

TheKiosk: spring2002





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we like it outside

Published by the English department of Morningside College

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Creative writing award winners

First Place	<i>The World Series of Heaven and Hell</i> Beth Donahue
Second Place	<i>Untouched</i> Cathie Stangl
Third Place	<i>Consolation</i> Jessica Wheeler
Honorable Mention	<i>Table 508</i> Annie Dilocker
Cover art award winner	Jessica Wheeler

About this year's judge

Dave Evans, a graduate of Morningside College, is a recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bush Artist Foundation. He has twice been a Fulbright Scholar in China. His stories, essays and poems have appeared in numerous magazines and journals including *The Southern Review*, *The North American Review* and *Prairie Schooner*. His work has been included in over fifty anthologies including *The Norton Book of Sports*, *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest*, and *Voices in the Landscape: Contemporary Iowa Poets*. Evans currently teaches creative writing at SDSU in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

All entries are judged blindly by the editors, and no entry is given special consideration. Editors are eligible for award recognition; however, they are not eligible for prize money.

Editor's Foreword

When I first came to Morningside College, I knew that I wanted to work on *The Kiosk*. What did it for me was "An Ode to Algebra," a poem by Chris Marnach, whom I befriended my first year and to whom I owe many thanks, published in *The Kiosk* of 1998. I get sentimental when I think about it.

Now, dear Reader, you are thinking "Who writes poems about algebra?" In the same vain, who writes poems about grilled cheese sandwiches, garbage disposals or cheerleaders? Well, lots of people probably do. The truth is, though, these poems aren't really about x and y variables, the melting point of Kraft singles, kitchen appliances, or A-jumps. They're about something bigger.

I once dated a boy who told me that I could never do this job. That was in the spring of 2000, the year that Chris and I worked as co-editors for *The Kiosk*. I wasn't worried this year that I would suddenly find myself unable, but I was very worried that I wouldn't get any submissions. I was flipping out, actually. I thought Dr. Coyne would have to take a crash course in emergency medical procedures just to deal with me. But, lo and behold, and much to my salvation, a total of 105 pieces came in before the deadline. Out of 90 poems and 15 short stories, we came out with twenty-four and five, respectively. That's less than twenty-eight percent.

I encouraged the editors to base their choices on the integrity of the piece as a whole, to focus their attentions on the expression in the pieces, and, in short, I asked them to choose the pieces which spoke to them. I was hoping that it would be a difficult process for the editors, having different tastes and coming from diverse backgrounds and reading/writing experiences, to come to agreements on which pieces they liked. I was not let down. When we met to debate our choices, many of us walked the line between compromise and sacrifice, and many of our opinions were swayed by fellow editors whose cases were better than ours. I didn't know how many pieces were going to be selected until they naturally rose to the top of our piles, surviving many vetoes and heated discussions. Coming away from the editors, it was my job, as chief editor, to put it all together and make it work. This required decisiveness and using my presidential veto, if you will, and seeking the advice of Dr. Coyne concerning issues of which I was not sure. After months of working with these pieces, moving from 105 to 29, these that I give to you now are those which spoke the loudest.

They do more than merely speak, however, these pieces sing: from Jessi Plueger's sense of line to Jessica Wheeler's understatement, from Beth Donahue's

humor to Cathie Stangl's metaphor, these pieces have voices. For this reason, I decided to organize the magazine according to author so that the writer's voice comes through. The pieces need to be understood within the context of the voice. Within the voice is that "something bigger."

I am more proud of this *Kiosk* than for any other thing that I have worked on during my career at Morningside. But the credit is not mine. I owe so many thanks to the people that served on the editorial boards: Ryan Barnes and Jeanette Wiederien for all their help reading the poems, Annie Dilocker and Jill Koerselman for their help sorting through the fiction, and especially Jenny Nicklin, who was my second-hand woman, going through both poetry and fiction submissions. Without these five editors and their talent as readers and critics, this *Kiosk* would have been a far inferior publication. I also need to thank everyone who helped me post calls for submissions and everyone I mass e-mailed for helping spread the word. Many thanks are owed also to my co-workers and manager at Kinko's for the donations made to *The Kiosk*, to Marcie in the English department (her hand rocks that cradle), to Tim Duggan, adjunct English professor and mightiest of wordsmiths, who helped proofread and edit copy, and finally to Larry and Linda in the Print Shop who put it all together in the final stages of production. All of these people and many more (whom I am sure to remember post-production) made this possible. And I cannot even begin to express my gratitude to Dr. Stephen Coyne.

I will not shy from the truth: I had intentions with this *Kiosk*. I wanted to do something a little bit different. I changed the layout and the design of the magazine. I also incorporated a cover art contest. I had wanted to move towards including creative non-fiction this year, a newer genre that is becoming more visible on the academic landscape, but, alas, that didn't work out.

In certain ways, that haunting ex-love is right: I cannot do this job. I get too involved in these things. I think it may be the curse of the thinking woman, of the thinking human. And now, on the eve of finishing this *Kiosk*, my last, I am apprehensive and afraid. I find myself unable to let it go. I want to keep these pieces for myself, tuck them into a ball and bounce them around my head for a while longer. But I am hopeful as I bounce that ball on to you, dear Reader.

Now, dear Reader, as you flip through the pages of this publication, know that many things are happening in the white spaces and also know much is behind the blackness. Do not take for granted the contrast. They are not just words: they are *hymns*. I am sentient that you will hear the voices which I give to you now, and that you will know that there is something out there, something black and white which is echoing, something bigger.

Good luck to you, dear Reader.

Jessi Plueger

Let Me Be Frank

Perhaps I could be Frank
because sometimes Jessi doesn't work so well.
Frank could be unintimidated
and forward
Frank could say what's on his mind
Frank could stop leaving the world behind
I could be Frank
perhaps

Shoe

lost
weaving between the letters of the alphabet
stop.
have you picked out a single thought yet?
go
speeding through the light again
wait.
how well can you erase sin?
jump
choices aren't made by decisions
pause,
although nothing's improved by revisions

Said Simply

the people dress in their face of the day

- not letting on that being is play

they prance around

in whatever attitude befitting

for playing along equals quitting

outside - la, la, la, la

inside - (unknown)

knowing what the brain does mean

is truly *is* and not seem

This Way Because...

I am a body
a body of a girl
I'm high-maintenance
I am a high-maintenance body of a girl
This way because
I like to be close to other bodies
occasionally the body of a boy
The body of a boy
is as easy as
The brain of the boy
wants it to be

Melissa Grout

Roommate

Long, slender, shaven
Lounging at my side
Study buddy
Book in her lap, curly locks dancing on shoulders of pale bronze
I speak, it all comes out

Spontaneous Blah!

She laughs, cackles, beams
I tingle

STARE

STOP!

Am I caught?
Blushing, pseudo-reading
Friend

Core of my universe

Despise

Lust

Attract attention

Her dimensions

Intellectual

Semi-sexual

Words

I uttered a polite greeting
(with some subliminal sexuality)
toward an unhealthy relationship
waiting to crack like an egg
against the skillet-edge
of my Words.

