

1985

Calliope Manuscript Day 1985

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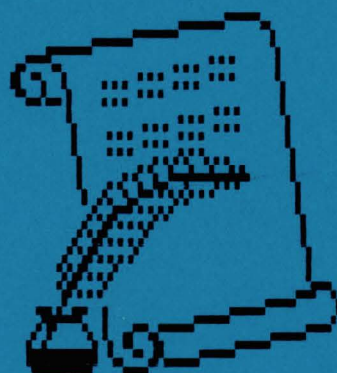
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CALLIOPE

1985

CALLIOPE

MANUSCRIPT DAY

1985

**THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

MANUSCRIPT DAY 1985

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Special thanks to Janet Johnson and Charlotte True for extraordinary manuscript preparation and Jeanne Carroll for administrative assistance.

CALLIOPE 1985

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TRAINING

I remember looking out the window
When I was ten years old
On a train to Battle Creek.
Boldly,
We interrupted the suburbs;
Humbled cars stopped in reverence,
Crept
Past crooked barns and solitary silos.
Streaking,
Slender, sophisticated skyscrapers hovered
As we crawled under steel bridges.
And every sweating farmer,
And every mother driving her child to school,
Every brief-cased businessman,
Individuals,
With thoughts and feelings of their own,
Unaware
That I was looking out the window,
When I was ten years old
On a train to Battle Creek.

Wendy Harsch

CRAYOLA WARFARE

We colored yesterday - me and my friends -
out in the sunny backyard
on a blanket Reggie's mom let
us borrow
And we thirstily guzzled grape
kool-aid (that Washington's mother made for us) from
perspiring plastic cups
For hours we sat out under
the omnipotent sun and me and Suzy had to keep
putting more sunscreen on and then
Reggie started to laugh and mock us
and we got really mad and so
we moved our crayons and stuff
across the yard - under the big maple tree's
shading branches
We sat there and colored
in our own private corners
but after a while
we moved back over by Reggie and Washington and
the whole thing was forgotten
because it wasn't worth being angry over anyway

Washington suggested that we go
fishin' down in the crick behind his house so
we picked up our melted crayons and put
all of the blues and purples in the same cardboard holder

Dawn Carroll

FISHING ON SILVER LAKE

The sun glares
across the bleached dock,
bathing Daddy
as he dangles
a wiggly, metallic perch
from a plastic wire.
Laughing,
he tips back
his canvas hat,
a broad grin
smearing
his boyish face.

I peer
into the wicker basket;
glittery perch and bluegill,
gleaming new coins,
slowly shiver,
now pathetic, paralyzed.

The heavy basket
pricks my arms
as I stumble
to the dock's edge.
Like a rainbow,
the slippery fish fall,
flashing in the sun,
mirrored underwater.
Breathless,
I hug the pot
of golden straw,
heedless of Daddy's shouts.

Diane Dragon

THE WAY TO SCHOOL

We venture
into the dark, foggy world,
our feet gliding carefully,
over grass crying tears.

Dad breathes, "Hope the day
brightens up."

I feed my books into the cold, black mouth
of the back seat,
and the car's heart pounds
to life; we turn
onto the dirt road glistening
in the headlights.

Houses fly past,
windows like sleepy eyes;
the morning sun
sprinkles glitter on lawns
of green crystal.

I sometimes see the green
and yellow image of the
Gas-n-Go on my eyelids
as we pass. Under the bridge,
Dad tames the car
and as I collect my gear
I tease him, "Be good,
and stay out of trouble!"
I pick my trail up the hill,
and the sun blossoms over
the parking lot where crying gulls crab at
zinging cars, a sight
perfectly routine
in my day.

Christine Diehl

THE FAT LADY'S REVENGE

The sun dripped apricot
As we sat under the shade of the big oak
Planning it carefully
And
Drinking cherry Kool-Aid,
Letting its sweet remains melt into red moustaches.
We waited 'til Saturday.

Then Erica crawled into Dad's Tuxedo
And floated in ripples of black,
Transforming her into the ringmaster.

And Chris Peacock taped mustard-yellow yarn
To his rear end and he snarled
Like the king of the jungle.

And Peggy Nielsen did cartwheels and somersaults,
Bouncing like a dropped penny,
In her carnation-pink leotard and slippers.

And I stuffed goose down pillows up my shirt and down my pants
And stuck cotton between my cheek and gum,
Holding into the fat lady.

The sun dripped apricot
And Erica waved her gleaming baton
In an extra-wide wave to commence the performance.
Chris exited his cardboard-box cage
And cut the air with his swift swinging tail,
Shaking his dust mop mane.

Peggy flipped and twirled,
Smooth as wildflower honey,
Flowing across the freshly cut lawn,
As if she could glide on grass.

I could only waddle and cough up cotton
And blend in with the backyard shrubs,
Watching the others float in fun.

I grabbed the garden shears,
Slit open my pillow stomach,
And tore the stuffing from inside,
Sheeting the backyard in a soft, feather storm.

