

The York Review

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Fragile

Shattered.
Like a stained glass window,
But not as pretty.
My colors run--
Fluid to the last.
Four years,
And I am nothing but older.
Trying desperately to put myself together
Again,
And yet, I've forgotten
Who I was.

Stained by years of uncertainty--
Canvas, white and pure,
Stained red and sorry,
Ever blue, like water--
To cleanse,
To bathe,
Rivers of soul pour over flesh.
A scream
Silenced.
To be seen and not heard.
To be touched and not loved.
To cry like a child
In borrowed sheets,
But you were deaf like stone--solid
Till my wall came crashing down.

A fractured soul doesn't show up in the mirror.
And time doesn't heal all wounds.
To fall from grace,
One must have resided there.

-Ann Johnston-

Barbarian In Black Formal

by

Kristin R. Scott

I am a barbarian. I move as one, like I can only focus on one thing at a time. I grunt, in my own way, spitting out the appropriate answers to polite questions. My eyes are glazed and perfectly round. I look straight ahead of myself, being careful not to make eye contact. If my eyes meet someone else's, they might betray the pain I'm trying to conceal. Almost anyone in my situation would. I can't do it, really. But it has to be done. I have to be 'strong' and 'doing so well with it, really' or something in that strain. Because I can't let them see me cry. I'm not evolved enough. There is still an unrefined savage in me. Buried so deeply in the DNA, going back hundreds of generations, is that fear of letting someone have visual proof of your grief. Why do I constantly feel the need to hide all of these normal human emotions? I don't know. No one knows why people do it, why humans just generally aren't open enough to express their emotions freely. So that's it. The really real truth. I haven't evolved enough yet. I'm still a primitive. A savage. A barbarian. But I stand here, fake smile on my lips, glazed eyes that never seem to focus fully on you, standing here, shaking your hand. Dressed in my best black wool, high heels, even with my hair done, standing shaking your hand stranger, in front of a coffin, where my Grandfather lies, dead.

10:11

by

Jerry Kimbrough

I. Ian. 8:42 PM.

I have no idea what color scheme Ollie's car falls under. Using the Crayola color chart, "sea green" is the most likely candidate, although I still think that all crayon companies should consider creating a "sickly green" crayon to properly capture the essence of Charlotte.

He'd named the car after his mom, which could've been considered a grievous insult to her. I'd gone with Ollie to pick it up; he had bought it from a sixtysomething year old man who lived four or five streets away from my house. When he saw that car, I swear...I didn't even bother trying to argue with him. He paid fifty dollars for it; a Buick Regal that Charon would probably feel most comfortable rowing down the River Styx. He'd had his driver's license for a year, and nearly went into convulsions on the prospect of his own wheels. He apparently hadn't renewed his contact lens prescription though, because I distinctly remember him calling that car "cute". Adorable.

Up until the night of Ollie's accident, the car looked aesthetically good; no dents, nothing. Hell...it was raining pretty hard. Anyone could have been in his situation. I can still summon up images of his chubby face, his eyes bulging in shock, his mouth open in a silent scream. I almost laughed. I'm sorry to say it, but I almost laughed, it looked that funny, man.

So it's October fifth, sometime at night; we're sitting uncomfortably in Ollie's car.. Our search for an ultimate purpose for the day had yielded visiting the newly renovated McDonalds, somewhere on Route 35. Paul sat in the passenger seat, staring out through the frosted glass. Ollie cuffed him gently across the forehead. "C'mon, man. I heard they have a life-sized sculpture of Ronald McDonald on the roof."

Paul gave him a withering look, but said nothing. Most likely, he was thinking about the last McDonalds he had eaten at; he had bitten into his McChicken sandwich with great zest and gusto, and had been delighted when he discovered six or seven strands of blond hair in his mouth. His face showed no surprise. I couldn't say anything. Satisfied with my apparent inability to speak, he very deliberately stood up and made his way through the exit door. "Why waste a perfectly good sandwich like that?" Ollie mused to nobody in particular. Nobody in particular answered.

The previous owner of Ollie's car had, in a bimonthly pattern, set his house ablaze and watched the fire rage from a group of poplar trees across the street. It always happened at the same time; eleven after ten in the evening. I had watched his house burn once when I was twelve and once on my sixteenth birthday. The moon had been full both nights, and eerily seemed to complement the crackling and hissing flames; the moonbeams evoked something of a spirituality within the fire. This sight spoke volumes to me; the simplicity of the universe was revealed to me within the conflagration. Ignite a match, and it'll burn. What you see is what you get.

I don't know if the owner - Heckman, his name was - was trying to reveal some intricate symbolism about the decay of humanity by setting his house on fire. Might have been the full moon. Maybe his neighbor's lawn furniture told him to do it. I don't know. Or really care. The town eventually found out about his devoted pyromania; his clothes were soaked in gasoline when they found him, passed out by the grove of poplars. He threw himself in front of a Mack truck three months later, on Route 18. Aww.

Paul's voice knocked me out of my reverie. "We're here," he grumbled. "If you wanted to sleep, you shouldn't have come."

I grunted eloquently by way of response, and nudged the back door open.

II. Paul. 9:06 PM.

A chill raced through my body and I heard her voice, needling me. "Good thing it didn't eat you up like it ate me up, Paulie." I could almost see her, smiling that lopsided grin, her pigtailed wagging up and down in the wind. I shut my eyes.

Don't make an idiot of yourself, Klein. Don't. Take some deep breaths. Clear your mind. Relax. Compose yourself. I looked up; Ian was looking at me, bewilderment etched upon his face. Before I could say anything, he lowered his head and marched towards the entrance. Ollie slammed a meaty paw into the small of my back. "This's gonna be great, man. Might get another instant win, y'know? Either way, it's gonna be *great*."

I rubbed my forehead. A particularly *great* migraine was starting to develop towards the back of my head. Yep. Pretty great.

The place was decked out in a garish fashion; overdone and tacky, probably too expensive. A waste. "Wow," Ollie breathed, taking in the sights. "Beautiful." I glared at him. Ian had a familiar indifferent look on his face.

I shambled up to the registers and ordered a combo meal. "Uh, could you possibly make sure that there's no hair or human debris on my food?"

Ian snickered. Ollie shoved me aside and began to profusely apologize for my behavior. The clerk, a fifteen year old redhead with spiked hair, looked to have tears in his eyes. "The burgers here are really quite clean, sir," he offered, in a trembling and petulant tone.

"See?" Ollie crowed. People looked up from their meals, chuckled, and went back to eating. "Not clean, but *quite* clean! I'm sure that this fine lad," he preached, indicating the clerk, "supervises the cleanliness of the meats *himself*, for that matter!" Meatmaster Spike beamed at this. Ollie looked at me reproachfully. "Now pay the man."

I paid the kid. "Money's a fuckin' curse, kid. Get rid of it." I glanced at my food. "No hair. Nice."

Ian was already sitting, far in the back. "Surprised you got into the car tonight," he said, examining a value meal advertisement on the wall.

I looked at him questioningly. He locked eyes with me for a second. "You know."

I knew. Lindsey's voice returned, filling my ears. "Paulie, I got into a car once and it ate me up, Paulie, it ate me up and spat me out." A spasm of pain blasted through the top of my head. Jesus, nothing bad had happened this time, but I was really pushing my luck, right? His car could blow up, couldn't it? Get hit by a bus? Fly off a cliff? My sister had died in a car; why shouldn't I?

I opened my mouth to respond to Ian, but he had already directed his attention to the Extra Extra value meal advertisements on the other side of the store. Fuckin' shouldn't have bothered talking to him, anyway.

Ollie returned with two large cups of water and placed them in front of us. Ian looked briefly up at his. "I don't want this," he said dryly, and pushed the cup away from him. I took it and drank deeply from it. Restrained the urge to spit it out. Disgusting.

The rain began to pound against the glass windows of the restaurant. I disposed of all my trash and followed my friends out, leaving the half-empty cup on the table. Place sucked, anyway. My sister's voice mocked me as I walked to the car, growing louder with each

step. God. Stop, please. Stop.

III. Ollie. 10:04 PM.

I love going to McDonalds. When I was little, I always used to get the Happy Meals. They were so great. My mom would take me out every Saturday and get me the chicken nugget meal, the one that came with that yellow brontosaurus. It was great.

I don't really think Paulie likes my car. He always fidgets when he's in the front seat and even in the back. His sister was killed in a car accident, did you know that? She was being driven home by Mrs. Sullivan, her friend Susie's mother, and they hydroplaned off the road and flipped six times. They both were killed on impact, but it's okay, because they're in Heaven now with baby Jesus. So it's cool, right?

