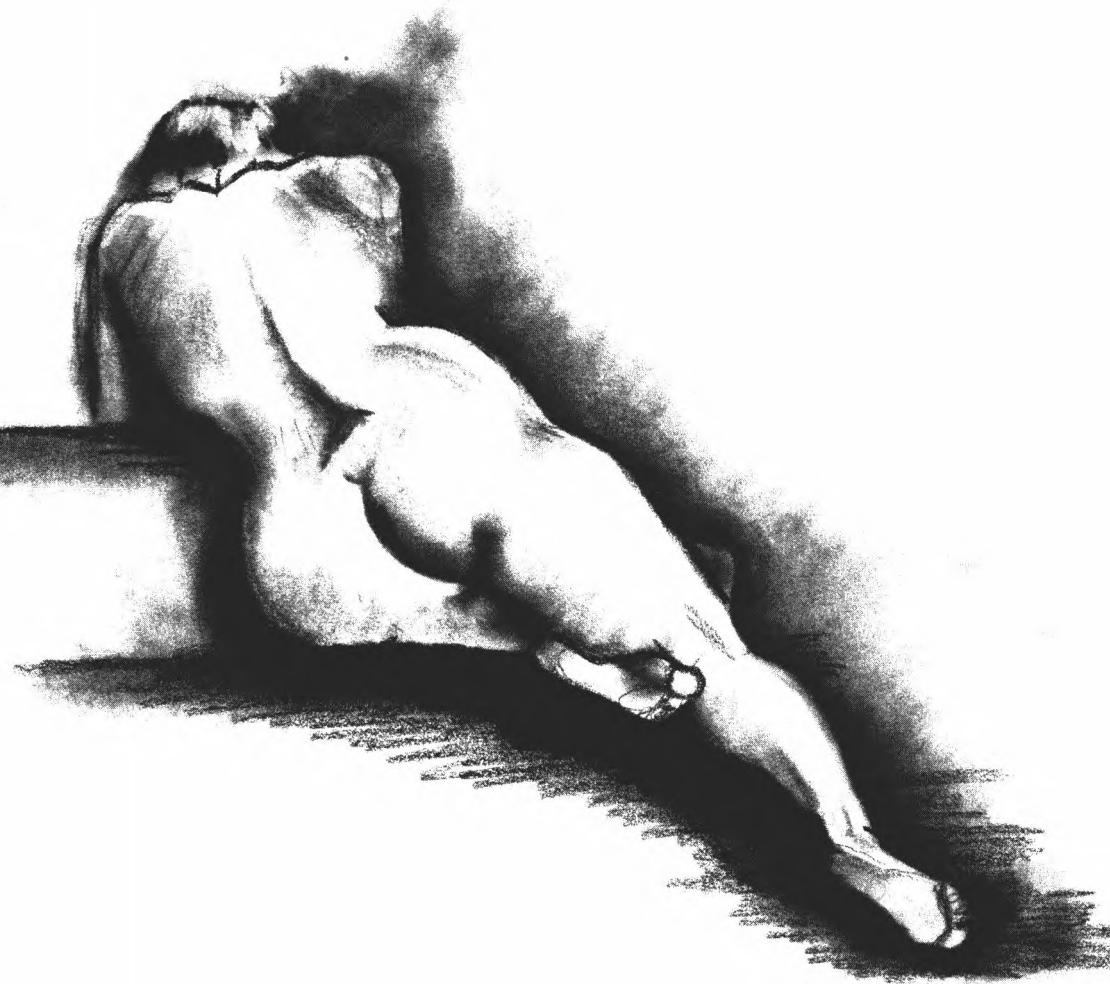


# Harbinger 1999



**STEPHENS COLLEGE**

# Harbinger Staff

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## Untitled

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*Pat Kelley*

There was something about watching a thirty-three-year-old man wearing a grey tweed sport coat ritualistically putting each finger into his mouth and drawing it out with a loud slurping sound. We had eaten corned beef and cabbage for lunch, which obviously you can't eat with your hands, so why was he licking his fingers, except to be the most annoying jerk I ever met in my life?

We were at Barry's Cafe, it was St. Patrick's Day, and Beef—yes, I briefly dated a guy named Beef, although his name might have been more appropriately Lardhead—had given me St. Patrick's Day presents, a tin of instant Irish coffee and an antique pocket book of Irish melodies. I had never dated anyone who gave me so many presents. It was really too bad that I didn't like any of them. On St. Valentine's Day he presented me with some sort of a mutant overgrown red sponge twisted into an unfortunate floral sculpture probably meant for a banquet table that he could barely fit in his car.

"Would you like a napkin?" I knew perfectly well that he had one, but I offered him mine as a hint, which he didn't take.

Barry's Cafe was an old fashioned bar with dark walls, wood booths and tables. The salt and pepper shakers cast strong shadows over our empty plates. The bright Nebraska winter sun poured in the two picture windows at the front of the bar, casting beams of sparkling dust in the gloom. I worked across the street; we frequently met here for lunch. Beef was the only guy I had ever dated who always paid for the meal, but watching him meticulously suck and lick each finger, his bald head and long hair alternately shining in the sun, I wondered what I was doing.

I was supposed to be getting a divorce. I had met Beef one night through a friend at a bar. He said he'd heard all about me, and the next day was my birthday. At work the next morning there was a big box with a bow on it. I looked at it and gasped.

"What is it?" My friend Amy asked. Amy and I were the clerical staff in the newsroom, and we were there before anyone else.

"It's from this guy."

"What guy?"

"I met him at a bar."

"Well, see what it is."

"You open it."

"It's not my birthday."

"Amy, what am I going to do? I don't even know him."

Amy lifted the box off the table. Underneath there were party decorations, napkins, a dish of assorted nuts, two Jamaican rum cakes and a note from Beef wishing me a happy birthday.

Everyone wished me a happy birthday that day, except for my husband who wasn't speaking to me. Beef's friend gave me a rose, Amy came to my mother's house for dinner, the reporters pretended they were drunk on the rum cake.

It wasn't as though everything had been going well with my husband up to that point. It basically had never gone well, and at O'Rourke's.

"I thought you gave up drinking for Lent?"

"I did, except for St. Patrick's Day."

"I don't think Lent works like that. You don't get wild card days.

"I'm feeling kind of sick. I have to get back to work."

Beef threw down a couple of dollars for the tip, stood up and, taking my coat, held it for me. He always held my coat and opened doors for me. I wonder if he realized how much his finger-sucking behavior undermined all his other efforts to appear the perfect gentleman. He was fat, bald, mean, pompous and insulting, but he was a wonderful

cook. He had me come over for pheasant simmered in wine and wild rice. He had baked cheesecake for me. I had been living on cigarettes and coffee it seemed like for years; my ribs practically showed through my clothes.

My husband was an alcoholic diabetic. He lived on bourbon, Camel straights, and chocolate bars. My mother lived on cigarettes, coffee, and snacks from the deli. I had cooked a lot at one time, but everything I made now turned out screwy. I called Beef my guardian angel. He told me his ex-girlfriend had dumped some succotash he made into the trash, but as far as I was concerned he could have assigned to me every psychological problem in the world so long as he could cook.