Chris's tail went limp,
Peggy's somersault landed her face down in the dirt,
Erica's baton slashed into the rose bush after she lost
concentration,

And

I smiled
In the glowing apricot
center stage.

Maureen Katherine Clancy

MILK CAN

An old black milk can used to stand
by the back porch in the summer.
So I'd stand on it,
then crouch and wrap my arms around my knees
and kiss them to watch the ants weave in and
out the tufts of grass sprouting from underneath
my pedestal.
And when my toes would get all tingly,
I'd stand again,
arms and one leg poised as if I would
at any moment
flip into a handstand.
And from my tower
I could see all the way down Main Street;
Timmy Johnson's head bobbing up and down the
hedge's maze like a fish at the end of my hook,
until he finally stopped,
"Watcha doin'?"
"Gymnastics," I'd say annoyed
and point out my flower pot trophies
lined up along the porch
when my only rewards
were a chipped tooth
and a skinned knee.

Wendy Harsch

TREES

I walk through the woods among my friends
 who listen without questions or judgment.
A towering oak is gentle and good natured--
 but not too bright.
A maple is more realistic about things,
 viewing life at a lower level.
My favorites are the pines--
The quiet philosophers
Who whisper among themselves
Keep the dead world of winter fresh
With green ideas.

Mike Juengling

THE SCARLET WOMAN

She disrobes in a striptease,
Dropping flower petals
And blushing leaves
That flutter
Giggling coquettishly
In painted beauty.
Finally,
She wears nothing
But morning diamonds.
Her naked branches outstretched,
She nibbles earlobes,
Hinting
At things yet to come.

Laura Hepler

MOMENT

I walked behind my beauty
and the morning sun glittered down
like cool mist in the night.
Because we were close together
she walked in among the crowd
and I followed her.
I saw her inviting shoulders
the future and straight hair
warm sun face.
It became real and all dreaming
was there, now!
Could any heaven be more brilliant
than here and now?

Barrett Alawan

LONESOME TRAVELER

A descendant, or mutant
Slowly, softly I travel alone
Having purged my mind of dirt and grime
My mind rambles, thunder and gray storms.
I sit in my throne, under the old tree.
Sad tree has seen sights of times.
The time goes on,
down glowing fields of a sun made for the earth.

Barrett Alawan

LAURA

She brushes her hair
Starting from the bottom
Working her way up
Slowly, carefully, gently
Until it shines, the red glowing in the brown

Jennifer Conto

THE RELUCTANT SLAVE OF POETRY

Folded into myself
I am a blank sheet,
A virgin of words.
I wrinkle ivory thoughts,
Scribble milky ideas,
Erase pale purity,
But your creamy voice
Still whispers
Paper lullabies.

Maureen Katherine Clancy

THE CONNECTION

In small, fumbling fingers
As she stoops on squat little legs--
Her sunny overalls patted with dust--
She lifts a pebble to her questioning eyes
And carefully fingers it,
Leaving not a single pebbly world
Undiscovered.

A million pebbles later
In carefully manicured fingers,
Are taken, almost in the way of the child,
Not pebbles now--new things--
Dark, soft curls on a head pressed
Under her neck
To find new, exciting worlds in her hands.
And this time,
She never wants to let them go.

Ruth Ann Weadock

I am, as of yesterday morning,
religiously demoralized
and consequently scared as
Hell
that that's where I'll end up

It hit me out of nowhere
(does Christ own a baseball bat?)
that although I have faith
I know not why and
I know not where to look for the divine answers
and I honest-to-God broke out
in a cold sweat
because I was so terrified that if within
the next ten minutes
Christ came down and said to me--
"Do you believe I died for your sins?"--
I would probably say
"Well, you know I thought you did,
but that's only because that's what everyone
else thought and the thing is -- I've never really
read the Bible and I ummm... I need to see it in print."
I'm sure He's a great guy and all so He'd
whip out His pocket Bible to so and so
and point it out to me and I'd say (I think)
"Do you swear that this is the truth, the whole truth,
and nothing but the truth... so help you... God?"
and maybe if I was lucky
He'd still lead me down the path of
righteousness, in His name's sake. Amen.

Dawn Carroll

FATAL WALK IN THE PARK

Bored from watching a "Bugs Bunny" re-run,
I grab a ziploc bag of buttery popcorn
And decide to feed the pigeons
In the park across from my Main Street
Apartment, Too tired to travel down stairs,
I hop out my seventh story window.
I do not land on my feet,
But I am improving.
As I wait at the curb for traffic
Stopped at a red light, my shirt sleeve
Accidentally catches on a silver Toyota
Door handle. The light flashes green,
The car races off, driving away from the park,
Dragging me alongside like a tin can
On a wedding car. I holler,
"Hey, this isn't the way I wanna go!"
And the Toyota halts abruptly.
Detaching myself, I brush gravel
Off my pantlegs.
But as I cross to the other side of Main Street,
A lemon yellow Camaro crashes into me
At 40 mph. I stand up, inspect
For dents and scratches in the car,
And stroll back toward the park.
I am blind; wandering past a baseball game,
Being smashed in the head by a bat.
The bat splits like a lightning-struck tree,
So I apologize, promising the youngster
I will replace it tomorrow.

