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Calliope Manuscript Day 1993

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MANUSCRIPT DAY 1993

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Play
Gossip
by Charlotte Kuzmanov

SCENE:
Betty and Marge sit on the porch talking. It is about three in the afternoon.

BETTY: So, what are you doing tonight, Marge?

MARGE: Oh, I don't know. How about you?

BETTY: Well, there's a teen dance at the high school tonight. I think I'll go on over there and see what's going on.

MARGE: You're a trip! You know that, Betty?... Hey, did you hear about Mr. Mill, the mail man?

BETTY: Oh, I'm a trip! Now what about you? (mumbles) Telling me that I'm a trip.

MARGE: So do you want to know?

BETTY: I'm waiting!

MARGE: Well, when Mr. Mill was going over to Miss Froot Loops Peggy Smith to deliver a package... Hey, did you hear her son died? He got demolished by a huge truck when he crossed the street, poor guy.
BETTY: Yeah, real bummer! Now what were you saying about Mr. Mill?

MARGE: Well, as I was saying--

BETTY: Was it a huge truck? What kind of truck was it? Was he crushed to bits and pieces?

MARGE: (Gives her a dirty look.) Would you stuff it, Betty! Now as I was saying, when Mr. Mill was delivering a package to Miss Froot Loop, Peggy Smith, her poodle attacked Mr. Mill. What a shame. Old Mr. Mill went home just a bit sore.

BETTY: I never liked that mailman anyway. Always trying to hit on me. I'd like to hit on him with a big steel pipe.

MARGE: Sorry, you're a little too late. His wife already tried that.

BETTY: What ever happened to his wife?

MARGE: Oh, Mrs. Nutcake, Judy Mill, she's probably in some institution by now.

BETTY: Good riddance. She was a nut. And boy, I never heard anyone gossip as much as that woman did.

MARGE: Hey, Betty? Did you hear about Brenda Herman?

BETTY: That her cat attacked her? (laughing)

MARGE: No, something else. Did her cat really attack her?

BETTY: Heck, yeah. She hadn't fed her cat for a week, and when Ms. old Huckleberry Herman and the cat met face to face, that cat gave her a whole new makeover. Now what were you saying about her?
MARGE: The county sheriff accused her of witchcraft. They said she set a spell on the neighbor's dog.

BETTY: It wouldn't surprise me. She was a little bit weird. What about the dog now?

MARGE: Well, the owners said they saw Herman in the backyard doing some kind of ritual. And after that night, the dog was never the same.

BETTY: That dog was never straight. Every time he saw a cat or even a mouse, he'd run the other way. So what happened to Herman after that night?

MARGE: Well, when she was taken in by the police, they took her to court for a hearing.

BETTY: What happened?

MARGE: The verdict was that she was innocent.

BETTY: I would have locked her up and thrown the key away.

MARGE: I would have too, but they didn't. Anyway, about a week later, all the dogs in the neighborhood started acting weird. The police knew then that it was Herman's doing. But when the police went to her house to check things out, she was gone. No one was there. And you know Herman, she's never left that place.

BETTY: With her gone, things won't be the same.

MARGE: What do you mean things won't be the same?

BETTY: Well, who are we gonna talk about when we sit out here on the porch?
MARGE: Well, how about those idiotic teenagers around here?

BETTY: Yeah, you’re right. There’s some pretty juicy things going on with teenagers these days.

MARGE: How about Missy Hatter?

BETTY: What about the town’s tramp!?

MARGE: Well, I hear she gets around these days.

BETTY: She does more than get around. She had three boyfriends in the last week.

MARGE: Did you hear about the prom?

BETTY: That Mandi Backers was stood up?

MARGE: No, about the accident. Who stood her up?

BETTY: Mike Brown. He didn’t miss a thing.

MARGE: You got that right. Who did she end up going with?

BETTY: Her brother.

MARGE: Her brother! Why her brother?

BETTY: Because everyone else was taken. Now what about the accident?

MARGE: Would you finish?!

BETTY: I am finished!
MARGE: No you’re not!

BETTY: Yes, I am. Now what about the accident at the prom?

MARGE: *(Says it fast so no one understands.)* Well, just that two guys and their dates collided with a train, that’s all.

BETTY: You could say it nicer, and stop being so stubborn.

MARGE: Why should I? You were being mean to me.

BETTY: Because I said! Now finish!

MARGE: Fine!

BETTY: Come on, I don’t got all day you know. I got that dance to go to.

MARGE: Well, these two guys and their dates went to the prom. Someone spiked the punch, and they decided to go driving. Well, they had a little too much punch and they were driving near the railroad tracks. The train was coming and they didn’t see each other, and they hit.

BETTY: Did any of them survive?

MARGE: Well, what do you think? If you smashed into a train, would you live?

BETTY: I was just asking. Don’t get all cranky about it.

MARGE: Do you know what my husband asked me to do?

BETTY: I couldn’t guess. Just tell me. The suspense is killing me.

MARGE: He asked me to clean.
BETTY: My husband asked me to clean once. I told him to drop dead.

MARGE: And I see he did, huh?

BETTY: He didn't have to listen to me.

MARGE: I don't know what to do. You think little old me could clean a house?

BETTY: Just tell him to drop dead. It worked when I told my husband. Man, it's sad when you can't keep your old man down.

MARGE: Hey, you hear about Elvis?

BETTY: Yeah, Mrs. Johnson was just seeing things. Said she saw him [at] Carters.

MARGE: She said she had pictures.

BETTY: Pictures, my butt! She don't have pictures. She's crazy.

MARGE: Well, I don't know.

BETTY: What do you mean you don't know? Do you really believe all that bull about people who see Elvis? Can't people get it through their head, Elvis is dead, D-E-A-D!

MARGE: Well, then why would all those people say they saw him? Answer that one.

BETTY: I ain't gonna answer anything from you, you pig-headed, noisy, old nobody.

MARGE: Well, excuse me!
BETTY: There is no excuse for you.

MARGE: What’s your problem? Did you get dumped by another man again?

BETTY: You don’t go talking about my men. You been stuck with the same old man since I can remember. I’d get bored if I were with that man all my life.

MARGE: My man is just fine the way he is. You’re just jealous.

BETTY: Jealous! Why would I be jealous of you? I’m the one with all the guys. All you can get is a sack of overgrown potatoes.

MARGE: Well, it’s better than the spuds you get.

BETTY: My men are not spuds!

MARGE: Well, better than nothing, huh?

BETTY: Shut up, you old hag!

MARGE: Why don’t you go somewhere? Isn’t there some dance?

BETTY: Maybe I will. Just to get away from your ugly face. *(A minute later and Betty is half way down the street.)*

MARGE: Oh, and don’t forget, come over tomorrow. You didn’t tell me about Mrs. Miller.

*(It is the next morning and MARGE and BETTY are sitting on the porch. It is silent and MARGE begins to speak.)*

MARGE: So how was the dance? Hear anything we don’t already know?
BETTY: Remember when I told you about Missy Hatter? Well, anyway, she danced with five different guys. Did you want to know about Mrs. Miller?

MARGE: What about her?

BETTY: She said she saw a ghost.

MARGE: She needs glasses, too.

BETTY: Would you let me tell my story?

MARGE: Just tell me. I don’t got all day, you know.

BETTY: Oh, shut up. I’ll hurry. I thought you were so anxious to hear what I had to say.

MARGE: I ain’t anxious for anything you have to say.

BETTY: Then I won’t tell you.

MARGE: You’re something else, you know that?

BETTY: Something you ain’t!

MARGE: Thank God!

BETTY: What do you mean, Thank God?

MARGE: You know what I mean.

BETTY: You’re jealous of my beauty, aren’t you?

MARGE: Honey, if looks could kill, your looks would kill everyone.
BETTY: You’re jealous, I knew it.

MARGE: I wouldn’t be jealous if my life depended on it.

BETTY: Yeah, right!

MARGE: Woman, you are as stubborn as a donkey.

BETTY: Do you want to hear the story or not?

MARGE: Why not? Can I ask you a question?

BETTY: Well, hurry up! You’re wasting my precious time.

MARGE: Why do you always gossip? All you do is talk, talk, talk. You’re so noisy, it drives me crazy!

BETTY: Oh, I drive you crazy. You couldn’t find your way across the street even if you had a map.

MARGE: Girl, you got a hard head. We could use your head for a golf ball. My husband was looking for a hard enough golf ball to smack around.

BETTY: Yeah, well, we could use you as a basketball. If we dropped you, if we could even manage to pick you up, you’d bounce right back up.

MARGE: Yeah, well better to bounce. You would need the moon’s gravity to bounce you back up.

BETTY: Why don’t you go back with the hogs. I think I hear someone calling you.

MARGE: Well, at least someone wants me. I never hear anyone calling for
you. And why are you always here? Don't you got a home?

BETTY: No, I live in a shoe box!

MARGE: It wouldn't surprise me. Just look at the way you dress.

BETTY: (Looks down.) What's wrong with the way I dress?

MARGE: Nothing, Betty, nothing!

BETTY: You know, ...

MARGE: What don't I know?

BETTY: I think--

MARGE: Right, you don't think. You never think. If I were you, I'd think before I said anything.

BETTY: What I was going to say is that I think we should stop fighting. We've been friends for how many years? About...

MARGE: Don't even, I know how long it was. You don't need to remind me.

BETTY: Yeah, you just don't want to admit how old you are.

MARGE: Yup, you got that right. Hey, finish that story about Mrs. Miller.

BETTY: Why?

MARGE: Because I said, Now!

