Calliope Manuscript Day 1999

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poems
Gray Hairs

The Hostess sighs when we say *Twelve*, then disappears. When she returns, we follow her to the back of the restaurant. Mother pushes me in first, next to the great view of the K-Mart parking lot. The waitress plops a stack of menus on the tables and disappears. The room is filled with old people, not the kind that you see driving half way in the lane going twenty-seven on a four-lane road but the kind that most of the time still know what is going on. A portly gray-haired guy sits within arm’s reach. He looks around the room and outside like he’s expecting someone. The waitress nods her head indicating Mother should start. "Ham omelette with green pepper and mushrooms." "Yup, yup." The man says softly. Then me. "I’ll have the Granny Omelette Special." I expect to hear the old guy, but he’s silent. "Oh, wait, and hash browns," I remember during Uncle Joe’s order. Then, "Yup, they always forget," the old man mutters. I can feel him staring at me, mouth open to speak if I just look his way. "Ya know, this reminds me of the time that I was in France. Yup, was stationed there in ’44. I remember gettin’ up and going down to the mess hall, and they had eggs and hash browns for breakfast, and I ended up giving it all away to my buddies." He tips his cup. "I tried out for the Air Force once, but they said I couldn’t see well. So I had to become a grunt. But D-Day. They needed us on D-Day." Mother gives me a look, and I just nod. "Yup, those were the good ole days when a man could be a man and there was none of this modern day nonsense." I stuff my mouth so I can’t respond. "Yup." He tips his cup and leans toward me. I nod and smile.

*Geoff Denstaedt*
After Hours in Cabin B-2

The first girl said
Aaron. Aaron wearing
A wife beater
Mowing your front lawn.

The second girl said
Sam. The guy Sam,
not the Girl. Dancing
Around the field during aerobics.

The third girl said
Sean. Sean swatting
On the stage imitating
One of the staff members.

The fourth girl said
Jon. Jon standing in
Your room, in his boxers
Doing his happy dance.

The fifth girl said
Everybody. Everybody wearing
Speedos, swimming in my pool.

Jessica Ratzow
Allison vs. the typewriter

I still think about the first girl I kissed.  
(Not all the time, just a few sparsely lit moments)  
Sometimes I can’t remember her name  
Or what she wore that day,  
The color of her eyes, the shape of her face  
Yet I still hear about her, through weak connections and old friends  
(Truthfully I always seem to ask, out of pure wonder, really)  
She only exists for those brief seconds of conversation,  
Then fades again into the poetry of daily life.

Daniel Brooks
The Last Poem of the Great American Revolution

The leisure
is chemicals
Entertained by walls and a trash experience unnoticed unsheltered
clinging to whatever they find,
And so livid...

Well, I was sitting there on the toilet, cutting my nails, Watching the clippings fall into the trash can I straddled, Talking to myself about the last poem of the Great American Revolution. If I could just get it out," I said, just audible above the snap of the clippers. "Pour it all out, all this would finally be over! The late night scribbling, Uneasiness of lost words, inability to converse; this rage would end!"

Then, almost unnoticeably, like the beginning of an orgasm, I could feel the last poem coming, dancing around the pupils of my eyes, The words lightly formed out of nothing, seeming more like A code for complete rest, the prize of the poet, to silence The poems themselves, to find peace...

Above, I saw the code becoming sentences in front of the bathroom wall, I knew it was the end of all the poems, my peace.

Suddenly, almost as quickly as it formed, it disappeared, Replaced by a giant bat flying out of the wall, Fluttering around my head, shrieking, Its huge wings creating a draft in the small room, Its reddish orange eyes beaming from a crown of purple hair. It returned to the wall as the image of the poem faded Into a Violent Femmes song playing from the radio behind my head. Dazed, I turned to check the time and turn off the radio... Forty-five minutes had passed! It was 2:37 a.m.
(Even though the clock was always around ten minutes off, give or take two minutes).
I knew I had to try to remember the poem I saw.
I returned to my room where I had tried to start this poem forty-five minutes before
In one of my duct-taped notebooks.
It sat glaring up, five lines, two indented...
The word "leisure" aligned with the word "is" in the second line,
The beginning of the last poem, this poem.
I tried to write what I had seen,
What my subconscious or upper mind or some bullshit
Had projected onto the bathroom wall.
I thought it was over, I thought I was finally writing
My final poem (another poem I never finished two or three years ago
Shares the name "The Last Poem of the Great American Revolution").
I then realized that this isn’t
The last poem of the Great American Revolution;
Despite the title, it’s just another masturbation poem.

Daniel Brooks
untitled #4

Sunlight's effort to
tan my paleness blusters my
cheeks into evening.

Lana Jaeger
Standing Firm

The maple sapling stood against the wind. 
Its small trunk swaying, 
orange leaves rustling. 
Children fly by ready to save the world. 
At a nearby table they crank out two-minute masterpieces. 
Scribbled fish and rabbits win first place ribbons.

Now I lay in the grass. 
Simple clouds become elaborate pictures. 
Why after 18 years can I wish for those crayon drawings, laughter, and firetrucks.

They can save the whole town in one afternoon. 
Hair blowing in the wind unimportant.

Farther away, the tallest trees barely sway at all. 
The children begin to laugh while the young tree fights against the wind.

Sarah Uchman
The Waiting Room at Pro Muffler and Brake Shop

The coffee drips a syrupy oil into the stained glass
I count the seconds between each splash
2:50, 2:55, 3:00, and I’m still waiting.
Two Chinese look unfazed
As they flip through People
The younger guy next to them looks as if he needs a beer,
Isn’t he my neighbor?
The older guy next to me seems to be fascinated with
The car wash next door.
Me, I sit wondering what’s in their minds?
My thumbs making senseless circles
Obvious Silence ignored.
Why don’t we talk to one another?
Finally, a little boy runs in and plops down,
We stare
He sits and slurps his McDonald’s shake,
Forever ending the silence.
I smile.

Amy Jewell
Baking 101

The woman grabs another handful of self-rising flour, tossing it into the large white bowl. She adds water now, purified, of course. That's the only way. "Next," the instructor sings, with great enthusiasm, "blend until evenly distributed." The woman knows better. Nothing is ever that simple.

The woman begins smoothing the bulbous head. Her aged fingers pick and pinch until the beginnings of a nose are evident. "Interesting," the baking partner concludes, her eyes shifting satisfactorily from the woman's creation to her own.

The instructor takes a moment inspecting each one. He runs his hands over new pinkish flesh, pauses shortly, then frowns. "Too small. Too many knots." Disappointment crowds his face, as he holds the baby up for the whole world to see. "It will have to do, there isn’t any time to start over."

Lindsey Prudhomme
My Mother Conquers Her Writer’s Block

I came home that day
knowing exactly
what had happened.
Everything
was tumbled on the floor.
Flower pots showered
dirt onto the carpet.
My mother’s daffodils
had committed suicide
across the open notebooks.
The book shelf rained
prose and poetry
onto the sofa.
A crash in the kitchen,
I knew before entering she must be
on the counter
again
tossing dishes
across her theories
as she trod through her creation making her red Freudian blots
on the tiles
the result: poetry had exploded.

Krisha Novak
Uncle Bud

I never really knew you well

I knew your round face,
your boyish grin.
How you always went outside
to smoke
at family parties,
And sent me a two dollar bill
for every birthday.

I knew you loved
the Cubs,
Herbie the cat,
the meager garden in your backyard,
and giving us candy when we came over
for Halloween.