Eventually my hands quit shaking, and everything I made didn't end up a revolting garlic onion goop. After my husband died I used up the rest of his bourbon in southern pound cake, and I used to see all of his friends when I went to parties with Beef. I made Lucretia look like a sentimentalist.

When the weather was warm, Beef knew two or three parties to go to every night. I'd gone to two or three parties in my life, much less in one night. Just about every night he would show up and ask me to go to a party. And we'd go meet the same crowd we'd seen the other night, only with a few different people at someone else's house. It was basically the same crowd of guys from his old college fraternity. Beef was best man at everyone's wedding, and he told me all the gossip about his friends, how all the girls were really mad when Bill married Elaine, because she wasn't as attractive as he was. He told me about a woman he had almost married but didn't because she had the kind of figure that you could tell that once you married her she would just start spreading. I've noticed that fat guys are more particular than anyone else.

He always brought my mother flowers and presents for my sisters' children. For the first time my family actually liked someone I was dating, but I was beginning to see exactly why his ex dumped the succotash into the trash.

I started being busy, covered with mud, planting roses when he came to pick me up for a party. One day he was especially annoyed when I stayed home to clean the refrigerator instead of going to a spring preview football game.

He picked me up after the game and took me to a plant show. Afterwards I gave Beef the news.

He pushed back the reclining seat in his car and laid there on his back—his round face red, gushing with tears and sobbing. I was close enough to walk home then, but I sat there with him patting him on the shoulder, “There, there it’s OK. I just don’t want to go out with you anymore.”

He brought flowers for my mother on Mother’s Day and somebody’s kid with him the next time he stopped to ask me to come to a party. He probably figured I wouldn’t say something rotten and refuse in front of a kid.

He already had invitations for the one formal date we actually dressed up for. I had no idea where to get a formal. I ended up wearing a simple black dress I made out of some 50 cents a yard polyester and a white linen jacket and some sparkley jewelry I borrowed from my mother. In Nebraska women have their old stretched out white bra straps crossing their backs in a backless dress. They fall out of the tops and trip over the skirts. I felt as chic as Chanel, and it was the only time Beef ever approved of what I was wearing and didn’t tell me I needed to start working out, developing muscles, getting a suntan, wearing clothes that weren’t quite so bohemian.

He said that he had a good feeling about our relationship, so did I; it was the last time I ever saw him.

Diana



wendleton

*Casey Wendleton*

## Swingin'

---

*Beth Shippert*

She says she has some  
Funky-ass  
Hip-swingin'  
Girlfriend thing  
To tell me  
I say all right  
She tells me it ain't easy to swing  
Your hips that is  
When someone, me,  
Isn't listening  
I say all right  
She says something in the middle  
Some funky Girl-go-on thing  
That makes me laugh  
She says she's glad we could talk  
And she swings out  
I say all right  
Two funky-groovy minutes later  
I've forgotten all but the fact  
That I can't swing my hips  
Like that

Tropical Dancer



*Grenada Minifield*

## Disco Dancing

---

*Anonymous*

Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces  
In your pocket  
See your reflection  
In the water puddle  
Step on a crack  
Break your mother's back  
Drink down to my finger.....

Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces

Can I have a beer  
Espanol todos  
No se que hacer  
I just want a Coke  
Can I have a beer

I'm not drunk.  
I'm just drunk enough to say I'm drunk.....

Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces  
Tienes ocho peces

My mother's in the "Keys"  
Walk like an Egyptian  
I've got glass on my face

But it's O.K.  
We got the beat, we got the beat  
We got the beat, yah  
We got the beat!

“Puedo tener una otra cerveza?”

## In That Old Apartment in Denver

---

*Lilian Janes*

Pillows, blankets, towels, sheets  
Curtains, candles  
Deep hues of blue, green, red

Dark blue couches  
Matching chairs  
A TV for our cable  
An alarm clock by our bed

In that apartment in Denver

I make dinner while he showers  
After a hard day of work  
We sit and share our day

Laughter, tears, yelling  
Cleaning, cooking  
Fighting, loving

In that apartment in Denver

Nights of endless talks  
Nights where the tears won't stop  
Mornings together

We did it all there  
Grew up so many ways  
We can do everything

Because we learned to do it  
In that apartment in Denver

40 Hour Drawing



*Wes Gentemann*

## The Break-Up Speech

---

*Beth Shippert*

How often has the sunlight stretched trees into  
long sticks  
It's the black part that colors the green all muddy  
That makes the arms look like legs  
The legs look like they could not be attached

I could not be that attached  
You could not be that attached  
We are not that attached

It's true  
I find it to be true  
It's all just some stretching

Sometimes the reassurance  
Of the sun coming over the mountain side  
Maybe just the hillside  
Today it might be the plains  
Who said the plains weren't just as beautiful  
Whoever said it lied

The pine forests  
Their arms stretch differently once the light  
Reaches  
    Them

Hallelujah! they yell  
The sun, the sun, the sun!

And there it is  
The sun itself  
Stretching licking lapping rays  
To the branches in stream of consciousness beams

That reminds the standing timber that the cold is  
coming  
Bedtime is waiting  
And night is imminent  
And that, my once-love, is the end

## The Apricot Tree

---

*Toni Henzler*

We spent more time in the apricot tree in Grandma's backyard than we did anywhere else. She was no ordinary tree. She was a ship, a fort, a castle, and a mountain. She was a house, and a jail. She was the jungle, the desert, and a hospital. She was a prancing steed, a bucking bronco, and Man O' War. And we were pirates, Indians, cowboys, and knights. We were damsels in distress and we were dragons. We were moms and dads, husbands and wives, and babies. We were explorers, gorillas, doctors, and robbers. We were judges and policemen. We were everything but heartbroken children. We were never children of broken homes. We were never lost, or lonely, or afraid. We were safe, uninhibited, and in complete control. That tree told us secrets. She told us that the Indians had tied her down so that her trunk would bend, pointing the way to water. She told us that the big, black ants that we saw crawling on her bark wouldn't hurt us. She sang us lullabies and held us while we slept. She was the most wonderful friend that pair of 6-year-olds ever had.

Angsty Poem: Verbal Intercourse with the  
Shaven Carp  
Question: Why are you so shy?

---

*Michelle Kerr*

And why are you so loud?  
You must be kidding  
You must have missed the punchline  
Hasn't anyone told you?  
No, probably not  
You've given me  
Incessant rambling  
Headache-causing—  
Worse than sirens and just as loud  
Your flow of words  
Spewed, strewn together clumsily  
No meaning  
Hurtful words  
Here's a dictionary  
Catch!  
Oops; it'll heal eventually  
Maybe if you didn't talk so much  
Maybe if you'd watch what you say  
How do you know that I'm not ignoring you?  
Maybe it's just you  
Yeah, that's it.



## Untitled II

---

*Kat T. Burke*

Oh! So I'm not as pretty as you  
I'm not as thin as you

I hate you  
No—I love you

Tears should fall down my face

Am I pretty yet?  
Am I fine?  
Do I have nice skin?

All the other girls cry  
But they're not like me

I hate you

Fucking is what I do best  
Fighting I enjoy

loving myself?  
Not one bit

Fuck you

I can't have your sweet eyes  
Nor smile  
Nice stomach to touch  
To kiss?

(Next page)

My back curves like her

But I'm not like the other girls

I don't talk soft

Or cross my legs

I don't like being polite

Because that's how we're supposed to

be

Right?

