

Hi John, you don't know me, my name is Michelle. I've been receiving your voice mails for Julie.

JOHN

(you can practically hear the embarrassment in John's voice)  
I don't know what to say; I'm so sorry for bothering you all this time.

MICHELLE

It really wasn't a bother. I liked listening to your messages.

JOHN

You did?

MICHELLE

Yeah, and to be honest with you, I almost feel jealous of Julie. If only I had somebody who felt for me, even a fraction of way you feel about Julie.

JOHN

You think so? Sometimes I felt

Julie took things for granted...

There is a lull in the conversation and Michelle fidgets in her seat.

MICHELLE

I don't know, but if I were Julie,  
I wouldn't have let you go.

JOHN

But you don't even know me.

MICHELLE

*I feel* like I do, though. I've  
saved all your voice mails and  
listened to them a few times...  
After I received your second  
voice mail, I had trouble  
keeping you off my mind. I kept  
wondering if you would call again  
and how long it would be until you  
gave up. After your third call, I  
just knew I had to contact you. I  
felt as if I was leading you on by  
not revealing my identity, and I  
also wanted to get the chance to  
talk with you...

Another pause. Neither person seems to know what to say, or where to go from here.

JOHN

(his voice is oddly calm)  
Would you like to get together  
sometime for coffee? And we could  
talk some more face-to-face?

MICHELLE

I think I'd like that. But what  
about Julie?

JOHN

This doesn't have to do with her,  
this is about getting to know you.  
While I still have feelings for her,  
I *am* trying to get past them. I am

coming to the realization that I probably won't hear from her again. Since I was leaving messages with you, I don't have the right number for her anymore, and she hasn't responded to any of the emails I have sent. So how does next Saturday, one o'clock at Joe's coffeehouse sound?

MICHELLE

(after a short pause)  
I'll be there.

CUT TO:

INT – Joe's Coffeehouse

A full shot shows John sitting at a table, engrossed in a newspaper and sipping a mug of coffee (The camera's point of view is as if we are eavesdropping and no sound from the shot can be heard). He is a young man, probably in his late twenties or early thirties. He is dressed in tan cargo pants and a casual long-sleeved shirt. He looks up and sees a woman approaching, then stands to greet her. A menacing look, which seems to pass by Julie unnoticed, crosses his face as they shake hands. The two take their respective seats at the table where John was previously sitting. Michelle seems eager to begin their conversation and practically hangs over the table while John hangs back, keeping his personal space.

FADE OUT

## **Leisure Time**

Brenda S. Simmons

I have to ask, do I have leisure time? I know nothing of the kind.

I get up in the morning to hear many sounds; I rush to the kitchen to start brewing coffee grounds.

The kids are in the bedroom making a lot of noise, when suddenly across my head whizzes a very hard toy.

The kids are screaming all over the house However, when I yell they become quiet as a mouse.

One is in the kitchen, one in the bath, the others in the closet with a little finger gash.

I round up my charges as fast as I can, rushing to the doctor for he cut his little hand.

After many hours at the hospital we are finally home, the kids are eating super and I am answering the phone.

Now it is time to bed them down for tomorrow is another day where I will be far from sitting to watch the children play.

So back to the question, do I have leisure time?

This all depends if you are going to count my private bathroom time.

## **I Saw Her Soul**

Nancy Hoke

Through hollow eyes, I saw her soul.  
And she the captive inside looking  
Out. Through a well-like hole

She saw, her silent voice inviting  
From broken clay in airless wheeze  
In pallor, sadness, desperate longing

Just to die, I saw her pleas.  
She knew herself the prisoner of  
A not-so-beautiful disease.

I saw her soul, and from above  
Her twisted cell I saw her cries  
Silently screaming; death was the love  
She sought, staring with waiting-room eyes.

## WASHING HARLEYS AIN'T ALWAYS GOOD

Anonymous

Washing my new Harley brought about a new high/low in my life. After visiting the third car wash, each with all bays filled and a line at each, a thought came to me, which I, a few minutes later, regret ever having. Each trip from one car wash to another took me past a Sheetz store. I noticed and then remembered I had washed my truck at the Sheetz car wash.