BETTY: Don't tell me what to do, you hag!
MARGE: Who you calling a hag, you cow. Moo, moo. They’re calling you. Go join them. Hey, look. I think they just nominated you for leader of the herd.

BETTY: And proud to be! Can we please stop fighting?

MARGE: That is what we do best, isn’t it?

BETTY: Yeah, well I got to go. I’ll stop over tomorrow. Then I will tell you the rest about Mrs. Miller.

(BETTY steps down off the porch and is half way down the street. MARGE gets up and walks into the house.)

MARGE: Crazy woman. I could use her for a stocking stuffer!
Fiction
Mother’s Mary Kay Mission

by Jennifer Beckmann

I thought my mother’s eyes were emeralds, watching her transform herself from the woman who fed my cat and always burnt the toast to someone who was leaving me with fifteen-year-old Jennifer McJeffries. I hated Jennifer McJeffries and her boyfriend, who flew my canary out the townhouse window with its twig leg tied to the end of a string. I also hated her too red cheeks, tricolored eyelids and shirts that exposed the pink acrylic-and-lace, preteen Maidenform bra with a small cotton carnation between her breasts. Once, between reruns of The Incredible Hulk and Battlestar Galactica, I found Jennifer McJeffries teasing her dishwater blonde hair and applying Mama’s Mary Kay lipgloss in front of our small second-hand vanity table. It made me sick; she could never look like Mother.

For as much as I hated that stupid Jennifer McJeffries, I loved to watch my mother dress for the evening. She always began with a bath, steaming the mirrors and foaming with Mary Kay Violet scented Bathing Pearls. They smelled great, and had a plastic coating that dissolved in water. I’d bet that lady on Green Acres, the rich one, used Violet Scented Bathing Pearls from Mary Kay. After the bath, she would wrap her red hair in a towel that looked like a turban and powder her vanilla flesh. She pinched her pale cheeks and colored her parted lips with a red gloss that nearly matched the Barbie Ferrari I got for my birthday last month. The right rear wheel already fell off. She always wore her black dress that contoured the delicate hollows of her frame and waist. She let down her red hair and rolled on the black stockings with her slender fingers until her toes cradled against the seam of black silk, and she would draw those stockings as smooth
against the lotioned velvet of her leg as the shadow that falls across
my white linens when the blinds are slowly rotated. And with a final
smile she would ask me to get the emerald teardrop earrings from her
water-stained jewelry box on the dresser and toss her hair over her
shoulder, the way the ladies in the soap operas do. When she put
those emerald earrings in the smooth white flesh of her lobes, her
green eyes would shine and you couldn’t tell if it was the reflection of
the stone or her eyes that flashed green in the light when she shook
her hair. Dressed for the night, she was not the Mama that made me
peanut butter and jelly for lunch and washed her own clothes.

****

Uncle Jap walked me to the porch while I worked at the double
scoop of Superman and Blue Moon. Uncle Jap was great. He taught
me card tricks and bought me ice cream from Stahl’s on the days
Mama painted. The rush of fumes watered our eyes as we opened the
door.

"I’m in my room," shouted my mother. I could see her
standing on the pink foot-stool we found at K-Mart, gingerly coloring
the corners of her bedroom walls with this week’s chosen color.
Today it was green. Two weeks ago the room was a rose. Mama
tried to explain that she felt empty in her stark white room. If she
painted it red, maybe she would feel like she was living inside a rose
and its petals would close over us in the night, making us warm. I
guess her rose world was too cold, because the following week she
painted it blue, and sitting on her white shag carpet it did seem like
we were lying on a cloud. She said that if we sat there long enough,
the angels would think we were on cloud nine, and maybe sit beside
us. They never came. Every Saturday, searching for a more
comforting world between the walls of her own bedroom, she painted.

"What do you think, Uncle Jap?" asked my mother with a
jaunty flip of her red hair.

"Well, hell, Deb, it’s green, why’s it so damn green?" His
face was screwed into a knot of confusion, and one eyebrow cocked itself above the other with an air of absurdity.

"It’ll be like sleeping in a meadow, surrounded by blades of grass." Mama smiled at my enthusiastic interpretation of her eccentric endeavor.

"Whatever floats your boat, you two. I just hope you don’t get mowed, and someone better remember to turn off the sprinklers, or ya might have yerself a wet dream." He howled at this remark, ending with a fit of cigar coughs. Mama just grinned and settled her weight on her right hip, defeated by the old man’s sick wit. I didn’t see what was so funny. Uncle Jap caught his breath and began his storm of knock knock jokes and amateur magic tricks. I hoped he’d never grow up.

That night, after pork chops, milk and Flash Gordon, me and Mama slept in the cool comfort of our pasture. I could feel the soft mist settling on the long green blades, and the soil beneath me was firm. Our old mattress didn’t creak so much when you pretended you were sleeping on dirt. The round, frosted light fixture with a crack through the middle and a chip on the right side smiled back through the darkness with all the dignity of the moon herself, and the crickets sang their sweet melodious symphony while nature slept with us. I loved sleeping in green. A soft sob from Mama’s side shuddered the sheets.

"What’s wrong, Mama?" I asked, a little frightened of the scolding I would receive for not being asleep.

"What’re you doing awake, child?" she asked with a slow, lazy roll and sigh of relief.

"Sorry, Mama." I choked back a giggle, relieved that she wasn’t mad.

"It’s o.k., I can’t sleep either. I feel so small inside this blade of grass, where not even the birds can see you."

"We can pretend it’s a green pepper, like the big ones at the market, and the seeds are our cushions. We could pretend we’re in that green pepper, and we’re just waiting for someone to cut it open
and find us inside, like a treasure." She must’ve thought about being in that green pepper because her eyes started to water real bad.

"Yeah, baby, we’ll just keep waiting for someone to open us up and find the treasure. Then maybe the world’ll look a lot prettier." She wrapped her arms around me, and I watched the light of passing cars dance in the green abyss like the fireflies Uncle Jap trapped in a jar last week, and slowly I let myself dream. I thought everything looked fine.

****

Thursday, after school, Mama told me she was having a party. When I asked why, she told me it was a make-up party. That just cracks me up, a bunch of grown-up ladies talkin’ and puttin’ on make-up. When Thursday came, so did all the ladies that do wash in the basement of our brick apartment building, and Jennifer McJeffries. She was definitely no grown-up. The ladies sat, round and plain, around our kitchen table while I watched The Brady Bunch in the other room. Peter broke Jan’s nose with a football. It was a rerun. Mother brought a box with Mary Kay Cosmetics Co. stamped in Pepto-Bismol pink across the right flap, and THIS END UP across the other. I watched in silent amazement as my mother explained the benefits of having a nice foundation and cake powder, and the dramatic effects of careful cosmetic artistry. She pulled out a pallet of Mary Kay make-up and began to paint a sunset horizon on the fat cheeks of Martha Smithers. She looked like a clown, fat and painted.

"Now Martha, your cream white complexion needs cool tones, like pink and frosted plum, to get that soft, seductive look you want." She painted Winter Sunrise Pink and Frosted Sugar Plum Fantasies across the horizon of her eyes. Twilight Pink, thick and greasy, coated her plump lips and Sparkling French Lilac powder blush was swept from ear to ear.

"Gorgeous," she murmured while wiping some of the pink sludge from her two front teeth in full view of Mama’s hand mirror.
Mama smiled triumphantly at her success as she copied a list of products the women needed to make their lives complete. Escaping the masquerade, I retreated to our blade of grass and picked the green paint flecks off of mother’s water-stained jewelry box wondering when she had last worn the teardrop earrings.

"What’re you doing alone in the dark?" asked my mother, with the flush of profit still lingering on her vanilla cheek.

"Lying in our pepper, checking to see if anyone’s started cutting yet. The seeds are getting too ripe." I replayed my mother’s Mary Kay miracle over in my mind and wondered if Mrs. Smithers knew how ridiculous she really looked.

"I have something for you," she said, handing me a small tube of Mary Kay Strawberries and Cream lipgloss on a pink braided rope.

"Every time I have a party I’ll get something better, and if I have enough of them and sell a lot of this stuff, they’ll give us a pink car. Imagine us driving a pink car!" she said, waiting for my acceptance of her newest scheme.

"Yeah, we’d look cool in a pink car." My enthusiasm wasn’t so apparent. "Mama, why do those ladies like to have all that make-up on their face?" I asked, becoming sick of the obvious layer of gloss that felt heavy on my lips. With one quick, firm wipe, it stained my left sleeve pink.

"I think it just makes them feel comfortable. They feel safe," she said, and reached for her box of Mary Kay Violet Scented Bathing Pearls, and I reached for the water-stained jewelry box.

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That fall, Mama got her pink Cadillac with a Mary Kay bumper sticker pasted across the back, and I got a Maidenform bra with a small pink cotton carnation in the middle, just like Jennifer McJeffries. Mama brought me more of that sticky lipgloss, in shades of Mandarin Orange and Bubblegum. It doesn’t seem so bad anymore. Old Uncle Jap still hasn’t grown up. Mama painted our
room deep royal blue so that we could pretend we were the birds looking down into the tall green blades of grass, seeing everything so small, with passing cars casting the stars upon our wall, and every Saturday Mama and me drive into the frosted winter sunrise in her pink Cadillac.
The Day No One Talked

by Jason Boog

The day no one talked dawned just the same as any other day. As the sun rose slowly, a few birds began to chirp hesitantly. A lone cricket hummed its little tune beside the pond, and gradually the rest of the morning sounds followed.

Just a mile away, the farm began to move, each hand doing its daily chores, without a sound. There was no bothersome morning chatter, only stillness.

