

# THE KIOSK

2005  
Volume 67





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# *The Kiosk*

2005  
Volume 67

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# Creative Writing Awards

First Place

*The End of Nothing*

by Emily Kesten

Second Place

*Sleep Timer*

by Cathie Stangl

Third Place

*Poem From the U of L*

by Rick Rector

Honorable Mention

*My Kaakaa Muse*

by Maureen Kingston

Honorable Mention

*Abuelito Négro and Nanichi*

by Gretna Sanchez

Cover Art

Benjamin J. Washburn

## About this year's judge

Matt Mason earned his M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of California, Davis, where he taught poetry and fiction writing. Over 100 magazines, newspapers, and anthologies have published his poetry, and his eighth chapbook, "When The Bough Breaks," just came out from Lone Willow Press in late March. He loves poetry slams, open mics, literature festivals – all the different flavors of writing.

All entries are judged blindly by the editors, and no entry receives special consideration. Staff members are eligible for contest placement, but are not eligible for prize money.

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# Editor's Foreword

## by Jessi Plueger

The 67th volume of *The Kiosk* has kept with Morningside's tradition of high standards of writing, but to keep with the idea that college is all about experimentation and growth, *The Kiosk* has gotten a bit of a revamping, which we hope will add to its charm.

In the last couple of years *The Kiosk* staff has experimented with the magazine and reformatted it to "magazine size," added the creative nonfiction genre, put color on the cover, and we continue to explore ways for improvement, sort of the way Frankenstein pulled pieces and ideas and sewed them together into one cohesive project – sort of. Not that *The Kiosk* wasn't a fine publication to begin with. Anything that gives students a chance to express themselves creatively is already a good thing in my book.

This year's authors have reached deep inside themselves ripping out metaphors, humor, parallels, nostalgia, perspective and research in all its glistening intestinal glory.

Some of the things that really brought this magazine to life were Gretna Sanchez and Lacey Bensink's memorable metaphors, and Cathie Stangl and Maureen Kingston's use of humor and sarcasm; not to mention their unique perspectives.

Marcie Ponder and Emily Eaton have a way with sentimentality and nostalgia, while Mallory Trudell and Emily Keston have talent for gluing eyeballs to the page.

Cliff Thompson used several interesting parallels in his poetry, as did Jayne Vondrak, but she also added another level to her poetry by doing research.

Diverse expression is what *The Kiosk* is all about. It took many people to stitch this wonderfully eclectic issue together. We have seen the not-so-dull eye of the creature open,

and after breathing a sigh, we present it to you, the reader.

As the faculty advisor of *The Kiosk*, Steve Coyne has helped me with all of my silly questions, whether by answering them, turning me away to decide for myself, or sending me to Marcie for help.

I would like to thank Terri McGaffin and John Kolbo for all of their help in Graphic Design as well.

Thank you also to Cathie Stangl and Mark Clark for keeping a sense of humor and being very understanding.

All of the editors were very patient with my continuous questioning, new-found disorganization and were precise in their judging of submissions. I offer them my many, many thanks.

Thank you to Dr. Bill Deeds, Vice President and Dean of the College, for all of his support.

Thank you also to the manager of the printshop and mailroom, Larry Watters, and Assistant Director of the Communications Center, mailroom, and printshop, Linda Olsen, for all of their help with the printing.

My Nick was very gracious by being my kicking dog; always there for me to kick around – to let my frustrations out.

I would also like to thank Matt Mason for judging this year's *Kiosk*.

And, finally, thanks to my mom, who always told me, even when the stitches were visible, everything looked nice and sounded good. And, as far as the final product goes, I hope you agree; good job everyone.





# How To Write A Story

by Cathie Stangl

## 1) Avoid Clichés.

The problem with writing is that it has all been done before. Jack Kerouac ruined road trips. Sylvia Plath and Susanna Kaysen ruined insane asylums. Charlotte Perkins Gilman ruined insane people in general. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker ruined the suppression of blacks and women, as well as rape and incest. Jean Shepherd ruined humorous nostalgia. Between E.B. White and John Steinbeck, all the stories about farm animals have been ruined (George Orwell didn't help any either). In fact, John Steinbeck ruined the Depression, too. George Orwell and Aldous Huxley ruined dystopias and utopias. Epics went out with Homer and Beowulf. J.R.R. Tolkien ruined made-up epics. Mary Shelley ruined monster stories. Stephen King, Anne Rice, and Tom Clancy ruined all genre writing. Romance novels were ruined from the beginning. Ernest Hemingway ruined the simplistic style. William Faulkner ruined stream of consciousness. He also ruined non-linear time and the mentally challenged. Everything slow moving was ruined a long time ago by the British writers, and then pounded into the ground by Thomas Wolfe (any novel where the main character is not born for forty to sixty pages is wrong). Everything quick that was left after Hemingway was ruined by J.D. Salinger, who also ruined what was left of the bildungsroman. I could go on, but the point here is that everything is now a cliché. And clichés are bad. This is a cliché. I am a cliché. Repetition is a cliché.

## 2) Beginnings: The setting and other background information.

You will want to begin with a beginning. The beginning of the story I am writing is technically preceded by a paragraph (a disclaimer, in my opinion—"Caution: Contents Under Pressure"). This is sometimes okay. You may precede your beginning with an introduction, a foreword, a preface, a poem, or a quote. I would recommend using all of these things before your beginning—arranged as follows: foreword, preface, introduction, and quote and poem in any order after—because I have never seen this, so it may be the only thing in the world that is not a cliché. It is also best if you can get someone famous to write one or all of these things for you.

Beginnings are the easiest because they are meant to grab attention, and when you first write the beginning it doesn't have to actually make sense since there's no context to put it in yet. (Just beware that when you write the second sentence or the second paragraph you may have to change your beginning so that it makes sense.) Your attention grabbing technique may be a single word: "Fuck." Or it may be two words: "Jesus Christ." Or it may be three words: "Jesus Fucking Christ." Using vulgar words would be an attempt at a shock effect. It is the same as using a gruesome image to open your story.

A different approach is using an "original" poetic line: "A shiver of grace tremored through her body."



I am not a poet, so this is not a very good example, but you get the point.

Another beginning is an odd situation: “Two men are standing at adjacent urinals in a truck stop and accidentally make eye contact with each other.”

You may begin the beginning at the beginning: “Two squirrels walked into a bar . . .” “I lost my lighter at this party . . .” “There I was . . .” However, this is wrong. Beginnings do not start at the beginning anymore. They start in the middle. They start with the conflict (a concept that will be addressed shortly). So do not start with a character waking up, waking up to an alarm clock, waking up in a strange place, waking up next to a strange person, or waking up and throwing the alarm clock against the wall (if you try doing all of these things in one beginning you will have a first paragraph with at least five clichés in it, so don’t even try it). I think it is okay if you start a story by having a person not wake up, but I’d ask first before I tried it.

But since the beginning of the story is not the place for your beginning, we will talk about it later.

### 3) Middles: The Setup and Conflict of the Story

The middle is the longest part of the story. It has at least several paragraphs. It includes most of the story. It is also where the conflict should be. Conflict is complicated—figuratively, literally, and literarily. Conflict may be a physical fight, a verbal fight, or not a fight at all. It may be external or internal. It may also be all of these things. But the best kind of conflict is psychological. This is because readers have

psychological problems, so they can all relate.

The key to a good conflict is to make it believable. The good thing about making the conflict believable is that most things are believable today. One hundred years ago it was not believable that your sixty-year-old mother announced at Thanksgiving that she was a lesbian. Luckily, this is believable today, and if you’re a good writer, this conflict will probably last through an entire short story. If you can’t make it stretch the whole time, you just throw in more conflict—that she is pregnant and going to raise the baby with her new lover of six months.

But you need to be careful about how much conflict you put in. If you add that your mother was accidentally artificially inseminated with your brother’s sperm that he anonymously donated a month before when he was looking for some quick cash because he was late with his credit card payment, you may get yourself in over your head—you may end up writing a novel (which is okay, it’s just that it will take longer). Don’t put in more conflict than you or your reader can handle.

Since beginnings now start with conflict, you will have to pick a part of your middle to be the beginning. In the hypothetical story above, you would probably start the story with your mother’s announcement at Thanksgiving. Then you can go back to the actual beginning that includes the setting and background information. Then you’re back at the middle where you explain how everything led up to the conflict. At this point you talk about the conflict for a little while. You explain the ramifications of the conflict, which should only make the conflict more complicated and horrible.



#### 4) Endings: Tying Everything Together and Closure.

The ending is where you bring closure to the conflict you have created in the middle. You tie up all the loose ends. Or you don't. It depends. You may tie everything into a neat little bundle which will create a happy ending. Or you may let the ends dangle a little so it is a depressing or questionable ending—a non-happy ending. Either way, you must have some sort of closure that brings the reader to a new idea or shows them a moral. Happy endings are easier to do, because the loose ends all tied together create closure. But readers don't really like happy endings anymore. They are clichéd. So it is better to pull off a non-happy ending. This requires one or two of the ends to be, at maximum, almost tied.

#### 5) Show—Don't Tell.

Readers like to feel smart. They like it when they read a story where they are told things that let them figure other stuff out. For instance, they like to be told that the two-year-old is crying, red in the face, and stomping his feet on the floor, rather than being told the two-year-old is having a temper tantrum. Readers are not that smart, so they feel good when they figure out the kid is having a temper tantrum.

#### 6) Leave the Story Open for Interpretation.

Because readers are not that smart, they like to perform a thing called "creative reading." This means they find things in the story that were never really meant to be there. Again, this helps them build their ego. The best way you can help a reader perform creative reading is to

have a non-happy ending, because, as discussed earlier, this leaves some loose ends. This allows them to come up with their own meaning or moral for the story without having to think there is only one meaning and theirs may be wrong. Even if you know the real ending you don't have to write it (especially if you want the story to sell). But don't be too cryptic with these ends. You don't want to confuse your reader.

#### 7) A Point.

Closely related to the open interpretation is the point. Like the ending, your point can be clearly stated or vague. Just make sure you have one. A story without a point is just a story, but a story with a point is literature. Thus, a story is like a pencil: every good one has a point. (You might also want to include metaphors or similes in your story—those are good, but not a necessity.)

#### 8) Empathetic Characters.

Characters cannot be too outrageous or your reader will not empathize with them. The chainsaw serial murderer is not a character your readers will empathize with unless he has a valid motive. A common and widely accepted motive is a psychological hang-up because of childhood trauma. For example, the narrator's father accidentally killed the family cat with a chainsaw when the murderer was five years old. Or the murderer's father was sent to prison for murdering his wife with a chainsaw (which is probably the best way to go since the reader will feel smart figuring out the moral:



“Like father like son,” . . . only pick something that won’t make the story’s moral be a cliché).

#### 9) Flashbacks and Flashforwards.

Flashbacks are traditionally used to get important background information to the reader. They are used instead of writing the information down as exposition. Writers don’t use exposition anymore because it is boring. But be careful about flashbacks. You first need to have a concrete place to flash back in time from. Then you have to make it clear when the flashback is taking place. Then you have to make it clear when the flashback is over. (I would suggest giving the main character both a stopwatch and a calendar if you are attempting to make him flash somewhere.)