I'm not part of them

Not pretty, not thin, not loveable

You don't want to touch me

Don't hug me

Don't even come close

I can joke

I can laugh

I hate me

Fuck you, love me

## On the Floor of My Own Hell

---

*Anonymous*

The stench of stale smoke, alcohol, and piss fill my nostrils as I sit on the hardwood floor of my own hell. The room was dark and cold and the deerskin hanging above his bed frightened me. My five-year-old eyes were fascinated by the little "beads" that rolled over the floor from his bullet machine. His gun rack was another fascination because it was forbidden. I was playing alone. He came in. He kissed me on the lips, with his tongue. The taste of alcohol overwhelmed me. At the age of five I knew this was wrong and my purity and innocence were shattered. I wanted to scream. I wanted to run. But he said it was okay. He said I was his little girl. I was "daddy's girl." He told me I was supposed to touch him. And he touch me. Tears rolled down my cheeks as his fingers penetrated my vagina. I screamed. He grabbed my hand and forced it down his pants. This strange object I had never experienced before was very hard and scary. Mentally I ran and hid. I observed from afar while this man, who was my daddy, was torturing my body. It seemed like hours later and once again I was alone. I lay on the floor and my chubby fingers play with the "beads." My spirit had once again entered my shattered little body . . .

I roll over and open my eyes. He is yelling at me from the other room.

"What the fuck are you doing? I told you to come here."

My tired, achy body gets up and moves slowly to the other room. I stand in the doorway and gaze into the fiery eyes of my first love. I thought Brandon was so perfect. He took care of me. He protected me. He promised

me he would never hurt me. But I had no idea how a man was supposed to treat a woman. It wasn't always bad. He made me happy, sometimes. But in his eyes I was never good enough. I was too fat and I whined too much. So, of course, I got up every morning at five thirty and did aerobics. And I never ate in his presence without him modifying my food. And I always kept my mouth shut unless asked to speak. But there were times when that little five-year-old would come out. And she was always very angry. I had no control. Brandon didn't understand this. He didn't know. He would blow up and lash out at her when the only thing she needed was to be confronted.

"Yes, sweetie."

"What? I can't hear you."

"Sorry. Do you need something?" My voice cracked.

"Yes, go get my shirt from the laundry room," he replied sweetly.

"Okay. Do you need anything else?"

"Yeah, iron my pants while you're up there, too."

"Okay."

"And hurry up!" he yelled as I walked up the stairs.

While I'm walking up the stairs I hear her coming.

"No, daddy! That Hurts!" she pierces through me like a thousand tiny daggers ripping my soul.

I get very angry and I start to shake. The tremble is an earthquake from within. The two souls bumping one another. I crawl the rest of the way up to the laundry room. I crawl through the dark laundry room over piles of dirty clothes. The pungent smell of soiled clothes fills my nostrils. The overwhelming aroma of cleaning chemicals makes me float. She takes over. She uses my body to curl up in a fetal position and lays my stricken face down amongst all the rotten clothes.

I hear Brandon. I don't know how long she took over. I don't know how long I have been lying in this shit

but I do know Brandon is mad. I hear it in his footsteps. His anger radiates through the entire house. My soul feels like a beautiful doe caught in headlights. I freeze. My eyes widen. I run. She takes my place. Brandon fills the doorway. She lies amongst the piles of shit, kicking and screaming. He grabs her up by her arms leaving pretty purple marks. She fights back this time. She kicked and clawed and bit whatever was closest. She hurt him with her child-like ways and the strength of my body. I fell to the floor with a thunderous thud . . .

I sob. I have no idea what I have done wrong. But I have done something wrong. I see it in his eyes. The fire in his eyes is devilish. It glows through the dark room. I sob. He pushes me out of the way. The silence pierces my soul. I cry out, "Hold me."

Without his even turning to look at me he puts his shirt on and walks out of the room.

Hours later, I lie in his arms and he asks me why I had to frighten him like that. He says if I wouldn't have frightened him he wouldn't have hurt me. I promised I would never frighten him again . . .

This happened over and over again. And over and over again I promised I wouldn't frighten him anymore . . .

Then we had good days. The bruises on my arms and legs began to heal. We would spend hours just gazing into one another's eyes. We were in our own little world. We would go to the mall together and walk proud because we were in each other's arms. We went to Florida and New Orleans and made love wherever looked good. Our souls danced. The little girl stayed sweetly asleep. But the longer she slept the worse it would be. She would come out and Brandon would grab me by my neck and slam me into the wall until he knocked her unconscious. She would come out again and he would slam her on the floor and cover my body with bruises.

This went on for two years. I would get drunk and let her come out. He would get drunk and high and throw me around like a rag doll. His 180 pounds had no trouble over-powering my 100. But there were times when I overpowered. One night I got pissed. I was beyond pissed. I was outraged. I attacked. She attacked. We knocked Brandon's ass down. He was stunned. I was stunned. She just laughed and made me run. I took over again and I froze in fear. I just knew he was going to beat me until my blood filled his floor with pretty scarlet puddles. I screamed, "No Daddy!"

Brandon froze. He took me by my hands and led me to the bed. We lie in each other's arms and cry . . .

I cry because I'm still alive . . .

He cries because he really wanted to kill me . . .

