Participating Schools and Teachers

Battle Creek Central High School ................. Barbara Whitehair
Centerville High School ............................... Coral J. Fry
Comstock High School ................................. Richard Bailey
East Grand Rapids High School ......................... Will Brenner
Forest Hills Northern High School ..................... Steve Azkoul
Galesburg-Augusta High School ....................... Nancy Emmerich
Lakeland High School ................................. Dorothy Segowski
Lakeview High School ................................. Mrs. Kane
L'Anse Creuse ............................... Barbara Moran
L'Anse Creuse North High School .................... Donna Sogge
Northville High School ................................. P. Dorrian Sandbothe
Orchard View High School ......................... Lou Graham
Plainwell High School ................................. Candace Lockwood
St. Joseph High School ............................... Dan Holt
Southwestern High School ................... Eileen Marshall
West Bloomfield High School .................... Janice Mekula
Winston Churchill High School .................... Robert Bott

WMU Participants

Phil Egan, Coordinator
Nancy Stone
Jeffrey Krebs
Beth Roberts
Jaimy Gordon
Arnie Johnston
Peter Blickel
Daryl Murphy
Herb Scott
John Woods
Cliff Johnson
Frank Asciutto

Rick Bridges
Brian Agne
Wilma Kahn
Rob Haight
Deb Dzialowski
Anne Lundquist
Luanne Rowder
David Sarra
Shelly Hudson
Scott Deshong
Rod Torreson
Adelaide Wiley

We wish to thank Norm Carlson and Nor Carlson for their extraordinary efforts in the preparation of Calliope, and to Michele McCarville for administrative assistance.
CALLIOPE 1987

Poetry

Kerry Kitchens.................................1
Soren White..................................2
Alexa Finkler.................................3
Don Nalezyty.................................4
Pamela Zoltowski.........................5
Pam Trigilio.................................6
Courtney Bond.............................7
Ted Bennett................................8
Mary Oettinger............................9
Tyra Sorensen..............................10
Stacie VanOosterhout......................11
Kay C. Hope.................................12
Cathy DeLoof.................................13
Shawna Smith...............................14
Laura L. Davis.............................15
Eric Camu Kramp.........................16
Ann Giese................................17
Kelly L. Beehler.........................18

Prose

Rebecca Spafford..........................19
Glenn Ward..................................24
Maura Noordhoorn.........................26
Gary Garrison..............................28
Ted Bennett.................................30
Vanessa Ballingall.......................32
Ray Mittan..................................34
Jenny Vander Weyden.....................36
George Dillard.............................41
Tracy M. Peters............................45
Jeff Kosloski...............................48
NEIGHBORHOOD

I. Italians
   They lived all around us
   St. Louis had a place called "The Hill," that was
   where most of them lived in "pasta harmony"

II. The Testas were our closest Italian neighbors
   Always yelling and swelling in Italian
   Mary Margaret and Angelo were both roly-poly, black-haired type
   With lots of kids, of course
   Having dinner at their house was like eating in Italy
   A lasagna smell was always there

III. Dad and I, when fall finally came, would walk up to the
     front of the neighborhood and get the newly ripened persimmons
     Bright orange with a little tint of yellow, textured like plums
     Dad always got the ripe ones, mine made me screw up my face in
     sourness

IV. Three giant stately willow trees dominated our back yard
    We had rope swings hanging from the splintered deck
    And the vegetable garden was my Dad's prized agriculture

V. The neighbor's dog, a Lassie type, used to come over and do his
    job in our yard all the time
    One day Dad gathered it all up, and threw it on the side of their
    cream house
    I bet they always wondered how dog-crap got there
    This same dog attacked our lawnmower one day
    He lost

VI. Heather and I made tacos from nature
    Leaves were lettuce, rose petals were tomatoes,
    dirt was the meat, and dead leaves were the taco shell,
    "the green leaves were the lettuce"

VII. I was stirring up memories in my mother's mind
    Her best friend, Mrs. Jean Belt, got drunk on tequila one night
    at some party
    She happened to live at the top of a hill
    The party was at the bottom
    She crawled up the hill to get home
    I guess I was too young to understand

VIII. What a neighborhood
      I still didn't mention the murderer in the park

Kerry Kitchens
EROTICA

I am a poem
And you are my reader.
I control what you think
As your eyes glide over my
Supple poem shape

I'm a full-bodied poem
With words in all the right places.
My prepositional phrases are particularly large,
And my soft, round adjectives are exciting to behold.
My indirect objects are ready to receive action.
My conjunctions join us together
Until you stop reading me at my
Shapely, firm, and so finely packed
End.

Soren White
SUNLIGHT

Smoothly it pours into the room,
Dust tries to clog the flow,
It swarms about the light,
But the light continues to shine.
There on a desk a grain of sand,
It holds the light sacredly.
Blondes become golden in the glow.
Quick reflections from a moving pencil,
Flash and catch my eyes.
On the far wall a white triangle,
How long has it been,
Since I’ve seen the light?

Don Naleyty
12:02 am on Friday

Doing 63, trying to be
less late.

A smile for
Mr. Pushover.
The skin pulls tight on my forehead.
The place where a kiss had once been,
given to remind me to drive carefully.

At home
I hold my sweater to my cheek
and a whiff of cologne misses
you.

A whim.
I pull polar bear Phred Phredd into the cold
vastness of a single bed.
Not quite the same.
It will have to do, I mindsigh,
as I turn to dreams of Uncle Remus
and sofas for
two.

Alexa Finkler
SUNLIGHT

Smoothly it pours into the room,
Dust tries to clog the flow,
It swarms about the light,
But the light continues to shine.
There on a desk a grain of sand,
It holds the light sacredly.
Blondes become golden in the glow.
Quick reflections from a moving pencil,
Flash and catch my eyes.
On the far wall a white triangle,
How long has it been,
Since I’ve seen the light?

Don Nalezyty
SNAKE

The snake slides, rough scales rustling, through dead leaves.
The small, pointed face is poised, mottled with frustrated anger.
The forked tongue slips out, flickering with nervous intent.
Burnished scales gleam and come to life, as shafts of sunlight touch them.
The black shining eyes gaze mercilessly, on the intended victim.
In one fluid motion, the lean body catapults like an arrow, striking true to its mark.

Pamela Zoltowski
Bee weird.

Hang from your knees on monkeybars

And observe the world

And observe those bank lines

And enjoy the view from out over Bounds.

If insanity sometimes wants to come over and play,

By all means make dinner, call it breakfast and invite him to stay.

Pam Trigilio
MORNING IN INTERLOCHEN, MICHIGAN

The sun blinked awake
Behind eyelash evergreens,
But the August wind still slept.
The lake, calm as the air,
Swirled only where I dipped my squeaky oars,
And seaweed fingers stretched
To stroke my rowboat.
Passing wood cottages,
Their eyelid window shades still closed,
I leaned back to bask in isolation
Like a frog sunning
On a lilypad.

Courtney Bond
HE'S GONE

A slow realization,
cold syrup drooling from a bottle.
I walk closer.
My grandpa.
Sunken eyes and cold hands like pieces of white ice.
Wrapped in pure lace frosting and
stiff wood
and brass handles.
His favorite harmonica in my hand,
the antique one from Germany.
Dry tongue, bland face.
Strangling collar and tie.
Hot sweat turns my hair dark at the edge of my face.
Grandma with a drawn look-
taffy being stretched or silly putty.
Her crooked plastic smile.
All these people interrupt.
Shiny black shoes with thin, waxed string laces.
Pressed tan pants.
Navy blue suit coats, pink dresses.
"He was a fine man,
I'll always remember that time when he..."
"Such a shame. Oh, they did a good job on him, though."
There's a lion roaring in my head. I'm whirling.
Don't talk to me, don't pat me on the back.
I just want to be here with
my grandpa.
A hand is choking me, I can't breathe.
Heads turn-
I'm a circus act.
The bathroom.
Alone,
and I'm playing that
old harmonica and crying.
CHOCOLATE

An expensive bar of dark chocolate
With raisins and nuts,
Its sweet bitterness,
Dark and rich.
And I do not know whether I like it or not.

It is so bitter.
Like losing a love that I never owned,
But wanted desperately.
Like the latent bitchiness that sometimes appears in me
And lashes out at my friends
And my enemies-
"Get the hell out of my life,
You're a jerk!"
"I don't give a damn what you do,
Just give me my f---ing book!"

But the nuts, the meat,
The food for my heart and spirit-
Poems and novels,
Plays, music, conversation.

And the raisins—sweet,
The joy of writing, of playing, of eating and drinking,
The pure fun of joking with friends—
"This will all go straight to my thighs."
"Yeah, there or the old donkey."
"We won't mention where else!"
And "How was the brunch?"
"Great, we rolled home!"

And the richness of the chocolate itself,
Love, family, friend—
People.

Dark, rich, and bitter—sweet.

Mary Oettinger
DANISH SUMMER MORNING

The sun shines softly across the ancient white beech floor of my room
At five in the morning.
The air already filled with the gossips of birds and Gentle billows of flowers from the castle garden.
The soft dusty coolness of the timeless white beech floors on my feet
As they slide from beneath the warmth of down to stand at my window.
The trees in the castle garden stand upright, stiff, tall,
Proud of 500 years of northern summer mornings.
The gardener’s sprinkler already pours water onto his plants.
He sits in the garden on the Queen’s bench smoking a cigarette
In between trimming the hedge into miniature Christmas tress.
I turn to the hall and steep stairs that lead down To the garden door.
A cool wetness still hangs in the early morning air.
The sun now strikes a small table Covered with Farmer’s tablecloth and Beb’s dishes.
Yogurt, oats, rye bread, Jarlsberg, Blue cheese, and the Always necessary pot of tea.
A huge twelve cup white porcelain teapot crouches, Steaming—waiting to be drained.
Yes, I’ve become accustomed to the Danish summer morning.

Tyra Sorensen
LETCH

"What a dirty mind
that old coot had!

Why, just yesterday he goosed Thelma.
She giggled, slapped his hands away and squealed
'George, for a seventy-year old guy,
you sure got a lot a spunk left in ya!'
'Well, Thelma,
a woman like you can really perk a man up,
if ya know what I mean!'

We all hooted over that one.
Even last night at bingo
George was tryin' to pinch that young lass's tusche.
Amazing, isn't it?
One minute he was all full of vigor and youth,
and now . . .
Well, thank God we got memories, Bee."

"Amen,"
she replied,
as the floppy rose thudded on the lid of the coffin.