After we left McDonalds, Ian brooded during the entire highway trip and only relaxed when we hit his neighborhood. He didn't like the rain, he said; it made him nervous. Which was kinda weird; Ian's not usually nervous. In fact, he's rarely much of anything. I contemplated turning on the windshield wipers, but hell, there's no one on the roads at ten, is there?

"Turn your windshield wipers on." This came from Paul, whose voice was quavering. "It's raining pretty fucking hard, man."

"We're almost home," I said through gritted teeth. I *hate* it when people tell me what to do! "Hell, there's no one on the roads at ten, is there?"

Paul didn't say anything to this, which made me even *madder*. I turned around and locked eyes with him. "Nothing'll happen."

But something happened. I hit something. "Ah, damn," I complained. "Shit. Oh, well. I had to get the front end fixed anyway." I glanced back – Ian sounded eerily like he was laughing.

I pulled over to the side of the road; the rain was slowing now, and the moon was shining a feeble glow on the surroundings. We all marched, single file, down the road to whatever I hit.

Oh. Not great. Not great at all.

I turned and looked at my friends. "Guys," I said apologetically, "I gotta go home and tell my mom that my car's kinda trashed. Just wait here, okay?" Without waiting for a reply, I turned and ran to my Charlotte, my poor Charlotte, I could almost feel her pain, almost. Her engine started, and I looked back and saw Paul retreating in the other direction. Ian stood there, his coat unbuttoned, hands in his pockets, looking at the ground.

Gotta go. Bye.

IV. Ian revisited. 10:11 PM.

The strains of Beethoven's ninth symphony floated in my ears. The poplars rustled in the breeze, their branches groping towards the skyline. The girl was roughly nine or ten years old, with a shining head of blonde hair and a light scattering of freckles across the bridge of her nose. I didn't know her name, her parents, or where she lived. She was very, very dead. She lay on her back, her arms and legs spread out. Her hair caressed the pavement. God, she looked like an angel. Her eyes were still open, unblinking; green. I looked away.

Why the hell was she on the road? She might have been walking home. That really didn't matter, though – she was dead, and that's enough to deal with, believe me. I felt something...new. Pity, sympathy – terror, disdain – it was a combination of the four. Maybe more. No wonder the others ran. I knew Paul would, but Ollie?

That didn't matter either. I knelt beside her and tried to shut her eyes. They wouldn't close. Horrified, I pulled my jacket off and spread it over her face. I couldn't look at her; she might let out one final scream, or grab my throat or something.

"Why?" I asked the sky. "What the hell is this?" No answer. I hurried over to the old, weathered payphone on the side of the road. Grabbed the receiver. Dialed.

As I spoke to the really not-so-polite 911 operator, I glimpsed movement in my peripheral vision. It appeared to be Paul; he had come back. *That* was unexpected. I hung up and turned; he was sitting, crosslegged, by the girl's body. I walked over. "Didn't think you were gonna make it back, pal." He didn't reply. "It's not her, Paulie. You've got to deal with this. Death sucks, man. It does. I've had my share of death. It's the way our world works, man." I ceased preaching; Paul wasn't saying anything. He had moved my jacket and was staring into the girl's eyes.

"Ate her up, man," he said. I nodded. It sure did, buddy.

As the wail of sirens began to come ever-closer, I knelt there next to my friend and the little girl whose face, to him, was probably identical to his sister's. I looked to the sky, which still hadn't responded to my previous question.

It probably couldn't think of an answer.

The Conversation

I wonder why	She listens
he provokes tenderness	with a sweet gravity
and trembling	suppressed joy
He gently guides	my thoughts
through awkward pauses	seizing forgotten words
I want to whisper	darling, cherish
that you understand	the heavenly serendipity
wanting to preserve	your presence in my life
the beautiful fragility	time only deepens
this love-dream	

-Bettina Jaffe-

Yesterday

Yesterday,
My heart was broken by a
Sassenach.
Tall drink of water with
Blue eyes and a
Girlfriend.

-Ann Johnston-

Small Campus

By David Rahn

"You shouldn't have any trouble finding your way around here at York College. It's a small campus" said Associate Registrar Jessica Bryson. I was beginning the process of registering for full time classes. I looked out the window of her office and saw a large brick building, beyond which sat another of similar size. Looking hard to my left I could see the flagpole and fountain that mark the geographic center of the campus. I suppose that, compared to other campuses, York's might be considered small.

But at that moment my mind went back to another school setting over fifty years ago. I was six years old and it was the first day of school of my life. I was in the company of my older brother Bill, and Mary, my only sister, in sixth and seventh grades respectively (giants, by my then reckoning) and John, my closest brother in age and a third grader. We walked the one-and-a-half miles to a one-room schoolhouse.

It was the autumn of 1945 and, though few knew it then, the institution known as the one-room school had less than ten years left of existence. By the middle of the 1950s nearly all of York County's little brick schoolhouses had been replaced by the consolidated schools that we know today as area school systems. I have unwittingly become a bridge from that time to this, and I would like to share with my readers a glimpse of school life in that period and in those surroundings.

The walk to school was not over roads. It was through open farmland and the route followed nothing more sophisticated than machinery trails. In fact, the first third of the way was only a cowpath through Edwin Adam's large meadow (known to all the local kids as Adam's hill and a great favorite for sledding in winter, except for that darn creek at the bottom). The school itself was tucked into the geography so neatly and so removed from public roads that I could place most people in the correct township and allow them a full day of searching and they probably would not find it.

Nearly all of these schools were built just after 1900 and followed a similar pattern of construction. Most were brick, though a few were stone and even fewer were made of wood, which required more maintenance. Ours was brick and was named Snyder's School for no particular reason that I could ever determine. A reasonable guess would be that the name came from the first teacher to preside there. Coincidentally, my teacher's name was Daniel Snyder, but he had only been there a few years at the time and so was hardly the reason for the school's title.

The structure was nearly square in shape, measuring thirty four feet in length and thirty in width. Light entered the building through four tall windows on each side of the school. The front had only a solid wood door with a movable transom above it for light and air. The back was adorned with nothing more elaborate than a chimney placed in the very center so that it emerged through the peak of the rather steep slate roof. There was a porch running the entire width of the front making easy access to the door. The interior walls to the right and left of the door contained shelves and coathooks (a nicety strangely absent here in the classrooms at York College) that continued to the corners of the room and along about four feet of the side walls. Just inside the door was a rope tucked into a holder against the front wall and rising up to disappear through a small hole in the ceiling. This was the bell rope and was used four times daily: It convened classes at eight in the morning, announced the end of the morning and afternoon recesses and called us all inside at the end of the one hour lunch break. The bell had an audible range of at least a mile, which was just as well since the adjacent woods were a powerful draw to restless students, especially in the spring when Nature was coming alive again and singing her siren song to kids who didn't really want to be in

school anyway.

Inside there were four rows of desks containing six in each row. These desks were wide and intended to seat two students. A little math indicates that the school could then hold 48 pupils, but this was rarely the case. A more likely figure would have been in the mid thirties. The usual approach to seating was to double up the smaller children and allow the higher grades to occupy desks singly. Compatibility was a factor in seat assignment and some shifting of desks early in the term was standard procedure. If a troublemaker emerged, that person would find him/her self seated alone and near the front of the room. This search for optimum seating was generally accomplished within a few weeks of the beginning of the term.

The desks faced the rear blank wall of the building and, like schools today, there was a chalkboard running nearly the entire width of the room. The difference there was that this was real slate and at that time the phrase "chalkboard" was unnecessary. We knew it only as the "blackboard" since slate was always that color. Above this blackboard were displayed the letters of the alphabet in the cursive style of the period and in both upper and lower case. An American flag containing 48 stars stood in the right front corner of the room and it was before this symbol that I learned our national pledge.

The teacher's desk occupied the front and center position in the room. From there Mr. Snyder held court over eight different grades. There were two long benches placed forward of the front row of desks on each side of the room. As each particular grade was in session, the teacher called them up to sit on this front row seat. It was from here that I was introduced to Dick and Jane and Sally and Spot (younger readers ask your parents, or maybe grandparents, about this). Arithmetic, for first graders, began with nothing more complicated than number recognition and counting. Sometimes we were asked to draw numerals on the blackboard. As the school year progressed we were assigned the task of reproducing a few sentences of text from our readers, at first in block letters and later in cursive form using the alphabet over the blackboard as our model.

When a class was over the pupils returned to their assigned seats. The next class would then go forward. The progression was always from lowest to highest grades. In this way six-year-olds were exposed to teaching levels all the way up to eighth grade. It happened that Mr. Snyder was a born story teller and an insatiable traveler as well. This was a happy circumstance for me since I had an apparently unquenchable appetite for narrative.