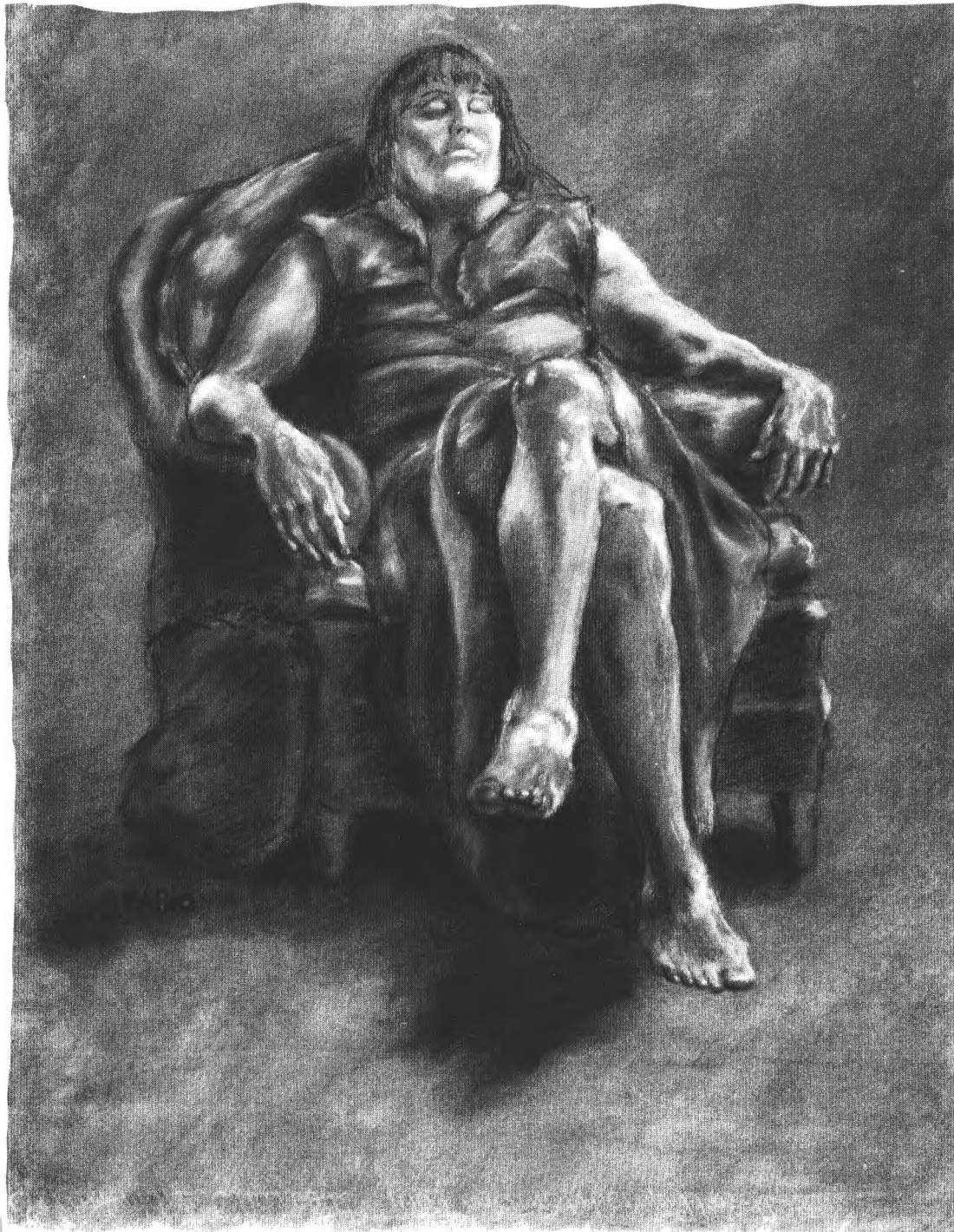
He doesn't ask why I called him "daddy." He just holds me. Once again we are in our fairy-filled world. We fly. She sleeps. We go on vacation. We spend endless hours every night, making love at the lake house. During the day we ride the wave runner together and then ski. Sometimes I sit in the shade, my body caked with sunscreen, with a book under my nose. All the while, Brandon's skin glistens its golden beauty in the sun as he plays football with his dad and brother. His sweat-drenched body walks over and kisses me because he notices me watching him over my book. His soul is still playing the game. He stares at me blankly. He turns around to watch his dad throw the ball. His eyes twinkle. I used to make his eyes twinkle like that. I know we are fading. His love for other, bigger and better things is taking over. He let it. I fought it. I don't know why but I did. This just caused more pain. But for some reason this pain was satisfying. I think because it was the only way she could come out. But he just did more damage. I guess I was hoping he would help me heal her. But I got to the point where I just couldn't take it anymore.

The wounds inside were coming more rapidly and they were getting deeper. Some were even starting to corrode my bones. I had hit bottom. I was weak. But this gave me more strength than one can ever imagine . . .

I sat on the toilet, a cigarette pressed between my lips. My body trembling so bad the toilet shook. I was going crazy with rage. I was ready to cut loose. I was prepared when he burst through the door. Our gazes pierced one another. His fist introduced my face to the orange shag carpet on the floor. Instantly, I stood up and knocked him in the nose. His nose swelled and turned purple. He went crazy . . .

He grabbed me by my hair and threw me to the floor. He kicked. He kicked hard. My body curled into a fetal position. My head was the easiest target. He kicked, and kicked, and kicked . . . Somebody grabbed him. He was done. So was I. This was the last time, and once again the stench of stale smoke, alcohol, and piss filled my nostrils as I lay on the floor of my own hell . . .

Untitled



*Fabio Rodriguez*

## Missouri Monsoon

---

*Christy Alexander*

I hear the sound of water running.  
Drip, drip, drip, into depression.  
My spirit falls with the rain that  
Fills the sky and flows over the gutters.

It runs everywhere,  
Indoors and out,  
Through the leaky walls  
Into the occupied dorm rooms.

Wet and damp, my clothes  
Cling to my moist skin.  
My sopping hair is  
Glued to my face.

Drip, drip, drip, onto  
My scrapbook and pictures  
Sitting on the shelf by the window.  
Another thing spoiled by moisture.

The saturated air smells  
Of rank, spoiled things,  
Like a fish recently gutted.  
The rooms smell like mold.

Soggy pink worms randomly  
Strewn across the drenched sidewalk,  
Between the chain of countless puddles,  
Try to squirm into the saturated ground.

(Next page)

The incessant showers fall,  
Thunder rumbles far, yet near, and  
Here, inside my room  
I hear the sound of water running.

## The Soundtrack

---

*Beth Shippert*

You never asked me where I was going today  
I always wonder why you don't ask me that

I mean you never ask me that

If you did you might have found out sooner  
Found out before the music decrescendoes and it  
just isn't that meaningful anymore  
You never listen to the soundtrack, do you?  
I have often wondered,  
As I hear the guitar solo,  
The beating of drums,  
Why you care until the light piccolo solo  
The quiet mandolin  
The moment of least importance  
It's then you need me  
To drive you  
To exist with you  
But I warned you during the fight scene,  
The love scene,  
The moment of all truths,  
You pick the credits

You're like that

Here you go again  
It's that ceaseless wandering  
Through the land of disenchantment  
That makes me question  
My own movie

(Next page)

No one will ever buy the soundtrack  
It won't make any sense  
I mull it over  
Will the music make sense in your movie?

Something makes me doubt it

## The Omen

---

*Toni M. Henzler*

I got to the woods that morning at 6:30. The triple forked tree I was hiding behind provided perfect cover. I could see the entire field, yet I was invisible to any approaching critters. My .270 rifle was within easy reach and the sun burst through the darkness in a display that took my breath. Bright pinks and purples brushed the edges of a blazing orange sky. I wondered if the "hunter orange" sunrise was an omen of things to come.

Two days earlier in the season my hunting companion had been startled by a 12-point buck careening through this very field. I was hoping he would come back today. For the thousandth time I scanned the edges of the soybean field looking for deer or any sign of movement. Nothing. Then he appeared. One second there was nothing but the same brush and weeds that had been there since the first hint of daylight started teasing my eyes. The next, there he was.

He was larger than life when he materialized on the edge of the field. My heart leapt to my throat and pounded in my ears. Shhh! I told my blood to quit rushing so loudly. Surely he would hear it surging through my veins, and he would vanish before my eyes, as surely as he had appeared. I could see rays of sunlight glinting off of the magnificent crown he bore upon his regal head as he strode through the swirling gray mist.

Dear God, don't let him see me! The wind was blowing his scent to me. I was the predator. He turned to look back into the trees behind him. He's seen me! No, he's turning back; onward he comes. I reached over and picked up my rifle, raised it to my shoulder and looked at him through the scope. The cross hairs were on his chest, maybe 80 or 90

yards away. My mind was racing, but I decided not to shoot yet. He hadn't seen me and was coming closer. When he got within 30 yards of the tree I was hiding behind, I got concerned. Where was this deer going? His path had been a direct one, straight for me, and now I was wondering if he was going to try to enter the woods that were behind me, right beside me! At 20 yards, I realized he was a small buck. In fact, his magnificent crown of antlers was an 8-inch spike on the left side of his head, and a 3-inch spike on the right. His rack was not regal by anyone's definition.