Stacie VanDosterhout
SNAKE

She talks at him
In the hall.
Waxy smile,
Woolrich sweater,
Designer jeans over
Slender thighs.
Crisp leather loafers.
She slithers
Past me.
I smile.
She whispers,
Sticky,
"Good morning."
Moves on,
Slippery.
As she slides away,
My own scruffy loafers
Tell me
Why she doesn’t stop
To talk.

Kay C. Hope
SIX YEARS OLD

The living room floor is covered, wall to wall.
The house, the car.
The is the best family yet.

The mommy is having an affair.
Her lover is many years younger than she.
The daddy has A.I.D.S.
It was a needle, nobody knows.
The sister is three months pregnant.
Father unknown.
The brother is facing a prison sentence.
He knifed the girl next door.
The grandfather molested his granddaughter.
She was only six.
Just like me.

This is boring.
I think I’m getting too old to play Barbies anymore.

Cathy DeLoof
MEASURING UP

Boys’ toys, we always played with boys’ toys.
I think they wanted boys.
Tonka trucks and science kits,
We worked with Dad in his woodshop downstairs,
And helped Grandpa build the jungle gym out back.
We always played with all the boys on the block
(But then, there weren’t that many girls around)
I think they wanted boys.

Shopping for matching clothes,
We always went shopping for matching clothes.
I think they wanted triplets.
With a span of six years from the eldest to the youngest,
The three of us dressed the same when we went out together.
To this day, although we still look nothing alike,
They still call each of us by the others’ names.
I think they wanted triplets.

Shawna Smith
CANDLE

The candle that was molded
from the fat of the dead whale
that I saw in National Geographic
is burning on the stool
Its molecules are bleeding in the air
and bleeding in my nostrils
And as I watch
I shudder at the thought
of baby whales
becoming part of my body.
Baby whales
swimming around in my warm blood
not being able to see through my dark veins.
now I wish
I could stop breathing
and throw the candle
back
into the Ocean.

Laura L. Davis
CLASSROOM

The teacher preaches
Fire and brimstone lecture
About misapplication of Darwinism
As students sit and stare
How little they care about survival of the fittest.

A note is written
Adding
Little paper scraps
That swim and spawn
Throughout the floor

The predator
Tries to catch
Eye of the fox
His musk reeks throughout the room.

Eric Camu Kramp
PRISMS

Shy people
Are prisms
Occupying the smallest space
Clearly nondescript
Just another piece of glass
But when they shine
Prisms make rainbows

Ann Giese
OBITUARY

The deceased is survived by:

Four Andreas Vollenweider albums
Scratched by overuse,
A fifty-dollar phone bill
In calls "Just to say hi,"
A car that never seemed to work
And a pen that never stopped working,
Rejection letters from all the
Finest academic institutions
In the nation,
A Monet calendar with the birthdays
She always forgot
Of people she always remembered,
Nightmares of cancer,
Videotapes of Hepburn/Tracy films,
Subscriptions to Connoisseur, Opus, Books 100
To improve her mind,
And Twilight Zone Magazine
To entertain it.
And an ocean
To hold the ashed remains of
A girl who laughed
At all the wrong things
And cried
At all the right ones.

Kelly L. Beehler
I guess one way you could best describe me is normal. Normal Norma. Out of two sons and two daughters, my parents had to stick me with a family name. Great-Aunt Norma was a missionary in Africa, and she won some award, something like a Pulitzer peace prize, but not so important. Anyway, while the rest of my family have names like John, Christopher, and Bethany, I got stuck with the tapioca name of Norma. In view of my Great-Aunty achievements, and of mine, I figure she must be turning over in her grave.

I'd imagine that if you were to walk by me on the street, you wouldn't think to look twice at me, unless you have an obsession with the normal. I'm your usual gawky twelve-year old. You know, I'm at the stage in life where everyone's always telling you, "You'll grow out of it," or "It's just a phase." Hopefully, everyone is right!

To sum myself up; my feet are too big, my arms are too skinny, and I look like a southern beanpole during a drought. My eyes are brown, and my hair is too, (sticky-straight, I might add) which is O.K., if you are Italian or beautiful, or both which I'm not.

I have a beautiful family, which only makes it worse! My mom was the homecoming queen for her high school, and a cheerleader in college, while my dad was the captain of the football team, and class salutatorian. I know that sounds corny, like the "All-American" couple, or something, but it really is the truth.

People are always saying my older brother, Johnny, who's 16, is the spitting image of my father who everyone says is handsome! "John has a strong jaw" is what my mother says.

His girlfriend is all giggly, and is always at our house. She wears Blossoming Pink lipstick. I know because she left her purse here once, and I looked through it. Just to make sure it was hers, you know.

Christopher, my younger brother, who's eleven, has blond hair and freckles. He takes after my mother, (lucky him), and everything he does is excellent. Ever yone says he should be in commercials, but somehow, I just can't see Christopher selling toilet paper! He's a bit of a pain, especially when his stupid friends are with him, but I guess if we weren't brother and sister, we'd be pretty good friends.

Christopher, (for some reason no one calls him Chris), is the best artist I've ever seen. I don't mean comic books heroes or cartoons, but real painting kind of stuff, like trees and bowls of fruits. When we went on vacation last year to the ocean, he painted this sunset, and my mom bought it from him like he was a real artist! She has it hanging up in the front hallway. I sure wish I could draw half as good as he does!
Now, Bethany is the youngest and everyone knows the youngest practically means favorite. She gets things and does things and says things I know I never got, did or said! At least not when I was her age. I hate to admit it, but Beth is really is adorable. She has curly black hair, just like my dad’s and Johnny’s, (Don’t ask me where I got brown!), and a little pugnose like all four-year-olds seem to have. She is always laughing about something and getting into trouble. Her favorite family member is definitely John. In the morning she always runs into his room and jumps onto his bed to wake him up. I think if I were him, I’d strangle her, but he doesn’t, he just laughs and pretends to beat her up. She loves it.

So, you see, I’m into it deep. I have a handsome father, a beautiful mother, a brother who looks like my father, a Leonardo de Vinci, and roly-poly little adorable sister. Where does that leave me?

Well, once our family had this open house, and I overheard this stuffy old woman talking to this stuffy old man. She said, "The Monroes have such adorable children! That John is going to be exactly like his father."

"Yes," answered the stuffy old man, "probably end up with a football scholarship!"

"And I hear the younger boy is a real artist, he wants to be a painter or sculptor. Martha says he’s very talented."

"Oh, he is! They have one of his paintings in the front hall, it’s an ocean scene, if I remember correctly. Oh! And the baby, isn’t she adorable!"

"Yes! a real beauty she’ll grow up to be! And don’t they have another one? A girl, I think. Haven’t heard much about her!"

"Well, I reckon the poor things rather plain, but she does well in school, according to Martha. She was in Martha’s social studies class last year..."

I didn’t even want to hear the rest! Now do you see what I mean?

Normal. That’s me. Not only normal, but boring as well!

Ever since I heard this conversation, I guess I’ve just had it! I’m going to the bus station tomorrow, and ride until I can find someplace great! I’ve already gotten my things packed and my money all saved up, one hundred dollars! Tomorrow.

I’ve only been on a bus once, and that was when our old Chevrolet had broken down, and so Mom had to take me to a doctor’s appointment by bus. I ended up getting two shots and no lollipop, then we had to stand up all the way home. I was only five, and it didn’t make a good impression.

Remembering this, I felt a little nervous, and kind of freaked out by all the hissing brakes and roaring engines.

I goose-stepped through the doors and ran to a seat, one of those hard wooden seat that are supposed to be hard and wooden. I guess that’s so all the bums won’t be able to get comfortable enough to sleep. I’m sitting there now, and thinking about my situation.

I told Mom I was going to look for bottles and cans. She’s a fierce conservationist, and doesn’t like litter, but she also likes for me to get the deposit money too! She’ll expect me to be gone for awhile, and by the time they know I’m gone, they’ll never find me. Since I’ve been here, I’ve seen every kind of person imaginable, from bag ladies to executives, to muggers to bums, and all over again. I feel like the Statue of Liberty, you know, "Give me your tired, your poor, etc."
I've been watching this little old man, a bum, I guess, and I think he's been watching me. Everytime I look up, he's a little closer, always staring. Remember that obsession with the normal I was talking about? He's probably got it bad. Poor guy, he's practically dressed in rags. He has one of those puke-green jackets on, with "21st Street Mission" in block letters stenciled on the back. His pants are plaid, and they look about two sizes too big, kind of like when you run out of lunch bags, and have to put your lunch in one of those bigger ones, he's all swallowed up.

I looked up, just now, and he's coming, he's coming this way! Oh Great! Murdered by the station bum!

It's funny now, but it wasn't then. You hear all these stories, you know, and you wonder. Well, anyway, he shuffled up to me, then paused for a minute indecisively; he shook his head in that way old men have and sat next to me.

"Missy," he said. His voice surprised me. It was exotic; rich and foreign, but clear and good, like a grandfather, is supposed to sound. "Missy, what's a little thing like you doing here? This place is for people who are all washed up and goin' nowhere or somewhere, dependin' pon if you have someone waitin' for you at the end of a bus line, but you, you've been sitting here all day, and I can't tell if you's one way or the other. Now, tell me, does your momma know you's here?"

With this, he'd put his hand on my arm, very gently, almost imploring. For some reason, that simple little touch broke the mainline. All the years of being the ugly-duckling, and putting up with the snide remarks came pouring out. I told my life story to that dirty little bum in the Southside bus station, and he listened quietly, with an occasional comforting pat on the arm. He handed me a spotted white handkerchief, and despite my mother-hen's warning to never put anything dirty near my face, I wiped my eyes and blew my nose.

"There now, Missy," he said grinning widely, "There now! my sakes!"

He delivered that last statement, and then just sat there with that silly grin on his face. I'd started to feel a little uncomfortable, when he began his story.

"Missy, there was a time in my life when I wasn't like what you see now. I was rich and famous, and respected as well.

"Once upon a time, I was the head master of the most famous circus in all of Germany. We had eighteen dancing bears. Eighteen. Missy, have you ever seen even one?"

Not waiting for my answer, which I hadn't planned on giving (although I really had never seen one), he continued. "We had those eighteen dancing bears, fifty trapeze artists and ropewalkers, five eaters, acrobats, dancers, ponies, elephants, and of course, clowns.

"There was a young dancer we had, Nina, she was beautiful! Oh, was she beautiful! She moved, always, as the wind moves among the flowers."

