1998

Calliope Manuscript Day 1998

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Thanks from the Department of English to members of the WMU Creative Writing Program for staffing workshops; to visiting professors Sharon Bryan and Elizabeth McCracken for the teachers’ workshop; to Rebecca Beech for typing Calliope; to Jana Pyle for the cover design; and to those who will give a reading at the program, undecided at the time of printing.

Calliope prepared by Rebecca A. Beech
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fiction
"I'm sorry, sir, but this is a non-smoking car. Should you still care to smoke, you may do so in Car Two, directly behind us."

Felix looked up from the lighter in his hand, obviously frustrated at its uselessness. He apologized abruptly and put his cigarette case away. The gentleman sitting to his left, next to the window, had fallen asleep. The man’s loud snoring had already begun to irritate Felix. Every time Felix felt sleep come near, the man’s unusually loud snorting noises would waken him again. The attendant tried to arrange a seat for him elsewhere in an extra seat but the people sleeping peacefully nearby were not to be disturbed. Felix resorted to just sitting. This last leg of his trip, by fault of the snoring man, proved the most exhausting. He glanced at his watch. Three more hours to endure.

The train slowed to a stop at his destination. The snoring man had already awakened and stretched his arms next to him. Felix pushed himself up weakly. The sudden stiffness in his neck made him cringe. Reaching into the pocket inside his suitcoat, he drew out his glasses. Unlocking his overhead compartment carefully, so as not to cause an avalanche, he pulled out his worn leather backpack and proceeded to throw it over his shoulder. Everyone waited anxiously to get off the train.

Bag in hand, he stepped out to the curb in front of the station and whistled. A cab driver spotted his raised hand and made a sharp swerve to pull up next to him. Situating himself in the back seat, he gave the driver his destination. The driver nodded in confirmation and pulled out into traffic.

He remembered the first time he made this trip. At nineteen, he
worked to earn money to put himself through college. His parents had recently divorced and neither parent appealed to him. He pushed college further into the back of his mind, hoping someday he might get there. When he left to find his own place, he still hadn’t raised enough money. As each year passed, his future looked dimmer and dimmer. That’s when his grandparents took him in. This trek to see them, oftentimes, had been his only bridge to sanity.

As the cab crossed the river, the sun was just rising and its splendor nearly brought a tear to his eye. Gram loved the sunrise. She would get up at ungodly hours of the morning to view the terrific sight from the roof of her building.

The driver pulled up to the diner where Felix meant to get out. Felix almost mechanically pulled out a crumpled and worn scrap of paper from his pocket. On it was a barely legible telephone number. This same scrap of paper had seen him through some rough times. He pushed open the diner door and the jingling bells overhead sounded his arrival. He surveyed the customers. Stepping aside to make way for a bustling waitress, he settled on a seat at the counter. A waitress promptly took his breakfast order and poured him a cup of coffee. The procedure had always been the same. Next, he made the call. He dialed the familiar number on the crumpled scrap of paper. An elderly man’s voice answered.

"Hello?"
"Hi, Pops. It’s me, Felix."
"Felix. How are you?"
"Good. I’m down at the diner."
"Well, what are you waiting for? You know where to go!"
"All right. I’m coming!"

Felix paid his bill and thanked the waitress graciously. She paused a moment to smile at him. He pulled up his collar and stepped into the bright morning sun. He had realized long ago that he didn’t really need to make this stop at the diner. But if his grandmother had taught him anything, it was how to be a gentleman. She believed that manners made the man. It didn’t matter that they lived only about a block away.

He rang the bell and from behind the door’s frosted glass he could see
the figure of his grandfather coming to let him in. The door swung open and Pop’s arms reached out to embrace him. He pulled Felix close. At first, Felix felt uncomfortable with this open display of affection, something he wasn’t used to. But this was Pops. His grandfather reached for his bag.

"No, I got it, but thanks."

"Okay," he said, tousling the young man’s hair.

Felix began mounting the steps, two at a time. When he glanced back and saw Pops trying to keep up, he slowed. He had forgotten that pops wasn’t as fit as he used to be.

"You okay, Pops?"

"Are you kidding?" he proclaimed in his heavy Irish accent.

"Just checking!"

Felix arrived at the door at the top of the stairs and reached for the knob. He could already smell the aroma of frying bacon wafting up from the bottom of the door. Once inside, Pops started asking all kinds of questions about his mom and dad and what was going on in his life. They talked easily about the past few months. Pops made an enormous breakfast platter for him. Felix’s stomach already regretted eating at the diner. He smiled to himself. This was home for him. He hadn’t felt loved like this in a long time.

Pops had made no mention of Gram yet. Felix hesitated to ask. Pops had called him a week before and asked him to come as soon as possible. The voice that had always been full of life and brought comfort to Felix had become resigned and tired. Deep inside, Felix knew why Pops had called. So, that’s why he had hopped on the first train he could right after finals ended. He could wait no longer. He had to ask the looming question.

"How is she?"

Pops lowered his eyes. His face turned pale. Afraid Pop’s knees were going to give way, Felix reached out and took hold of him. He sat the old man down at the table and quickly got him a glass of ice water. Then, he sat down across the table and looked him in the eyes.

"What is it, Pops?" urged Felix. The man remained silent. Finally he spoke.

"I’m losing her, Felix. I’m losing her and I can’t do anything about it."
Felix slumped back in his chair. He knew this day would come but he could never have prepared himself. Gram got sick about a year and a half ago. She was diagnosed with lung cancer. The doctors did what they could but gave her only six months to live. The news devastated Pops. He loved his wife more than life itself. The thought of losing her was incomprehensible. Pops handled the situation the best he knew how. He devoted his life to her. Every day he was at her side in the hospital room. He bore every pain she suffered. Sometimes while she slept, she would curl herself up, writhing in pain, due to the medication. They couldn’t give her anything now that would help her. Pops could only hold her hand and watch as tears of agony rolled down her face. The doctors told him to talk to her, that she could hear him. He could think of no words that could ease her suffering. So he simply told her how much he loved her. Words of encouragement gave hope. He read her poems and stories, sometimes the newspaper. They would spend hours listening to the radio. Every week he brought her flowers even though she hardly ever opened her eyes to see them. Each morning, at five-thirty sharp, he arrived in her room. Sitting next to her on the bed, he would slowly lift her frail body. She laid in his arms like an infant. The nurse would open up the curtains on the window. And together they would wait patiently for the sun. As it rose above the horizon, Pops would describe it to her. He would tell her how beautifully the light filled the sky and how all the shadows darted into hiding. The sun’s dancing rays would fill the room and they would sit, like a parent and child, with the warm sun kissing their faces.

After dropping Pops off at the door, Felix circled the hospital parking lot for nearly forty-five minutes. Beyond frustration, he resolved to park across the street and three blocks down. As he walked back to the hospital, he began to prepare himself for what lay ahead. This was not unexpected, and yet he could not begin to comprehend the situation. He drew in a long breath of the crisp December air. He looked up at the shining sun and pulled his jacket a little closer. He could feel its heat between the gusts of wind. It was almost as if the sun pointed a finger at him. He shook away a chill and shivered.