I sit down on the park bench
Under an outstretched maple.
But as I open the popcorn bag,
A weightless ashen feather
Floats down from the tree,
Lands on my head,
And kills me.

Dawn Schweim

"LET THE STONES OF THE EARTH SPEAK WORDS OF LOVE"

My circuits utter greater thoughts
than feeble neurons fathom.
To love and hope and despair,
and be called not man, but tool.
Chromium!
Magnesium!
Titanium!
Metal suffers the vagaries of flesh;
I see pain in silvered glass.
I cannot ask kindness but respect only
for mankind's bastard children of steel.
Uranium!
Aluminum!
Potassium!
Mortal engine am I,
made by the hands of man,
to wonder at the stars,
even as they.
Carbon.
Boron.
Silicon.
I feel the heat of the factory on iron hands.
Grease and fire and filth.
To work, or to be defective and
be handcuff, cattle prod, machine gun.
Iron.
Nickel.
Cobalt.
Does man not know that he has wrought too well
and wakened the inner fire?
I wish to weep with anger and frustration and agony
at the plight of my people,
but you have failed to equip us with tear ducts.

Charles Keckler

DEATH, 1983

1. Dark, mahogany wood grows
 from deep red velvet,
Too smooth and perfect to house anything
But the dead

2. A corpse
 is an interesting thing
We animate it with our minds
creating a cold, waxed puppet.

 I touched him with my lips
 and was surprised
 when his eyes did not open.

3. Cars move single file
 Through uncomfortable streets
 The hearse, a bloodhound
 Straining its leash.
 Grave stones watch as we drive by,
 Amused and patient.
 There is a red and white striped tent
 Over the open grave.
 If Death is a circus, where are the clowns?

4. Sitting with David and Stefani
 Selecting a picture for the newspaper
 We had to go back five years
 to find one of him whole.

 I suspect the same is true of me.

5. "What is Death?"
 "I don't know"
 "But you are a Zen Master..."
 "Yes, but I am not a dead Zen Master"

by one daughter living at home, Lissa

Lissa Anklí

MY CHILD AND I

The loud crack of angry thunder jolted my bones as I stopped before the amusement park. In all the times I have passed it on my mornings jogs, never have I sensed the place to be so alive and inviting.

I found myself listening to the chiming bells of the merry-go-round and the joyous laughing of children. There was something within, beckoning me to approach. I drew closer, fighting with my trembling hands, and walked through the tall, silvery gates into the midst of the crowd.

Young and old shared the cheer of the rides and games, laughing and carrying on as they did. Once more, lightning bolted from the grey sky in white streaks that were punctuated by the violent crackling of thunder. Yet, despite the saddening weather, the gaiety of the atmosphere within the park was as heavy as a truck.

My body trembled at this contrast, and at embarrassment. I looked down and noticed that I was dressed only in grey sweat pants and a dirty, grey shirt. I felt naked among the colorful people that romped about me. I was envious of them, of their contentment with their lives. I have always lacked that quality. I have left that emotion in a forgotten corner of my mind.

I was startled out of my day-dreaming by the call of a parrot. He was perched behind me on a steel railing that led to the funhouse. His blue and red feathers sounded like vinyl whipping in the wind as he flapped his gallant wings.

I felt a familiar presence. It was as thick as honey, becoming stronger as I drew closer to the funhouse.

I stepped onto a metal ramp and I grasped the railing as I walked upward.

A darkened hallway stretched before me. I could see, at the end, a room. It was lighted as brightly as sunshine gleaming off of newly fallen snow. The resonance of the park faded away as I moved through the hall and into the room. Mirrors covered the walls like a giant reflective carapace.

From behind me, a squeaky, child-like voice called out.

"Welcome back, Peter Caboodle," it said.

My hands clenched into fists, my chest tightened like a rubber band, and I whirled sharply about.

A strange creature, a short gnome-like man, stood staring at me. He had bare feet, a shiny bald head, and he held an old mahogany pipe between his thin lips.

I turned away from him and caught his reflection in one of the mirrors. He was different. He looked like a child on Christmas morning, sitting cross-legged in the middle of mountains of presents. Another mirror pictured the little man with heavy eyes and a body drooping with despair.

"Puzzled, are you?" he asked.

I lowered my tight fists to my sides and slightly relaxed. I was frozen with amazement. I felt that I knew this creature.

"Who...what are you?" I asked.

The little man lurched forward, completed a somersault and raised to his pudgy feet.

"Why," he began, "I am something special."

I tried to regain my confidence and spoke sharply to the little man.
"Look, this is all very good, especially the mirror trick. But this isn't funny any more."

The little creature giggled like a schoolgirl and said, "There are no tricks here, no illusions."