Could I wash my Harley there? I began thinking just how I might do this. The car wash would not touch the motorcycle if I parked it where the middle of a car might be. The spray would not be any more powerful than the hand washer spray I was going to use. So, after reasoning it out, I was sure the bike would be safe. Next was just how would I get it in position and then get out without getting wet myself. I timed a few cars. It took more than a minute from the time money was inserted and the program selected before the actual carwash began. I practiced a few times outside the car wash and was very confident I could park the bike and get outside before the wash actually began.

Satisfied that I had it all figured out, I was going to get my bike washed with very little effort and without getting wet. There were no cars in sight, so I drove to the “put your money in here” spot and did just that. I selected the program and now I had a full minute to get my bike in place and leave. In I went and was I in for a surprise. I had forgotten about the undercarriage wash. Maybe my bike needed an undercarriage wash, but I am sure I did not. I wish I had been wearing chaps or even maybe something more, to help protect my undercarriage, instead of loose-legged pants!

## **The Elucidate**

Rebecca S. Heston

I don't write poetry anymore.  
I'm too busy  
saving the world  
for writing simple words  
in patterns.

Because it's such a crazy world  
these days.  
Fires rake my country;  
wars go on.  
People care, of course,  
but nations don't cry.

And I can write a paper on that,  
analyze it,  
and present my opinion  
in APA format.  
I'll even document properly  
other people's  
words.

I saved a life today  
between a paper on sexuality  
and a project  
on educational funding.  
She was a little Latino girl  
from a trailer park,  
wearing no socks.

And then I got back to work.

I don't have time to write poetry.  
I care too much  
about saving the world.  
But perhaps tomorrow,  
I will write something great  
when I find a reader  
who has no time  
for poetry.

## Rain Drops, Ember Shards

Katelin Reever

The sky opens, and a single rain drop falls.  
The tree sways, hailing the coming mistress.  
The sky opens, and a second rain drop falls.  
The stone calls a greeting to my Father.

Deep in the belly of the earth, beyond the reach of light,  
A single spark flickers to life.  
Deep in the belly of the earth, beyond the reach of light,  
A second spark halts the silence.

Within the flesh of blood and bone,  
A stirring awakens the senses.  
Within the flesh of blood and bone,  
A battle is uprising.

Through the underground rivers of rock,  
The ore is resting, waiting.  
Through the underground rivers of rock,  
The ore melts and begins to quicken.

The pool shivers, moving restless thoughts to the surface.  
Images of the soul are seen in the deep.  
The pool shivers, moving restless thoughts to the surface.  
A window into roots and rocks hidden far-  
beneath the falling drop of rain,  
above the smoldering ember,  
within the flesh,  
throughout the course of a carving river.



## Thoughts on World Hunger

Nancy Hoke

The Third World, it's still dying.  
While people are hungry and babies crying,  
    lifeboat ethics of hunger live.  
Nations of plenty take what they need  
    then choose who will be starved overboard.

Farmers rest, land lies barren.  
Government pays to stop growth that could share in  
    the needs of the Nations that die.  
Dollars are there if tobacco grows –  
    it's the pleasure not hunger we feed.

Eat less meat, they are saying,  
To have grain for people, not cattle grazing,]  
    but grain still won't reach hungry cries.  
America drinks the grain that is saved,  
    and the alcohol conscience is blind.

The Third World, it's still dying.  
The people are hungry, babies are crying,  
    and we don't have a reason why.  
Potbelly children show us a sign –  
    Are we only pretending to see?

## **Flower Bouquet**

Satoko Unno

I will gather all the flowers blooming on the earth  
to make a bouquet for you.

A bouquet tied with red ribbon of pretty worth.

Give me words, just a few.

I will catch all stars twinkling in the sky at night  
to send you them in the crystal cage.

A cage shining and sparkling in your sight.

Come with me to turn the page.

I will dive for pearls sleeping in the sea  
to make a tiara to match your hair.

A tiara gemmed with pearls you can see.

Smile for me, my princess, lovely hare.

Wishing I will be watching you everyday.