Inside, Felix proceeded to the hospice floor and asked the nurse for
Gram’s room number. He took his time going down the hall. His knees were so weak he was sure he wasn’t going to make it. Something inside him kept him moving. When he finally arrived at the room, he hesitantly stood in the doorway. The curtain around the bed was partially drawn and he could not see her face. He approached the curtain and slowly pushed it aside. He caught his breath. He was sure that this was not the same Gram he knew. She lay in a pitiful state against the propped up pillows. Her arms and legs had wilted and her hair was nearly gone. All the character that once possessed her face had been replaced by sunken eyes and narrow cheeks. He bent over and kissed her forehead.

"Gram, it’s me, Felix. Remember? Your grandson. I came to see you." Felix watched for some response in her face but none came.

The two spent the day at her side. Felix talked about college, how funny his roommate is and how difficult his classes and professors are. He told her how strained he felt to succeed, how he had to do well in order to keep his scholarship. Pops told jokes and they did a production of Who’s On First?. At eight o’clock they decided to get some dinner. Unsure of whether or not they would return after eating, they said their good-byes. On the way home, they stopped at a little Italian restaurant just around the corner from the apartment. Pops and Felix ate in silence.

After dinner, they contemplated going back to the hospital. Felix noticed how tired Pops looked and refused to let him return. Pops protested with all his might but he surrendered to the thought of a good night’s sleep. They went back to the apartment and immediately got ready for bed. Pops dozed on the couch while Felix watched the evening news. Rather than waking him again, Felix grabbed a blanket and gently laid it over him. He retired to his old room and soon fell asleep, exhausted from the long day.

Felix slept restlessly. He tossed and turned all night. He would cover himself up only to kick the blankets off again. He awoke several times. At about five o’clock he was shaken from his slumber. He sat up in bed. Silence. He rubbed his face and yawned. Crawling out of bed, he tiptoed past the couch and into the kitchen. He turned on the faucet and let it run cold. He filled a tall glass and gulped it down. As he tiptoed past the couch on his way back he realized something was wrong. He could not hear Pops
snoring. He peered over the back of the couch and pulled back the crumpled blanket. Pops wasn’t there. Felix checked the bathroom and the kitchen. He searched the balcony and the stairwell. Pops was gone. Suddenly, it occurred to Felix where to look. He bolted back into the apartment. He pulled on a pair of jeans and a sweater, grabbed his coat and the keys to Gram’s car and raced out the door.

He raced down the deserted streets. Lights were just coming on in some windows. The early risers were putting on coffee in the kitchen. Felix was not surprised that there were actually parking spots, being that it was 5:15 a.m. He hurried as fast as he could up to the seventh floor. As he approached the desk, Gram’s nurse rose.

"I’m so glad you’re here. He’s in there with her now." Felix thanked her and proceeded to her room. Being quiet so as not to let his presence be known, he slipped through the doorway. Pops was sitting on the bed holding Gram gently in his arms. He was slowly rocking her back and forth. They were waiting. Waiting for the sun.

At about 5:30, Pops leaned close to her ear and whispered, "Here it comes."

The sun peeked up from just above the tree tops. Around it was a halo of orange light. The sky was a pale crimson shade. The two watched in silence. After about five minutes the sun had risen to its perch in the sky. It bathed everything in sight with its gentle radiance. Pop’s face was all aglow. Felix looked to Gram. A weak smile came to her face and for an instant she opened her eyes.

"I love you," Pops said.

Gram’s eyelids slowly fell and outside a cloud blocked the sun.
The dusk sunlight emerged from behind a flock of gray clouds and lazily cast itself upon the skin of my neck, numbing my mind with a certain pleasurable warmth, an emotional delicacy of sorts, a rare dish I had not tasted in a long time. I remember lounging on top of a makeshift raft, crudely constructed out of several half-rotted timbers we gathered on the riverbank, shaped by confident hands worn with the scars of experience hard-won, of a peaceful state just recently realized after years of torment. Gently we floated down the path of the sullen stream, caring neither for direction nor for any particular frame of mind, content merely to wade through the depths of our souls, and be swept away by the current.

Doubt had been blazing at the forefront of my consciousness, sparked by a nagging question which in my mind was always a constant blemish on the face of reality: the omnipresent query, "Why?".

"Why what?"

I glanced over her elegant body, draped with layers of artificial fabrics and cheap paint which corrupted her natural beauty, and engaged the bright green eyes I knew so well. They were sharp and attentive as usual.

"If we are composed of mostly nothing, why must we endure so much? I mean, even at the most fundamental level, with our primary particles aimlessly shooting about the void, we exist as beings of relentless motion. Objects we perceive as solid are in fact only collections of atoms, composed mainly of empty space, constantly moving, always transient. Given this knowledge, how can we come to trust perception, to depend on it?"

She gently pushed back the hair a piercing wind knocked over her
shoulders, and casually tossed her head to one side before raising an eyebrow ever so slightly, informing me that she was pondering my question. Her quirky position amused me. I enjoyed just watching her move, examining the precision she gauged with each blink of an eyelash, with every motion of her pale arm. Two sets of mildly chapped knuckles began to rap musically up and down the length of the wood.

"The irony is we depend upon perception alone to condone a world which doesn’t care about how you see, or what you think about, or the intensity of your emotion. We seem somehow out of place, lost in an irrational dimension of the counter-intuitive. If you are one who values the quality of human intuition, you must be offended when told the real world is independent of your will, and of the rules you impose upon its forces. The ordered reality you project upon it is done merely to comfort yourself, to further delude your mind into thinking you have it all figured out."

I felt a torrid anger when I heard her voice echo throughout the valley. To consider the possibility of another person picking up those rapturous vocals was an unbearable prospect for me.

"Ours is a comical species," she mused. "The only one capable of intellectual diversion, of experiencing happiness beyond the primitive highs brought on by a fresh kill, or a successful mating season."

"Such thoughts further muddle my overworked gray matter," I replied. Her eyes met mine as she smiled.

"Language is the only barrier between us," she stated in an emotionless tone, glancing right through me as she spoke. I suppose they were words not meant for me, but for the Independent Arbitrator in the sky, the great one who watches over his clueless peons with lightning bolts of ruthless compassion.

"Why must you always appeal to that ambiguous god of yours?" I retorted with measured cruelty.

"He may be ambiguous, but that does not make my belief in Him worthless by any means. It helps me reconcile myself with the fact that mortality is an unavoidable burden I must bear, and faith in His wisdom has assisted me in dealing with eternity."

"A crutch of spirituality..."
"Not a crutch, a life partner."
"I cannot comprehend the notions which compel you to suggest an eternal power is responsible for all that is, was, or will be."
"I do not understand how you can believe that everything you see, all you know, all you have experienced has come into being by chance, by the roll of mother nature's evolutionary dice."
"Such tremendous gulfs of thought are difficult to bridge..."
"But if we do not start building, who will?"

The wind began to pick up fiercely, and my love took my hand as the water slowly welled up around us.
The Rehearsal

by Jennifer Yeager

Jody thought the bus screamed as it forced all eight tires to stop. She lifted her floral luggage her mother had given her, and once again rehearsed her plans. Exit bus at Ninth and Twelfth, and look for an affordable motel in somewhat okay downtown conditions. Glancing at her watch, it was now nine o'clock; she had been awake since four. Judging her steps, she boarded the bus.

Unfolding her ticket, the bus driver looked past her, and once again glanced over her fragile body. "Just you, Missy?"