Mr. Snyder would call both seventh and eighth grades forward at once and combine the classes. The time saved in this manner would allow him to engage in sharing his adventures abroad without neglecting the serious part of the class's intended purpose. In this way I passed many a happy morning or afternoon being transported in imagination far from the little brick building where the rest of me was. There is no way to be sure, of course, but I have always wondered if my passion for language and communication sprang from this early exposure to constant story telling. Perhaps it would have developed anyway, but certainly I am no poorer for the experience.

There was no water source at the school. For that we needed to go to the neighboring farm, about a quarter mile away. We were sent by turn in pairs to carry a porcelain bucket back full of water which was then dumped into a crockery type container with a push-button chrome dispenser near the bottom. This task was usually given to lower class students from the second to the fourth grades. It was considered a good assignment as it would get us out of the classroom for perhaps half an hour. But there are pests in Paradise. In this case the pest was named Rover, the farmer's dog. He had been known to nip a few kids while performing this duty. For this reason I tried to arrange to go for water with a boy named Russell, whose grandfather owned the farm and whom Rover saw as an ally and not someone who was invading his space.

There were no organized sports programs as there was no playground in the normal sense. So, like kids the world over, we made our own. Hide and seek was a natural with the woods so near at hand. The problem here sometimes was that, given the multitude of places to hide, one needed the skills of a Native American scout to avoid being "it" the whole period long. Another game we played was called handi-over (spelling uncertain, as I have never seen it in print till just this minute). In this endeavor the players divided themselves into equal groups on either side of the building. A sponge rubber ball was then thrown over the roof of the school and, if caught on the fly, the catcher then emerged at one corner or another of the structure (one never knew which) and tried to hit a member of that side's players. If successful, that player was then transferred to the opposite side. The object was to get all players on one side of the building. This required a nimble kind of allegiance since players' loyalties switched to whichever side they found themselves.

One other game played at Snyders School that deserves mention was something called prisoner's base. It was played with absolutely no equipment except that provided by nature. Several dead limbs about the size of fence rails were placed in parallel rows about eighty feet apart. These became the bases. Children lined up along their base and attempted to tag any of the other side who had left their base earlier than they had. This was the key to playing prisoner's base. Whoever had left their base last, even if only for a second, had the power to take a prisoner by tagging a player who was not "hot" by virtue of being last off base. In the melee that resulted from kids running all over the place one can readily see that disputes would arise about who was last off base and much time was lost in arguing about this touchy point. When taken "prisoner", the player would go over to the opposing side and place one foot on the enemy's base and extend an arm toward his own side. As succeeding prisoners were taken they would join hands and this chain of humanity would come closer to their own side. All that was required to free them was for one of their own players to tag the nearest prisoner in the chain and all would go free to resume playing. Winning, of course, was when all players were taken prisoner. The quandary was that the closer to winning a team came, the closer to the opposing side their prisoners would be and the likelihood of freedom increased accordingly. We had set up a "Catch 22" situation thirty years before the term had been coined.

Students graduating from these places had little pressure on them to go on to high school. Many were farm kids and were absorbed into the family agriculture business. The term "dropout" had not yet found a place in our national lexicon. Those who did choose high school were seen as advanced learners and a 12th grade diploma was viewed with at least as much respect as an associate's degree is today.

The world was considerably simpler in this era and the products of this kind of education were probably as well equipped to handle the conditions of their time as children today are with their sophisticated schools and teaching methods. I have lost touch with nearly all of the graduates of this school over time. But if I may use my own family as a guide, here are the results. My sister has successfully operated her own dog kennel for decades. My oldest brother is still running his BMW motorcycle business in Fairbanks. John achieved a Ph.D. in physics and has just retired from that profession. I chose the route of the building contractor and ran my own business until recently, surrendering it to become a full time student here at York.

I suppose as colleges go, Jessica, York's is a small campus. But there is a little kid that lives inside of me that will always measure schools by that original one-room standard, and by that kid's yardstick YCP is huge.

Writing this has allowed me to visit some memories that had long been blurred by the passage of time. Having done so, I have decided that if I were allowed to rewrite the script of my early school life I would change very little.

Sitting On A Green Couch

Sitting on a green couch, surrounded by schoolbooks
With random papers and black pens.
It's amazing where the mind can wander to: those red roses are dying,
I must refill the soap, we got a good price on toilet paper at Wal-Mart today.
Sure the studying gets done, the assignments are finished, eventually.
Yet there's something about sitting on a green couch sharing laughter and smiles
That strengthens a relationship. Even if we're laughing about a shell man
With blue pipe cleaner arms.

-Megan Stambaugh-

Partygirl

I was standing in a kitchen full of smoke
And drunken boys.
Shots of tequila were inhaled as though they were
Oxygen.
I watched a tall, lanky man
Down an electric blue kamikaze in a test tube
And I thought to myself, "Is he eating well? He looks thin."

I am a spinster.
I surrender.

I reject flat-chested women in tank tops,
Blacklights, bass boost, and warm beer.
I do not want to see your "fly booty,"
Nor do I want to "get jiggy wit" you,
But a kiss on the hand will do.

I am a spinster.
I surrender.

-Ann Johnston-

On Your Leaving

That was moments ago and
You are
Miles away,
And I am standing here
Staring into what might have
Almost been
If only...
Questions are pointless,
Answers are shadows
Of comfort.
Theories abound in my circle of
Friends:
Unflattering adjectives
And rumors of conspiracy,
And the accusation that
I poured my love into an empty soul.
I sit quietly with a crooked smile,
Tired of defending your
Good
Name,
Resisting the urge to grab the voodoo doll,
And promising myself that I will bleed these thoughts
Onto the white page.
The quiet pain persists,
The ache is
Ever present,
But I haven't cried in days.

You did not break me,
But damn if you didn't leave a crack.

-Ann Johnston-

Tuesday

rain drenching the golden carpet of leaves
spread out before me
leaves fighting to hold onto their vibrant colors
costumes of gold and red and orange
I imagine the leaves bleeding into the street
nature's water colors
I will paint the world my own way
but I stand here
waiting by the willow tree
in the pouring rain

-Megan Stambaugh-

Loved

Soft and pale,
new,
to me
from you
poured a purity that you called love.
Behind your blue eyes lies a soul I wish I knew.
You never let me in, and yet
I can't get
out
of time and innocence and hopefulness and I
remember the cobblestone sidewalk and the coolness of that August night, the
fading sun slipping behind your broad shoulders.
Trees, the brightest green I'd ever seen...
And I walked along with you with no idea
and I can only hope you loved me, because somewhere in Michigan you have my
innocence.

-Ann Johnston-

The Final: A One-Act Play

Cast

Ann: idealistic English major

Shuli: brooding artist

Wesley: whimsical sage

Kolleen: driven student

Four seniors discuss their futures the night before finals. They are seated in a corner of the library surrounded by bookshelves.

By Bettina K. Jaffe

Ann: My favorite professor here has been a friend since my very first class with him. I remember I approached him with a question about a critical essay he had assigned. His kind eyes smiled, glimmering behind his glasses. "Ann, there's always room for creativity!" I have one final assignment for him before I graduate—a creative writing essay 'What I Learned from College as I Enter the Real World'. I am waiting for my friends. We chose this corner of the library to suffer, I mean study together.

She takes a book of the shelf, smiles, and places it on the table. Then, she flops spunkily in a cushioned chair.

I would rather write an essay on what the "real" world can learn from us. *She pauses at the sound of approaching students.*

They're the people who need to prepare.

Three students enter from stage right. Shuli is wearing a white T-shirt and blue jeans. He has an old bookbag. Following him are Kolleen and Wesley. Kolleen has a trendy professional look. She is wearing a tech vest and khakis. Wesley is whimsically dressed with a chauffeur cap, bare feet, and a friendly grin. He is carrying no books but has a pencil tucked behind his ear.

Shuli picks up Ann's notebook and reads aloud.

Shuli: This is my letter to the world that does not write to me.

He tosses the notebook back on the table and not too gently shoves some of her books aside.

Fairy tales and novels about drapes. Your life is a literary reference.

He slides into a chair at the end of the table.

Wesley: *smiles at Ann*

Hey there kiddo! What's up?..Any discord with that dreamy (*said in a tender mocking imitation of Ann's voice*) musician you've been dating?

Ann laughs.

Ann: Oh, we were in two different keys.

Shuli leans forward and says softly.

Shuli: What finals do you have left?

Ann: Just this essay. How about you?

Shuli: an art history final and a chemistry exam

SILENCE FOR A FEW SECONDS

Kolleen: Does anyone else think it is unbelievable that we are about to graduate?

Wes: If we pass our finals...