Wishing I will be listening to you, anything you say.

## **Morals**

Amanda Skjeveland

Pulled close,  
Fanned against my chest,  
My morals I've lived, mothered, taught by.  
I unfold these treasures and look across the table to see instead  
The shimmer in the 4's and 5's,  
The quiet beauty of the mundane.  
My aces are bullets,  
Alone, haughty, barely alive.  
Being so high up  
And always concerned with the trump.

**So, East meets West**  
Sami Winkler

Never before has one detected so much truth behind her smile.  
Never before has it meant so much to get up and face the day.  
Never before has she experienced so much without searching.  
Never before has it been so exciting not to play by the rules.  
Never before has she seen so much beauty in one being.  
Never before has it been so interesting to learn.  
Never before has it occurred to her to care so much.  
Never before have her lips been so soft.  
Never before have her eyes been so blue.  
Never before has she listened so well.  
Never before has she felt so complete.  
Never before has she understood.  
Never before has she fit in.  
Never before has she felt more beautiful.  
Never before has she felt more wanted.  
Never before has her life made sense,  
than when East met West.

## **THE QUEEN AND THE NINJA – A Modern Love Story**

Rebecca Cheek

JOHN MALONE–

In his mid 30's, he tries to be the stereotypical Private Eye. He is under the impression that the services he provides are the best in his field. His costume consists of a trench-coat, hat, and a white dress shirt rolled up at the sleeves, with a tie half-undone. Black horn-rims are optional. He is the only “serious” character.

BETH THOMPSON –

Between sixteen and eighteen years old, a total “drama queen.” She is known to equate anything and everything to characters or plotlines from famous musicals. Many costume changes, will randomly sing her lines at any given point. (Not to be over-done.)

NILES ARCHER–

Same age as Beth. Niles will break out into a kicking and “chopping” frenzy at times. He is always dressed in all black, like a ninja. He calls himself “Niles the Night Ninja” or “Triple N.” He’s not too bright, but thinks he’s very cunning.

### SETTING:

Everything occurs in Malone’s office. The entrance is Center Stage Right, through a door with “John Malone, Private Eye painted on the glass pane.

Malone’s desk is Down Stage Left. A chair or two are in front of the desk for customers, maybe a plant or two somewhere around the room. The office is tidy, but Malone’s desk is a bit cluttered.

### PROPS:

Old analog “hotel type” telephone on the desk, a plaque with Malone’s name and title on it, a few manila folders with “files” inside also on the desk along with a mug of writing utensils.

THE PLAY:

**SCENE 1**

(Malone enters office, takes off his trenchcoat and drapes it on one of the empty chairs, takes off his hat as well. He sits down in his chair, and addresses the audience.)

**MALONE**

It was raining cats and dogs outside the day my two strangest cases began. I hate April. Fewer “clients” (makes quotation marks with his fingers) and less interesting “cases.” (makes quotation marks again, sits down.) Misty can barely live on what I’m paying her as my secretary. Then again, I don’t even know if I’d pay her more. She’s a real doll, but not very good at her job. Always interrupting me with phone calls when I’m with clients, taking a coffee break the moment I need her, you know... the kind of stuff such a well-trained and quick-witted Private Eye such as myself can’t have. Gonna have to fire that pretty face one of these days... But I’m getting ahead of myself. I’d just come in from lunch and decided coffee would help take the chill out of my bones. I was paging Misty for some, when it all began. (Lights up, Malone is still seated. He presses page button on phone) Misty, (pause) Miiiiiiisty... (pause) (yells) Misty! (There is a knock on the door, Malone gets up to answer it. Starts speaking while he opens the door) Well, it’s about time, Misty, I want you to make me a pot of cof... (Is surprised when Beth, dressed as Orphan Annie, walks into the room.)

Oh! You’re not Misty!

**BETH**

(Looking confused, and a bit apprehensive) Uh, no I'm not. Are you... John Malone?

The Private Investigator? I think I need your help.

MALONE

Yes I am, and you *think* you need my help? My dear girl, whatever it is, robbery, murder adultery, John Malone is your man. I can help you. Now, tell me what's troubling you.