From the male I received
nothing
but the sick smell of training
and the distant stare
of the machina animata
processing commands.

From the girl I found Fear
in her instinctive defense
and irrational insecurity
about her cracker-jack wedding ring
when she barked about possession:
He has a wife!

Just as polite as before
(now with obvious sexuality)
I ignored the automaton
on a leash
and assured his master
that I was addressing only her.

Procreation for Consumption

A growl from my stomach
as I pondered existence
prompted me to create

my first grilled cheese sandwich.

Bread growing old
with mold and varicose veins
eats away at my patience,
pleading for praise
of its meaningless life,
fearing the inevitable

Disposal.

I decided to continue
my negligence
by substitution of pop-tarts
as the birth and death of the cheese of

Creation.

But is there not more
to life than cheese? Life is
not so bland
that it cannot be represented
by vanilla ice cream and a slab of Spam.
I threw these items
into the pan of pregnancy
along with a pickle and an empty
bottle of chardonnay.
My biological clock
impending over my work
chimed, the time is near.
I baked my seed
in the womb of the oven.
During this gestation
the oven violent,
blamed irrationality on the incessant

kicking of the alien
sandwich inside its body.

Thought I heard
this mothering beast scream,
DRUGS!
Until I realized
it was the buzzer
documenting time of

Conception.

My invention hurled
into my oven-mitt hands.
I loved my grilled cheese sandwich.
I bought it every beanie baby
ever made,
paid for its schooling,
cried at its wedding.
All the while
it never reciprocated love,
in fact, it went through life
aloof with apathy.
As I grew old
with mold
and varicose veins,
hunger
for that youth
methodically ate away
at my creation until
it accused me of senility.
Sentenced me to
the retirement home,
cemetery for elders
with food poisoning
from consuming the lives
of their offspring.
Is death, then, the meaning of life?
My stomach roared its last.

Starvation.

Reflection

Back in the day,
as they say,
my hands demanded
to be seen,
to be clean,
and all boys carried diseases
of a foreign frame of mind.

I could never greet the moon
from my room
while pretending to sleep,
always keep
the closet closed,
and i chose
to make an expense,
in a sense,
of the electricity
so I could see...
the Light.

But in pride
I confide
in those lies
that accumulate with my years,
and in fear
I hide
those lies
from the eyes
I despise,
is that...
wise?
Because I allow
my power
to diminish
when I cower.

In retrospect,
I reflect
on this text
as a song.
Strong.
Like the hands
of a hard-working man.
And then a test
to confess
that all your perfection
was only reflection
of your lack of direction.

So we can show our hands again.

Forgive me, Father

Forgive me, Father, for you have sinned. I've yet to admit confession.

I wear the same brand of genes as you, though mine are now torn and tattered. I wore them so many times without washing them clean again because mother wasn't always around to fix them. Now you may say I am less pristine than you and be right. It wasn't always the case.

You were unclean before as I now am. I remember when you held me against the wall with one hand clutching my neck so I would not fall. My feet could not reach the ground and I was flying above a world of pain. The wall was cold and comforting against my back, just like the fright that chilled my body in the face of your hot anger.

Mother, where were you when I tried to scream but my voice was strangled to an abysmal whisper? Did you help him build the wall behind my back?

I will never forget the night I did something forgettably wrong. That night you joined him in his iron-fisted rule. You both unleashed a mutual malice you had suppressed since before I was born to you, and because I was born to you and shared between the two of you, it must have been my fault. "Let's forget our own problems and focus on those of our daughter," your white-knuckled fists told father's before they all struck my face.

I couldn't see anything after that except explosions of red and blue behind my closed eyes as I was beaten to the floor in that fetal position that you loved me in. When you left me there, I opened my wet and burning eyes. I was in a tiny room, pink like your womb, and the walls were closing in.

Then I saw everything with the freshly washed eyes of Lazarus. I had died and been resurrected. I could start over my search for your love and forget my search for your forgiveness.

I left those walls behind and found you both outside grieving. I am not really dead, only different. Why did you cry? You hated me when I cried, father, so I hated you then, too. I'm just like you, really. We wear the same brand of genes.

I showed you I hated you both so that you'd love me more. "Look, mother, my knuckles get white just like yours did," my fist told her face.

Forgive me, father. I thought you knew. I'm just like you and your father before you.

From then on I was imprisoned behind bars of misunderstanding and distrust. They didn't understand me because they didn't understand themselves. If I was going to act like a baby, they were going to treat me like one. I had a tin cup full of tears to rattle across the bars of my crib.

But I was never again sentenced to death. I think they believed that violence had driven me crazy. It wasn't that; it was after that. I was institutionalized in my own home, and they would watch me like we used to watch the animals at the zoo. But they wouldn't touch me.

Over time my wounds scarred into an armored shell. I no longer longed for love. I longed to leave. The novelty of my ignominy eventually wore off, and they became bored with me. They let me go. I was free.

I met many men on the outside, but none of them compared to you, Father.

Then I met him. He was almost just like you. His fists felt the same. But he was weak, father. He always cried afterwards. If there's anything I've learned from you, it's that we won't tolerate crying. Tears inspire that wall of wrath (the one that you and mother built just for me) to close in on the weakness of a helpless victim.

I couldn't stop hitting him. My fists were clenched so tight with fury that my knuckles seemed to cut right through my skin. He wouldn't stop crying. Why doesn't he hit me again, father? "I dare you to hit me again!" my fists scream to his face.

He stopped crying. I think he stopped breathing. I stopped punching and saw that I was covered in his blood. It was all over my genes.

Mother, why won't you wash this blood away? Please don't shut me out—Forgive me, Father, for you have sinned. Now so have I. I'm just like you.

The World Series of Heaven and Hell

In Heaven and Hell, there are no distinct seasons, but the calendar still marks the months, and October can only mean one thing: baseball. This year, the World Series had been expanded to include teams from all over Creation, and Heaven and Hell both fielded excellent ball clubs. The Archangels were managed by God, and the Devils were managed by the Supreme Devil himself, Satan. The divisional playoffs had been tough, particularly for the Devils, who had only won their series over the Yankees by one run. In the bottom of the ninth inning of the seventh game, the Yankees star closer hit Beelzebub in the nose, loading the bases. Lucifer promptly hit one out of the park, and the game was over. Heaven's team easily won their particular division, advancing to the World Series by way of a ten-game winning streak.

Special allowances had been made for the extra traveling time between Heaven and Hell, incorporating an overnight stop in Cleveland, and the series itself was proving to be quite exciting. Games One and Two were won easily by the Devils, as the Archangels' best players, Raphael and Gabriel, were on the disabled list due to food poisoning (from bad pizza in Chicago). The Archangels rallied to win Game Three, the Devils claimed Game Four, and the Archangels' great pitching and hitting won Games Five and Six. By Game Seven, all of the firmament was involved, and the stadium just outside the Pearly Gates was packed. Angels, spirits, and demons of various sorts filled the stands, and traffic around the stadium was at a standstill because the Devils' fans screamed and ranted at the Archangel fans, who promptly blessed the Sinners and tossed handfuls of Grace around like confetti.