I knew it was you
Mom was talking on the phone about
the night you died.
So unexpectedly and peacefully
you left.
Left me with a dull ache in my stomach,
Regret that

I never really knew you well.

Karyn DeSchaaf
Rubbings

A cold day in November when leaves shake beneath a pale blue sky. Everything, a pale blue: amorphous maples from afar, seagulls swooping by, fog lying low. And me? Sitting at my desk contemplating death, its suddenness, its inevitability. A quick swipe of a knife. A loose brick. A sharp turn of a steering wheel.

Years ago, we made rubbings of tombstones, sketched below a white moon in cold wind imprinting names like Eleanor and Margaret. They could have been anyone. Librarian. Lunch lady. Mailman.

Lately people have told me the secret to life is counting the days left. I can see it now, everyone counting down like mission control before takeoff. But, Eleanor, there is another way. Eleanor, I know the secret to life: run like white moon fire, escape to calling wind, spoon fog and chase runaway kites, floating dandelion dust, until none is left.

Tom Wisniewski
Content Removed
Per
Author Request
Chris’s Knees

Bare feet make me smile.
I said yours were the ugliest I’d ever seen.
And they really were.
But that didn’t bother you.
Your knees brought your only self-consciousness.
There’s a picture of us,
our heads together,
but your body engaged in an awkward struggle
to keep your knees from showing.
They still do.
You fell skateboarding once,
now they don’t grow any hair.
You can’t tell from the picture though.

The last time I saw you,
I spent the day sitting on your dock,
keeping your five-year-old blond cousin, Jake
from throwing the wrench you were using
into the lake.
You were smoking and he kept saying
"Grandpa, I didn’t know Chris smoked."
Your grandpa spanked him
and sent him up the bank.
"Go sit with Grandma."
He never did, though.
He walked to the end of the dock and jumped in the lake.
That’s Muskegon Lake.
Only rich people
live on it
and they all have jetskis, boats, use fertilizer on their lawns. It sits on the surface. That’s what your cousin jumped in. I was afraid when you finally threw your cigarette in the water, that the whole thing might ignite. It didn’t, though, and I was glad not to have to go to the hospital while you were still wearing shorts that showed your knees.

Becky Kosick
Color Doesn’t Matter

I remember exactly when you left me;
a six-year-old
fatherless.
I can see myself staring out of your bedroom
window in our brick house on Firwood Avenue.
I can see the gas fumes trailing from behind
your silver?—wait, red?
car.

I didn’t know then that I wouldn’t see or hear from you
again until three years later
when you so graciously
"decided"
to be my dad again.

Forgive and Forget?

All I forgot was the color of your car.

Anne Prussing
Again

Busy street I see, with endless cars speeding past this useless road.
Loud exhausts;
Kids scream and play at their grandma’s;
The neighbor lady yells at her son to mow the lawn;
The dogs wrestle.
Smelling fresh cut grass, faint exhaust of semis, and oil as he continues to work on his car.
Bored.
I reach for the flower pot hanging from the front porch,
Half alive, half dead...
The bright purple flowers feel soft and smell sweet,
The dead ones flake off and smell like nothing.
Once again I make a mental note about how my life will be.

Heather Ackerman
fiction
Underwater World

by Carrie Vivian

I look into the aqua green water, and am hit by the spray of a whitecap that ends its path on the side of the boat. I stare deeper into the clear water, looking for a mysterious creature from another world, a world that I will soon be joining. I see a glimmer, a flash, deep in the water, maybe a fish, or the sun. I fight with my body, mind over matter, to convince myself that the bobbing horizon doesn’t bother me. And as the water and sky start to dissolve into black I feel a steady hand on my shoulder, and hear the reassuring strong voice of my uncle.

"Ready to go?"

I was ready to embark on this journey, to view, for the first time with my own eyes, a part of this world foreign to most.

How I got to this body of salt water is amazing considering I come from Michigan, a state surrounded by fresh water lakes. This is my Spring Break vacation. My family and I joined my aunt and uncle’s family to an exotic trip to sunny Cancun. Even while still in the plane the clear, aquamarine water hypnotized me, so clear I could trace the outlines of the coral reefs on the small round windows of the plane. And drawn so much by the water I convinced my uncle, sister, and cousin to join me to a trip under the sea. After a couple days of hands-on training in the warm pools of the resort I was ready for the real thing, or so I thought.

With that thought, and a deep breath I fitted the mouthpiece to my diving tank in my mouth. I waited for the right second, and with a quick prayer, took a giant leap into millions of tons of forty-degree salt water. I
bobbed like a buoy to the surface, and choked as a gagging reflex on the cumbersome mouthpiece. Then I grabbed the towline connected to the sea floor, forty feet down. I slid down through the waves into a new world. A few feet under I felt the pull of the waves cease, and the water around me became calm. As I slid down the rope I felt pressure increase on my head, and remembered to pop my ears to release it.

I slid to the bottom and landed with a soft thump, my black swimming fins splayed out around me, tangling me in the green sea fan next to me. My legs itched, and I saw the sea fan climbing my legs, clinging to me. I screamed silently and swam away, causing a whirlpool of silt to follow me. And I continued to swim, slipping through the clear green water like silk as I felt weightlessness travel from my head to my feet, spinning the dot of sunshine above my head to under me, and all around. So I shook my head, and breathed deeply into my oxygen tank, inhaling the pure air forty feet below the surface. I heard a short, sharp sound to my left, and it awakened me from my silent world. And obedient as the child I felt I was, I followed the group into the maze of coral reefs.

There I was, lost in my own world of wonder, the colors of the reefs, the fish, and the anemones were as brilliant as the dying sun. Deep purple brain corals stained the reef, like a royal carpet leading us on. Among the pink, blue and green anemones small silver fish flashed in and out of rock crevices, in a play or a dance, all for our amusement. Large grouper fish moved lazily along, barely moving, yet seeming to move with terrific grace. And a large yellow and black fish caught my eye, swimming alone away from the others. With a clumsy kick of my fins I followed it, curious to where its secret haven under the waves was. I stopped short with a sharp burst of sound from the instructor’s air horn. I was being disciplined, I had wandered too far from the group, into danger. The fish moved silently and swiftly away, into the dark cover of the reef. I turned away and joined the school of intruders of this mystical world, different not only in looks, but in thoughts.

For forty minutes of wonder I was there, exploring a rainbow-colored world of shifting currents and strange creatures. Then the inevitable came, our journey through the reef was complete, and it was time to rise to the surface. I grasped the hand of my uncle, and that of my cousin, and in a
circle we rose slowly to the whitecaps above. As our heads popped through
the surface a cold breeze hit my cheek, so different from the warm, caressing
currents below. And how turbulent the water was compared to the soft
easiness of the water near the floor.

Here the whitecaps threw me about, trying to jerk the mouthpiece from
the tight grip of my teeth. Once I gave up, and let the water peel it out of my
grip, but the next wave filled my lungs with salt water. I spit it up and
replaced my mouthpiece. The horizon didn’t even exist to me, nothing did
except the towering waves and the darkness that descended upon my eyes.
Suddenly I was pulled up; I had blacked out, falling face first into the water,
still floating because of my life vest’s buoyancy. I remember the drawn
brows of my uncle, and the voice that was too garbled to understand. Then
one word made sense, "boat," the boat was here. Relief poured through my
body as I was half dragged, half pulled to the portside. But there I found my
muscles unable to haul my exhausted body and the fifty-pound tank out of the
water. So I cried. Reality didn’t exist, I didn’t realize the boat wouldn’t
leave without me. Instead I felt as though I had come so close, but now had
to see the prize ride away on those horrid whitecaps.