Ann: What I can't believe is that you're leaving us for USC. You'll probably fall in love with one of your graduate school profs. and settle outside of Malibu as the perfect hostess.

Kolleen: You're so dramatic, Ann. You saw my charred attempt at dinner for Greg's parents so I don't think there's a danger of me being a West Coast Mrs. Dalloway. And I will try to fill my prosaic letters with romance leaving out important facts so you're guaranteed to write.

Shuli: I'm going to get some coffee.

He takes a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket not so subtly.

Kolleen: I could use a cappuccino myself. Oh and I can quiz you on the periodic table on the way there!

Shuli rolls his eyes but walks out with Kolleen.

Ann's look follows Shuli and Wesley's look follows Ann. Then Wesley turns to browsing the bookshelves as Ann addresses the audience again.

Ann: Wesley is the most genuine person I know. Even though Wes seems to have the least direction, he is the one I am the least worried about. I don't have to say a lot to Wes to know he understands me. I will miss our silent conversations of exchanged looks. What I've learned from Wes is not to worry so much about what other people think. He is a champion of non-conformity. Once I gave him an e.e. cummings' poem that I found. "To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best night and day to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight and never stop fighting.." And Wes, probably knows more about me and Shuli than even Kolleen.

She turns towards Wes and asks in a light-hearted voice but when Wes turns to look at her she becomes very serious.

Ann: What's going to happen to Shuli?

I wonder if he has any idea...

Wes: How much you care for him or how much he cares for you?

Kollen comes back before Ann disguises her wonder at Wes's words. Kolleen sits down and Ann dreamily wanders over to some nearby shelves.

Wes: *looking at Kolleen with a strange expression.* "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

Kolleen: You should have been a poet or philosophy major Wes...

Wes: I should have been a great many things.

Kolleen: Can I ask you a question? Are you scared about the future? I mean I've had my whole life mapped out forever and you..

Wes: are not even holding the map right side up.

Kollen: I didn't mean

Wes: It's okay. I never make any big plans because I'm afraid of ending up in the wrong guy's shoes.

Kolleen looks down at his bare feet and suppresses a smile.

Living someone else's dream. My father is an accountant. My grandfather was a sign painter. I don't think I was meant to do either..*sigh*. My mother would have understood.

Kolleen: I understand. *She places her hand on his shoulder.*

I've seen your handwriting...and I've never seen you with any money. *She hugs him briskly and sits back down.*

As long as we're confessing, I envy your freedom. I keep thinking about conversations with my older brother Peter, who is a lot like you. He used to read to me books and poems from his college assignments. I remember him saying, "You will be a catcher in the rye and I will be a swinger of birches." He always encouraged whimsical dreaming....and I don't know how much that will help me on the bar exam."

Wesley: "I, being poor, have only my dreams."

Kolleen: All right. Now, I have to do some serious studying.

Ann heads back to her seat just as Shuli comes back in from his smoke. He pulls the chair out for her. As she sits down, she touches his hand and they pause exchanging electric looks.

Everyone is studying while Ann begins another soliloquy.

Ann: Kolleen is amazingly smart and talented. We first met in a history class sophomore year. I was impressed with her opinions, the way she said them even if I didn't always agree. Once after class-we walked to lunch together continuing our debate about the feminist movement. Kolleen is as conservative as President Walker's ties and I am unabashedly liberal. She even throws parties with the meticulous planning and strategic organization of a political campaign. We disagree about everything except classic movies and how much we enjoy disagreeing with each other. She doesn't

express her emotions a lot but I know she treasures our friendship...and my wardrobe. I think that's my vest she's wearing.

Kolleen rises.

Ann: Finished?

Kolleen: bathroom break

Ann gets up and leaves with her

Wes: Why do women always go to the bathroom in pairs?..

For protection?

Shuli: for conversation

Wes: I wonder what they talk about?

Shuli: *dejectedly* I don't know. I don't know anything.

He takes a book of the shelf, leafs through some pages, and begins reading.

Midway on our life's journey, I found myself

In dark woods, the right road lost

I'll tell about those woods so hard-so tangled and rough

And savage that thinking of it now, I feel that old fear stirring

Death is hardly more bitter

And yet to treat the good found there as well.

He closes the book showing Wes and the audience the title-Dante's Inferno.

Wes: And the award for best performance by a brooding young intellectual goes to Shuli Welder. This isn't hell, it's This Side Of Paradise.

Listen, I'm not going to pretend that I'm an expert on right paths. But I do know you have a lot of good before you. There are only a few things in this life, I *am* certain about. One-I look devastatingly handsome in this hat. Two, Kolleen is going to wow the West Coast and finally learn she can open herself completely to those who love her, who she loves. And Ann is going to love you-whether you ignore her tenderness or not. You can continue to push her away and feign cynicism but you won't be fooling anyone, especially not Ann. Shuli, she sees everything in you that you torture yourself about, everything that annoys the hell out of me, and she loves you. I know that scares you but.

Kolleen and Ann walk in. Shuli gives Wes a grateful look as Wes silently signals Kolleen and they walk behind the bookshelves. Shuli pretends to be studying as he composes himself. Ann looks over at him and begins to speak.

Ann: Shuli took me to the Met once to see a French Impressionism exhibit. Shuli's own art tends to

be more abstract but he remembered how much I enjoy the paintings of Renoir and Monet. I think my love for Shuli is a lot like those paintings. In the midst of it, I am confused. When I step back and look at the big picture, I can see the beautiful together.

Just last week, Kolleen's ex-boyfriend Greg had the hutzpah to ask me why I could possibly like Shuli! Imagine! I like the way Shuli runs his hand along his chin, checking his shave as he ponders the profound and how he shoves his hands in his pockets when he is showing me one of his paintings and I said to myself what an awkward prince. I see so much good in him that I wonder that others do not wonder with me. When we became friends, I was so afraid of hurting this Sydney Carton—so sad and sweetly noble. We have shared so much of our past-painful relationships, favorite poems. He is such a part of my present and undeniably linked with my future. Shuli has taught me the art of understanding someone so deeply that you can love them unconditionally..even when they push you away. *She sighs and leans forward.*

What are you writing Shuli?

Shuli: *shows her a blank page*

I am not eloquent like Kolleen or a great writer like you Ann. I don't even have Wes' talent of always saying the right thing to a woman. *Smiles*

I wanted to write you a letter since I know how much you value beauty in words. I keep thinking of that sonnet we read in Snyder's class junior year. Do you remember? "Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising haply I think on thee and then my state something something sings—For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings that then I scorn to change my state with kings." I don't understand why you have always seen in me who I want so very much to be. You are doing that thing I love where you fold your hands when you are listening very passionately. That and how you place your hand over your heart when you are watching a kiss in an old film, listening to Miles Davis, and once when I showed you one of my paintings. *His voice lowers and raises in volume. He stands and at the end of his speech begins to put his hands in his pockets but clasps Ann's hands instead.* Really what I am trying desperately to say but I hope you know is that I love you.

At these words, Wes knocks a book off the shelf and you see the sheepish faces of him and Kolleen. Ann holds on to Shuli's hand and climbs on her chair.

Ann: Come over Wes, Kolleen. I want to read something to you.

My Final

Futures are uncertain things—barely discernable shadows and all too burning horizons. I am not one who claims to possess facts about our shared destinies, nor would Shuli,

She turns to him and smiles, think my love of all things fiction exactly qualifies me for the position of seer. Yet, I know—have learned here—several undeniable absolutes about what lies ahead.

Wes has, as is typical, not alerted the world to the exact way he is going to challenge and conquer it. That doesn't really matter. His pure character and gentle wisdom will always make him stand out among men. And he will most definitely never wear a tie.

Kolleen's strength and dedication to her career is matched only by her sweetness and compassion for any who do not have a voice. She has kindly taught me many practical things— all of which I dismiss as nonsense.

Kolleen throws a wadded up piece of paper at her and everyone laughs.

Shuli is an artist which enables him to see beauty where there is much pain and grace in a clumsy dreamer. He will continue to serve others by painting what others so often ignore and will never suppress the sweet nobility that is his essence and the heart of his masterpieces.

College has changed me. You have all carried kaleidoscopes, fragmenting my world and sharing with me a very different, infinitely more beautiful view. What I have learned from college I have learned from my friends. The future I see for us all is not the fairy tale I would have once wanted. It is not a dark comedy, a compelling tragedy, or unfortunately a Jane Austen novel. I think that it will be more like a very painful very beautiful fable, this real world of theirs. And it will be my friends who will make it be *our* world.

Travels

A thirteen –year-old boy gave me my
first kiss.

A tall, skinny, brilliant kid taught me about physics and
That nice guys don't always finish
last.