Flashforwards are generally bad. They confuse the reader too much, so don’t use flashforwards.

Don’t attempt a flashforeword, either. A flashforeword comes in two forms, both of which are bad: (1) a very short foreword, which is pointless (especially if you have an introduction and preface), or (2) a flash from the middle of the story back to the foreword before the story, which is also pointless since the foreword already said what you, or someone famous, wanted it to say.

#### 10) Title.

Most stories have a title. Titles can be obvious and state what the story is about, or they can be vague, having a hidden meaning or significance that the reader will get after reading the whole story. Usually the title is centered at the top of the story. It doesn’t have to be cen-

tered, you can talk to your editor about that, but it does have to come before the story starts.

Sometimes a story can have a subtitle in addition to a regular title. A subtitle can clarify the original title, or if you have two good titles and want to use them both you can make one a subtitle.

#### 11) Tie All of These Things Together in a Flawless Manner.

*Example:*

*Goldilocks and The Three Bears:*

*Goldilocks Breaks In, Steals Porridge, Breaks a Chair, and Sleeps in a Stranger’s Bed*  
[Note the use of a title and subtitle.]

*When the Bear Family came home they found their door ajar.* [Note that this starts with a suspenseful point in the conflict.]

*Once upon a time earlier that morning* [Note that we’re now at the beginning and have set a clear time.] *there were three bears. A Mama Bear, Papa Bear, and Baby Bear. They all lived in a cozy cottage in the woods. Mama Bear had made porridge for breakfast. She poured the porridge into three bowls: a big bowl for Papa bear, a medium-sized bowl for herself, and a small bowl for Baby Bear. The porridge was too hot to eat, so they all went for a morning stroll in the woods while they waited for their breakfast to cool.*

*While they were gone, a little girl named Goldilocks came walking up to their house.* [Note that this is the start of the middle.] *No one was around, so Goldilocks let herself into the house. Goldilocks’ mother let herself into Goldilocks’ room all the time at home, so Goldilocks didn’t see anything wrong with letting*

herself into the Bear Family's house. [Note that Goldilocks is now motivated by a childhood trauma.] She saw the porridge sitting out on the table and decided to give it a try. First she tried the big bowl. It was too hot. Then she tried the medium-sized bowl. It was too cold. Then she tried the small bowl. It was just right. So she ate it all up.

Then Goldilocks wandered into the living room. She saw three chairs. First she sat in the big chair. It was too hard. Then she sat in the medium-sized chair. It was too soft. Then she sat in the small chair. It was just right. So she sat and rocked for a while. But the chair suddenly broke, so she ran into the bedroom.

In the bedroom, Goldilocks saw three beds. She hopped in the big bed. It was too hard. So she hopped in the medium-sized bed. It was too soft. So she hopped in the small bed. It was just right, so she fell asleep.

When the Bear Family came home they found their door ajar. They went in the house and saw that someone had eaten all of Baby Bear's porridge. [Note the transition from the middle to the end.] Then they saw that someone had broken Baby Bear's chair. Then they walked in the bedroom and saw that someone was sleeping in Baby Bear's bed. Just then, Goldilocks woke up and saw the bears. She was so frightened that she jumped up and ran straight out of the house, never to be seen again. [Note the lack of full closure in the ending.]

You will see that this example follows the rules outlined above. There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is a title and bonus subtitle before the story. The story begins with suspense. There is conflict. Goldilocks has a

motivation and a psychological hang-up, so she is believable. And, most importantly, the end is not all tied up in a neat bundle. The moral of the story is open to interpretation. It may be any number of things: "Don't sleep in other people's beds," "Don't break into houses," "Don't keep looking for something that's perfect," or, "Don't go for a walk while you let your breakfast cool." The possibilities are almost endless. It is up to you, the reader, to figure out what it means for you.



My Kaakaa Muse  
by Maureen Kingston

Honorable Mention

I wanna be Bukowski's bitch,  
piss bourbon at first light,  
say kaakaa in a poem, get rich.

I wonder if a woman can be granted such a wish,  
be allowed to stick her straw into a man's insight?  
Could I really become Bukowski's bitch?

Yessir, I wanna lick his mustard sandwich  
along the crusty crack, then bite  
into my kaakaa muse and get rich.

I'll tell the judge to go fish  
when he sez a woman shouldn't fight,  
tell him how I'm trying to become Bukowski's bitch.

I'll ride the rails when I get the itch,  
leave the kids to stew in their bed mites,  
let 'em paste kaakaa on the walls till I get rich.

And when I'm spread dying in a ditch,  
I'll amuse the crowds in the desert night  
with my tale of becoming Bukowski's bitch,  
about how I laid kaakaa in a poem and got rich.

# Poem From the U of L

by Rick Rector

## Third Place

### I.

Don't get me wrong.  
Sometimes,  
I can almost abide.  
But that's just not good  
enough.

### II.

I look at where I stand  
and the thing that's  
always missing  
in the landscape I will not paint,  
is the mountains.  
A lump, a bump, a hump—  
something other than  
rolling  
goddamn prairie.

### III.

Sometimes.  
I stand in a row of pine trees.  
Or  
I  
Smell the bark at  
Earl May  
because  
sometimes,  
it reminds me of the back-  
bone of the world,  
The Rocky  
Fucking Mountains.

### IV.

And you won't be  
there  
when I wake up  
in the middle of the night  
to pee,  
unzip the sleeping  
bag,  
squirm out past  
my wife.  
Maybe I'm naked.  
I probably don't care.  
I'm peeing on a mountain.  
and  
I  
am  
happy.



## Slides of my Youth

by Cliff Thompson

the playground slide was my first  
a painted yellow tube  
rough hot and short  
the teachers always yelled  
that there wasn't enough room  
to fool around  
up top

the park had two  
first came  
the small one  
with high sides  
out in the sun  
it got hot but  
was wide enough for two  
to lie down together

the tall park slide had thirteen steps  
straight into the sky  
we sat up there  
above the crabapple trees  
me behind you  
with my hands on your hips  
we could see the courthouse  
the swimming pool and  
the alley behind the park  
where the older boys and girls went

I remember our first time on the  
tall park slide

I landed underneath you after  
the narrow slippery slope

dropped

away

fast with no rails  
no slowing down  
no turning back

# Abuelito Negro and Nanichi

by Greta Sanchez

## Honorable Mention

"Nanichi." I can still remember my grandfather uttering that word every time he saw me.

At the tender age of six, I asked my Abuelito why he called me Nanichi when I was called Cindy. He laughed and told me I was a curious one, always asking simple questions.

There was a nice breeze blowing across the island the summer I visited my grandfather. He sat me on his lap, and we watched videos of him in his youth, his boxing days. I mimicked his hand movements and his facial expressions on the tapes. He nearly never showed pain.

I asked him why he wore big red cooking gloves to fights. Abuelito put up his hands and said, "Para Proteger la cara de Cano de mis manos de hierro."<sup>1</sup> To me, Abuelito was always the best, even when he fell and hit the mat. He always had the determination to get up. Every time he stood back up, he looked into the cameras, as if he knew I was there watching on the other end. I loved him for that.

Abuelito Negro was my name for him. He was darker than my other grandfather. Abuelito's skin was dark brown like a paper bag left out in the rain.

Every Friday my grandmother went out to Rio Piedras to shop. She always returned with Abuelito's and my favorite cake. Grandmother set the cake on the top shelf of the fridge, next to the milk, juice, and sofrito.

When she left the kitchen, Abuelito beckoned me and said, "Nanichi, guarico." By that time, I knew "guarico" meant "come."

Abuelito and I sneaked into the kitchen. I was always the thief. Abuelito was the look-out. I opened the fridge and grabbed the M & M Chocolate cake, savoring the sweet smell of temptation. I felt a sense of victory at my theft success.

Abuelito and I then switched roles. I was the look out while he cut the cake. He knew what to do to not get caught until dinner. He cut a circle of the cake out of the middle. Next, he reached into the top corner of the cabinet, where he hid our special cover up—chocolate frosting. Abuelito stuffed the cake with bread and covered the top with the frosting. Then, he rearranged the M & M's on the cake.

After dinner, Grandmother pulled out the cake. One at a time, Abuelito and I asked to be excused. I went through the side door. Abuelito met me by the guanabana tree.<sup>2</sup> We heard Grandmother calling us by our birth certificate names. Abuelito and I laughed. I saw the two gaps in his mouth, teeth knocked out in a boxing match.

Throughout the years, Abuelito and I built a special bond. When it was time for me to go home in the summers, I hid in his van as early as eleven in the morning. Only he knew

1. To protect Cano's face from my iron hands.

2. The Guanabana is a fruit also referred to as a Custard Apple or Sweetsop.



how to get me to come out. Abuelito knew me better than Papi. He looked at me before I moved to run and hide. "Nanichi, NO." I never really figured out how he knew. Maybe it was the devious look that children give before they do something wrong that gave me away.

Like many Puerto Rican families, Abuelito was the backbone of my father's family. When Abuelito spoke to my uncles and father, they listened immediately. They stopped goofing around and went back to their work. There was something about the way he raised his eyebrows and the stiff expression he got. I used to mimic his face, but then Abuelito gave me his look of disapproval and I had to stop. He could always make me smile, though. Even when Abuelito was upset, he made all my sadness go away.

From the time I could walk, I knew I was different from my siblings and mother. I remember reading the Ugly Duckling and relating to the poor little brown duck. My older sister teased me. She said that Mami took a shit when I was born, and that was why I was darker. My mother laughed and told my sister to leave me alone. I stomped off, saying I was the Ugly Duckling in the Little Golden Books. Mami held me and said that my Papi and his family were dark, so I took on those features. When I talked to Abuelito Negro, I told him what my sister said. He, too, laughed and said, "Nanichi tu eres negrita como yo, el color en tu piel es bello."<sup>3</sup>

Years later, I asked Abuelito again why

3. Nanichi, you are brown like me and the color of your skin is beautiful.

he called me Nanichi. Before Abuelito got very sick, he sat me on his lap and said, "Tu historia." Abuelito told me the story of Puerto Rico, or Porto Rico, as Ponce de Leon coined it. I listened with the intense attention I usually only gave to cartoons.

Puerto Rico's original descendants called the island Borike'n, Great Land of the Noble Lord. It was inhabited by Taino Indians, who came from South America. The Taino were very timid and lived in small villages in peace.

Christopher Columbus discovered the island on his second voyage. The Tainos welcomed him and the Spaniards. But the Indians later realized that introducing Columbus to the island and its richness was a mistake. The conquistadors exported the Indians as slaves to the New World. The Tainos began dying. They could not regain enough strength to continue working for Columbus.

Abuelito continued with the story, but I drifted off to sleep. A few years later, I finally found out what "Nanichi" meant.

I was in fifth grade. I visited Abuelito that summer on a Friday. He was very sick and lay in bed, but he still smiled. His outlook on life gave off the same overwhelming light the sun gave on those hot sticky days by the beach. "Nanichi, guarico," Abuelito said.