"My heart would grow, and I would be weak when she was near. I was handsome then, and I was respected. We fell in love, madly in love, and were never apart, but I don't think I ever loved her more than when she danced. I had given her beautiful white slippers beaded with pearls and little shinie for her birthday. She would put those on and whirl across the floor, a gazelle. Her feet would glide above the ground; and to me she was a Venus or Helen, everything a woman could be. I loved her so much." He stopped, and was silent for a very long time. I felt an ache in my heart, and I could see
the beautiful young Nina, flowing across the moonlit circus lawn, while this poor old man, so young and handsome watched with a bursting heart.

"She was killed when our train derailed on the way to our summer location" he said abruptly. "She had wanted to sit by the window, but I wouldn't let her. She was frail, and the windows were thin, with cold drafts. I was afraid she'd get sick. When the train derailed she was thrown into the aisle. A crate that had been stashed at the back of the car came unfastened and it... it crushed her." His voice trailed off and he lowered his head. But when I touched his arm, he looked up, and I saw in his face the agony he must have felt.

"If she had been sitting... if only I would have..." he sighed deeply. "I tell myself I can't be sure. Perhaps God had already decided.

"I tell you all this because I see you sitting here and I think, she looks like my Nina, so I come closer, and I see."

He reached into his 21st Street Mission coat and pulled out a good sized velvet bag. The colors were faded, but I could tell they had once been bright and cheerful, and the velvet was patchy having more bare spots than plush ones.

The old bum rubbed the bag lovingly, thoughtfully.

"After Nina died, the respected man I had been died too. I took to drinking, and the circus soon asked me to leave. So, I left Bavaria, and Germany altogether and came to America. When I came, I cannot find a job - I have no education, no respect, and I end up just around with no money. But, I have my memories. Would... would you like to see my Nina? I have photos, here."

He handed me the bag so precious to him and opened it. My mouth was dry, so I licked my lips and as I pulled open the draw strings. My finger found a small pack of tiny types, held together by a thinning rubber band.

The first was of a young couple, arms entwined. The picture was blurry, and I couldn't make out any of their features, but I knew it was Nina and my friend.

I slid this photo to the back of the stack and gaped at the one proceeding it.

Nina had light hair, I couldn't tell exactly what color, because the photo was black and white, but it was long and straight, and hung wispily about her face. She was beautiful! Her eyes were round with long, curled eyelashes, and her smile, which seemed so perfect, was reflected in them. She had a long, slender neck and face and white, straight teeth.

I flipped the picture over and read the message there, written in small, curved letters spaced closely together.

My Dearest Clarence—

may we never be parted

Ironic huh?

"She always did love to go on about Alynam, she did." Clarence smiled fondly. "Saw it was the name you'd give to a mule -- and I was stubborn as one, so it fit."

The next photo was color, but it looked like it had been painted on, or done with crayons, but my grandmother told me once that's how color pictures used to be. Anyway, this one showed Nina in a powder blue leotard and tutu, with Clarence's white slippers on. Her hair was brown, or an indistinct blond, but it seemed to shimmer in spite of it. I realized with a start that my hair was that color. I grinned, and went on through the rest of the
photos, some showing Clarence, (and he was handsome!), while others had only Nina in her dancing costumes.

My biggest surprise came from the very last photo. It was of a girl about twelve, in one of those ballet positions. She was skinny with stick straight hair and too big feet. Straight-forwardly--she was normal. Her name could have been Norma, for when I looked at the photo I saw myself.

I flipped the picture over and read the words--Nina Berniece Conklin, 13.

"Now do you see why I saw my Nina in you? Someday I know you, too, will dance your way into some handsome boy's heart." I thanked him and turned to go. I had almost reached the revolving doors when I heard a voice calling.

"Now, Missy, why don't you run on home."

"Missy! Nina!"

I turned and saw the old bum following me. He still carried his tattered bag, and his eyes glistened. Out of the bottom of the bag he drew two shining white slippers with trailing white ribbons. They had been treated with love, and looked almost new. He grabbed my hand, and softly placed them in it.

"Now you dance." He said in that beautiful, clear voice, with tears in his eyes. I hugged him heartfeltly, and slowly walked out.

That was last spring, and people have already noticed the difference in me. I'm known as "The Dancing Monroe," among the "Handsome Monroe" the "Beautiful" and the "cute" Monroe, the "Artist" and the "Football" Monroe.

Rebecca Spafford
Leaves swirled silently from the towering trees lining Lakeshore Drive. Most fell in blazes of color to the sidewalks below to scatter about at the feet of passersby, while others occasionally became airborne again, kicked by the hurrying pedestrians and spun around at the will of the winds. One such leaf, a magenta-hued large red maple, floated across a guard rail, down towards the river below and settled onto the brim of a riding cap perched at an angle atop the head of Gonzo Roosevelt.

Gonzo at the time was piloting his barge up the Chicago River to its berth along the immense docks of the east-side wharf. Gonzo, an aged, often smiling man, had graying eyebrows, a large nose, high cheekbones and deep-set brown eyes that shimmered with every casual glance. His wool-lined leather coat kept him warm against the harsh Chicago winds that blew up and down the river, carrying his frosty breath away with each gust.

Gonzo had been raised in Detroit, the son of a longshoreman whose wife had died a few years after Gonzo was born. A fairly good student in high school, "The Gonz" had tried several other areas of employment before following his calling as a barge pilot. This was the work he loved; the slow, steadfast sputtering of the stout craft, pushing onward through parting waters, half-frozen to a deep blue hue. He was married to his work; when on break, often deep in thought, he would simply eat his lunch upon a nearby wooden piling, its top hammered to a flowing, glassy smoothness by an ancient pile driver, and watch the boats go up and down the stolid river.

One icy November morning Gonzo maneuvered his barge up to a side canal in the private sector; he had been assigned the delivery of bulky electrical transformers to a warehousing facility far south of his usual route. It was near five in the morning; Gonzo had volunteered for the dark, chilly hours out of sheer love for the work, something he rarely saw in the other barge captains. A bulky nautical radio kept him company; right now it was dictating a weather report to the Windy City. A frigid arctic wind urged him to turn up the collar of his lambswool jacket; after doing so he plunged a frozen hand, shivering and numbed by the icy steel of the steering wheel, into the depths of his coat pocket. Gazing at the gnarled paw that was left piloting the barge, Gonzo whimsically thought that it now resembled more closely the bark of the ancient riverbank oak tree that bore his and Loretta's initials than the youthful hand that had carved them there so long ago on a lazy autumn afternoon.

In his pocket he found a ticket stub, colored in all hues of the rainbow, that he had purchased from a lottery machine some days before. He recognized the faintly etched call letters of his tug translated into numbers, 79355, on the side of the ticket. What could have possibly come over him at the time to waste his money like that he had no idea; perhaps it was a little of the Christmas Spirit overpowering his prided sense of thrift, or maybe just an off-the-wall splurge for no reason in particular. But whatever the case,
it was a damn foolish waste of money, he thought, and with a deft flick of his hand he made as though to throw the ticket over the side.

But somehow it remained on his hand, despite several efforts to shake it off. Surprised, he suddenly realized he had forgotten about a wad of gum wrapped in its paper near the corner of his pocket; a part of the gum had affixed itself to the stub and now was stuck firmly to both his hand and the ticket. The ticket seemed to grow warmer despite the cutting edge of the air around him; his mind wandered to thoughts of the scarlet Jaguar he'd always wanted, or the alabaster chateau by the hillside, or the prize golden tenor saxophone shining through the music store window he had so often fogged up with his breath as a child...

Hogwash! One in a million. Never happen to him anyway, he thought. Why, it'd be more trouble than it would be worth, what with taxes taking away half of it and all of his friends begging and stomping down his door for the other half.

Still, wouldn't it be nice to ....

With a swift tearing motion he ripped the stub to shreds; first halves, then quarters, then eighths, and flicked them over the guard rail to the opaque blue-black waters that lay some twenty feet below the high command post steering the ship.

Well, that's over and done with, he thought. To catch the tail end of the forecast he turned up the radio and listened attentively.

"... with moderate winds and sudden snowstorms approaching early this morning. And as a service of your local radio station, today's daily lottery numbers: seven, nine, ...."

Gonzo, hesitating for a moment upon hearing the first few numbers of the broadcast, abruptly and impulsively flicked off the old maritime receiver, protesting with static.

On the side of the barge, below the guard rail, their size seemed far out of perspective; painless they lofted downward: alabaster, gold, scarlet; all tumbling languidly end-over-end and side to side, like autumn leaves not at all discouraged by the killing frost.

Glenn Ward
Ratatouille

The last boat of the annual Fourth of July boat parade passed in front of our dock just as the McMahons arrived. It's sort of a tradition for our families to spend the Fourth together. I went to the house from my front row seat on the dock just in time to hear my mother say, "Of course Courtney would love to teach you how to windsurf, Michael."

Great, I thought, hiding behind a potted fig tree on the porch, I get to teach Mike how to windsurf. I'd rather have my wisdom teeth pulled. Not that Mike isn't a nice guy; he's actually one of my favorite people, sort of like a rambunctious Saint Bernard. Still, Mike is the last person in the world I would want to teach to windsurf, mainly because he was on sort of a macho kick. "Courtney!" Mom yelled.

I couldn't hide on the porch for the rest of my life, I decided, so I walked into the living room and made polite conversation.

"So what have you been doing this summer?" asked Mrs. McMahon. "You're so tan."

"Mainly windsurfing and working," I answered. "I went out earlier today. It got so windy I wasn't sure if I could get back in. Also, all the Fourth of July boat traffic made tons of waves."

"The wind has died down since one o'clock though," my mother chimed in, interrupting me so I can't mention the part about drunks driving boats and almost hitting me (totally false of course). The adults then went across the street to baptize a neighbor's new deck with gin and tonic.

Mike walked in, covered with bruises from football camp. That meant I was probably going to hear manly stories about how he got them.

"Hi!" he said simultaneously punching me in the arm, "You ready?"

"For what?" I said, playing stupidity, my arm throbbing.

"To teach me how to windsurf. It doesn't look that hard."

"Everybody says that. "O.K. I will." I sighed, now resigned to my fate. "Help me set up the boards and sails. You get to use my old one."

"Why?"

"Because the old one is easier to learn on." This statement was also totally false. My new one matched my swimsuit better and the sail was lighter.

We carried the boards and sails out to the yard. I tried to explain to him how to rig a sail. After fifteen minutes I gave up and rigged both of them.

"I could have done it," he said.

"Too late to do anything about it, I observed. "Of course," I said, sarcasm dripping off my words.