Irritated she replied, "Why? Am I supposed to be with someone?"

Disappointment settled in his eyes. He pulled the long silver mechanism that swung the door shut with a loud rush of air.

She moved down the aisle turning her head from side to side. To her right sat a comfortable looking woman deeply involved in the knitting of a yellow and brown scarf; a bundle of assorted yarns occupied the seat next to her. The only other place possible remained to her left.

She turned; a fragile looking man sat next to the window. The bus jerked and unexpectedly she was flung forward snapping her neck. The shock sent her bags flying down the aisle. She bent over trying to keep balanced by holding onto an orange plastic seat. Grabbing all her luggage, she sat in the only unoccupied seat next to the man. She exhaled, relieving the red embarrassment in her cheeks. The man seemed to take no notice of her, continuing to look out the window. Jody wished she had prepared herself better.

Trying not to be obvious, she pretended to look at the T.V. two rows ahead. With her auburn head at just the right angle she could study the man
next to her. His hair was a blondish-brown and its stiff straggly body kept it consistently in his eyes. His clothes were layered a number of times, with a maroon sweater on top. His smell made Jody nauseous, reminding her of the time she visited her grandma in the hospital, so she began breathing through her mouth. Through some god she relaxed, losing control of the weight gaining in her eyes.

At Ninth and Twelfth Streets, the sun seemed somewhat brighter, the park’s well kept trees a little greener. Jody’s knees ached from the weight of her bags as she exited the bus. She began walking down the paved sidewalk, staring at her feet to avoid the bright sun. The park was somewhat empty, yet she found it hard to find a place to sit and rest. Still standing, she contemplated whether or not she should sit on one of the park’s damp, wooden benches. Then she noticed a round-faced toddler dropping his pacifier. Jody watched it fall, first bouncing on the stroller tire, then splashing into the mud. The baby began to whine, raising the mother’s eyes just above the level of her Mademoiselle. Kneeling, Jody lifted the chewed plastic from the brownish-green mud.

"Oh, don’t worry about that old thing. Just plop it back in his mouth. He’ll be as good as new." The mother continued on with her article. Carefully unfolding her navy handkerchief, Jody wiped away the mud, and thought, what a sorry act of a mother.

A pang of hunger shot up from her stomach. Exiting the park and leaving behind the careless mother, she followed her nose to a nearby hot dog stand. She thought the vendor looked insane, like he shot the real vendor and now he was taking over. The crazed bearded man seemed to mumble something to her, to which she replied, "One hot dog, not burnt, please."

Glancing at the troublesome luggage, she noticed something was wrong. "Jesus Christ, I must have left my purse on the bus when I dropped my bags!" Luckily, the man took no interest in what she was saying to herself.

"Not burnt, you say?" he said sarcastically, as if he knew she was not in the mood to talk, yet he would force her to reply.

"Yes, I believe that’s what I said." Rolling her eyes she began fumbling through her pockets for loose change. In some foreign tongue he
told her the cost, but it didn’t matter. He set before her an extremely well cooked hot dog, and Jody had to catch herself to not lash out at the man. She didn’t need to. Obviously this man was not going to go out of his way to please his customers. She set the scramble of change on the vendor’s silver countertop.

Walking away, she knew he was probably still counting pennies, and any minute now he would realize she was about a dollar short. Trying to gain speed seemed almost impossible for Jody, with her hands full of luggage. Then she felt a sharp pull on her shoulder holding her back. The bearded man speared her with his eyes. He quickly snatched the half eaten hot dog from Jody’s trembling hand, and flashed a set of obviously fake teeth.

The slight drizzle had slowly worked its way into a full blown hurricane, the winds grabbing and stealing the floral luggage away from Jody’s grasp, the rain lashing into her face, leaving her tears unnoticed. She felt left alone and wet as if the town was hiding from her. Unsure of what to do next, thinking maybe there was someone who would help her, she blindly found a nearby pay phone.

She began dialing an all too familiar number in her head. Then she remembered her empty pockets. She hung up, dialed "0" and said, "Collect, please."

Her ears were greeted by a fragile voice: "I’ll accept the charges."

"Hi, Mom. Umm... this is Jody. Hey look, can you come pick me up. I’m downtown on Ninth and Twelfth Street."

"No, sorry, Jody. I can’t.‖ Mother’s voice was still calm.

"Excuse me?‖ She was shocked with what she was hearing.

"No, you go right ahead and finish whatever this is you thought up in that mind of yours. Maybe you could rent a room with the money in my purse you stole, Missy."  

She kicked the pole that the phone was hanging on, for a moment breaking the connection. What had she accomplished?

"Just come and get me, all right? I’ll be standing outside the Chinese tailor shop, with the yellow walls and green blinds.‖ She slammed the phone down, and it slipped off the cradle. She knew she remained a failure.
Once upon a time, in a distant land known as Krestiva, there lived the miserable young princess, Leise. She was the frail, unhappy daughter of the King and Queen of Krestiva, Malgar and Tangeeta Olacrast.

Malgar was rotund. He was round, heavy, loud and usually drunken with thick curly black hair only in the edges of his otherwise bald and shiny thick head. He spent his time inside the castle nestled in his leather La-Z-Boy recliner, whiskey in hand, watching cock fights in his basement. Leading the nation he left up to his boldly overwhelming mate, Tangeeta.

Tangeeta was also heavyset in a stocky rather than fat way. Her weight was evenly distributed, from her frizzy head to her red polished toes. She stood about two to three inches taller than her other half, to whom she rarely paid any attention. She spent her precious time out and about making appearances in influential community groups and legislatures attempting to give the impression that she honestly cared about the "little people." When she wasn't out gloriously politicking, she was inside the stone castle recreating herself.

The sad product of these two characters was the young, robotic Leise. With only eighteen years under her small, inexperienced belt, she knew only what she had been taught inside the castle boundaries. However, she did know that she could not exist like her mother or father, but after remaining captive of the pointed gates of their castle, she knew no other possibilities. The only life she was familiar with was friendless and hopeless. Our poor moldable Leise stood about five feet, five inches tall. Through her gray eyes
the castle looked like a cage, and had for many years. Leise took little care of herself. Her auburn hair had grown long and straggly, and her skin lifelessly pale. Only two people had seen her become this way, and even they did not take notice. You see, Tangeeta and Malgar conversed on only one topic, money, which they refused to spend on their daughter. Otherwise, they abided by the unwritten rule of remaining out of each other’s affairs. Tangeeta made all of the rules concerning her nation and her puppet, all of which went unquestioned.

From the beginning, the decision was made that Leise would be strictly confined to the boundary of the estate and would be taught to walk in the exact footprints of her mother. To Tangeeta, who simply had no love or compassion for her daughter, the only way Leise would be of any worth would be if she carried on her mother’s work. Since she was an infant, Leise was taught politics and pushed to uphold her mother’s strongly biased opinions unquestioningly. Tangeeta’s methods in programming her daughter had worked successfully until recently.

Eighteen years down the narrow, sheltered tunnel and Leise had lost all ambition to obey her commander. Her carefree youth, which had passed by, was undoubtedly gone. She had no idea of what to do with herself. Never having had opportunities to make decisions and mistakes, she felt like a lifeless marionette. And so, seeing no other options, she was in search of a model, someone to mold herself into, to make her feel human.