In its own way, it was peaceful.

Many miles away, the city began to awake. Traffic moved at sluggish morning speeds, an occasional car horn rising above the busy traffic sounds.

The crowded sidewalk flowed smoothly, the swish-swish of feet the only sound. No hate-filled words were spit between grumpy pedestrians, no pushing or shoving. There was only a dazed silence, eyes never meeting.

Police officers stood at various corners, watching the quiet procession. They too bore an expression of wonder, not quite understanding the unfolding day.

A street person sat by one alley, playing a sad guitar, no voice to sing along. A few coins lay at his feet, but not enough for a meal. No words of complaint were raised, only the quiet shuffle of hundreds of feet that soon drowned out the soft guitar.

High in the sky, one or two clouds drifted lazily along the horizon. It looked like rain.
Far away, the president looked out his window after breakfast. His country was quiet, no one was talking. His plan had stopped the harsh words of anger, and in that quiet his nation would have peace. It almost seemed right.

The day continued, people died, and others were born on the day of silence. Not too much had changed, and the world went about its business as best it could.

As the workday ended, the hazy afternoon traffic carried its people home. Clouds moved faster, covering the once cheery blue skies. Humidity rose, and the footsteps became heavier, but no one spoke.

No happy children’s voices were heard that hot afternoon, and families instead gathered around flickering television sets. Soundlessly pictures danced, images with no particular meaning. Still, the world watched, hopeless, because it was the day no one talked.

Dusk gathered its shadows, and the setting sun was invisible behind thick masses of clouds.

The president finished dinner, and smiled. The first day under his idea had gone well. The silence had hidden the hatred, the ugliness of his world. He did not suppose he could ask for more.

He left the table, and a gentle rumble of thunder rolled about the dark skies. Lightning flickered, and the first drops of rain fell. The sun had gone away.

Back beside the pond, lost among the deep, dark forest, one man was alone. While he sat on an old stump of a tree, the rain fell harder, washing over his body. The humidity faded, as it would be cold soon. Thunder roared in its own fury, and lightning tore the dark night sky.

Nature would be silent no more. The hatred crashed with the thunder, the anger flashing across the land where no one would talk.
In the rain he stood, and he could see no moon. He laughed, and at the same time wept, raising his arms to the unfeeling sky. No one could hear his small voice, buried by the storm, in the empty forest.

No voice answered his own, because it was the day that no one talked.
Certainty

by Caitlin Rooney

He quoted the Bible to me. To me, an atheist who fainted in mass. Something about love and being faithful. I was only seventeen, and he wanted forever. I wanted to give it to him from our first awkward kiss, but my heart and my brain got into a huge argument about it all and left me breaking his heart. But first we fell in love.

It happened in an instant in the woods. We’d been talking about nothing for hours when I lied, "If I didn’t know better, I’d say I love you." I didn’t mean it, but, for what it’s worth, I wanted to. Then he changed the course of history. "Will you marry me?" Yeah, right. I was sitting in the woods with a virtual stranger who had just asked me to marry him. "Sure," I joked, and then we kissed for the second time.

I once saw a movie where the narrator commented on the ten greatest kisses of all time as the hero and heroine embraced in number I-don’t-remember-what. Well, this kiss must have been somewhere on that short list, because by the time it was over, I, who had never so much as played house, wanted nothing else but to be his bride, barefoot there in the woods.

We wandered back to reality a few minutes later. Back into my grandparents’ backyard, back to their fiftieth anniversary party, and back to the disapproving stare of many a relative. "What’s that Amy up to now?" all their eyebrows silently mused. They all knew that, despite my good mother’s valiant efforts, I was not a model child. I’d had my fair share of boyfriends and had accordingly been the butt of a whole mess of locker room rumors, some of them true.

The fact of the matter was I liked attention, and somewhere between my mother’s telling me that babies came when God blessed
a married couple who loved each other and Him very much and the first time Bobby McCullough felt me up in the school parking lot in seventh grade, I figured out how to get some. But that's not what it was about with Michael.

He was an innocent. That I knew when he first tried to sneak a kiss and bumped my sunglasses clear off my face. That was when we first met, the night before the party at my grandparents' house. He and my cousin Chuck were good friends, and he came along with Chuck to meet my train.

Chuck decided we should all go bowling, so we rented red and blue shoes the whole town had worn before us and bowled. More precisely, Chuck bowled while Michael and I had a gutterball contest. I won, and as Chuck turned his back on us to bowl his last frame, Michael leaned over and kissed me. It was stupid of me to be wearing sunglasses indoors anyway. Then Chuck turned around, we returned our shoes, and I treated the guys to softies at the local Dairy Queen. Not once did I even think of seducing him.

Two days later I was back on the train, heading home with all the family gossip for Mom and a bag of leftovers Grandma had insisted I take home to "your folks." "It's a pity they couldn't make it, but it was nice to get a chance to see you at least. I just hope you weren't too bored out here with us," she said at the station. "Of course not, Gram," I smiled.

I got on the train and cried. As soon as I left I knew it was over. How could poor, sweet Michael stand a chance against the Bobby McCulloughs of the world? Bible or no, he couldn't. I listened to a Walkman full of love songs, knowing I was only seventeen, and that my mind was right to keep asking, "What about your dreams? What about your future?" I was too smart for love, plus, I had to go home. There, nobody bowled and there weren't any woods for miles.

That was before we bought the house, of course. And before I learned to trust a kiss.
Jim Preston
by Jay Sherman

Some people say that horror is the most fearful feeling ever. To be totally honest those people are correct. Horror is the basis of all fear. Fear of the unknown and fear of the known are all horrible. People fear everything. No one person in this world is not afraid of something. Everyone has a fear. It may be death, it may be life, it may be illness, or it may be wealth.

I was sitting in my ebony rocking chair reading my favorite book when I realized that it had suddenly become dark outside. Storm clouds rolled in from the east, blocking out the beauty of the morning sun. Gloominess and gray skies marked the day’s downfall. With a thunderous crack, a flash of light stretched through the heavens, and the rain came with the bolt. The forest around my house came alive. Swaying from side to side as a dancer would, with the harmonic motion of the wind. The wind went whistling through the weeping willows, as if the Sirens sang to awaiting sailors.

I heard the sounds of footsteps stumbling to my door. The crackle of the branches which lay on the ground, the splash of the water on the steps of my porch. Then the sounds stopped. BANG! BANG! BANG! A person was knocking on the door. To my great delight it was not my expected visitor. I shall live on.

Death stalks us all, but for some, the truly lucky, it is swift, and it strikes unknowingly upon them, as a lion attacks its prey. For the ones that can predict it, the sorrow and fear come along with that prediction. The wise will prolong it for as long as possible. For they know death is inevitable, as are many things in life.

Breathing heavily I closed the door, hoping he would not return, but I knew he would. I returned to rocking chair where I sat, again. Knowing, fearing, that my visitor was still watching me.
Trying to find my sanity, I looked to the bottom of a bottle. It took one and a half bottles to regain that one thing in life that is still precious to me, my own sanity.

Being sane once again, I began to read my book, looking beyond the print and through each page. I wondered what my brother, Jim, was doing. For some unknown reason I felt as if he were traveling some great distance, in a terrible hurry. Then I heard a thump at my door. Where I had dropped my book I had not a clue. I was overwhelmed by a sense of fear, and horror so intense I broke the glass bottle that was in my hand. I squeezed it so tightly my fingers became numb before it broke. When I finally managed to get a grip on myself, I started for the door, prepared to die. I opened it with a horrible yell of "Oh, my God!" With arms wrapping tightly around me, I clenched my teeth together and opened my eyes to see Jim. He stood as if he were absolutely exhausted. His fatigue lasted only a moment. After he had caught his breath he explained how he had been falsely accused of theft and murder. He also stated that he rushed here to request my help to prove his innocence.

He told me that proving his innocence would be a difficult task because he was at home, by himself, while the crimes were committed. While telling me this, I received the impression that he was very afraid. His hands were trembling, his face was as white as snow, and his arms were contracted as tightly as they possibly could be. His speech was a mumbled mess.

I offered him a drink. Without hesitation he accepted. After five or six glasses he began to speak clearly and comprehensively. When I figured out what he had already stated, I tried to comfort him.

We had decided to go back to his home, and wait for further news. The train ride was slow and rigorous. When we arrived at his apartment, on the top floor, we found a note tied to the handle of his door. The letter read as follows:

"Jim Preston,
This letter is to inform you that I request a meeting with
you. It would prove wise for you to come alone, and I will be 'Unarmed.' If you are puzzled, show-up and receive some answers. The Park Square. Eleven o'clock p.m."

The letter was unsigned and it left no clue to the writer.

Jim was now mystified, as I was also, about the person behind the letter. I was the first to say anything. That was when I asked him if he had any enemies, or anyone who had a reason to harm him. He came up with a typical response, "I don't know?" Upon entering his place we sat in the dark, thinking each to himself of the happenings of that dreadful day. Jim spoke with a clear voice, knowing exactly what to do: he was going to the meeting. No matter its outcome. He was going to get some answers.

At 9:30 Jim woke me, to join him in the park. Without saying a word, I went with him. On the way to the park he told me that when we reached the entrance, I was to wait half a minute, then begin walking behind him, without losing sight of him. When we reached the park gate, I did as told, I waited. Then I proceeded without losing sight of him. At eleven o'clock he reached the park square. Not a soul was in view, not even a movement in the air. The trees stood as still as a high rise building. The benches were as bare as the great plains of America.

