Dear Readers,

COMMONthought 1997 was made possible through the literary contributions of not only the undergraduates at Lesley College, but also through the efforts of the faculty, graduate students, staff, and alumni. All involved worked hard to make COMMONthought 1997 a diverse and exciting compilation of literary and artistic expression. The editorial staff received many high quality submissions; unfortunately we were unable to publish all of them. Therefore, through a thorough process of evaluation, we have selected a variety of works that represent the essence of community at Lesley College.

We would like to thank Dean Carol Streit and Dr. Lynne Morrow. We also would like to extend our special thanks to Dr. Anne Pluto for her guidance and support throughout the process of publishing this magazine. Thanks also to Lindsey Davelaar and Peaco Todd for their extra efforts with layout work, to Ann Albrecht who carefully typed many of the submissions, and to Becky Belk who helped retrieve lost computer files. Last, but not least, a big thank you goes to all members of our editorial staff for their work of selecting pieces, proof reading, and dealing with the various other tasks involved in creating this magazine.

We are excited to present to you the COMMONthought 1997, and hope that you will take away from your reading of this magazine a sense of the diversity of Lesley College.

Sincerely,

Kara Lamoureux
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jennifer Hancock
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Table of Contents

Prose & Short Fiction

2        My Grandmother the Hacker  Ellarwee Gadsden
16       Taina Luisandro Reynoso
25       Weddings and Me  Alejandro Salazar
31       "A Lot He Knew!"  Melanie Campbell
37       The Embroidered Blouse  Marcela Correa
44       Persona Doll Story  Marie Elena Mangiamele
48       Caitlyn Beth Enos
51       Friendly Skies  J. Roberts
53       Stream of Consciousness  Kara Lamoureux
59       Trying to be Strong  Jackie Foschia
69       Ties That Bind  Jere O. Hinds

Poetry

1        Unruly Lines  Kathy Marino
5        Ode to the Moon  Barb Webb
6        Desire  Coleen O'Connell
7        You  Jennifer Lee
8        The Spirit Within  Melissa Nelson
9        Feast in Vain  Pam Steinkamp
10       Unnamed  Margaret Krell
11       Jason  Rebecca Irvin
12       A Virgin to this Feeling  Lindsey Davelaar
13       Dark Side Poem  Natasha Taylor
14 Night and Day  Jon's Allison
28 First Love  Jennifer Hancock
29 The Dimwit and the White Key  Ruhiyiyih Comack
30 First Love is Forever  Becky Kinney
42 The Plastic Woman  Stephanie Bouchard
50 Becoming a teacher...  Carole Brandon
54 Life's Journey  King Kwan K. Cheng
57 Working Hard Just For You  Amanda Daniel
65 Untitled  Robyn Leigh Weer
66 Poem to the Child That Did Not Come To Be  Lisa "Riz" Risley
74 The Rage  Juli Stuart
75 Unrequited Lovecrap  Eliza Packard
76 Hostage  Shannon Bovermann
78 Mutilation Nightly  Marion Knox
80 Under the pear tree  M.L. Morgan
83 A prayer of Courage  Judith Cambell
87 Dear Water  Madeleine Ostling
88 Driftwood  Beth Reed
91 Spy Pond, October  Kate Hallen
92Untitled  Dorothy Scotten
93 One Time  Ray Davis

DRAWINGS & PHOTOGRAPHS

4 No.13 Golden Lane, Prague Castle  Richard Rogers
15 Untitled  Erica Rogers
43 Untitled  Alejandro Salazar
86 Untitled  Dena Rosenberg
Unruly Lines

she writes too many strange things.
She tries to come up with rhymes,
But the rhymes are caged animals,
And she doesn't like going to the zoo.
She tried to convince her lines to pull themselves together,
But they fall out of line laughing at her.
She's tried to be subtle,
But lines keep getting out the window and hanging on the ledge.
She's tried to be subtle,
But lines keep getting out the window and hanging on the ledge.
She's tried to be cryptic,
But her lines keep pulling up their skirts above their knees.
She's tired;
Because she's tried to be serious,
But she ends up writing about dogs and fish bowls.
She's distressed...
The lines cause her to smile sometimes,
But she wants to change the world with them.
Still she ends up grinning and writing.
Maybe she should give up;
Let the lines hang from cages at the zoo a while in short skirts.

Kathy Marino
My Grandmother the Hacker

Somehow I thought that because my 74-year-old grandmother did not want a microwave oven she would not want a computer. As a 23-year-old second year law student riding in my sports car on the information superhighway, it all seemed logical to me. However, what I discovered was I had made other assumptions both about the young and the old.

I retired my 10-year-old non-hard drive PC when I went off to college. Since it was still in working order and had been upgraded several times, I thought it still had a lot of life left in it. I may only be twenty-three, but I am not in an ivy league law school for nothing. I know that just because something is old does not mean it has no value or usefulness. I donated the computer to a local nonprofit organization. I was amazed and saddened to find out from a friend working there that no one used the computer. It seems there was no shortage of those who were computer literate. What I was not prescient enough to know was that the computer was too old, too different for anyone to bother learning how to use it. Therefore, they saw no value in it.

My conscience was clear. I donated something I valued to a cause in which I believe. It did not sit right though. There it was, sitting in someone's vacant office, gathering dust, its potential untapped. I kept asking myself, "What is wrong with this picture?" Why was I unable to unhook myself from this inanimate machine? No one can fall in love with a computer, right? Why couldn't I let it go?

Meanwhile, I watched my mother turn fifty the same year; it was one of the most painful processes I have ever had the experience of sharing with her. A graduate education and hair that has been graying for a decade still had not prepared her for the chronologically inevitable. I think at the core of her distress was her fear that someday she might end up like that old PC: good, serviceable, slightly the worse for wear, but usable and still of value. Returning to school to work on her Ph.D. has gone a long way to restoring her faith in herself and her abilities.
It was thinking about this one day that I raised the unused PC to my mother. She pointed out that when my grandmother had visited the other day she had mentioned that what she liked more than anything else was figuring things out. She had taken up carpentry at the age of sixty-two and makes anything from picture frames to wall-units to platform beds, simply by looking at objects in great detail and figuring out how they are put together. I was telling her about how no one at my friend’s job seemed interested in figuring out the PC I had donated. I said I would bet that if she had that old Tandy she would be able to learn how it works. She had not lost her map on the information highway. Putting it all together is so easy now. But, that is not how it happened.

I ‘un-donated’ the unused PC and gave it to my grandmother. It brought tears to her eyes. She said she had been wanting one for some years but they were too “pricey” for her retirement income. I asked why she had not told me or my mom she had wanted one. It was clear I made a mistake here and forgot how old, and from what faraway Southern place my grandmother comes. She noticeably bristled saying she was not one to let anyone know what she wanted or needed. It was her job to take care of that herself. Thank goodness that over the years she has become more flexible about receiving gifts, because it was a match made in heaven.

My grandmother called me the other day to say thanks, again, for the computer; in three days she has learned to play two of the computer quiz games and is now beginning to study the word processing program. This from a woman who majored in motherhood in school and never even took typing. No one, and nothing should be considered without value simply because of its age. Thank Heaven, there are those who really believe and practice that.

Ellarwee Gadsden
No. 13 Golden Lane, Prague Castle

Richard Rogers
Ode to the Moon

Manipulating tides through orbits and pulls
Descriptions that change, silvers and grays
A man with a face, a full moon you're called
Does that mean you're empty for 28 days?
Twice in a new moon, 30 time frames
I've waited and watched for your figure to change.
Eons of starting from one eerie post
Expressionless, solemn, slow-motion ghost.

You see all we're missing, we snore through the watch
Night sounds and creatures, shadows that blotch.
Are you prideful or humble at the pow'rs you possess?
Unmarred and unblemished by the scenes that you witness?
Are you so calloused, how can you endure?
Crimes are unfolding even now in your presence
At dawn revealed ghastly, sickening sewer.

Why did you pull up the covers just then?
Embarrassed, ashamed? I didn't mean to accuse
Deception, debauchery, the raw face of sin?
We all yearn to flee from this cruel abuse.
O moon, I wonder, has it always been so?
Are there nights when the clouds shield your eyes from the blows?
Hold steady your vigil, endure from your space,
I understand ugly; I too turn my face.

Gaze here at the infant, illumined he sleeps,
Bathed in your brilliance, purity, and peace.
The dust on your garden, a sprinkle like snow,
We see it from here, we notice, we know!
Your shape is now blurred, your aura is fading
Your image vanishes, you leave me here waiting.

Stealthful cloud the prisoner keeps,
The guard's watch is over, the vigilant sleeps.

Barb Webb
Desire

S

omewhere in the shadows of my heart
floating in an eddy of blood
freshly returned from the body journey,
there lies a small vessel
boat-like with its transparent flesh sheathing,
tossing as each beat of the canyon wall of muscle
responds to the ebb and flow of emotion.

There, at the bottom of this vessel,
is a hole--so tiny that only
the glare of sunshine
or sometimes the quiet moon glow
reveals.

It is to this tiny opening that desire,
when it is taken into the breast,
travels.

But instead of filling the hole,
making the vessel lifeworthy,
it leaks out
and is absorbed by the sea of blood,
dissipating as quickly as it appears,
gone--leaving the hole gaping.

Coleen O'Connel
You

Something feeds on your blood;
   It counts your heartbeats and holds your mind.
   It makes love to you at midnight without touching you
and disappears with the light.
But you still feel it; you tell me so,
though I don't understand.
I listen intently. Fascinated.
Blood trickles from your neck. Your soul.
Something is inside you,
and those who see you really don't. Nor do you.
You have no reflection. I will never forget you.
You watch me here, jealous of midnight. Come in, I have welcomed you.
You are right. You are death. You are alive.

Jennifer Lee
The Spirit Within

There is a Ghost, living in my veins.
Its spirit flows through me.
Engulfing my essence,
Slowly it eats away at me
Consuming my blood, my life source.
Constantly taking more and more of me
Till I am no more than an empty shell.
Left to lie on an abandoned beach.

My life consumed, by this monster.
Taken away, gone without a trace.
How could something like this
Happen to a girl like me?
A girl so full of hopes and dreams,
Digested by this Devil.

She longs for the day
When the Black curtain is drawn,
and she can finally be at Peace again.
How can one night of passion
Cost so much?
Feast In Vain

We give ourselves to love
to something greater than ourselves
to be shucked naked
to be kneaded pliant
and pressed to perfect whiteness.

We give ourselves to love
to part of a greater whole
a great feast of emotions
sweet and bitter, pain and pleasure
it is all in vain my sweet.

Pam Steinkamp
There are times
I cannot say your name
for to say it
would give you too much
life and move the longing
to my lips that has pooled
at the back of my throat: Once,
green hunger cast
its net on the pond,
it trapped the blue,
clear silk beneath.

Margaret Kneefel
For the brief moment we met,
Your beauty awed me.
I watched you watch me,
And it thrilled me.
I cannot describe what you did,
With your fiery hair,
And long dark coat.
You changed me,
Before you even said a word.

I can hear you asking now,
What I wrote then.
I told you my heart,
You laughed
And said that I would do.

Later on you slept,
Sunlight caught your face in a halo
And made me wonder for a moment,
If perhaps you were my angel.

Then our bus pulled up,
I would get off, you would go on.
So we said goodbye,
And it was nice to have met you.
And I debarked into my lovers arms,
And smiled.