A green-eyed boy proved that I lie well,
and that big eyes,
feigned innocence and
a low cut blouse
will get a girl anywhere she needs to go.

A blonde boy taught me how to
hurt and
hide and
doubt.

A lanky man with a southern accent and a guitar reminded me
how to sing.

You are the man who made me invulnerable to silly boys
and bad poetry.

So, if love ever slaps me in the face again,

At least

I'll know what hit me.

-Ann Johnston-

Sacrament

There is something sacred about
a kiss,
something holy about the
curve of your shoulders,
something sinful about the way
you say my name.

-Ann Johnston-

Keep the Change

by Angela Newman

“And just where the hell do you think you’re going?” The old woman folded her arms across her chest from her armchair. She flicked the ash from the tip of her cigarette into her Elvis ashtray and scowled at the King.

Ray shifted his weight nervously. “Thought I’d head into town, meet a couple of the guys for a beer or two.”

“You mean a slut or two.” She glared at her son with contempt. “Don’t think I don’t know what you really do down there. I ain’t stupid, you know.”

“I know,” answered Ray. His eyes were fixed on a small hole in the carpet where a cigarette had been accidentally dropped and left to smolder. It was his favorite spot to –

“Look at me when I’m talking to you, godammit! You ain’t going. You been down there every night this week, and every night you come back all red-faced and eyes glassed over... How the hell am I supposed to hold up my head and look people in the face when my only son is a no-account piece of trash walking around full of god knows what kind of diseases those kind of girls got nowadays. It ain’t decent, and I won’t allow it.”

“Okay,” Ray responded tonelessly, “but I still got to go.”

The old woman narrowed her eyes at her son. “You walk out that door, and don’t you even *think* I’m letting you back in. I’ll call Clarence down at the station to haul your ass into jail for trespassing first.” Her challenge issued, she sat back in her chair and waited for her son to trudge back into his room.

“Okay,” he repeated and slunk out the front door.

It was about six when Ray got down to Annie’s, the local bar. It wasn’t much to look at, but the place was clean and the service was decent. Inside, you could play darts or catch a game on the old color TV Annie’s nephew had donated last Christmas. There was a pool table, but some bum had made off with all the balls for a prank and never brought them back. Ray had his suspicions, but he usually tried to avoid trouble, not invite it. And since the McMullen boys always seemed to be handing out the invitations, Ray was in no hurry to accuse them of something as stupid as stealing billiard balls.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ray saw the two men lounging in a far corner of the bar and wisely kept his eyes fixed on the aging barmaid straight ahead. He shuffled over to the bar and slapped down a dollar. Pushing up her sleeves, Annie asked, “What’ll it be?”

“The usual.” He added, “And you can keep the change.” It was their joke.

“Great, I can almost make a phone call,” she said, grinning. Although most of her customers disgusted her, she couldn’t help liking Ray. He used to come in about twice a month on a Tuesday, because that was when his mother went to York to get her hair done. He usually stayed for a couple hours, nursing a single 75c draft and watching whatever game happened to be on. But lately Annie had noticed a change in his routine. For the past week, Ray had been coming in around six every night, then high-tailing it after his one drink. Probably had a girl in town. Annie hoped so and, smiling to herself, poured the kid’s beer.

Ray caught the smile and returned it. He liked her too. He had once seen her break a beer bottle over a guy’s head who had been trying to rip up the place. Just like in the movies.

“Here you go, kid.” She gave him a wink. Suddenly, her expression turned serious as she

caught some commotion coming from the back corner. Her lips thinned into a line. She'd just about had enough of these assholes.

"Well, what the hell is this?" hooted one of the McMullens. Ripping down the hot-pink flyer that had caught his attention, he read it aloud in a thick southern accent. "Come and discover that *Jee-zus* is alive!" A few drunken souls chuckled. He climbed up onto the empty pool table and continued, adding hand gestures and facial expressions. "Experience him as the solution to all your problems! Just come on down to the Red Hot Holy Ghost Revival down in Dairyland Square! Ted and Terry Shuttlesworth will be preachin' nightly! Give us your money, and we'll save your soul!" By now, the Reverend Asshole McMullen's stirring speech had turned the chuckles into peals of laughter, and more than one man had tears running down his face.

His brother chimed in from his permanent barstool. "Well, shit! That's right around the corner! What do you boys say we head on down there and shake the place up?"

More laughter, and some of the men even started reaching for their coats. Annie set her jaw, and Ray thought he recognized that beer bottle look in her eyes. "That's enough!" she yelled. She climbed up on the pool table herself and pushed the Reverend off. "I got something to say!" Boos and hisses ensued. "I said, I got to speak up about this, and you losers are gonna pipe down and listen." The crowd reduced its protests, even though Barstool McMullen could be heard to mutter, "Fuck you, Grandma."

Annie glared in his direction and continued. "If I thought it would make a difference, I'd tell you that you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Those people ain't there for your entertainment. That's their religion. It's what keeps 'em going."

"Those people ought to be locked up for stupidity," said Barstool.

"It's important to them, even if it ain't to you, and the thought of your ugly asses going down there and fuckin' it up just about makes me wanna puke. You'll do what you're gonna do, but god damn if I ever let any of you into my place again. That's all I got to say."

A dangerous silence settled over the room, and Ray swallowed hard. Screwing up his courage, he walked right through the small throng surrounding the pool table and reached up his hand to his friend. "Why don't you come on down now?"

"It's important," Annie repeated, closer to tears than she should have been over a stupid tent crusade. Hell, she wasn't even a Christian anymore. "People got to believe in something. It's important that they understand."

"I know," he said softly, "but they don't."

"You're right," she laughed mirthlessly. "Help me down then, kid." When she was back on the ground, she clasped his hand and held it to her heart. "Ray," she muttered, shaking her head. After a pause, she looked over at the neon Budweiser clock and dredged up a grin. "You wouldn't want to be late for your lady friend. You should get out of here."

Ray looked around the room and agreed, "Yes, I should." He turned to Barstool and the Reverend who had been watching the scene between Ray and Annie with some contempt from their dark corner of the bar. Ray took a deep breath. "And what the hell kind of idiots steal the balls off the pool table of their own bar?" The brothers gaped at him, as the other men in the bar broke out into fresh laughter. Ray shook his head, shoved his hands deep into his coat pockets and walked out of the bar.

The night was brisk, and the walk put some color into his face. He walked with his head down, his eyes focused on the frayed cuffs of his jeans over his shit-kicker boots. He didn't need to watch where he was going. The streets were fairly empty, and he knew the way well enough. After all, he had been there every night that week.

The house was full by the time he got there, so he just leaned up against the wall and listened. And even though the Shuttlesworths did their damndest to convince him, Ray did not believe that Jesus was alive and the solution to all his problems. He had never been a particularly religious man, and no tent crusade was going to change that. Yet all week Ray had gone down to the Red Hot Holy Ghost Revival to listen to the voice of the Reverend Theodore Shuttlesworth rising and falling with a passion and a beauty that Ray had never experienced any other time in his life. He closed his eyes and believed in it.

The Power of the Voice

By Danielle Ayers

One of the most pleasant and important memories from my childhood occur when I remember Mom reading to my siblings and I, for about an hour after lunch. Everyday I couldn't wait to find out what would happen next to my favorite character, while I'd be transported to another time or place by the elasticity of Mom's voice, as it became that character. When the chapter or time was up for the day, we'd often beg for more.

"Mom, pleasee read just a little more! Just ten more minutes, com'on, please." And Mom would usually smile and read ten--or fifteen or twenty minutes--longer.

Mom rarely read trivial paperbacks that would never be heard from again; we read the childhood classics. The *Little House* books were a family staple, and the *Secret Garden* was my first suspense novel. *Cheaper by the Dozen* had us laughing until we ached, and *The Yearling*, with its lush descriptions and heart-wrenching story, made us cry. These books were dubbed "family books," and we continued to read aloud together even after I was old enough to read on my own. Mom believed it was important to experience different language styles, even if it sometimes was a little challenging to comprehend. The power of the audible voice captured any wanderings of my mind, making the stories dance off the page and into my imagination.

I can't recall what I read first as a child, but I remember waking up early to read a *Happy Holister* mystery book before breakfast around the age of nine. About that same age I started reading the *Sugar Creek Gang* and *Mandie* mystery series. Mom would come tuck me in bed and tell me good night, and then, by the light of my electric candle, I'd secretly read my book, quickly putting it back on my night stand if I heard footsteps, and diving back under the covers. I was reprimanded the first time, but when caught again, I was punished for my disobedience.

"You'll ruin your eyes!" Mom would exclaim, but who cared about the strength of one's eyes when there was a robber to chase!