For the first time, I was scared of him. I smelled death. I smelled his passing, his coming goodbyes, and his cancer. I smelled it all. And I was scared.

Abuelito looked up at me and said again, "Nanichi, guarico." I went. As I approached, I thought my heart would explode into dust, like vampires shoved into the sunlight. I remem-

bered Abuelito before he was sick, though. I ran the rest of the way to him. I hugged him and tears ran down my cheeks. "No me dejes!"

<sup>4</sup> I did not understand why God wanted to take him away from me. Why couldn't he stay with me forever? I sobbed and said, "I will love you even if you are wrinkled like a prune! Just stay here!"

Abuelito began to cry as he sat up on the bed. He took my hands and crossed them on his chest, right over his heart. He said, "Nanichi, me amor, no te voy a dejar porques eastas aqui in mi Corazon." <sup>5</sup> 'Nanichi' is Taino for 'My Love.'

That day when Grandmother ran her usual Friday errands, Abuelito felt well enough to get out of bed and play with me. When Grandmother returned, we played "Thief and Look Out." We ran to the guanabana tree and laughed when Grandma called us by our birth certificate names.

4. Don't leave me!

5. I won't leave you because you are here in my heart.

# Maribel

by Maureen Kingston

On the first day of kindergarten  
she stands out among the legion  
of Spiderman t-shirts  
Dollar General flip-flops  
and sensible fleece hoodies:  
her dimpled cheeks  
and cocoa Mayan eyes,  
her crown of black braids  
dotted with wild violets,  
her creased tangerine pleats.  
When the school bell rings  
she pushes to escape  
Momi's locked arms,  
anxious to complete  
her migratory mission  
to the new world.  
Momi whispers,  
*te quiero hiji Maribelita, mi mariposa,*  
but the love message misses her ear,  
gets tangled in the cobweb  
above the coat cubby.

Trinity  
by Cliff Thompson

Jesus pleases my father but not me.  
An ocean of divide is there.  
And I find it hard to believe

because I never perceive his hand against my cheek  
and so I wonder if he really cares.  
Jesus pleases my father but not me.

His time is split over so many  
people. It doesn't seem fair.  
and I find it hard to believe,

because it's so hard to achieve his approval, and it seems  
that my mistakes are held up, bloody and bare.  
Jesus pleases my father but not me.

but I swear it's not a worry,  
not to me because I swear  
and I find it hard to believe

that I'll go to hell if I don't say my rosary  
and kneel----every----damned----time there's a prayer.  
Jesus pleases my father but not me.  
and I find it hard to believe.



## Now Available in High Definition

by Cliff Thompson

My friend and I wondered whether or not our lives would ever be  
real stories like our parents had, like what was on TV.  
we wondered if our plot lines would ever materialize  
from this no reception snowstorm static into at least some  
types of lines maybe even someday  
shaping up  
and then adding some color.  
colors as bright as the alcoholism of our mothers  
and then our now colored and shaped lives would gain motion  
moving slowly at first until we could move and remove  
smoothly like both our fathers smoothly removed themselves  
from their first marriages.  
Our 'made for TV' motion picture lives might gain some  
emotion between the lines and there'd be some anger  
and some lies.  
Then we'd have it all.  
because with line and shape and color and emotion  
we'd be real characters, not just going through the motions.  
Never again would we wonder if there was true love  
outside of summer,  
and we'd never fear the ocean again

# I Swedish Fish You

by Mallory Trudell

What's going to happen?

The thought repeated itself over and over. I slowly sipped on a cup of hot tea. I placed my hands on either side of the Styrofoam cup. I hoped the heat of the tea would warm the rest of me, keeping me warm and blocking out the rest of the world.

What's going to happen to her?

My mother walked over. "Honey?"

"Huh, wha?" I looked up and saw her holding out a packet of honey. "Oh, no thanks."

She sat down next to me. She prepared her own cup of tea methodically. First she dipped the tea bag in steaming water, then bobbed it up and down three times, put in a drop of honey and milk, and repeated. I watched her hands as she worked, noticed how old they looked, bony and wrinkled. I thought of how many times those hands had wiped away tears, held champagne up to lips, been held in another's hands.

"Mom?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Sarah is going to be all right, isn't she?"

My mother stared down into her tea. "I don't know, Anna." She held her cup up to her chapped lips. "I really don't know."

I stared out the window. The sky was dark, and a light layer of snow covered everything. The first snowfall of the year. I usually loved this time of the year, but this year I could only worry. I worried it would be Sarah's last

first snowfall. I hoped that if it was, it would be the last of that bastard driver's as well.

"Damn," I said, not realizing I was speaking.

"What's that?" my mother asked.

"I'm just remembering all the time I've spent waiting in the hospital. Remember a few years back, when I had to come in to work with you so I could volunteer at that camp down the street? I'd sit in here and write in my journal for hours. It all seems so long ago."

"Five years can be a lifetime, honey."

"Five hours can be a lifetime, Ma." My mind had turned back to Sarah. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be bitchy. I'm really scared."

"So am I."

My cell phone started to ring.

"You need to turn that off. You can't have a cell phone in a hospital," my mother said.

"Yeah, I know. I forgot. Sorry."

\*\*\*

Thanksgiving Break had just started. I was excited to be home and do nothing for a week. I was lying on the old sofa in our basement, lights off, blankets piled over my body. I stared at the television screen, enjoying the mindlessness of the moment. I shut my eyes and thought a nap would be nice, but then my cell phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hey seester!"



"Sarah! Hi! What are ya doin'?"

Shouldn't you be at work?" I always had trouble picturing Sarah at work, a headset crushing down her thick hair, trapped in a small gray cubicle. It just didn't seem like her.

"I am; I'm on my lunch break."

"Oh. What can I help you with, dearie?" I asked.

"I was thinking--"

"Well that's never good!"

"Ha ha ha, shut up! I thought that maybe you might wanna come spend the night at my apartment tonight? Some sisterly bonding time or whatever? We can rent movies and you can tell me all about your love life and school and all that good stuff. Whaddaya say?"

"Well..." I tried to drag the word out as long as possible, just to annoy her, "I suppose that would be all right."

"Coolio."

"Oh, you did not just say coolio, did you?"

"Yeah, why?"

"That's not so coolio, Shorty."

"Ha ha ha, you suck. See you later, kiddo."

"See ya."

\*\*\*

My dad approached our table. "I need coffee."

"You don't drink coffee," I said.

"Well, today I do. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah, fine. God!"

"Listen, Anna, the last thing I need from you right now is attitude!"

"I wasn't trying to give you attitude,

Dad. Never mind- sorry."

"Where's Elizabeth?" my mother asked. Elizabeth was my stepmother. She was fifteen years younger than my father, dumb as a tree stump, and always tried to act like she knew more about my father than I did.

"She went to the gift shop. She's looking for something to read while we wait."

My mother and I looked at each other. Her eyes looked tired. I guessed mine did too, but not as tired as hers. I didn't have twenty-three years of worrying about a daughter behind mine.

"I'm sorry she's so bored. Next time, we'll bring board games," my mother said. She leaned back in her chair and glared at my father through ice blue eyes.

"Katharine, just stop. I don't need this right now," my dad said.

"Right, because you're the only one going through this!"

"Mom, Dad, please!" I said. "Calm down! We're all a little tired and stressed right now. I think we just need food or something. I'll go get you that coffee, Dad."

My mother had left by the time I returned with my dad's coffee.

"She went back to the waiting room," my dad said, his eyes fixed on his hands. He was picking at his cuticles, rough and chapped. "We should head back there, too."

I put his coffee down on the edge of the table and grabbed my purse off the back of the chair. "Yeah. I'll be there in a minute; I've gotta make a call first."

Dad stood up and grabbed his coffee. "Who's so important that it can't wait?"

"Jason."

"Oh," he said. "Well, be quick about it."

I headed outside. I took my phone out and brought up Jason's number. Sarah had just told me the good news three days ago.

\*\*\*

"Oh God, that is vile!" I said, my throat on fire. "I've had shots of tequila that weren't that evil!"

"Anna!" Sarah said, eyes wide and mouth agape.

"Oh, stop faking, you know I drink!" I took another sip. My eyes squinted and mouth puckered from the heat of the alcohol.

"Okay, so, that cleared my sinuses! Ack! Anyway, what's the special occasion? My death from the worst champagne ever?"

"Hey, it was cheap and quick. Plus, it's called 'Red Rose.' I thought you'd appreciate that. No, I just thought you'd like to know that Jason proposed," she said in a bored voice, like it was something she had told me a thousand times before.

"What?!" I immediately hugged her. We jumped up and down and shrieked in tones that not even dogs could hear. We stopped when her roommate started pounding on the wall.

"Sorry Jane!" Sarah yelled. We sat on her bed and she held out her hand. Her blue eyes sparkled like the diamond she was holding out for me to see. I thought her jaw was going to snap off if she smiled any wider.

"Last night, after dinner, he asked me what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I told him I don't know; I mean, I like my job right now but I really want to finish those last few credits and get my bachelor's degree, ya

know? And then actually do something with myself. Anyway, so I told him I don't know, and he said he'd figured out what he wants to do with the rest of his life. I asked him what and he said, 'Be you husband.' How cute is that?"

I was back to my cynical self. "It's adorable, as long as that's not really all he wants to do. I don't want him thinking he can leech off you, or worse, your family for the next eighty years."

"Ha ha ha, shut up! He was being romantic, Anna."

"Romance, that's right," I said, snapping my fingers. "I'd forgotten about romance; it's been so long since I've had any in my life."

"Don't worry. You'll find a guy who's smart and funny and handsome and loves you, just like Jason loves me."

"I think I just threw up a little," I said, fake gagging. She punched me in the shoulder and glared. "Just kidding!"

"Yeah yeah yeah. Shut up, be happy for me, and have more of this awful champagne!"

"Now that I can do," I held my cup out for her to refill. "When are you gonna tell Mom and Dad?"

"I was thinking I would tell them at the Thanksgiving dinners tomorrow."

"You're not gonna tell 'em together? This'll be fun to watch."

"You're such a brat," Sarah said. "I'm gonna tell Mom first, and then Dad before we go to his in-laws. Or maybe after. I haven't figured that one out yet."

"Good luck with all that. Okay, now, a toast to you and Jason. May you be happy together forever and not pick disgusting brides-



maid dresses!”

“Salud!”

We both downed our glasses and filled them up again.

“Does he Swedish fish you?” I asked.

“He does.”

\*\*\*

“Do you wanna hang out this weekend?” Sarah asked.

“I can’t, I work all weekend,” I told her as I changed clothes to go from one job to another.

“How about next week?”

I turned and glared at her. “I have to work. I work all week and all weekend. I have no time to hang out. Unless you’re gonna pay my tuition next year, shut up and lemme change so I’m not late.”

Sarah rolled her eyes and hopped off the edge of my bed. “Fine, whatever. I came over here to see you, but obviously you don’t care. That’s fine.” She stalked across the room and threw open the door. “Maybe I’ll see you in September!”