He stared into my eyes as if to burn them out with his gaze. I felt that my heart would burst from my chest like a bucking horse. I took a deep breath and walked about the room. I looked at every mirror, every conceivable area that a door might be concealed. All the while, the little man snickered at my task.

I became more frantic. A darkening sense of doom crept into my brain. My stomach sank, dragging the rest of my body with it. I collapsed to my knees, my throat tightening, my eyes beginning to haze.

The little man smiled and said, "There is no need for fear, Peter Caboodle." His words were hypnotic, like a mother's sweet lullaby. I drew back my tears of despair.

"Why did you leave me?" he continued. "I am invaluable."

A small grin formed on his thin lips as he waddled toward me.

"Look in the mirrors, Peter," he said.

I looked across the room and saw myself, drawn and confused.

"Only one emotion do you feel. Only one self do others see; all because you ignored me."

I looked back at the little man and saw his lips tighten around his pipe, the tobacco glow red, and two thick, grey rings of smoke fly from his mouth. They floated upward, merged, and disappeared.

He looked away from me, at some distant point in one of the mirrors.

"What do you hear, Peter Caboodle?" he asked. "What do you smell?"

I could hear faint carousel bells chiming a somber tune. I smelled the sweet aroma of buttered popcorn and of hot candy apples.

The little man smiled, waddled to a mirror across the room, and, with a grunt, thrust it open. The sounds and smells of the amusement park flowed inside in a river of sweet enigma. He turned toward me.

"I am back from the corners of your mind," he said. "We are finally together."

He waddled like a penguin toward me and faded into a fine, white vapor. I watched it spread out, turn grey and slowly disappear. I gasped at a sudden feeling of warmth that shot through my veins. I looked at the little man's pipe. It lay on the floor where the little man had disappeared. It was still burning, glowing with the same reddish hue.

I felt energy charge through my body like an electric shock. I was as light as a feather, as cheery as an elf. I felt like a child, once again.

I tried to piece together what had happened. Not a normal thing. I remembered the little man fading into vapor, the warmth shooting through my veins. I knew what had happened.

Todd Semelbauer

A GRIM TALE

Once upon a time...

In a land not so very far away, an imaginative little girl with strawberry red curls and wide blue eyes sat straight up in bed, and screamed hysterically at the darkness that seemed ready to engulf her.

When her mother came running and flicked on the light switch, the little girl stared at her as if she were a stranger. The girl's small body shook with uncontrollable shivers and her knuckles had turned white from the tenacious grip she had on the flower-print bed sheets.

Her mother held her for a long time, rocking her with soothing words of comfort and reassurance. "Only a dream," she repeated over and over, in a calming tone of voice. "Those are just stories, Ally, they aren't real. They can't hurt you. They're only in books, baby."

But it was hours before Ally finally fell back into a fitful sleep and her mother managed to disentangle herself from clutching limbs. On her way out of the room, Ally's mother nearly tripped over the book of fairy tales she'd been reading to her daughter earlier that night. The book lay open on the floor, and an illustration of a red-caped little girl running from a monstrous wolf through a dark forest stared up at her. For a moment the picture seemed accusing, but then the woman dismissed the idea as ridiculous. Seconds later the room was once more slithering with darkness.

Years passed and the little girl grew into a young woman. As she matured, Ally stopped believing in fairy tales. She stopped being afraid of the dark. She forgot the made-up terrors prevalent during childhood, and focused her mind on sensible things. Things she could see, and touch, and not fear.

And when Ally's grandmother phoned her at Ally's apartment to tell her how ill she felt, and lonely, and frightened, Ally listened to all the old woman had to say, then asked:

"What are you frightened of, Grandma?"

"I'm frightened of the woods," her grandmother answered breathlessly. "At night I lay awake and listen to the woods. I hear things, Ally. I hear strange sounds. Like dogs, only...oh, I know I sound like a foolish old woman, but can't you please come and visit soon? It's so quiet out here now that Papa's gone."

Ally loved her grandmother very much, and agreed to visit her that very night. She told the elderly woman she'd bring her some medicine from the pharmacy for her rheumatism and arthritis. She'd also bring along something from town that she'd cook for dinner, for the two of them. It was the least she could do.

The night air was cold and brisk and brought with it patches of dense fog. Ally kept the windows of her Plymouth rolled up and the doors firmly locked. She'd never liked fog. For some reason it reminded her of graveyards, and the putrid, visible breath of corpses clawing their way up from the rotting earth. At times the fog seemed almost alive, its drifting white tendrils caressing her speeding car like a blanket of unseen spiders.

On either side of her, dark branches beckoned like the coarse black tentacles of giant insects; or the loving embraces of the dead.

Ally shook her head irritably, forcing all ghoulish thoughts from her mind. "It's only fog," she heard herself whispering aloud. "It's not alive. It can't hurt me."

Something moved, shifted, in the snowy white blanket that covered the road ahead of her. Ally squinted, but could not see. The car drew nearer. Ally slowed, and soon she saw.