I also read out loud in order to share my love of books. When I was about twelve, I read the entire *Chronicles of Narnia* to my brother and my Dad while we were on a road trip. The long, cranky hours went quickly, and even Dad hated to stop for gas, because then the story would have to be interrupted.

My love of literature did not diminish when I out-grew my childish paperbacks. When I was in 9th grade I was resolute in my goal to start reading "adult" classics. I distinctly remember my experience of tackling *Ben-Hur*, for some unknown reason, when I was fourteen. I never struggled through a book more than I did *Ben-Hur*. I read it in spurts, and it took me a whole year to finish it. I recall lying in bed wondering why I'd ever chosen this book to read, while fingering the thick yellowed pages and frayed black cover. However, I actually liked the second half of the book, although I did not enjoy the first half for lack of action. *Les Miserables* was the next giant book to fall into my hands. I plowed through steadily and determinedly, yet I was immensely satisfied and proud of myself when I completed it.

The benefits from those cozy days curled up on the couch did not just result in better reading skills. My sister, brother and I dramatized our favorite stories. We led a wagon train sitting on a picnic table and made "stew" out of water and freshly cut grass. We hid maps in the floorboards of the barn, buried and then found our own treasure. Our imaginations soared with story ideas to act out either in private, or in theatrical performances various family members had to sit through.

However, I can also trace my love for writing and art back to those years of family reading,

which influenced my decision to major in English and graphic design. Listening to so many great books taught me what good writing sounded like, and I, wanting to emulate it, soon took up writing faintly plagiarized stories. Slowly, my stories became more original and evolved into my constant companions; I'd drag them with me on any trip, to the grocery store or to visit grandma. I was determined to become the youngest author to ever be published. Well, that didn't happen, but big dreams are a natural part of childhood.

The various illustrations, which accompanied many of my childhood books, engrossed me; I'd spend hours copying my favorite scenes. Then, one day, I decided to try to illustrate my own book, and from there on I mostly wrote and illustrated my own little stories. Carefully cutting squares of paper, I would write a few paragraphs on each page, then I drew and colored the scenes I saw in my head.

It's easy for me to see how my life was enriched and nurtured by an investment of time as simple as reading out-loud. If I ever have my own children, I can't wait to introduce them to my childhood friends from other times, and other places. By then, hopefully, I'll be reading them some published books of my own.

Impressions

By

Bettina Jaffe

Some memories are valentines-sweet whimsical remembrances. Then there is the rare memory that is a love letter, beautiful, heart breaking, and unforgettable. This memory is quite often a mystery- the miraculous serendipity of meeting a stranger who colors all the moments that follow. One of the mysteries of *my* life has been these strangers who enter it for a brief moment, sharing kaleidoscopes, fragmenting my world and making me look at in a different more beautiful way.

These are the people you wonder about years later on rainy Tuesday afternoons. Today a beguiling couple on the subway failed to adopt the obligatory dismalness of rainy day commuters. I arrived home cheered by the charming tableau of two passengers kissing behind a dripping *USA Today*.

I placed my dripping umbrella on the carpet and eagerly checked my mail. As I sunk into my father's comfortably unfashionable recliner, I absently wondered how to combat the puddle on the rug. What mysterious epistle had I expected to arrive? Was the rain of a mystical quality designed to encourage enchanted re-constructions of memory mosaics? There was one recollection I indulged frequently. By remembering, I felt I was preserving *her* sweet influence on my life and a part of our irretrievable past.

It was raining oppressively, the perfect dramatic accompaniment to my thoughts. I was twenty-two and busy rehearsing my performance as a jaded brooding intellectual. I practiced; my smug indifference on the subway, my cynical soliloquies to co-workers over lunch and at night, I made a lonely exit to a small apartment on the lower than east- side. Four months earlier, I had arrived in New York after completing four years at a private university upstate. A favorite professor kindly wrote down a few phone numbers of publishers and gave me one final piece of advice as his student. "Remember Hemmingway. All books are alike in that they are truer than if they really happened and after you are finished reading one, you will feel that it all happened to you, and afterwards it all belongs to you, the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was. If you can get so that you can give that to people then you are a writer."

I silently repeated those words as I walked to the sandwich shop on the corner of fortieth and N. Haley. Years later, Shuli would make an appearance as one of my most endearing characters in a short story collection. For now, I was content to have a genuine friend among all those strangers.

Shuli was employed at the 29th Ave. bookstore and had helped me convince the manager of the imperative necessity of hiring me. Shuli had a disarming smile and I recall his chief passions were playing the trumpet at a nearby jazz club, beautiful women, and playing the trumpet for beautiful women who frequented the jazz club. Shuli the musician was magnetically cool. With his trumpet placed lovingly in its case, Shuli was as bashful as my kid brother asking the neighbor girl to the Fourth of July picnic. Once, when I heard him play, he whispered, "I wish I could talk to that girl. (He pointed to a pretty listener in a lavender dress.) I mean tell her how she makes me feel. He sighed. "You do." I replied, gesturing to his trumpet. "You do."

The rain felt colder now and I checked my watch. It was early. I looked for a place to dry off for a minute. Noticing a sign for the art museum across the street, I dashed over incurring the wrath of no less than four cab drivers. The lobby was sanctified by the smell that pervades old museums. It was a comforting mustiness.

I smiled at the guard and picked up a pamphlet from the visitor's display. Then, and I still marvel at the beauty of my clumsiness, I collided with a girl. She was wearing a brown coat and from a pocket, a pear dropped. As she reached down to pick it up, I fumbled for an apology but the opportunity eluded me. She straightened, smiled, murmured an apology, and walked away. I moved towards the Renaissance paintings-reproaching my lack of social grace. I began probing the faces in the portraits, searching for a story to tell. I moved upstairs, past a sculpture exhibit and a room of German expressionism art. I found a small room with an unassuming sign-Impressionism. The lighting was different in this room and I thought I was alone. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I saw the girl with the brown coat standing in front of a large painting. At the time, I was more concerned with the girl than the content of the painting. Her face was one of sweet gravity, her hands clasped in front of her in a pose more lovely and worshipful than any of the museums sculptures. She might have been a sculpture herself. She was so still but there was the faintest flush about her cheeks. I don't know how long I watched her. It might have been a second or an hour but the sound of the museums' clock awoke me from my trance, as well as announcing that I was late for lunch with Shuli. I turned from the room and did not look back. I walked briskly to the deli.

Over lunch, I did not mention the girl. It was too simple and sublime to be expressed before I had allowed myself to ponder it more. Instead, I told Shuli about a short story I had submitted to a local magazine with intense spasms of fear and excitement. Shuli was a good listener.

The next day, I ran errands for my boss. Around noon, I found myself unexpectedly across from the Art Museum steps. I glanced over half-anticipating the presence of the girl with the brown coat. There was only a pigeon picnic and an old man reading a book. I delivered O' Riley's packages and decided I had just enough time to explore a little more of the museum. At least that's what I told myself as I forced myself to walk slowly through the lobby, upstairs past the sculptures, past the German expressionism exhibit, and into the small room of Impressionist paintings.

There she was. The pear girl. Her hair was pulled back with a blue barette. She was standing in front of the same painting with that pure expression. I stood there willing myself to breathe, when a museum guard startled me with a loud clearing of his throat. The museum's clock chimed and the girl startled from her reverie. It was so perfectly timed. I felt as if I had just turned a key in a music box-letting a tinkling of music escape and causing the tiny ballerina to pirouette.

She took a pear out of her pocket and hurried from the room. Her face was eclipsed; shadowed by a look I could not name. Back at the bookstore, I worked madly, anxious, for once, to finish early. I wanted only to return to my own world of thought. On the subway, I finally allowed myself the luxury of re-visiting the museum and the strange vigil I had witnessed. Was it her late mother's favorite painting? Was she an aspiring artist yearning for inspiration?

"Maybe, she's the daughter of the painter's illegitimate son. Or a master art-purloiner-memorizing the details in order to replace it with an exact replica. Is she pretty?" Shuli and I were discussing the girl's mystery. It was a topic which captivated Shuli's imagination as well as my own. I had decided that the puzzle deserved to be shared with my best friend and hopeless romantic. I seized the girl's story instantly as an idea for my own writing, but I knew Shuli's noble heart would treat the subject with the wry humor tinged with reverential gentleness that governed all his comments on the fairer sex.