Instead I saw an unusual angel appear. No more than my height of
five foot four, he was twice as wide, giving him the peculiar shape of a
square. A wide white smile split the dark face, and spoke to me in a musical
English/Spanish tone. "It’ll be okay, no problems here. Why don’t you just
turn around and let me see if I can lift you out of the water?" And suddenly
I was pulled from the water, and deposited like a bag of potatoes on the deck
of the boat. He threw me a towel, and I discarded my tank and vest for the
fuzziness of a warm blanket.

I rode the first half of the trip in silence, taking in the warmth of the
sun, and the sparkling water we raced through. Then my limbs started to
give off the most peculiar feeling. I felt my hands tighten and shrivel up, all
the muscles pulling towards the tips of my fingers. Again the hot tears ran
down my face and dripped onto my shivering shoulders. And I spoke softly,
but with urgency, "My hands hurt, they hurt really bad." I repeated it until
my cousin noticed my distress and I curled up in a ball to ease the pain that
was exploding throughout my body. Then darkness settled upon my eyes.
I could still see as they lifted me up onto a makeshift table; I could even see my dark angel bending over me and massaging my arms and legs, trying to get me to relax. But everything was coated with a film of black. Finally, too exhausted to keep fighting, I fled gratefully into complete darkness.
Little Brother Syndrome

by Mercedes Combs

I sneak around the garage; my prey unsuspectingly walks up the drive. My hands are armed. I sink into the powdery whiteness and wait. Soon my plan of action will be in effect. I must wait till the perfect moment, when nobody knows of my existence. Sleekly, I move around the garage to counteract his move. I think to myself he might know my whereabouts, but that’s impossible. Closer, closer, he comes. I wait. He walks closer still. I wait. Then, when he is nearest and less observant of his surroundings, my performance is ready. Quickly, I pounce from my hiding spot. Before I have time to see his reaction, I throw. Once, twice, three times I throw. He doesn’t move. I’m out of ammunition. I reach down to refill my arms, but it’s too late. I didn’t consider the possibilities. Now, with my head buried completely in snow, I scream. I thrash about, hoping to strike him. My attempts were airy. Eventually, the excitement comes to an end; he leaves me sitting on the ground, my face bright red and my hair wet. I look at him to compare my damage. He’s wet and pink. It was worth it.

Josh dusts off the remaining snow from his hair before opening the door to go inside. He looks at me from the doorway; I can’t tell whether it’s a smirk or a grin. Once he’s gone, I pick myself up. Drips of cold water slide down my face. I dust off the snow that’s still in my hair. Follow Josh inside.

Nora is in the kitchen, but Josh isn’t. Nora is a friend of my parents. She’s been taking care of us for about a week now, ever since our parents left
for the cruise. She glances up when I walk through the door. I think she knew what happened. Did Josh tell her, or did she just watch? She smiles like she’s holding in an I-couldn’t-have-done-it-better-myself laugh. I smile too.

I stood in the doorway a while, peeling wet layers of clothes off my body. Once down to damp jeans and a sweatshirt, I look for Josh, a heap of soggy clothes behind me. I consider picking it up, but decide against it. Nora shakes her head but doesn’t say anything.

It didn’t take me long to find him. Realizing he’s been discovered, he rolls his eyes. I ignore the sign. "What are you doing?" I ask dumbly. It was more than obvious he was watching television. He didn’t answer me. I picked up the remote that was sitting on the couch. I hadn’t planned on changing the channel, but my hand slipped. Josh ripped it away from me, and fixed it. He didn’t give it back, but he set it on the couch. I knew better than to pick it up again.

One time I heard Josh tell someone he liked me. It was only once that he said this, and all the other times he plays the part of the annoyed older brother rather well. Nora says I play the part of the annoying little brother even better. She tells Josh he’s good to me, but I don’t know what she means by that because Josh has a history of shoving my head in the snow, water, leaves, or mud depending on the season. Even though I blame it on him, deep down I know that I start it. I guess I’m asking for it, although I’d never admit it to anyone, not even Nora.

I didn’t know what Josh was watching, and eventually I got tired of trying to figure out. I guess Josh didn’t like it either because as soon as I left the room he changed the channel. I didn’t care.

Oxford was lying on the floor at the bottom of the stairs. I sat down to pet him. Oxford was a big dog, an Irish Wolfhound, but much larger than normal. When he’s on all fours, he almost comes above my waist. Nora’s family used to breed these kinds of dogs, and she says she’s never seen anything like him.

Josh and I used to play with Oxford every day. We used to fill up wagons with treasures that we found on our adventures. I remember one time, it was the middle of the winter, and Josh and I tied our sled to Oxford’s
collar. We rode behind him for hours. We didn’t even know where we were going. But we pretended that we were in a dog sled race. Of course, we won.

* * *

I woke up early Monday morning. I walked into the kitchen where Nora was making pancakes. The radio was on. "...Ford Elementary, Pine Hurst Middle School, and Oakland Elementary...," the announcer listed off the school closings. His voice faded off in my cheers of excitement.

I half ran, half-skipped into Josh’s room. He was just getting up. I pulled him the rest of the way. "No school today," I screeched. Josh smiled at me and then climbed back into his bed. "C’mon, Josh, let’s go sledding or something! Don’t go back to sleep." He didn’t listen; his eyes were already shut.

I walked back into the kitchen. Nora knew what had happened, she probably heard, but I told her anyway. "Josh won’t come sledding with me."

"It’s still early, maybe he’ll go with you later." She smiled reassuringly.

I spent the morning watching cartoons I ordinarily miss. Around eleven o’clock, Josh came and joined me. Captain Planet was on; he didn’t even try to change the channel. We sat there only a few minutes before the phone rang. Josh answered it.

"Hello?.... Yeah, when?.... Okay, I’ll meet you half way.... Yeah. .... Okay, bye." He hung it back up.

"Where are you going?" I asked. He ignored me.

"Nora?" he called out, making his way into the other room. I tried to listen.

"I’m going over to Kyle’s house. We might go see a movie or something." I couldn’t hear the rest, but I heard the door open, and then close as Josh left.

A couple minutes later, Nora asked me if I wanted to go sledding with Chris, the neighbor. I told her I didn’t want to, but I did, a little.

Josh stayed at Kyle’s house a long time, long enough for me to find
something else to do besides wait for him at least. I got out my sled and tied it to Oxford’s collar. Just because Josh isn’t here doesn’t mean I can’t have fun! I sat down on the sled, and let Oxford do the rest. I wanted him to take me into town, to where the cinema was; maybe to where Josh was, too. But Oxford has a mind of his own, and I was just along for the ride. Chances are, I knew, we’d end up pretty close to there anyway. We usually did.

Oxford carried me into town; I saw the movie theatre a little ways down the road. If Josh was there, maybe he’d let me play with him and his friends. I got off the sled; Oxford stopped. I went around to the back of the theatre, leaving my dog and sled near the sidewalk. The movie hadn’t started yet. Nobody was even there. I walked back around to the front; nobody was there either. I was mad, a little, because I wanted someone to play with, but part of me knew he wasn’t going to be there.