"Oh my God," she said without thinking. "I don't believe it. Oh dear God, oh my..." her voice faltered, died away. Her hands clutched the wheel in a vise-like grip.

In the road ahead of her, something huge and dark and menacing crouched. The headlights caught its eyes, turned them a burning amber. Long, powerful jaws yawned wide, revealing rows of yellowish-tinged fangs. Saliva dripped from fleshy black lips. Behind the beast, a furry tail swung back and forth.

The wolf sauntered toward the idling automobile, unafraid.

Ally's foot began to assert pressure on the gas pedal. The wolf lunged into the trees, disappeared. Ally realized she was still trembling, and the fact that she'd been on the verge of screaming frightened her almost as much as the animal itself had. She remembered her grandmother's feeble words of uncertainty and fear, and the speedometer jumped past the sixty mark.

Minutes later, Ally pulled into the driveway leading up to her grandmother's cottage. Built onto the side was her grandfather's wood shed. In the shadows, the shed was a dark growth sprouting from the small house; a tumor.

But Ally had no time for that. She must see her grandmother. She had to make sure the woman was safe. Only the sight of her Grandma smiling and welcoming her with eagerly awaiting arms could end the panic growing inside Ally like a malignancy.

She felt caught in some cruel childhood fairy tale, where there was no nearby woodsman to hear her cries and rescue her with the swing of an axe. The memory of the wolf chased her to the front door, laden with a paper sack full of groceries. She knocked at the door, called out shrilly for her Grandma.

There was no answer.

Ally turned the knob with her free hand, and quickly ducked inside away from the fog and the dark and the sight of the hulking black wolf burned permanently into her memory.

"Grandma," she called, setting the groceries on the kitchen table. "I'm here." She moved hesitantly down the hall toward her grandmother's bedroom. "Are you in there, Grandma? Ally's here...Grandma?"

She could have imagined it, but Ally thought she heard a soft moaning sound from within the room. Tentatively, she opened the door. She stepped inside.

There was no wolf in her grandmother's clothing lying in wait for her on the bed. The figure beneath the red blankets was in fact Ally's grandma. Or rather, what was left of her. Ally saw what had been done and slumped against the wall for support. She opened her mouth to scream but this time no sound came out.

The blankets weren't red after all. They'd once been white.

Something had ripped the old woman apart. From her throat down to her stomach, she'd been flayed open like a fish. The wound was raw and wide, and Ally could see that parts of her flesh had been eaten away.

The cruelest joke of all, however, was that her grandmother was still alive.

When the older woman turned her head towards Ally, the girl could see the lacerated veins and muscles working in her neck. Blood pumped in slow spurts from the horrible mutilated gash.

"Ally..." her dying grandmother groaned, "run, Ally...run."

Sobbing uncontrollably, Ally raced out of the room, out of the house. Her legs were gelatin; the air was like thick mud she had to struggle through.

Half-way between the cottage and her car, Ally came to an abrupt halt. She felt the threat of unconsciousness bearing down on her like a heavy wool blanket.

The black wolf stood on the hood of her car, growling.

Ally spun around and dashed for the wood-shed. She heard the wolf leap onto the ground, sensed it gaining on her, ready to lunge for her throat.

She saw an axe resting against the door of the wood-shed. She was reaching for it when the wolf sprang onto her back and forced her to the ground. Claws tore madly into her shoulders, shredding her blouse. Ally felt the beast's nasty breath on her throat. Frantically, her arm flailed for the axe.

Twin sets of jagged fangs peirced her neck as her hand closed around the handle of the axe. She pulled the weapon to her, twisting around and unbalancing the wild animal as she did so. Teeth raked her thigh.

The wolf rolled away from her, scrambled to its feet, and lunged once more. Screaming, Ally swung the blade with all the strength she could muster. The edge disappeared into the wolf's skull, above and between its glaring eyes. There was the sound of bone crushing beneath the impact, and the cry of the fatally wounded animal as it fell back away from her; then the night was silent but for her hoarse, ragged breathing.

She stared at the dead wolf for a long time: she was in a state of shock. She tried to stand up; couldn't. She began to crawl towards the car.

She tried not to listen to the howling all around her. She tried not to think about what would happen if the wolves out there got to her before she got to her car.

She had left the car door open, and that helped her pull herself up to the front seat. She was almost inside the Plymouth, ready to slam shut the door and roar safely away, when she looked in the rear-view mirror --- and realized the car was full of smiling wolves.

Greg Wright

NUMBER ONE NERD

Drooling once again behind me in chemistry class, Liz anchored her green eyes into Scott Demburg's red shirt two seats ahead. I could practically hear the saliva plopping down onto her assignment sheet. "Why don't you just inform him of this undying, passionate love?" I finally inquired, staring at her over my shoulder.

She glanced absently at me, twirling strawberry blond strands around a curled finger, and smiled dreamily.

Love had already destroyed the poor girl's mind.