By gametime, tensions had soared to a fever pitch. The fans were so numerous that Moses was called in to "part the crowd" in order to get Elvis into the stadium to sing the National Anthems before he was due back in Purgatory. He gyrated his way through rousing renditions of "Heaven is My Home Now" and "Burning Ring of Fire," then Jimmy Hoffa threw out the first pitch, and the game was on.

The Devils batted first, and Satan put in his best hitters right away. They only succeeded in getting one run when Adolph Hitler grounded to second, but Noah dropped the ball. Jeffrey Dahmer scored on the error. The Archangels did well too, as God let David bat first, and he promptly hit it out of the park. Saint Peter, temporarily relieved of his duties at the Pearly Gates by Mother Theresa, got to third on a line drive to the fence, then scored on an RBI by Abraham.

The second through fifth innings were scoreless as the pitchers for both sides, Gabriel and Attila the Hun, threw shutout innings. By the top of the sixth, the fans were getting a bit frenzied, and the umpires were forced to call a time-out while bits of molten lava and chunks of gold that had been thrown by the fans were swept off the field. When the game resumed, Saint Francis hit a home run, which put the Archangels up by three. The Devils' fans were greatly upset, and a few offered to sell their souls to Satan in exchange for a win, then realized that they already had.

By now, Satan was livid and brought out his secret weapon, Goliath. Gabriel's arm was fatigued, and God was forced to put in Jacob, who promptly gave up two hits, and then Hitler connected with the ball and sent a homerun into the upper deck. By the Seventh Inning Stretch, when "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" was sung (poorly) by Harry Carey, the Devils had singed their Gatorade to a boil, and prayers were flying so thick around God that he had to put a few of the Saints in charge of taking messages.

The eighth inning passed uneventfully, and the ninth was soon at hand.

Goliath succeeded in getting on base with a bunt, and Stalin drove him home with a deep shot to center. Jacob walked one player, then gave up a run to Lucifer. By the time the inning was over, the Devils and their fans were already celebrating, but Heaven couldn't be counted out yet.

Jesus was up first for the Archangels and hit a double deep to left field. The Virgin Mary made a sacrifice fly to right, bringing Jesus home, then Raphael struck out. Adam was Heaven's only hope. God gave him the specific directions to walk and try to get Noah up to bat, but Adam, as usual, refused to listen. He swung at the first pitch... strike one. The second swing fouled into the stands... strike two.

Everyone in all Creation was on their feet. The demons stomped and cursed, and the angels flapped their wings and prayed. Attila, working for a win, suddenly cramped up and threw two balls, so Satan was forced to bring in Ghenghis Khan from the bullpen. After a few throws, he was ready, and he wound up for Adam.

As the pitch neared the plate, Satan blew a breath of flame at the batter and scorched off Adam's eyebrows, and he let the ball go by for ball number three. The crowd screamed deafeningly, and the gates of Heaven trembled with the noise. Adam stepped up to the plate. The pitcher snarled, selected his pitch, and let it go-- a wicked fastball straight across the middle of the plate. Adam closed his eyes and swung.

"Crack!!"

The Kiosk

The ball popped off the bat and soared deep over left field going... going...

The crowd was silent. God sat in his dugout and smiled as the ball arced toward the fence. Suddenly, he raised a finger, and a gust of wind carried the ball forward, over the fence, and beyond it. Gone!

The crowd roared in joy or lamentation, and God grinned while Satan boiled and fumed. Moses once again cleared a pathway through the crowd, this time to get the Devils back out to their bus from Hell. God and his Archangels kept their trophy in Heaven right next to the Holy Grail and the Ten Commandments, while the Devils went down to Hell (or at least Georgia) until next season.

Mary A. McMann

Fowl

Broken chicken bodies

On my bedroom carpet

Ritual sacrifice

Measuring Up

Dancing in the rain

Became a wet t-shirt contest

And I just lost.

Table 508

It had been a long night at work, and my feet and back had started to ache. I hadn't eaten all night, so I should have been feeling hungry. I'd smelled food for hours, though, so that seemed to have kept me feeling full. The kitchen was closed, and all my duties for the night were done. But I had one table left. A friendly middle-aged couple had come for some drinks and had already paid, but it looked as if they would be nursing them for a while. I decided to find my manager to see if she could take care of cleaning off this one table for me so I could go home and get something to eat. I found her behind the bar.

"Hey, Elaine," I said. "I've just got 508 left, they've already paid, and I've got everything else done. Want me to stick around?" This was my roundabout way of asking her if I could *please* go.

"Yes," she said and simply turned around.

Great, I thought. Guess I'll be sticking around here for nothing but a lousy couple of dollars an hour. Elaine was a beautiful girl, but it was too bad that her looks didn't make up for much in her personality. She'd had one steady boyfriend since I had started working for her three years ago. If sleek long brown hair, perfect skin, and a size six waist were what he was looking for, then he'd found his perfect woman.

I went to find a seat at the bar where I could watch the doorway for table 508 to leave. There were a dozen or so other people seated there. "Hey Henry," I said.

Our bartender turned around, "Yeah. How can I help you, Miss Kate?"

"Could I get a Bud Lite, *please*?" I didn't normally drink on the job, but I was practically done. Elaine wouldn't care.

"Sure thing. Need a mug?"

"Nah, thanks though." I liked it better straight from the bottle.

"You drivin' home?" he asked. He lowered his chin and raised his eyebrows accusingly. He had calm, dark eyes. I loved them.

"Nope. I've got Charlie coming to get me, whenever I call him."

"All right. But I could take you home if you needed."

I smiled. "No—thanks, though. Charlie said he would."

I could always count on Charlie when I needed him. One of my brothers had needed to borrow my car, so Charlie had offered to pick me up from work. He'd told me he didn't have any other plans, so he didn't mind. Charlie used to work here until his sister, Elaine, became manager.

Henry turned to get more drink orders, since the bar section of the restaurant wasn't closed yet, and my mind began to wander. Charlie would come to get me, and I would ask him if he had any plans. He would say no and then ask me the same question. I would say no. I would ask him if he was hungry, and he would say he didn't know. I would ask if he wanted to go get some drinks, and he would say he didn't care; he would only if I wanted to. We would go to his apartment and sleep until noon the next day. How depressing was that?

"Hey. I'm Paul. Is it all right if I sit here?" I turned to see a guy sitting down next to me, and he was directing the question at me.

Oh sweet Jesus, I thought. *This man is gorgeous. Stunning.* He smiled at me with a young Harrison Ford-haven't-shaved-since-yesterday-which-makes-me-even-more-smoldering smile. I was impressed that he didn't feed me a cheesy pickup line. Finally, I'd stumbled upon a man who knew how to meet ladies at the bar correctly.

I hoped I didn't gawk, but I might have, and then I smiled big—probably too big.

"Hi," I said. "How are you doing tonight?"

"Well, I'd say that *now* I'm doing just great. How are you?"

"Perfect. Thanks." Perfect? I thought. Why did I just say I was perfect? Why do I let words like that stumble out of my mouth?