"I really could have." "I know."

"Really." "I believe you."

After twenty minutes of bickering we splashed into the water. We paddled about seventy feet out.

"O.K., stand up and gently rock to get used to the balance and just try to do the same thing as me," I instructed.

He stood up and did as told--for once.

"Now grab the rope attached..."
"I'm getting the hang of this now," he interrupted. "I've watched people windsurf before."

And with that, the wind started to push him across the lake.

"Ha, I knew this was..." he yelled before he fell, pulling the sail on top of him. I lost all traces of self control and laughed so hard I almost fell off my board.

Silently, with a very angry expression on his face, he climbed back on his board.

"I'm glad you're enjoying this," he said.

He had a piece of seaweed draped over one ear. That, combined with his facial expression reduced me to a giggling heap in a black, pink and blue bikini. Silently, he hauled up the weed-encrusted sail.

"You can't just let the wind push you." I shouted between gasps. "You have to control..."

"Shut up!" he yelled. "I'm doing it, aren't I."

He fell again; this fall the most spectacular because he landed face to face with a dead fish. By this time, I was dangerously close to peeing my pants, or rather, swim suit. He started off again.

"You're out too far!" I yelled once he reached the middle of the lake. He pretended not to hear me and kept going, trying in vain to look cool. I went back to shore to watch him fall through binoculars.

Since my parents and McMahons weren't home, no one could force me to rescue Mike. I could have gone out on the Sunfish and helped him, if I'd wanted to. But, he'd probably yell or sulk or both. Who needs that abuse, so I decided to leave him there.

After a half an hour or so of watching him flail around, I began to feel sorry for him. I knew how stupid he felt. My sister used to do the same thing to me. Once she left me out in the lake and I had to paddle a half a mile to get back. I always managed to come back in either by paddling or by getting a tow. Mike's new-found masculinity would not let him do any of these things.

Feelings of guilt washed over me. Really. No one would believe me, of course, but just before I was to go in the Sunfish and rescue him, the phone rang. It was my friend, Kristen.

"Hi!" she said. "You want to come over to my house to watch fireworks?"

"Sure." I answered. By this time it was awfully boring watching Mike.

"Can you come early for dinner?" she asked.

"I'd love to." I answered. I was glad she said that because my mother had made ratatouille and spinach quiche for dinner.

"See you in twenty minutes then, bye," she said and hung up.

I hung up the phone and walked back out into the yard. Mike had drifted even farther out. He didn't even paddle; he just sat on his board, waiting, his bruised body slumped over in apparent defeat.

Well, I thought, if I go and get him now, I'll miss dinner at Kristen's, which was probably something normal, like hamburgers. The hamburgers won out. I hurriedly left for Kristen's. After all, if I could paddle in, he could too.
I wanted to go up to you and say "Hi," but I realized you didn't recognize me. Just seeing you, though, brought back memories of times I'd almost forgotten.

I stared at all the new faces in class, while my sweaty palms stuck to the desk. When lunchtime, I took out my Scooby Doo lunch box and started to eat. You trotted up to me with your straight black hair hanging over your eyes and asked me if you could have one of my cookies that I was beginning to eat. I thought about it, since they were chocolate chip, and said "yes."

"Thanks," you said politely.

"They're chocolate chip," I murmured, hoping for a reply.

"Good," you replied. "They're my favorite."

I drank my juice and as I tightened up the red cap on my thermos, you turned to me and asked, "You wanna to play cars later?"

"Sure," I said, forgetting I didn't bring my cars.

"I brought my Corvette."

A lump banged against the sides of my throat. I wished I'd brought my cars and especially my Thunderbird.

"Uh... I forgot my cars."

"That's ok. You can borrow my bug."

I was relieved.

When the bell rang for recess we scampered out together with the teacher yelling behind us. I wanted to stop, but since you didn't, I follow you, a dog chasing his master.

"What's your name," you called as we plopped down in the dustiest part of the sand box.

"John," I complied.

"Mine's Matt," you said proudly as if you were the only one in this world.

"Here's my bug." I took the car and we made weaving highways across the box desert.

I was nervous. It was the first time someone asked me to their house. It was worse than when the dentist flaunted his poking tools in front of my face. My mom dropped me off and I walked slowly up to your door not knowing what to expect. I knocked while I stared at the doorbell. I could hear "Be there in a minute," and "George, get the door."

The door opened and a tall man with a shady moustache said, "Come in, Matt's cleaning his room." The man smiled and showed me down the hall and to your room.

"Johns," I heard a voice say. "See my stuff?"

It was hard to believe. Skeletons stood all around the room, their shimmering teeth smiling at me. "This one is tor-an-a-soar-us Rex," you said, "and these other ones, I forget."

"Neat," I said with amazement. I didn't have anything this great.

After my lesson in dinosaurs, I followed you down to your basement. It was messier than ours. Your dad showed us how to make paper airplanes out of newspaper. I had the weather forecast printed on my right wing. When we went back upstairs, your mom was cooking liver for dinner. I'm glad my mom picked me up before I got a chance to eat.
That summer you moved away and went to a different elementary school, and we never said goodbye or stayed in touch.

And now when I see you in high school, I'm surprised. I look at your hair spiked six inches above your head and I wonder what ancient reptile you're trying to imitate. I see you roam the halls, like you own them and every time we meet, I try to gain recognition through eye contact, but you just keep walking.

I can't figure out how a person can change so much, but when I go home and look at my bedroom mirror, my reflection jumps back to me. A new fuzz covers my chin and lip and the boyish toys that were once scattered on my dresser are gone.

Gary Garrison
THOUGHTS OF A JANITOR

Harvey Sloane followed his push broom along the fake marble floor of the cavernous shopping mall, wondering whether he was pushing it or it was pulling him.

"5:30 is too early to be up on a stupid Monday," he muttered to the thing in front of him. He followed it obediently until he came to the row of black doors at the end. He stopped and leaned against the wall, his deformed Nike tennis shoes wedged between the floor and his feet. He had always been kind of chubby. His dirty brown hair stuck out of his big head like crinkled paper wads in an overstuffed waste basket. He didn’t bother combing it anymore. The same negligence showed in his clothes, a greasy Mickey Mouse sweatshirt, and rumpled blue cords that sagged under his bottom. He could have passed for one of those brown trash dumpsters, there, standing by the wall. He gazed down the open area.

"Man, this place is really huge when you think about it. It’s like a castle. Man, if I could live in a place like this, run around all day, one big room," he breathed. His broom suddenly fell from his hands and hit a Salvation Army collection bucket, jolting him back. He stopped and lifted the lid of the swinging red pan.

"Shoot, they never leave anything, anymore." He picked the broom up and continued with a new row. He slowly passed the empty stores. Sometimes he got so he didn’t see anything but white in there. His mind drifted back to the empty bucket. Christmas. In a few hours, this place would be full of people. "They’ll be shopping for presents, rushing around, pushing, wanting to get it all done as fast as they can. What a waste. How stupid." It was nice now when he was the only one. No pushing... no people... It was just as empty to him with all the people there as with none, maybe more.

"I like it like this, best." He stopped again and looked around. It was all stark and white again.

"The lights are never turned off in this place. It’s always day." He suddenly realized all the noise, as if it got trapped and constantly echoed, the clicking shoes and talking. It was the music. It never stopped, 24 hours of that background, elevator music, Frank Sinatra’s Songs For Santa played again and again." He frowned.

"I’d get rid of all this hype." He ambled to Santa’s house and his mechanical elves. They never stopped, just like the music. They were corralled in the middle of the mall, one pounded a toy horse with a little hammer over and over again, two ran after each other in a circle. Their legs never changed position. He could see the silver track they followed. Another just kept bending over to pick up a package. He took his broom and held the little elf in the down position. It tried to come back up. He pushed harder. The gears started to grind. It was funny until it started smoking. He quickly took the broom off. It didn’t move. He glanced around and guiltily swept away. "Someone will see it and fix it, not my fault, should make those things sturdier, anyhow."

It was 6:30, Harvey had finished two wings of the building and was starting the next.

"All these stores," he mumbled, "how do they do it, sell junk by making people believe they need it." He stopped by a store with a clown and a big
ball above it. Big letters in the window said "fool your friends, great at parties!" There was a glass with ice in it. He looked closer. One of the pieces had a bug in it.

"Ha, what a joke," he laughed, "I wonder how much it is," he looked for a price. Suddenly, he heard some talking down around the corner. Then there was a sound like water falling. It was a whole bunch of footsteps.

"Well, what in the world," he glanced at his watch. The mall didn't open for three hours yet. He took out his broom and started sweeping towards the increasing sounds. They suddenly came into view. It was a funny sight; they scurried along the edges of the mall like discovered cockroaches, old people in sweatsuits, in single file, marching like they were hurrying to an appointment.

"Mall walkers," he breathed. They were people that needed exercise, but didn't like cold weather. "Mall walkers.... wall mockers." He laughed at the switch in letters. It was ridiculous either way. They slowly circled around the parameter, sometimes becoming lost from sight in the other wings, but then popping around a corner, arms flailing, big steps- a hundred of them- blowing like fish. He stood, leaning against his broom, staring at them without self-consciousness. He subconsciously viewed himself as the observer and not the observed, like he was invisible. It startled him when an old lady waved to him as she passed by.

"We appreciate all your hard work in keeping this nice place clean for us," she yelled and continued with her concentrated pace. He took a step back in apprehension.

"Uh...uh, yeah, sure...." he stammered after her apprehension. She was gone. He looked down in front of his broom where, by now, should have been a good amount of dust. There wasn't anything.

"Aw, who'll notice, anyway, can't get every speck." He started sweeping where he left off and tried not to notice all the people passing him.

Ted Bennett
"Good luck" she said, and I never saw her again. I didn't really know what she meant when she said it. I could have taken it two ways: (1) she was daring me my "good luck", (2) she really did wish me "good luck". Either way I thanked her.

She had purple-tinted hair when I saw her last, who knows what color she's wearing it now. She changed hair colors with her moods. Joe, a friend of mind from the center, insists he saw her getting into a car. She had black hair, he claims. I don't believe him; she was afraid of cars, "They are deadly toys. More creatures are lost to those wretched contraptions than wars," I remember her saying.

I saw her out of the center once. She was sitting beneath a twisted oak holding a pen and a small notebook. She smiled at me. I noticed something strange about her at the time, but I've forgotten now. I asked her what she was writing. She corrected me, "Analyzing, not writing." She looked up at me, a puzzled look on her face, "Could you inform me of the name of this creature?" she asked.