“Probably not, because then I’ll be non-stop busy with school.”

“Anna,” I could tell she was about to start yelling at me, but she took a breath and said, “Okay. Well, I love you.” She waited in the doorway for me to say it back.

“What? Oh, yeah, love ya too,” I mumbled, searching through my clothes piles to find a clean shirt.

“No, stop,” Sarah said, walking over to me. “That was lame. Do you love me?”

“Of course I love you - you’re my sister,” I said, stopping the search and looking at

her.

“Then say it like you mean it. How would you feel if I died tomorrow and the last thing you did was mumble ‘love ya’?”

“Sarah, I do love you, but I don’t have time for this right now. I have,” I grimaced when I saw the clock, “fifteen minutes to get across town for work. Can you finish this lecture later?”

Sarah picked up some of my clothes and threw them at me. “No, damnit, listen! Saying ‘I love you’ should mean something, not just be like saying ‘cheese sandwich’.”

I looked at her, face squinched up, trying to remember where I’d heard that speech before. My eyes widened when it came to me. “You stole that from that movie! The one with Jon Favreau!”

Sarah blushed and looked away. “Okay, yes, it’s not the most original thought I’ve ever had, but I still mean it. Saying ‘I love you’ all the time makes it just words, it loses the meaning of the word ‘love.’”

I sat on the edge of my bed and put my sneakers on. “It’s not just words; I really do love you. I mean, you’re my sister - of course I love you.”

“Well, I don’t love you. I cheese sandwich you,” Sarah said, sticking her chin up and smiling a goofy grin.

“Well, fine then, I’m gonna steal lines from that Amanda Bynes movie - I Swedish fish you!”

“I’m not just stealing lines,” Sarah said. “I really mean it - I love you so much, ‘love’ isn’t enough. I cheese sandwich you.”

I looked her in the eyes to see if she was

serious. When I saw she was, I walked over, gave her a hug and said, "I Swedish fish you."

\*\*\*

The buzz of my cell phone brought me out of my trance. I looked down and saw I had a message.

"Annie, this is Jason. What's going on? You sounded freaked out before. 'Call me, something happened.' What does that mean? Give me a call. Soon."

I dialed his number. I counted the rings before he answered. One, two, three, four - my heart beat faster with each ring. How would I tell him?

"Annie?" I usually hated it when he called me "Annie." I usually thought it was condescending, but this time it was comforting.

"Yeah, Jason, it's me. What are you doin'?"

"Just cleaning, making a snack, boring stuff like that. What do ya need, Annie? What's going on?"

"Um," I scratched my forehead while I tried to think of what to say, "you need to come down to the hospital," I said. "There's been... you just need to get down here."

"Which hospital?"

"The one where Mom works. I'll meet you in the front lobby, by the parking garage." I waited for Jason to say something, but all I heard was his breathing. "Jason, are you okay?"

"Sarah - is she de- I mean, is everything, ya know... is she okay?"

I scratched my forehead again. "Just get down here Jason."

I hung up the phone. I could feel gravity forcing me toward the ground. I needed to sit

down. I went back inside and found an empty couch in the lobby. I collapsed onto it and began to cry. The hot drops warmed my frozen cheeks.

God, you have to see her through this. It isn't fair! She just got engaged; she's been doing too well for herself. See her through this. I can't be the only child, the oldest sister. I won't have any nieces or nephews if you take her away from me. You can't let that happen. You have to save her. I did thirteen years of Catholic school - I deserve something in return. So here it is - don't let her die. Don't do this to us. I can't handle it; I can't do it. See her through this. See her through this. See her through this. What's going to happen?

I jerked around when I felt something touch my shoulder.

"Jason!" I jumped up and hugged him.

"There was a car accident. She was hit by some jackass. She was in the ER, but they had to send her up to the OR for some reason. Mom's explained it to me a thousand times, but I can't remember any of it."

"Okay," he said, pulling away from me, "well, take me to her and I'll have her explain it to me." We took a few steps, but then he stopped. He hugged me again and said, "She'll be okay, Annie. We're not gonna lose our girl."

"What if we do? Our last conversation will have been a fight. That can't happen. I can't let that be her last memory of me!"

"Won't happen," Jason said.

\*\*\*

The door slammed shut behind Sarah. I hurried out behind her. She stalked over to her car and fumbled with her keys.



"He is unbelievable!" Sarah said.

"Shorty, calm down!"

"Don't call me 'Shorty.' God! No! I mean, seriously, can you believe him? I tell him I'm getting married and the first thing he says is 'Hope you're not expecting me to pay for it.' Who reacts that way?"

"I... He... Sarah, you know how Dad is. He says stupid things. You need to take it with a grain of salt. You know that," I said, standing halfway between the house and the driveway.

Sarah opened her car door and turned to look at me. She was shaking, and her eyes were crimson red from tears.

"You don't get it, Anna. You never do." She started to get into her car.

"Get what?" I asked. "Huh? What don't I get?"

"You don't get how this feels, Anna. The perfect child. The one everyone loves," Sarah said. "They expect you to do great things, to have the perfect husband and cute little children, to have an amazing job, to take care of them when they're old. They expect me to screw up! They can't stand it when I'm happy!"

I rolled my eyes. "That's fucking ridiculous and you know it!"

"Oh, really?" Sarah said, slamming her car door shut. She stalked over to me. "Who pays your tuition, Little Anna? Who pays for your sorority and car insurance and buys you everything you want?"

I stepped closer to her.

"You know jack shit about my life," I said, stepping even closer. "I worked my ass off last summer to be able to pay for my sorority dues and car insurance. I work my ass off

at school to keep my scholarships, which pay for most of my tuition. And, let me point out to you, big sister, that they bought you a car, too. They fucking sent you to Europe, so don't say they treat me better than you."

I turned to walk back into the house, but then turned back around to shout, "Twice! They sent you twice!"

She stared at me, and I could tell she was trying to think of the ultimate comeback. "Fuck you."

"Oh, bite me, Sarah. You are so freaking immature! Yes, Dad pissed you off, but that's no reason to bitch at me! I came out here to comfort you, to tell you to give him some time. He had a bastard-ish response, yeah. But you're his oldest daughter. Your getting married probably makes him feel old, and so—"

"Don't use your one semester of Gen Psych to explain Dad's head to me, Anna! He and I have never gotten along, and this is the final straw."

"Don't you want him to walk you down the aisle?" I asked.

"I thought I did, but I forgot how he can be." She had calmed down a little by then, but was still crying. I walked over and gave her hug.

"Listen, I love the both of you. Go home, call Jason, relax, maybe even have a little nookie, but of course tell me nothing about it - cuz ew. Just forget about today, about everything with Dad. Then, tomorrow, send Dad an e-mail explaining that his comment hurt you. Apologize for your reaction, but explain why you felt so hurt. Then, things will be better, okay?"

"Okay." She gave me another hug and got into her car. She rolled down her window. As she pulled away from the curb, she shouted, "I cheese sandwich you, seester!"

"I Swedish fish you, Shorty!"

\*\*\*

We were all gathered in the beige waiting room. My mother sat next to me, grasping my hand in hers. Jason sat on the other side of her and put his hand on her shoulder. My father and Elizabeth sat next to each other on the opposite side of the room. We sat in deafening silence, where the smallest noises became overpowering. I could hear my mother whimpering, trying to hold her sobs in. My father was tapping his foot on the ground. The clock ticked slowly above my head. Whimper, tap, tick. Whimper, tap, tick. I was about to scream just to break the silence when the door opened. My father stood up when he saw the doctor.

"There were complications. We tried to stop the bleeding, but..." he said. "I'm so sorry."

My heart felt as if it was trying to escape its bony prison, and my stomach settled in my sneakers. I could hear my mother crying and my father yelling, but it was muffled, like I had my headphones on. I felt someone holding me, and realized that it was Jason.

"Can we see her?" my father asked.

"Yes, but only two at a time, please," the doctor said.

My mother and father went first. They were behind the doors for half an hour before a nurse shuffled them out. Jason and I went in next.

A sheet covered her body. All I could

see was her head. Besides a bruise on her forehead and a cut lip, she looked fine. Jason sat down in a chair in the corner. He had his head in his hands and was crying. I walked over to Sarah.

"Hi Shorty!" I said. I could barely see her face through my tears. "You'll never guess who called me last night after you left. Pete! I might have some romance back at school after all. So you need to get up, Sarah. I need you to just wake up right now."

I stared at her, expecting her to move simply because I demanded it. When she didn't, I started to sob.

"Sarah, I'm supposed to be your maid of honor! You're supposed to give me twenty nieces and nephews so I don't have to have any kids of my own. You can't leave me like this, Shorty. I don't know what to do without you!"

Jason walked over and stood beside me. He started to say his own goodbye to Sarah, so I went and sat in the chair in the corner. When he was done, he looked over at me. He turned and left the room, and I walked back over to Sarah.

"Well, Sarah, miles to go, right?" I said quietly. "I'll watch after him. I promise. I just don't know how I'm gonna get through this life without you, Shorty. I Swedish fish you."



## Looking Up

by Marcie Ponder

I long for those long ago summers free  
from responsibility and regrets. Our only intent  
was racing our shadows and collecting freckles.  
The days linked together like the dandelion  
chains we wore.

Curiosity and creativity were our companions.  
We wove the neighbor's daisies into halos  
while the glow of lightning bugs became our  
jewels. Spinning with arms opened wide we  
would trip on our cloaks of laughter.

Certain you and I were the center of the universe,  
we were children unencumbered by fear or  
embarrassment. Lying in the grass with arms  
linked our world encompassed all that was  
within view.

Watching and waiting for rainbows, we  
would squint at the sun or ponder the  
proportions of clouds or welcome the  
rain with open mouths and darting tongues  
and whisper promises for the future.

I still search for rainbows  
while you only see the dark lining of  
a silver cloud.



## Depth of Field

by Cathie Stangl

We are peripheral  
vision and  
the rule of thirds,  
not that cliché of missing  
jigsaw pieces. We are  
all here, you just  
can't look at  
the center or  
expect to see  
the wholeness.  
Even the hollow  
Easter bunny is  
whole—  
milk, eggs, soybeans,  
wheat—the parts are  
there. Not even missing  
the illusion of  
wholeness until a  
part is broken.  
It's different than  
modernists—  
we are not hung up on  
the pieces, we do not  
call them shattered bits  
of our lives.

Post-modern,  
closer,  
but the label is irrelevant,  
it will change  
in twenty years. Anyway  
we scoff at labels.  
Label us and we will not  
go to college,  
have a career,  
eat your food,  
take your money,  
listen to your music,  
or live in your houses.  
(We never said  
it was original.)  
We will  
wear dirty clothes,  
smoke pot,  
work at McDonald's,  
sleep with whatever  
man/woman (both) we want,  
and be anti-war without  
bothering to protest  
or even vote.  
We will fit in that space between

long-haired hippies  
and tall-haired punks.  
To wake up with a  
two-day-old hangover  
in a one bedroom house with no  
heat is not our life story,  
it's just part of the peripheral.  
Our center is not  
the beer or rum,  
the job or girlfriend,  
the overflowing litter box  
on the porch,  
the bong  
in the corner,  
the half-written song  
next to the stove,  
the painting  
leaned against the toilet,  
the hand-made bracelet  
on the coffee table.  
It is the click of a camera—  
that object in the  
background sitting whole,  
but blurry.