I was about to pull the trigger when a crazy thought occurred to me. Why not let him go? Why not see just how close this (probably) 1-1/2-year-old buck would get to me before he realized I was there and tore across the soybean field like his head was on fire and his tail was catchin'? He was 10 yards, a mere 30 feet, away from me when I sat my rifle down and leaned it against the tree.

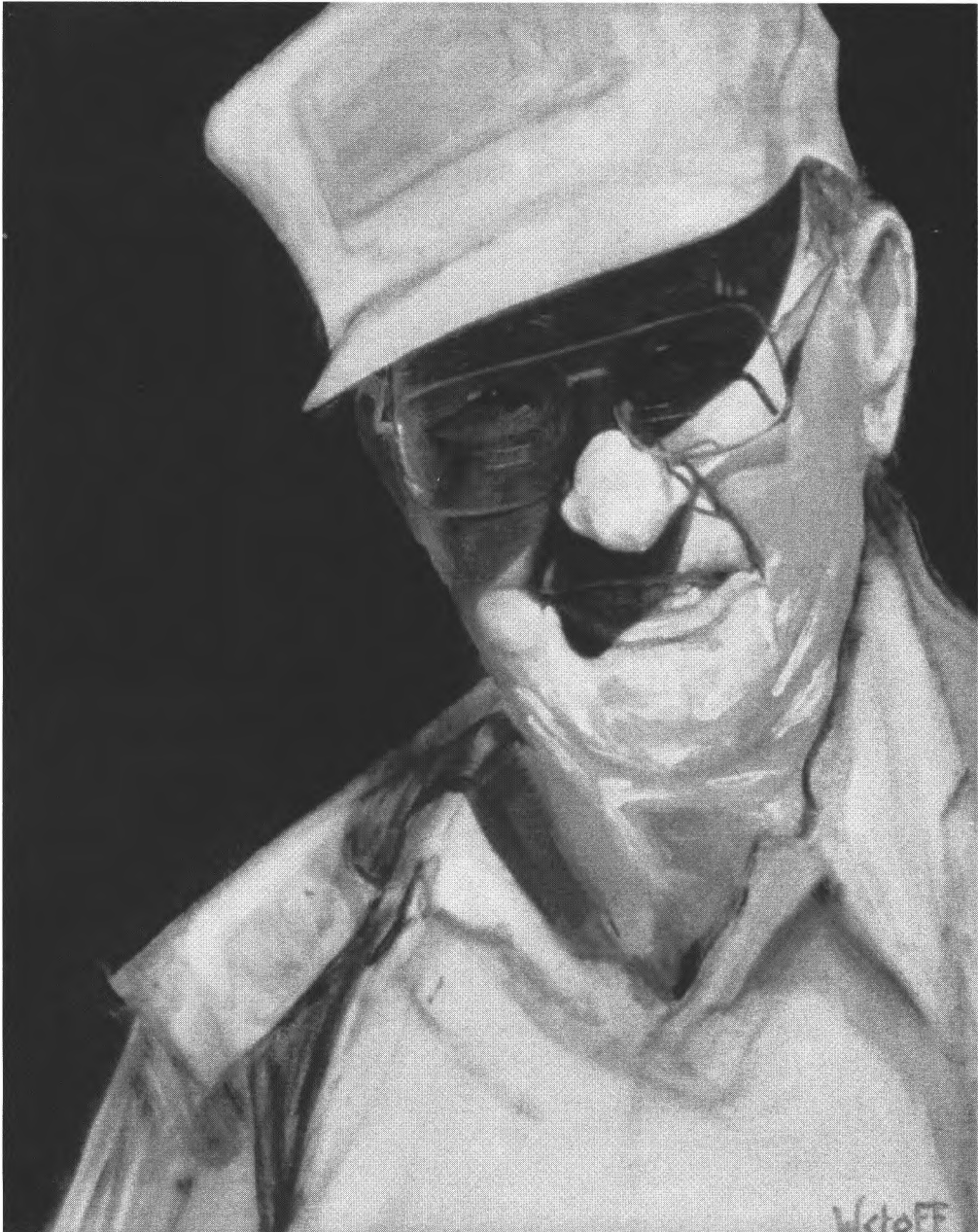
The buck turned suddenly and stared intently back in the direction he had just traveled. Just when I thought he would take off, he began turning in circles, like a dog making a bed, or looking for a place to relieve itself. Less than 20 feet away from me, he was spinning around like a top. Finally, he stopped spinning and started nibbling on some soybeans the combine had spilled during harvest. I could see his tongue between his lips as he lapped the beans up. His eyes were huge and black, not brown as I expected them to be; his nose was shiny and looked cold and wet.

After a minute or two, he meandered down the edge of the field looking for soybeans and nibbling on random blades of grass growing among the bean stubble. I watched as he approached a large oak tree branch that hung out over the edge of the field. He walked underneath it, disappearing from sight as he entered the woods. I heard him take one step into the blanket of dead fall leaves, then silence. He was gone. I let my breath out.

Did I just dream that, or did it really happen? My trembling hands and legs told me that it wasn't a dream.

You'll regret not shooting that damn spiky buck! Just like you regretted not shooting that doe last year! No. Not this time. Not this deer. I really didn't have a good shot at that doe. I wasn't in good cover, and even though she wasn't as close as he had been, she would have seen me if I moved. I wasn't supposed to shoot her then, and I wasn't supposed to shoot him now. No. Even if I never kill another deer, I will never regret not shooting that "spiky" buck.

Grandpa



*Mark Westoff*

## Life with Dad

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*Heather White*

“In elementary school, we were expected to make cards for our dads on Father’s Day. For me, the Father’s Day card was always a predicament. Daddy didn’t live with me, so did I make him a card? Would I get to give him the card? When I finally saw him and gave him the card, would he even accept it, or would I find it stuck in my suitcase to go home on Sunday? I thought about this every time Father’s Day rolled around. My friends would draw pictures of their fathers playing ball, or playing with the family cat. Dads always wore ties and were forever smiling. I decided I was missing this integral part of my life, this father figure. I realized that I needed a full time father. It was decided: life without a dad was hell. But was life with my dad any better?

“My father seldom wore a tie or smiled. I remember him best in a white T-shirt and blue jeans with a black belt and white sneakers. His smile was elusive, coming out only when he knew his jokes were getting to me. This was the father I knew. I only knew the man I saw on weekends, who drove a black Ford Festiva and never took off his sunglasses until he got inside the house. My father made TV dinners, Hamburger Helper, bologna and ketchup sandwiches, sausages, and eggs —his ‘bachelor cuisine.’ I knew a man who read volumes on helicopters and who told me the Vietnam war movie Hamburger Hill was a classic, who spoke of Vietnam as if it was just another day in his life.

“‘Dad,’ I asked as I sat in his brown plaid chair, reading a helicopter manual, the page lit only by a lamp with a dusty shade. ‘Listen, I know this might be hard for you to talk about, but we’re studying Vietnam in school now, and, if it’s okay, I wanted to ask you about your own experiences.’

"He looked up, and for a moment I thought I was in trouble. But then he started talking, his face blank.

"I flew helicopters during Vietnam. We were sent in to hoist the dead bodies from the fields with a giant net. We sometimes shot at people with guns from the helicopters. We had giant nets.' His eyes became animated as he talked, telling me the horror stories of his life as if it were about ice cream and parks.