A figure appeared out of the shadows. Unable to see his face, I reasoned that he was about the same size as my brother. He had on a long brown coat, a 'Dick Tracy' hat, and dark glasses that covered his eyes. I could hear the voices of both, which I may say, sounded very alike.

Jim asked, "Are you the man that left the letter on my door?"
The stranger replied, "Yes! Now you wish to know..."
"Yes, I wish to know what the hell is going on? Why do you cover your face? Why do you hide in the shadows? How do you know me?"
"Well now, that is very easy. I felt you would be more
interested in how you can get off the charges that you have been accused of."

"That too, but start from the beginning!"

"Well, you request many things. For I am a simpleton, with a simpleton’s view. You ask for me to start from the beginning...

"Yes, the beginning. It goes like this. I was robbing a well-to-do family uptown, when a man came in and tried to stop me. As if he could really stop Me, of all the stupid motions, that was about dump. Anyhow, I shot that stupid peon. Thump, he fell dead to the floor. So I finished my job. Then I left."

"Oh, my Lord. Please, NO!"

"Oh, yes! Anyhow, I was reading the paper, and I saw that you had been accused of my crimes. You know, that made me laugh louder and harder than I have in many years... I’m getting off track again. Then I found your address and came looking for you. For the last two days, I came to this square waiting for you to show."

"Now I have showed! What do you want from me?"

"Well, I just want you to see who you are going to hang in the gallows for!"

I saw him take off his glasses and hat. He was, how do I say it? He was an exact replica of my brother Jim.

With a horrible scream Jim fell to the ground. That mysterious man vanished, like he had appeared, without a trace, never to be seen again. When I walked over to Jim, he looked pale, as if he were a ghost. With his last breath he told me.

"I’m innocent!"

The ebony clock in the square rang twelve times to mark his passing.

From his body walked a shadow, a long flowing cloak, of the same dark color as the clock. The shadow stopped and looked at me, with the tip of its finger pressed on my chest as if in signal to me.

He is waiting, now that he has my brother, he waits. Patiently he waits for me. He wants my soul. He, an angel, a dark angel, he has no mercy.
The Bus Ride
by Nikki Cook

Only sounds of people breathing could be heard on the bus. No one was making a noise, for the school bully, Obart "The Ox" Winchester was on the prowl. Anyone who made a false move would more than likely be terminated by this Incredible Hulk. When Georgie came onto the bus, everything became dismal because he was the number one enemy of "The Ox." Georgie didn’t know that Ox was in a bad mood, and frankly, I don’t think he gave a damn. However, Georgie surprised us all today, for he didn’t make even one of his snide remarks directed towards Ox. He sat down quietly in his seat and looked straight ahead.

We knew something had to be up because never in all the years we have gone to school together had Georgie and Ox not gotten into some quarrel over something trivial. Our questions were answered when, from the back of the bus, this huge wad of soggy paper came flying over our heads and hit Georgie right in the middle of his head, as if he had a bull’s eye shaved in his hair. A bellowing laugh was heard by all. Ox had thrown that wad of paper. To everyone’s surprise, Georgie did not retaliate. He just sat there, not making a move, as if paralyzed by the blow to the head.

Little did we know that while everyone else was hunched over in his seat for fear that he would be Ox’s next victim, Georgie was making his own ammunition. After a few minutes of anticipated worrying, and no more paper attacks, there was a calm about the bus again. Everything seemed to have returned to the stage in which
everyone was afraid to talk or to move, since their avenger was not answering the attack.

Suddenly out of nowhere, a storm of paper came flying through the air, aimed directly at the Ox. The rest of the passengers got into the action, as Georgie pronounced loudly, "PAPER FIGHT!" Paper was flying all over the bus. Most of the action was focused at Ox. He dodged paper left and right, rarely getting hit, for Ox was not only strong, but also very quick.

I decided to stay out of the action, though, because I was too busy trying to defend myself from being hit by the paper. Nevertheless, I did manage to get one shot in. The wad of paper I threw was saturated with water from the puddle formed on the floor from wet galoshes, but it was the only one I could reach because I was crouched in between the seat and I was stuck. So I threw the yucky piece of paper. And wouldn't you know it, I hit the one, the only, Obart "The Ox" Winchester. And it was not just a minor hit, that wouldn't have bothered him, but it whacked him in the face. Ox thundered out an ear-piercing yell that silenced the whole bus. Even the paper throwing stopped. "Who was the shithead that threw that piece of paper!" Of course nobody answered knowing they would get the crap beaten out of them. For some reason, Ox knew right where to come.

He walked down the aisle, in the direction of my seat. I was quivering so much, I think I was shaking the whole bus. Everyone could tell what was going to happen next. I was going to go to heaven at an early age. Ox stopped right in front of me. Then, with an abrupt turn of his body, he glanced at me with one of the meanest faces in the whole world. That alone made me want to start crying. Ox just stood there for a moment and then let go of this enormous roar that sent the whole bus flying under their seats. Ox then continued to psych me out with all his roaring and mean faces. And let me tell you, it was working.

Just when I thought the worst was over, Ox clenched his fist and wound up for the knock-out punch. From that moment on,
everything came at me in slow motion. The first punch advanced at me with such fury it looked as if his fist was covered with fire. Without even thinking, I ducked. I don’t know where that impulse came from but I’m glad it came. Ox then broke through my window and shattered it into a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle.

The bus driver slammed on the brakes. Don’t ask me where she was while all this was going on. She came barreling back to my seat. "What in the HELL is going on back here?" she questioned. Ox just lay there huddled into a little ball, whimpering like a lost puppy. I just sat there, amazed at myself because I am the only person ever to survive one of Ox’s bashings without a mark on me. Normally, the person Ox beats on is the one that ends as Ox did. The rest of the bus was cheering, for nobody had ever seen Ox cry, and probably never would again. For them, this was an historic occasion. One of Ox’s victims finally became the victor. That’s me... Tommy Tucker!
"Everything Is All Right"

by Anya Gurski

I told you to leave me alone!" a man hollered from downstairs. Then a door slammed shut shaking the headboard on my bed. I yanked my comforter up below my eyes and nose, clutched my doll, and turned my head towards the door trying to listen for the voice again. Daddy never yelled that loudly and never in the middle of the night.

I didn’t hear anything so I slid my feet onto the carpet and stood to the side of my half-open doorway, still clutching my doll’s hand. I peeped into the hallway and dim yellow light flooded my face. I didn’t see anyone so I gradually slid the door all the way open, cautious not to allow it to squeak. I tiptoed towards the stairway, automatically stepping over the invisible spots in the avocado green carpeting that hid creaky floorboards. I plopped onto the top step to wait. I looked down at my doll’s face. Her pink cheeks reflected the hall lights and her blue eyes had bright, white sparkles in the corners. She wore a bright red dress and matching black and red shoes. Daddy had given her to me two weeks ago after he had returned from his business trip. She had become my favorite doll and has never left my side. As I looked at her, my eyes began to droop and my head to fall into my lap, but it flew back up again when the shouting bolted me awake.

"Shut up! Don’t tell me what to do! I’ll go to sleep when I feel like it!" Daddy barked out his orders like a drill sergeant. His voice had never blazed so wildly before, not even when I ruined his
best tie playing dress-up last year.

"Just calm down, Richard. You’re just getting yourself more upset by yelling. If you don’t lower your voice, you will wake the girls." Mommy took long, calming breaths in between each phrase, and her soothing voice came to a gradual and powerful crescendo.

"I will not be quiet! I’ll be as loud as I very well please!"

Daddy hurled back.

I sprang up and ran back to my room, forgetting the creaky floorboards and squeak of the door. I felt like a puzzle dropped on the floor, with all its pieces scattered in different directions. I tried to dream about playing tag and going to birthday parties, but Daddy’s wrath shattered them.

The next morning at breakfast I sat silent, pushing my scrambled eggs into a design on my plate, wondering if I had been dreaming last night. Mommy scurried around the kitchen, searching for odd pieces of fruit and leftovers to put into our lunches. Daddy sat at the opposite end of the table, eating his fried egg, sunny-side-up, with two pieces of toast, and reading The Boston Globe. My sister Kata gobbled up the remaining bites of her scrambled eggs and ran back upstairs to get ready for school. I usually slept late on school days, but this morning I had rushed out of my bedroom as soon as I could and raced into the kitchen. I waited at the table, hoping Mommy and Daddy would explain the shouting voices I had heard, but by the time I had to leave for the bus, neither of them mentioned it. I decided it must have been a nightmare and went off to school leaving my fears at home.

That night Mommy tucked my flowered, rose comforter all around me and gave me a kiss. Before she turned out the lights, she gently squeezed my shoulder and patted my face. I turned onto my side to face the hallway and floated off into a dream. Hours later I jolted awake to the same shouting as before.

"Just leave me alone. I don’t need you around, telling me what to do! I’m just fine by myself!"

I knew this could not be a dream. I took my pillow in both
hands clutching each end, molding it around my head, choking away the tormenting voices. The bellowing transformed into tranquilized whispers under the feathers, and I fell asleep.

My pillow became my life preserver over the next few weeks, saving me from drowning in the waves of shouting and confusion. If I awoke during the night, I mechanically pulled it over my ears. Only once did I ever sneak back into the hall to listen to the conversation below me. I had eavesdropped at the top of the stairs as Mommy plucked out the tones of a telephone number and spoke.