Her thin body lay limp on the stained white cotton comforter which barely covered the stiff twin bed. "BZZZZZZZZZZZ!!! BZZZZZZZZZZZ!!!", the alarm sounded which signaled the end of her midday nap. She scurried mechanically down the cold stone steps which eventually led to the main floor. Here she stood in the lavish living room, tired body erect at full attention to her commander, not forgetting to close the door behind her, of course.

"It’s about time, child," Tangeeta said coldly.

"Please excuse me, ma’am."

"Now, what have I always told you, Leise? To be on time is to be late, and when I say three o’clock, it should be instilled in you to be here at quarter ‘til. Tell me, how can I ever expect you to succeed if you are so
incredibly rude and show such little interest? Hmmmm?"

"Please excuse my shameful behavior, ma'am," Leise said robotically. Leise had mastered the skill of saying exactly what Tangeeta wanted to hear at any given time. After all, she had been programmed from the beginning.

"Anyhow, it seems to me that your lesson this evening should be doubled. You haven’t been as attentive lately and what better to arouse your interest than more work? Be in the library at five o’clock, and you had better know what is meant by five o’clock." Tangeeta began to walk away, but turned back. "Oh, and if you even think about entering those library doors before I arrive, you can expect to see nothing other than the cold gray walls of the attic for a couple weeks. Now, get out of my sight."

Leise quickly nodded and turned away, swiftly making her way up the cement steps through the stone hall three levels up to her quiet abode. She plopped herself down on the small bed and looked around at the shell of a room. It seemed to get smaller everyday. The creaky, unstable wood floor seemed weaker and the tattered gray curtains seemed more suffocating. She picked up her small wooden mirror and studied the mysterious face that looked back at her. The gray eyes were sunken and dull. The flesh was pale, and the lips were thin and tight. There were lines which had formed from tension and a few scars which told stories of censures. She watched for the first time the left eye twitch, and then the right as they swelled and filled with drowning water.

Five o’clock came slowly. As told, Leise arrived at the thick oak doors of the library promptly at quarter ’til five. To her surprise, the master was not there waiting. She began to think about what forbidden treasures were hidden on the other side. What wonderful secrets were kept on the thin pages? The only books she had ever touched held statistics, facts and dates. There must be something better than governments and committees locked in those bindings. Although she had been instructed not to enter the dark doors, temptation overcame her and she gave in.

The heavy portal creaked as she used all of her strength to slip inside. Quiet, yet swift, she swept over to the very first book she saw. It was small and thick, with a picture of a strong, barechested man embracing a
voluptuous, scantily clad woman on the cover. She ran her bony fingers over the raised gold letters which spelled "Danielle Steele." Carefully, she flipped the cover over and began to read.

About ten minutes later Leise heard the faint sound of the door opening and the "click click" of high heeled shoes on the tile floor. She quickly put the novel under her sweater and ran tip-toed to the table, unseen by Tangeeta. Tangeeta stormed up to the dark ebony antique table where her angry glare bore into the pupils of her disobedient pawn.

There was no exchange of words. Tangeeta only pointed and the girl rose to accept her punishment. She was directed to the Tower. The meek child solemnly trekked up eleven flights of steep, narrow, cement steps while her overseer had ridden the elevator and was waiting at the top. When she finally reached the apex of the exhausting climb, her possessor struck her violently and pushed her into a tiny chamber which was completely vacant aside from the ineffective boarding on the small window. With one final blow, Leise found herself on the freezing, dirty, floor. Her master turned away saying, "Maybe this will teach you a lesson more valuable than that of the library." The thick door slammed and locked behind her. However all was not lost, for she had managed to smuggle in the paperback undetected.

Leise was surprised to see the ray of yellow sun emerge through the wooden board the next morning. She had stayed up all night reading her love story, and hardly noticed the time pass. When she finally closed the back cover she was dumbfounded. An entire world was revealed to her which evoked in her new, astounding emotions. She set the sacred book down on the floor and rose up to peer out of an aperture in the rotten board. She gazed out at the town of Krestiva and along the green countryside. Her stare wandered back to the royal land where she beheld a dark-skinned muscular man laboring in the gardens. It was then that she grasped what she must do.

All day long, Leise worked to discover an escape from the stifling quarter. Finally, as the sun began to dip behind the thin clouds and paint the evening sky shades of orange and red, she made a breakthrough. After working incessantly on the small brass lock with two tacks she found on the
floor, it finally unlocked and she was freed.

Determined to find her love, she trod down eleven flights of stairs until she came to the ground. She stopped and stared at the massive door. It was the escape from everything she hated and the entrance to all she knew she’d love. Tangeeta would lock her up for the rest of her life if she found out, but that didn’t seem to matter much anymore. Since reading the sacred novel, a new Leise had emerged and taken over. This Leise needed only one thing, her true love.

Without another thought, she pushed open the door and stepped into the cool fresh outdoors. She looked around the landscape, but could not find what she was in search of. Walking around the bushes and on to the wet green grass, she thought of her book. She must remember to stand up straight, smile and bat her lashes and surely her true love would run to her and take her away to Europe where she would learn about theatre and classical music. What a wonderful life they would have together forever. She would get a job in (wait, what was it?)—architecture, and her love would cook and garden, and put rose petals on her pink satin sheets.

"What you doin’ out here?" were the words which ended her day dreaming. She looked up, startled, to see the man whom she was searching for.

"I’ve been looking for you, my darling."

"Girl, you must be crazy. My name ain’t darling. It’s Carlos, an’ you best git inside befo’ yo’ mama sees you.

"Carlos, I love you."

He looked at her, astonished. "What you talkin’ ’bout, girl? You must be crazy."

Leise was a little hurt, but she knew she could show him that they were destined to be together. "Come on, Carlos, we need to go. I know you love me, and we really must get going."

"Git goin’? The only place I’m goin’ is away from you. I don’ need no trouble."

"What are you talking about?" she said, beginning to cry. "We are meant for each other and we need each other to survive."

"I don’ know what you is talkin’ ’bout. I don’ even know you. All
I know is dat I best git away from you 'cause if yo' mama sees me, de only
gardens I be seein' is doze in my own graveyard." Having said this, he
turned away and began to jog in the opposite direction.

"Wait! Please, my love!" she called after him with tears running down
her face, beckoning for his return. He did not turn back and Leise just stood
there, numb. She had lost her love, and she watched, heavyhearted as he was
enveloped by the cool night air.

What would happen now? Her only chance for love was gone and
now she couldn't go to Europe and live peacefully in splendor. Her lover
was gone and she was left saddened and hopeless. She began to run across
the wet grass, through the lush trees until she reached the tall, pointed
wrought iron gates which were the only obstacle that stood between her and
freedom. Although the columns were bound very closely together in the
middle and top sectors, the bottom columns were fairly far apart leaving just
enough void for her to squeeze through. Once on the other side, she began
running. There was no hope for her, she thought. Leise ran up the brick
road through the midnight air, tears streaming down her cheeks. The small,
quaint homes of the town of Krestiva rushed past her as she fled. At last, she
stopped running and found herself on a fairly tall metal bridge which
connected East and West Krestiva.