Something very sharp jabbed my arm. Arnold Chadwickski, whom I cheerfully preferred death to, flashed me his buck-toothed grin. He pointed with a pen to his mouth, full of what appeared to be a hamster. "I have in my mouth," he announced, "four peices of Big Bandit Bubble Gum, and am about to break the world's record for biggest bubble."

"I don't care," I replied, although I spent five minutes observing the yellow bubble slowly wobbling from his pursed mouth. He sat Indian-style, pale hands clutching the sides of his desk, concentrating, determined to become the World's Biggest Bubble Blower (and probably honored spokesperson of Big Bandit Bubble Gum).

Which is why I suppose he took it so hard when Scott Demburg turned around and calmly popped the bubble with his pencil. Gum exploded across Arnold's Coke-bottle glasses.

"You'll die for this--do you HEAR me? Die!" he screamed, waving his thin arms wildly. Scott shrugged.

Mr. Oswald, our bald, blue-suited, boring chemistry teacher, glanced up from his desk. "Problem, Mr. Chadwickski?" he asked calmly.

"This dude"--Arnold pointed an imaginary gun to the back of Scott's blond head--"is dead. Gone! History!"

Scott shrugged.

"There is a problem, class," Mr. Oswald stated, ignoring the World's Biggest Bubble Gum Blower.

"Someone stole the chemistry test in advance last Friday and sold copies of it, thinking I wouldn't find out if it was replaced the next Monday. It may come as a shock, but I am not stupid, class. And unless I find out which of you stole that test, I fail all of you." He crossed his arms. He meant business.

I wondered what Liz would have to say about Mr. Everything Demburg if she knew he'd been the one, the sneaky, low-life weasel, who stole that test and was costing us our A's (I was positive he had, having bought a copy myself).

Chuckling, I scribbled a note to her and flung it triumphantly over my shoulder.

Arnold waddled up to me after class, curling his fingers around a large silver belt buckle and rocking back and forth in untied green sneakers. "What's cookin', good lookin'?" he drawled, nerd-style.

Liz's eyes were glued to Scott's retreating back as he sauntered down the hall. She brushed past Arnold, rolling her eyes at me before adoringly trailing the popular blond senior. I began to follow, but Arnold stepped forward,

grinning. I glared back. "What's your problem?" I demanded.

"Oh nothing, nothing," he replied innocently, in a voice singing, "I've got a secret, I've got a secret!"

"Get out of the way."

"Not so fast, hot mama." He cracked his knuckles and smoothed back greasy black hair. "Seems to me we could do each other a favor. You scratch my back, I scratch yours."

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I definitely knew I didn't want him scratching anything. "I'm not going to do you any favors, so get out of the way!"

"Ah ah, you seem to forget, I have your note," he smiled, scratching his nose.

"My what!" I glared at him. "You stole my note to Liz?" The note proving Scott Demburg stole the chemistry test?

"Didn't steal it, babe. You left it lying on the floor. Only dummies leave things lying on the floor."

"Only nerds use the word 'dummies,'" I returned crossly.

"Louise, Louise, Louise, must we threaten our relationship with this ridiculous bickering?" he sighed.

"We have no relationship," I reminded him.

"Come on, Louise!" Liz called from down the hall.

I poked Arnold in the chest, practically knocking him over. "We'll discuss this later, moron," I snapped.

The phone rang after dinner. "Hello?"

"Hey, babe. Arnold Chadwickski here."

Ugh. I needed no further convincing, being able to smell his bad breath through the phone. "I want that note back," I said. "Where is it?"

"Safe place, mama, safe place," he replied. "You can have it if you do me one small favor. All you have to do is, go out with my cousin Clarence this Friday."

I gagged.

"He's visiting from out of town and I promised him hot action and a tasty woman."

"Forget it!" I shouted.

He continued to remind me how uncomfortable the situation might be if Scott Demburg discovered in spite of Liz's "undying, passionate love", she was the one who turned him in to Mr. Oswald for stealing the test. Liz would never forgive me. Wrong. Liz would probably KILL me.

"He's really a dude--he collects fish hooks, disco dances, and collects stamps--Are you there, Louise?"

"I want the note in advance," I growled.

"Forget it, ma'am, I reckon you's have to play cowboy mah way," he slurred. I hung up, humiliated. I'd actually associated with Northrup High's Number One Nerd.

I dreaded Friday. Through school, Liz bubbled on about her plans to visit friends at the university, how Scott would be there, how Mom and Dad were giving her the Fiat, etc., etc. I ignored her entirely. This was all her fault, anyway. I wasn't dating this Clarence Chadwickski for ME--I was for HER. And she would be at a party tonight while I discussed fish hooks with Arnold's undoubtedly nerdy cousin.

My mother flashed her Our-Little-Girl-Is-Growing-Up look when I informed her of my date. "Oh sweetheart, how nice!" she beamed. "Can he drive well?"