I chuckled nervously. I remember her oddity gripped me and I simply replied "An oak tree." I had heard from people at the center that she was disoriented with "our world" (as she put it).

She only laughed at my answer and said: "Thank you, but I am fully aware of the name of the creature we are now beneath. "Please explain to me what this creature is." I was stunned to see her holding out her small hand, as if waiting for change, and in the center of her palm sat a rock. I told her what it was. "No," she said, "please explain to me what it is." I could not explain. Rocks are rocks. They are a given fact; 1+1=2. I began to explain this logic to her.

She wasn't listening, "There are so many of these creatures. One would assume an explanation would be simple, but you make it complicated with logic." I began to try to convince her that the logical theory is the universal theory. "Your limited boundaries shine around you," she said. I walked away.

We began to run into one another more frequently at the center. For some reason I was extremely happy to see her. She fascinated me and I began to understand her—not what she said but what she did. She would tell me of places she had been, unlike any I had heard of before. She imagined these places, I think. We became friends, maybe not. Something was there, though, a sort of trust.

On one occasion she had dropped her plastic paisley purse after pushing hurriedly and blindly into me. I was shocked to see her in such haste. "Forgive me," she asked, "look, I've dropped my favorite purse." I stooped to pick it up for her. I told her that dropping a purse was hardly anything to be upset about and asked how she felt about the current headlines (I've forgotten what they were). She seemed awed, she sighed as if annoyed and retorted, "This world dwells on questions of the past and future, never on the 'insignificant absurdistities,' like 'why don't some people understand other people?', in the present. Nothing is insignificant completely, many things are absurd. Problems should be dealt with creatively, with insight, not logic.
Do you understand me?" Of course I had. I always listened--I told her.

"No, do you really understand?" I told her I did, but she didn't believe me.

I recall another incident that jolted my perspective, for a moment. I was with her. We were standing at a water fountain in the center. She was telling me of a dream she had had. I leaned to the flowing water and filled my mouth. Then I realized. I noticed she was studying me and had stopped talking. I pushed the water on and with my other hand I grabbed at the perpetual arc.

"Look," I said, "it's like holding water in my hand. You think you have it, then it's lost." A grin stretched across her face and she stared at me for a moment. Then continued telling me of last night's dream. I remember feeling embarrassed. She noticed and frowned.

She frowned on me, she pitied me. One day she even told me she pitied me. She pitied, but also envied, my naivete. She asked me if I had ever felt pity for anything. I told I felt sorry for people who are different from others.

"Have you ever felt pity for a rock? They are the simplest of creatures and are omnipresent but they cannot be explained. Have you felt pity for rocks?" I knew she was serious, but I laughed.

She flashed me a foreign look of disbelief and, as strange as it may seem, I felt her trust for me die. I stopped laughing. "I've tried to reach the unreachable. I've tried to teach the blind-ignorant. Nothing is impossible as everything is perfect. I must abandon all hope here. I'll leave it with you. Good luck," she said, and I never saw her again.

Vanessa Ballingall
When I was four, I had a big brown book about spiders. There was a picture of a big tarantula on the cover that scared me, because if you stared at it long enough it seemed to move. I loved that book, and every time I’d see a spider I’d run to it and look it up and read about it. My father had given me that book for my fourth birthday.

Our house was covered with white wooden planks that overhung the stone foundation by about a half an inch. Spiders used to hide between the wood and the bricks. I’d take a jar and a pencil and scrape the spiders off the wall and keep them. It was fun to watch them scratch at the glass with their useless legs. One day my mother was mad at my dad because he’d left the peanut butter out all night, and she threw the jar at him. It shattered, and she stomped on the scrambling spiders while she screamed at my dad.

I was sitting at the hammock in the back yard watching my mom and my dad trying to hit a birdie back and forth across a badminton net. This was true entertainment because they are not athletic people at all. Then I saw a giant black spider reaching down from the tree above my mother trying to grab her and pull her to her death. I blinked in amazement and realized that it was only a low branch blowing in the wind. My mother never even noticed because my dad had launched the birdie in her direction.

There was a tree outside our house that had thousands of spiderwebs near the top. I would climb up there and watch the spiders as they climbed around. If I blew on the webs, they would move frantically about, so I did it often. When I fell out of the tree and hurt my leg, it took my mom and my dad ten minutes to hear my crying, because they were loudly arguing about dinner. When they finally did come running outside, the pain had gone, but I told them that a red spider had pushed me out of the tree. My dad laughed, but my mom began to cry and ran inside the house. I wondered what I had said wrong.

I awoke late at night to the sounds of my parents yelling. I never would’ve believed that my dad could cry. This was the first time I realized that they didn’t like each other anymore. There was a big black spider who had a web at the corner of my bedroom. I called him Alex and he was my best friend. Now I walked across the room amidst the shouts and sobs, and turned on the light. Alex’s insides felt warm in my hand as I smashed him over and over again. I didn’t stop hitting him until they stopped yelling.

The driveway was a small dirt road that led from the highway to our house. It was nearly a quarter mile to the mailbox. Everyday after school, I ran all the way from the bus to the house, where my mom would be waiting to make lunch for me. Once, she told me that she’d seen a spider the size of a dime in the mailbox, so I turned right around and ran back to the road to see it. When I opened the mailbox, it was empty and dark. I trudged back slowly, and told her that the spider was gone. All she said was, "Oh," and then made me a tunafish salad sandwich. I’ve wondered if she was lying about that spider.
On Sunday nights my dad and I always watched "Wild Kingdom." We both sat there and watched it while my mom made popcorn. I remember the night that the show was about the African rain forest. I was wishing my mother would hurry up with the popcorn so she wouldn't miss the part about the bird spider. Those spiders were the largest in the world. I went and got her from the kitchen and we all sat together on the couch and watched the white spider suck the life out of a sparrow.

There was a daddy-long-legs on my wall that was so big he scared me. I couldn't even move. I called to my dad to come to kill him, but my mom came instead and told me that my Dad was gone. I slept in my parents' bedroom that night, with spiders in my nightmares. My dad didn't come back for two days. When I tried to tell him about the spider, he just looked at me sadly and put his hands over his face.

The doors of the empty moving van swung open with a loud creak. There was a silver spiderweb in the corner, a yellow monster crouching in the center. My dad didn't even help as my uncle and I moved my mom's things aboard the truck. When my desk was loaded in, the drawer fell out, and as I replaced it, I thought I saw a small movement amid the junk inside. Looking up quickly, I saw that the silver spiderweb was empty.

Sitting in my new bedroom, on my bed, I felt a tickling on my leg. Seeing delusive spiders, I became paralyzed with fear. I had nobody to call to, and I was sure it would kill me. I was at its mercy. My mother was afraid of spiders too, and now we were alone against them. I looked down at my leg, there was nothing there. Paranoia, I guess.

I used to think spiders were cool and interesting. Now I can't even look at the pictures in that big brown book with the hairy tarantula on it without shaking. It's too bad, really. My dad gave me that book for my fourth birthday, and I haven't seen him in two years. He only lives three miles away.

Ray Mittan
Elissa Hawkins glanced around the darkened sleeping room, squinting at the still figures of the other children to make certain that she was the only one awake. Satisfied that the nine other children in the room were asleep, she slowly rose from her bunk, her bag slung over her shoulder. As the video camera swept across the room, she ducked into the shadow of one of the beds until it was past her. It was almost time.

Elissa was an orphan, as were the other children sleeping at this shelter. Being an orphan at this time wasn't as uncommon as it might have been a few years ago. Ever since the war had started back in 2079, thousands of kids all over the world had been left homeless and parentless. Elissa sat on the floor in the dark, out of sight of the video camera. The digital readout on the wall near the door told her she still had another fifteen minutes until she could activate her plan. She sighed and closed her eyes, thinking about that day long ago that had taken the lives of both her mother and father.

The war had started when she was eight years old. At the time her family was living in a small town in midwest America, one of the few places in the U.S. that didn't belong to a megalopolis, a city that stretched for hundreds of miles. They led a quiet life in Jacksonville, where her mother was an astronomy teacher and her father was a doctor. Then the war started between the United States and the alliance of Germania, U.S.S.R., and China. All the nuclear and atomic weapons in the world had been destroyed nearly half a century before, so the war didn't mean the end of life on earth as it would have in the last century. Instead, it was mostly an air war, between laser-equipped fighter gliders, and bomber ships destroyed the civilian cities of the enemy.

For a while the war hadn't greatly affected their lives in Jacksonville, since they didn't live on either coast. But slowly the front drew closer and closer, until one day airships descended and almost totally destroyed Jacksonville. After the raid was over, Elissa emerged from the rubble that had been the school, where she had been protected by a shielded emergency shelter. Fire and debris littered the streets, and Elissa stopped dead at the sight of people lying dead on the streets, their flesh charred where the lasers had hit them. Then she remembered her parents, and went off to search for them, trying not to panic. It was a little after noon, and every day Jack and Stella Hawkins met for lunch at a local restaurant. Remembering this, Elissa hurried to the town towards the restaurant.

Dazed people had been everywhere, most of whom she knew. But Elissa had not noticed their grief, too wrapped up in her own horror and dread. She kept telling herself that her parents were fine, they would hug her and her brother, tell her how much they loved them. They could all move far, far away from America, no matter that visas were nearly impossible to secure. They would find a way to escape this war, and when the world was at peace again, only then would they return to America.

But when she reached the spot where the restaurant had stood, she was shocked into reality, for only the smoldering ruins remained. She stared at the pile of cement for a long time, then turned away. As she began to walk
away from the ruins, a familiar blue glider caught her eye, and she rushed across the street to it. A few yards from the vehicle she stopped, staring in horror at the front seat of her mother’s glider. Her parents lay together, her father’s body partially covering his wife’s still form, as if he’d tried to protect her from the invaders. But his protection had been useless; they were both dead.

That had been six years ago, when she was only nine, almost ten; she’d been on her own ever since. With no living relatives in the world, besides her little brother, Dolphy, who went with her, she made her way from city to city, joining gangs along the way to survive in the streets. She soon learned how to defend herself, and fought day after day to stay alive. The time that she wasn’t travelling or looking for a place for her and Dolphy to stay, she spent in a library, any library she could find. Schools had ceased to exist three years after the start of the war, but she wouldn’t have attended anyway.