## Restoration

by Lacey Bensink

I'd like to buy that fixer-upper .  
on the corner with  
peeling paint and dangling shutters,  
one side of the rotting porch  
half collapsed, hanging only  
a few inches above  
the unmown lawn,  
but it still has so much  
potential to be  
beautiful.

I don't know how to hang sheetrock.  
I don't really even know  
what sheetrock is.  
I don't know to hammer straight or  
use a nailgun to quickly drive  
home the purpose of my poetry.

Contemplating repairs,  
maybe the addition  
of self confidence,  
resurface the uneven scars  
running up and down my arms.  
Scrape away the fatty doubts  
as enduring as the cellulite  
that somehow developed on my ass.  
Rebuild the lifelong levels  
of self imposed stupidity riddled with  
improper studs and instability.

I have to chisel away  
the many layers of gray paint  
sometimes mingled with streaks of red—  
countless personas covered in  
the blood of several slit  
wrists that were never cut  
quite deep enough  
to create a new and brighter coat.

The house has stood so long against  
the rain and hail soaking  
the wooden floors.  
It is quite imperfect.  
The wind blows  
through the cracks  
and, like calculated insults,  
shakes the supporting beams.  
The door sticks  
in the frame.  
No one gets in.  
But I can't  
kick it down and run away,  
so I may as well  
begin repairs.



# The End of Nothing

by Emily Keston

## First Place

Amy wished the quiet would press in.

Instead it hovered just beyond her reach, kept aloft by the squeaking bedsprings in the room above her, the rumbling breathing at her neck. She'd tried hunching, curling into a little ball to escape it, but that wasn't working.

She missed the soft, incoherent mumbling of her roommate, who was probably long asleep back in the dorm.

"Don't wait up for me," she'd told Maggie. "I'll be late."

"So, you're coming back, then?"

Amy hadn't answered.

Now, trapped under a man's arm in a hotel room, Amy tried to match her breathing to his. He'd fitted his body to hers, so maybe if she matched his breathing, she could sleep. Synchronized breathing.

She tried to relax into the rhythm, but her thoughts could not settle. Not with this man, not with his scent filling her lungs.

Robert had driven across three states to see her. Amy met him on the Internet three years ago. They'd become friends. Just friends with some minor flirtations. Still, it sounded so sordid, so bottom-dwelling and pathetic. And she'd be naïve to say there wasn't some of the old stereotype following him here through Illinois and Iowa. Two lonesome people meeting on the Internet, and now, physically, in a hotel room. Guilt—that nagging twinge in her stomach and in the hunch of her shoulders—had given her reason to refuse this meeting a week ago. The cost of coming to see her—gas, food, hotel—put too much meaning, too much expectancy and obligation and implications between them.

"Don't be silly," he'd said on the phone. "We're just friends meeting. I don't expect anything like that." But he wanted to keep it open, in case she was open.

Pun or no pun.

He'd tried to reassure her, but that hope, that energy, still hung in the air. It'd followed him all the way from Indiana.

And she'd thought she might. No one else seemed to want her. Robert seemed to. He'd said she was svelte, intelligent and witty. He didn't mind that she was plain. So, she'd given in. She knew he expected something. Why else would a guy come all this way?

But she'd panicked, somewhere between then and now. Probably the moment she'd hung up the phone. She didn't love him. She'd always vowed to do it for love.

Why chalk up another failing tonight?

It wasn't even night, anymore. Her eyes fell on the red, judging glow of the clock.

3:13.

She couldn't lie in the dark next to this man, who said, "Let's just cuddle, then."

She couldn't sleep, couldn't listen to another deep, masculine breath. Or let him fill her lungs. She'd suffocate under Old Spice and sweat-dampened cotton.

Tossing any pretension of sleep aside, she tried to extricate herself from the bear's lair. Her limbs, tensed from lying so still, moved stiffly, cautiously. The sheets rustled too loudly. Accusingly. Her breath caught, her muscles trembled, and her heart stuttered. In his sleep, he muttered and shifted, then rolled toward her.

She replaced herself with a pillow and slipped out of his reach. Like a twitchy rabbit on the run, she found her gray sweater and zipped it up. Why are hotel rooms always so cold? she thought with a shiver as she pulled on her sneakers. She pulled her hair, the unimaginative color of old straw, into a loose ponytail.

Then she stole into the corridor.

The harsh hall lights seemed to smack her across the forehead. Ducking her head and wrapping her arms tightly around her torso, she shuffled toward the lobby exit. A ringing in her



ears overwhelmed the riff playing erratically in her heart. She glanced nervously behind her, back at Room 117. The door was still closed.

The front desk was empty. No one saw her chew on her thumbnail, cast another look into the hall, and then slip out the glass doors.

Outside, her car awaited her, dark and reflecting the city lights. She had been uncertain enough before this night to be sure to have an escape. Or an invitation: a change of clothes he didn't know about in the trunk. If she had brought them into the room with her, he would have known she'd considered more than dinner and a movie. Had thought about staying.

Alone in the parking lot, she paused a moment, her eyes drifting from her car: her quick, somewhat planned flight. Cool and quiet settled around her at last. Indifferent, unmindful. Only the brightest stars pricked the hazy orange glow of city lights. Behind the Comfort Inn, cars, sounding distant, breezed under the interstate bridge before disappearing around the lonely curve into the country.

She rocked on her heels. If she went back to her dorm, questions would be asked. Questions she could not answer.

Her eyes itched, but she felt wide awake. Amy rubbed at them absently.

Everything's closed. I live in a city that sleeps more than I do.

Sighing, she started to walk, but did not move toward her car. That escape was too fast, too definite. But she couldn't just stand still, either.

Just as she neared the hotel's corner that held the sleeping Robert, her eyes alighted on a glowing yellow sign across the street. Casey's: the only convenience at three in the morning.

A cappuccino would do nicely.

She smiled and felt her shoulders relax a little.

Crossing the empty four lanes usually choked with exhaust and blaring horns, she followed the promise and clarity of caffeine.

The dull-eyed cashier barely acknowledged Amy. The window looking out at the

vacant parking lot intrigued her more. Amy glanced at the woman. She was dumpy, that indiscernible adult age. Greasy, stringy strains of hair fell from her loose ponytail. Judging by the stains and smell, her shirt hadn't been washed in a good week or two.

Heat flushed Amy's cheeks, and she quickly headed over to the caffeine machine. Tonight, of all nights, she could not be justified in judging that woman. Not when she'd just been in bed with a man she'd met on the Internet. And she'd even failed utterly at that. Leading men on was certainly as bad as poor hygiene.

"Have a good evening," Amy told the cashier, passing her 87 cents across the counter.

The woman glanced at her dully in reply. Amy tried to smile; the woman couldn't be blamed for her silent rebuke. Amy had been a cashier many times before. Who wanted to pretend to care at three-something in the morning? She knew how artificial even her "good evening" must sound, but this time she meant it.

Outside, in the parking lot, nothing had changed. Not that she'd expected it to.

The first sip burned her tongue, as it always did. She held the steaming styrofoam to her lips again, blowing into the tiny sip hole. It did not deserve to be called cappuccino. But nothing's as good as it seems these days, she thought. Cheap and bitter. Except for college; no one could call that cheap.

The tip of her tongue, rough from the drink, ran over her chapped lips as she watched a lone pair of headlights cruise over the interstate bridge back to her dorm room. The beat up little coup was probably as old as she, but had traveled farther and had seen more.

She watched it turn the corner to wind up the hill, then disappear down into the developing district boasting late-night hours.

Taking another sip—she could endure the burn now—she crossed the street back to the hotel. She dug in her pockets for her keys. Now she could let the wheels take her.

Amy pushed the unlock button on her



remote. The headlights winked in greeting. She paused to run her hand fondly over the gentle slope of the hood. The hotel sign, warped and distorted, reflected in the deep maroon paint.

Then she opened the door and settled in the comforting familiarity of her seat. A seat that formed to her body without rumbling, clinging . . .

Shuddering slightly, she set her gas station cappuccino in its holder and started the engine. The radio flipped on, filling the dark quiet with forlorn acoustic strings.

Amy smiled.

Rolling out of the lot, she felt more than knew where she was going. The bridge was closed, to lost little girls, so she turned left, following that well-traveled, hobbit car. Her Olds 88 wound up the hill, the overlooking bluff her friends had ridden cafeteria trays down in the snow last winter.

Instead of topping the rise and careening down into the river valley, she turned onto a side road. It did not take her far. The headlights shone over stone picnic tables, haloed like angelic ghosts. Like a graveyard.

Amy gazed at the lonely specters. She couldn't remember ever seeing picnickers here. After a moment, she turned the car off. The headlights slowly dimmed, the tables retreating into the darkness, leaving her alone.

Slowly, Amy grabbed her Casey's cappuccino, and got out.

Her eye caught the distant, white glow of the hotel sign. She spun on her heel, facing the bluff. The dark pines reached for the stars trapped behind murky city glow. The large water tower loomed at the top, phallic and offensive.

Amy took a deep breath, another sip, and began to climb the hill.

The sky, heavy from city lights, pressed upon her. Trees and bushes that kept the bluff from collapsing after hard rain loomed at the edge of the sledding slope. As she trudged breathlessly toward the top, she felt the hotel drop away. The night was perfectly cool. Just

enough to know all this vast emptiness was filled with something real. She could feel air kiss her cheeks, brush teasingly against her sweater, but she was not chilled.

The caffeine pulsed in her hand, warming the blood traveling up and down her arm. She wished she could see her breath coming out in little misty clouds.

When she reached the top, her legs burning, she gazed down into the only part of town awake with her. The sight, or the climb, left her breathless. Orange streetlamps cut through the river valley, leading sleepless consumers to Wal-Mart to empty their pockets and Dr. John's to fill the dark hours. Capitalism and sex.

Amy wondered how many people stopped at Wal-Mart for its hometown value liquor and then crossed the street for naughty lingerie and kinky toys. All just for a little distraction.

She turned slightly to her right, letting her eyes rest on the northern hills. Nestled snugly in the dark, families slept. The settled people. Her dorm room was there, by the quiet streets, trimmed hedges, and matching-curtained windows. It looked peaceful. Perfect. But here she was.

She sat on the cool, dying grass, and folded her legs under her. Interlacing her fingers around her cup, she sipped slowly, enjoying this moment. Up here, on top of this bluff, disembodied.

The school year had been too busy to take a moment like this. Or maybe she hadn't been ready for it. The more she thought about her life—what it was up to this point and what it was supposed to become—the more meaningless it became.

Amy thought college would be profound and enlightening. Suddenly the bland, thoughtless halls of high school would be cast aside for inspiration and—behold—thought. By now, her second year, she would be on her sweeping course as an English major. Bent on writing words. Words to fill others with all she had absorbed and imagined.