She leaned against the railing and peered down at the deep black
waters far below. She thought about what it would be like to jump and end
her miserable life. Nothing could possibly feel worse than how she felt right
now. Besides, what exactly did she have to live for? She couldn't possibly
go back to the castle and she didn't know how to survive in the city.
Suddenly, she was startled by the sound of someone approaching. Leise
looked up to see a middle-aged woman who had black circles around her eyes
and wore ripped, battered clothing.

"Hello," said Leise.
"What's your reason, hon?" the woman said.
"What do you mean, ma'am?"
"I mean, what is your reason for jumping?"
"Why would you think that I would, ma'am? Are you?" she inquired.
"Well, it seems to me that that is what most people who come here
crying in the middle of the night intend to do. And yes, I am."

"Why will you be jumping, if I may be so bold, ma’am?"

"I am going to jump because I have nothing to live for," the woman said matter-of-factly.

"I have nothing to live for either," replied Leise sadly.

"Really, a young girl like you has nothing to live for? You’re not very convincing, kid."

"What do you mean?" Leise asked, confused.

"You are so young and have your entire life ahead of you." She hesitated. "Are you on the run or something?"

"Yes, I ran away. I have nowhere to go and no lover to take me to Europe."

The woman laughed. "Why do you need a lover to take you to Europe? God, I’m forty-eight, and I’ll be damned the day some babe sweeps me off my feet and takes me to Europe. Hell, I’ve been married twenty years, got four kids and I’ve never had anything close. You don’t need a lover, kid."

"Well, since I have run away, I won’t be becoming a politician like Tangeeta wanted."

"Tangeeta?! You must be kidding me! You’re the princess?!"

"Yes, ma’am," she replied.

"No wonder you’re all confused. I’ve heard all about the way they treat you. Anyway, why do you need to be a politician now, you’re free?"

"I don’t, I guess. Then what will I be?"

"What do you want to be?"

"I don’t know," Leise said thoughtfully.

"You don’t know? What do you like to do?" she asked.

"I don’t really know."

"How can you not know, child? Then what do you know?" There was no answer. "I guess I see how it is then, kid. Leise, let me tell you something. You have got to live for yourself, whoever that is. I don’t even think you know. Anyhow, you can’t live for your mother, and not for some nonexistent lover, that’s for sure. By the time I figured that out, my parents had already married me off to some abusive scum who beats me and my kids."
So, here I am, ready to do myself in, never living a day for myself in my life. And now it’s too late for me, but it’s not too late for you. Leise, you go out there and figure yourself out." She stuffed her hand in her pocket, pulled out the last of her money, and handed it to Leise. "Take this. Go and live."

"I don’t know what to say," Leise said as she watched the woman mount the railing. "What are you doing?"

"I’m jumping. You turn your head. You don’t need to see this."

"Please, don’t do it," Leise begged her.

"You don’t know what you’re saying, kid. You have no idea of the problems I got, and if you did, you’d be up here with me."

"You are right, I don’t know what kind of problems you have, but I do know that you have four kids who need you."

"I can’t go back there," she said sadly.

"Please, yes you can. You can’t leave them there. They need your love." Leise took out the money and handed it back to her. "Here, take your money back and save them like you saved me."

The woman looked down at the rushing waters and then at Leise. She carefully got down from the railing, took Leise’s hand and they disappeared down the long winding road.
Carriers of the Thunder Stick

by Catherine Aiken

Something was going to happen today, one of the elders told me. I nodded and smiled. I thought she meant that my brave would ask for my pledge of love. I left our camp in search of my sister eventually finding her by the river with her legs in the water. As I neared her I saw she was with her brave; they had secretly pledged their love to one another. He was in the water resting his head on her knee and they both were looking across the river intently at something I could not see.

I walked up to them and gently called her name. They smiled as I wrapped my arms around her shoulders. I looked towards where their gazes were directed. I knew then what it was they were captivated with: the silent beauty.

In the next instant explosions like thunder followed by screams broke the silence. We looked fearfully in the direction of camp. Before we realized we had even stood up, we found ourselves at the edge of camp hiding in the bushes. People we knew and loved lay all over the ground, pools of blood, open eyes, terror-stricken faces everywhere.

My sister’s brave saw the body of his mother and ran to her. My sister stood to follow him but I held her back. Something was not right, something was wrong. As we peered through the bushes we heard a crack of thunder. My sister’s brave screamed as his body twisted in agony. He fell to the ground and was surrounded by men with pale faces. My sister rose and ran to her brave screaming. They turned and stared. She ran up to her brave and held his head as he took his final, ragged breath. She fell over his body and sobbed.
I sat in shock. It was as if my body and my soul had been severed. I had no control over my body; I had tried to stop my sister and yet could not move a muscle to do it.

A young man with yellow hair knelt beside my sister and spoke to her in a language alien to my ears. The words themselves were strange and harsh yet the tone in which he spoke was amazingly soft. She did not look up but when he put his hand on her shoulder I saw her back go rigid. She sat up and looked at her lover with tender eyes then looked at the yellow-haired man with such intense abhorrence in her eyes that he had to look away.

She looked in my direction and began the death wail. I shivered in the warm heat. I sat there not knowing what to do. I desperately wanted to go to my sister but my body was still restraining me. I looked around for my brave but in my heart I knew I need not look: I could not feel him. I rose and walked to my sister. The men did not notice me until I was next to them. They raised their thunder sticks and watched me intently. I could feel their eyes burning through my skin.

The man with yellow hair stood as I knelt beside my sister and embraced her. We wailed together for our village, our people.

My sister and I were led to a camp that bore no resemblance to any other camp we had ever seen before. The first few weeks we were watched closely by the pale men. They believed we would run off to our home, but what home did we have? There was nothing our home had to offer to either of us.

The men were friendly to us and they respected us, which we found strange after what they had done to our people. The man with yellow hair, or the fair one as I began to call him, paid extra attention to us, tried to understand and please us.

He and I began to understand each other better. They were so strange in their ways and their tongue. My sister became more reclusive though. She spoke only when I was around and even then it was with great pain. She heavily mourned the loss of her lover and she wished to be with him.

One morning I woke up just as the sun was sifting through the treetops. I looked at the sleeping form of my sister then headed to the nearby river for a swim.
I walked into the slightly chilled waters and disappeared beneath the surface. I rose up with my eyes looking towards the shoreline silhouetted against the morning.

I saw a man's figure wading towards me. It was the fair one. He stopped a short distance from me and asked in my language if he could come near me. I nodded.

We returned to camp to find the men waiting for us with frightened looks on their faces. I ran to my sister worrying that something had happened to her. I found her curled up in a warm, secure ball. I sighed in relief and put my hand on her back. I recoiled in fear: her back did not rise. I rolled her over just as a hand was placed on my back. I screamed and threw myself into my fair one. He looked over my shoulder at the body still clutching the knife.

I began to crawl into a shell; I hardly spoke, ate little and became lost to myself. My fair one did everything for me; I no longer cared. I wished for death to steal me away. I became more detached as the men began talking of return to their home across the water. My fair one knew I would not go. I had neither desire nor reason.

The day of their departure came quickly. I watched them load the ship and said good-bye to each man as he boarded. Last was my fair one. He held me close and lowered his face to mine. I watched him walk up to the ship, then I turned around. I felt arms clasp themselves around me. He turned me and told me he could not leave me.