One night in Philadelphia, Dolphy mysteriously disappeared, just vanished from the deserted warehouse where they were sleeping. After spending several months searching for him, Elissa finally gave up, for there was no trace of him, anywhere. Since then, she’d spent countless hours in libraries, reading anything she could get her hands on. Most of the computer disks were stored in a shelter in the libraries she found, so she could study them without the fear of being interrupted by raids, which were becoming less frequent. Elissa memorized almost everything she read, and the information she collected was stored away in her mind as easily as computer saved information on a disk. She learned that she could access information she needed anytime she wanted with a little concentration. Files that contained information or stories about the past interested her the most. She memorized the American Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and several other major historical documents. She read about American life back in the twentieth century, and soon a plan began to form in her mind, a plan of how to escape this time of war and death.

Before she’d left Jacksonville, she’d gone to her home and scrimmaged up everything she thought she and her brother might need, carrying the stuff in a large heat-and-water resistant bag. The contents included personal momentos, things given to them by her parents, like a gold digital that had a voice capacity and was engraved with her name, social security number, and date of birth, January 21, 2071; some clothing; a few pieces of jewelry she could hock if she absolutely had to; a laser, designed by her mother, who was something of an amateur inventor; and a small flat, round disk that fit into the palm of her hand, another invention her mother had been working on. Stella Hawkins had explained to her husband and daughter that the object was a time transporter, untested and non-functional as of yet. This Elissa wore on the chain around her neck, and the laser she wore strapped to her side. Fortunately, it was a laser that her mother had designed to use a special kind of energy cell, so the weapon wouldn’t have to be recharged for a period of twenty-seven and one-fourth years.

Elissa was now fifteen-and-a-half years old, she’d managed to keep away from children’s homes until now, in the city of Chicago, which was the start of a megalopolis that ran from Chicago to what remained of New York City. An unexpected patrol unit had appeared as she was lifting a wallet on a back street, and two of the guards had grabbed her and brought her to this Reformatory for Homeless Children. Word on the street had it that these RHC centers, located all over the country, were really using the children to
manufacture weapons and fighter gliders. Some of the older kids were disappearing, to some secret place known only by the crooked Union government. So Elissa, when she was taken to RHC in Chicago, decided to finally put her plan in action. Now that she had learned everything she could about America in the past, she was ready to take the big step: tonight she was going to use her Mother’s last invention. Tonight she would attempt to travel back in time.

Opening her eyes, Elissa glanced at her digital, and took a deep breath. It was time. She twisted around and peeked over the edge of the bunk at the camera over the door. It was facing the other way, so she stood and took the time disk from around her neck. The time and place were all set, all she had to do was press the button. And now that Dolphy was gone — well, there was nothing to keep her here. With her bag slung over her shoulder, eyes closed, Elissa pressed the button.

For a long moment nothing happened, and she opened her eyes in disappointment. Then suddenly a blinding light filled her vision, making her shut her eyes against it, and a strange weightlessness filled her body. Then everything went black, and she was no longer conscious of the experience. A loud noise startled her suddenly, and Elissa’s hand automatically reached for her laser. She sat up to find a tall man looking at her. His words finally caught her attention. “... did you get in here? This is private property.”

He was tall and dressed in a dark blue uniform, and she suddenly remembered seeing a man dressed similarly on a graphics history disk. He was a police officer, the same as the Union patrol in 2086.

Elissa climbed to her feet as an exultant, triumphant, feeling coursing through her. She’d made it back! If not to 1986, then at least to sometime in the twentieth century.

“Excuse me, Miss,” the officer said impatiently. “What are you doing here?”

She glanced up at him, a grin lighting her face and eyes with irrepressible laughter. “Where am I?” she asked in a voice that sounded lifting and slightly foreign to the man’s ears.

He stared at her in surprise. “You mean you don’t know that you’re in the Museum of Science and Industry, in Chicago?”

She glanced curiously at her surroundings. “Is that where this is? Well, officer, could you possibly direct me to the exit of this building?”

“Sure, kid,” he replied, shrugging. He pointed out the exit and watched as she walked quickly out of the museum into the cool late-summer air. Teenagers had the weirdest ideas of fashion these days, he thought, shaking his head as he noticed her outfit.

Elissa stopped outside the building, staring around at the brightly lit, late-twentieth century city. Everything looked so ancient and foreign to her, from the buildings jutting up into the sky to the —what was the word? Oh, yes— automobiles traveling along the wide streets. Her street-wise wariness suddenly returned, pushing out her feelings of joy and relief at having made it back to what it seemed to be, 1986. As she walked down the street, her hand rested on the laser she carried strapped to her waist beneath the stretchy dark jacket she wore. Beneath the jacket she was wearing an old, body-hugging blue tunic top and a loose, comfortable pair of black pants that stopped short of her black, shape-molding, stretchy shoes. Hopefully she wouldn’t stand out too much in this time period until she got enough money to buy some new clothes.
Still a little tense, Elissa walked quickly down the sidewalk, gazing about in wonder at the city’s nightlife around her. Not even aware of where she was going, she walked for hours, getting used to the sights and sounds and people of this city. Finally, when she noticed how tired she was, she sat down on a wooden bench to rest her aching feet. She might as well sleep here tonight, and tomorrow she could figure out what to do with her new life here in 1986. It would probably take a while to get used to, but she was a fast learner, and, more importantly, a fighter.

Around half an hour later Elissa awoke abruptly from an uneasy doze to find herself surrounded by a group of jeering young men, her age and a little older. One who appeared to be in charge stepped forward, and the others immediately quieted.

The guy who stepped had dark hair, pale skin, and pale eyes that regarded her cruelly, and Elissa sighed to herself. It seemed to be a street gang. She sat up and unobtrusively laid her hand on her laser, confident that she could handle this bunch. She’d dealt with larger gangs at worse odds before, she could do it again.

“So, little lady,” the leader finally spoke. “You new around here?”

She’d expected him to attack, or take her bag, not make conversation, and his apparent interest caught her offguard. “I-uh, yes,” she stammered, glancing down at the flash of gleaming steel that suddenly appeared in his hands. To calm herself, she took a deep breath, and managed coolly, “Actually I’m waiting for my boyfriend and his gang. They should be here at any moment.”

His eyes narrowed warily. “And which gang does your old man run with?”

“Old man?” she thought, confused by the reference. Oh, well, it was just some street talk, most likely. “He runs with the Bombers,” she said, naming a notorious street gang from her own time.

The gang leader threw his head back and laughed, and the rest of the guys followed his example. “The Bombers?” he finally said, scornfully. “You know guys, that sounds like a faggot gang to me, and I ain’t never heard of it before.”

“That’s because we’re from New York,” Elissa said quickly, looking around nervously at the knives and the chains they held.

He laughed again. “Good try, honey, but no go. What do you say we introduce this pretty little piece to our city, guys?”

Evil grins appeared, and they began to move towards her. Realizing there was no way to reason with them, Elissa stood, and suddenly the laser was in her hand, pointed at their leader. “One step closer, Patrol slime, and you’re blasted into the next century.” Literally, she thought wryly. The gang members stopped their approach, looking uncertainly at their leader, eyeing the weapon in her hand warily. “What the hell is that?”

“This is the kind of weapon we use where I come from, Gang leach,” she said silkily. “Now if you and your playmates don’t start moving soon, one of you is going to end up fried like a Thanksgiving turkey.” To demonstrate that she meant exactly what she said, Elissa fired the weapon, aiming at the sidewalk in front of the leader. Before the incredulous members of the gang, the cement glowed briefly, and a hole appeared in the surface of the sidewalk.

A moment later Elissa was alone. She stood there for a moment, her heart pounding heavily in her chest. Though she was used to being on her own, encounters like that one still scared her. She’d thought many times that she was lucky to have her mother’s laser, because at 5’6” and 110 lbs., there
wasn’t much she could do without a weapon if a gang attacked her. Glancing
around and hoping no one had noticed the events of the last few moments, she
reholstered her laser. Evidently she was safer on the move.

She was in the slum section in Chicago. At three in the morning, the
streets were nearly deserted, and the traffic signals were flashing yellow
cautionary lights. Her feet began to ache, and the bag on her shoulder bit
into her skin painfully. She wished she could stop somewhere, but wasn’t sure
she could risk it. She didn’t know anyone in this city, or even in this
world, for that matter. The thought depressed her more. Perhaps she could
just go back to her own time, and take her chances on surviving there. At
least she knew what to expect and how to act there, whereas she wasn’t even
certain where to go. Her steps dragged, and when at last she’d reached a
better neighborhood a few miles from where she’d started, Elissa began to look
for someplace, any safe place, where she could spend the rest of the night.

There were only a few places that were still open in that neighborhood.
Two were all-night diners, which she was pretty sure were the same as
restaurants, while one was an ancient looking building that read “YMCA.” That
looked like the best bet to her, and the name YMCA seemed vaguely familiar,
though she was too tired to remember where she might have read about it. At
the entrance to the three-storied YMCA building, Elissa paused, wondering if
she could actually go in. But suddenly she was too exhausted to care anymore,
and hesitantly opened the door.

Inside she found a lobby with what appeared to be a waiting room, and a
reception area. There was no one there, so Elissa crossed the room to the
waiting area and lay down on a threadbare sofa in a corner. She was so tired,
all she wanted to do was sleep. Perhaps things would look better tomorrow, in
the light of day. Then she could decide whether or not to stay in this time.

Jenny Vander Weyden
GOD ON TOUR

Here I am again. It's 10:00 Sunday morning. I'm attending church when I should be home dreaming of pirates or movie stars. I suppose if Mother is happy, I can live with Father Smithy, this room, and God for an hour.

The church smell is definitely strong today. The combination of incense, candle wax, and Holy Spirit is lingering thickly. I wonder if it gets on my clothes like cigarette smoke and that's how people know if I've just come from church.

I wonder who woke up early enough to come today. I see that I'm blessed with the same two old birds, er, ladies rather, that always manage to sit in the pew in front of me. They just exist there with their flower print dresses, arthritic hands, infinite facial wrinkles, horn-rimmed glasses, and scarf-covered gray hair as if they were a couple of rag dolls flopped on a shelf. When they sing, they remind me of Deep Throat from All The President's Men.

Oh my gosh, there's that gorgeous girl that I've been concentrating on lately. I wonder if I should smile at her. Maybe she'll smile back. I'm going to give it a try. Cheese! Oh, she wasn't looking. No, lady, I wasn't smiling at you. Those tight jeans sure hug her hips. I know that I would love to hug her--wait, I'm in church. I shouldn't be thinking thoughts such as that. But her pink fuzzy sweater and seductive cinnamon-colored eyes turn my control switch to excited. I just try not to ponder over her cute dimples and shapely--

Owww! Somebody just plucked a bald patch into the back of my head.