"Perfect, huh?" He was teasing me. "I don't know if I could handle a perfect girl." His skin was tan, his brown hair was purposely messy for the 'fun' look, and I was sure he lifted more than just occasionally. He probably owned a gym. He looked like a guy who could definitely handle a perfect girl.

"Hey—that's not what I meant." He made me smile. I couldn't stop smiling and actually felt nervous. I really cared what he thought of me, and I shouldn't have. Dating him was out of the question anyway.

"Where are you from?" I asked. He had a southern accent. I turned in the bar stool and put my elbow on the bar and my chin in my hand.

"Wichita Falls, Texas. And you?"

"Here. So what are you doing all the way up in Lincoln?"

"Oh ... I'm here for a funeral. My grandmum."

Grandmum? Was that a word they used a lot in Texas? "I'm so sorry. Were you close?" My words were oozing with sympathy. I just wanted to grab him and hug him.

"Well, yes, I was. At one time. But I hadn't seen her for a while. So... seeing her this morning was kinda... weird." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. Shoot. So, anyway, my cousin is taking me out for a few drinks to catch up on

our stories before I go back home tomorrow.”

“Where’s your cousin?” I asked.

“Oh, he found a girl he knew, and I saw you sittin’ here, lookin’ kinda bored...”

“Yeah. I was. Thanks. I’m just waiting for my last table to leave...” And I am so glad you noticed me, I thought.

“So how do you like working here?” he asked.

“Well...” I briefly thought about it. I had enjoyed working here at first, but I had been wondering how long I would be working for Charlie’s big sister. I wanted to sound like a positive person, though. “Yes, I do like it here. I have some good nights and some bad nights.”

“So, was tonight a good night?”

“I would say so, yes. Other than mistaking two of my female customers for guys, and one of them claimed we worked together a couple of years ago. They stiffed me on the tip, but whatever.”

He laughed. “So, is that a Nebraska thing?”

“Not typically,” I said. “But if you’re a Texas thing, I think I need to move.”

He smiled and raised his eyebrows. “Oh really?”

I replied by looking down, blushing, and smiling.

“Hey, can I get you another drink?” he said. “Looks like that one’s about up.”

I hadn’t been watching the door very carefully to see if table 508 had left yet. I asked him to let me check on the table first, and they were still there. Great, I thought, I’m nervous to get back to him. I stayed out of Paul’s sight for a little bit so I could just think. Why hadn’t Elaine just offered to clean up the table for me so I could leave? Yes, I was enjoying talking to Paul. There was no doubt about that, but I felt guilty. He made me feel attractive, just from the way he looked at me with his bright eyes. I actually seemed to be able to come up with funny comments when I was around him. Around Charlie, I had hardly ever felt funny. For some reason that had always been an important issue to me.

When I got back to the bar, he asked again about the drink.

“I heard you weren’t driving home,” he said, at which I felt myself blush. He must have been listening to me talk to Henry, which meant he must have heard something about Charlie. I didn’t know what to say.

“I didn’t mean to embarrass you,” he said. “It’s just that it was hard not to notice you.” His compliments were subtle but very effective.

“Thanks. You mean that as a *good* thing, right?”

He laughed easily. “Yes, that’s definitely a good thing.” He sat quietly for

a second and just looked at me. I wasn't used to this. No, not at all, but he was charming. I wondered for a second if I was leading him on, but then I decided that I didn't care.

"I was fixin' to get another drink. Would you like another beer? It's on me," he said. "I'd like you to have another one."

"Oh, so now you're trying to get me drunk?" I was teasing, but I honestly didn't know if that was his intention once he said that.

"Yes, that's it. That's exactly it." He looked at me like I was a friend who had tried to make a joke, but it had turned out to be a lame one. "No, that's not it at all. I just enjoy your company."

I melted. "Sure, I wouldn't mind another one. I was just kidding, ya know."

He turned to Henry and ordered another beer for me. Henry would have shaken his finger at me if he could have. He knew Charlie and I were engaged. He also knew that Charlie was Elaine's brother and that I'd better be careful around her.

"Kate." It was Elaine. I hadn't even gotten a sip from my new drink. "Charlie's on the phone for you."

I turned bright red and headed directly for the phone, as if nothing were more important than her brother. "Hello," I said when I reached it.

"Hey, babe," he said. "When can I come pick you up? I'm getting bored around here." That was his idea of a compliment. He meant that he wanted me around. It was sweet in his own way.

"Well, I don't know. I'm waiting for a table to leave. I have everything else done, but they just won't go."

He sighed and didn't say anything for a few seconds, as if deciding what he should do next. "All right. I'm just gonna watch a movie 'til you call. 'Kay?"

I didn't care what he wanted to do while he was waiting for me, so I just agreed. "I'll call you as soon as I'm done, 'kay sweetie?" I said.

"Ok. Love you."

"Love you, too. Bye."

When I turned to go back to the bar, Elaine was standing a few feet away with her arms crossed. I got the feeling that she had blatantly listened to our conversation, and I stopped, expecting her to say something. She only shook her head and walked away.

I decided that I had nothing better to do than talk to Paul while I waited for 508 to leave, so I returned to my seat.

"Who was that?" he asked. Of course he would ask that. He was probably

even more curious because he'd heard that the caller's name was Charlie.

"It was my ride, wondering when I wanted to be picked up."

"I see." Maybe he wasn't all that interested. Why should I care. After all, he was from Texas.

"So what do you think about the Reds?" he asked, pointing at one of the bar TV's. We launched into a partially deep discussion about baseball, and what a great team the Cubs were. When I mentioned that all three of my brothers played baseball, he told me that all three of his sisters were musically inclined. When I told him that I played the guitar, he confessed that he had always wanted to learn, and that maybe sometime I could give him a couple of lessons. The subject of whether or not we were already seeing other people never came up, and I was glad. It was fun to flirt again. He seemed like a really great guy, and it was exciting to be doing something wrong.

We glanced around the bar, looking for his cousin, and found him talking to another girl. "Looks like he's quite the popular one here," said Paul.

When Elaine called my name again, I jumped. "508 has been gone for the past fifteen minutes. You can clean it up and go if you want." I wondered why she hadn't told me sooner. She was probably just waiting to see how caught up I was in Paul.

I smiled and thanked her. She left us, and I told Paul I'd be right back. I left to clean up the table and wondered what was next. Should I call Charlie and leave, which would seem right, or should I go back to talk to Paul? The truth was, I'd been thinking about leaving Charlie for almost a year now, but I just wasn't sure. He was such a nice guy and would do almost anything for me, but I had always wondered whether he was truly the one. Talking to someone like Paul was another reason why I shouldn't be with Charlie. Why would I be talking to Paul if I truly loved Charlie? But I didn't want to hurt him, the man with whom I had spent so many years—the guy who trusted me and loved me so much that he had asked me to marry him. And I had said yes.

"Talking? *Phub*. Talkin's nuttin'," I said to myself as I cleared away the dishes.

When I turned from the table to take the dishes to the kitchen, Elaine was standing there. "Don't hurt him, Kate," she said. "Just leave now, and you won't hurt either of them. And you won't be on my bad side."