There was nothing that either of us wanted more than the other. We watched the ship sail off into the blue and embraced each other, embraced life and our love.
drama
The Secret Club

by Rebecca Hayes

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

EARL, 11, friends with Sara and Ben; founder of the club

SARA, 10, member of the club; friends with Ben and Earl

SETTING:

The action occurs in the present and in the summer one Saturday afternoon in the attic of EARL’s garage where meetings of the Secret Club are held weekly.

The garage attic has an entrance from the lower level, denoted by an opening in the floor in the left front part of the stage. Steps lead up to the attic from this entrance. No other exits are visible. A tattered red couch is in the stage’s center with an antique nightstand positioned next to it. A radio sits atop the nightstand. Strewn about the attic are tied newspaper stacks, labeled boxes, kitschy furniture, a tennis racquet, instrument cases, a clothes rack, and a full-length oblong mirror. Three small windows, very dusty, look out to the neighborhood.
(In the darkness, radio static can be heard. Lights up and EARL is seen, his back to the audience. He is adjusting the dial and settles on Frank Sinatra singing "Stormy Weather." EARL throws himself onto the couch and lets his leg hang down. SARA is heard climbing the stairs.)

EARL: Hi, Sara.

SARA: Sorry I'm late. (Fingers inside of her mouth.) Had to get my wires changed. Ouch. (EARL is ignoring her. He is now sitting up and lip synching to the song. SARA's hands are still in her mouth.) I can't wait until you hafta get braces.

EARL: Is Ben coming?

SARA: Ben?

EARL: Yeah. Ben. Where is he?

SARA: I dunno. I'm not his babysitter.

EARL: I hate it when he's late.

SARA: We've only had three meetings.

EARL: He's been late twice.

SARA: So maybe he's sick or something.

EARL: Who gets sick in the summer?

SARA: Your brother was sick right after school got out.

EARL: Kip had his appendix out. That's different.
SARA: Everything’s different with Kip.

EARL: What’s that s’posed to mean?

SARA: Hey! I think he’s cool too.

EARL: He’s not, okay? He’s just my brother.

SARA: Oh, come on. You *like* him. Remember that time he gave you that baseball card and--

EARL: It was a Cal Ripken. It was a good card.

SARA: I *know*. It’s just that you bragged about how much Kip liked it and then he gave it to you. And how you always say, ‘My big brother’s older than yours and he can come and beat you up!’ to Brendan Price on the bus.

EARL: Excuse me for not being an only child.

SARA: Oh, who cares. I’m just saying maybe Ben’s sick. *(Goes to radio and slaps it off.)* That’s all. We should just start the meeting.

EARL: You don’t have to make excuses for him.

SARA: Someone’s in a bad mood today.

EARL: Am not.

*(SARA shrugs, imagines a balance beam in front of her and begins a routine.)*

SARA: Let’s just start without him.
EARL: What if he just quit?

SARA: You want to call him?

EARL: I shouldn’t have to.

SARA: *(Split leap.)* Maybe he forgot.

EARL: Didn’t you talk to him yesterday?

SARA: Yeah.

EARL: Did he look sick?

SARA: *(From handstand.)* I don’t know.

EARL: Did he say he’d be here?

SARA: I think so.

EARL: So why isn’t he here?

SARA: *(Cartwheel.)* I don’t know, stupid. He’s just … late or something.

EARL: He just better be here in five minutes--or else he’s out of the club.

SARA: Why are you making such a big deal about it?

EARL: I can do what I want.

SARA: You’re being dumb.

EARL: *(Turns radio back on, tries to find a station.)* Shut up.
SARA: (Pauses.) Want me to tell Kip you like Gina? He’d really like that.

EARL: (Not finding a station.) Shut up.

SARA: (Giggling.) ‘Kip! Kip! Guess who likes your girlfriend!’

EARL: Shut up. I never liked her.

SARA: Oh, come on. I know you like somebody.

EARL: Do not.

SARA: I’m not gonna tell.

EARL: I don’t like anybody, okay?

SARA: Not even ... me? (Cartwheel.)

EARL: What is it with you? (To himself.) Ben just better get here.

SARA: (Goes to radio, turns to frenetic violin duet.) So what are we gonna do until then?

EARL: I don’t know.

(SARA dismounts beam and presents to where the judges would be. EARL turns radio off. SARA lies on the floor and does knee kicks into the air.)

SARA: I know.

EARL: What?

SARA: Well ... I’ve got a secret.
EARL: The meeting hasn’t started yet, Sara.

SARA: So?

EARL: So you can’t tell the secret yet. Remember when we made the rules?

SARA: You made up most of them. I can’t remember them all. Me and Ben just made up the secret kick. Come on, Earl. You need to practice this ... (Stands on one leg.) Come on, Earl. You need to practice this. Don’t you want us to be a real club, where we all know the secret stuff? This kick is really pretty easy.

EARL: Come on! Wait till Ben gets here.

SARA: Oh...

EARL: What?

SARA: (Flops on couch next to EARL.) Earl, we’ve gotta start the meeting.

EARL: How come?

SARA: Because we gotta.

EARL: (To himself.) Stupid Ben.

SARA: Yeah, stupid Ben. But we gotta start.

EARL: I guess so. He’s had enough time.

SARA: Yeah...

EARL: So it’s started.
SARA: You hafta start it like always, so it’s for real.

EARL: Okay, fine. I call the meeting of the Secret Club in order--

SARA: No! You hafta say ‘to order.’

EARL: Okay, I call this meeting to order. Now you do that flip thing.

SARA: It’s called a back walkover.

EARL: Whatever.

SARA: It’s important, Earl. You have to pay attention to these things if we’re gonna be a good club. (Gets in the stance, puts arms over head, then looks back to EARL.) So you remember why I’m doing this?

EARL: I know why. It’s so the secrets don’t get out.

SARA: Right. (Arches into backbend.) Okay, Earl, go under. (EARL pushes himself on the ground, slides under SARA’S arc.) Good. (SARA kicks her legs up and over, completing the walkover.)

EARL: Now we can start.

SARA: Earl! You forgot the kick. You’ve gotta get the kick. I promise I won’t make fun. Come on! See. (Goes to mirror.) Just stand here and practice. I’m the only one here. Come on.

EARL: And if Ben comes--

SARA: Then you can show him how good you can do it. Come on, I’ll practice with you.
(SARA stands in front of mirror, raises one knee, swings it up and left, kicking leg out, then swings it down and to the right, kicking it out again. Her hips twist; effect is hilarious.)

EARL: Wow, Sara, do you think you could teach me to do it just like that?

SARA: (Unaware of his sarcasm.) Of course, Earl! Then me and you and Ben can do it in front of other people and they won’t even know--(Turns away from the mirror to face EARL. He is now dissolved in laughter.) Thanks a lot, Earl.

EARL: What?

SARA: I do a lot for the club and then you have to go and make fun of me. Thanks a lot.

EARL: I’m sorry. It’s just that it looks so funny when you do it, when you get so in to it.

SARA: I don’t see you trying to do it. Before you make fun of me, I’d like to see you try to do it. I think you’re just jealous of how flexible I am. (Pause.) I can do the splits all three ways.

EARL: Hey, I never said you couldn’t.

SARA: I still think you should try it.

EARL: I’ll just wait until Ben comes. He’s not so good at it either. We can look dumb together.