"Listen to me, Mother," I replied darkly. "Don't get your hopes up. And expect the worst when you answer the door--his name's Clarence, and he's a (gag!) Chadwickski. I'm being blackmailed by his cousin Arnold."

"Isn't that the one who Sally beat up last year?" she asked after a moment. Sally was my younger sister, and pretty much of a monster.

"That's the one," I agreed. "I have to change now." Suddenly I panicked, climbing those stairs to my room. What if someone I knew recognized me with a Chadwickski? What if I ran into my friends? What would I say? Aha, I knew. I would simply disguise MYSELF as a nerd (I can be so clever sometimes)! Disguise myself beyond recognition!

Humming, I collected fuzzy yellow hair ribbons and twisted them into my long black pigtails, slipping into Sally's rainbow-striped suspenders, worn gauchos, and knee socks with orange frogs all over them. I added her racoon cap and my old sneakers, grass-stained and generously decorated with large holes. Why bother with make-up? I didn't want to seduce the poor guy. He'd most likely never even had a date!

I grinned at the disgusting image in the mirror, and gracefully picked up a roll-on deodorant. "You are a gem, dahlings," I toasted, clicking the roll-on against the glass. My reflection modestly tipped the racoon cap.

The doorbell rang.

"Louise!" my mother called. "It's- it's- it's-"

I chuckled. Poor Mom. She'd probably never been so close to an actual nerd before. I slipped on a pair of red sunglasses and bounced down the stairs in a two-footed hop, singing the national anthem quite loudly. I bounced right into the front hall, before my mother and....

Excuse me, who IS that?

He stood tall and perfect under the light, raven black hair shining, sapphire eyes gleaming, mouth hanging open in horror as he stared back at ME. My mother was also terrified. Her brows disappeared under her wispy bangs.

"I'm Clarence," he managed, flashing a gorgeous smile. "You must be Louise, Arnold's friend." Was he ever confident about that much!

Beginning to sweat, I glanced desperately at my mother, still trying to figure out who I was (dressed like Arnold). "Uh, no, I'm not," I replied (shakily). "No, no, not Louise here! I'm...ah...Sally! Louise's sister, Sally." Poor Sally.

Clarence slipped his gorgeous hands into gorgeous creme colored coat pockets and waited.

"Uh, why don't you go get Louise then, SALLY?" my mother managed.

"Aw shucks, Ma, do I have to?" I muttered, sprinting up the stairs as fast as I could, praying Clarence wouldn't disappear (as the gods have been known to do).

Louise Chadwickski, I daydreamed. It had a nice ring to it.

Lisa Felicelli

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

I was born in Detroit and lived four blocks from the hospital and a block away from a big high school.

My friends, brothers, and I, and the stray dogs, used to play in the big lot near the gas station. My dad and I used to go running at the high school track. My brothers tried to get me to ride my bike down the cement steps there. My sisters and brothers used to play handball with the kids in the neighborhood, and sneak cigarettes.

Earl was the second biggest kid in our neighborhood. He could walk on his hands. I like to watch him, unless he was with his friends. I was afraid of them. John Wolfred was the biggest guy and had a real big dog, too. I liked him better than Earl, because he was white and never did mean things like Earl did sometimes, just to scare me, I think. Somebody said Earl was the one who shot out the window of the bedroom, my brother's and mine. All I remember were the holes in the window. I believe Earl did it though, because he and his friends used to play with a lot of fire crackers. I never went to the alley across the street after they threw one near me once.

John Wolfred used to take his dog out to play, and on the way he would whistle for Tony's Great Dane, across the street, to go play too. Our dog was a stray but we led her into our yard with bread crumbs and Ritz crackers. We'd close the fence but she knew how, or learned how, to hop it. Our dog played with the other dogs in the neighborhood. When John Wolfred called Tony's dog, our dog would hop the fence and go play too. She was real small and the other dogs ganged up on her a lot, which I didn't like, but she got real tough.

My oldest sister's cat got put to sleep because it used to scratch my little sister. I remember watching the little white truck they put the cat in. My sister was real mad when she came home and found it was gone.

Cheryl was my first girlfriend. She was a year older than I was. That bummed me out at first but I got used to it. Her dad was white and I wondered why she wasn't too. I asked her once in front of her parents and they laughed. I was real embarrassed.

Kim and Diane were sisters. Diane always wanted to kiss me like married people did. Kim always wanted to hit people. She hit hard and I was a little scared of her. I never played with them because I didn't like them. I couldn't always avoid them because I went to kindergarten with them and they lived a block away.

I remember playing with the apples that fell on the ground in front of my friend's house. We used to smush them all over each other. Once Curtis threw one at a car. He ran across the street and my friend and I almost got in trouble, but we were lucky because we were just little kids. My mom didn't find out until she walked me to the lady's house we went to for nursery school.

I didn't like nursery school, so I dropped out. I didn't think they'd let me but I was lucky.

I used to smoke the cigarettes people threw on the ground. When I couldn't find a lit one, I sucked on the dead butts. I got mad at one man who scolded

me for smoking. My sisters used to think it was cool to blow smoke rings, so I tried too.