Oxford was still waiting for me, and I hopped back in the sled. He started walking the same direction we had been going, but all of a sudden he started running. I wasn’t expecting it, and fell off as soon as he took off. He was barking very loudly. I picked myself up and ran after him, not even realizing where he was going.

"Oxford, get back here!" I yelled. My shouts could barely be heard over his deep roar. I didn’t keep up with him, and pretty soon he was far ahead of me. Then he stopped.

There was Josh. I was so excited to see him, I didn’t even notice what was going on. I kept running toward him, and I got all the way there before I saw the blood. Josh was kneeling in the snow, drips of red blood were all around him. I was stunned. "Are you okay?" I whispered. Oxford kept barking and growling, but he stayed by us. There were three boys, about the same age as Josh running away.

"Yeah, I’m alright," Josh said. "Thanks."

Thanks. The word slipped off his lips with sincerity. I didn’t even do anything, and Josh was thanking me. I was a little confused at first.

Josh started petting Oxford. "Good Boy," he said to him. Josh was glad that I was here. For once, Josh was actually glad to have me around.

"You’re welcome," I said.
Saturday I walked into Josh's bedroom. He was watching television; he didn't even look up when I came in. I sat on the bed, Josh was lying on the floor. "G.I. Joe is on," I told him, hoping he would take some interest. "Go watch it then," he snapped. I didn't answer, and I didn't leave. The remote control was right next to me. I thought about picking it up and changing the channel myself. I decided I better not. Not yet, at least.
Fresh Starts

by Blake Costello

I stand around on the corner for fifteen minutes before I notice a note taped to the wall directly in front of me. It’s from Jill, saying she’d be an hour late. I need coffee and an hour is too long to wait, so I’ll add a half hour to the note and walk down to the cafe. This cafe is where the artist, or trying-to-be-artist, type students go. It’s not bad. You can ask the waitress to bring you a copy of the paper with your coffee.

I went to the cafe instead of the place down the street where my friend works because free coffee wasn’t as important to me as one more chance to read the paper and be myself. But just as I’d begun to lose myself in the news, the headline caught my eye: “First day of spring.”

I started to think how I felt about the season which I was coming upon. Easily excited, easily disappointed. Big ideas, big plans, big worries. Long walks, long days, and letters from long lost friends. It’s best to keep the letters short, though; like a good song or a good fling, it leaves you wanting more. It’s spring in the world right now, and I don’t mean just the weather. The old are young again; washed-up old bands are exciting again; washed-up people are excited again, second chances for everyone. Free refills. It’s never too late to be late.

I stay up late, I sleep in late and still wake up in time for coffee, then soda, and the sun is still shining. Unbelievable. Let’s hear it for cut-off jeans, black tee-shirts, black spray paint, and black and white photographs turning yellow. Lost pride found, lost friends found, and suddenly the past
is just a good story instead of a ball and chain.

It’s spring, brush your teeth and break some bones. Stolen kisses and stolen glances, pretty much anything goes as long as you can get away with it. No one’s worse off for your slyness. Finding money on the sidewalk and bracelets in the pit after the show. Finally hearing the song that’s been stuck in your head for weeks. And reading a good book. Spring also makes me think I can trick time, like I can live for three months and experience a whole year’s worth of experiences, but still be just as young. I realize I’d only spent three months of time but in my mind I still aged a year. What a great trick. I’m seventeen but feel twenty. I realize you have a certain amount of time and a certain amount of living to do, and you can’t take it when and how you want to, although it takes time to understand experience.

I used to be jealous of my friends who, when we were younger, racked up experience in a mad rush. Like Jill. I was jealous of her because she took every chance, pushed every bit of luck, raced time and milked it for all she could. I just sat on the edge of all that life, watching it, reporting it, only passing through the center quickly and quietly. Never in the limelight. Always the friend of whoever was. That feeling was this horrible after-taste I couldn’t shake because I only had a sip while someone else drank the whole bottle.

Thinking about how long a fourth of a year is, I remembered how short an hour and a half was, and realized I was late. When I got to our corner, she still wasn’t there. I waited for a while and then realized what had happened. Someone had ripped the note off the wall. She had never seen it. Yet another missed connection.

Sometimes I think Jill and I should just give it up, stop trying to connect our past with the present, but it’s hard because we still want to be friends. Our lives are just so different. These days, she’s an athlete and a dedicated student. And I’m something else. It’s a good thing we met years ago, because we would never have met now.

Four thirty A.M. I’m lying in bed thinking about how in two months of timing, I could screw up my connection with Jill. I screw up on the first day of a fresh start. But I can’t let it get me down. People are always saying stupid depressing things like, "Everything happens for a reason," which
translates to, "You got what you deserved, and it’s your fault." People seem to find comfort in the idea that they are not in control of their own lives. On the contrary!

But, hey, tomorrow is another day, and it’s the late nineties. And we didn’t die in a nuclear war like we figured we would. Well, at least not yet. And so I’ve had a lot of time since thoughts in younger days to go about doing all the so-called fun stuff they did then, and screw up just as much if not more than they did. Now that I think about it I’m not so jealous anymore, and every day can be a fresh start if need be.
I met him for the first time when I took my car in to the shop to get it fixed. I was not happy. My car had been making a weird clunking noise for weeks, but I had decided to ignore it. Then the stupid thing finally quit on me.

I had seen him before. He was a friend of one of my close friends, but I'd never really talked to him or anything. The first thing I noticed when he was talking to me that day was how blue his eyes were. I'd never seen anything like them before. They reminded me what the sky must look like in Alaska. Pale blue against the white of the snow on the mountains.

"So what's the problem?" he asked.

"I have no idea," I said. "It just wouldn't start this morning, so I had no ride to school. Can you have it fixed by tomorrow?"

He looked at the engine, poked around at a couple of parts that looked completely useless to me, while I stood there and watched. "Yeah, it's nothing major, you can pick it up tomorrow," he finally answered.

My best friend gave me a ride home. I sat staring out the window, watching all the trees and buildings in our small California town go by. We drove near the ocean, like always. My friends and I like to drive on the highway that is closest to the water because we love to be as near to the ocean as possible. It's a little bit out of the way, but definitely worth it.

I kept thinking about him, and the way he seemed to see right into me. We only talked about my car, not exactly the stuff of romance novels, but I
was quite taken by him. I just couldn’t get over his eyes.

"Hey, Natalie," I asked my friend. "How well do you know Steve?"
"Pretty well," she said. "Why?"
"Oh...I don’t know." I was still staring off into space.
"You like him, don’t you?" she asked.
"No. I don’t know."
"He’s like twenty," said Natalie. "What would your parents say?"
"I don’t even think I really like him. Forget I asked you that, okay?"

Later that night I found myself thinking about him still. I couldn’t concentrate on my homework. I kept picturing his eyes, and the way he smiled. I was startled out of my daydreaming by the phone ringing.

"Hello?"
"Hi, is Skye there?" came a male voice.
"This is," I said. Then I sat there and waited for an answer.
"Uh ... this is Steve."
"Steve who?" That was a stupid question. I knew exactly who it was. Or at least, I hoped so. I got a weird feeling in my stomach. I got all nervous for some reason. Usually stuff like that doesn’t happen to me.

"Remember, I’m fixing your car," he said.

I was disappointed. I thought maybe he called because he wanted to talk to me. "Oh, is there something else wrong with it?" I asked.

"No," Steve said. "Actually, I was just calling to .... see what you were doing."