"Hi, Mara? Yeah, it’s Mom. He’s getting out of hand tonight. Could you come over?" Mommy’s voice quivered but it did not break. She spoke, stressing each syllable with urgency. Within a minute after Mommy had hung up the phone, I saw my second oldest sister Mara slip through the front door. She had a house-sitting job next door and only had to run through both yards to get home. I clambered back into bed, knowing Mara could handle Daddy even better than Mommy could.

The next day Daddy didn’t come home from work, and Mommy’s errands ran late, so Kata and I had stay at a friend’s house until she picked us up.

"Where’s Daddy?" I questioned as we walked into the house. "He’s never late from work."

"Don’t worry about it right now, Honey," Mommy replied. "I’ll tell you everything after dinner, but right now I’m starving."

He must be on another business trip, I thought. He always told me he had an important and busy job and has to go on a lot of business trips.

After dinner Mommy called us into the family room, sat us in front of her, and looked at us, her face taut.

"Girls, Daddy didn’t come home tonight because he’s not feeling well."

"He’s sick? Does he have the flu? I hate having the flu," Kata interrupted.

"No, he doesn’t have the flu," Mother continued, her facial
muscles tightening even more. "We don’t know what he had so he has to stay at the hospital for a little while to find out. That’s where he is now. The doctors are going to figure out what is making him sick so they can make him better." She stopped and looked deep into our faces, trying to analyze our thoughts.

"When’s he gonna come home, Mom? He’ll be home for my birthday, won’t he?" I waited for her to answer me because I knew she could always make things right.

"I hope so, Honey." Mom’s reassuring voice started to shake. "But you know what we can do before he comes home? We can go visit him and cheer him up! He’ll be awfully lonely and he will miss you both very much. You two want to do that?" She forced a reassuring smile at us.

"O.K. Mom, but how can Daddy be so sick? He didn’t look sick this morning."

"I’m not sure, Honey. Things happen that can’t always be explained," she answered, as she got up to finish the dirty dishes.

Three weeks later, the smooth beige doors slid apart and we stepped into the familiar fluorescent-lighted hall with sickly yellow walls and sticky brown floor tiles. We turned the corner and walked to the family-room-style visiting area, with tightly woven rust carpeting and brown and orange plaid couches. A t.v. sat high on a shelf in a corner, tuned to a black and white cowboy movie, and a few battered checker boards with several missing pieces sat on the end tables. Daddy sat alone on one of the couches, staring at nothing.

"Hello, Richard. Do you want to play checkers with the girls? I have some paperwork to take care of before we go home."

He turned towards Kata and me and stared.

"Rena and Mara are sure growing up, aren’t they, Harriett?"

"Yes, dear. But this is Kata and Anya, your two youngest," Mom corrected.

He only nodded. His face never looked alive or full of happiness anymore, only empty and confused. His cheek bones stuck out and his shirt hung loosely over his body. He looked like a little
boy.

Kata and I played checkers with Daddy while Mom spoke to the doctors. She had said Daddy could probably come home with us today because the doctors knew what sickness he had and could start making him better. When Mom finally came back over, I smiled because I realized Daddy would be home for my tenth birthday next week, and I was going to have a big party!

A nurse came and took Daddy to his room to help him pack his suitcase while Mom sat with us on the couch. She pressed her lips into a thin smile, but her eyelids sagged.

"Daddy's coming home today, girls! Isn't that exciting?" She waited for us to respond, but we didn't. We wanted her to explain. "You know how Daddy keeps forgetting our names all the time? Well, the doctors said it's because he has a bad disease. It's not because Daddy doesn't love or remember us. It's the disease that's making him forget."

We couldn't ask any questions because we didn't understand what she was saying except that Daddy was still very sick.

"He's going to keep forgetting a lot of things," Mom continued, her eyes flooded with tears, "but it won't be his fault. He still loves both of you very much so don't forget that, O.K.?

"O.K. Mom, but when will he be better? Will he be better by my birthday?" I questioned her knowing she could make everything right.

"I don't think so, Honey. The disease he has lasts a long time and it can't be cured fast."

"What's it called, Mom? Does it have a name?" Kata asked for the first time all day.

"It's called alzheimers disease," Mom answered as she lowered her face into her hands and began to sob.

I looked down and in my lap lay my doll. Dirt splotched her face, hiding the sparkle in her eyes. Deep circles of grime had turned her bright red dress brown.

I knew then that Mom couldn't make everything right.
"What time is the service, Mom?" I asked as I walked into the kitchen.

"It's at seven thirty, but if we want to get a seat, we'll have to leave here by six thirty. The roads are really bad," she said as she mixed up her special pizza sauce.

"They are?" I asked.

"Take a look," she offered.

I ran to the window in the living room. On tiptoes, I peered over the window sill. I watched the swirling white sky and white roads. I ran to the kitchen and looked at my mom with my mouth drooped.

"Aw, I don't want to go early," I whined.

Just then my brother Brian came in. "What? We have to go early? To what?"

"To church," I moaned.

"Aw, Mom, it's not fair!" cried Brian. "I don't wanna go!"

"You don't have a choice, and that's final! Another word and you'll have to wait till tomorrow morning to open your presents!"

"But, Mom, we've always opened our presents on Christmas Eve!" Brian yelled.

"If you'd like to keep it that way, I suggest that you don't say another word!"

"But--" I stammered, then we both ran to our rooms before she
I played with some toys for a while. Then Mom yelled, "Boys, hurry and get dressed! Be sure to take a shower!"

"Shoot," I moaned, "I hate showers."

When I finished my shower I put on the Superman robe that I got for Christmas last year. I went to my room. Mom had laid out a white shirt, a blue clip-on tie, a blue sweater, and a matching blue pair of pants. I put them on and played a little longer before combing my hair.

Dad slowly pulled out of the driveway, and headed down the street. You couldn’t see fifteen feet ahead of you, the snow was blowing so hard. The ice on the road didn’t reflect the headlights of our little Chevette, because it was covered by a few inches of snow.

"What did you get me for Christmas?" I whispered to Brian.

"Corey, that’s a surprise!" exclaimed Mom. "Brian, don’t you dare tell him!"

"I wouldn’t have told him anyhow," sneered Brian.

I looked out the window and daydreamed for a while. Then I asked Brian, "Don’t you hate going to Christmas Eve Service? They tell the same story every year. We know it by heart already."

"I know. We should just skip the service and open presents early instead. Then we could have more time to play with our new toys."

We lived in St. Joseph, Iowa, and there were many corn fields surrounding the town we lived in. We travelled down the long, slippery road. When we approached the school that my brother and I attended, I saw a large shadow below a street light. As we got closer, I saw that it was a dog. It began to walk across the street.

"Look!" I shouted.

Dad was startled and jerked the steering wheel slightly. The car swerved across the icy street. Mom instinctively screamed.

Dad quickly turned the wheel and we crashed into a ditch. I felt myself being thrown forward by the impact, even though my seat belt held me firmly.
I looked out my window and only saw a foggy mist. I wiped it away and saw the white sides of the ditch we were in. Our Chevette was in the ditch at a steep angle facing downward.

My brother started to cry. I hit him in the arm, and yelled, "Baby!"

He stopped crying and hit me in the arm. I started to cry, and he said, "Wimp!"

"Baby!" I cried back, covering my face beneath my coat.

"Wimp!"

"Baby!"

"Wimp!"

"Shut up, Brian!"

"Make me!"

"No, really! Look at Mom and Dad."

We both peered around the space between the two bucket seats.

"They aren't moving!" exclaimed Brian.

"They aren't telling us to stop arguing, either," I pointed out.

"Hey, yeah. You're right."

"Let's try to wake 'em up," I suggested.

I tapped on Mom's shoulder and Brian on Dad's. Then we shook them, but they still wouldn't wake up. We got scared and panicked. First my brother, then I began to shake them violently.

"Wake up!" I yelled at my unconscious mother.

"Wake up!" Brian yelled.

"Stop!" I said. "They aren't waking up."

I maneuvered myself so that I could look at my mom. She had a cut above her left eye. Blood trickled down and dripped onto her cheek. I turned and saw my father had an abrasion against his forehead where he had hit the steering wheel. As I looked at him, he twitched his hand slightly. My eyes grew wide. Then my mother moaned softly. My mouth drooped and I plopped into my seat. I looked at Brian who had tears in his eyes.

"I'm scared," he whispered.

"Let's give them our coats, they need to be warm," I said.
There are some blankets in the back, too."

We both took off our small coats and draped them over Mom and Dad. I grabbed the blankets and we covered them as best we could.

"We have to find help," I said
"How?" asked Brian.
"Let's try to flag down a car."
As we prepared to get out of the car and find help, I realized I couldn't open my door because the snow was piled so high.
"Now what, Corey?" asked Brian.
"Roll down your window and climb out."

We rolled them down as far as possible, and climbed out. The chill of the cold wind was incredible. I climbed up the steep ditch. I shivered as I waited for Brian to meet me beside the road. We couldn't see if anything was coming, because the snow was blowing so badly. The wind blew through our sweaters. We were shaking violently.

"I'm freezing!" cried Brian.
"Me too!" I looked down the road. "I don't think any cars are coming. Maybe we need another plan."
"I think so, Corey."
"I crossed my arms rigidly and looked around. My eyes fell upon the school. I had an idea.
"Let's find a phone across the street!" I exclaimed.
"O.K." said Brian, "but who'll we call?"
"911."

The swirling winds howled in our ears as we peered across the icy street. As I took a step onto the street, I slipped on the ice, and fell on my back.
"Ow!"
"Are you O.K."
I wiped away a couple of tears and sniffed, "Sure."
I looked at my old shoes that I'd been wearing to church for months, and realized that I didn't have any traction on my soles. I
didn’t know how soon a car would come by, so I had to get across quickly. I took a step back and braced myself. Then, I slid across the ice. I tumbled into a snow bank on the other side. I got up and brushed the cold snow off my thin pants and sweater.