"Bobby! Stop that this instant!"

Hip hip hurrah. I get to sit in front of Bobby Wilson this week. Little Bobby makes Darth Vader seem like Tweety Bird. Bobby likes to play with his toy truck in the middle of mass. He enjoys sending it down the pew while everyone is standing. I think he likes to see how far he can make it travel before the people sit back down.

Bobby's mother is in complete contrast to her over energetic little Bobby. She's not even thirty and she's the proud owner of many streaks of gray in her dark hair. She talks in a high-pitched gritted teeth tone. And I don't know if it's my imagination, but her eyes seem to glow when she gets the opportunity to snatch little Bobby from beneath the pew and swat his little behind.

There's Mr. Birdseye, the usher. I think he came to the church as part of a deal package from God. He's always shuffling up and down the aisle, in the same old blue suit, seating people. He purses and unpurses his lips, making his jowls wiggle. He's a pleasant old fellow, but he reeks of cheap cologne and hair oil. I wonder who he's seating now. Oh no, it's Mrs Weatherbee.

Mrs. Weatherbee is a blonde lady approximately forty-five years of age. She wears a long, flowing cape to mass every week. Her hair is always stacked upon her head. Today it leans at a peculiar angle. She must have used a can of hair spray this morning. The most irritating thing about Mrs. Weatherbee is that she loves to sing in church. In my opinion, the woman should audition for a touring opera cast.

"Please rise and greet our celebrant, Father Smithy, as we sing number 405 in the Worship Two," Amazing Graze."
I guess I'm obligated to stand up now. Here comes Father Smithy. His gray hair is disheveled as usual. His cool gray eyes glint behind black-rimmed glasses. I will have to admit that "Amazing Graze" sounds better coming from Mrs. Weatherbee than from the hoarse rasp of either Father Smithy or two old ladies in front of me.

I see that he made it to the altar without tripping over the folds of his robes. It's time for the greeting.

"The Lord be with you."
"And also with you."
"Lift up your hearts."
"Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."
"It is right to give him thanks and praise."
"Good morning, everyone."

Yes, good morning, Father. I wish he'd cut the greeting shot and not drag it out with his stupid jokes and bits of humor.

He must have read my mind. He's already up to the forgiveness of sins. His style resembles that of Brother Kenneth Copeland or Reverend Jerry Falwell.

"... turn those sins loose and concentrate on what good you can do..."

Good. We get to sit down and listen to some scripture as read to us by Chester Hill and his whiny Richard Siemons voice. The reading is a fairy tale about the fisherman who gives up his fishing career so he can bump around with Jesus Christ. I can't see anyone relinquishing a good job with a good pension, food on the table every night, and a good social position to wander aimlessly around the country with a guy that looks similar to Ted Nugent and be persecuted by everyone he meets.

It's time for the responsorial psalm.

"The way of the Lord is one of good and righteousness. One we should all follow."
"The Lord is good to me. I will hold him in my heart."
"Leave the path of evil and follow the trail of God."
"The Lord is good to me. I will hold him in my heart."

Yeah, yeah. This is nothing but a cheer. He says 'go' and we say 'fight'. This is taking longer than I was hoping it would. I wonder if we're stopping for juice and doughnuts after mass today.

"Pssst. Hey, Dad. Are we stopping for doughnuts and juice after mass?" Hmmm. I didn't get any response except a glare from my mother.

At least we get to sit down again. The only problem is that we have to hear another reading. I suppose some small sacrifices must be made. At least that's what the Bible says.

Once again, it's time to stand up. Up, down, up, down. Did I make a mistake and sit in on an aerobics class this morning instead?

"... a reading of the Gospel from Luke to the Corinthians." I think that's the same as reading people's mail without permission.

At this point in the mass, everybody must develop an itch on their forehead, their lips, and their breast. Then they must scratch all three, in that order, with their right thumb. I don't understand it.

Thank you, God. The gospel was short. So now I get to sit down again. Father Smithy leans on the podium as usual, giving his sermon.

"... so Jesus took the man..."
My head feels light.
"... reminds me of a lady I knew..."
"...muffrig, aslop grunifox..."

Star Wars was a tremendous movie. I'm really Han Solo trapped in a big spaceship. Thousands of stormtroopers dressed in choir robes are all around. Luke is duelling with Darth John Paul II. Princess Leia is—Ooof! My ribs are inflamed with pain. What is going on? I was sleeping. My mother is giving me her "you're seventeen years old and you should know better than to sleep in church" look. Did that cute girl see me sleeping? No, she hasn't looked my way yet.

I have to stand up again. I am reciting my profession of faith. I can't stand this prayer. Part of it goes "we believe in Jesus Christ, his only son." How do I know that God has only one son? Jesus could have a brother hanging out somewhere. Heaven has to be a big place.

I get to sit down once again. This time the ushers bring the wicker baskets down the aisle and wave them in your face. They have money in them. I can't figure out whether they want me to take or give. If it was up to me, I'd take. But I don't think I'm up to another elbow to the ribs.

I see that another fine family has been selected to transfer the bread and the wine up to the altar from the back of church. I don't understand why they don't leave the stuff up front to begin with. I notice that an usher always carries up the cash basket. I think that they get twenty percent. The priest gets prepared. He washes his hands. There go the altar boys into the back room. I'll bet they are probably having a cigarette or drinking some altar wine. I know that I would be. There's no way that I could sit up on those seats next to the altar for the whole mass and be that close to the action without being on something.

The altar boys are back. The priest feels safe enough to break the bread now. This means that we have to stand.

"This is the body of our Lord, Jesus Christ." The bells ring.

I pray some more now. Our father who art in haven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, just let me sit down again, my legs are tired.

"... let us offer each other a sign of Christ peace."

Everyone is expected to shake hands now. People who are married are allowed to kiss each other, though.

Yecccch. Old lady handshakes turn my stomach. Thank you for the peanut butter-and-jelly-handshake Bobby. Peace be with you, Mom. Peace be with you. There's a funny sight. A family of eleven is spread out along the entire pew and each one is trying to shake every other family member's hand. Now it's time to kneel and pray.

The organist leads us in a song while we proceed up to the altar to receive communion. The ushers let us out of the pew in an orderly fashion. People in the front go first. I don't understand why the ushers start out in the front at the same time, but are always out of sync in reaching the back. I mean, it's the same distance for all of them.

We didn't get any wine today. That's a shame, because I was looking forward to having some. We have to kneel and pray until the priest talks again.

"Let us pray."

He's reading some philosophical crap about taking the word of God and applying it to our everyday lives. I'm sure he knows as well as I do that there are plenty of people here who cheat on their income tax, beat their
children, commit adultery, and sin in an infinite number of ways. It doesn't make any sense.

I'm singing the final song now. My family and I are exiting now. I'm surprised my mom didn't want to talk for an hour to someone.

I suppose I'll be back next week. Take care of yourself, God, and if you think of it, my physics grade could use some help.

George Dillard
THE THRONE

I was king. King of the jungle-gym, king of the teeter-totter; the playground was my empire—and then you came along.

I remember all of the kids stopping and watching the enormous moving truck making its way down our dirt road, passing the playground and stopping two blocks down, at the house right across the street from mine. They started unloading couches and mattresses and dressers. All of the children were entrance, except me. And then, out of the dust, came a little red sports car, bumping gaily up and down, and stopping in the driveway that the giant truck was now leaving. Suddenly, you hopped out of the car back hatch, like a martian exiting his spaceship but without the uncertainty. Your eyes were stern as you took in the little, red brick homes, and the perfectly manicured lawns. And then they ran toward you; all of my loyal peasants ran from their king to greet you.

In the years that flew past us, I hated you. You, who took my kingdom and turn it into a shambles, making all of the children envy you instead of me. You, who took out your garbage and cleaned up your room, something that my mother threw in my face every waking hour of my pitiful young life. But I was force to be congenial by my mother who called you “the new kid” for six years.

So, we played together, you and I, in what was slowly turning into your kingdom. You were quick and agile, and had an authority in your voice, all of which made my hatred grow hotter and hotter. All of the kids like watching you and occasionally I myself would find you quite fascinating, but the spell wouldn’t last long.

Then one day the playground was having a wrestling match. Everyone wanted to wrestle you, although they knew that they were in for certain defeat, but you came to me and pointed.

“You, will you wrestle me?” But it was more like a command then a question.

Everyone looked at me with envy in their eyes. I did not want to be made a fool of, but on the other hand, I couldn’t risk my throne.

“Alright, tough guy, let’s go.” I said as I threw my dirty mop of hair away from my face.

I backed up a few paces and charged, lunging desperately at your stomach. You caught me and threw me down, but I squirmed by thin body free. Now you were going to play dirty, so you leapt into the air and landed just above me, your long arms and legs trapping me like a bird in a cage. Your face was very close to mine and you lowered yourself closer to me, like a vice, squeezing me, between you and the ground. Suddenly I didn’t want to fight anymore, I just wanted to lie there in this warm place, next to you. But that feeling went just as quick as it came, and now it was taken over by fear and confusion, so I leapt up and ran home as quickly as possible.
Sweat was flowing from every pore in my body as I pushed that scene through my mine over and over again. None of it made sense. How could I possibly have felt that way when I hated you so much?

While the other girls were beginning to wear make-up and buy pretty clothes, I was playing baseball in dirty jeans and a scruffy, red cap, which held my long, stringy, brown hair wrapped up tight in a bun. All of the girls looked down their noses at me because I was so much different than they. They just couldn't understand why I wanted to be the only girl on an all-boy team. I never thought much of it. I had been brought up playing with boys. You and I on the same baseball team seemed no different to me than wrestling on the playground.

After our games were over, you would walk away from your position on third base and grab some cute cheerleader with perfectly blue-rimmed eyes and an innocent little apricot blush on her cheeks. It seemed to me that you had a new girl everyday. You were tall and had a stylish hair cut, and wore trendy clothes, but you still had the authority you had had that first day I saw you. Maybe that was why I still hated you so, or maybe it was because when you were walking down the hall with Jenny Newman, you would look at me, and flash your winning smile.

I was definitely and outcast, but you never stopped being nice to me. I assumed it was the type of congeniality you would give to any other team mate.

And then there was the night when we won the biggest game of the year. You went running of the field ahead of me, and I stood high on my toes to see what tonight's girl would look like. It was a ritual that occurred every night. You would walk away with some pretty girl; I would wonder what you saw in her and would try my hand at flirting with the other guys when you looked my way, but I was never very good, and your smile made me want to run home, just like I did when we were little. But tonight there was no girl, just you standing there next to the bleachers. I kept walking.