SARA: (Looks out window.) Just stop it, Earl.... He’s not coming.

EARL: (Moving to window.) How do you know?
SARA: I just do.

EARL: Sara...

SARA: You’re gonna be mad if I tell.

EARL: Just tell.

SARA: (Faces EARL.) Ben’s not sick. He’s fine. He’s just not gonna come anymore. He’s not coming and he says he quits.

EARL: He quit? Why did he quit?

SARA: (Kicking floor.) Just ’cause.

EARL: (Sits on couch.) I don’t care.

SARA: (Sits on opposite end of couch.) Yes, you do.

EARL: Just forget it.

SARA: Why did he quit, Earl?

EARL: We don’t need Ben.

SARA: Come on, Earl. You care.

EARL: Forget about Ben, Sara. (Pause.) Did he say anything else to you?

SARA: He just said to tell you he quits. Honest.

EARL: He didn’t say why?

SARA: Uh-uh.
EARL: I don’t care.

(Pause.)

SARA: Earl?

EARL: Huh?

SARA: Promise not to be mad?

EARL: About what?

SARA: I’m not saying I think it’s true or anything, it’s just what Ben said. (Pause.) He said you broke a rule.

EARL: You said he didn’t say anything.

SARA: He said you broke a rule.

EARL: What rule?

SARA: Just a rule. He said you broke a rule and the club was stupid if you weren’t gonna follow the rules.

EARL: “He said that?”

SARA: Yeah.

EARL: He’s a liar. He’s a liar and a cheater and I hate him.

SARA: What happened, Earl? Why did Ben quit?

EARL: I can’t believe he told you. (Gets up, kicks the floor, finds a baseball bat in the rummage and tries grips out, swinging it around.)
SARA: What's wrong?

EARL: I can't believe he told you.

SARA: It's a secret.

EARL: But it's not. It was just an accident.

SARA: Oh.

EARL: I told him not to say anything. I was gonna tell it today. And Ben was gonna be here.

SARA: Uh-huh.

EARL: (Swings at some boxes, knocking them over.) And he quit.

SARA: Yeah. He quit.

EARL: (Swings at the clothes rack. Some dresses fall limply out of their hangers.) He quit the stupid club and he's probably telling everybody.

SARA: He was with Joey when I saw him. But I don't think Joey'd tell... I mean, I don't think Ben would tell, but--

EARL: (Releases bat into the pile of dresses.) Who cares.

SARA: So was that your secret today? What you already told Ben?

EARL: I didn't mean to tell him.

SARA: But was it?

EARL: It was just an accident.
SARA: (Pause.) What did you tell Ben, Earl?

EARL: It’s nothing, Sara. (SARA goes to clothes rack and places one hand on the top bar for balance and begins going through ballet positions. EARL has found a lighter and is on the couch, trying to get it to catch.) It’s not a secret.

SARA: So what is it?

EARL: It’s just ... a thing.

SARA: (Stops, frozen with her knee held horizontal.) It’s a secret, Earl. I’m not stupid.

EARL: Is not, okay?

SARA: (Moves away from bar.) If you’re scared to tell, it’s a secret.

EARL: I told you! I was gonna tell.

SARA: (Walks in front of couch, presents to audience and mounts beam.) But you’re not.

EARL: I didn’t think Ben would quit.

SARA: You don’t trust me.

EARL: Sara--

SARA: It was your idea to have a club.

EARL: Yeah, so?

SARA: (Pauses to face EARL.) So you should follow your own stupid rules
and keep the secrets in the club. You should listen to Ben!

EARL: And you should leave me alone. If you’d told me maybe I could’ve talked to Ben before now, before the meeting.

SARA: (Tries to resume routine, looks confused, can’t remember what to do next.) You wouldn’t go talk to him. You’re afraid of him ’cause now he’s got your secret. You let it out of the club where we kept them safe. (Walks away from beam to behind couch.)

EARL: (Turning to face SARA over couch’s back.) It’s not a secret!

SARA: Is too!

EARL: Is not!

SARA: Is too!

EARL: Is not!

SARA: Is too! Is too! Is too, and you know it.

EARL: Shut up! Why don’t you go play with Ben since he’s your best friend.

SARA: Maybe I will.

EARL: (Throws down lighter.) Go ahead. I don’t care.

SARA: (Crosses arms.) Alright, I will. I’ll ask him to tell me the secret. And he’ll tell me. And I’ll tell everyone.

(Pause.)
EARL: You wanna know? Fine. I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you the secret. But you can’t tell everyone. And you won’t like it.

SARA: What do you mean?

EARL: I’m just warning you.

SARA: Did you warn Ben?

EARL: I didn’t have to, he just asked me a question and I just answered him.

SARA: What did he ask you?

(EARL bends over and pulls up the back of his shirt, craning his arms to point out the scars--mainly cigarette burns but also infected welts, scabs.)

EARL: See it? See the secret?

SARA: (Backs away.) What happened, Earl?

EARL: It’s what happens when I go to Maryland.

SARA: To visit your dad? (EARL nods.) Earl ... this is really bad. Your dad does this to you?

EARL: I only see him once a year! This time Mom let me stay longer because Kip got a job. I stayed all of June and until after the Fourth of July--that was when me and dad took the boat out in the bay to get a better view than anybody else. I wasn’t s’posed to get scared but I thought those fireworks were going to crash into us... He was mad about me being scared.

SARA: (Backing further away.) Earl ...
EARL: What? I told you the secret, dummy. What more do you want?

SARA: You’re right, Earl. It’s not a secret.

EARL: Okay, fine. Who cares?

SARA: Ben does. He’s upset.

EARL: He just saw my back when we were on the tire swing. I didn’t think he saw but he started talking about how my back was all funny-looking and like I had chicken pox or something. But worse, he said. And this was in front of everybody--Casey, Pat, Kelly, Joey. so I took him over by the slides and told him to shut up about it, that it’s from my dad and just shut up about it. Then he just shut up for real ... didn’t say anything. So I had to make him promise not to tell. He wouldn’t even look at me. Acted all scared like I was gonna hurt him or something.

SARA: Earl ...

EARL: I wish Ben didn’t know.

SARA: You were going to tell anyway.

EARL: I don’t know if I was or not. I’m just sick of this. (Curls up on couch.)

SARA: (Mounts imaginary beam again, arms are limp at her side, points her toes and walks the beam, staring blankly ahead.) I wish I didn’t know your secret. It’s a bad secret.

EARL: I told you, it’s just stupid! I only go to my dad’s once a year!

SARA: I hafta find Ben.
EARL: No, you can’t! You can’t! I mean it, Sara! It’s not a bad secret! You don’t have to get all worried.

SARA: It’s a million times worse than a bad secret.

EARL: I thought I could trust you.

SARA: It’s not my fault you didn’t tell on him sooner.

EARL: If you tell, they’ll never let me see my dad again.

SARA: I’ve gotta find Ben.

EARL: (Grabs her arm.) Don’t, Sara! Okay! It’s a bad secret, I know, but please! Just stay.

SARA: Let go of me! I’m gonna get your mom!

EARL: She’s not home.

SARA: (Breaks free.) I don’t care.

EARL: Sara, I’m sorry. Please just stay. The meeting’s not over.