I did not return to the Art Museum for a week fearing to disturb a dream. My story progressed as late-night typing led to early morning revising. I blended genres-making the story half fairy tale-half one of intrigue. Yet I told Shuli something was missing. "An ending perhaps?" suggested the always helpful Shuli. The awful truth was I had noticed a cynical edge creeping into my words. I acknowledged this as an effect of New York. Yet I had loathed phony intellectuals in

college opting instead for the quietly brilliant tutelage of those idealistic profs. who encourage dream building not bulldozing. The stories I wanted to tell were not fairy tales or dark comedies. I wanted to share stories about the genuine goodness of people and praise the nobility suppressed in all but a rare few. I wanted the story of the pear girl to be as beautiful and unforgettable as she. At the same time, I was tortured by my own right to author the story at all. Was it not her story I was desecrating with my lyrical re-touching? Besides, her enchanting face was not that of a princess but a tragic heroine-an everyday Ophelia with a worn coat and a pear for lunch.

On Monday, I asked Shuli to work my hours at the bookstore. I left him pouring over coffee table art history books with a seriousness that was almost comical if I had not been awed by his intensity. He called after me. "Remember Forster. Only connect."

The key to the mystery lie in the painting. And so I journeyed to the museum, the now familiar guard nodding to me like an expected guest. For a moment, I considered questioning him. He seemed to have an unspoken connection to her. Perhaps she inspired that in many. I grew suddenly angry. What was he guarding anyway?

I wondered how I had failed to retain even a vague image of what the painting depicted. I who, prided myself on a love of details. I knew I must view the work before lunch hour and her arrival. I thought suddenly of Shuli and his amazing way of communicating through music. Suddenly, I was convinced that he would understand the profound message embedded in the painting and envied him for it. The museum clock ticked faintly as I reflected on the painting and its significance. The artist had depicted a café scene, typical of impressionistic work. The youthful merrymakers were wearing expressions of transcendental bliss. The scene evoked was a charming tableau but it still did not explain the young woman's strange fascination with the work.

She walked into the room a moment later although my eyes were still fixed on the painting. I felt her presence as I felt the magic of half-forgotten half remembered dreams. She made no sound but stood next to me, her coat brushing against my arm. Then miraculously, she spoke with hushed intensity. There are a few times in life when two strangers can dispense with formalities and begin talking as if they had known each other all their lives. This was one of those moments. If you have never experienced it you will dismiss my words as those of a sentimental writer prone to melodrama. You are not the people I write my story too although I do not despair of your someday understanding.

"Do you sometimes wonder about lives who have no connection to your own? The girl's words echoed my mission. "I read a poem once that called us "children of chance..."

"Who passed the door of heaven and never knew". I finished the line for her, inspiring a delighted smile. "I am a writer. When I was a little boy, my mother would scold me for my fascination with strangers. I would stop to stare at the face of an old man reading in the park. I wondered about the girl in my math class with the strange sad eyes. I imagined a terrible past and created a heavenly future for that girl. As I got older, my mother helped me realize that I had to tell their stories, these people who share our world." I feared I had spoken too long. I also realized that this girl was the first person, besides Shuli, who I could talk to without re-creating a new character. The girl was pointing at the picture.

"There are many reasons why I visit this painting on my lunch hour. Art museums hold a special enchantment for me, inviting me to lose myself in my own world of thought. The amazing thing about this painting is that most people look at it and see a bunch of merry people on a holiday. They smile at the dancing couples and the colorfulness of the café but I do not think they see the whole painting. Look."

The girl's outstretched hand implored me to really see. In the lower left hand corner there

was an old man holding a flower. His head was bent down with the look of a wounded man. I noticed another tableau among the painting's revelers. A young man with a worn suit was kneeling before a girl in a swing. He was holding her hand. The girl's disdainful expression did not seem to be quelling the young man's passion. Finally, the girl pointed to the top right of the painting. In the distance, as if just coming to the party, was a small girl with a brown coat.

"It is an admirable thing to want to tell the story of those you see. I like this room because its paintings remind me not to lose hope. Sometimes my life seems so confusing and then I step back and see how all the parts of it blend together to make a beautiful togetherness. My life has sometimes held much pain. I hope that when I leave this room, I will not ignore the faces around me that mirror my own sorrow in favor of the mirth filled ones. Tell the story of lovers and heroes but please do not forget to write of old men who read books on museum steps or shy musicians who breathe passion."

"I have a friend you would like." The girl smiled and took my hand.

"I do not know if we will meet again but I do not fear for your future. We children of chance have a way of remembering each other." The museum's clock chimed and she clasped my hand harder. Then gracefully, she turned and darted out of the room and back to the world that gave her twenty minutes for a lunch break and enough time to help a disillusioned writer rediscover his vision and his heart.

She helped me remember that the people I met were not just potential material for my next story. Many were lost like myself, crying out for tenderness and someone to remind them of the beauty in their lives. I thought I would never see her again and eagerly talked of the afternoon with Shuli. I thought he would not find the girl's simple explanation a satisfactory ending. He was rather disappointed about being denied meeting her. Later that week, we had traveled back to the museum. There was a new guard, somewhat younger with an official glare. I ran up the stairs past the sculpture exhibit, past the room of German expressionism paintings. Shuli noticed it first. He pointed to a yellow sign that said, "This room closed for renovations." As we walked to the diner, I comforted myself with the memory of the girl and her words. Shuli was very quiet but seemed to understand. "Ethan, he said with uncharacteristic solemnity, "I think life is like a gracefully written fable. It is often very painful and often very beautiful and the only thing we can be certain of is that good will ultimately triumph."

I did not spend many more months in New York. I received modest success with a publisher in Washington D.C. and excitedly began to plan a move to the nation's capital. "There's a lot of art museums there you know!" reminded Shuli with a grin. That was the hardest part, leaving Shuli. I wondered what would happen to my whimsical friend. On the day before the big move, I hurried across town, saying good-byes and looking for more boxes to pack my books. It was raining which forced me to ride the subway back to my apartment. The car was crowded so I concentrated on finding a free pole before looking around. Then, I noticed Shuli seated on the opposite side of the car. Before I could say hello, I was presented with a tableau more comforting than any gift, more rewarding than finding the biggest box in all New York. I watched silently as my friend Shuli talked intensely with a fellow passenger, a girl in a brown coat and blue barrette! They were close to each other. The girl was laughing as Shuli related one of his favorite jazz club stories. I couldn't have arranged this serendipity- to be leaving my best friend to the friendship of a charming girl, the subject of our dreams and late night deli conversations. I decided to keep my presence unknown and made my way to the door. As I prepared to exit the next stop, I turned back once more. There was bashful Shuli kissing the pear girl behind a dripping newspaper! I couldn't have written a happier ending myself!

Rodeo

Driving down the highway,
Lost in Philadelphia,
Looking for a rodeo
In New Jersey.
Next to me the girl who brushes my hair and
Dries my tears.
Best friend.
We're closer to
Midnight and farther from
The cows.

A song comes on the radio-
It's by that band with all the
Songs that sound alike.
Something about jealousy and lost love and regret
And that awful feeling that perfection is inches away,
But looking in the other direction.
I'm singing at the top of my lungs, tears are rolling down my face,
And I'm thinking about you.

The sky is a silky blue and I can see forever.
The moon is staring back at me;
She knows what I am thinking.
I dry my tears and
Wait for the next song.

-Ann Johnston-

Sunday Morning

The old orchard is dying
and soon the history of a generation
will join antiquity,
in the shadows of the past
beyond all living memory.

-Matthew Zito-

Sealed with a Kiss

Raining from the sky
are my tears,
released from intensive care
only to be caught
on the tongue of
my betrayer.
The balancing act
I performed
made no difference-
my fate was sealed
with a kiss
of a million tiny raindrops
on your lips.

-Jenn Cossentino-

Eleanor
By
Kelly Charlesworth

"Mother, put the picture in the box. We'll take it with us. We've got to get going now before nightfall."

The words were said to her slowly and deliberately, as if being spoken to a small child. For the past two weeks, ninety-year old Eleanor felt as if she were young, again. People catered to her needs constantly and enunciated every word with a painstaking slowness. Just because she had a stroke and couldn't speak any longer, everyone acted as if she was no longer able to fend for herself.

"Mother, please. I'm trying to be patient." Eleanor stared straight out the window to the fields, ignoring her daughter's insistent badgering. The autumn leaves trickled off of the old tulip tree, reflecting the orange of a fading sun. Her late husband, Walter, had planted that tree amongst the corn, for the sole purpose of delighting the eye with the bright fall spectacle. Walter had always done things like that. They were so young when they had first bought the farm, so full of hope and energy for a new life. So happy when the rain was plentiful and the harvests were abundant. So proud when their children were born, healthy and strong. It was harvest time now, but there would be no harvests. The barren cornfields stood as alone and ancient as a petrified forest. Fragments of a once happy past. Walter never would have allowed the fields to crumble into a barren wasteland. He worked until his hands were raw, he slaved over the fields without uttering a complaint, he...