He was nervous. My heart soared. Maybe he liked me! I was glad he was nervous, it made me feel better since I was so nervous I could hardly think. My palms had started sweating, and I could barely talk. All this over a guy. What was wrong with me?

There was a long silence, then he said, "I’m sorry. I probably shouldn’t have called. Natalie gave me your number."

"No, no, it’s okay," I said. I wanted to talk to him. I just had no idea what to say. "So, um..."

And so went the conversation. We didn’t say a lot, and there were a lot of awkward silences, but I was so flattered that he called. I hung up the
phone with this huge, stupid grin on my face.

A few minutes after we hung up, my mom knocked on my door and came in. I always yelled at her for doing that. I want her to wait until I tell her to come in, but she never listens. "Who was on the phone?" she asked.

"Steve from the car place," I said.

"Steve Mitchell?"

"Yeah, that’s him."

"Why is he calling here? Was it something about the car? Is there something wrong?"

"No, he just called … to talk," I said.

"Well, I don’t want him calling here anymore. "He’s twenty years old, his dad is an alcoholic, and he probably is too. You don’t need to associate with losers like that." Then she left.

That really upset me. I hate it when my mom acts like that. She doesn’t even know him. All she knows is what she’s heard about his family. Well, I guess I didn’t really know him either, but still. I didn’t like that she was so quick to judge someone that she’d never met.

I didn’t see him again for a long time, because he wasn’t there when I went to pick up my car. He called me a few times over the next couple of weeks. Luckily he called when my parents weren’t home. I eventually told him about my mom and dad (I got the same speech from my dad the day that my mom yelled at me). He completely understood. I think it kind of hurt him to be judged because of his parents, but he said it’s been that way his whole life. So I think that was why he never asked me out or anything. He knew that I wouldn’t be allowed to see him.

So far, the only relationship we had was on the phone. We talked about a lot, but we’d only really seen each other the day I brought my car into the shop. The first time we ever spent time together, it was in the middle of the night. My friend Katie and I were going for a walk one day when Steve and his friend Matt drove by us. They saw who we were, so they turned around to talk to us. We stood around and talked for a while, not really about anything important. Then Matt asked us what we were doing that night.
"Like, when?" I asked.
"Oh, about twelve o'clock or so...." said Matt.
"What do you mean?" asked Katie.
"Do you guys want to sneak out?" asked Matt. "We'll come and pick you up."

We thought about it for a while, and then decided it could be fun. We were spending the night at Katie's house, and her mom would never know. And if we got caught, we could just say that we were up late and it was nice out, so we decided to go for a walk. She'd never have to know the real reason we were out in the middle of the night.

So we made plans to meet on a dirt road by Katie's house at midnight. It was only about noon when we made these plans, so I spent all day thinking about it. I was excited! I'd finally get to spend some time with Steve! I wondered what we would do. I wondered if he would kiss me. I spent all day wondering what would happen, making up stories in my head. It was a long day.

Finally it was midnight and time to leave. I was so nervous. I was so sure we'd get caught. We went out Katie's bedroom window, because it didn't have a screen, and it was low to the ground. We made a lot of noise. I was sure we were going to get caught.

Once we were outside, I wasn't so nervous. It was a warm night. I was wearing my favorite denim shorts and a white tee-shirt. I was getting that funny feeling in my stomach again. I wasn't paranoid about getting caught anymore, but I was nervous about seeing Steve. Maybe once he spent time with me, he wouldn't like me anymore. I didn't know how to act around him.

It only took about two minutes for us to walk to the spot where we were supposed to meet Steve and Matt. They were already there. They were sitting in Matt's truck, waiting for us. There really wasn't enough room for all four of us in the truck, so since Matt was driving, Steve made me sit on his lap.

"No, I don't want to. I'll squash you," I said.
"No you won't. You weigh, what, a hundred pounds?" and he pulled
me on top of him.

He had his arms around me the whole time. Even though I didn’t really know him, it felt good, and I was comfortable with it. He seemed to like it too. Whenever we went around a corner, he’d hold me tighter. Matt was kind of a crazy driver, and Steve didn’t want me to get hurt.

We drove down to this spot on a river that I’d never been to before. It was in the woods, but there was a little clearing where we parked the truck. It was so nice out. I couldn’t get over what a perfect night it was. There was a warm breeze, and even from where we were, there was a scent of the ocean in the air. The moon was so beautiful peeking through the trees, and I’d never seen so many stars in my life. We were far enough from the city that the lights didn’t block out the stars.

Eventually Katie and Matt went for a walk in the woods and left us alone. They had hit it off right away. So they took off on this trail that went along the riverbank. The moon was bright enough so they could see where they were going without a flashlight.

Steve and I spent the whole time talking. We sat in the back of Matt’s pickup truck and watched the lightning bugs. Eventually, we lay down and looked at the stars. He had his arm around me, and my head was lying on his chest. We pointed out to each other the constellations that we knew. He knew a lot of them. I’d always been interested in astronomy, but I’d never really taken the time to learn many constellations. I was surprised how much he knew.

Finally Matt and Katie came back. Their hair was kind of messed up, and they both had this look of satisfaction on their faces. Steve and I laughed out loud when we saw them. They were so cute together.

It was getting late, so Matt drove us home. I sat on Steve’s lap again, and I was even more comfortable than I was on the way there. I felt like I’d known him forever, and this was the first time we’d ever really been together.

When they dropped us off, Matt and Katie got out of the truck. I got out, and turned to look at Steve.

"I had fun," I said.

"Me too." He looked at me with those gorgeous blue eyes of his. I once again got the feeling that he was looking not really at me, but into me.
It was a bit unnerving at first, but now it was a good feeling.  

We stared at each other for a minute, but to me, it felt like forever. Finally he cupped my face in his hands, and brought his lips down to mine. He hadn’t tried anything on me all night, and this was our first kiss. Any other guy would have taken advantage of the situation, having a girl alone in the woods in the middle of the night. When you think about it, it was actually a pretty stupid thing for Katie and me to do. They very easily could have hurt or raped us. We didn’t know them that well. We had no reason to trust them. Luckily nothing like that happened. I didn’t ever think it would. The fact that he didn’t try anything all night made me feel like he respected me. I was really surprised, considering our age difference. I was only sixteen, and he was twenty. I would have thought he would want to move faster than he did.

School was still in session, so we only saw each other on the weekends. Sneaking out became a regular thing for Katie and me. Every Friday and Saturday night we would sneak out to see Matt and Steve. Things didn’t work out that well between Matt and Katie. They liked each other, but not that much. Some nights they would sit there and make out, and others they would fight. Steve and I kept getting closer and closer. I learned a lot about him. He told me about his childhood, and how it wasn’t very pleasant. His parents physically and emotionally abused him. Especially his dad. He’d never really been close to anyone before, but he told me that he felt close to me. It made me feel good. I loved being there for him. I felt like I could talk to him about anything, too. And I did. We would sit for hours and just hold each other and talk.

The nights that we went out weren’t always that boring though. One particularly warm night, we decided to go swimming in the river. The water was warm, and the current was slow, so it was a lot of fun. Then Matt decided to be cool and jump off the bridge that spanned the river near the place where we were swimming. The first time he did it, he made it to the water without incident. The second time, though, was a different story. I wasn’t really paying attention to what he was doing, I was too busy laughing with Katie about Matt’s swimming trunks. They were purple and covered with flowers. He told us his mom had picked them out for him. Anyway,
we weren't watching what he was doing, when suddenly we heard, "HELLLLLLPPP!!"