(He motions to the chairs in front of his desk, and sits in his own chair. Beth takes a hesitant seat.)

BETH

Alright, well, see... here's my problem. There's this...

MALONE

(Cutting Beth off) Wait, wait, wait. Let's start with your *name*. (Gets pen and paper, sits poised and ready to write)

BETH

I'm Annie. Annie Thompson. T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N. People always forget the P. I'm a senior at Grover High School, and I'm in the drama club. The lead role every year, you know. I dance too. And sing. Would you like to hear my solo for this year's production?

(Bursts out in song) "The sun will come out, tomorrow..."

MALONE

(Interrupts Beth quickly) Very very nice. I see, um hm... Alright, well... what is the nature of the *case* you would like me to investigate?

BETH

Oh right, the case of course. (smoothes her wig) It's a case about... well, about love.

(looks a bit sheepish, but grins)

MALONE

(Gets excited) Excellent! You suspect your husband is cheating? Or your boyfriend is quite possibly sleeping with your sister? (sits forward in his seat, anticipating)

BETH

(in shock) Oh no! Of course not! I don't *have* a husband, I'm really too young. And I don't have a boyfriend either. In fact, that's part of my problem.

MALONE

(In disappointment) ... You want me to discover a boyfriend for you? (Throws down his pen in disgust) So sorry, but I don't do that line of "*work*" here. They have online dating sites, for that sort of thing, you know.

BETH

Look, Mr. Malone...

MALONE

(cuts her off again) That's INSPECTOR Malone.

BETH

Sorry... *Inspector* Malone, I need your help. I'm in love with this guy, His name's Archer, and I need to find out if he's interested in someone else. (puts back of hand to forehead dramatically) I just couldn't bear it if I told him how I feel and he likes... *her*.

MALONE

(Starts to gain interest in the case once again.) And just who *is* this "her" you speak of?

BETH

(gets more indignant as she goes on, some of her "drama queen" side begins to show) Apple Carroway. She's the school's varsity cheerleader. And she's perfect. She gets



perfect grades in all her classes, is the Senior Class President, has perfect blond hair, straight sparkling white teeth. She always does a perfect little giggle when Archer tells his most ridiculous jokes. I get sick to my stomach just thinking about her. (said in drama queen style) And so help me, if she digs her perfect little manicured nails into Archer's heart, I'll cut myself with a rusty spoon!

MALONE

A... rusty spoon, Annie?

BETH

Yes a rusty spoon!!! Now where was I? Yes. Archer. And Apple. (Shudders) Anyways, Niles and I have been best friends since last year when we were partners in Biology. He's the reason I get up in the morning, and I've wanted to tell him for so long how much he means to me, but... if he doesn't feel the same way... I'll be crushed. That's where you come in. I need to know if Apple is going to steal my love or not! (begging and pleading)

Inspector, will you please help me? I don't care how much you charge. Please...

MALONE

With all due respect Annie, why don't you just tell him how you feel?

BETH

Oh no no no. I couldn't do that! I just can't seem to find a way to tell him. He's a very important person in our school. One of the security guards in training, and I don't ever want to come between him and his work. I could be a distraction!

MALONE

I don't understand what that has to do with me taking your case.

BETH

If you, a private eye, investigate for me, not only will I get the answer I want, but Archer will also have to put his guard skills to use! That way, it won't be a distraction. Be careful, though. Archer is very cunning, he may discover you before you have a chance to even uncover any evidence!

MALONE

(sighs, pretending to labor over the decision) Well, I suppose I can take the case.

BETH

(ecstatic and gushing) Oh thank you thank you thank you! You just have no idea what this means to me! Thank you! (reaches over and takes his hand, shakes it vigorously)

MALONE

Calm down, calm down. Typically I charge \$200 an hour. But, seeing as how you're still in high school, and because I'm such a giving, kind-hearted person, I'm only going to charge you half that.

BETH

Thank you so much, Inspector Malone. (Hands Malone a scrap of paper) Here's my number. Call me the very moment you have anything to report, anything at all!