I didn't say anything and continued to the kitchen. It would have been nice if she would stop stalking me. I had known I should leave, and now I was going to. Before I went back to Paul at the bar, I called Charlie and asked him to come get me. Charlie asked me if I wanted to do anything after he picked me

up. I told him I just wanted to rent a movie and stay in. I didn't want to risk seeing Paul at another bar or anywhere else that night.

When I got back to Paul, I apologized and told him that I needed to leave. I felt like a teenager again, as if I had been grounded. Life was completely unfair, but I understood—certain things had to be done, or supposedly had to be done. Still, I couldn't help but wonder about this guy. Could he be even more wonderful than Charlie? I convinced myself that it wasn't possible, and that he was probably just a player out for a good time. Why would he be interested in me anyway?

Paul looked confused. I wanted him to give me his number, but he didn't offer it. I didn't ask. Thanking him for the drink, I told him honestly that I hoped that he would be visiting Lincoln again.

"Stop in again if you come back," I said.

"Yeah, maybe I will," was all he said. I had hoped he wouldn't be offended, but he did look kind of confused.

I left, regretting every word of that last part of our conversation and waited outside the restaurant. My thoughts were racing. Should I go back inside and explain it all? Should I get his number, or at least give him mine? What could I possibly do to make myself feel better about this situation and about him?

I looked down and noticed something glistening in the crack of the sidewalk. I rubbed my eyes and bent down to look closer. It looked like a tiny jewel, so I reached down and pinched it between my fingers, bringing it closer to my face for a better look. I wasn't sure how I had noticed it, but it was similar to a clear gem, about the size of the metal tip of a ballpoint pen. My thoughts began wandering again, but this time they were about the new shiny object. What was it? Who lost it? Could it be a diamond? What would I do if it were a diamond? Should I keep it? Take it to a jeweler and see if it is authentic? Or maybe it was just cubic zirconium, or probably even just glass. I didn't know anything about jewelry.

Suddenly the door opened next to me, and I turned to see Elaine. My heart pounded.

"What're you doing?" she asked.

"Just waiting for Charlie," I said. "Shouldn't be too long."

"Good decision."

There was something in that statement that really ticked me off.

"I was just talking to that guy, you know. It didn't mean anything," I said.

"I know," she said. She changed the subject. "What are you looking at?"

"Oh, nothing. Nasty hangnail. Stings." I hid the shiny object in my hand

and pretended to bite off a hangnail.

"Uh-huh." She didn't believe me but must have decided not to press it. She turned to go back inside and said, "Well, hope you don't have to wait too long. See ya later."

Nosy bitch, I thought. Why wouldn't she just leave me alone? Had she just come outside to see if I was actually waiting for Charlie? What else would I be doing out here?

I waited a couple more minutes for Charlie. During that time I considered what I should do both about Paul and about this gem. I didn't even know if it was a gem—it could have been a fake. It probably was, otherwise somebody would have been more careful with it. But what if it was real?

When Charlie arrived, I considered running inside to slip Paul my number. How hard would that be? Who cared what Elaine thought? Actually, I cared. And so I got in the car and gave Charlie a kiss. But before I closed the car door, I tossed the jewel back onto the sidewalk. It was probably nothing, and I didn't want to raise my hopes by keeping it.

Appliance Envy

My heart hurts.
Literally.
Like it's been thrown
from my body
crushed
stomped
flattened
like liver in a frying pan
with onions.

I hate that stench,
it lingers for days.
You soak the
pan and still the
burnt on
stuck on
fried on
organ clings.

Caramelized onions
slither down
the drain as the disposal
wreaks havoc on
forced entrees.

If I could have
just one wish,
I'd be turned into a
gnashing, stainless
steel-toothed appliance,
placed precisely
in the bottom
of a sink
where I could
devour and destroy
that which gets fried
time and time again.

Epiphany

Mental.

The word I heard
my brother speak into
the phone as he stood
in the hallway and the
door slowly closed.

Sterile.

White walls,
a green garbage can
and his back that I tried to
focus on through the
crisscrossed lines of wire
pressed between glass
in the window of the door.

Pity.

I felt sorry for
the wires in the
window and spent days
trying to figure out how long
they had been held captive.

Funny

what I remember.
Screams down the
hall and shrieks of begging
that echo all night long.

Terrified

and relieved at the same time
when I realized they were
my own.

Twinges

from Russia with love: a found poem

Thank you for being
what you are. You talk
to me and it gets
better - very quickly.
Still hurts a lot, but the pain
is different.

It recedes and transforms into
dull pulsations.
Do not get me wrong. It is not
masochistic revelation,
just written attempt to get some relief
through talking to you.

I twisted when you said
you wanted to take my
face into your hands.
It was a scarring coincidence of time
and desire.

I know myself to some
extent and I know the morning will
be hard. I will be
better, but it will take time.

I want, I want, I want...
so many things with you.
Indian Sages are right,
There should be Days of
Silence.

Cathee Phillips : alumna

One falling leaf

Grief is a stalker
Coming upon you unaware
No matter how many locks you have on the door

It is the wind that slips in under the eaves
And the pressed leaves falling from an old book
It is your reflection in the window

Hours are lost in seconds
Months in minutes
Years in days

And though you stretch your hand back to Adam's rib
What is done cannot be undone only done and done
Again
And again

And one red maple leaf becomes your world

A Quaint Little Paradise

I have often passed the quaint, blue house on my afternoon jogs and thought that it looked quite out of place among the decaying houses with unkempt yards. The house, which sits on the corner of 5th Street and Kennedy Avenue, is not only well-kept on the outside, with short, green grass and tulips that always seem to be in bloom along the side, but is (through the windows) visibly clean on the inside, as well. I recall jogging past the house around Thanksgiving a few years ago when a cookie-baking smell drifted out, and all I could think of was *Leave it to Beaver* and *Dobie Gillis*. Now the house reminds me more of the Wilson's home from *Dennis the Menace*. I often imagine my own mother and father living in it—my father fussing over the lawn and lounging in his unwrinkled bathrobe, reading the Sunday paper and smoking a pipe that brings him peace of mind instead of cancer and emphysema, while my mother—wearing a crisp white apron that is neither a sign of servitude nor vanity—bakes fresh cupcakes and cookies in a sweatless kitchen. However, this image comes to my mind less frequently as I think of the owner of the house, whom I stumbled upon a few months ago as I stood on the sidewalk gawking through an open window at the back of the house.

One afternoon in April, I thought I'd run by to check on the tulips. I approached the house from the back, and the wind whipped around sharply, stinging my eyes. As I got close, I could see the enormous, beautiful French windows and the back of a figure sitting on a stool just inside. When I reached the back gate, I could see clearly that a young man was painting on a large canvas. Without realizing it, I was standing still, watching him apply the final strokes to a castle on a sandy beach. I was awed not by the painting itself, but by the actual activity of painting—his elbow elegantly arched in a gentle curve and the soft moving of his wrist made his whole arm sway drowsily as if dancing. It seemed almost appropriate that the man, surrounded by a neighborhood ridden with noise, crime, and a general slumliness, was painting in his perfect little house. He was an artist plugging away at his passion despite his surroundings, and I seemed to disregard that the painting was a melodramatic castle on a beach—the kind of painting that is replicated thousands of times, yet still seems original in the mind of its artist. Untouched by his surroundings, he had established my paradise home and used his unspoiled talent to paint his.