I looked up at the bridge, and sure enough, there was Matt, hanging off the bridge by his shorts. I was scared at first, but once I realized he was okay, I couldn't stop laughing. Apparently he had climbed over the side of the bridge, and was balancing on the little ledge that you had to stand on before you jumped, when he slipped. His shorts got caught on a bolt sticking out from the bridge and it held him there. Steve ran up on the bridge to try to help him, but there wasn't anything he could do. He couldn't reach Matt because the railing was in the way, and he couldn't balance on the ledge and pull Matt up at the same time. So Matt had to hang there until his shorts finally tore and let him fall to the water where he proceeded to do a flip before he landed flat on his stomach in the water. He was now naked, and even though it was dark, Katie and I got a good view of his white butt as he ran up to the truck.

Finally school let out, and I could see Steve almost every night. He never really asked me out, but I knew he considered me to be his girlfriend. I didn't mind at all. I'd never liked anyone as much as I liked him. I really felt like he cared about me, and he was the only guy that I ever felt respected by. Katie and Steve eventually stopped going with us, so Steve and I spent some time alone. Most nights we would go to the beach, and sit and look at the ocean and stars. Sometimes we would swim, sometimes we would go for walks. It was hard having a boyfriend that I couldn't tell my parents about. I had to lie all the time, and I never got to bed until about five a.m. But I didn't care. It was worth it. I had never been in love before, but I knew I loved Steve. And I knew he loved me, too. I've never been the kind of person to trust people. I was always so afraid of getting hurt. It felt so good to let all that go. To trust, be trusted, love, and be loved. I had never imagined a guy could make me so happy. My experiences with guys had always been bad.

I trusted Steve so much, and I cared about him so much, that he ended up being the guy I lost my virginity to. I'd had many chances in the past to have sex, but I always chose not to. I knew Steve respected me, and that he
truly cared about me, so I wanted him to be the one. I had always been taught to wait until marriage for things like that. But it was my body, my choice, and I felt like I was ready. We didn’t use protection, but I wasn’t worried about it. I never really thought much about STD’s or getting pregnant. I just figured that wouldn’t happen to me. I thought teachers and other adults were just being paranoid, and didn’t want us having sex at all, so they used those things to try to get us not to. I realize that I should have thought everything out before I decided to start having sex. But I guess it’s too late now.

I didn’t know I was pregnant for about two months. I was sort of in denial about it. I thought I had the flu or something, and that was why I always threw up in the mornings. My periods had always been irregular. One time before I became sexually active, I skipped three months for no apparent reason. So I just tried not to think about it. I just sort of pushed the thought to the back of my head, not letting myself believe it. I had no idea what I would do if I ever got pregnant. I didn’t want to worry about it, because I was so sure that it would never happen to me.

I didn’t really even give the idea serious thought until I read something in a magazine that made me consider the fact that I very well could be pregnant. There was an article in it about a girl who got pregnant, and never told anyone. There was a little table that told signs of pregnancy, and when I read it, I realized that I had over half of the symptoms. I finally decided to go out and buy a pregnancy test. I didn’t tell anyone about it, not even Steve. I couldn’t face up to it. I thought that if I said it out loud, then that would make it come true. So I kept it a secret from everyone.

I got home from the store after buying the test, and did exactly what the directions said to do. I locked myself in the bathroom, even though I was home alone. Both of my parents were out somewhere. I waited the ten minutes. When I saw the blue line that indicated pregnancy, I went into a state of shock. I just sat in the bathroom, not moving, not really even thinking, for a full half hour. Then I went into denial again. I drove all the way back to the store to buy another one. I figured I must have messed up or something.

I got the same result from the second pregnancy test. I couldn’t
believe it. It couldn’t be true. How could this happen to me? It’s not like I slept around or anything. I knew lots of girls who did, and this never happened to them. Why me? And what was I going to do? I couldn’t tell my parents. They still didn’t even know that I talked to Steve. I knew that they would press charges on him. My parents are like that. And then he would go to jail and it would be all my fault. I loved him so much, but I kind of blamed him for this happening to me.

I called Steve right away, and told him to pick me up. I didn’t even care if my parents happened to come home. I needed to talk to him. I was sure he’d know what to do. I couldn’t face any of my friends with something like this, and he was the only one I could turn to.

He picked me up, and we drove down to the spot on the river that we went to the first night that Katie and I ever snuck out. He knew something was wrong, but I didn’t tell him what on the phone. I was still too upset, and I knew I’d break down if I told him right then. I needed time to sort out my thoughts and feelings. I needed to be calm and think the whole thing through. I also wanted to be with him when I told him the news. I was so scared, I didn’t know how he’d take it.

We got out of his car, and sat down on a grassy hill sloping down to the river. It was a gorgeous day. The sun was shining, the river was moving slowly, and I could see little fish darting beneath the surface. I could hear birds singing, and watched as a little white butterfly flitted by. But I didn’t appreciate any of it. I didn’t care. I was mad that everything could be so pretty and so normal, even though something this bad had happened to me.

"Skye, what’s wrong?" Steve asked.

I didn’t answer for a while. I couldn’t find the words. I had no idea how to tell him. "I’m pregnant," I whispered.

"What?" he asked.

"I’m pregnant," I said, louder this time.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"No, I’m lying," I said sarcastically. "Why would I tell you something like that if I wasn’t serious?"

I couldn’t take it anymore. I finally broke down. I sat there and cried for what seemed like forever. He held on to me and stroked my hair. I think
he knew it was better not to say anything, to just let me cry. When I finally got control of myself and looked up at him, I saw he had tears in his eyes, too.

"What do you want to do?" he said finally.

"I don’t know! I said. "What can we do? I can’t keep it, but I can’t kill it either. I can’t tell anyone, but there’s no way I can keep it a secret. What are we going to do?"

I thought of all the time Steve and I had spent together. All the laughing, hugging, kissing, dancing... Then I pictured him on trial, in jail, the anger and disappointment in my parents’ eyes. I started crying all over again.

Steve just held on to me like he did before. When I was finally okay again, I looked up at him. He looked directly into my eyes, right into the heart and soul of me.

"I love you, Skye," he said.

My bloodshot eyes got wide. I knew we loved each other, but it was the first time we said it. He wiped the tears off my face. "I love you, too," I said.

"Then run away with me."

"What?" I asked.

"Run away with me. We can save our money, and in a couple of months, fly somewhere else, where no one will ever find us. You can have the baby, we’ll have a life of our own. We’ll have to leave everyone we know, but it’s worth it. Skye, you’re all I need," he said.

I looked at him in disbelief. I hadn’t even thought of that. But we could do it. I knew we could. I started to feel a lot better about the whole thing. It would be just Steve and me. No one to tell us what to do, no one to dictate our lives. We could be together without having to worry about the consequences.

"What about my friends?" I asked.

"I don’t know," he said. "You couldn’t tell them where we were going. Maybe after a couple months you could call them and let them know you were okay and stuff."

At least it was something. I was sure this was the only way. There
was nothing else for us to do. I would have to make some sacrifices, and
hurt people I loved, but I didn’t have any choice.

The next two months were hard. I put in extra hours at the restaurant
where I worked. Steve worked a lot of overtime, too, and we saved all the
money we could. We planned everything out. At first we thought about
leaving the country, but I didn’t want to. We’d have less of a chance of
getting caught if we left the U.S., but I wasn’t sure what the medical care in
another country would be like, and that was important to me. I didn’t want
to do anything to endanger my baby. I had already decided that if it was a
girl, I was going to name her Kylie, and if it was a boy, Kevin.