Brian slid across. Then we looked for a phone. As we walked slowly around the building, I saw a phone beside a door. The phone had snow on the receiver. I brushed it off and picked it up. I remembered the quarter in my pocket that Dad had given me to put in the offering. I popped it in and dialed.

"Isn’t that a free call?" asked Brian.
"I don’t know. It’s not a big deal."

I explained to a man on the other end what happened, and he said, "We’ll be over as soon as possible."

"How soon will that be?"
"On these roads, at least a half-hour."
"Thank you," I moaned.
I hung up, frowning. "We have to wait a half-hour."

We walked to the road and skidded across in the swirling winds again. I tumbled down the ditch and landed beside the Chevette. Brian landed beside me. We got up and brushed ourselves off before climbing through the window.

"Brrrr!" I said, rolling up my window.
"Well, we have a half an hour to wait..." I moaned.
"I’m scared," Brian moaned after a long silence, then he began to cry. He shivered uncontrollably.

I tried to figure out a way to help him stop crying.
"What did you get Mom and Dad for Christmas?" I asked.
"I got Mom another mug, and Dad some of that aftershave Mom said he likes. What’d you give them?"
"I got Mom a mug, and Dad a pair of socks."

We sat again in silence, but soon Brian began to whimper and shake.

"We could have a service in the car," I suggested.
"I thought you said you didn’t want a service, it’s the same ol’
story every year," he sniffed, wiping a tear away.

"Yeah, but it’s not like we’re gonna preach or anything."

I pulled out my Bible as Brian leaned forward and turned on the lights. "Where should you start reading?" asked Brian.

"Somewhere at the beginning of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John."

I opened up to Luke and searched through the bold print until I saw The Birth of Jesus printed above a paragraph.

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree..." I read four paragraphs, then Brian read four more.

"...The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

"That’s still a nice story, I guess. Even if you do hear it every year," I said.

"Yeah. Hey, let’s sing some carols, Corey!"

"O.K. How ’bout ’Joy to the World,’ ‘Away in a Manger,’ and ‘Silent Night’?"

"Sure!"

We sang for a while, but soon we finished.


"No."

"What if we pray for Mom and Dad?" I asked.

"Good idea."

We bowed our heads and turned off the light. "God, please let Mom and Dad be alright. Don’t let anything bad happen to them, please," prayed Brian.

"God, help Mom and Dad. They’re hurt real bad. I’d give up all my presents for them to be O.K., Amen." I looked up at Brian. "You know, until now, it really hasn’t seemed like Christmas, ya know?"

"Yeah."

Just then, flashing red and blue lights illuminated the interior of the car. We opened the windows and climbed out. "Here!" we
screamed to them. A police car was with an ambulance. A big, burly policeman pulled us up from the ditch.

"You must be freezing!" he said, staring at us. "Hurry, get in the car. We'll take care of your parents."

We got in the police car, but instead of being excited about being in a real live police car, we just peered out the window as they got Mom and Dad out. They were there a while, because of the snow that jammed Mom and Dad’s doors shut.

Soon, the ambulance drove away, and a little while later, the police car we were in followed it. I leaned my forehead against the window and watched the white scenery slowly float by. When we got back into town, I saw many lights of different colors and I could even peer into the white haze and make out the silhouette of a Christmas tree in someone’s window. It was brightly lit with colorful lights. I imagined there was a family inside sharing memories and opening their gifts.
Neat! Neat! Neat! Neat! Mason groaned as he rolled over and smacked the alarm clock. "Oh, joy!" he thought as he pulled on some silk boxers. "Another wonderful day in the real world."

He still couldn’t believe that last week he’d left the ordinary life of high school. And, here he was, going to the University, where just six months before he and his buddies watched the college girls playing tennis every Wednesday afternoon. He stared at himself in the bathroom mirror remembering how they used to wish that they were in college. Now he wasn’t so sure.

"It used to be exciting," he thought as he brushed his teeth. "Why is it, all of a sudden, so monotonous? At least in high school I could be weird and make something happen every day. Now I want to be accepted for what I am."

His best friends don’t even know, and he doesn’t quite know how to tell them. He has faked it all his life in order to be accepted as a "normal" person.

Mason opened his notebook and wrote:

January 14, 1993

Today is the day! Tonight at the study group, I will reveal myself and tell everyone there that I am different!
He sucked in a deep breath and said out loud, "I hope I’m doing the right thing." Checking his watch, he hopped into the shower, got dressed, and gathered his books into his Eastpack. As he got into his El Camino, he noticed a note on the windshield. It said, "Meet me at the cafe for coffee, I really need to talk. Reva."

Mason wondered if he should just tell Reva this morning instead of later, but he had better find out what kind of mood she was in today. From her message, it didn’t sound so good. Reva was the kind of person who was very open-minded and didn’t like it when people formed opinions. However, sometimes she went along with the crowd because she didn’t really have good self-esteem. Mason knew about Reva’s mood-swings; he’d been friends with her ever since Mrs. Jackson’s history class in the seventh grade. He was new to the school and she was the first to talk to him and be his friend.

He parked across the street and saw Reva sitting in the cafe. As he walked toward the building, he could see that she was having a double-strawberry shake, which was what she treated herself to when she was depressed.

"Well, here goes nothing," he thought. Reva looked up and smiled, and said, "Howdy. Glad you could make it."

"Thanks, babe," Mason replied. At this, Reva blushed and looked down at the shake, stirring it slowly as though she was in deep thought. Mason noticed this, and was puzzled, but he let her talk first.

"Mason?" she asked quietly.

"What is it, Reva? You look upset."

"I have to tell you that I think I have some feelings about you that are more than friendship feelings."

Mason cleared his throat, now knowing that he had to tell her. "But I know there’s no possible way you could like me." A warning light went off in Mason’s head. He ordered some coffee, black, from the waitress who just appeared.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Mason, you can’t keep your big secret one forever."
"You mean you know?" His mouth dropped open about a foot and he abruptly sat back in his chair.

Reva said nonchalantly, "It's not like it's a big deal or anything."

"Not a big deal?!" Mason sat there shaking his head. "Just exactly what do you think is my big secret?"

"I first noticed it in ninth grade when you never went to any dances or never had any girlfriends." She sipped her shake and continued. "Then, your asking me to the prom two years in a row convinced me totally." She looked up at Mason and smiled. "I won't tell anyone, if you want."

Mason just sat there staring at his coffee. He wondered how many more knew. He thought he'd covered it up well enough by doing everything all his friends did. All those dates with only hugs at the end, the make-out parties where he only played cards, and prom. Yes, prom, where he had taken his best friend Reva both years. Of course she would figure it out. She was smarter than three-quarters of the people he knew.

Mason felt stupid and ashamed that he didn't tell her earlier.

"It would be good if you didn't go around and blurt it all out to everyone. I was going to tell the study group tonight, anyway."

Reva took his hand and said, "This is cool with me, and it doesn't change the way I feel about you. Do you want to talk some more?"

"Yeah, but first, let's order some of those tempting Danishes."
Dad taught me how to catch fish best. He showed me that what was commonly called fishing was actually a variety of many activities. On hot spring days he would call me out of bed and we would walk down, already sweaty, to the dock. We only fished up north because the rivers were so dirty and crowded with boats.

Friday nights we'd drive up to the lake. The cars crawled along the highway under the descending sun. Nobody was in much of a hurry, they were entering a new world. We saw billboards for "World Famous chicken" and passed out-of-the-way gas stations. We drove through four block cities and stopped at "The Big Bear" for a pop. Afterwards we would head up sloping hills with old barns and drive around smooth curves until we reached the cabin. You always anticipated seeing the water first. But by the time we would arrive the waves were ripples and the boats purred softly to their destination. The cabin would fall asleep hearing the water lap onto shore, docking boats.

I much preferred fishing to eating the fish that was caught. The bones crunched between my teeth and the skin would slip off. Dad like serving the fish with their heads still on. Once he began a science lesson on a fish's brain until my mother became angry.

As we rode across the lake I ran the tips of my fingers through the water. We went through a field of water lilies and I picked a few, trying to keep their long stems as I pulled. The pine trees towered
over the lake and I rubbed more sunscreen into my face. Dad and I have the same skin, red and wrinkled around the eyes. We burn easily.

We dropped anchor in a shallow area and I dived in. We were on a sand bank that quickly fell off into deep black waters. The water was perfect and cool.

"Come on, let's go," Dad said. He helped me into the boat and we pushed off. I watched him steer us through the swampy wetlands. Green plants shot up on all sides of us and Dad pointed out two turtles. He was an intelligent man but still I think I sometimes disappointed him.

"Where's Maria this week-end?" he said.
"I don't know. Why does it matter?" I asked.
"I was just wondering," he said. But I knew why he asked. It was because Maria was better than me in so many ways. She made people laugh and stare at her face. She had fine indented features, the eyebrows, the cheekbones, the curled lips. Dad wondered why I wasn't with her, meeting new people and smiling—meeting boys. He would be unhappy to know that my best friend and I were growing apart.

I had so often admired her. She always knew how to please every person. But she was also a jealous person. She talked behind every person's back. She told jokes with one girl and later—privately—told jokes about that same girl. But I trusted her.

For a while I hadn't seen her. She was busy, I was busy. Her list of friends grew and I became more awkward around her. I was usually on hold when I talked to her. And Dad started asking where Maria was. The whole situation was a constant source of friction. I had only hoped she wouldn't come up over fishing.