Rebecca Irvin
A Virgin to this Feeling

Your clouds of cigarette smoke
have faded away
leaving my craving unfixed.
Your speech passes
through me; conversation
so light I have forgotten.
Forgotten the wind
that used to blow my hair.
What I once thought of
not wanting- because the
cherry was not yet picked.
I despise my inability.
Did my admiration
leak from my eyes,
unclothe itself in my touch,
peak from my words?
Your hair now being
caressed by something
I introduced, but could not prove.
Your attention
was the fruit around
my pit.

Lindsey Davelaad
Dark Side Poem

Saying "good-bye," no. Too simply, too easy.
Saying "I'll see you around," no. It's a brush off
and I know that you can come up with a better line
than that.

Ending this "dear" friendship between you and me isn't as
easy as you conjured in your mind.
Time changes the human soul, this I can feel.
Love changes the human eye, this I can see
but you as my companion through any battle,
I thought, would not be different in anyway,
shape or form.
Hearing "I'll see you later,"
I guess I will just have to do with.
Hearing "good-bye,"
will just ring and bang in my mind.

Natasha Taylor
awake to the sun's golden smile
yet, in me the night has taken over.
Through the day I laugh and smile,
In my soul I cry and kill.

Why don't you let me go?
He does not answer but walks into the night.
I follow, the night is my keeper.

The sun, the day try to find their place in me,
But then night is my lover and darkness prevails.
He keeps my soul dark and locks out the light,
the light that I need and want so much.

I plead with him to let me go
but my tears are his wine.
He drinks them eagerly
and enjoys my anguish.

Sleep is my escape.
Where night disappears and light rules.
I dream of happiness, of life without the night.
The night, the darkness crush these dreams and my hope.
The voice of the captain woke me up and in two languages, he was announcing that soon we’ll be landing in Santo Domingo and to fasten our seats belts. The flight was pleasant and the food was lousy but I was finally there.

It is sure a tiny airport for such an impressive name but after all it WAS the first airport in America. “El Aereopuerto Internacional de Las Americas.” The Customs was a Catholic Hell. Boy, my friend was right when he told me that you have to be ready to give tips all over the place. After the Customs experience, I was “attacked” by a bunch of baggage carriers. I tried to explain to them, half-English half-Spanish, that all I was carrying was two little bags and I did not need help but this did not convince them. Finally, somebody yelled something in Spanish, and they seemed to get the message, because they left me alone.

When I turned to see my rescuer I discovered a friendly smiling face. It was my friend Maria Evangelina. I met her and her father two years ago on a cruise; we talked a lot about her country, The Dominican Republic. She described it in such a way that I really wanted to see it. We gave each other addresses then, but I forgot about it. I was surprised when I got her first letter. I did not answer because I was busy. Then I got a second one. Boy, was she persistent! My male ego told me that she was probably very interested in me. Of course! I was handsome, with blond hair, blue eyes, athletic, and most of all, I was an American, so what else could she wish for? I answered her, and we kept writing each to other. As I came to know her I discovered many things. This 22 year old woman was a wonderful human being with a capacity of caring for all living creatures on earth. She has a happy spirit and an outgoing personality. She makes people feel comfortable.

I also discovered that she has had a boyfriend since she was 18 and that she loves him very much and they are planning to get married. She has this wonderful mix of the traditions of her culture with the modern influence of American life. She believes that men and woman are equal in intelligence and that they should work like partners. At the same time she is happy with the man being the head of the house. She speaks her mind and expresses what she feels with conviction and strength. She dreams of getting married moving to a farm and having children.
"Hola rubio, (hello blond) it is so good to see you," she said as she gave me a big hug. She apologized because she was late.

I said "That is okay, I know Latinos are never on time." She laughed and called me a prejudice gringo. Sometimes she has these outburst of strange humor that I've learned to love through the years of our letters and phone conversations. Next to her is Rolando, her fiancé' who I had seen only in pictures. Evangelina introduced us.

"Rolando this is Richard. Richard this is my prometido, Rolando." He said hi to me in a kind of cold way. I think he did not like me very much.

Maria Evangelina does not live in Santo Domingo, she lives in a town called "La Vega" but we will spend the rest of the week in Santo Domingo so she can show me around. As we walk to Rolando’s car I can feel the heat.

"Woo! it's hot," I said.

"Wait until tomorrow," Rolando said. We got in the car and opened all the windows. Maria Evangelina put the radio on blasting with a merengue. The drive to her aunt’s house was beautiful. You can see the sea with the prettiest blue color I’ve ever seen. The palm trees are dancing to the music and the wind. I see people’s faces, smiling faces, the Dominican Republic has the reputation of being a poor country, and you do not expect to see beautiful houses and luxury cars running around, but they are. She took me to Arroyo Hondo, an area where a lot of rich people live. The houses are mansions. I also saw a group of houses made of cardboard and palms. Such a poor area, right in front of the mansions. What a contrast!

I was all set in my mind to drop my luggage and take off right away. I wanted to see everything. Maria Evangelina had other plans. Her aunt had prepared a dinner in my honor. "My God," I thought, "She does not even know me! and besides giving me room in her house, she is preparing a dinner in my honor!"

"It is a Sancocho," Evangelina says, "You will like it."

"I think is too hot for Sancocho," her boyfriend said.

"I know, that is why we are going dancing first and then we are coming back to eat." Maria Evangelina said, "We will leave from here around 7:30 and be back by 11 or 12 to eat."

"At midnight?!" I replied.

"Yes," Rolando said, "that is the Dominican way. You go party all night and then come for a Sanchocho and go to bed when the sun is coming out."

17
“Okay,” I said.

My room had its own bathroom with real plants inside. The bedroom was big, all carpeted and with gorgeous paintings of mountains on its walls. The windows were huge and from them you could see the surrounding areas. There was a lot of land. Green, peaceful, you could hear the birds getting ready to sleep because it was getting dark. “How can they want go to a disco now?” I thought I would rather take a walk. This place is beautiful.

We hit the disco. Maria Evangelina was complaining that because it was Thursday the place would be half empty, including “the Malecon” which is a boardwalk where people go to see the sea but also it is the gathering place. You go there to show yourself. No matter where you go that night, Evangelina said cool people always drive slowly around the malecon so others can see them. I found the Malecon pretty full. “It is not,” Maria Evangelina said, “on a Saturday night the traffic jam is so bad that you can leave your car in the middle of the street, go buy a beer and come back without the line even moving.”

They took me to a disco called El Meson de la Cava. Everybody was dressed up but me. Maria Evangelina told me that the only reason why they let me in was that they knew gringos “never dress up.” The place was amazing. It was underground in a cave, a natural cave. Maria Evangelina explained me that this cave was discovered 15 years ago. If I look carefully at the walls, I will find some painting done by the natives hundreds of years ago.

“I do not think there are any left,” her fiance’ said, “I think they covered more of them when they were turning this into a disco.” I was shocked that they did such a thing with such a beautiful place. “Unfortunately, dollars talk,” Rolando said. “A very important American company ‘leased’ the place and they decided to make a disco. It’s sad, but it’s even more sad that we are here supporting this.” Maria Evangelina told Rolando to lighten up. But, I respected him for thinking like that.

It was close to 12:00 when I woke up the next day. What a party last night! We came back from the disco late that night and the house was full of people with another party going on. We had dinner and then more dancing and laughing. I finally decided to go to bed and despite the noise I went to sleep. The house was now quiet and except for “Tia Petra” (Evangelina’s aunt) and the help; it seems that everybody else was sleeping. The first thing she did was offered me food. They already had a full meal ready. The aunt did not speak
English very well, but from what I could understand the party was over after sunrise. Maria Evangelina and Rolando, went to sleep a couple of hours later. She did not think they would get up until late in the afternoon, especially Rolando. She made sure that I knew they were sleeping in different rooms because “here, decent girls do not sleep with men until they married.” She said. I did not like the remark, but after all, hey, this is another culture and besides I am NOT a girl. In fact I used to think that the difference between good girls and bad girls was that the bad girls help you take their clothes off. I am glad I do not think like that anymore but I think some of the beast is still in me. I asked the aunt if they always party like this in the middle of the week.

“No,” she said, “Special Occasion. Maria Evangelina here, you here, Maria Evangelina marry soon. Party special present from me.” I asked the aunt if it would be okay if I went and take a walk in the woods behind the house. She said that was okay but be careful of the mosquitoes! Before I left she said, “Me no here when you come back. I visiting my granddaughter. You feel at home.” I thanked her and went off to take my walk.

I was enjoying this very much. It was as hot as Rolando had said it would be. I sat down under a tree. I was thinking that this place would be fabulous for camping. Something attracted my attention. A noise like... running water, could it be? No way, I said to myself but I decided to follow the noise. I ran like a maniac for a while, stopping frequently to make sure I was on the right track and to make sure I knew my way back. Finally, behind some bushes I found it. A river, beautiful surrounded by trees (like a protection fence) with rocks close to the shore to sit on a summer afternoon like this. I could see birds and hear the sound of insects and see little lizards running all over the place! Maria Evangelina had talked about them with me. “There is not a tree in Dominican Republic that does not have a bunch of lizards. They are harmless. They help to kills flies and mosquitoes. My grandmother says that they are the ones who bring water to the souls in purgatory. Just be careful with the light green ones they like to jump on your throat, and once they are there, it is very hard to get rid of them. They grab you and won’t let go. If you see them, do not go too close and keep moving, because they do not jump on moving things.” I really thought that Maria Evangelina was making up stories.

I took my shoes off, sat on a rock and put my feet in the river. The water was cool and so pleasant. I was tempted to take all
my clothes off and have a good swim, but I did not know if it was safe to do that. I took off my shirt and washed myself. The temptation was getting stronger and stronger. "I do not care if they are vicious animals inside, or if the water is poisoned! I am going to have a swim." So, I took everything off but my underwear and slid into the river. The water was terrific. I took a quick swim and got out. I was sitting close to the river when the mosquitoes came. I decided to take a last swim and go back. As I was going into the river I put my feet on something slippery. I do not know what happened, but I lost my balance and hit my head on a rock. I could feel myself getting drawn into the water, but I could not move. "I don't believe this. This is a stupid way to die." I could swear that something was pulling me down deeper and deeper to the bottom of the river. Then I felt myself falling into some kind of hole. I heard somebody laughing like a child. Finally I stopped when I reached the bottom of this hole.

I tried to get up and felt a soft hand helping me to get up. I backed off quickly, trying to see in the darkness, but it was pitch dark. "Who are you" I said in English and then in Spanish, "Que quiere?" (What do you want?).

"Just to welcome you," said a female voice with an English accent.

"Welcome me? What are you talking about? How did I get here? What is this, the twilight zone?"

She came closer and took my hand and said: "First, we should get to a more comfortable area for you, then I will answer SOME of your questions."

I was afraid, but I had no choice. I was thinking that Maria Evangelina was wrong when she once told me that the Dominican Republic did not have crazy maniacs like us, gringos. I mean, who was this woman? Then I reacted, what am I talking about? She is a woman, I am a big, strong man, I can handle her and anybody else. She grabbed my hand again and told me with a very soft voice, "You will be safe. We are going to a nicer place. I know you can't see anything but it's okay, I will guide you."

We walked for a while in what felt like a narrow, rocky path. I had never been in such a dark place before in all my life. Finally I started to see light, and I do not know how it happened, but suddenly I was in a place that look like a park. There were children playing and laughing, people walking around, but this does not look like the Dominican Republic. The scenery was different. The trees were in
silver and gold tones instead of green and there was a soft music that seems to go up and down with the wind. People were dressed in a very strange way with floating materials. Everything was in soft colors.