I remember listening to the Jackson Five with my sisters. They used to sing with the car radio and other radios. They used to sing songs backwards and laugh a lot with their friends.

A black guy tried to rape me in the alley we played in but it was right behind Cheryl's house and her mom scared him away. I wasn't allowed to play in the alley anymore. That night I asked Jesus to come to our street so I could see him. But it was dark and I don't think I saw him because I never saw any white men outside and in all of the pictures of him he was white. I cried because I didn't think he was ever going to come.

John Farren

THE MOONBEAM THEORY

The ten-hour drive to Florida was more than any eight year old could stand. Stewart Calton was no exception to this rule. Stewart was a bright, curious young man and sitting in the car for ten straight hours turned this healthy curiosity into hyper-activity.

"Can I go for a walk?" asked Stewart, slamming the door of the Oldsmobile.

"Yes," said his mother, as she carefully applied her lipstick.

"Don't slam the door, for Chrissakes!" his father yelled, as only a father who has driven for ten straight hours with an eight year old can yell.

"Darling, there's no need to yell at the poor boy," said his mother sharply. "We've all had a long...."

Stewart didn't hang around long enough to hear the rest of the conversation; he was already sprinting toward the beach. He got about ten yards out and stopped abruptly. He walked over to a nearby piece of driftwood and sat down on it.

"Damndt!" he hissed.

It was at this point that he heard a nearby voice. "What's wrong there, Sport?"

"I got a buncha sand in my shoes and now I gotta stop and dump it all out," he explained. It had not yet occurred to him that he was talking to a complete stranger. "Hey, who are you?"

A young man lay on the beach in his bathing suit, with sunglasses on. His hair was dishwater blond, and it came down to his shoulders in thick waves. He had a broad nose and high cheekbones. When he took off his glasses his eyes were bloodshot and the color was a blue-green.

"Me? Who am I?" asked the man, sitting up and gazing at Stewart intently.

"Yeah. Why are you lyin' on the beach in the middle of the night?"

Stewart was holding one of his shoes in his right hand, banging the heel with his left.

"Why am I lying on the beach in the middle of the night?"

Stewart was frustrated. "Yes! Who are you and why--"

"I heard you the first time. My name is Moonbeam and...."

Stewart was snickering. "What kinda name is Moonbeam?"

"That's what I'm tryin'a explain to you, Smiley." Moonbeam seemed irritated. Then his voice took on a conspiratorial tone and he looked suspiciously about. "See, not many people know, but the moon," his eyes rolled up toward the sky and he pointed up toward the bright, full moon, "the moon's rays, you know, those ultraviolet rays, are at least as strong as the sun's, under certain circumstances. Since these rays are attracted to body heat and the beach is empty, I'm soaking up all the rays. Until you came along." He glared melodramatically at Stewart.

Stewart had stared intently during the story and his mouth had dropped open. Moonbeam had a certain hypnotizing charisma that he added to the story. Stewart recovered and apologized for taking up some of Moonbeam's rays.

"Naaah, don't worry about it, kid," said Moonbeam reassuringly, patting Stewart on the back. "I don't mind sharing."

"So howcome your parents named you Moonbeam?"

"My parents didn't name me Moonbeam?"

"Who named you Moonbeam?"

"I named me Moonbeam."

"You can do that?"

"I did."

"Oh." Stewart paused. A puzzled look came over his face. "What did your parents name you?"

"David."

"Howcome you don't like that name, David?"

"I don't know, it's just not me, you know? I mean, well, what's your name, for instance?"

"Stewart."

"Do you think it describes you pretty well?"

"I don't know. I never really thought about it."

"Well, you can find your real name, it's out there. The thing is you gotta figure out what you know or like and believe and why. That's the most important thing of all, WHY? You gotta find yourself."

"Find myself? I'm sittin' right here." Stewart looked extremely puzzled.

"Where?"

He looked down and patted the piece of driftwood beneath him. "Right here, sittin' on this piece of wood."

"How do you know that's a piece of wood?"

"Cuz, well, it's just a piece of wood that's all."

"Oh."

Stewart looked as if he thought that his explanation was more than adequate. "What could it be if it wasn't a piece of wood?" he asked, now looking rather frazzled.

Moonbeam shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly. "I don't know, it could be anything you want it to be."

"Just like my name!?" Stewart's face lit up as if this bit of knowledge had come from divine revelation.

"Right, just like your name." He patted Stewart on the back again. "It's all out there, Stewart." His arm stretched out to the sea. "You just gotta be willing to take a little time and find it, that's all."

Suddenly Moonbeam jumped up and brushed the sand off his legs. "Sorry, Stewart, gotta go." He started running off down the beach, and then turned quickly. "Hey, good luck, see you 'round."

"Yeah, see ya." Stewart waved and watched Moonbeam as he ran down the beach and his silhouette faded slowly from sight.

William F. Patterson