But it wasn't so. Amy felt bereft. Classes were unsatisfying, her routines the same, and relationships . . . well, tonight summed that up.

Amy took another sip, then picked at a bit of grass.

Maybe she just got her hopes up too much. She certainly had last year. Oh, it had been exciting at first. Watching Dr. Palin perch on his chair, literally twitching with energy as his poet's voice conspiratorially told them the secrets of stories. He reminded Amy of a leprechaun. He liked to play with illusion, and encouraged her to do so.

And she did.

To the extent she threw herself into Dr. Palin's office one afternoon, shaking with frustration.

"It's all nothing, isn't it?"

Palin folded his hands together and raised his eyebrows. A corner of his mouth twitched. Amy noticed a smudge of black ink on a hardened knuckle. "What's nothing?" he asked.

"All of it." She sat on the edge of the deep-seated chair, fastening her hands on its arms. "Okay, we all know we see everything from different perspectives, right? And we don't share the same experiences. So, our minds all have illusions of what is and isn't—what's truth and not." Amy paused for breath. If her words could take physical form, they would be flying around the room like crazed birds. Feathers would be settling on Dr. Palin's crowning cowlick.

"So then," she said, "if everything just exists or has meaning in the mind—and every mind is subjective—how can anything have meaning?"

Dr. Palin smiled a little. Amy's hands tightened on her chair arms. She knew the answer would come. Her professor leaned slowly back in his chair and stretched an arm out to the window blinds. Bright eyes usually fixated keenly on her face stared intently between the slits of plastic.

Amy couldn't see what held him so

transfixed.

"People settle, Amy," Dr. Palin said. He returned to her, as if he'd never looked out the window. "That's the real world. The big, collective illusion, if you will. Humanity, somewhere along the line, agreed upon it. How else are we supposed to live?"

Gazing down at the city lights pretending to be stars to guide lost travelers, Amy couldn't quite understand how anyone would want to settle for this.

It certainly hadn't done anything for her so far. She'd thought that was what college was for. But now she thought it was the biggest illusion of all. Or maybe she'd missed that proverbial sweep of inspiration.

She'd been waiting for something to happen. Her entire life. She'd passed so many happenings, so many moments meant for meaning, but had felt nothing.

So, she'd tried for it, for something.

And now she was here. Overlooking what Happened.

Wal-Mart. Dr. John's. A bluff, created by wind, sand, and dirt, now buckling under a road and a monstrous tower. Streetlamps lighting a street leading nowhere.

Her cup was empty.

The night seemed colder now she must call it morning.

Sighing, she stood up, knowing that behind her the horizon would be changing.

She turned, and saw the small, glowing white sign of Comfort Inn, tiny and meaningless below.

Carefully, she made her way down the hill to her car. It hadn't changed, hadn't moved. Only the picnic tables had, the hour and the faint glow on the horizon coaxing them out of the darkness.

She slid into the driver's seat and turned the key. She had no plan. The radio automatically turned on. Amy liked to think it sensed her demand, her need. A familiar song—the perfect song, the one she needed—burst from the speakers.



Eve 6's "Open Road Song."

"The night is beckoning, although I have nowhere to go but home. Feels good to be alone."

Amy smiled, set her empty cup in its holder, and sang softly, "With every turn comes a new frame of mind. If I could frame my mind, where would it hang."

The car, so familiar and attuned to her, coasted down the hill. It passed the hotel. Instead of taking the bridge back to her dorm, she accelerated east onto the lonely curve into the country.

# Iowa

by Cathie Stangl

It snowed in April—  
thick wet, stick-to-everything  
snow  
nine inches.  
Four days later  
I sunbathed in 85-degree  
weather—  
worst sunburn in years.

## Change of Habit

by Marcie Ponder

In a flash of tongue  
I finished my lunch  
of a leafy bug  
turning and leaping  
ever straight and true  
I returned home  
to a mossy stump  
by a slow moving stream  
crooning a love song  
to the pearl throated ladies  
along the shore

A drunkard hawk  
who thought to imbibe  
the jug o' rum of  
my low rumbling call  
plucked me from  
the muddy marsh  
and bound me up in  
a raptor's sharp grasp  
to soar far above  
the swampy stage  
of my cabaret

Then a snap of bone  
broke free from  
the cutting grip  
on my brawny leg  
launching me downward  
in a tumbling spiral  
of webbed appendages  
searching for hold  
while racing the wind  
the earth leaping up  
to break my fall

From a polliwog daze  
I was rescued by  
a healing touch and  
content to pass the rest of my days  
limping and listing  
on a leggy stump  
swimming in circles  
in a rushy pond  
humming the praises  
of a lady fair



## Fishing With Dad

by Emily Eaton

The summer sun  
wraps itself  
around the brim of her small  
flower print sun hat,  
casting a shadow onto the  
deep grey  
floor of the Lund.  
She sees the plastic  
Plano tackle box,  
tucked under Daddy's  
swiveling chair.  
One of her small  
Banana Boat-lathered hands  
reaches for the box;  
Daddy's too busy  
baiting another hook  
to notice.  
Her fingers,  
plump sausage soldiers,  
reach the edge, and  
march  
slowly into  
the brown box.  
She pulls out a  
green,  
shiny,  
plastic worm.  
Raising it to her mouth, she  
pops it in between her lips,  
Victory!  
she thinks.  
She bites down on her  
rubbery prize;  
her teeth bounce  
matching the waves  
as the boat trolls  
through the  
choppy  
afternoon waters.

# Angel Squad

by Deb Mandicino

Voice-over:

This is the Garden. Paradise, Eden, Planet Earth. There are 10,000 creatures here in Paradise. Some are innocent, others are not so innocent. That's where I come in. My name's Michael, and I carry a sword.

My partner and I were working the vice squad: Golden Gate Precinct. The boss was Captain Peter. He said to get over to East Paradise—ASAP. My partner is Sgt. Archangel Gabriel. The Captain wanted me in on this one because it had all the marks of a serpent seduction, and I've seen some action with serpents before.

We pulled up over Paradise Boulevard, Cloud Nine District. Two suspects were standing under a fig tree, shivering and trying to cover themselves. It was obvious these two had something to hide. The suspects were a male and female of unknown race. I asked the male suspect what seemed to be the problem, and he nodded towards the female and said, "Ask her." At this point the female suspect became agitated and unruly. My partner and I separated them and took each one aside. After speaking to the suspects, my partner and I conferred.

Sgt. M: So what do you make of this?

Sgt. G: The wife's story doesn't add up to me.

Sgt. M: You think she's trying to take the rap for the husband?

Sgt. G: It crossed my mind. How about him? What's his story?

Sgt. M: He claims the wife ran off into the

woods. Wouldn't obey. She came back hours later and tried to give him some snake in the grass tale, and then charmed him into eating a piece of forbidden fruit.

Sgt. G: Hmm. This could be big.

Sgt. M: You thinking what I'm thinking?

Sgt. G: The big O?

Sgt. M: Yup, original sin. Somebody's gonna take a fall here.

Sgt. G: Who do you suppose set'em up for it?

Sgt. M: I don't know, Partner, but I'm going to take a little walk over to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. See if any evidence got left behind. Keep an eye on these two.

Sgt. G: Will do, Pardner. Should we call in some backup?

Sgt. M: Just hang tight until I get back.

(End Scene)

(Shortly later Sgt. Michael bursts through the trees.)

Sgt. M: Look who I found trying to slither out of sight. (Holds up a large serpent.) And I found this, too. (Displays an apple core.)

Sgt. G: (to serpent) Okay, pal, what do you know about all this? (Serpent refuses to incriminate self and requests counsel.)

Sgt. M: He tried to give me some story about being taken over by an evil force who seduced the woman into eating the fruit. Says he was just sleeping off a big dinner in the underbrush when something seized his body.

Sgt. G: (In snake's face) Listen here, mister! Save that for the Judge. Read him his rights,



Michael.

Eve: (approaching Sgt. Michael) Officer, what's going to happen to us?

Sgt. M: That's for the Judge to decide.

Adam: Hey, she made me eat it.

Sgt. M: Listen here, you little punk. Nobody put that fruit into your mouth and forced you to swallow it. I've seen a million smart little punks like you. You're given everything and you think the rules aren't for you. Then, when you get caught, it's always someone else's fault.

Adam: Do you know who my father is?

(Smirks.) He's gonna have your wings for this.

Sgt. M: I'm not too worried, son. But if I were you, I'd lose the attitude. It won't do you much good where you're going. Gabe, let's take 'em downtown and book 'em.

Voice-over:

This story is true. The names were not changed to protect the innocent. On Friday, Year Zero, a trial was held in Celestial Court before God. In a moment, the results of that trial.

(End scene)

#### (COMMERCIAL BREAK)

Scene: Adam is just coming in from a hard day in the fields. Eve meets him at the door.

Eve: Adam, you gotta try this! (Holds up a chocolate bar.)

Adam: (groans) Oh, Eve, not again. Don't you remember what happened last time?

Eve: But, Adam, this is an Original Sin Bar! I got it from the serpent. He says if we eat this, it will fix everything, and it's chock full of nuts and yummy caramel and nougat. (Smiles and winks toward camera)

Adam: Well . . .

Eve: C'mon. Just one bite.

Adam: Well, I am kind of sick of eating the fruits of my labor. (Takes a bite.) Mmm, good. (It grows dark in the distance, and a big flash of lightning rips across the sky.)

Announcer: Original Sin Bar. It's sinfully delicious.

(End commercial)

#### (BACK TO ANGEL SQUAD)

Announcer:

And now the results of the trial . . .

Voicer-over:

Eve and all her descendents were sentenced in Celestial Court to a term not to exceed the end of the universe, to give birth in pain, and to be ruled over by men.

Adam and all his descendents, for the crime of listening to his wife, were sentenced to an indefinite term of hard labor by the sweat of their brow, and to eat of the plants of the ground.

The serpent and all his descendents were sentenced to crawl on their bellies and eat dust until Judgment Day, or until an appeal is heard and accepted on their behalf on the grounds of possession by Satan.

Satan—never apprehended. Believed to be still at large. A suspect in several car bombings and believed to be responsible for the election results in Florida, Ohio, and other key states in the 2004 presidential election.



# She-ku

by Maureen Kingston

great plains gust . . .  
her arching  
cello hips

Valentine's day  
my purring tabby  
licks her rosette

spring slaughter . . .  
her bruised corsage  
her bloody panties . . .

pms craving  
I scatter sunflower seeds  
for the squirrel

summer in the city . . .  
painting my toenails  
martini olive green

Indian summer  
behind the fruit stand  
split tomatoes

November muskeg  
snapping the filter  
off my Camel Light

# Assonance

by Cathie Stangl

She was all consonants  
and no vowels.