"This man I called 'dad' called my mother a 'bitch' and 'horseface' and told me about his dream girlfriends.

"Yes,' he would tell me. 'That Debbie Gibson is real cute, or how about Madonna? I've got the Dick Tracy soundtrack you know. Blondes and redheads.'

"Dad,' I would shoot back, 'I don't care. I really don't. Hey, I'm blonde.'

"I knew that the smiling fathers with the ties didn't talk about such things. This was my life with my father.

"Life without dad was going to school everyday and coming home to mom and grandma. Grandma would sometimes make me apples and peanut butter in our yellow kitchen, the afternoon light casting a shadow about the room. Sometimes she would have a Gleaners meeting, or as I called it, the 'old ladies' meeting, where she and older Baptist women sewed and talked about their families. That was great for me, because that meant being by myself for a brief hour.

"Life without dad was going to night classes with my mom and eating dinner in the cafeteria of Sage Graduate School. We would ride home late at night through the strange traffic of downtown Albany, the streetlights casting a weird glow on my face as I drifted off to sleep, the green glow of the clock radio on my mother's face. I acted in my third-grade production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and made baskets for our 5th and 6th grade basketball team and tried to avoid practicing the piano. Life

without dad meant listening to New Kids on the Block when I got home from school, and classical music before bed. I played with Amber and Pam, my best friends, and let my dog Bisco, a scruffy brown and black mutt, take me for walks in the snow. When I was older, I had my first boyfriend and my father wasn't there.

"Guess what, Dad," I said excitedly. "I have a boyfriend now." I was beaming with mischievous pride, because finally, I was the one with love-interest news.

"Really?" my father said.

"Yeah," I beamed. "He's a football player and his name is Eli. He's real cute."

"My father responded, 'Oh, that's nice.' As usual, my father had no knowledge of my life.

"I landed my first lead in a show without his knowledge, praise, or presence. I went out on stage as Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof* and received a standing ovation, with no father to give me a hug afterward. I did not know what it was like to have a man to look up to, as many of my friends did. I didn't smell aftershave in the bathroom, or even have to worry about the toilet seat being left up. These were alien concepts to me, except on the weekend. But, in the back of my mind, my father was always there. I still tried to make him a part of my life. That was life without dad.

"I wanted a father more than anything. I fed my dreams on Dad's constant apologies to my mother, on his promise that they would get back together. I knew it would work out, it had to work out. In the movie *The Parent Trap*, the girls had brought the parents back together. I could do that! Dad and Mom, back together—it was perfect. When Daddy met Patty, a real woman he was actually dating (unlike Madonna), I had to give up the dream. It wasn't going to happen now. I would not know what it was like to come home and have that masculine energy in the house, to be able to bring Mom and Dad to picnics and shows. We

wouldn't be the "perfect family." I began to realize, however, that my concept of what it would be like to include my father in my everyday life was not reality. Time passed and I realized that it was better that Dad lived in a different house, that his life was not intertwined with mine. Dad had problems that had nothing to do with me. He had insecurities he couldn't deal with: the pain of Vietnam, the anger he felt when he couldn't communicate with me or anyone else. He wanted me to be someone I wasn't. Maybe a friend, or a confidant, but not a daughter. I began to see what was going on in my father's life. I saw a man who sat in a security booth at three in the morning, isolated from life.

"I began to understand that life with dad meant pain, anger, frustration and immaturity. It meant being fed sausage and bologna, and then being told I was fat. It meant endless lessons in calculus when I was ten, and humiliating bike riding lessons. Life with dad was hell.

I remembered the specific bike lesson. 'I'm going to teach you how to ride a bike!' Dad barked at me one Sunday morning. He grabbed my bike and we went to a vacant parking lot. I did not want to ride that bike. I was scared out of my mind. I kept yelling, 'No, Dad, I don't want to!' but I got on the bike anyway. There was no way we were leaving that parking lot without me on that bike. In the middle of one of my tirades, a woman stuck her head out of her apartment window and yelled at me, 'Just ride the damn bike and shut up.'

"Dad said, 'See? Even she wants you to ride the bike.'

"I did not understand how my father's mind operated, but he certainly was in his own world most of the time, not realizing how much he was hurting me.

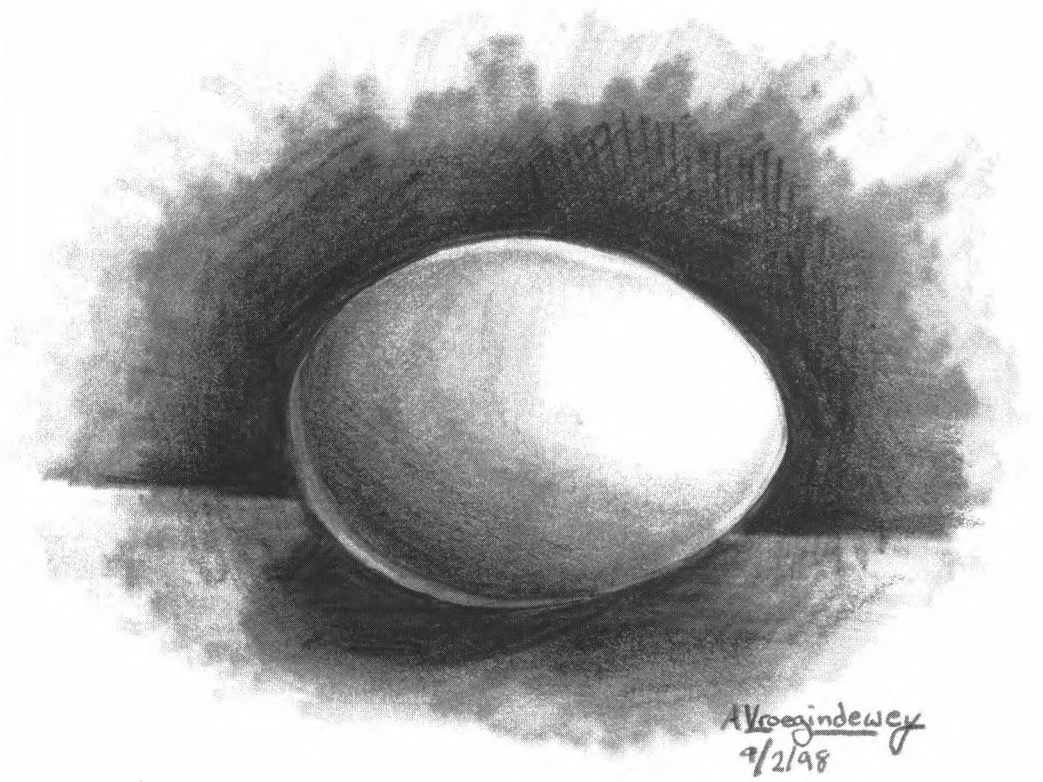
"I was the adult always, telling him to stop calling my mother names and always feeding his ego. We were about ready to leave after a brief visit with my grandfather in the Veteran's Hospital when I spotted a piano in the lobby.