(Bounds quickly out of the office, singing "The sun will come out..." She shuts the door as Malone watches her, shaking his head. Lights fade, blackout.)

MALONE

(Lights up on seated Malone) After Annie left my office, I thought about my high school days, and didn't remember them being so dramatic. I could tell this dame was gonna be

trouble. The way she flipped her hair, talked with her hands, and even burst out in song told me this case was going to be interesting. (blackout, then lights come back up as Malone pages Misty) Misty, could you *please* bring me a cup of coffee? (There is a knock at the door) Come in! Thank goodness Misty, I was just about to page you again...

(Is surprised once again when Niles walks in “stealthily,” his arms up in defense.

He is, of course, wearing his Ninja suit) You are definitely *not* Misty!

NILES

No, No I’m not. (Looks around, concludes there is no threat, and puts down his arms, assuming a ‘normal’ standing position) You must be John Malone, good to meet ya!

(Shakes Malone’s hand, who is unnerved by Niles.)

MALONE

Why... Yes, I am. And you are?

NILES

Niles, but you can call me Triple N if you like.

MALONE

Triple N? Is that some sort of nickname?

NILES

(seems surprised that Malone has not heard of him before) Of course! It is short for Niles the Night Ninja. You mean you’ve never heard of me before?

MALONE

No, can’t say as I have. Now, why are you here, anyway?

NILES

OH! I *think* I need your help.

MALONE

(Mutters to himself) Not this again... (Louder) You *think* you need my help? My good man, from the looks of your wardrobe, I think the fashion police would better serve you.

NILES

Excuse me?! (Raises hands in karate position, bends knees) I am well versed in Toe-Kwin-Die and Karpe-tay. Best in both classes, I'll have you know! Are you challenging me with your clever banter?

MALONE

(In disbelief at this guy) Don't you mean Tae-Kwon-Do and Karate? And no, I wasn't challenging you. I apologize. (tries to take Niles seriously) We got off on the wrong foot, I believe. (Mutters) This guy is one fry short of a happy meal...

NILES

What did you say?! C'mon! Let's settle this! (Starts bouncing around Malone almost like a boxer, but occasionally does a little karate kick or chop) What, you scared, Malone?

Huh? Huh??

MALONE

Alright that's it! The name is INSPECTOR Malone, and I don't have time to deal with crazy kids who think they're ninjas. You either need my help or you don't.

NILES

(remembering why he came, drops his hands, letting down his guard a bit) You're right. I'm sorry. I get carried away sometimes. I definitely need your help.

MALONE

(motions to chair, sits in his own) Do tell. I'm all ears. (Pulls out pen, and gets ready)

NILES

(still a bit on edge) Well, see, there's this girl, and... I really like her. I mean a lot. And I think she's totally into that freak-a-zoid Jeff from her stupid theater class, but I'm not sure. Well, her class isn't stupid, but Jeff is. (begins to pick up speed, rambling) Whew, I mean he's crazy. He always wears this huge black cape like he's a count or something, and I don't even know why Beth would be attracted to him, except for he *is* a pretty good actor, and I mean, they have done Romeo and Juliet together and I just don't know what to do and...

MALONE

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down there Cowboy. I mean, uh... ninja. You say this girl's name is Beth?

NILES

Yeah, I said that didn't I? And can you please not interrupt me? Like I was saying, she's amazing, and she deserves better than Jeff, you know?

MALONE

Ah, I see, hm... (Ponders) Well, pardon me for asking, but what's to stop you from telling her yourself how you feel about her?

NILES

What? You gotta be kidding me! She'd ruin my budding ninja career if our friendship turned sour. She's got a lot of friends in high places if you know what I mean. It's too

risky on my own, man! So will you help me out? Please? I don't care about the cost. Just help me figure out if she likes him or not. Otherwise I just won't be able to tell her.

MALONE

The cost is typically \$200 an hour, but seeing as how you're Triple N, (poking fun, but Niles takes it as a compliment) I'll only charge you half of that. How does that sound?

NILES

Oh man, Mr... I mean Inspector Malone, that sounds great. Really great. (Hands Malone a paper, while Malone grabs Beth's scrap and shoves it in his pocket) Here's my number if you need to call me. Hey, what was that paper?