The man stretched his arms out to his sides and then brought them over his head, clasping his hands together around the paintbrush. He held the posi-

tion for a few seconds while he straightened his back and puffed out his chest, then he slowly let his hands down and turned around on his stool, glancing out the window. I froze with a sudden terror as his eyes met mine, and I realized with a flush what *peeping Tom* really means. I frantically bent over and clutched my knee as though I were in pain. In a hurry he stood, set his paintbrush down, upset a glass of murky water with his elbow, and rushed out of the room. Terrified, I sat down on the sidewalk and continued clutching my knee. Seconds after I sat down, the man appeared at the side door of the house and came running toward me, asking, "Are you all right?"

"I think I'm okay," I said, craning my neck awkwardly to look up at him.

Catching me off guard, he asked what I had done to my knee, and I stammered something about a crack in the sidewalk and an old basketball injury. I looked the sidewalk up and down and found nothing but smooth concrete all the way around the house. The young man ignored my lie and asked in a concerned tone, "Do you need a doctor or something?"

"I think I'm going to be fine, I just need to sit for a few minutes," I said.

"I could take you inside and get you an ice pack or something," he offered, waving his hand towards the house.

"That's okay, I think I'm going to be fine."

He looked genuinely concerned. "At least let me take you in to get some water."

Flustered, I accepted his invitation into the house. He reached down and took my hands in his, gently pulling me to my feet before I could object. I stood flushed and breathless for a second while his warm body shielded the wind from my watery eyes. He was at least two inches taller than I, and he was standing so close that I could feel his breath. For a split second I felt ten years younger, like I was back at my high school homecoming dance and the guy I had a crush on was about to ask me to dance. But the man offered his shoulder, not a dance. I took it and hobbled into the house with him.

He eased me into a chair at the kitchen table and introduced himself as he opened the refrigerator and took out a bottle of water. He assured me it was fresh and asked if I jogged often. Not particularly listening—I was busy looking at the pictures on the wall and wondering how water could go stale—I replied that I jogged almost everyday. He patted his belly with his hand and said, "I've been meaning to start jogging myself. Just haven't gotten around to it yet."

I looked at the man—his black hair was a messy tangle as though he had just gotten out of bed, he needed a shave, and the shirt he was wearing was covered with paint, but he had a warm smile and intense, round hazel eyes. He

looked like he needed a hot shower and a trip to the barber's more than a jog. Nonetheless, I smiled at the man's polite remark and looked at a painting of a vase with flowers in it hanging on the wall.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

It looked incredibly familiar, but I just said I liked it very much and asked if he had done it himself. He smiled, ran his hand through his hair and said he had done them all. He pointed his slender fingers around the room to numerous paintings that hung on the walls. One picture was of a kitten rolling around with a ball of yarn. Another depicted two butterflies sitting on bright purple and pink flowers. Above the sink was a portrait of a brown horse galloping in a meadow. No longer interested in the paintings, I asked if he lived alone and to my astonishment, he said, "Yes." The quaint little blue house belonged to an artist—it was unbelievable. He was no Beaver Cleaver and he certainly wasn't George Wilson. He was just a guy living in a blue house. I looked about the spotless kitchen with amazement (there wasn't even a dirty dish in the sink) and wondered if he had a maid, but decided not to ask, because I was afraid his answer would be "no."

We sat in an awkward silence for a few minutes as I sipped my water, rubbed my knee, and pretended to be interested in his paintings. Every time I looked from a painting to him, he was staring back at me, his eyes burning with pride and his smile about to burst. I just sat and looked and smiled back until I finished the water. "Well," I said to him, holding up the empty bottle, "I appreciate everything, but I have to get going."

He stood up abruptly, almost knocking over his chair, and asked excitedly, "Would you like to see the painting I just finished?"

Anything was better than sitting with this man in his kitchen, so I said, "I'd love to," and limped along behind him as he led me into the back room of the house where his castle sat on the beach.

The spectacular painting seemed somehow disappointing as I stood next to it trying to muster a politely awed gaze. He was immensely proud and said, "I just finished it when I looked out the window and saw you." It really was charming the way he put a strange meaning behind the words "saw you"—as though it was mad love at first sight. He shuffled closer to me and took the empty water bottle out of my hands while he leaned his head in towards mine, letting his hair fall on my forehead. His breath smelled strongly of cloves, and I turned my head away to look at the painting.

"It really is beautiful," I said as I silently thought that the painting looked a little chunky up-close.

The Kiosk

He backed away. "Have you ever done one?" he asked.

"I could never make anything that beautiful," I lied, not taking my eyes off the picture.

"They're really wonderful things," he said. "Easy to do once you get the hang of it." This seemed an odd thing to say about painting so I asked him what he meant, but he looked confused by my question.

Suddenly his face lit up, and he seemed to understand something. "You thought I painted those from scratch?"

"Scratch? What are you talking about?"

Then his smile cracked into laughter. "It's a paint-by-number," he said.

I leaned towards the painting to inspect it. I could see tiny, black numbers underneath the light paint, and I suddenly felt the urge to hit the young man, who was saying, "It's like coloring books for adults. You should try one sometime." I gave him a blank look, and he smiled back. "Actually, I had to special order this one," he continued, "that's why it's so big. I'd done all the ones in the stores, so I had to write to the company and ask if they had more."

I decided I really had to leave before he made me furious. I attempted to make up a lie about a business meeting, but I was so shocked and flustered, I stuttered something about a paint-by-meeting at the office on the beach and, forgetting to limp, bolted out of the house and down the street without looking back.

I don't jog past the house at 5th and Kennedy anymore, but I frequently try to imagine it in black-and-white with a cookie-baking smell about it. I found a tiny paint-by-number of a blue house with a line of deep red tulips in a single neat row across the front of the house. I threw away the petite containers of paint from the kit, and the picture now hangs colorless on a single nail in my bedroom. I often look at the little numbered image and smile as I think of my father walking barefoot through the yard, the thick grass tickling him between his toes, and my mother sitting in a rocker on the front porch with a tall glass of cold lemonade in her hand. A quaint little paradise.

Bush

If Bush looked less
like a monkey, I might take
him seriously.

Untouched

A girl sits
on a gurney
in an emergency room.
Her head,
round like a globe,
has translucent
skin and no hair.

Her lanky limbs
sit like they are
too frail to move
or touch.
She wears
hot-pink nail
polish and purple
earrings shaped
like butterflies.

Pale as death,
she sits with
her back hunched
so the ridges in her
spine are visible
through the light
hospital gown.

In her lap she holds
a white plastic basin
into which she has
been vomiting.

But she sits with her
legs crossed
holding the basin like
it is nothing—
sitting like any other
four-year-old would
sit in front of the tv
on Saturday morning
with a bowl of Fruit
Loops balanced
in her lap.

She sits
like there is no pain,
like she is not holding
her own sickness,
like there is no sadness—
like the word *terminal* is
not final.