All tsk-  
and no oh. Not even  
an oo for the yellow moon,  
full at dusk. When she  
was twenty she read  
a thick Russian novel  
by a man whose last  
name was all consonants.  
Now she can't remember  
what the book was about—  
passion long dead  
on the page.  
She dated a guy who  
smoked Marlboro Reds.  
He talked incessantly,  
managing to say  
nothing while leaving  
her only enough room  
to nod her head. So she'd  
make out with him  
for silence. On a November night  
in the backseat of his car he hit  
exasperation. She wouldn't produce  
any vowels for him—  
no ahs, oos, ohs,  
or even an uh,

only a sporadic mmm  
like thinking or  
a cat's purr.  
He convinced her  
to smoke pot—  
relax. Limber like  
jello, she exhaled but  
couldn't do it in an O.  
"Jesus, girl,"  
he told her,  
"I can't fix this."  
Five years later she met  
a man who spoke  
in a thick French accent full  
of vowels—oos and aaahs.  
One night they drank  
red wine together in  
an Italian restaurant.  
After, in the front seat of  
his car, he leaned  
over whispering,  
"You sound so sad  
when you speak."  
She thought of  
the Russian novel  
full of passion fueled  
by liquor and life.

"Are you sad?"  
he asked her,  
eyes scanning the  
strap of her dress  
slipping down her shoulder.  
"I have nothing to be  
passionate about,"  
she told him,  
watching his eyes.  
His hand barely skimming  
her shoulder, he leaned further in.  
"There is passion here,"  
he whispered,  
placing a finger on her  
chest where the dress began  
to slip farther.  
"And here," he mouthed,  
placing the finger  
on her lips.  
She touched his  
hand, entangling their fingers.  
Barely moving, he  
kissed her—  
full and vibrantly round.  
And she sighed with a  
long breath:  
"Ooooooh, I see."

## Labrinthytis

by Jayne Vondrak

You crawl around the curve of my ear,  
enter canal without a paddle,  
drum against the tympanic membrane  
until I let you inside the dark depths of me.  
Forging your way in, you strike hammer to anvil.  
Foot in the stirrup, you ride across my body's  
smallest bone. From the vestibular window,  
I watch you spiral into cochlea.  
Your vibrations excite minute hair cells,  
transmit your infectious impulses  
to my brain's core. I embrace you  
inside this tunnel, but you stretch arms  
and legs to fill up my auditory sense.  
I invite you to crawl inside my curves,  
and you throw me off balance  
so that now I cannot let you go.



# Sleep Timer

by Cathie Stangl

## Second Place

I have seen every episode of *The Cosby Show* at least twice. I can recite whole episodes of *Cheers*, *Three's Company*, *The Facts of Life*, and *Diff'rent Strokes*. This is not because of an obsession with television. It's because I couldn't sleep for about three years in college.

I took up smoking a year into my worst insomnia. I did it because of the stress of classes and "becoming an adult" offset by the boredom of being awake and alone during the early hours of every day. When I couldn't sleep I'd go outside to smoke, thinking it would make me sleepy. Then I realized my logic was a little questionable since I always had a cigarette in the morning, thinking it would wake me up. So I stopped smoking in the morning, hoping for a psychological phenomenon to kick in.

That's when I started drinking pop in the morning, too. But the vending machine was always out of Cherry Coke, so I took to drinking root beer. It was two weeks before I realized root beer doesn't have caffeine in it.

It was about a month into the cigarette and pop habit that I began to feel like I was the main character in *Fight Club*. Not that I had an alter ego running around building a nation-wide conspiracy while I thought I was sleeping, just that I couldn't tell sometimes if I was awake or not. When I did sleep my dreams became episodes from my childhood. They were calmer versions of *Twin Peaks* without the dancing midget. I wasn't living in the past—just seeing a TV miniseries of it.

\*\*\*

I'm sitting at my desk looking at a paper the teacher handed back. A large, bubbly "100%" is written at the top in sparkly blue ink. In smaller, cursive handwriting the words, "You may get a bookmark from the second drawer!" appear under the number. I smile and squirm in my chair. I want to run home and tell Mom and Dad. I imagine Mom giving me a great big bear-hug, a wet kiss on the forehead, telling me how proud she is, and maybe even giving me a candy bar. I'm almost nine but still can't decide if it's the candy or the attention I will like more.

I imagine how I will run up to Dad when he walks in the door that night. I'll run at him for a hug, shouting, "Guess what I got today?" He will guess for a while: "A sticker?" "A candy bar?" "A haircut?" "Your ears pierced?" I will say "no" to each, eventually tire of the increasing silliness in the guessing, and finally reveal the bookmark. I will again make him guess before I remind him of the math tests. Then I will explain in great detail about the timed tests and each prize given for completing them correctly. Dad will listen with an intense interest as I describe the conquered addition test and its prize of a sticker, the newly mounted subtraction test and its prize of a bookmark, the highly difficult multiplication test and its prize of a book cover, and the nearly impossible division test with its prize of a poster. Dad will ask questions like how long each test took, which ones were the hardest, and which people had finished which ones. These questions will be vaguely familiar to me, because he has asked them all



several times before, but I will ignore his forgetfulness and babble on for half an hour, just sitting in his lap and marveling at the stubble on his face and the smell of wood he always seems to have after he comes home from work.

\*\*\*

I became horrifically upset when *Nick at Nite* started showing episodes of *Roseanne* and *Full House*. I'm a child of the eighties. I grew up with those shows. I come from the generation that spells the word "night" wrong because of *Nick at Nite*. The worst part was that it wasn't even the first years of *Roseanne*, when the show emphasized the reality of being a lower middle class family. It was the later seasons where every episode was about how Roseanne was an overweight, whiny bitch who got whatever she wanted because every time she spoke it came out in an overly obnoxious screech.

I never learned anything from *Full House* except what life wasn't like, but *Roseanne* taught me some things in its earlier seasons. When Darlene got her first period in one episode I was completely confused. I asked my mother what a period was and she, sheltering me from all things potentially uncomfortable or embarrassing, told me it was when a woman got ready to have a baby. It was the next season before I realized Darlene wasn't pregnant. It was several more years before Roseanne taught me what a gay person was and what pot was.

\*\*\*

The bell goes off and I leap out of my seat, bolting out the door to go wait by the gym for my brother. I like walking home with him, and I like him more than I let him know. I am especially happy to see him today because I

have good news and can't wait to get home. He has a bad habit of showing up ten or fifteen minutes after the bell without so much as an explanation or excuse. But he's on time today, and I announce my good news to him. I stand smiling, waiting for a response. He doesn't give one, but begins walking.

"Fine, I won't talk to you either." I stand still, deciding he can just leave me behind and get in trouble for it.

He keeps walking and yells back, "Abby, c'mon. You're going to make us late." I run and get a few steps in front of him and begin stomping the way home so he can tell that I'm really mad.

We reach the bridge that goes over the railroad tracks by our house. I'm so caught up thinking about the subtraction test and bookmark waiting in my backpack that I don't see I am walking alone. I look up and see a dog trotting across the street. It starts barking and my heart instantly beats a hundred times faster. I reach for my brother's arm. But I look like I'm swatting at a fly—he is not there. I feel the pulse of the barking in my eyes.

"Chris!" I am frantic. "Chris!"

I look down the bridge and see him slowly picking his way down the steep hill towards the tracks.

"Wait for me! Wait! Please, I'm sorry . . . wait, wait!" My eyes stop pulsing.

I backtrack a few steps to where the bridge splits with the ground. I'm half sliding, half walking down the hillside that leads to the tracks and another large hill. I think about how we're not supposed to cut across the tracks. How Mom can always tell when we cross the



tracks because our shoes are muddy and we get home early. How Mom is going to yell at us. But I can't turn around—dogs are more dangerous than stupid trains that stay in a straight line.

When we walk in the house still out of breath, I know by the look on Mom's face that crossing the tracks has not been a secret. My brother goes straight to his room. I go straight to the good news before Mom has time to say anything: "I got all of my subtraction problems right."

Just as I had imagined, Mom scoops me up in a bear-hug and gives me a kiss on the forehead.

"I'm so proud of you, Honey."

I giggle. "I want Dad to be the first to see the bookmark."

She says that's fine and suggests we all go shopping to celebrate.

\*\*\*

I've had my TV since I was thirteen. I saved my allowance and babysitting money for an entire year and then bought a thirteen-inch Magnavox television on sale at Best Buy for one hundred twenty-nine dollars (\$135.45 including tax). I paid with two tens, six fives, and eighty-six ones. The cashier smiled at me and patiently counted the money out loud while I stood looking at the box with my TV in it.

It took me years to figure out that the "Smart Sound" feature, which was supposed to even out the volume levels between commercials, didn't really do anything. And I could never understand the sleep timer. I knew how it worked—I could turn it on and off just fine. I just didn't get it. Who was desperate and lonely enough that they needed to fall asleep to their

television?

\*\*\*

When we get back from shopping, Dad's car is already in the driveway. We walk in the house and there is a musky smell sitting inside the door. The living room is dark. The curtains are shut and the floor lamp in the corner is giving off dull light. Dad is sitting with his head in his hands, glasses dangling from his pinky finger. He's in the flowered chair where we read books before bed every night. Dad looks like he has been crying.

He looks up at Mom, who has stopped just inside the door. He says something that I do not hear, and Mom walks over to him. They have a conversation which I do not hear but understand. Grandma has died. My brother disappears from the room.

I am on the couch now. Mom is sitting next to me. "It's all right to cry, Honey," she says.

I don't feel like crying. I don't want to cry. I want Dad to have color in his face. I want to tell him about the subtraction test, show him the bookmark. I try not to think about the new bookmark. It doesn't matter now, but I can't shake it from my head.

"Daddy?" I get up and walk to his chair. He smells of the flu.

"Yes?"

"If it makes you feel better, I got all of my subtraction problems right today. I got a bookmark." The last word comes out and I spin around before I can see his face or let him say anything. I run to my room, shut the door, and flop down face first on my bed. The house reeks of subtraction.

\*\*\*

After I smoked a whole pack of cigarettes one night, I started trying to use the sleep mode on my TV. I guess I was tired of rolling over in bed and looking at the clock every thirty seconds. Or maybe I finally got desperate enough and lonely enough to need some kind of noise in the room.

But it didn't do any good. Every night I'd develop an odd liking for the episode of *Full House* where Stephanie crashed her uncle's car into the back of the kitchen, or I'd suddenly have to know what it was about *Epil-Stop* that was better and more exciting than any other hair removal method on the market, or I'd get ravenously hungry watching the Food Channel's special on how frozen burritos are made—never mind that I don't even like burritos. Whatever was on, I'd always be awake when the TV clicked off.

\*\*\*

A whisper reaches me: "Abby . . ."

I flop my arms around trying to shoo the person away. I am a disgrace, I don't want to talk to anyone.

"Abby . . ." It was my mother.

Somewhat relieved, I open one eye.

"Honey, I need to talk to you."

I don't want to talk. I don't want to wake up. I especially do not want to see my father.

"Come on, Honey, wake up."

I lift my weight up onto my elbows and squint at her.

"Honey, you can stay home from school today if you want . . ."

I'm confused. It must be morning. I

feel like I'm going to vomit, and I'm sticky from sweat.

"Abby, did you hear me?"

"Uhhh."

"I said I need to know if you want to go to Grandma's funeral. I need to call the school to let them know."