"Hi." Your blue eyes pierced me as I stopped to look at you. The rest of the team shuffled past us, shouting a very loud victory cry.

"Oh, hi." I said, trying to be very nonchalant. "Um, you played a great game tonight, that home run you made was terrific." I felt terribly uncomfortable standing there talking to you, so I reached down and twisted my damp jersey between my fingers.

"Thanks, you played great, too. I think everybody is pretty excited about winning."

We both looked down on our wriggling toes.

"You have a date tonight?" You asked.

"Me? No . . . not tonight." As if I had a date any night.

"Oh, well, I mean, I saw you with a couple other guys on the field, and I just assumed, . . ." you drifted off and turned your attention from my eyes back to your toes.
I was wondering why your authoritative voice seemed to be getting weaker. I had never seen you like this before; it frightened me, and sent a tingling feeling throughout my entire body.

"I know you've never liked me," you looked back up at me now, "but I've always . . . well, I guess I've always, cared about you."

"I like you . . ." I tried to catch myself before I could blurt out the rest, but it was too late. All of these feelings were bubbling up into my throat and forcing my tongue to spit them out, "I've always liked you, ever since that day you wrestled me on the playground."

"Really?" The authority was coming back now, stronger and more certain. "But why didn't you ever tell me . . . talk to me?"

"You were always with other girls, I never had the nerve, it didn't seem like I was your type. You always went out with cheerleaders and . . . well, I just never thought."

"I wish I'd gotten up the nerve to say something sooner." You pulled me up close to you and wrapped your arms around my waist, and I knew why I ran that day; everything shone perfectly clear. As you kissed me sweetly, my heart leapt, and the pleasure I felt seemed almost frightening.

---

So, I'm sitting here now throwing on some apricot blusher and a touch of blue eyeliner, my hair is curled and my clothes are clean and pressed. But, I'm really not doing it just for you, although I know it makes you happy, but I'm honestly doing for myself, because I'm realizing that I'm a girl, maybe you made me realize that. Maybe knowing that you love me just for me made me more like I am now, whatever it was, it makes me happy.

The doorbell just rang with quick little chime, and I jump up, knowing, of course, that it is you picking me up for our date. We're going to the wrestling match.
DEATH IS A MANY SPLENDORED THING

I

"Would you like some more champagne, my dear?" Eric Huntley asked his wife, Marge.

"Oh please, Eric. You’re so romantic. The hot tub, the champagne, the moose head on the wall. It makes me, well, you know..."

"That was the idea, my little love pot." He stepped out of the hot tub and wrapped a towel around his waist. "I won’t be a moment, my little cream puff, my little sex kitten, my little slam dunk."

Eric flipped on the light in the kitchen and walked to the liqueur cabinet. He filled the glasses with champagne and set them on the counter.

"How about some music, my little jello mold?"

"That would be wonderful, Eric. And hurry please, I’m really, well, you know..."

"Here I come, my little love tulip. Something romantic for you, dear. How about Heavy Metal Sonata Number Two?"

"Oh Eric, please!"

"Of course, my little slingshot."

The music played lightly from the speakers as he walked into the room.

"Your champagne, my little lamb chop," he said, standing above her.

II

Skip Dujack drove his silver Porsche 930 Turbo down Castle Road. He wore an unconstructed black sports jacket over a white muscle shirt. His face was stubbly and unshaven—some people claimed Don Johnson looked just like him. He also had incredible insight.

"I wonder why they are called ‘sports jackets’?" he thought aloud.

"You don’t play sports in them. If I tried to play football in one of these, people would laugh. And how about football. You don’t use your feet except on a kick off, or a punt. You usually use your hands, but it’s not called handball. And all handball is is racquetball without racquet. And all racquetball is is tennis in a small room with a smaller racquet. And how about polo?"

He drove on, contemplating the reasoning behind the names of almost every sport in existence. Just before coming to Jai Alai, his mobile videophone flicked on, revealing the face of his friend and trusted employer, D. Thomas Diehard.

"Skip. Skip hello!"

"D.T. What’s up?" he replied.

"I just got a call from Eric Huntley. Says his wife was killed, and he doesn’t know who or why. You got to go to 711 Sandburg Lane. I thought I’d better put our best man on the case, and we all know who that is."

"Who? Stanton? No, it’s gotta be Wilson. Or maybe...."

"No Skip. You. You’re the best man we’ve got."

"No. Really?"

"I don’t lie, Skip."

"Well, then how do you sleep?"

"I hang from my feet, but that’s not important right now."
"Goodbye Skip. And good luck."
Skip then slammed on his brakes, turned around, and headed in the other direction—to Eric Huntley’s estate.

III

Eric Huntley slumped into his lounge chair. His face was emotionless, but his hands were trembling. His mother sat smoking a cigar on the couch, his sister Janet shot paperclips at his cat with a rubberband, and his nephew Jonathon, or Zodiac Mindwarp as he preferred to be called, was piercing his nose in the bathroom. Just then the doorbell rang.

"Mother, could you get that for me?" he asked meekly.
"Go to Hell!" she growled while opening a bottle of Schiltz Malt Liquer.
"Thank you." He slowly walked to the door.
Looking through the peep hole, he saw an eye looking back at him.
"Who is it?" he asked.
"Detective Skip Dujack from the Diehard Detective Agency."
He quickly opened the door and allowed Skip to enter.
"You gotta get a big window in that door," said Skip. "Couldn't see a damn thing. Where's the stiff?"
Eric led him to the family room. There was a woman floating in the hot tub. The frayed end of the radio plug floated beside her. Skip ran to the tub.
"My God," he said, "This woman's dead too."
"Well, that's Marge."
"You know this woman?"
"Of course. She's my wife."
"But your wife's dead."
"So she is. She is my wife. She is dead."
"Was she dead when you married her?"
"Of course not. She died, or was killed rather, this afternoon."
"Ahh..." Skip pulled out a notebook and jotted down a few things.
"Perhaps we should sit down and go over the events leading to the death."
They walked back into the living room. Eric's mother was passed out on the couch, his sister Janet was stuffing the cat in the garbage disposal, and his nephew Zodiac was braiding the hairs in his armpits.
"Would you like something to drink, Mr. Dujack?" asked Eric.
"Some club soda would be nice. And please, make it Skip."
Eric walked into the kitchen, and soon walked out with a glass in each hand. He skipped one off the table into Dujack's hand, and began drinking his own.
"So Mr. Huntley," began Skip.
"Eric, please."
"So, Mr. Eric, let's start by finding out why you killed your wife."
"But I didn't kill her!" said Eric, startled.
"You said you did."
"I said someone killed her. Certainly I didn't."
"Was anyone in the house then this happened?"
"Why, no one that I know of. But someone could have snuck past the guards."
"Where was she when this happened?"
"In the hot tub, where she is now. I haven't touched her. All I did was unplug that cord."
"Where were you when this happened?"
Suddenly there was a loud grinding noise, a cat's final yelp, and then a neurotic laugh.
"Where were you when this happened?" he asked again.
"I was in the kitchen pouring us a drink. I had just put on a record when I walked in to find her electrocuted."
"Wait," said Skip, "what record did you play?"
"Why, Heavy Metal Sonata Number Two, of course."
"There you are," stated Skip. "She killed herself. H.M.S. Number Two sucks. You should have played...."
"I don't think she killed herself because of the music, sir. I don't think the music has to do with her death at all."
"That's why you're not a detective. Had your wife been threatened in any way before the incident?"
"No, not that I know of. She did get into quite a squabble with our neighbor Emily, though. Emily threatened to sue her."
"Sue?"
"No, Marge. Seems Emily had loaned her Twenty Gauge to Marge to go moose hunting. Marge lost the gun somewhere in Australia, and refused to pay Emily back. I don't believe Emily would kill her though, not for that."
"Well," said Skip, "seems your neighbor was killed in Beirut hunting wild camels with bottle rockets. She couldn't have done it."
"Oh. Well, other than that, I really don't know. She did have a lot of enemies in her business, though. She was in a very competitive field."
"And what was that?" asked Skip, still writing in his notebook.
"Why, boxing, of course."
"She made boxes?"
"No, the sport boxing," said Eric.
"I wonder why they call it 'boxing'," asked Skip. "What do they call it when you make boxes?"
"I'm not sure."
"Oh."

IV

"The reason I have you all here today," said Skip, "is because you all are suspected in the murder of Marge Huntley."
Standing or sitting in the living room were Eric Huntley, his mother, his sister Janet and her son Zodiak, Sugar Ray Leonard, an Amway Representative, and an Orkin Bug Exterminator.
"I have gone over the evidence long and hard, and did much research on my own. I found that all of you had motives to kill Marge. Mrs. Huntley, for winning your combat boots in a game of poker; Sugar Ray, for knocking you out in the third round of your seventh comeback. The list goes on and on. But I have found the true killer."
"The person who performed the act was very sly indeed, but did not realize that the greatest detective who ever lived would be on the case."
"Who?" asked Zodiak.
"Me, of course," retorted Skip.
"Oh."
"I will now announce the killer of Margaret 'The Bull' Huntley. Drum roll, please."

Everyone in the room pounded the table.

"The killer is the Orkin Bug Exterminator!"

Everyone in the room gasped.

"Yes, it was me!" the exterminator yelled, suddenly holding a can of Raid to Eric's head.

Everyone screamed and dove behind the furniture.

"Oh God!" screamed Eric in panic. "Don't let him exterminate me!"

"Shut up!" the exterminator yelled, increasing his grip on Eric's neck.

"Marge was having an affair with me. When I refused to search her house for termites, she said she'll kill my pet platypus and feed it to her mother-in-law for dinner. I had to kill her."

"You killed her to save your platypus?" asked Skip.

"Of course. It was the only one of its kind. It had ears. But none of that matters now. He was playing in the street and was hit by a bus."

Suddenly the Amway Representative jumped from behind the couch wielding a bowl of toilet cleaner. He quickly sprayed it into the eyes of the exterminator, causing him to drop the Raid. Skip ran and cuffed the exterminator.

"We really appreciate your help in this case," Skip was saying to Forest, the Amway Representative.

"Well I'm glad I could help. They say I'm quickest draw in the business."

"Well, then you've certainly got what it takes to be a detective. How'd you like to work with me?"

"Sounds great. When do we start?"

"Monday. How'd you like to go to the Red Wings game tonight?"

"Love to."

They began walking to his car.

"Say," asked Skip. "Do you know why they call it 'hockey'?"

Jeff Kosloski