"Fine Mother, you can take it with you in the car, but we're leaving now!" Leaving? Where did her daughter say she was going? A retirement home of some sort had been mentioned. Eleanor gaped at the idea of being spoken to like and insolent child. She openly cringed, not because of the unknown journey that lied ahead, but the fact that her daughter had used such a disrespectful tone with her.

Eleanor's fingers weakened from the tight grasp of the portrait that she so stubbornly clung to. It was a portrait of Eleanor herself, back in her early twenties. It was the capable and strong Eleanor that she thought of herself as. The devoted wife, and proud mother. The Eleanor that had survived the Depression, a few wars and recessions, while still maintaining enough sanity to run a household. Only now, the wheelchair prevented her from walking, the arthritis wouldn't allow for cooking, and her age gave the world permission to treat her as the feeble-minded frail woman that she was not.

The wheelchair made a squeaky sound as her daughter escorted her out the door. The wind blew strands of gray hair in her wrinkled face, but Eleanor would not put the portrait down long enough to brush the strands away. As long as she held the picture, the world would see that she was once strong, and independent, because for some reason, people seemed to think she was not.

Fire

by

Courtney B. Decker

I had always been fascinated by fire. I thought there was something mystical and cleansing about it, and of course, something dangerous. I knew it was powerful. I'd burned my hand on a kerosene heater when I was seven but at that point the only effect it had on me was the joy of missing gym class for two weeks.

I'd always kept candles in my room. I liked to turn off the lights and watch the shadows flicker and distort my room. It was 1992, and all of the posters on my walls were unicorns and teen idols - eighth grade fantasies.

I lit a candle after everyone went to bed. My basement bedroom was a private sanctuary; it was perfect for the rebellious teen who wanted nothing to do with the family. I was writing a letter to my best friend Jamie in purple pen, probably something about which guy I was going to marry this week. Afterward I folded the paper into the shape of an arrow. I thought I was so creative.

Clearing off my bed, I threw the crumpled drafts into the trashcan that was already overflowing. My mother had been bugging me to dump it out since the marking period had ended. I was just happy to be rid of all the dittos. Second to only my mother, school ranked pretty high on the list of things I resented. Reaching toward my bookbag to drop the note inside, my elbow brushed the candle. I leapt back, more out of surprise than pain, and saw the candle fall into the trashcan. Flames began to crackle immediately.

Panicked, I ran into the adjoining laundry room to get the large bucket we kept for washing the car. I fidgeted while it filled it, wishing the water would somehow come faster. Finally, success! The bucket was full. I lugged it toward the other room, all the while thinking over and over about the hell I'd be in when my mother found out.

When I reached my room, the fire had already spread to the blankets on my bed, and had consumed my stuffed dog Brownie, an old pal from kindergarten. I ran over with the bucket, splashing half of its contents on myself on the way. The fire wasn't going out; I had just created more smoke by attempting to drown it.

My eyes began to water and I was coughing. My heart plummeted to my feet when I realized the situation was beyond my control and the only thing I could do now was get my family out safely. I took several shallow breaths and headed for the stairs, catching one last glimpse of the flames licking greedily at the posters on my walls. I ran upstairs in a blind panic and managed to call out to my family. I don't remember exactly what I said, but I was shrieking and crying.

My family bounded downstairs, bleary-eyed and confused as my mother herded them outside and went back for the pets. I ran into the kitchen to call the fire department. The rotary phone was maddeningly slow and my fingers were shaking so much that I had to try twice to get through. I gave them all the necessary information and then joined my family outside wearing nothing but pajamas, my bare feet already going numb in the February snow.

We lived in an apartment as the house was being renovated and one day my mother took us to look through the ashes for anything salvageable. I wandered down into my room with a flashlight, the wet and smoky smell filling my nostrils. I shone the beam over nondescript, blackened heaps - the material accumulation of my fourteen years lain to waste.

The beam laid to rest on a book which I turned over with the toe of my sodden shoe. It was

The Bible. Lying next to it, burnt almost to complete ash, was a wet little pile with half a cover on it: my favorite book, The Neverending Story. I sat down, mindless of my white jeans, and cried over all of the memories I'd left behind.

Four years later, a senior in high school, the memories of the fire had begun to fade. But strangely, one day on the way home from school, something familiar caught my eye. Lying on the ground was a small plastic motorcycle man - a figure I'd named Brian sometime in elementary school. He was covered in soot, but it was him: same stupid green goggles and paint chips on his yellow helmet.

I clutched that figure so tightly in my hand that it bit into my skin. I was determined not to lose it again. This thing, this stupid action figure, was a link to my past. I realized that it was not the material things that I missed so much, but my innocence and childhood. I was forced to grow up so quickly during the fire and its aftermath, and had to leave childish things behind.

I still have Brian though. What girl wouldn't hang onto a man who walked through fire for her?

Notes from Contributors

Danielle Ayers is a junior at York College, majoring in Graphic Design and English (writing concentration). This semester she has started learning about how to write for a specific publication through her internship with *Baltimore* magazine. In her free time she enjoys mountain biking, hiking, traveling, painting, and a creamy mug of caramel mocha.

Kelly Charlesworth is an Art major from Dillsburg, Pennsylvania.

Jenn Cossentino is a junior English major at York College. She enjoys creative writing, especially poetry and has had her work published in various publications, the most recent being last year's *Drippings From the Inkwell*. After graduation Jenn would like to move to New York City and work in publishing while writing poetry on the side.

Courtney B. Decker is a Secondary Education English major from Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Bettina K. Jaffe is an idealistic sophomore, majoring in English secondary education. Although she enjoys writing book and film reviews for the college newspaper, writing poetry and short stories is her true passion. Recently, she has become involved with YCP's theater group, co-directing the one-act she authored. She is enchanted by Victorian novels, Impressionism paintings, e.e.cummings, and beating her best friend Matt in pool. One of her castles-in-the-air is to teach literature classes after attending graduate school in New England-although she is working on the obligatory mediocre first novel.

She wishes to thank her friends for seeing grace in a clumsy dreamer and Dr. Puccio for sharing literary treasures this year.

Ann Johnston is a graduating senior who is not well. She can't dress herself, largely due to the fact that her left hand often hangs limply at her side. She hasn't sent any resumes out yet. However, she has been in my kitchen and boy, can she cook! Ann would like to thank her fiends (No "r" in that, editors...) and family (especially Baya) for their love and support. Ang will do.

Christina Jaffe enjoys writing poetry and short stories. Much of her time is spent reading, singing, and listening to various music styles. Photography is only a recent hobby; Her biggest challenge is to guard her new Yashica T-4 camera from the dangers of dust and fingerprints. She wants to acknowledge everyone who submitted their writing to be read by others; That is a special kind of courage.

Jerry Kimbrough is a sophomore currently majoring in English here at York College. He current (and very unlikely) aspiration is to be listed on the exalted New York Times bestseller list. A native of New Jersey, Jerry enjoys long walks on the beach as well as sleeping for extraordinary spans of time. He is an Aquarius.

Angela Newman is a graduating senior who has spent the last four years eating pizza and making friends. She has never been to a tent revival. She thanks her family for their continual support and her friends for the surprise party. Angela

would like to dedicate this story to Nan, who always reads without complaining.

David Rahn is a former building contractor who is presently pursuing an English degree with a concentration in writing. He is in his junior year at YCP and hopes to graduate in 2001/02 or sometime.

kristin Royal scott is 23 years old and currently attending York College, as a junior; majoring in English. (Thanks to her Mom and Dad) She is most well known for her role as 'that hippie girl who never seems to have her shoes on'. Keeping her options open, Miss scott (that 's no typo, first and last name are both spelled in all lower case letters) hopes to grow up, get married, have some kids and raise them, stopping along the way only to erase her student loan debt, rejuvenate the resources of our planet, and in general free every last person from the mental slavery of narrow minded thinking that has been a sad blight obscuring the ultimate beauty of life for far to long. She also enjoys

cooking, reading, and painting and likes dogs.

Matthew Speicher didn't submit a thing for this thing-but he did the layout. this bio is his publishing debut. he'd like to thank his fish, Fish. his future plans include keeping the door locked and finishing his bottle of Black Cherry IBC.

Megan L. Stambaugh will graduate in May with a BA in English/Writing Concentration. I hope to use my degree to work in proofreading/editing for a publishing house or magazine, or in research for a museum. I interned at the Maryland Science Center researching and writing press kits for an upcoming film and exhibit. I love to write poetry and short stories. I have a poem to be published next summer in *Along the Path*, a nature and spirituality magazine in California. The theme of most of the poetry I write concerns nature or relationships.

Matthew Zito is a Secondary Education Social Studies major from Glen Cove, New York