MALONE

What paper?

NILES

The paper you just shoved into your pocket.

MALONE

What pocket?

NILES

Your *pants* pocket.

MALONE

Where?

NILES

Uh, attached to your pants?

MALONE

I don't know what you're talking about.

NILES

(scratches head in confusion, can hardly remember what he was questioning) Oh. Well, I guess I'll be going then. Don't hesitate to call me. If you find out anything, anything at all, just give my cell a little ringy-ding-ding, and I'll pick that puppy up like a free bag of Doritos.

MALONE

Um... right, yes. Good, good. We'll be in touch! (quickly comes around the desk, and ushers Niles out the door) Goodbye!

NILES

(out the door, while Malone closes it on his face) Yeah, uh bye!

(Blackout, then lights up to Malone sitting at his desk, once again addressing the audience.)

MALONE

Something smelled fishy about these two cases, and it wasn't Niles' lack of deodorant. About this time, I began to wonder why I agreed to help these kids out. Probably because I hadn't gotten my coffee... (Blackout, Lights come back up and he is paging Misty) Misty, I'll take my coffee now. (There is a knock on the door, Malone hangs up the phone) Wow. That was fast! Come on in, Misty! (Beth enters, dressed as Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz)

MALONE

This is ridiculous! You are STILL not Misty with my coffee!

BETH

No sorry, it's me, again. Uh, Inspector Malone?

MALONE

(through clenched teeth, tries to look calm) Yessss?

BETH

Is this a bad time? Should I come back later or something?

MALONE

Oh no no no. Everything's just *fine*. Have a seat, Annie. Tell me what I can do for you.

BETH

You mean Dorothy. My name's Dorothy.

MALONE

(looks at her strangely, but decides to play along) Oh, right, Dorothy. So sorry. Now, how  
can I help you, *Dorothy*?

BETH

(sits down) Well, I was just wondering if you've found my little dog, Toto... I mean uh...  
if you've found anything out yet.

MALONE

I just saw you yesterday, Dorothy.

BETH

But I'm sure you've been busy doing research, collecting evidence of Miss Perfect trying  
to steal Archer away from me already, right?

MALONE



Well yes I have, actually. Nothing conclusive of course, that's why I hadn't thought it necessary to phone you yet. (pulls out a piece of paper from a file, and shows it to Beth)

Tell me, does mean anything to you?

BETH

(takes paper from Malone's hand) This is Archer's phone number... where did you find it?

MALONE

(Takes Archer's number from her hand.) I discovered it in a classmate's locker. I don't want to jump to any conclusions just yet. All in good time, my dear, all in good time. Thank you for stopping by, Annie, I mean Dorothy, yes! (ushers her out before Beth has a chance to respond, she looks bewildered.)

(Malone breathes a huge sigh of relief and pages Misty, only to be interrupted by another knock.)

MALONE

(through clenched teeth) That *better* be Misty. Come in!

(Niles enters)

NILES

Hey M! I can call you M, right? It's so much cooler and shorter than Inspector Malone, and I just thought it fit you and everything and I...

MALONE

(cutting Niles off) Listen here, pal. Can I call you pal? Because I'm going to. Look here, I just saw you yesterday. What can I do for you?

NILES

Well, I hadn't gotten a phone call from you yet, so I thought to myself, "Niles, buddy. You just need to march yourself over to the office since it's right across the street from school, and find out what's been found out!" So that's what I did. I'm ready for the dirt,

so hit me.

MALONE

Excuse me?

NILES

I want to know what you've found out so far! So let me have it!

MALONE

Triple N. You need to give me more time to work. I've only found a few scraps of paper that don't mean anything yet. Though, I wouldn't object to you taking a peek and telling me if they mean anything to you. (Opens file, showing papers to Niles.

NILES

(slams fist into hand) Blast! I knew it!

MALONE

What? Do you recognize anything?

NILES

Oh MAN!!! This right here! It's a picture of Jeff and Beth together from last year's musical. The writing on the back says, "I'll always be yours, baby." (starts to wail, and in distress, karate chops around) What am I gonna do? It's true! She *does* like him.