I dashed over to it, feeling the keys under my fingers. I was finally able to show Dad that I could do something. I was a fairly adept pianist and I wanted to show him my stuff. I had only been able to get out about two bars of music before he was over at the piano. 'Here,' he said, gently moving me aside. 'I used to play this song when I was a kid.' I was supposed to tell him how wonderful he was, what a great pianist he was.

"Life without dad had its downfalls, but it was better. Because of scheduling conflicts, I was unable to see my father on a regular basis. He was too busy, or I was too busy, so my time with him dwindled. I called him and invited him to shows and concerts, inductions and special events. He did not respond. I kept calling, and he would complain and yell at me because my mother wouldn't talk to him. He just couldn't be bothered to see me. I stopped calling finally and wrote him a letter telling him how I truly felt. I told him how much it hurt me when he didn't come to my shows and how sad it made me when he insulted Mom. I told him I wanted him to initiate contact.

"Two years later, I haven't heard a word from my father. This will be the second Christmas I haven't talked to him. I will not call him again; he needs to make the first move. I do want a life with my Dad, but on my own terms."

Egg



*Andy Vroegindewey*

Polka Dot Dress



*Dean Larrick*

## Untitled I

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*Kat T. Burke*

Circles circles  
Dancing triangles and  
flirting squares

Twigs to play with  
clouds to dust  
squirrels  
fighting for food  
NUTS

needy rabbits who only want breakfast  
bears . . . lions . . . tigers . . .  
shit

birds of prey  
searching for dead meat  
scowling  
praying

need for thirst  
hungry for hope  
believing with sincerity  
faith with acceptance

turkeys  
CHICKENS  
you you you  
i laugh at you

## Not all piercings are done at Dream Catcher

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*Beth Shippert*

It's the laugh  
Might be the wink  
Perhaps the arms  
That I touch too close  
Too much for comfort  
Was that a cringe that I did singe  
Nerves  
I'm sorry  
Laugh smile grin sin  
There are no emotions for a broken stomach  
Stomach not heart  
That's where it's felt  
In the pit of the stomach in the wheretheresnofood  
Section of the deepest blackest pit  
Of my stomach  
Like I need this  
Like I need this today  
Damn you  
For your effervescence  
For your contagious laugh  
For your breach of faith  
I held stock in you  
Enigmatic soul with an enigmatic smile  
You've pierced the pit  
The pit  
The pit  
Of my stomach

Thinking



*Casey Wendleton*

## Better Than Grape Kool-Aid

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*Toni M. Henzler*

Whenever summer rolls around and I see a mulberry bush laden with fruit, I think of that day so many years ago, when Jeffery Robertson and I began our journey from the light of innocence into the darkness of reality. I remember how that journey started. Earlier in the week my mother had plucked a dark, purple berry, shaped like my 4-year-old little finger off the tree by the chicken house. I didn't want to eat it, it looked so strange and different from the things you normally would put in your mouth. Mom said it was okay, but you know how they are. They're the ones who will tell you spinach is okay. She fed me some line about how I didn't have to if I didn't want to. Cowgirls ate them; regular little girls did not. That pretty well settled it. I was a cowgirl, even had my own pony. I reached for a berry. Don't drop it on your shirt, if it gets stained we'll have to throw it away. I snatched that berry and shoved it in my mouth. I didn't want it to drop on my Mickey Mouse shirt. It was my favorite and there was no way it was going in the trash. I bit into that berry and my life was changed. My doubt and fear bowed before the magical mulberry tree. Tell me tree, how is it that you kept your secret hidden from me? I've played beneath your branches for two summers now. Why did you wait so long to reveal yourself? Mom was laughing at my puzzled eyes. Want some more? Foolish question, of course I did. We stood under the tree that day, taking of its goodness, laughing, learning, and growing. Neither of us suspecting the life lessons that would be learned there in those boughs.

That weekend, Jeffery and his parents came to visit. They came to our house only when we didn't go to theirs. There were never two children who were better friends (or got in more trouble) than Jeffery and I. We shared everything, so of course I had to tell him the secrets of the mulberry tree.

Anytime he and I were together there was a list of "Don'ts." Every weekend that list grew. Don't chase the chickens. Don't ride the goats. Don't throw rocks in the horse trough. Don't shoot the pigs with your BB guns. As we headed out the door that day, another "Don't" was added to the list. Don't climb the mulberry tree. Were they trying to condemn us to eternal damnation? In that fateful moment, we became Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The mulberry was our forbidden fruit. Now he *had* to taste it. We stood looking at the tree, not too close, not too far away, just looking at it. Are you sure those things are good to eat? Better than grape Kool-Aid. He was cautious. Those things just didn't look right. Time to pull out all the stops. I called on all the feminine wiles a four-year-old tomboy possessed. Dare ya! It worked! He was caught in the same trap my mother had caught me in. Four-year-old pride. No way out.

We found a few that were in reach of our sweaty little hands. I picked them. Here you go. I ate one, just to make him feel worse about being such a baby. He took one and swallowed it whole. No fair, you gotta chew it. This time he did, and it was a glorious sight to behold. His eyes flew open then rolled around in his head. Then he gasped. Those little things are good! Let's pick some more. Problem. We had already picked the only three we could reach!

Let's just climb the tree. Jeffery was always prepared to blatantly disregard "the list." We can't. We'll get in trouble. We've gotta find another way. I was the practical one. Stand on my shoulders and you can reach them. We tried and tried, but to no avail. Here, climb up on the car,

and then step on my shoulders. I still don't know how such a silly, simple, childish plan led to such a great discovery, but after I had climbed up on top of that Volkswagen Bug, it all fell into place. I could barely contain my excitement! Jeffery! Look! Up here! I bet if we got on the roof of the chicken house, we could reach some berries! He scrambled up on the roof of the car like an organ player's monkey coming after a peanut. Together we stood there looking at the roof, then the tree, then the roof, then back again to the tree. It seemed an eternity before Jeffery spoke. I can do that. I can jump to the chicken house from here; I could make it to the tree. It was a long way to the ground and I was scared of heights. But if Jeffery Robertson could jump that far, then by God so could I. Yeah! I figured if I acted REALLY brave about it, it wouldn't be quite so scary.

You go first. The mind of a boy isn't really much different from that of a man, especially if a girl dares or challenges him. She didn't even have to be a girly-girl, so long as she was a girl. He didn't have a choice now. Even if he wanted to back out, he couldn't. A girl had challenged him to go first. If he didn't, he was chicken. If he did, and failed . . . he hesitated for just a second, gazing off toward the house like he heard our moms calling. Like he was hopping our moms would call. When he was satisfied no one was going to intervene and save him, he started to climb.

The car was parked pretty close to the little chicken house, so really all he had to do was get a toehold in a knot-hole and pull himself up on the roof. He did it, and pretty quick too. Come on. Well, this part didn't look like it was going to be too bad. I tried to remember where he had put his toes and where he had grabbed, and figured if I did exactly what he did, I'd make it too. It worked and climbing up to the roof was a piece of cake. We sat on the roof surveying the yard from a totally new perspective.

How far do you think I could spit from up here? Don't know. Bet ya can't hit that chicken (spittin' on chick-

ens hadn't yet made it onto the "Don't" list. *Yet* being the key word). Jeffery worked his jaws around, getting up a ball of spit worthy of our new perch. He drew in a deep breath and let it fly. It sailed up, up, up, and we sat there watching it go. It was moving in slow motion. I had to admit, it was pretty impressive, but it didn't come anywhere near hitting the chicken. I really didn't wanna hit that chicken. Yeah. He had to save face. I meant to do that. Sure ya did. I let it go because we had bigger fish to fry. Time was passing and it was rapidly approaching mulberry-thirty. He must have read my mind, because we stood up together.