At noon we reached our spot. We waved to pontoon boats with folks sipping drinks and drove around slow moving paddle boats, tan legs pounding away, water whooshing out behind them. We reached the far end of the chain of lakes and shut off the motor.

The worms were embedded in cool dirt. Dad baited my pole
and I pulled out a can of Coke.

"Here," he said, handing me the ready pole, the end of my line dancing with bait.

I took it and cast out. Then I sat back and waited. I watched the other fishing boats. Most men sat silent, eyeing the lines and scanning for fish. In one boat a man began wrestling with his tugged line. He pulled the pole back and back. He reeled in hard strokes, quick and with a strong look on his face. Finally he pulled out a long fish. A few men clapped and some raised their beer cans to him. Dad smiled.

"That's a big one he's got there."

"Yeah," I said, eyeing the wiggling fish. Soon it hung still, suffocated.

The day passed and one by one the other boats left. A few new ones came but didn't stay long. It was becoming frustrating.

"What's Sara doing this week-end?"

"Uuhhh, what does it matter? She's doing something and I'm here... fishing."

"Not too many fish though," Dad said and began reeling in.

"No." I began reeling in too. He laid down his pole and held his hand out for mine.

"I'll bait it," I said. Dad laughed and handed me the container of worms. I felt the dirt with one finger. It was black and stuck heavily onto my skin. I went in farther and pulled out a long worm.

I thought about how I learned in third grade that if you cut a worm in half, it would live. It would become two worms. The day we found that out kids at lunch ran around looking for worms. They placed them in small piles of three or four. And like dutiful scientists some boys and a few girls used plastic forks and knives to slice in half the worms. When the bell rang we left the worms there, guts and all on the black cement.

"Now put it right on the hook, don't let it slip," Dad said as a cloud passed over the sun.

I folded the worm and held it tightly as I fumbled with the
hook. I stuck one end of the worm into the sharpness of the hook. It went in easily enough but I couldn’t put the whole worm through. I pushed harder and harder. I wanted to cast my line out and catch a fish twice the size of the one I had seen that day. I gave a final squeeze and the hook shot through. It shot straight through the worm and through my hand. For a moment I just sat there. And then slowly I pulled the hook out. It stung just a little. But as the hook came free of my skin, my cut swelled with blood.

"Hold your hand over the boat," said my Dad. "Stick it in the water, that might make it feel better."

I did. I pulled my hand back out of the water and pressed it, allowing the blood to drip into the water.

I noticed how easily the water mixed with my blood. The red slid off my hand and then branched out into patterns of all different shapes. I saw birds, faces and leaves created in the wake of my blood. Circles bellowed out like great rain clouds. I looked up to the pine trees. So long they had been there. What did this matter? We would fish again in a month.

And then I cried. Not only for that day, catching no fish, but for all days. I cried for days when nothing had been right. I cried for people who were gone and for those who were going. I cried for Maria and for my father. They would never meet again. How I would miss them. Their lives and mine were only at a crossroad.

I stared at my blood, my reflection. Something distorted it. A wave, a ripple.

"Dad, Dad, it’s a fish, no, it’s two fish, and more!" I was so happy. Fish! We had accomplished the day. My blood had attracted the trout and I had not cried in vain.
Poems
The Autumnal Equinox

The heavens and earth collided at 1:43 p.m. and the day became as long as the night. All was equal while the sun kissed the equator,

and I Dream of Jeannie reruns skillfully diverted our minds at 2:00 so that we might never feel the pressure of equality.

Jennifer Beckmann
This place...
dark, dreary, and desolate.
A piece of
dirt
constructed
with
gravel
sand
foundation!
Which has had many visitors
... squished gum ...
... a smoldering cigarette ...
the force of nature
or two.
The sun beats down
on this piece of concrete
wherever it can
... rain drops ...
brightly colored lines
etched by a little kid for a
HOP-SCOTCH game.
Dogs.
Snow.
Dust.
And leaves.
Crack lines which stretch from end to end creating several spider webs. Broken glass from a soda bottle which was dropped by accident.

A graffitied skull and white skeletons.

A jack hammer beating up the

To accomplish what?
To put a parking meter in the hole with more cement. Who knows what will abuse

a N.Y. SIDEWALK next!

Geoff Azzopardi
PEOPLE WATCHING

My plane has been delayed.  
Now I'm sitting in the Detroit Metro terminal, 
in a small, blue chair  
with cold, metal armrests.  
I'm watching the people filter in,  
a few at a time,  
like bees returning to their hive.  
I'm also playing the 'scenario game.'  
One man, dressed in a cowboy hat and boots,  
is probably on his way to making a fortune  
in Las Vegas.  
There is a couple, in the middle of a discussion,  
with tense looks on their faces,  
who are maybe fighting about how long  
they will have to stay at  
the woman's mother's house.  

Each person sits in a chair  
away  
from someone else,  
making the terminal look like a honeycomb,  
which is half filled.  
Once every-other chair is taken,  
the people, late in arriving,  
stop  
and, judging by appearance, decide who is the safest person  
to sit next to.  
If they don't want conversation,  
they sit next to the businessmen  
in their navy blue, pin-striped suits,
ties loosened a little, 
pretending to read the Wall Street Journal. 
Or, desiring conversation, 
they sit next to the old lady 
who reminds them of their grandmother, 
and is doing needlepoint. 
But, if they’re bored, 
they will sit next to the high school girl 
and read the poem that she is writing 
about them.

Jacci Bean
Chantra

She looked at me and smiled whispering,
"I’m beautiful, you know."
She said it humbly and laughed, but her eyes flew to my lips.

I remember we danced to disco and laughed in the red light while the rhythm moved us up and down together like pistons and we burned bright blue.

And I imagine her coming from a hot shower with her skin all soft brown sugar and smiling as she passes a mirror, staring in awe at her lines, straight lines and curved lines.

She knows she tortures boys with her eyes and her movements. And now she smiles and whispers, "I’m beautiful, you know."

Miguel Centellas
Robina's Tights

I slide Robina's turquoise and lime striped tights on my hard 12 year old thighs. The cold fabric droops like the underarms of a pruned woman. I poke my finger in the unraveling hole above my right knee. A warm tunnel for ants and beetles to burrow through. A cavern for hungry men to explore—Paul Bunyons and Don Juans; their large intruding fingers grope through this door. Robina is forbidden. Forbidden like the word fuck, white cleavage and Mom's top dresser drawer. She is the sun inviting ants and beetles to nest and lay their drab oval eggs in her skin's pores. She is a keyhole for men to peek into, 25c a look. their greedy fingers push through this eyelet hoping to be the first to score. And I am the little girl who loses her tights at show and tell.

Annmarie Borucki
Daddy

I.
and Mom called them Quickies.
and each night I gave Dad one,
a kiss and hug.
not on the mouth
or bear hugs where our bellies touched,
but side hugs and quick pecks on the cheek,
sometimes in his ear.
i remember how the thorns in Dad’s beard
pricked my 7 year old skin,
branding my lips with a frown.
He has never said I love you
and I don’t think he knows how.

II.
i remember how Dad whipped out
the leather belt from his pant loops
and how the floor boards rattled
in his search for me.
and as I hid in my toy box,
that square wooden coffin,
i prayed not to see daylight,
but to be saved.
and how I stared at the cold potatoes on my plate
and pondered what Ethiopians were.
and the number games I made up
at that kitchen table,
counting the red, black and white squares
on the linoleum floor
until I was excused.
Does he know we have the same hands and skin?

III.
and now I’m 16
and know right from wrong.
i make up for the lost memories of us
playing on the castle slide
in the magic park on Tawas Bay.
or the time my little hands
and his large hands planted marigolds.
I don’t ever remember calling him Daddy.
and now that I know what chemistry is
and appreciate bird watching and rocks,
things he likes,
i lean against his soft body.
his belly rumbles beneath the
white undershirt
and I imagine snowflakes
are swirling inside.
I do not need snapshots to remind me
I’m living in the good times.

Annmarie Borucki
WAITING FOR THE SUN

We reach the dark river long before light does and put on our waders. We find a gravel bed where fish lie and converge into the icy water below the dam. Six of us standing along the shore waiting for the sun. Almost as eager for its warmth as for its light. Others trickle in, taking guarded possession of their areas. They force their way toward holes in the river bottom where steelhead spawn. Their lines, each one a long single strand of a spider’s web, have the steelheads’ favorite meals on the hooks: salmon eggs, fly larvae, and other tasty treats which are being thrown and retrieved in a systematic fashion keeping tie-ups to a minimum. Suddenly, I hear the excited cry of "fish on!" The man with the fish begins to move down river to land his catch. Almost instantly, three men take his spot, casting frantically.

David Clark
Lady with
scarf wrapped tightly,
despite sixty degree day.
Dragging five Farmer Jack "R" bags.
Trolling side streets
for ten cent returnable cans.
Three and a half year old child
claunches to Mother.
Urban scenes hit suburbia.
25645, 21 mile Rd. Mt. clemens, Mi.

Matt Dertinger
Dream Keeper

My bed.  
The keeper of all my dreams, nightmares, fears, hopes.  
It knows more about me than any person.  
When I lie down at night,  
It takes from me  
My last portion of daily energy.  
Mesmerizes me.  
Feeds me with medicines of relaxation and unconsciousness.  
Puts me into a state of lifelessness.

As I dream,  
My bed pulls ideas from my head.  
It must store them  
Somewhere deep inside itself.  
In its mind.  
Some dreams it takes from me  
Before I even realize what is happening.