I also had a really hard time not telling my friends. I had always told
Natalie and Katie everything. This was the first secret I’d ever kept from
them. I felt so bad about it. And I knew I’d miss them so much when I was
gone. I was so mad at myself for doing this to them, but I didn’t know what
else I could do.

The pregnancy was hard on me. I always threw up as soon as I woke
up. I was tired all the time. I didn’t have the energy that I used to. I didn’t
want to be pregnant. Not at all. I had always been happy with the way my
body looked, and now I was going to get fat. I wasn’t very happy with the
prospect of gaining a lot of weight. I was also scared of having the baby.
I wasn’t a very big girl, and I knew that could cause some problems. I was
afraid that something would go really wrong, and either the baby or I could
die.

Since I was so small, I didn’t gain a lot of weight at first, so it wasn’t
too hard to keep it from my parents. They were basically preoccupied with
their own lives and their own problems, so they didn’t even notice any change
in me. I was beginning to wonder if they’d even notice when I was gone.

The weeks dragged on and on, until finally it was the night we planned
to leave. I snuck out of my house at about midnight to meet Steve. We
booked a red-eye flight; we figured we could be long gone before my parents
ever even woke up. We bought the plane tickets under false names, so that
way the police would have a harder time finding us. I was so scared. I
didn't want to leave, but I knew I had to. I thought maybe after I had my baby I could put it up for adoption, and then come home. I wasn't ready to live on my own. I had always wanted to, but now that it had actually come down to it, I knew I wasn't prepared. As much as I loved Steve and wanted to start my own life with him, it was hard not to think about everything and everyone I was leaving behind.

As we drove to the airport I sat and stared out the window, looking at the houses and trees and everything else familiar to me, not sure if I'd ever see any of it again.

Steve looked at me, and must have seen the expression on my face. "Are you scared?" he asked.

"A little. What about you?" I answered.

"I guess," he said, "but I'm just glad that we're together, and that we can finally get out of here and start our own lives."

That was easy for him to say. He should have been living on his own years ago. I was only sixteen. I still had some goof-off years left. I didn't want to raise a family, cook meals, clean a house, and do all of those things. I just wasn't ready. I wanted to go to college, I wanted to have a career. As I sat there, I watched all the dreams I had for my future slowly disappear. And because of that, I was scared.

It was a two-hour drive to the airport, and the whole time it was all I could do to keep from screaming. I didn't want to leave. I knew I would hurt everyone that loved me, and I felt so bad about it. I didn't want to hurt anyone. So I just kept telling myself that I had no choice, and it helped a little to soothe my conscience.

We finally got to the airport. The car we were driving was an old junker that Steve had fixed enough for it to get us to the airport. No one knew he had it, so that way it couldn't be traced back to us. He parked near the back of the parking lot, and we carried our suitcases into the building. We each only had one bag, because we had to pack quickly and didn't have time to grab much. We basically only brought the necessities. We'd saved almost four thousand dollars, and I had to carry all of it in my purse. I was really uncomfortable with it, so I made Steve hold on to it for the most part. I wanted to put the money in one of our suitcases, but he insisted we carry
it on us just in case our luggage got lost or stolen.

We boarded the plane almost as soon as we checked in. We showed up as late as possible, so not many people would see us, even though I doubt anyone would have noticed us anyway.

I sat down in my seat, and Steve sat next to me. He took my hand and squeezed. He looked into my eyes and kissed me softly on the lips. "I love you," he whispered.

I began to see everything in a new light. I still felt bad about leaving everyone I was close to, but now I was kind of happy to be leaving. I really was in love with Steve, and I wanted nothing more than to be with him. Forever. And that was what I was going to get. Once we were settled in somewhat, I thought maybe I would call one or two of my friends and try to explain. I would just have to hope that they would forgive me and understand. I was going to have to wait to contact my parents until I turned eighteen, because I knew they’d make me come home, and try to put Steve in jail. I couldn’t let that happen.

"So where are we headed again?" I asked Steve.

"Ocean Point, South Carolina," he said.

"Oh, yeah." For some reason I could never remember the name of the town. I’d never been in South Carolina before. But we researched a bunch of small towns, and decided this one would be the best. It would be warm year round, like in California, and it looked like it’d be easy for us to find an apartment and jobs. After I had the baby, and we were financially stable, I planned to finish high school. All I had left was my senior year. But if I couldn’t do that, I was at least going to get my GED. I had always looked down on people that dropped out of school, but now I could kind of understand why some people would.

I fell asleep soon after we took off. Steve woke me up a few hours later. "We’re almost there," he said.

"Really?" I said groggily. I looked out the window, and sure enough, we were close to the ground. I could see green grass and marshes stretching out for miles and miles. It was really pretty.

We landed a few minutes later. Once the plane stopped, a male voice came over the intercom. "Welcome to Charleston. The local time is nine
thirty a.m., and the temperature is eighty-eight degrees. Thank you for flying American Airlines."

"Let's go," Steve said.

We got up, grabbed our bags, and got off the plane. There were few other people on the plane with us, so it didn't take long. It took forever to get our bags, though. They were the last ones to finally come out.

We took our bags and headed outside to catch a cab. It was only a fifteen-minute drive from Charleston to Ocean Point. Steve had already made reservations at a hotel for us for a few nights, so we would have time to find an apartment.

As soon as we were outside, the air hit me like a hot, wet blanket. I wasn't used to the humidity. After only two minutes outside, my hair was damp and sticking to the back of my neck. It was kind of nice, though. I could smell the subtle scent of the ocean in the air. It reminded me a little of home.

Steve waved down a cab. A heavyset black man got out and helped us put our bags in the trunk. We got in the back of the car, and Steve put his arm around me and pulled me close.

"The Mariott Hotel in Ocean Point," Steve said to the cabbie.

We rode most of the way in silence. I stared out the window some more. I always like to do that when I'm in a moving vehicle. I watched all the little buildings fly by. The foliage was a lot different from California. It was all really pretty. "I think I'm going to like it here," I said to Steve.

"Good," he said, smiling. He squeezed me, and kissed my hair. For the first time in my life, I felt truly content.

The next few days were actually kind of fun. We were on a mission: to find a place to live. We went through what seemed like hundreds of apartments before we finally settled on one. It was small, but cozy. It had one bedroom, one bathroom, and a larger room that was split into a kitchen and living room. Furniture came with it, and the rent was only $250 a month. It was amazing that we found someplace so perfect, and so cheap.

Steve quickly found a job working in a garage working as a mechanic. The owner of the garage apparently made a lot of money, and luckily he really liked Steve. So within a few weeks, Steve was making close to twenty
dollars an hour. I found a job waitressing in a homey little restaurant that was within walking distance of our apartment. I wasn’t making all that much money, and because I was too worn out from the pregnancy I couldn’t work very much, but I figured that every little bit helped.

I started going to a doctor, to make sure everything was going okay with my baby. He was a big, friendly man, and very informative. I liked him so much that I asked for him to be the one to deliver my baby. It was still quite a ways off, but I wanted him to be there.