MALONE

Now, young man. Let's not jump to any conclusions just yet. I'm working on a few leads right now, and I have confidence they'll pay off. I just need some more time. Allow me to escort you out. (Leads Niles to the door.)

NILES

Thanks a heap, M. You just don't know. I'll catchya on the flip side! (exits, muttering about pummeling Jeff. Blackout. Lights back up, Malone addresses the audience.)

MALONE

Things just weren't adding up. I'd looked high and low for this Niles character, and never found him. I couldn't very well ask security about him, or my cover would be blown. And as for Beth, she was nowhere to be found either. I went to a few drama practices, but no one could be identified as this Beth girl. Annie/Dorothy was there, of course. I thought to myself, "Too bad Annie/Dorothy's not Beth. This couple would have been a match made in heaven, what with their antics and quirky personalities. I had no idea at the time, that everything would become clear very soon.

(Blackout, lights come back up, Malone is at the desk, paging Misty. The phone rings, and Malone jumps, startled)

MALONE

Hello, Private Investigator Malone speaking. (sigh) Yes, Dorothy. What? Your name is Annie? Again? Wait, what? Annie (incredulous) *Oakley*? Still nothing new to report, I'm working very hard to solve your case, uh, Annie. Why don't you come by my office tomorrow right after school. What time would that be exactly? 4pm? Alright. I may have something by then. Alright, bye now. (hangs up phone)

(Tries to page Misty again, only to be interrupted by ringing phone again.)

MALONE

Oh. Triple N. Hello. What? Yes. No new developments. I told you, I'm working on them. (Gets exasperated.) Why don't you come over tomorrow after school, about 4:30? I have a client coming in at 4, so 4:30 is the soonest I can squeeze you in. We can talk about any possible developments then. Sounds great. See you tomorrow. (Malone hangs up the phone with a sigh.) Boy, do I ever need some coffee... (Lights fade to blackout.)

## SCENE 2

(Malone enters with his hat cocked, looking very agitated and distracted. He is paging Misty)

MALONE

Misty, Misty? Hmph. She must not be in yet. She better get here soon! I just need a cup of coffee to get me started... (addresses the audiences)

I expected to crack these two cases open in no time, but it's been a week, and I haven't even located Beth or this Archer character! What am I going to tell Annie/Dorothy/Annie when she comes in? She's a real crazy dame, but she's still a client, and I feel like such a failure having to let her down like this. And Niles. I've never met such a confused young man before. Doesn't he know real Ninjas don't practice Karate or Tae Kwon Do, they only use Ninja Stars? Oh well. He's a client too. I just wish I could have been more help.

Malone, You've really gotten yourself in deep... (looks at watch) Well, it's almost 4 o'clock. How I loathe giving the bad news to clients...

(There is a knock at the door, Malone goes to answer it. Beth enters, she is wearing a red dress, the style reminiscent of Scarlet from Gone With The Wind)

BETH

Hello, Inspector!

(Gives him a charming smile as she seats herself, acting quite dignified. Malone is still taken aback by Beth's constant "persona" changes, and takes his seat behind his desk.)

MALONE

Well, good afternoon Annie. Quite a lovely dress you have on there.

BETH

It's Scarlet.

MALONE

I can see what color the dress is, Annie.

BETH

No, I mean my *name*. It's Scarlet. Scarlet O'Hara. (A bit put out, said in a huffy way) I've talked with you more times than I can count this week, and it upsets me that you still cannot remember my name! (Comes to terms with this) Now, tell me about the new developments.

MALONE

Well, to be honest, I... (There is a firm knock at the door, Malone sighs.) I'm sorry,  
...Scarlet. Please excuse me a moment. That must be my 4:30 appointment. I'll ask him  
to wait in the hall until we are finished.

(Before Malone can answer the door, Niles bursts in, karate chopping away)

NILES

Hiya, Inspector. (chop chop, kick) I'm ready for the updates! (looks around, spots the  
back of Beth's head) Oh man, I'm sorry! I forgot you had a client. Let me know when  
you finish.