The woman who was guiding me said, “Let’s enter here for a moment. We need to get you clothes.” Then I realized I was **TOTALLY NAKED**! I did not know what to do so I did nothing. We entered a house made of something that looked like flowers, but as I came closer, I realized it was painted like that.

The minute we entered somebody covered me with a blanket “What would you like to wear?” the woman said.

“I want to wear clothes and I want to get out of here.”

She smiled and answered “Just because you do not know where you are does not mean this is a bad place for you to be. One of the greatest mistakes of humanity is that the minute they find something they don’t know, they reject it instead of coming closer and see what it is”. She turned to another woman and said, “Get him a pair of loose jeans and a black silk shirt, one size bigger than him.”

“Levi’s please,” I added sarcastically. Then the man in me said that I was being too passive, I was just letting this woman do whatever she wanted, and that isn’t right. But, there were something about her that made me feel... safe? I did not even know who she was, I don’t know where the hell I was and I do not believe in life after death; therefore, I am not dead. For the first time I really looked at her. She was young with big, light caramel eyes. Her skin was dark, her body small and very attractive. I could not believe that I was paying attention to a woman’s looks in the middle of this weird situation, but I could not help it. She was talking to a man and I kept looking at her. Her hair was black and long, extremely long. She turned her back on me to talk to somebody else, I realized that she was not talking in English any more. It sounded like humming, very soft and pleasant.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned abruptly. It was a young man. He took my hand and guided me to a small room with mirrors, hanging crystals, and with a black marbleized floor. “Nice dressing room,” I said. He smiled and pointed at what seemed to be my new clothes. The jeans were loose and the shirt was one size too big. As I put the shirt on, I felt a feeling of relaxation inside me. It was as if the softness of the material was wrapping my soul with a feeling of warmth.
When I was dressed he took my hand again. I reacted violently and said “Leave my hand alone. I know my way out.” I left the room, and he followed me. I approached the woman who had brought me here and said to her: “Look, I want to know what the hell is this place and how can I get back to where I was.”

“I will not explain to you what this place is because you are not ready for it yet. You will get back when you want to.” She said with a soft, firm voice. Then I realized that her lips were not moving. I was hearing her voice inside my head! Telepathy. She noticed my surprise and said “It’s okay. I can not make the sounds of your language with my lips but I can with my thoughts.”

"Can you read my mind?” I asked.

"Yes, I can, but I would not do that. Freedom of thought is the last thing left to humanity. It would not be fair to rape you like that."

“Since you can not tell me where I am, I would like to go back right now,” I said.

She looked at me with sympathetic eyes and said, “Very well, let’s go.”

We left the store and started walking. I realized how slow she walked, in little short steps, like a bird. I looked down and stopped. “Your feet! I said, “they are, they are backwards!”

“From whose point of view?” she asked very naturally and then added, “Everybody who lives here has feet like me, so you see for us YOUR feet are backwards,” and then she laughed. The air was beautiful, very bright, the sky totally golden colors seemed to be in the wrong places in this city, from my point of view.

“You did not give me shoes,” I said, “I can see nobody uses them here.”

We were crossing a huge garden and it had the most amazing scent. The flowers looked very different, but nothing caught my attention like the Blue Roses. They were big, in a shiny royal blue. I was amazed. I’ve always liked flowers, but I never told anyone because I am a man, and men just get close to flowers when you are buying them for a woman or at a funeral. I was very happy to be able to enjoy them here. I touched them and smelled them. I tried to take one, but the plant cried. “This is a weird place,” I told her. “What is your name?”

“Taina,” she responded.

The sound of a street singer caught my attention. He was surrounded by people. His instrument sounded like a guitar, but
higher. I couldn’t understand the words of his song he was singing in that “humming” language they have. “What does it say?” I asked Taina.

“It talks about freedom; it says that freedom of the soul is the most important of all; it says that people should not only have freedom to speak but also to be quiet if they want, freedom not to look or to look later, freedom of silence, freedom to speak in verses.”

The song was over, I was the only one who clapped. “It looks as they did not like it,” I said.

“They liked it very much. If you look at their eyes you will see all the love and gratitude they are sending him.”

“How about some change? I am sure he would like that.” She smiled at me and said, “We do not use money here. People share. For example, when I went to the store and asked what I needed for you, they gave it to me.”

That amazed me and I said, “What about if people want to take more than what they need?”

“I do not think that will happen,” Taina said. “People want to be happy and everybody knows when you have more than what you need your life gets complicated, you want more and more and, you cannot be happy.” I again noticed the musical sound that seemed to come with the wind, and I asked her what it was. “It is the people,” she answered. “People live in harmony and love. What you are listening to is their vibrations.”

We kept walking, and I could not help asking “Why is it that you always take my hand? Why does everybody here always hold hands?”

“It is an expression of unity and caring,” she said.

We arrived at the entrance of what looked like a cave. “This is it”, she said. “You wanted to go, now you can go.” I felt sad that I had to go. I could not believe how sad I felt.

“I do not think I want to go any more.”

“I know,” she said. “For now, you will go, but you will come back, I am sure. You will come back many times and maybe one day, you will decide to stay.” Saying that she suddenly pushed me into the cave and I felt I was falling. Somebody was shaking me, and I could hear my name.

“Richard, Richard! Are you okay?” I opened my eyes. It was dark but I could see her face in the moon light. Maria Evangelina was shaking me. She and Rolando helped me to get up. I was
wearing my original clothes. We were right at the river shore. It was night. "When I woke up and did not find you in the house, I thought you may have gone somewhere with Tia Petra, but when she came back without you and told me you had gone for a walk around noon I got really worried! Rolando and I came down here to look for you," she said very nervously. We came back to the house. I told them that I probably fell asleep. I wanted to tell them that I had the most amazing dream but I did not.

Rolando suggested that we have dinner and then go out. I told them I wanted to take a shower first. I was sort of stunned by this strange dream, and everything that happened. How could I have slept so many hours? Did I ever get in the river? I could not believe this experience. After the shower I went to get dressed and as I stood in front of the mirror, I froze! I could not believe my eyes! On my chest, a tattoo, a small blue rose with the name "Taina."

Luisandra Reynoso
Weddings and Me

The day started pretty well. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was hoping for rain, but as usual God never heard my prayer. It was the most exciting thing happening in my neighborhood. A wedding gets the whole family together for a reunion you might say. Grandma comes from Mexico, and all my wetback cousins end up staying in our house for the entire weekend. We’re family so I guess I have to live with it. I end up having my own little party down at “dykes are us” the bar made for people like me.

My sister Carmen was getting married at noon in Our Blessed Virgin’s Church down on 46th street. Such a hypocrite my sister. She’s not a “blessed virgin” of any sort. But as far as all my cousins and neighbors know, she was the better daughter in my family. It was mom and dad and Carmen and Juan and Me. I am the ugly duckling you might say. The loser. The freak. The confused child. I was also the oldest so I had to play “mom” every day to my younger brother and sister until they turned fifteen. I didn’t mind it. I knew I would never have my own kids so I might as well take advantage of my situation.

Anyway, Carmen was getting married to Tony. Tony was a good guy. He had a job which was more you could say about any other twenty year old man in my barrio. He was handsome too. Your typical vato. He even owned a lowrider which he built himself. Augh!!! He was still a man. I don’t get into guys. I knew that Carmen would have a big wedding, so I knew that I would be pissed. The church part was what killed me. I knew that the Father John would never marry me and my baby. I could probably have a reception and dance the march, but I doubt that grandma or my million wetback cousins would come all the way down from Mexico to celebrate my union.

Carmen was up and ready around six o’clock. Mom woke her up while playing Las Mananitas like every other Mexican wife-to-be. She arose like a sleeping princess. Except for her hair which stood ten feet high. Her green eyes lit the room, except for her big nose which sucked every bit of oxygen when available. I’m joking! My sister Carmen is an Angel. I just wish I was normal like her.

The music played over and over until she woke up. My mom and me and her stupid three bridesmaids all sat at her bedside and said, “Today’s the big day.” I felt stupid. Maria, Leticia, and
Martha just looked at me and smiled like three dogs in heat. Carmen hit the shower and time went into full swing.

I helped dad with his tuxedo which he rented at "Pepe’s Tacos and Tuxedo’s and All Your Car Needs." The guy who would sell his mother if he had a buyer. Dad looked sharp! A man. My daddy is a man. I love him so much! Juan was still five so he just sat down watching cartoons in the living room. Carmen planted herself in the rest room until the wedding mobile arrived. Mario, the hairdresser, arrived late and I just ran around making sure that my little sister would have the best wedding possible. I bitched at Mario for being such a faggot by being late; I called Pepe to tell him that his Tuxedoes suck; I even called Rita, the lady down the street in charge of making a million tamales for the reception, just to tell her that I was personally going to count them so that she better make them all!

It was around eleven thirty when the car had arrived and Carmen was ready to go. She walked out of the rest room and I swore I heard “Haaaaa—lle—luuuyah! Hall-eelu—ya!” Tony’s car had about a thousand pink carnations on the hood, on the windows, on the tires, everywhere. I said I would drive so I could spend a little time with my sister one on one. It took me about two minutes to get dressed. I wore my new Wranglers, my red ropers, and my blue and red shirt like the one George Strait wore in his video’s. I was set and ready to go.

Carmen stepped outside the house and everyone followed her steps like little baby ducks in a pond. Her white dress was held high by her three bridesmaids to keep it from getting dirty. I sat in the car listening to Patsy Cline.

I kept hearing over and over, "When are you getting married Elizabeth?" I just smiled and smiled and smiled. I nearly screamed once and yelled, “I’M A FUCKING LESBIAN. LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!” But I just smiled instead. It was Carmen’s day not mine.

Carmen finally got into the car and I began to drive to the church.

“So Carmen are you excited?” I asked.

“Yeah, Tony’s a nice guy.” she said.

“Where are ya’ll going on you’re honeymoon?” I asked.

“If we get enough money with the dollar dance, we’ll go to Mexico,” she said.
“Mexico? What do you want to go to that shitty country for?” I said.
“To stay with Grandma for a couple of weeks. Did you know that Tony’s never been to Mexico?” she said.
“Why would I know and why would I care,” I said.

I stopped at a red light on 45th street, just one block from the church. I could see Tony and his best man standing outside on the church steps. The light changed and I drove up slowly.
“Carmen,” I said
“Yeah, what?” she said.
“Do you know why I haven’t married yet?” I said.
“Yeah because of what happened between you and Robert,” she said. F.Y.I.-Robert raped me when I was ten. He was a bastard.
“No it isn’t because of Robert,” I said.
“Then why? She said.
“Because I’m a Le...” The doors swung open on her side and Tony grabbed her hand as she stepped out of the car. I stood in the car facing forward. I could see through the corner of my eye the little statue of La Virgencita that stood next to the church. She was my guardian, my life. I knew then that she would help me get through this day.

My damn eyeliner was ruined. Dad tapped the window and smiled. “The wedding started!” he said. I finally stepped out of the car and dad gave me a big hug. “It’s O.K. mi hijita you’ll find a man one of these days,” he said.