I had never really wanted to be a mother before, but I already couldn’t wait until my baby was born. I knew I was kind of young to have a family and all that, but I wanted it. I’d never been so happy in all my life. I knew Steve was excited for the baby to come, too. He came with me to every doctor’s appointment. He was there for me no matter what. Even when I had horrible mood swings and started screaming and crying and throwing things across the kitchen. He hid in the bedroom until I calmed down some, then he came back out, hugged me and made me lie down and take a nap. I couldn’t believe how supportive he was. I thought all the time how lucky I was to have him.

Every once in a while I would get homesick. Usually I was okay, but sometimes I just couldn’t hold back the tears. I missed my friends and family so much. I couldn’t really make new friends where I was, because I was too busy all the time, and I guess I was kind of scared to get close to anyone again. So I just relied on Steve. He didn’t seem to mind, though, because I think he was doing the same things.

I was a little bit surprised to find that we hadn’t gotten caught yet. I never left a note or anything for my parents, so they could very well think that I was dead. That made me feel really bad, but I didn’t know what else I could have done. I would think that they would realize that most of my clothes and things were gone, so maybe they would know that I left of my own will, and I wasn’t kidnapped or something. I also hoped that they didn’t blame themselves for me leaving. It wasn’t their fault at all. I had dug myself a hole, and I did what I thought I should to make the best of it. And for the most part I was happy. Yes, I regretted having to leave all the people I loved, but all in all, it was worth it. I was finally where I thought I wanted
A month or so passed fairly uneventfully. So far, we were doing well. We were making plenty of money, and had a place to live. I was about five months pregnant by then, and I wasn’t feeling well most of the time.

Steve wasn’t home very much, but that was okay. I wanted to be by myself most of the time anyway. I had to quit my job because it was just too much for me. It didn’t really make a difference, though, because Steve was making more than enough to support us. I spent my time at home reading books about motherhood, and how to care for newborn babies. I knew almost nothing about caring for children, and I wanted to be the best mother I could. I was still only sixteen, far too young to become a mother, but I was really excited about having my baby. I knew Steve wanted it to be a boy, but I was secretly hoping for a girl. We decided to wait until it was born to find out which it was going to be. But either way, I still couldn’t wait.

Lucky for me, Steve happened to be at home when I went into labor. He had decided to come home for lunch that day because he said that he missed me. I hadn’t been feeling well all day, so I was glad to have him there. Suddenly I felt really sick to my stomach. I went in the bathroom and that’s when I realized I was bleeding really badly. I knew something was very wrong.

"Steve, something’s wrong," I said to him. "I’m bleeding, and it feels like I’m having contractions."

Without a word, he led me down to the car, and rushed me to the hospital. I knew I was getting blood all over the car, but I didn’t care. It was the least of my worries at the time. I kept trying to figure out what could be wrong. I couldn’t be going into labor, I was only five months along. I had no idea what was happening to me.

It only took about five minutes to get to the hospital, but it seemed to me like five hours. I was in so much pain. Steve carried me inside because I couldn’t walk by myself. I was taken immediately to a room, where I proceeded to give birth to a dead baby. I’d had a miscarriage. The doctor explained to me that I was just too young and too small for my body to be able to handle having a baby.
I had to spend the next few nights in the hospital because I didn’t have the strength to go home. The doctors wanted to keep an eye on me to make sure nothing else went wrong. I don’t really remember anything about being there. I was in such a state of shock and grief that I don’t think I wanted to remember any of it. It was kind of like being in a dream. I slept most of the time, and when I was awake, faces of doctors and nurses, and occasionally Steve, just kind of floated by in a mist. Nothing mattered. Nothing at all. I felt like all my hopes and dreams had completely shattered. I had given up my life for this baby, and now that I didn’t have the baby anymore, what was there to live for? I slept as much as I could so I didn’t have to think.

The weeks after I left the hospital took me to the lowest point that I’ve had so far in my life. I was severely depressed. I didn’t eat, I rarely slept. For the most part I didn’t talk. I just lay in bed and cried on occasion. Steve would try to talk to me, but I would just stare at him. I don’t think I even comprehended most of what he was saying. I couldn’t think. I couldn’t do anything.

Finally I came out of my confused state. I could hold conversations again, and I started eating some. I slept a lot, though. Now that I could actually think clearly, I wanted to avoid it as much as possible. I couldn’t believe what happened. Since Steve was the only person that I was really in contact with, I took pretty much everything out on him. He tried so hard, but everything that came out of my mouth was a snappy, biting remark. I don’t know how he put up with me. Maybe he realized how hard it was on me to lose the baby. Maybe he realized how much I’d given up for him and the baby. Maybe he blamed himself. I know that I blamed him.

That really wasn’t fair, though. I made my own choices. He never pressured me to do anything. I wanted to have sex, I wanted to run away. All he did was suggest it. The only person to blame was myself, but I just couldn’t handle that.

Eventually I was able to come to terms with what had happened. I was still depressed, but I was able to think of other things. Namely, my future. It was time for me to decide what I was going to do. I could either continue my life with Steve as well as I could, or I could try to finish my old
life. I thought about this a lot. But I kept it from Steve. I knew how much it would hurt him to know that I was thinking of leaving him. He was almost as hurt as I was at the loss of our child. So I knew that anything else would be too much for him.

After weeks of debating in my head, I had come to a conclusion. I couldn’t stay here any longer. I knew I would hurt Steve if I left, but I also knew I would be hurting myself if I stayed. I wouldn’t be able to finish my education, and I realized that I was no longer happy where I was. I missed my family, I missed my friends. I missed my home. I missed everything about California. So I finally decided to tell Steve. I broke the news one day after we finished eating dinner.

"Steve," I said. "I’ve been thinking a lot lately."
"About what?" he said.
Tears filled my eyes. "I want to go home."
He was silent for a few minutes, and tears started to slide down his cheeks. "I knew you would," he said. "And I don’t want you to leave, but I can’t make you stay."

"I know," I said. "Will you come with me?"
"Skye, as much as I want to," he said, "you know I can’t do that. I have nothing left back there to go home to. Everything I have is here. And I realize that everything you have is back there ... in California. I love you, and I want you to be happy. I know you can’t be happy here. Not after what happened. So as much as it’s going to hurt me to lose you, I want you to go. I want you to be happy ... to live your life... You’ve still got so much to look forward to..."

Then he broke down completely. I stepped forward and put my arms around him as he cried. As we stood there, I began to realize how much he actually did love me. If I left him, he would be completely alone. He had based his entire life on me. But he truly wanted me to do what would make me happy.

So that’s what I did. I still thought about staying, but I knew I couldn’t. I had to go home. I had to face the consequences of the choices I’d made. I knew it would be hard, but it would be best in the long run. So
I decided to call Katie to let her know I was coming home. My mom should have been the first person I called, but I couldn’t deal with her right now. She’s probably so hurt. Katie started crying as soon as she realized who I was.

"We thought you were dead," she sobbed. "Everyone was so worried about you."

I explained to her what happened, and gave her the condensed version of the events that took place. I asked her to tell everyone that I would be home in a few days, but not to tell anyone why I left. I wanted people to hear it from me when I tried to explain myself. I knew I could trust her.

That was yesterday. My plane leaves tomorrow at nine a.m. I should be home at about ten a.m. California time. I must admit, I’m scared. I don’t know what I’m going to do without Steve. I’ll miss him so much. We’ve agreed that we’re going to keep in touch. And maybe, when I turn eighteen, I’ll come back to him. I guess we’ll see. Whatever happens, happens. I’ll deal with that when the time comes. Right now I’ve made another choice, and I’m going to have to follow through. I’m going home.

The End