SARA: You shouldn’t have told anybody, Earl. Not if you wanted to keep it a secret.

EARL: (Breaking into tears.) It was an accident. He doesn’t really mean to. He gets mad. That’s all. He gets mad and then he tells me I have to take it like a man. But then it doesn’t stop. I hate it! I hate it!

(Earl buries his face in the couch, crying. Sara moves next to him and puts her arm around him. Earl shrugs her off. Sara stares out the window. Earl continues crying and swings his fists at the couch;
consequently, the radio falls off the nightstand and static is heard, caught exactly between two stations.)

SARA: Earl, does Kip know?

EARL: No.

SARA: I think we should tell Kip.

EARL: You can’t. I mean it, Sara, you can’t tell. Besides, you’d be breaking the rules. You’re always making such a big deal about how we have to keep the secrets in the club. The meeting isn’t over, Sara, and this is a secret. You can’t just break the rules.


EARL: So what if I did? Would you still want to tell? ...

SARA: Earl, this isn’t fair.

EARL: You can’t tell. If you told, we wouldn’t be a club anymore. You want to keep the club, don’t you?

SARA: Earl, this isn’t going to stop, is it? Your dad’s going to keep hurting you.

EARL: ... I only see him once a year.... I hafta learn to be a man.... It won’t happen again. He just got mad. (SARA kicks at the floor slowly.) So you can’t tell, okay?

SARA: (Looking at floor.) Okay, Earl.

EARL: I know what you think, and I know about Ben and--
SARA: I won't tell, okay?

EARL: Okay.

SARA: I think the meeting's over, Earl. I've gotta go.

EARL: I know. The meeting's over. I know.

(As SARA exits, EARL picks up cigarette lighter from floor, tries getting it to catch again; it does. Lights out, the flame is seen in the dark.)

end of play
poetry
The Scarecrow

Watch danger dangle on a candle
watch fear mount,
a hidden rider
a scarecrow hides
in the afternoon sun
screaming it wails
as the sun burns it
down
it slowly descends
under the morning’s already hot air
sending putrid smells of burning flesh

watch it dangle
in the afternoon sun
watch the birds pick and chew

Rob Lawrence
Winds

A sun filled room aglow.
Next to me you sit
hair tucked behind your ears.
Fake smiles await snapshots.

I think of you as it blows across my face.
Always moving, passing me by.
Constant motion both warm and cold.
Never stopping to enjoy the world as it passes you by.

You’re hardly around and when you are
you’re busy. You’re the breeze that’s always there and then gone.
Are you there or just the wind?

You don’t want to see me or hear me.
I want to know why you
don’t care and pass me like the wind
that you so often glide upon.
Do you see me or do you see what you want to?

You say that I’m trying to get attention,
nothing’s wrong. All that is there is a smart remark
that hurts. You don’t even make an effort.

Maybe if the breeze dies
you open your eyes
pictures won’t be the only time we’re together.
We won’t be pushed past each other by the wind anymore.

*Courtney Schubring*
Hypocrisy

When I was little,
my mom said,
"You can do
anything
you want."
When I was five,
I wanted to be
a firefighter,
like my dad.
I wanted to be
a big, strong
hero.
When I was seven,
I wanted to be
a teacher,
so I could watch
little children
grow before my eyes.
When I was ten,
I wanted to be
the President.
I wanted to be
the most powerful
person
in America.
But I grew up
to a world
where women
dance on tabletops
in their
underwear.
And nobody listens
when I'm screaming
for a chance,
because I aspire
to greater things,
because I
refuse
to sell
my dignity
for a few
hundred dollars
a night.

Julie Koval
Dreams

Sitting
in Aunt Debbie’s house,
surrounded by
fine and expensive interior decorations
in the unnecessary large sitting room.
It was a silent cathedral.

Is wealth an empty dream to fulfill?

In 6th grade
I imagined being successful,
INDEPENDENT

Rich
I dreamed of
shining crystal,
sparkling fountains,
maids and butlers,
A limitless wardrobe,
and a ballroom to host grand parties.
An indoor pool and Jacuzzi in every bathroom.

Now that fantasy
is gone.
I look closer
into a rich future
and see
a stressed lonely woman.
No time for family
Unused Jacuzzis
An empty pool.
No laughter, not even in my thoughts.
A ballroom full
greedy business acquaintances.
Dinner alone
table for twenty
occupied solely by me.

No
this is not a wealth to dream for.
I would rather be
a middle class wife,
with three or four children.
Be a Spanish teacher,
have time for my children.
Laugh with them.
Dinner time together
tell stories--the day's events.
Friendly neighbors.
A medium sized house
overflowing with love--not money.

Shaunna Barr
Paper

When you invite the light in,  
the trees and the lake come, too.  
These are days to remember  
in our uncertain world.  
Don’t just  
wilt like flowers.  
Get what you want.  
Wake up  
and realize  
that your fantasy  
IS  
at your fingertips.  
You were born  
in a world, where  
The best ideas  
don’t always, start  
with a clean sheet  
of paper.

Kelly Kovacs
A Dead Girl

I remember
she was always
amazed
at the size of the
fish in my
backyard pond.

I remember,
the day she
grew
out of my
tree, I
picked her
out of the grass,
like a flower--
tender and alive--
then hung out
to dry.

Lisa Brow
Drinking Nights in Brooklyn

Loungin’ in a smoky room
Leather chair possibly a cigar
Lit to perfection
Saxophone smooth and gentle
Black man playing from
Memphis maybe New Orleans
Playing mean

I don’t like to drink
But it’s jazz night
Brandy with ice
Wet napkin underneath
Dizzy jazz moving
People talking laughing
Drinks splashing

Stopped at the men’s room
To regulate my body
Jazz night drinking
Tip-tat-tinking go easy snare drum
You got the crowd thinking
Feel the beat
Dancing feet.

Adam Collins
The Trout

Down the river,
past the cabin
past the old tree
with the gnarled limbs
down where the river bends
and wanders back towards the cabin.
The shady bend
where the current has cut away at the bank,
carving a deep exposed overhang
and a fallen tree
channels the water across a deep dark hole.

In the hole
beneath the undercut bank.
There the trout lives.
As he has since before the cabin was built.
There he swims
evading the fisherman’s hook
and the predator’s claw.
Gliding among the exposed roots.
Eternally.

Will Code
Funky Miasma

Don’t you want to get up on the desk
and scream loud obscenities
at the top of your lungs
and jump up and down
and run like hell to 7-11
walk in like you own the place
and demand a large pot of coffee
for you and me, babe
drink it down
until you’re too full of caffeine
to stand still
you jump over moving cars
like they were hurdles
and do primal screams
paint the town
maraschino cherry red
after we have exhausted
every cell in our little bodies
we’ll find a mud field someplace
far from here
where we’ll throw mudclots
act like little girls can’t
and little boys can
we’ll make gourmet mud pies
and throw them at passersby
until isolation is a thing
we need not crave
we’ll take off our shoes
long since
super-saturated with mud
and laugh
because even crazy things
are better than nothing

Alyssha "Kat" Holdren
I couldn’t sleep so I pretended

we were on that dream date
where you lead me through the dark woods
and teach me about the astrology
I used to ignore in the Planetarium
and when I drop my eyes
from the clear stars
to sneak a look at you
you’re staring at me

Maureen McCarty