Alejandro Salazar
First Love

When I look into your eyes of blue
see a work of something new

a brand new light of love
i'm floating in air; a beautiful dove

soft petals of roses, I rub against my face
a long life ahead, at the end of a chase

i love you forever with all my soul
you've filled a place in my heart, an empty hole

your tender hand reaches out for my own
i never again will feel alone

my first love; my last love, I will forever remember you
you've given me something I hold everlastingly true

Jennifer Hancock
began to remember
You how you
stood in London
stepping timidly
on the edge
of my universe
as we witnessed
the changing of the stars.
I line up your words
like strings of lights;

AND THEN SUDDENLY I MUST
SHUT YOU DOWN
TURN YOU INTO A MACHINE
AND SHUT YOU OFF
STUFF YOU INTO MY PAST
AND SHUT YOU UP.
YOU ARE ALL THE SAME MAN
ARRIVING WITH A NEW MASK
AND THAT WHITE KEY
BENEATH YOUR TONGUE;

Poisoned milk which makes me a tricked child,
Leaves me kissing and clapping into the NIGHT...

Ruhiiyyih Comack
First Love is Forever

The Sparks made heat that rushed to my face.
My Mind Created commercials for happiness.
The Adventure was new and ever present.
My World became in sync and attuned.
I Believed that I would never turn back and I haven't.

Becky Kinney
“A Lot He Knew!”

I

t made things so convenient the way the shops were set up: the ladies'-hair-salon right beside the barbershop. And the two weren’t so much next door to one another as connected. You walked off the street into this hallway with two doors: the barbershop on the left, and Cut and Dried on the right. I walked into Cut and Dried first, but as soon as I took a deep breath, I wondered why.

The air smelled curdling-sweet with hair-spray, sticky-perfumy and sour all at once. There was so much hair-spray in the air that I could imagine it settling onto my hair and holding it as it was; all long and loose and blown seven ways at once. I swear that’s how it looked and still Josh had only just told me how he thought my hair was beautiful that way. Didn’t matter what Josh thought, I wanted to try my hair short. His practically jumping into my path to say it and grabbing my arm the way he did when I tried to get past him influenced my decision to cut my hair, but I wouldn’t give him all the credit, dubious credit as it was. It wasn’t as if I’d been thinking about getting my haircut for weeks already it just seemed the entirely right thing to do, the way that sudden decisions can.

Short haircuts for women were becoming popular, the entirely wrong cut. These styles featured hair razored barely above stubble in the back with these wisps that made it look long all over the rest. The walls of that Cut and Dried salon were covered in pictures of women with these haircuts. I thought about pointing to a picture of a woman turning her perfect profile to the camera and looking off into the distance so serious and saying that it was exactly what I didn’t want. I wanted it simple, I wanted it blunt and I wanted no illusion of length. I imagined my hair as a clean round shape curling under around my ears. It was so simple that I could have drawn a picture of it; basically, it’s the same haircut you see on some little boys. ‘A little boy’s haircut,’ that’s what I told the hair-stylist I wanted.

It was a good thing that I described my idea when I did; I was leaning my head over the sink feeling the warm spray soak my hair. You should have seen the woman’s face when I told her what I wanted, a wall of shock. So, there I sat looking up at this young woman with long, high, yellow-blond hair around her perfectly painted oval face and she’s staring down at me with electric-blue-lined eyes.
I sat up awkwardly, just in time to see a client walk in with her young son. His hair was neatly clipped, short but not too short, and bangs framed his face. I could not have asked for a more perfect example. “See that little boy? That is exactly the haircut I want. Can you do that with my hair?”

“I’ll tell you something; you don’t realize how long it would take for your hair to grow back. What would you do if you woke up one day and felt like you missed your hair?” The young woman pulled herself up straight, and the plastic pink-and-orange flowered smock she wore over her clothes squeaked with the movement. I wondered how a hairdresser who seemed so ready to try convincing a customer not to cut her hair could ever make a living. “With your hair, know what would look really great? Layers! I could cut layers into your hair and it would fall so nicely. Your boyfriend would love it; you got a boyfriend?”

Even before she asked about a boyfriend, I was getting ready to get up and leave. I wanted to leave politely, but I felt ready to sacrifice manners if it got me out of the place before that woman got the chance touch my hair. Luckily, she hadn’t even gotten a chance to wash it.

“Listen,” I tried to laugh. “There’s a barbershop next door; right? What I want, you see is a haircut like that little boy’s; no layers or anything. I’m sorry for taking up your time, but I think I better go next door.”

I got my butt out of that chair so fast you’d think the seat was electrified. I apologized so many times to that woman that I did everything but bow to her. I was worried she would want me to pay her for the time she took, but fortunately she didn’t. I was out of there like I was being chased.

That barbershop had everything you would think it should; it was all white surfaces and gleaming metal. The barber was this almost-old guy in a blue shirt and the kind of pants you can’t avoid calling “slacks.” He seemed too amazed to give me any kind of trouble about the kind of haircut I wanted. You’d think girls with wet hair dripping down their backs came running into his shop every day of the week. He asked a lot of questions, but he didn’t try to stop me.

Were all the young girls doing this now? Was that the style over at that St. Matthew’s Academy? Better this, he surmised, than any of those half-shaved-off styles you see on those punks sometimes, those “mohawks” or whatever. He guessed he should
feel lucky since it meant more business for him. But still, if his daughter came to him and said she was going to get her hair all cut off this way, he didn’t know what he would do. My father—did he know about this little-boy’s-haircut I was getting? He might get upset; did I realize that? The barber stopped in the middle of washing my hair and asked, “Your dad know what you’re doing?”

There was a lot my father didn’t know, and I wasn’t going to worry about a haircut. “No. I’m sure he’ll like it though. All the same, maybe I should call and warn him.”

“You better honey; he might just about have a heart-attack. I tell you, if my daughter Debbie was to come home the way you’re planning to, why, I think I’d drop where I stood.” He finished rinsing my hair, talking over my bent head.

“You should see my Debbie’s hair. Blonder than you could get out of a bottle and it takes a curl like nothing you’ve ever seen.”

“Oh, sounds lovely.” I felt that I needed to say something. I got up and followed him to one of the red-leather and chrome chairs in front of the long mirror.

“You bet she is! Now you gotta promise me, honey, that you’re gonna call your dad before he gets home and sees you.” He held his scissors over an extended lock of my hair; ready to cut if I promised. “If it’s a local call, you could use the phone up front.”

I felt as if I were shattering some grand illusion. “I don’t live with my parents; I live at school.”

“Ah, that’s not right. How old are you?”

“Seventeen,” I almost whispered.

“That is not right at all! A young girl like you needs to be with her folks. You ever get to feeling homesick? I’ll bet you do.” No matter what he may have thought about my living arrangements, this barber was cutting my hair. The first long pieces spiralled to the floor.

“Everybody gets homesick sometimes.” I didn’t feel like lying to him. In a weird way, I liked this guy. I tried to strike a hopeful chord. “I’ll be seeing them tomorrow; it’s March break and my family is going to California.”

“That’s more like it. Don’t you talk to me about your ‘living at school;’ you live with your folks. You just go to school here. School is not your home...”

His voice fell in with the clip-clipping of the scissors. I thanked the gods he was talking about family; he didn’t ask if I had a boyfriend. Well, he was the father of a daughter, and daughters’
fathers don’t want to know about boyfriends. On that score, they prefer ignorance, whether they realize it or not. Fathers appear to firmly believe in the perpetual virginity of daughters, their own and anybody’s.

If Daddy was going to get upset over anything, it would be my hair. He couldn’t get upset over something he didn’t know. What, did you think I would tell him about Josh? Oh, that would make one sweet announcement. I could practically hear myself. Hey Daddy, I was going around with this guy Josh this semester; this skinny kid who smokes and wears a hat that looks like something Indiana Jones might wear. Yeah, well anyways he got me feeling all jittery and curious when he kissed me. So we went into this soundproof room and had sex. The room was under the stage, and all I could think about the whole time was the cast of the school musical was dancing over my head. It only happened once, and after that Josh started lurking around after me. Maybe it only seemed that way because I was trying to get some time to myself. He kept following me, and that’s why I got my hair cut.

Imagining myself explaining to my father about Josh was like a joke. The voice in my head explaining wasn’t mine; I couldn’t say those things. Same way I couldn’t picture how Daddy’s face would look as I told him. He was never going to hear about it.

I wondered when I would be able to tell Josh that it seemed to me that we should end this thing—this relationship, this whatever. And it wasn’t just because I always thought that having sex with someone was going to be different. Different how, I don’t even know. Just different. I never imagined myself in a florescent-lit room taking off my clothes all at once because that’s what Josh asked me to do. I guess that isn’t much, but it felt all wrong. And don’t ask me the way that I thought it would feel, just not all sudden, violent and breathless. Yeah, and when I got back to my dorm-room I sat out on the fire-escape feeling kind of beaten-up from the inside and really baffled; was this what I wanted to happen?

Since then, Josh seemed to be spending all his time trying to be wherever I looked; which was weird considering that I missed him. Maybe it wasn’t him that I missed as much as the way we used to be together. It wasn’t just that my boyfriend was acting weird; he was acting weird and there was no one I could tell about it.

It used to be that I could tell Josh anything. Like the nights we used to sit out by the Smokehouse and ask each other how we
ever grew up where we did. Now, I would never expect a New York City kid like him to understand about running around the old neighborhood with my best friend Maggie, but he didn’t need to know anything about the old place to appreciate what it was like. Same way I could imagine what it was like for Josh to sit in a movie theater in New York watching two showings of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* even though I’d never been to New York and never went to the movies by myself until the night I really needed to be somewhere that he was not. I did that the night after the sound-proof room; I really needed to be by myself that night. It’s kind of too bad though; I might have missed my last chance to talk to Josh and really say anything.

Maybe I didn’t. I looked at myself in the mirror and saw the clean, new shape emerging. Clearly, this would be exactly what I wanted.

“Well, it was time you got your hair cut anyway.” The barber worked to finish off the left side, making it even. “How long has it been since your last trim?”

“I dunno; six months?”

“The ends, you see; they’re all split. Leave it too long and they get all frizzy. Hair’s funny; it grows to a point and then sorta unravels. Your hair was never supposed to be as long as you had it.”

There it was, I would walk out of there with my hair the length that it should be. Josh would see me walking around and he’d talk to me the way you talk to a friend who has something new about them; like someone returning from vacation with a tan. With all that dead unraveled hair off my neck, off my shoulders, I imagined myself walking beside him; having him talk to me like I was someone new and not some girl he’d stared at until he memorized her.

Maybe when I walked back to school Josh would see me as someone he needed to talk to, ask questions, to meet again. And if he didn’t? Well, that was no fault of mine. I wanted my hair short and straight. I wanted that weight off my shoulders.

This new haircut looked like me; I looked at the finished reflection as the barber brushed snippets of hair from my shoulder. For one thing, that was the end of dragging that big brush through my hair morning and night; that thing was bulky to have to carry around in my purse. And you could see my eyes without me having to shove all that extra hair out of the way. I looked myself in the eye;
I've got really pretty eyes you know, hazel with gold flecks. I wondered if you could really see my eyes with my hair all hanging long. Probably not; hey, they half surprised even me. And what was Josh talking about, saying I was beautiful with my hair hanging in front of my eyes? A lot he knew!

Melanie Campbell
The Embroidered Blouse

"Our breasts were to us treasured shrubs, needing only the proper combination of water and sunlight to make them flourish."

Jamaica Kincaid

It all began with a stupid magazine and her father joking about an article he had found in it: surveys had discovered that women with small breasts were brighter than women with large ones. Sitting at the dining table, she had laughed as loud as her three older brothers over the article and jokes. But as soon as the evening meal was over and her mother and sister silently began picking up the dishes to wash them in the kitchen, she ran into her bedroom. Closing the door tightly, she leaned against the door for a few seconds tuning her mind into the silence of the room, into her privacy.