BETH

(recognizing Niles' voice, turns around in chair) Archer?!

NILES

(stops dead in his tracks, whirls around.) Beth?! What are *you* doing here?

MALONE

You two know each other?

NILES

... Yeah, uh... This is my best friend Beth Thompson. (Coughs, is embarrassed)

MALONE

Wait, you mean this is...

NILES

(cutting him off) Yes, yes it is. Um, anyways, I'll just be going now! (tries to run out the  
door)

BETH

Wait just a minute, Archer. Where do you think you're going?

NILES

Oh you know, I have quite a few things I need to take care of at the school. Strict Security Guard stuff.

MALONE

(In complete disbelief) Scarlet, did you just call him Archer? Is that...

BETH

(Turning as red as her dress) Yes. This is Niles Archer. But apparently you know that already. Don't you? I'm really confused. Could someone please tell me what's going on?

MALONE

(Putting the two stories together) Well I don't even believe it. You two are unbelievable.

And to think I never even considered the possibility!

NILES

Excuse me? Could you please fill us in? Why are you here, Beth? And why are you so surprised we know each other, Inspector? We *do* attend the same school.

BETH

Uh... I uh... needed the Inspector's help with... something. (Trying to change the subject) What are *you* doing here?

NILES

Oh you know, just getting some help with a problem I've been having at school. (There is an awkward silence, and they both look pleadingly at Malone.)

MALONE

Allow me to clear everything up. You, Scarlet. May I call you Beth?

BETH

Sure, sure.

MALONE

Thank you. Beth, you asked me to help you find out if a certain friend of yours had feelings for someone else, is that right?

BETH

(Feels very uncomfortable talking about this in front of Niles) Yes, that's right.

MALONE

And you, Niles. Or should I say, Archer. You also had me helping you with the same thing, yes?

NILES

Uh huh... (still confused, and also uncomfortable)

MALONE

Well, my dear young people. It appears I have solved both your cases simultaneously!

BETH

What do you mean?

MALONE

I mean, that while I was busy searching for a Miss Beth Thompson and a Mr. Niles Archer, I completely missed the fact that (points to Beth) were Beth, and (points to Niles) you were Archer. Don't you see? Both of you asked me to investigate each other and your suspected love interests!

NILES



You don't mean... Beth? Did you really ask him to investigate me?

BETH

(sheepish and quiet for the first time) Yeah, I did. Are you mad at me, Archer? Please don't be mad...

NILES

Aw, Beth. I could never be mad at you. (Karate chops and kicks over to Beth, and picks her up in a romantic gesture, only to drop her) Oh man, Beth! I'm so sorry! Are you okay?

BETH

(giggling) I'm fine, Niles. Let's get out of here. I want you to hear my recently-memorized section of my play... (says coyly) It's a play about love...

NILES

Love, huh? (grins) Well I'd just *love* to hear it. Karate chops in front of Beth's face, then picks her up, successfully this time.)

BETH

Oh, Archer. You're so strong! You've been doing some extra training.

NILES

Sure have! (winks at Beth)

MALONE

Hold on a second, lovebirds. Aren't you forgetting something?

BETH

Oh, I'm so sorry Inspector. Thank you for everything. We really appreciate it.

MALONE

You're welcome, but that's not what I'm referring to.

NILES

Oh! Your payment! We'll get it to you just as soon as we can. I need to mow my dad's grass before I have enough to pay you. Is that ok?

MALONE

That's fine. But I would really like something else instead of the regular payment?

BETH

Well, what do you want?

MALONE

Can one of you *please* get me a cup of coffee? (Niles and Beth are surprised, and simply stare at Malone, who smiles, turns towards the audience, and shrugs. Blackout.)

**THE END**

**The Recrudescence of Tabitha**  
Madeline Newell

Tabitha, fell ill.  
Submersing,  
Submerging  
O! Descendent  
of the Upper Rooms.

The widows, bemoaned.  
In losing,  
Undoing.  
Solemnity  
Of deepest concern.

Peter's hand, reached out.  
Connecting,  
Affecting  
Recrudescence  
Of she, Tabitha.