The words are like jello. "Wha?"

"You don't have to go if you don't want to miss school. I can't go because the baby is due soon, so you can stay home with me if you want. But I need to know."

I don't want to see my grandma dead. I don't want to sleep in her house—it's old and creepy. I don't want to walk past the chair by the sewing machine where she died.

"Abby, do you understand?"

I nod. "I don't want to miss school." I bury my head in the pillow.

Mom sits stroking my hair. I don't miss Grandma. She lived so far away I only saw her twice a year anyway. I keep my eyes closed and try to do the multiplication in my head. Eight times two. Fourteen . . . no. Eight times two . . . eight plus eight. Sixteen. I've only seen her sixteen times. I don't remember most of them. All I remember is her thinning white hair. Her soft, wrinkling skin.

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You can learn about a lot of things when you're up at four and five in the morning. For instance, the vending machine that was always out of Cherry Coke always spat out the first coin you gave it. I learned from the guys upstairs how to rig a coat hanger to get the Poptarts and cookies out of the bottom row in another vending machine. I suspect the empty bottom rows



were also why the Doritos started being placed on the top row where they would plummet to their crunchy death only if you paid for them.

I also learned that “The Original Magic Bullet” can make hundreds of different foods in ten seconds or less. There’s no chopping required. No, really. You can make nacho sauce, alfredo sauce, salsa, guacamole, fruit sorbet, chocolate mousse, muffins, chicken salad, margaritas, and omelets, all without dirtying a single knife! The only thing I still can’t figure out is how you get a whole chicken into a coffee-cup-sized blender.

\*\*\*

Dad and Chris are leaving. They are going to sort through Grandma’s things in her house and see her dead body at the funeral.

“Bye, Daddy.” I give him a hug. His stubble rubs against my cheek. He radiates sadness. I don’t feel sad, but I want to see him smile.

They pull out of the driveway and I go back to my room where I have been all day. I have vowed to myself not to leave until I feel sad. I spend the rest of the day sitting on my bed.

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I reset the sleep mode one night in the middle of a *Roseanne* episode. It was the one where Roseanne’s aunt dies and the family inherits a couple hundred dollars. Everyone is ecstatic and they spend half the episode talking about how they’re going to spend the money. Finally, they decide to go out to eat at a fancy restaurant. David spends the entire episode disgusted by their celebration of a person’s death, and he refuses to eat at dinner. I sat there watching, completely understanding Roseanne’s

line about not celebrating the woman’s death but celebrating the money she left. It seemed logical to me.

*Cheers* came on and I closed my eyes. I am standing in Grandma’s kitchen watching her mix something in a saucepan on the stove. The floor is cold by the door, but the kitchen is bright.

Grandma turns and smiles at me, “Do you want to stir?”

I walk to her as she puts a chair in front of the stove for me to stand on. I peer into the saucepan. Hot chocolate.

When it’s done we sit at her kitchen table and she pours the cocoa into two mugs, the steam spilling out over the edges of the cups onto the table where it disappears into a small fog. We sit sipping and talking. I do not hear our conversation, but I hear her voice.

She stands and chuckles. “You have a chocolate mustache,” she says, wiping my mouth with her apron. “Would you like some more, Sweetie?” Sweetie. I nod. The mug warms again when she pours the cocoa in. The steam curls up. I tilt my head back watching it rise until I am lying on my back and feel a warm trickle down my cheek. I fall asleep before the TV clicks off.



## Rare Birds

by Randy Uhl

I followed you  
long before Mahomet went to the mountain.  
Sucked in by your bee-stung lips  
and pre-cocktail days,  
I would have loved myself  
had you asked me.  
There we were,  
rare birds,  
two young phoenix and not a match in sight.

Now you breathe pills  
and I exhale radiation.  
Love for us is as rare  
as we once were.  
Here we are,  
two old phoenix,  
lumbering up Vesuvius  
and everywhere we turn  
someone's offering a light.

## Imagine a Welsh Poet

by Jayne Vondrak

Imagine, Dylan Thomas perches in his shed  
above the Welsh coastline writing  
in a drunken daze persistent for metaphors  
like the seagulls diving for fish  
under crowning waves of poet's inspiration.

Imagine, Dylan Thomas scribbles above cliffs  
while tidal flats in constant change  
shift the seascape in charismatic villanelle  
that rage against the dying light.  
Surrounded by all this beauty, Dylan bleeds hope  
into eloquent emotion.

Imagine, Dylan Thomas leans back in a chair,  
arms behind head, satisfied with  
the poetic placement of wings and waves and words,  
alive on an unlined paper  
that will flutter and swirl on his American tour.

Imagine, Dylan's wife, Caitlin Macnamara,  
crossing the Atlantic Ocean,  
antes up spite on her husband's borrowed coffin  
in the ship's belly with sailors  
guzzling flirtation and rum straight from the bottle;  
so the story's told in Swansea.

Imagine, Dylan Thomas wakens alone from  
whiskey stupor to find himself  
stiff and encased in a watery womb of death,  
poker hands slapping the pine planks,  
placing bets six inches above his bloated face.

Imagine, Dylan Thomas rises, a phoenix  
in that gentle good night to raise  
a bitter glass or two to his wife's new partners,  
playing his cards in one last hand  
winning it all as the Atlantic slips away,  
rocks her lullaby beneath them.



## Green Tea

by Shawn Saylor

Herbal infusions-  
Heal me from all the emotional misgivings that drive me  
Insane from day to day.  
Let me see a brighter path through  
The Woods.

Pausing for just a moment-  
Taking time to let the tea simmer.  
Sipping life through a steaming mug seems to sooth  
My aching soul.

I dip a bag of thoughts into enlightenment  
Ever more I feel the cycle of mistakes-  
Maintaining a revelation during  
Sleep and Waking.

I search for answers in all of the  
Wrong places.  
Leading me to birth and eventual death.  
I find myself holding a smoking gun  
And it reminds me of the  
Negativity that I cannot be rescued from.

I am not sure anyone is listening  
To these thoughts  
I pretend not to notice.  
Tonight-  
Raindrops hit the ground  
Without making a sound.

Echoing into a thought-  
I look down  
The cup is empty-  
But my life is not.

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# Contributor and Staff Notes

Lacey Bensink is a junior from Monroe, Iowa. She is majoring in English Literature and Writing. This is Lacey's first year published, as well as her first year as a fiction and nonfiction editor for *The Kiosk*.

Mark R. Clark is a senior from South Sioux City, Nebraska. He is majoring in both Graphic Design and Photography. Mark has had photos published in *The Weekender*. He was Morningside College's "2004 Photographer of the Year." This is Mark's first time doing layout for *The Kiosk*.

Jan Dehner is a graduate student from Hinton, Iowa, taking courses in English, and writing in the Public Relations office at Morningside College. She has written for *The Weekender*, *Siouxland Lifestyle* magazine, *Orion Afield*, *Cyber Vision*, and "Orchestrated Murder," a collaborative murder mystery published by KUNI Radio. This is Jan's first year as a poetry editor for *The Kiosk*.

Emily Eaton is a sophomore from Saint Paul, Minnesota. She is an English/Elementary Education major, and a Religious Studies minor. This is Emily's first year being published in *The Kiosk*.

Emily Keston is a sophomore from Oakland, Iowa. She is majoring in English Writing, and this is her first year as a fiction and nonfiction editor. This is also Emily's first year being published, and she has won first place in this year's Creative Writing Awards.

Maureen Kingston is a graduate student originally from Vermont. Now living in Nebraska, she has been published in several editions of *Judas Goat* and *The Logan House Anthology of 21st Century American Poetry*, and won first prize in Wayne State College's annual poetry slam in 2002. Maureen is currently working on her first chapbook and editing the 2004-2005 edition of *Hot Papers*. This is her first time being published in *The Kiosk*, for which she has received an Honorable Mention.

Deb Mandicino is a native of Sioux City, and is majoring in Counseling Psychology with a minor in English. This is her first publication in *The Kiosk*.

Casandra Peck is a freshman from Scribner, Nebraska. She is majoring in Mass Communications and Religious Studies. This is her first year editing *The Kiosk*.

Angela E. Phillips is a junior from South Sioux City, Nebraska. She is majoring in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, and has an English Writing minor. This is Angela's first year as a poetry editor for *The Kiosk*.

Jessi Plueger is a senior from Sioux City. She is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Psychology. Jessi was published in *The Kiosk* for the last three years, and was a poetry editor for the last two years. This year she is the Editor-In-Chief of *The Kiosk*.

Marcie Ponder, from Sioux City, is major-



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ing in English Writing, and in her spare time she attempts to create order out of chaos while keeping the students and faculty of the English Department in line. This is Marcie's second year being published in *The Kiosk*. Last year she was a fiction and nonfiction editor and won second place in the Creative Writing Awards.

Rick Rector is a senior from Albuquerque, New Mexico, majoring in English Writing and Studio Art Painting. Last year Rick was Assistant Editor to *The Kiosk*, and was published in the 1986 issue, as well as the last three issues of *The Kiosk*. He also won first place in 2003, and third place in this year's Creative Writing Awards.

Gretna Sanchez is a senior from Bronx, New York. She is studying Religious Studies and Psychology. This is her first appearance in *The Kiosk*, but Gretna has been published in *The Spot* and *Bronx Voices*, and was once voted the "Most Thought Provoking Poet" of her school. Gretna has received an Honorable Mention in this year's *Kiosk*.

Shawn Saylor is a freshman from Ozark, Missouri. He is majoring in English Writing. As a freshman, this is Shawn's first publication in *The Kiosk*.

Cathie Stangl is a senior from Des Moines, Iowa. She is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Philosophy. In 2002, Cathie won second place in the Creative Writing Awards for *The Kiosk*, and first place for the Excellence in Writing Awards. She was the Editor-In-Chief of *The Kiosk* for the last two years, and this year she has won second place in the Creative Writing Awards.

Cliff Thompson is a junior from Trenton, Nebraska. As an English Writing major and a Mass Communications minor, Cliff is a staff writer for the Collegian Reporter and won third place in last year's Creative Writing Awards. This is his second year being published in *The Kiosk*, and his first year as a poetry editor.

Mallory Trudell is a sophomore from Omaha, Nebraska. She is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Mass Communications. This is Mallory's first time being published in *The Kiosk*, as well as her first time as a fiction and nonfiction editor.

Randy Uhl graduated from Morningside in 1990 with a degree in English Education. In addition to being on *The Kiosk* staff when he was a student, Randy has been published regularly in *The Kiosk*. Randy is currently teaching English in the Lawton-Bronson Community School District.

Jayne Vondrak is a graduate student from Kingsley, Iowa. She is working towards a master's in English Creative Writing. She has been a member of the Iowa Poetry Association since 1983, and has been published nearly every year since then in *Lyrical Iowa*, for which she has received a second place and a couple of honorable mentions. Jayne received a grand prize in the 1990 *American Anthology of Southern Poetry*. In 2002 she published a book of historically-based poems titled *An Albanian Gypsy Along Smooth Trails: Rose Wilder Lane*.













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