Go ahead. Okay. As he swayed to and fro, looking for just the right spot, gathering the proper amount of momentum, I started to realize the power females of the species have over the males. It was a heap big powerful thing—and I liked it. He jumped. He made it. I did it! I spotted a big branch that looked friendly and safe. I eased over to the edge of the roof and jumped onto that branch. The branch was holding and so was my breath. My lungs reminded me to breathe. Well, we had done it. A quick look around revealed it. Mulberry heaven. They were everywhere! They were big and ripe, just begging to be picked and eaten. Or thrown at your best friend. It was a great day.

We ate mulberries, and sang songs, and dreamed the dreams of "One Day." One day, I'm gonna have a horse like Fury, only my horse will be smarter. One day, I'm gonna have a job like my dad, and I'm gonna build the biggest house in the world for my Grandma.

And then we heard it. The twang of the spring and the hollow slam of the screen door. Both of our moms had come outside. They were looking for us. It had been too quiet for too long and experience had taught them that was never a good sign when Jeffery and I were together. We watched them from our tree. They can't see us; they don't

know where we are. Jeffery was making faces. I noticed that his teeth and tongue were purple. Then I saw his hands. And arms. And legs. And shirt. And shorts. He was almost solid purple. Even his platinum blonde hair had purple blotches in it. He was the funniest thing I had ever seen.

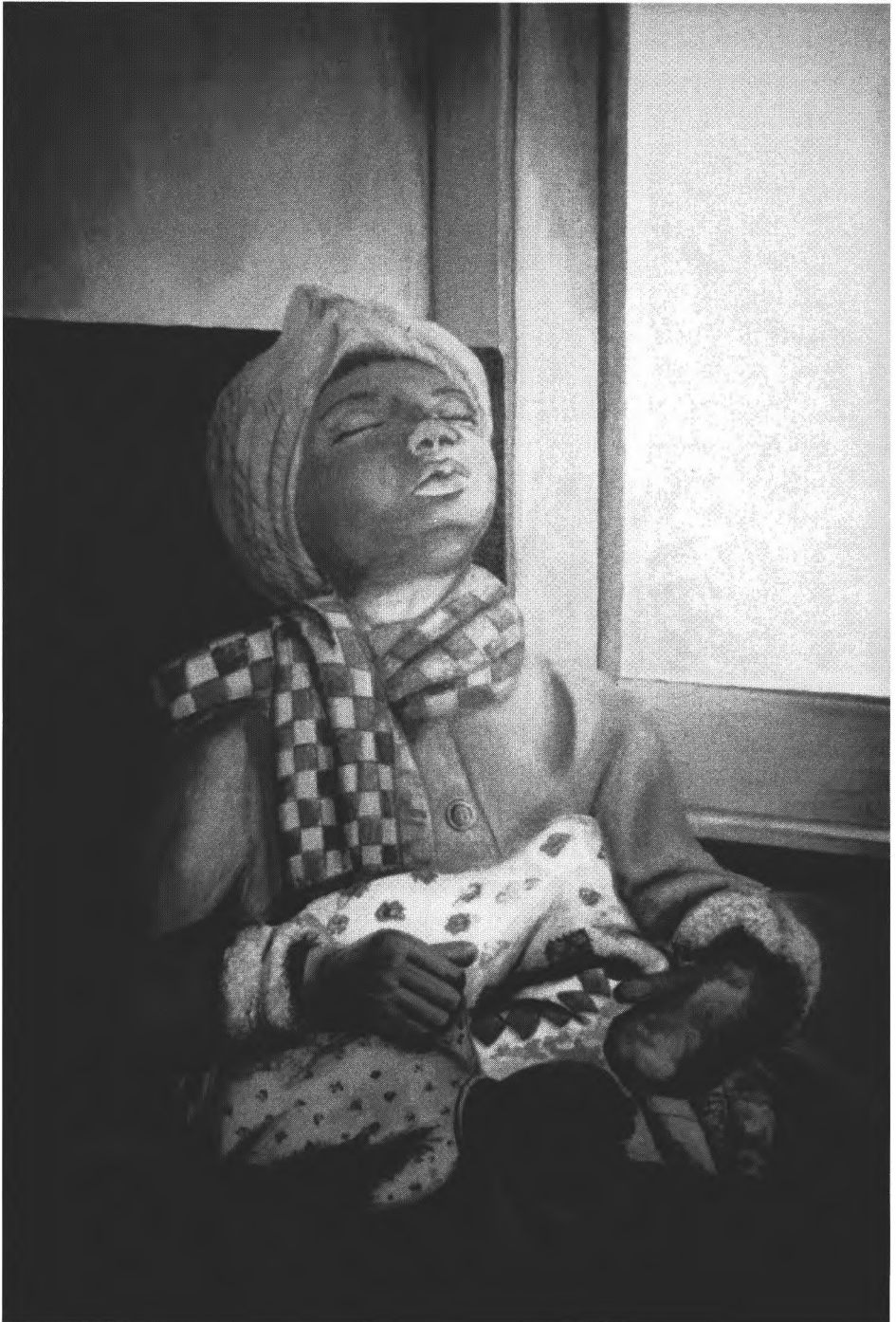
What's so funny? You. You're purple. So are you. I looked at my hands. There was no way we were going to be able to hide the evidence of this escapade. Then we started. That innocent laughter of children too young to realize that their voices carry. Our mothers looked up and spotted us. The yelling and promises began. When you get down from that tree, I'm going to give you something to laugh about! What could be funnier than we already looked? Moms. They just didn't get it.

We dismounted our mulberry steed and headed for the house. Our moms stayed outside for a moment. I swear I could hear them laughing as Jeffery and I got ready for the bath that we now had to take. The bath wouldn't do us much good; we would stay purple for over a week. It seemed strange at the time, but we never really got in trouble for defying our mothers that day. We kind of had them on a technicality, since we didn't climb the mulberry tree.

That is one of those sweet memories of childhood that always evokes a smile, and a laugh. And yes, even a little sadness for days gone by. I haven't seen Jeffery for many years now. Those days of being joined at the hip and the teasing by our parents that we would grow up and get married are long since gone.

I learned several life lessons that day in the mulberry tree. The last (but certainly not least) lesson learned that day was perhaps the most important lesson of all. If there is a will, there is a way!

The Return



*Casey Wendleton*

## Daddy Said

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*Julie Seidenfeld*

Daddy said "clean up that mess"  
    Mommy said it nicer  
Daddy said "improve that work"  
    Mommy showed me how  
Daddy loves me with all his heart  
    Mommy had to tell me that

## Untitled

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*Lilian Janes*

The plaster falls off the yellow wall  
    As her dry, flaky hands  
Turn the ancient pages that  
    Disintegrate, falling  
To the dusty floor as yellow  
    And red and brown leaves  
Fall to the dying earth.

The old photograph sits judging  
    The plate of burnt black toast  
Thrown before it.

The dried roses falling to the table  
    like  
    old forgotten memories turned  
to thick dust

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