Once she felt safe, she stepped away from the door, took off her sweater, her school blouse, her bra, and quickly placed herself in front of the full-body mirror. Slowly, very slowly she began looking. She was only thirteen but her breasts had puffed out already to an adult size. She began by caressing them, measuring their size inch by inch. She saw them swollen and ugly. "Aren't female adolescents supposed to look like elongated sticks, or big, sexless children?" she thought. She felt disgusted at a body that did not fit the image of the young adolescent she was told she was. A rage against her father overcame her; how could he pay attention to a disturbing article published in a cheap magazines? Her rage deepened against her mother for having given her birth—she had been a darling fatty baby, she was told, a sweet chubby child, and now, a round and heavy, fully grown girl.

Slowly that rage shifted to fall on her. For after all, she realized, it was left to her alone to bear the reality of that ugly-to-look-at body of hers. She thought she understood clearly now why Sylvia, her sister, was the father’s favorite, for it was so much easier to like and love her thin and graceful body. "Sylvia was visibly the brightest of the two," her father had laughed loudly at the table. This time she could not stand it, she lost control and once more brought her right hand up to her chest and firmly pressed against it, and kept pressing as if by pushing hard something would burst under the
strength of her palms and fingers, for she wanted to stop those inflated balloons of hers from growing once and for all.

Sylvia found her crying on the floor of their bedroom, in front of the mirror and nude from the waist up. She was put in bed and left to rest. No one asked her any questions— no one would ask her anyway, for the women in the family kept their silence. The men were at that hour always out and by the time they returned home, it would be past her bedtime.

From that day on she decided to stop eating. She refused to allow a single bite of any type of food to enter her body. She did not drink liquids either except for plain water and black coffee. Somehow, she started to feel an extreme pleasure in drinking black coffee. For her, it was a mixture of reward and punishment since the flavor of black coffee really was disgusting to her. She would indulge in half a teaspoon of honey once a day, and three teaspoon of cold milk every other day. Coffee was the only nurturing she provided herself.

Only when she fell seriously ill could her family do something for her—weak as she had become, she could offer no more resistance. They took her to a hospital and forced her to stay for two full weeks. The nurses fed her first with serum and water, then they added liquids and jellies, finally forcing her to eat purees and custards and all that hospital’s food so disgusting to anyone’s taste. They had succeeded in their effort to re-inflate her body—her groins, her belly, her cheeks and her breasts. Her endless fast were futile, the nightmares she had endured, a waste. She had seen herself mostly dressed in a simple night gown and wandering through the same rooms of the house—the dining-room, where her brothers would devour huge plates of fat bologna served with dripping prunes and pork meat. Her father’s bedroom, where she saw him slowly fingering endless pages of magazines, staring at pictures of deformed, strange and frankly ugly women. And finally the kitchen, where a cloud of smells would swell out as soon as she opened its door -vanilla extract, sweet clove, or the scent of boiling, perfectly cooked, vegetable broth. No one ever seemed to notice her, not even her mother or her sister who were always by the stove, too busy, cooking the meals for the male.

But her reality now was in that hospital where they had pulled her back to bear her old guilt. Hemmed in such an ugly armor as was her body to her eyes, she hated everyone: mother, father, sister and nurses. She hated God if such a thing existed, but most of
all she hated her own self. The moment this feeling became plain and clear inside her body, she could not choke the impulse that welled up—she had to cry. She cried loud, she cried in silence, she cried with sighs. she simply cried all the tears she could possibly have inside. Initially she felt them coming out of her eyelids, but then tears began pulling from her neck muscles, scraping all her inner throat on their way up to the back of her eyes, out to her eyeholes, and down to her cheeks and lips which she closed tight, afraid that she would have to swallow them back and cry them out again.

She wanted her tears to empty her whole being and she succeeded because the day she finally left the hospital she found she had nothing to say anymore. So she refused to talk, refusing to go back to school or even outside to play with her friends. She simply felt there was nothing for her out there as there was nothing for her inside herself.

Yet her life had to continue. At the beginning they gave her another nurse—a big, thick woman who sat with her through every meal to make sure she would eat. The first months, it took the nurse many hours to have her finish her daily portion. With time, she understood she had no choice but to eat, so she gave up. But with this, her pride left her, and with her pride, her strength. She felt so little, her presence in the house was so absent!

But something had changed. Sylvia had become somehow more timid, yet closer to her. On many occasions she caught Sylvia looking at her, late at night, or early in the morning, greeting her at her bedside with a shy and faint smile. One day, while she was combing her hair in front of the mirror, Sylvia took the brush and continued the task for her. She let her sister do it.

For a full year and every day, Sylvia would slowly comb her long hair down past her shoulders in front of the mirror. She would then plait it and put a hairband she had prepared for her. Everyday a different hairband, a new color, a new form, an old one that had been redone. Then Sylvia began choosing her clothing for the day. She started to adore her sister's taste—she would not wear anything that was not chosen by her sister, and if for any reason the clothes were not there for her, she would stay in her nightgown all day long.

Two years went by this way until the day she turned fifteen. It was a beautiful day of spring, cool and bright. Underneath her window sill there was a bed of carnations: two rows of tiny green stems, each holding a vain pink speck that swayed lazily under a mild wind. After lunch Sylvia came to greet her—she had brought
along a birthday present for her. Shyly, she took it from her sister’s hands then opened it up very slowly. She could feel Sylvia’s presence in every motion of her fingertips unwrapping the paper. It was a blouse, a pale cotton blouse, so light and delicate that in her hands it felt like raw cotton. She unfolded it gently. The most beautiful detail of the blouse was its embroidery, sewn all around the bottom of the sleeves and at the neckline, and made of thin silk thread—pale pinks, lilacs and aquas against the amber-white cotton of the blouse. The most beautiful patterns of flowers edged the wide decolleté. “This pretty embroidery will expose the shoulders,” she thought, “adorning the breasts.” In her excitement she turned towards the full-body mirror in the girl’s room and got ready to try it on. But a sudden impulse stopped her. She remembered her image in that same mirror many years ago, naked from the waist up. Furious and embarrassed, she glanced at her sister through the mirror. Sylvia’s mouth was pursed with tension, her hands clasped on top of her knees. They both waited looking at each other through the mirror. They were both scared, trembling for the moment. Unable to stand the tension any longer, she threw the blouse against the mirror, left the room and ran out to the very end of the back patio where no one could find her.

It was a corner of the patio where sand was left lying from the last repairs of the house. There she sat, hugging her knees tightly with her arms. She felt so angry for being reminded, yet she could not stop thinking of her sister. Something in her sister’s eyes moved her with sadness; they had the look she felt deep in her own eyes. Her right hand had fallen to the side now and was playing with the sand. Sylvia had chosen that blouse on purpose, she thought, while her eyes following vaguely the pattern she was drawing in the sand. Her fingers had opened narrow paths of sand linking the scattered daffodils that had managed to bud in that abandoned pile of sand. Every single day during two years, Sylvia had taken time to prepare her clothes, to comb her hair, to spend some minutes with her silent being. Her head was now turning, realizing, regretting. She felt a sudden urge to return her sister’s kindness and cheer Sylvia’s own sadness. “I could wear the embroidered blouse for her,” she thought, but she didn’t dare do that. “Yes,” she found at last, she would give Sylvia that beautiful blouse for her to wear. She knew Sylvia liked it as much as she did.

The next morning it was Saturday. She woke up early, took the blouse in her hands and sat on the tocador chair by the big mirror. She held her back straight to wait for her sister to wake up. Oh! She
wanted so badly to please her, filled with embarrassment for these years of selfishness. Time passed, the sun came up but Sylvia remained in bed. She waited more, breakfast was being served out in the kitchen, yet Sylvia would not wake up. When the older girl finally opened her eyes and did leave her bed, she had fallen asleep on the chair still holding the blouse. The touch of Sylvia’s soft grip gently taking the blouse from her lap awoke her. She swiftly moved her eyes towards the mirror, curious about her sister’s intentions. Sylvia lifted the blouse to her chest, turned towards the mirror and held it up with her hands. Moving her hips vainly side to side, Sylvia looked at her silhouette, her tiny breasts and her pale, bony shoulders. In silence she glimpsed at Sylvia’s face. She saw in it disappointment, disgust, and she recognized the sadness. Sylvia’s eyes trotted from one corner to the other, from one feeling to the other.

She got up from the chair, embraced her sister’s skinny waist and kissed her thin shoulders. Sylvia turned to look at her in surprise—ready to utter an apology. Sensing her sister’s embarrassment, she lifted her finger to Sylvia’s lip, commanding her with that gesture, to stop. Sylvia’s eyes were wider now, waiting for her younger sister’s next action.

“I know,” she uttered to the puzzled sister, “I’ve been the foolish one. I thought... I was the only one....” She felt a stumble of words fighting their way out, all at once and entangled with the salty taste of locked tears. Hurriedly, she took Sylvia’s hands, inviting her to kneel down and sit on the white vinyl floor of their bedroom. For long hours the two sisters sat and talked—she talked to her sister; and her sister talked back to her, she hugged and she was hugged; she asked, they both asked many questions, and they both got many answers back. For the first time they told each other secrets which if shared earlier would have saved them both of their small and big piercing sadnesses.

Then she called her mother and asked her to join them. The three women of the house had breakfast together at the kitchen table—fresh apple cider with bread and buttered toast. And once the meal was over and they had finished with the dishes, she ran back to her room and closed the door to be for a minute alone. She wanted so badly to engrave three images in her mind forever: the embroidered blouse, her sister’s skinny shoulders, and the mirror of their bedroom.

Marcela Correa
The Plastic Woman

Barbie has been reincarnated
Carved by the harsh winds of New York, simmering in the balmy sun of Florida
She is a resident of the world, a creation of universal desire
Drooling jowls, gawking mouths greet her every move
The only difference between dog and man is that one is chasing the cat and the other the pussy
Does she accept the primitive man or does she search for the Knightly Ken?

Parched lips sip Ruby Red Grapefruit juice- her thirst will never be quenched
Arms encircle her body, lips suck the last drop of liquid from her mouth
She bends toward the physical power, using her delicate fingers to extract the green bills from his back pocket
An employee of her appearance, a mother with one income
Her children are squeaky clean and pleasantly plump
Does it matter that she spends their waking hours in a dream?

A jewel of the night wrapped in a cocoon of potato chips during the brightness of day
The greasy residue helps to perfect the smoothness of a nature burdened with chronic P.M.S.
Her tongue can lash and lick with the same intensity

She has always been a picky eater
Her fingers scavenge the cereal box, she must rescue every raisin from the enveloping bran flakes
A taste of the innocent past, distorted by the crouching present
That waits for this Barbie doll to melt her plastic armor
An oozing pile of pink lava flooding the boundaries of society
The next generation will digest the seeping liquid of her strength
To survive exposure of the world.

Stephanie Bouchard
Persona Doll Story

Anita, viene da me! Anita, Ecco! It is your turn to get your hair brushed.” Anita loved when it was her turn to get her hair brushed. She was the youngest girl and it seemed that she always had to wait for her sisters to have a turn. Anita loved when her father brushed her hair before bed. It felt good to have her head rubbed and she loved the attention from him. She counted with her father sometimes in Italian and sometimes in English as he brushed her hair fifty strokes forward and fifty strokes back.

“Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty!” Anita squealed with mirth because she knew that her favorite part of getting ready for bed was next. Anita’s father scooped her up and carried her to bed as her sisters followed along and climbed into their beds. She felt so safe in his arms. Anita always got tucked in under the covers by her father at bedtime. She loved the way he tucked her in so tightly. It was as if her bed became a secret hiding spot. Her mother came in to kiss her daughters good night.

“Buona notte Mama,” her sisters would say.
“Ti amo!” Anita added.
“Ti amo!” her mother replied. Her father would sit down next to the bottom bunk bed where Anita slept and read them a bedtime story. She was always fast asleep before he finished the story. Sometimes she would hear him whisper as he shut the door, “Ti amo.”

A week had passed since her father was able to get home from work early enough to put Anita and her sisters to bed after their mother bathed them. They were used to eating dinner without him because he would work late at the factory. They were also used to not seeing him in the morning. By the time Anita and her sisters got up for school in the morning, Papa was at the factory already. Her mother said that he left for the factory very early in the morning before the sun rose, and even before the birds would sing. Anita drew her Papa a picture. Her older sister Concetta helped her write a letter to her Papa to tell him that she missed him. Anita’s mother gave the children their baths, brushed their hair, and carried Anita off to bed. Anita loved her mother very much, but she was sad because she missed her Papa. Concetta got down from the top bunk bed to read Anita a story.
"I miss Papa." Anita said.
"I know," said Concetta. "I miss him also."
Anita awoke bright and early on Saturday morning. Her mother was in the kitchen making crepes for breakfast which was Anita's favorite.

"Buon giorno Mama." Anita said "Is Papa up yet?"
"Yes Anita," her mother replied "but he is not here. I am afraid, he had to go to the factory again."

"Why is Papa always at the factory, doesn't he want to be home any more?" Anita asked. "Doesn't he love us any more?"
"Si, mi amore!" Anita's mother exclaimed, "Your Papa has been very busy and worried about the doll factory lately. He loves us all multissimo, but work has been quite bad."

"Are we out of money?" Anita asked.
"No, dear heart we are not out of money. You know we have all done our best to stretch what little money we have. We just have to try harder, that's all. Now eat your breakfast before it gets cold, then get dressed and we'll go outside to play. You do not have to worry yourself about money." Her mother smiled and gave Anita a hug.

Anita could not help worrying about money. It was all she thought about. Weeks went by and Anita and her sisters hardly ever saw their Papa. When they did see him, he was tired. Anita could tell that there was something different about him. He looked worried. Anita's mother still helped the children wash up for bed; she brushed their hair, and carried Anita off to bed as her sisters followed along laughing.

"Buona notte e ti amo," their mother said as she tucked Anita in.

"Ti amo Mama," Concetta slid off the top bunk to read a bedtime story to Anita. Anita understood that her mother was tired, so she did not ask her to read a book. Concetta read to Anita instead. Although Anita loved her sisters and mother, she still missed her Papa.

Sometimes when Anita would get up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water or to go to the bathroom, she could hear her mother in the kitchen crying. Anita wished so much that she could be a grown up and work. If she could work, she could give her parents money, her mother would not have to cry, and she could have Papa back. She could not understand why people on television
CoMMonthought

seemed to always have money and were happy.

One night Anita woke up to the sound of her parent’s voices. They did not sound happy at all, in fact it sounded like they were fighting with one another! The sound of their voices even woke Anita’s sisters up. Anita’s sisters jumped off their bunk beds and they all sat huddled together. They were too afraid to know what to do. Anita hated the sound of her parents’ voices sounding so angry, that she jumped off the bed without even thinking, she picked up her piggy bank, and ran into the kitchen. Her sisters ran into the kitchen after her.

“Basta!” Anita cried. “I do not want you to fight about money!” she said as tears rolled down her cheeks. “Per piacere, take my money. We won’t ask you to buy us anything.” Anita’s Papa scooped her up and held her as he said,

“Mi dispiace, please forgive me, it doesn’t mean that we do not love you. Adults sometimes lose their patience and we do not know what to do. We do not need your money, we will be okay. We are just going to have to be extra careful how we spend our money, more than before. Do you think you can help?”

“Yes Papa, we all will help!”

Anita’s father said, “Business at the doll factory has been very bad lately and I have been working very hard to try to save it, but I cannot. I have decided to close the factory.”

“Close the factory?” Anita asked. “Doesn’t anyone want to buy your dolls any more? How will you earn money?”

“Your mother and I have decided that we need to close the factory now. I will not make dolls anymore, I am going to make plastic bottles,” her Papa told her.

“Plastic bottles?” Anita inquired.

“Si, cara,” her mother replied. “People buy many things in plastic.”

“Like cooking oil?” Anita asked.

“Yes, like cooking oil,” her mother said as she laughed.

Anita turned to her sisters and shouted “Isn’t this great!”

Everyone was happy that the shouting was over. Her father kissed her forehead and her mother hugged her sisters.

Her father said “Adesso dorma,” and they went to sleep.

It was still a few months later before Anita’s Papa was able to put Anita to bed every night. She felt very special when he was home early from the factory. Sometimes as she dried off from taking her bath she would hear her father say,
"Anita, viene a mi. It is your turn to get your hair brushed."
He would brush her hair and she would count along fifty strokes
forward and fifty strokes back. Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty! Then
her father would scoop her into his arms and tuck her into to bed as
everyone said "Buona notte e ti amo." Anita loved to fall asleep to
the sound of her father’s voice as her read to her.

Marie Elena Mangiamele
Caitlyn

We got to bring her home from the hospital on Friday, July 5, 1996. Still weighing over 8 lbs., she was a nice sized baby. Moments after her birth, my fiancé, J.D. and I marveled at her size. And to think that the doctors had estimated the size of our baby to be at around 6 lbs.!! Caitlyn Viola Hobbs was about to change our lives forever.

My bundle of joy cried relentlessly though the fireworks on the forth of July. We had tuned into the Boston Pops performance on the Esplanade. Seems she didn’t care for it. The nurse didn’t check on us that night. I tried to breast feed her, but it wasn’t working. Finally, I grabbed a bottle of formula from beneath her cart. Although I felt guilty for feeding her the artificial stuff, she took down its contents swiftly giving us a brief hiatus before her cries began once again. I quieted my conscience by promising to try her at my sore breasts again the next day. Too tired to care for her properly, we rang for a nurse who reluctantly took the baby away at midnight.

So when we brought her home the next night, I was weary, yet filled with excitement. We couldn’t wait to get her into our home. I carried her wrapped in a blanket to the elevator shaft and waited for our cab at the front of the hospital. J.D. tried to console my jitters to no avail. When the cab finally did arrive, I was exhausted from standing. I wobbled into the cab. Trying to get comfortable was virtually impossible.

I had not one, but two maxi-pads between my legs, two tux medicated pads and a rubber glove filled with ice. All of this was contained in a pair of underwear (but not underwear) made out of mesh. The pressure of giving birth left a feeling similar to a constant weight on my pelvis and bowels. When I stood, I was certain that my insides were going to fall out because they weighed too much for my body to contain. Yet, there I was climbing into a cab with my newborn and my partner in life. It was a nice day and as we drove over the pothole infested streets of Boston, I could not help but worry about the air my precious baby was breathing in.

Then, the cab broke down. Less than a mile from our apartment in South Boston, the cab overheated. We were forced to wait on the curb of a busy intersection for another cab to pick us up.
The second cab lacked safety restraints and my two day old daughter was left to the mercy of the cab driver. We did not speak the rest of the way home, I simply held my breath.

At our home my mother welcomed us alone. All of the well wishers at the hospital had returned to the Cape to enjoy the forth of July and to get back to work. I can’t help but say that I was extremely disappointed.

We have run into many other obstacles along our parenting path. Many times the result has been disappointing. But, as I watched my daughter grow from a miraculous infant into the laughing, smiling, happy baby she has become, I know that it has all been worth my while.

Today Caitlyn visited the Doctor. She is 7 months old, weighs 21 lbs. and 8 oz. She is 27 inches long. She can eat table food. Our daughter, she is a miracle. I only wish that she wouldn’t grow up. I only wish that time would slow down. Watching her grow up is not only exciting, it’s sad. Sometimes I cry because I do not know how to hold onto these precious moments.

Beth Enos
Becoming a teacher...

The first day arrives. The new Student Teacher walks down the hall. Her backpack filled with papers and books describing how to teach. Her clothes are neatly pressed, her smile bright. She is filled with excitement as she walks to her classroom, to greet her students. The day begins.

The children's faces are open and eager. By lunch time she is tired. The morning has been full so much to learn so many unexpected moments of chaos.

Children who were so eagerly waiting to hear her words would not sit still, were laughing, were poking their friends. Attendance needed to be taken. How many children would have hot lunch? How many were going to after school care? The intercom interrupts important announcements—and back to the lesson. Where were we? Refocus attention on the children and the lesson. Where are the markers I just set down? And yes now it's time for lunch. Where am I supposed to eat? Will I make it to the end of the day?

Carole Brandon
 Friendly Skies

Damn it! Why did they have to call me? I can’t see you tonight, Tim, they’re sending me to Indianapolis. I’m sorry, I really want to be with you. I hate my job, I love my job. Why? I sit reserved in a hotel room for two days. I have a final exam in my hardest class on Monday. I’ll study on the plane. I’ll study in my hotel room. What if I don’t pass? I’ve tried so hard. I’ve been focused. I’m tired of studying. My grades are good. (Thank God, knock wood!) I’ll time it so I can socialize this weekend. I have to fly to Aruba Saturday and Sunday. I’ll read my notes in the cockpit. It’s so soothing up there. The clouds carry my frazzled mind; the stars sparkle in my tired eyes willing me to stay awake. And when one shoots, I’ll make a wish to just get through the rest of the semester. I can do it. I can do it. I can do it. Maybe I’ll quit. I change my mind every other month. I’m so spoiled by this job I love champagne breakfasts when flying on European airlines. I love shopping in the different countries, feasting on their exotic foods, and drinking luscious wine. This was the first dream that ever came true for me. Traveling the world was all I ever thought about as a teenager. Now I’m living my dream and going to school and it’s a little overwhelming.

I don’t know if I’ll be home for Christmas mom. I’m so sorry, goodbye. No Tim I can’t see you tonight, I’m sorry, goodbye. Laura, you won’t be able to come up this weekend; I have to work, goodbye. I hear my sweet sister’s voice saying, “When are you coming Jessie?”

“I have to work this weekend angel, but I’ll be down soon.”

“O.K., I love you.”

“I love you too, goodbye.”

My heart aches. I’m so tired of saying goodbye to people. Tim is a new guy. I like him very much, but will he stay with me when I’m always saying goodbye? I’ve lost three boyfriends as result of this job. I hope he understands I want to be with him, but I have to pay rent.

You have a trip Jessie. O.K., go. Indianapolis-Chicago-San Francisco, stay in San Fran overnight, showtime at 0700 on Friday the 13th. Work SFO, Indy, back in Boston at 1940 local. Disappointment. Tim is flying through Chicago today on business,
maybe I'll catch a glimpse of him. I really need a hug. I need to sit by the fire in Boston and eat pizza and listen to music. I need to be in my own bed. I'll call him from San Francisco. I have to stop. It's been the best time of my life, but I need to slow down.