In the Awe of Fire

A family stands on their front
lawn as their home is swallowed
by a fire whose flames
cut high into the dark sky,
scorching the watching moon.
The four are struck by
the agonizing beauty
of the flames,
the crackling
of splintering wood,
the fierce smell
of smoke.
They stand huddled
together, the man speechless
from awe, the woman
weeping quietly, the children
feeling their father tremble.
Sirens sound in the distance,
but the family is frozen in time—
in that moment when,
like the fire against the sky,
there is a frame of light in the pain.
They wish to stand in
solitude for eternity,
but the moment will soon
be torn away
when the sirens arrive,
igniting the devastation and reality.
For now they stand,
slightly swaying from
the impending grief,
and they are grateful for the
single moment of remove.

Randy Uhl : alumnus

Tender

Cut my teeth on the boys growing up
Skinned my knees searching for salvation
or giving it
Trying to make heads and tails of it all

Misspelling love
There were nights
I'd give myself away
and wake feeling spent

But my dues are paid
and I've earned more than boys
still coming out
of their mother
boys who say they love you
then come
to realize they are incapable
of making change

I must give them credit, though,
they knew the right words
but talk is cheap
and bad pennies
are a dime-a-dozen.
Now I owe it to myself
to start making sound investments.

Pushing August

This year's love
is pushing August
and last year's
left two summers ago
after telling me to get lost.
So I did

...and I was.

Now I find myself
counting days.
May bleed straight to October
so I celebrate each September
by dismembering calendars
and merlot...

and trying hard to forgive
June and July.

Fighting the Cold

Myra Ellen didn't care if it cost another one hundred and twenty dollars for season tickets. If it meant that she could sit rink-side it was well worth it. She would have gladly paid twice that if she had to and besides, she always had her beer and cigarette money to dip into if it came to that. That's what she called it, the money most people spent on beer and cigarettes. Since she neither drank nor smoked it usually added up to a nice sum at the end of the month. For as long as she could remember, fifteen years in all, she had sat in the same seat, in the same row, cheering the same team. With her coat in the seat next to her, she had plenty of room to stand and shout each time an opposing member took a spill or to yell if a referee made a bad call.

It wasn't that she craved a front seat for violence or the sound of bodies slamming into each other. In fact, even the crack of her own knees as she weeded her garden made her wince. No, it was something else entirely. Being that close, she had seen her share of split lips, parted brows, and missing teeth. It was all part of the game.

Three winters ago she actually spied a small canine lodged in the ice after a brutal fight broke out between a guard and a left wing. She remembers its whiteness against the pool of blood slowly freezing around it, like a single marshmallow in a cup of hot chocolate. She actually contemplated, for a moment, reaching in her handbag for a fingernail file to dig it free. She would have, too. She loved souvenirs, especially anything hockey: programs, wild pucks, banners. Myra even had a mouth guard from a very unlucky player who lost it during the '86 play-offs. That tooth would have been the pinnacle of her collection. The thought of not having it had made her sick inside, but the yellow-jacketed, blue-haired woman with "STAFF" stenciled on her back kept a close watch. Myra knew that if she so much as inched her way to the opening of the rink the old bird would appear and snap at her to get back in the stands. To be on the safe side she stayed put. The myth still circulated that an overzealous spectator, chasing a stray puck, lost a finger to a skate blade a few years back. It was after that the staff adopted a "no civilians on the ice" rule. Myra was still unable to convince herself to order a hot dog from the vending stand for fear of conjuring up visions of a curled, pink grub and the trail they said it left as it was caught in the melee and passed from player to player. When she retold the story she always added that the finger was retrieved after it became the only goal of the evening. Believing the story and sometimes the minor fib she tacked on gave her cause to

keep her seat. Still, she would have loved to get her hands on that tooth.

When the buzzer sounded at the end of the first period, it switched off the film projector behind her eyes and jolted her back to the arena. Lately, Myra found herself drifting off and thinking about the past seasons all too much and tonight was no different. The momentary distraction, however, was welcomed. Tonight's match was more of a rally so the excitement was quite low-key. As much as she loved the game, as much as she loved to be in the front row and feel the rush of air as the skaters passed, there was a drawback to being so close. The cold from the ice, like garden ivy, climbed over her feet and crept up her legs to choke her circulation. She tried thick tennis shoes. She tried boots. She even tried boots over thick tennis shoes, but when one sits still long enough it's easier for the cold to set in. Forgetting about the dull thunder in her shins and calves, even for a few minutes, was always welcomed.

Years earlier her legs could take it. She was younger then, and she had Ricky to chase around. He loved the sport as much as she did, and these Saturday matches became their weekly rituals. Jumping to her feet when a point was scored, throwing her hands up to be part of the wave, not missing a single hockey calisthenic with her son, these all contributed to the ever-widening road map across the back of her legs. She used to have lovely legs. Her husband called them "gams" back when she wasn't afraid to wear shorts in public.

The score board counted down twelve minutes until the next period. Time enough for her to get up and walk around, get the blood pumping. If she didn't, she knew she would be cuddled up all night with a heating pad. Also, time enough for the zamboni man to make his trips across the ice. Normally, she would love to stay and watch the monster machine chew up the ice and spit out water to freeze in the cracks. It fascinated her how such a large contraption could keep traction on the rink, even when the driver, a moustached, Italian-looking fellow, waved to the crowd without shifting his eyes to make the turn. She thought the audience squealed more for him and his snow cone maker, with "The IceMan Cometh" painted on the side, than they did for the players. She once heard someone call him Vito. To Myra, he looked like a Vito.

Grabbing her handbag, she stood and felt the pleasure-pain course through her legs. She had to steady herself on the arm of her seat for a moment till she regained full use of them. *Leg-warmers*, she thought. Maybe I'll take some of that beer and cigarette money and invest in leg-warmers. She spread her coat over the seats to let others know they were taken. Letting a fat boy with nacho cheese on his face pass, she eased out into the walkway. The aroma of coffee caught her nostrils. A cup of coffee would warm her up and go great with the candy choco-

late pretzels she had in her purse. Buying over-priced treats at the vendor stand was something she did on special occasions, like the championship matches or upsets no one expected. Tonight hot coffee and pretzels would do. In fact, the thought put a smile on her face.

She bought her coffee from a woman older than her but probably half the age of the blue-haired rink police. She was quite friendly, with eyebrows pencilled on that arched too high in the middle and gave her an unchanging look of surprise. That made Myra smile even more. The coffee was hot and bitter, burning as it flooded into her stomach. She grabbed an extra napkin from the stack on the counter and turning, she felt her blood and smile drop away from her face. The coffee she had just swallowed seemed to lose its direction and head upward. She thought she would vomit, so against the counter she steadied herself for a second time.

She had not lain eyes on Quentin Travers in close to ten years. Not since the summer's end after Ricky's funeral, had she seen him. That must have been right before he left for school. He had been in her head for what seemed a lifetime, moved in, set-up house, but it had been years since they had come face to face. Now they were, and she was sure her feet would slip out from beneath her.

"Mrs. Jennings!" The words felt like a gunshot. "How are you? I mean Myra. I can call you Myra now, can't I?"