If I could only rip open my bed.  
Pull forth all of my dreams from its soul,  
Or wherever they are kept.  
I’d take back what rightly belongs to me.  
Ideas, thoughts,  
 Ones I never knew I had  
That mysteriously slipped away.  
What secrets of mine would I find?  
All those thoughts from deep within me  
That disappeared.

Jessica L. Jacobsen
Aids and My Sex Life

We got ripped.
We were screwed out of
what was rightfully ours.
What about Woodstock?
What about free love?

Standing in line of a
really great roller
coaster.
Waiting forever.
Finally, when we were
in the very front of the
line.
Somebody barfed,
and they closed the ride for
cleaning.

Thomas Kacer
Staples

Bond
page
to page
to page’s corner,
painfully;
a bit of
chilling metal:
the collective
reminiscence
of a death-bitten
family-
perhaps the linking
of elbows, once
at a gathering,
in their guilt-drenched
shirts;
grandpa’s seams
stitch Dad’s sleeve
to Diane’s collar
and that to Kathy’s bodice-
the wool
is Peggy,
Ann,
Dan,
that half of the clan,
and grandpa’s threads
tie them to Dan’s flannel.
Both shirts
tethered
with bare crooks-
skin
to skin
to skin's jarred confessions...
one link,
and another staple
to hold
the pages
together.

Lynette Mallett
Metamorphose

Her spinneret deposits
old-cupboard molasses,
surrounding her
like a coffin.

Her shell freezes
like a leaf to ice,
cracking
like a thawing pond.

Her body releases
its preserving wrapper,
hesitating
like sticky bubble gum.

Her wings extend
a morning stretch,
unveiling her
like an extended yawn.

She tosses the alarm clock
off the tree where they hung,
and soars into sophistication.

Stacey L. Nield
WHEN I DIE...

I want life to end instantly.
I want to die in unison with the man I love,
so pain will not affect either of us.
I want to donate my organs,
so others can learn how to cure the living.
I want what’s left to be cremated,
my ashes placed in a small, antique jar.
I want a small funeral,
with family and close friends.
I want it to be a happy time,
for remembering times we’ve shared:
    camping with Jill at Pine Lake
when people thought we were "fisherboys."
    Panama City with the girls . . .
the beach, the night life, and the caravan.
Christmas morning at the Nelson house,
when Mom and Dad, or Santa,
    forgot to put out the presents.
I want an abundance of flowers.
Particularly daisies and daffodils.
I want smiles, laughter, and the singing
of "Friends," as led by the Pastor.
Finally, I want to be taken to the bluff,
to a place I call "The Sound of Music"
and scattered over Lake Michigan,
where others may
    swim through my soul
forever. . .

Sarah Nelson
HEAT & COLD

I don’t know why
and I won’t ever know when,
but when I’m near someone
who I think I may like,
and she talks to me,
I get a tingly feeling
From the ends of my toenails
to the tips of my hair,
and my pulse beats through my veins,
pounding like ancient Indian drum signals,
My palms then start to sweat
and my knees ache and try to
turn me and force me
to run away before it’s too late,
but no,
My stomach rumbles,
making me stand still until the
dull pain subsides.
And even after she has left me
to go off to her next class
these feelings still reside in my body.
The feelings merge to one of immense cold
and one of unbearable heat.
And both heat and cold do battle constantly
And not even ten minutes later
when the feelings have eased themselves out,
do I know which sensation won out
over the other.

Scott Reschke
WHY CATS DON’T DRINK COFFEE & WHY THEY ALWAYS TAKE THEIR TEA WITH MILK

One day Tebericus was having tea with his other cat companions. They were sitting in a circle near a large oak tree. Suddenly, an acorn fell into Tabericus’ tea. "Ah," he said, "This is why I do not drink coffee. It colours the sky a nasty shade of puce."

The other cats nodded in agreement, for they, too, had had similar experiences. But one cat, a young one only on his 2nd life, said, "I understand that, but why must we always have our tea with milk?"

"Why the answer is obvious, my young friend," Tabericus answered. "Because the days are long in the summer, we must draw our pictures with red ink."

Sarah Noble
WHEN I AM AN OLD WOMAN

When I am an old woman I will wear Reeboks...
I will glide across the living room floor
practicing steps from the previous night’s dance lesson
on my way to water the garden...
I will live every day as if there were no tomorrow...
one day pinching my granddaughter’s cheek so hard I have to
give her some of my homemade fudge to
relieve those nine-year old cheeks of their pain...
writing in my daily journal...
learning at least one new thing about sex
every day...
and praying to the good Lord
that has given me the strength to do all these things.

When I am an old woman,
I will not really be old...
I will sew my booties that are holy
from my weekly ventures with the girls
to Kelley’s Bowl...
I will keep my ears double pierced
and change my hair color every two months...
I will take flying lessons,
making sure to have a gorgeous
dark-haired, snow-pea-green-eyed
hunk of an instructor...
I will have a trucking company
dump a load of dirt on the crabby,
old hag’s lawn
next door,
and blame it on the kids down the street...
I will drink beer on the back patio of my house
and watch the mosquitoes
as they dance for me
from behind my screened curtain.

And when I am an old woman,
I will not be forgetful
of the things I said in my past.

Katie Rosenfeld
Bottle of Rain

One late night
In an early summer storm
He held an antique bottle
Tightly in his hands
and filled it with rain
He said that it was part of nature like our love
That it was pure and fresh
And sent from heaven above to save him, like me
He placed the bottle in my hand
and gazed into my eyes
and promised to love me forever
I sat the rain on my nightstand
Wondering if time or nature
would evaporate those precious drops
But I knew the rain would last
Like our love would last
Long after everything else is over.

Kelly Skar
Granddaddy

Grandmother squashed
Granddaddy's attitude
On their ring exchange day.
He died so as not to hurt
Grandmother's damaged heart.

He must have had a sense
Of humor to live with
Grandmother for fifty years.
The corners of his mouth
Rise upward at Grandmother's
Fussing over a pie.

He hits a golfball with
Such force, that it can
Kill a bird. But he picks
Up a baby with new-mother love.

Grandmother says
"Don't sit on my
good chair!"
But Granddaddy says
"My lap can be your chair."

Katherine Smith
FLY BYE

Once upon a meatball
The two fly school sweethearts parted wings.
Gone were the days of buzzing through the kitchen
landing on various food groups
together.
Often they would sit atop the old oven vent
and watch water boil.
They would make love on the ceiling
then land in a pop can to drink and cool off.

Yes, those kosher days have since passed.

All the late nights spent
talking of eloping.
Vegas was much too far,
for they were only a month old.
Instead of eloping
they often returned to the fly school
where they met. (located behind the hot water heater)
She was a wing leader.
He was a boxing champion in the fly weight division.
They dreamed of marriage while regurgitating on the flyball field.

Yes, those disgusting love days have since passed.

Screwing another fly he was
when she walked under the floor crease.
She regurgitated all over the fly slut
then darted out of the crease.
He chased after her,
apologizing as they flew through the living room.
The chase finally ended on a meatball.

Which brings us to the beginning.

Aaron Strebs
Staring out my window,  
I see an older couple  
Walking down the street.  
Savoring the moment.  
And I wonder,  
   "Will my true love spend my whole life with me?"

I go outside and there I find,  
Sitting on a park bench,  
An elderly man all alone.  
In one hand he holds a cane.  
He watches the children play with watering eyes.  
And I ask myself,  
   "Will my life be that lonely?"

As I continue to walk,  
I come to the corner store.  
Inside a girl helps an elderly lady  
Who is supported by a walker.  
And I wonder,  
   "When I’m old will someone be there for me?"

I decide to go home,  
Read the news, watch some TV.  
But there’s still a pain in my heart  
And many questions in my head.  
I think of my own parents before they passed on.  
And I ask myself,  
   "Will life be that wonderful for me?"
I sit down at the table,  
My coffee cup in hand.  
On the front page of the daily is a man.  
He’s retiring as president of a big corporation.  
He started the company; now it belongs to his son.  
And I wonder,  
"What will life have in store for me?"

I turn on the TV.  
There is a movie on, a little girl crying,  
Kneeling in front of tombstone.  
I can tell by what she’s saying it’s her grandmother’s grave.  
Then she slowly gets up, turns, and leaves the cemetery.  
And I ask myself,  
"Will anyone cry when I die?"

KariAn L. Wahl
ARTIFACTS

I Look Into The Backseat of My Car
To See Artifacts Left From Many Lazy Days
Enough Plastic 7-Up Bottles To Keep The Recycling
Plant Busy for Weeks
Receipts From Money Earned At Work
Receipts From Money Spent At Work
Lighters and Black Cat Fireworks Leftover
From Latenight Silver Beach Pyrotechnique Displays
Wrappers From Toothpicks, Pepermints, Beef Jerky
Bags From Burger King, Music Matters; Video Watch
Dried Clumps of Mud from My Soccer Cleats
Unopened Envelopes From Davenport College
And Empty Packets of Soy Sauce From Hong Kong House
The Backseat of My Car is an Evergrowing
Shrine to Myself.

Dylan Rinker
"Tap, tap, tap"

At grandma's
in the winter,
the lake is slick & smooth.
Casey assures me that it is safe.
We sit,
watching,
knowing,
wondering.
Casey ventures out onto the ice.
"Tap, tap, tap," with his foot. "See it's solid."
And with that, he plunged downward.
We laughed,
snickered,
sneered.
As he pulled his frozen self
up,
out,
and onto the shore.

Kaija Slack