Beep! Beep! Beep! Walk faster, the skycap is ganging up on you, I think to myself. Have to catch my connecting flight. Yes, Miss Burns we have an aisle seat; no Miss Burns the plane is not on time. CNN is drolling on in the background, ground agents are asking me who I work for. Hey do you know so and so? Miss Burns what is your employee number? The phones are ringing impatiently to be picked up. WILL YOU ALL JUST SHUT UP!!! My mind screams. Yes, Miss Burns, No Miss Burns, I want someone to call me by my name. I have to call scheduling. “Employee number 52634, do you have my hotel yet?!” I don't want to be a number. I don't want to be Miss Burns. I don't want to be “Oh Miss?”. Stop tugging on my skirt, stop stepping on my feet, stop ringing the damn call button. I don't want to smile when I’m scared. And no, I will not rub your feet! Please listen to us when we tell you to sit down! I don’t know what we're flying over, I’ll ask the captain. We're almost there, we’re almost there. Why are these people so relentless?! I’m majoring in special education, and I feel my job as a flight attendant has been excellent training in the area of patience. I’m proud of myself because I never knew just how much patience I had.

I fly for free, how can I quit? It's like a drug I can't stop taking. It's an addiction. Lately though, I’ve been feeling very unstable. I need to stay in one place for awhile. Stop. stop. stop. We’re almost in San Francisco. “Flight attendants, prepare for arrival.” As the plane touches down, the passengers clap, and so do we.
Stream of Consciousness

Confusing and wonderful like never before no restrictions but consequences watch out missing loving still free to a point comes classes and papers and jobs all the weights on flying and dancing now want to do laundry responsible stuff for me for myself with breaths all taken close by are my means my friends in a flash together as always morning night daytime all changing with moments and warnings too late oops there goes the window of life as it comes quickly he says he'll not wait for long i don't know i can't restrictions nowhere to be found no escape from the clutching and she says of course let him take you great places but what if once there is nowhere to go but agony deception trust far from my mind as the bells cease their ringing scared lonely still free is this ultimate not for the wary or far i'm me i can't change that with regard to my soulmate or schedule or class just catch me the light calls oh yes thought i wonderful and is all the same reflection plays tricks on my view of this time but with wonderful is confusion no corner to hide free for all and for one help

Kara Lamoureux
Come, my little one,
Come hold my hand.
I will guide you through life's journey,
But I cannot walk the path for you.
If you need support,
You know where to find me.

Cry, my little one,
Cry your heart out.
I will offer you my support,
But I cannot stop your tears.
If you need a shoulder,
You know where to find mine.

Dream, my little one,
Dream into a magical world of make believe.
I will comfort you when you are scared,
But I cannot chase away your fears.
If you need a friend to talk to,
You know I am here for you.

Fly, my little one,
Fly toward your dreams.
I will give you your wings,
But I cannot make your dreams come true.
If you need assistance,
You know I will be the wind beneath your wings.

Love, my little one,
Love yourself and the ones who love you.
I will love you unconditionally,
But I cannot tell you how to love.
If you need to nurse a broken heart,
You know I will give you your time and space.
Let go, my little one,
Let go of your heartaches.
I will share my wisdom and experience with you,
But I cannot make your heartaches disappear.
If you need a cure,
I know time is the best medicine.

Trust, my little one,
Trust your inner feelings.
For I believe in you!
But you need to have faith in yourself.
If you need reassurance,
You know I will chase your doubts away.

Laugh, my little one,
Laugh at life's ups and downs.
I will laugh with you,
But I cannot eliminate your pain and suffering.
If you need hope and encouragement,
You know I will be the light at the end of your dark tunnel.

Grieve, my little one,
Grieve for all your losses.
I will offer you my deepest sympathy,
But I cannot change your fate.
If you need comfort and guidance,
I know your faith will lead the way.

Rise, my little one,
Rise to your feet and walk again.
I will be your cane,
But I cannot take the steps for you.
If you need a hand,
You know I will be by your side.
Wish, my little one,
Wish for whatever your heart desires.
I will try to grant your wish,
But it is really up to you to make your wish come true.
If you need a magic wind,
I know your determination and desire will transform into one.

Celebrate, my little one,
Celebrate all your achievements, no matter how big or small.
I will be so proud of you,
But don't let success blind you.
If you need reminders to keep your feet on the ground,
You know I will be your STOP sign.

Rest, my little one,
Rest peacefully,
I will watch over you,
But I cannot protect you all your life.
If you need security and strength,
Just look within you!

King Kwan K. Cheng
Working Hard Just for You

If only you could understand how much I am trying
my soul struggling each day to live without dying

but slowly inside the pressures affect me
to go to school, raise you and maintain a healthy family

but you are only two and too young to understand
my attention, love and possessions you demand

pulling on my leg, screaming and crying all the time
causing stressful days to completely fill my mind

between you school and work
my life has never been so hard

I have given up the rights to my freedom
and now its like I live behind bars

But baby I know that this is not your fault
because you never asked to be here
and sometimes I shed a tear

I think about you and feel sorry
because you are lacking your dad, another parent, another body
it is not fair that he has not made you part of his life...
...someone so special
but in time he will realize a loss  
and that's when you become the boss.

Baby we will be all right and someday our lives will be better  
but in the meantime I worry about keeping your stomach full  
and on your back, a warm sweater  

you see that is why I am working so hard, while going to school  
because one day you and I will have a beautiful car a beautiful  
house and a beautiful pool

For now bear with me, for we have years ahead  
I will never give up on you  
to work hard for you I choose instead!

I love you

Amanda Daniel
Trying to be Strong

Jerome lives in the projects on the south side of the city. He doesn’t think of it as ‘the projects.’ Jerome is six years old. He thinks of it as home, the only home he’s ever known.

On the far side of the courtyard, up on the second floor, behind the brown metal door, is the soft brown couch he sits on with his mommy watching TV, reading stories. To the left of the living room is the kitchen where he and mommy eat their breakfasts and their dinners and sometimes bake pans and pans of cookies for school parties or holidays with family and with friends.

Home is home. As important as a mansion on the rocky coast of Maine to some, this tiny four room apartment is that important to Jerome. This is where he lives. Deep in the heart of the inner city, this apartment is his castle. Here is where his special rainbow sign of peace hangs upon his bedroom door. Here is where his bed is, a bed made special by the superhero sheets Mommy bought for him on his last birthday. Unencumbered by comparisons, he loves his simple home.

He loves the way the morning sun lights up the scary shadows in his room and turns the lurking monsters back into his chair, his legos, and his clothes rack in the corner shaped like a giraffe. He feels secure here. He feels safe. Or he did, until last night.

Last night, after Mommy read The Poky Puppy for the eighty-third time and turned out the lights, Jerome heard a series of loud bangs outside his window. He bolted upright in his bed. Too scared to let even one of his feet dangle out to the floor below, he froze. Stiff, unable to move, his mind raced desperately on trying to convince him that the shots he heard were only trucks backfiring. But there were no other sounds of traffic outside his window, no trucks or engines, no screeching of brakes.

Again a shot pierced the still night air. Jerome sprang up. In five giant leaps he was standing at his mommy’s bed.

"Mommy..." he whispered, his voice a hoarse rasp. His vocal chords stretched tight like rubber bands about to snap. He needed Mommy and he needed her now. He reached into the covers and grabbed hold of her shoulder. He shook her with all his might.
“Jerome? What are you doing out of bed?” she yawned. “It’s the middle of the night.” Peering over his head she snuck a glance at the clock on her bedside table. “It’s two o’clock in the morning, Jerome. What’s the matter?”

“Mommy, it woke me up.” His voice shook in bare whispers. As she reached to pull him closer to her, another shot rang out. In one motion she rolled the two of them from her bed onto the floor. Jerome clung like a small koala bear.

Lakita pulled the blankets and the pillow to the floor reaching up with one arm to do so, while holding Jerome close with the other. She wrapped the covers around her and her son, stuffed the pillow under her head and breathed deeply. “Help me get through this one, Lord.” Her silent prayer echoed in the dark. She pulled Jerome as close as she could and whispered, “It’s all right. It’s all right.”

Jerome peeked up at her. “It’s guns? They ‘gonna shoot us, Mommy?”

Lakita looked into her child’s eyes and said with as much calmness as she could muster, “No, Jerome. No. We’re OK. We’re inside. It’s safe inside. The guns are outside. It’s safe in here. We’re safe inside.”

Jerome wanted to believe his mother, but it was hard. If it was so safe inside, how come they were laying on the floor? How come Mommy was breathing so fast? Her heart against his ear sounded like his own heart pounding when he raced around the schoolyard with his buddies.

Lakita began to whisper-sing his favorite ‘Lullaby and Good Night’ song, but her words were different now.

“It’s ‘gonna be...be all right.
‘Gonna be all right.
Mommy’s here. Mommy knows.
It’s ‘gonna be all right.”

Jerome snuggled his head into her chest and listened. He swallowed his tears and tried very hard to be brave. But he still felt scared. He was too little to protect himself, too little to protect Mommy, too little to carry a gun. Fitfully he drifted into sleep, a crazy sleep, the place where dreams returned him to the source of the fear he tried so hard to flee.
In his dream, he was walking to the store around the corner from his home when he saw it. There in the bushes, among the old cans and pieces of paper that trashed the green was something shiny and smooth. The sun caught the metal and a shaft of light pointed to the weapon hiding in the grass amidst the trash. It was a gun. He squatted down and ran his fingers hesitantly over the gun, half-suspecting it would go off by his slight touch. Nothing happened. He picked up the gun holding it at arm’s length. Seeing it as powerful in and of itself, he feared it would turn on him and shoot him dead. It didn’t.

As he began to feel a little more confident about holding this piece of power, he pretended to aim it at an invisible bad guy. All of a sudden, he wasn’t little Jerome anymore. He wasn’t a small, skinny six year old boy who shook like a leaf in his bed at night listening to gunshots outside his window. Now he was somebody. He was a big guy, strong and powerful. He was a force to be reckoned with. Now he had the power of a gun.

He turned quickly, playing out posse scenes he had seen on TV. And then he turned again. He was feeling pretty secure now, getting more and more sure of himself with a gun in his hand.

“Brrsshhhh...” A sound in the bushes broke his TV reverie. Yet, still so caught up in internal drama, he swung around with all the self-assuredness of a Power Ranger, and fired his weapon. The shot rang out like a thunder clap, echoing through him. For a moment he was dizzy with the smell of bullets on his nose, intoxicated by the scent of power.

Then he saw it. There just a hand’s throw from where he stood, lay Emmy, the big orange cat that lived downstairs from him with the old lady, Mrs. Parker. Emmy was oozing blood. Jerome dropped the gun and fell to the ground next to Emmy’s body. Her eyes began to glaze over. Her body was limp. He pressed his mouth to hers trying to breathe air into her bleeding frame.

“Emmy... Emmy,” he sobbed. “Emmy, don’t die. Please don’t die. I didn’t mean it. I was just trying to be strong.” His words collapsed into a river of tears. He buried his face into the small furry body of his four-legged friend and wept. His tears mixed with the warm blood on her body. He wiped the back of his hand across his face to wipe the tears so he could see. He looked quickly to his right, then to his left. The streets were empty. Quiet. Dead quiet. He kissed Emmy and as he did, he noticed the red stain smeared across

He heard the screeching of brakes, and a horn, loud and banging at his mind. He halted and looked up. A giant of a man was sitting in the cab of a big, orange truck, pointing his long fingernail at Jerome. "I know it was you, boy. I knew you was a killer."

Jerome let out a blood-curdling scream. The spell of the dream was broken.

He awoke screaming. Lakita, still holding Jerome in her arms on the floor where they both had fallen asleep in the early predawn hours, whispered, "It's OK, Jerome. It's OK." She stroked his forehead and held him close. He was trembling, caught in the dream that blistered his hope of found protection.