Her first instinct was to apologize for spilling her coffee at his feet, but as she searched for words, she found the styrofoam cup still in her hands. Her uneven coral lipstick created a cracked crescent moon around the rim and she suddenly wished she were back with Vito and the blue-haired worker and everyone else that wasn't him.

"Um, yes. Myra. Please." Her words sounded to herself as if she were speaking underwater; like they were fighting to rise out of her. "Fine," she managed to add, half expecting a bubble to come out with it.

"Wow! It's been a while hasn't it?" The shots continued, "Hope Mr. Jennings," he corrected himself, "Um... Arthur's doing well. Send him my best." Then, without giving her a chance to speak, not like she could, he continued shooting words. "Hey, I'm teaching now; sixth grade science in Boulder. It's winter break so we thought we would fly back to see Mom and Dad."

We? There was a "we"? Myra was sure she heard a "we."

"My wife's here somewhere," he said, looking around as if she might be in their peripheral. "I had to bring her to see a Seal's game before we went back. I got her interested in hockey when we were dating and now she's hooked."

There was that "we" word again. Now it was answered... almost.

"The kids love it too, but at three and five they are into everything. We left them with Mom and Dad. I think they wanted to spend some time with them before we went back. It makes the nest seem less empty."

We? Wife? Children? She didn't know them, any of them, but they cut her to the pink.

"Well, I better find Jackie. She gets a little nervous in places she doesn't quite know."

Myra knew exactly what Quentin meant. For years she had avoided the unfamiliar for fear of situations just like this. Then the thought that she and his wife had something in common made her knees buckle under her. Reaching out, he grabbed her, unexpectedly, and pulled her tight to him. The hug caught her off guard or saved her, she wasn't sure. His warm cheek brushed hers, and her mind flew ages back to the napkin she would wet with her own spit to wipe the dirt from Ricky's face.

"I'll write," he whispered in her ear. "I'll even send pictures of the whole fam damily." Chuckling at the pun he made, he pulled back and added, "Take care."

"Yes. Please to- do." She meant to say "please do" and "you too," but they slurred together. Shaking her head to clear the confusion, she murmured, "Good bye," and he floated away and into the crowd.

Trying hard to catch her breath, Myra found it difficult to move forward. Completely unaware of the shoulders she was bumping into or the paths she was cutting off, she skated through the strangers without the slightest feeling of the floor beneath. She dropped the full, cooling cup of coffee in a trash can and fished clumsily into her handbag for keys as she slipped to the exit. She arrived at her car without remembering the walk and drove from the parking lot without letting the engine warm up. This was something she was a fanatic about, but not tonight. The cold outside didn't much matter right now.

On the drive home, lights from passers-by flashed in her eyes, but it was the memories that blinded her. She tried not to think of the black ice on the morning road or how Ricky was thrown from the car. It tore at her to remember finding Quentin sitting with him, dazed, still alive. He had been the last one to hear her son's voice, and now she could barely remember it. The tears were so thick she had to brush them away.

She pulled off onto the shoulder once to vomit and then again to dry-heave, but when she reached her driveway, a feeling of stillness surfaced. Taking a deep breath and saying a silent prayer, she put it all on ice and stepped through the

doorway he had tracked through so many times.

Quietly Myra walked into her bedroom. Undressing, she left on only her slip and crawled beneath the covers with the tickets crumpled unrecognizably in her hand. Laying her back against Arthur's, she was careful not to touch the cold soles of her feet to his legs. The last thing she wanted was to wake him. Myra didn't feel like talking tonight or explaining why she was home early. What she wanted, more than anything else, was to be dead to the world. Somewhere, in the gray between sleeping and waking, she got her wish, but not before she made her decision. Tomorrow she would search the paper for baseball schedules and shop in the afternoon for a new coat.

Jessica Wheeler

Busboy

His thin hair is parted
just left of the middle,
a feathery scar
that traces the curve of his skull
before flaring out
into the shining bald spot.
The coarse grey strands
cover his head like
a thread-worn blanket,
(the scalp peeks through
boldly from the gaps)
clinging to it, slick with oil
and sweat or perhaps some brand of hair
gel for men -
the kind that comes in a cheap tin,
like Super Slick
or Dapper Dan.
His frame is bent, shoulders
rounded as his withered arms
perform their pathetic chores,
pushing his cart and piling
dirty dishes with half-eaten
dinners. He moves like an apology,
shuffling down the aisle
throwing bitter glances,
he scrapes the plates of patrons
(as young as he used to be)
that think of this man
(older than they will ever be)
as a boy.

Pompoms and Pumps

She was a cheerleader
in high school, I just
know it. She's got that look
about her that says she's skirted
dogs like me
every day of her life.

An aged cheerleader who comes
home in her pleated skirt
dog-tired. To ease sore muscles,
she drinks a vodka rocks, every day,
looking at the clock to watch time pass and
in the bottom of the glass to find her high school spirit.

She dreamed of being a cheerleader
every day, when she was a kid and felt
like it, too scared to look at the boys
in high school. Her best friend
was the stray dog she picked up
on the outskirts of town.

When she was a cheerleader
in high school, at the basketball game
against the Bulldogs, she caught Ryan Hardie
eyeing the thigh at the edge of her skirt.
That look has been in her dreams
almost every day since.

She didn't like being a cheerleader after
the boys kept trying to get up her skirt
to get a look underneath
and she cried every day
and her dog died that year.
She was a sophomore in high school.

Now she's a grown-up cheerleader.
She goes to work every day and walks
the dog she got when she moved out
on her own and thinks back to high school
and worries that she's losing her looks while
she carefully presses the pleats of her skirt.

Boy, she had to be a cheerleader in high school.
She's got that look about her that says she's skirted
dogs like me every day and worries about the day she won't have to.

Consolation

Look at it this way,

she says with an untrue smile.

Your half of the bed
will now be as occupied
as the ring finger
of my left hand.

Dry Bones

Slip yourself into this skin
all the way up to the neck.
There's room for two;
room for you to
wind around
bind around my
dance around my bones
and feel the tendons
jump under your touch
muscles bunch and bend for you.
Slide into my veins and
tingle in
mingle in my
travel in my blood.
There's room for you to
slip yourself under this skin;
race through my body
all the way up to the heart.

Caligo memnon

I.

To hate you would
be divine. I could
hide that hatred,
tuck it in my belly
where it could feed
on me, a growing
child. I want to
despise you.

II.

You have wings.
Didn't I tell you?
I found them one day
when you asked me
to scratch your back.
They join just between
your shoulder blades,
that place you can't quite reach.
It's no wonder
you didn't notice them.

III.

There are butterflies
whose wings are patterned
to look like the eyes
of an owl.
It is a natural form
of defense.
Your wings look remarkably
like these.

IV.

The eyespots on your wings
are mesmerizing,
even when you fly
away. If I hated you
enough, I think I could
rip them off.
They would tear
from your skin like paper.
I would grind them
to ash powder
and snort that shit
like pixie sticks.
It would be the only time
you left me high.

V.

Without those wings,
it would be easy
so easy to swat you
away the next time
you fall out of the sky
and land in my lap.