"Mommy, Mommy," he gasped trying to find the breath he needed to speak. "It was awful. I had the baddest bad dream. The baddest."

Lakita held him and looked into his eyes, keeping her voice soft and steady. She tried to reassure him. "I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry you had a bad dream. But, it was a dream, Jerome, a bad, bad dream. It wasn't real. It didn't really happen. I've been right here with you, precious. And you had a bad dream, that's all, a bad, bad dream." Jerome dared to breathe and let his gasps for air slowly return to near normal breathing. All the while, Lakita was stroking his forehead and crooning her "It's 'gonna be all right" chant.

In a few minutes, Jerome found his voice. "Mommy, I want to tell you. I want to tell you, even if you hate me. I gotta tell you."

"Jerome, sweetie, there's nothing you could ever tell me that would make me hate you. You're my son. I love you. And I'm gonna love you always, always, no matter what."

Guilt's teeth gnawed at Jerome tempting him to believe she might not love him if he told her the dream. He knew Mommy hated guns. But he had to tell her. He was compelled to confess. Unable to stop himself, he went on: "Mommy, it was awful. I was just trying to be strong, trying to protect us, to be big, to be strong, and... and...."

Lakita waited for him to get the words out. "It's OK, Jerome, you don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"No, no. I want to. I got to. I was outside on my way to Mr. Jackson's store to get some milk. I saw a gun in the bushes. I never saw one close up before but I knew what it was. I knew you wouldn't want me to pick it up, to touch it even, but I did. I wanted
to feel what it was like to be big, to be strong. I picked it up and pretended to be a good guy fighting the bad guys, like on TV. I pointed it one way and then the other. When I was feeling real strong, I heard something in the bushes. I turned and pulled the trigger, and... and....” Jerome dissolved in a torrent of sobs. He held tight to his Mommy and began to wail. “I did it. I did it, Mommy.” His words came crashing between heavy breathing clumped with sobs. “I did it. I pulled the trigger and she was dead. Emmy was dead.” He buried his face in his mommy’s belly and sobbed. “I’m sorry, Mommy. I’m sorry.”

“Jerome,” Lakita said, a quiet pleading in her voice. “Jerome, look at me.”

He kept his face buried, talking straight into her belly. “I can’t. I’m ashamed. I was just tryin’ to be strong.”

“Jerome, it’s OK. You are strong and Emmy’s really OK. It was a bad dream you had, that’s all, my precious, a bad dream.” Slowly, steadily, hope lifting the edges of her voice, Lakita ventured. “What do you say about us both getting up off this floor, getting dressed and giving Mrs. Parker a call?”

Jerome’s eyes popped wide. “Mrs. Parker?” he questioned. “Oh, Jerome, there’s nothing to be scared of. I want to call up Mrs. Parker to ask her if we can come down and visit Emmy, so you can see for your own self that she’s doing just fine.”

“OK, Mommy.” Jerome forced a weak smile. “OK, but will you call Mrs. Parker right now, first, ‘fore we get dressed? Please?” Lakita smiled and laid her hand gently on his shoulder. “Sure, Jerome, let’s call her right now.” She stood up and reached for the phone on her night table. Jerome remained glued to her side. Anxiously, he held his breath as Lakita pushed the buttons on the phone.

“Mrs. Parker? Yes, this is Lakita... Oh, I’m doing all right... Yeah, Jerome, too... We just got ourselves a little problem maybe you could help us with... Well, Jerome had a nightmare last night and he’s still all upset about it... Seems Emmy was in his dream and she got hurt real bad... Yeah, that’s it... Yes, we’d love to come down... Sure... We’ll be right there.” Lakita hung up the phone. Jerome staring straight through her: “Well, my sweet one, seems your friend Emmy just woke up herself.”

“Emmy’s all right?”

“Yes, she’s all right.”

“Really, Mommy?”
“Yes, really. Mrs. Parker said she was just about to give her some milk, but she’ll wait ‘til we get down there so you can give Emmy her milk yourself.”
“Really, Mommy?”
“Yes, really, Jerome. So hurry up and get dressed and we’ll get on down there.”
Jerome turned to walk out of the bedroom but stopped in mid-step. “Mommy, will you come with me?”
“Of course I will. Let me put some clothes on and we’ll go down together.”
“No, Mommy. Go with me to my room. I still scared. I...”
Lakita walked over and put her arm around her son. “Of course, Jerome, let’s get you dressed first.”
They walked into his room together. Jerome holding his mother’s hand, treading a step or two behind her. He took a breath and dared to let his eyes look around the room. It was all as it had been the night before, his familiar chair, the big giraffe, the legos on the floor in the corner where he had left them.
“OK, Mommy... I guess it’s OK.”
“Yes, Jerome, it is OK.” Lakita strode to his bureau and retrieved his favorite shirt with the rainbow stripes and a pair of jeans from the middle drawer. “OK, sweetie, let’s get dressed.”
On their way down to Mrs. Parker’s Jerome stopped on the stairs and asked again, “Mommy, do you really think Emmy’s OK?”
“Yes, Jerome, I...”
At that moment Mrs. Parker her door and Emmy came pattering out, making a bee line for Jerome. Jerome ran to meet her. Dropping to the floor, he stroked her, murmuring into her fur. “It’s OK, Emmy. It’s OK. You’re OK. It’s just like Mommy said, it’s gonna be all right. It’s gonna be all right.”

Jackie Foschia
TIME PASSES QUICKLY UNLESS YOU ARE ALONE
ISOLATION ALLOWS TIME TO FREEZE
BEING SHOWERED BY LONELINESS STANDING IN THE DARKNESS
THE DEADLY SOUND OF SILENCE RINGS WITHIN YOUR EARS
A MIRROR REFLECTS YOUR BLANK STARE
SILENCE, ISOLATION, DEATH
BEING ALONE... TIME PASSES...

Robyn Leigh Weer
Poem to the Child That Did Not Come to Be

The pain inside me intensifies
I know you’re gone
Little stranger
Little life not meant to last
I watch the blood flow away
Chunks of tissue
Swirling away
A life ends
  I felt your life
  I felt you touch me
Once, twice
Tentative reaching
Of a life beginning
And I felt your death
Keener than any loss I’ve ever known
Oh, God, the sadness!

And I wonder if God will ever forgive me
If I will ever forgive me
I wanted you
Unplanned visitor
I wanted you
Your laughter
Your smiles
Your tears
Your skinned knees
Your every second on earth
Discovering the world
Little explorer
From my empty womb
As I bid you good-bye
I wonder what color your eyes would have been  
My sad brown, my daddy's eyes, soulful and so sad  
Or bright blue twinkles, like your daddy's  
Like my grandmothers, both of them  
Would you have been the son I pray for?  
Strong and true  
Curly-haired and quick  
A little Galahad growing to manhood  
Or were you the girl I fear—  
A beauty to be carefully cultivated  
So you do not become  
The broken rose that I am  

I wanted you, little one  
Oh, how I wanted you  
As the years grow shorter  
And I feel the purse growing smaller  
I wonder if I will ever be blessed  
With the baby I crave  
My ambassador to the future  
I see my cousins  
And I envy them  
I see women with new babies  
And I want to weep  
I wonder if God will relent  
And grant me my heart's desire
I feel your life leave me
I want to weep
But all I feel is empty and hollow
A sorrow older than time
I know this is not the "right" time
I know I should have my degree
And grad school
And a career
And time to live and enjoy
But biology doesn't wait
As my third decade
And the millennium approaches
I wonder what is more important—
Your future or mine
Logically better to wait
Logically better
Logically
Logical
But logic doesn't fill the empty spaces
Or the empty womb
As the months pass
Would you have...
But I'll never know

Farewell, little life unlived
I reach for the stainless steel lever
Feel the tears run down my face
Like the blood leaking down my thighs
And pray for you
For me
And for the life that will be
Someday
I hope

Lisa "Riz" Risley
Ties That Bind

In a fit of teenage rage and righteous indignation, Robbie left on foot. Carrying one bag stuffed with clothes, his toothbrush and razor he stormed up their street toward the center of town. She watched him from the dining room window until he was no longer in sight. Then she began to cry, silently, so her husband wouldn't hear.

Robbie was being unreasonable. It started yesterday. She was upstairs, working on the computer, and got a little silly from boredom. She started singing at the top of her lungs. Immediately his voice cut across hers. From downstairs he screamed, “Shut up! I’m on the phone.”

“What did you say?”
“Shut up - I’m on the phone.”
She was furious, panting as she stomped down the stairs.

“Who do you think you are? Don’t talk to me like that. You are acting like a spoiled brat.”

He was off the phone now but the verbal carnage would not end until both have drawn blood. “You embarrassed the hell out of me.”

She struck back, hitting him where it inflicts the most pain, his social life. There was only one thing she could take away that would get his attention - his car keys, the keys to his freedom.

“I don’t care. How was I supposed to know you were on the phone? I didn’t even know if you were out of bed yet! You have no right to speak to me like that. Don’t make any plans for tonight because you’re not going anywhere.”

“Yeah, right, just try to stop me,” he spewed.

He brushed past her and retreated to his room. She could hear him slamming drawers, running water in the bathroom. After fifteen minutes he came back to the kitchen, took his car keys from the hook and headed toward the door. The pink shirt and cap from Baskin Robbins were in his hand.

“I mean it, Robbie. You’re grounded tonight. I plan to tell your father about this incident,” she warned him.

“Oh, you have to run to dad cause you can’t handle me. You’re pathetic. You have no life, no friends so you want to ruin mine,” he sneered. Then, “I have to go to work.” And he was gone, spinning out of the driveway in his metallic blue chevy without buckling his seatbelt.
He returned to the house late in the afternoon with Cathy, his girlfriend. She liked the girl, who was pretty but not aware of it, not stuck on herself, a really sweet kid. Last week, Cathy came over to show her the prom dress she bought and they had talked girl talk, about flowers and accessories, and how she would wear her hair while Robbie rolled his eyes. Cathy was a good student, too. She’d been a good influence, good for Robbie’s confidence.

She was amazed. Robbie acted like this morning never happened. She knew he thought he could charm his way out of this situation and get her to relent on the grounding. He was sucking up, like he always did when he wanted something. She was determined not to make it too easy for him, even though she sensed that he would like to patch things up. Too often in the past he had manipulated her by playing on her feelings. Robbie knew she didn’t like conflict, was unsettled when things are tense. He was a smart cookie. He also knew she would not humiliate him by bringing it up in front of Cathy.

It was impossible to stay out of the kitchen which adjoins the family room where they were watching TV. She started to fix dinner, ignoring them unless she was spoken to. She took the ground beef out of the fridge and decided on meat loaf.

“I have to call my mom,” the girlfriend told him. This was routine, one of the things she liked about Cathy’s family - the rules, the connectedness, always checking in. It was something they had reinforced with Robbie as well.

The phone was in the kitchen so she couldn’t help but overhear. The gist of the conversation was that Cathy wouldn’t be eating dinner at home because they were having something unappealing.

“We’re having meat loaf,” she mentioned.

“I like meat loaf,” the girl answered.

So, she set four places at the dining room table. But when Robbie asked, “Do you want us to eat here?” she answered, “I don’t care what you do. There’s plenty of food.” So they left. She tried to understand why she set him up like that.

Her husband got home late, later than usual and she was annoyed. This was a pattern of their marriage. She transferred her anger at the son onto the father. If he had been home on time, he could have confronted Robbie. He could have been the heavy. But he was blissfully unaware, had not been involved in the day’s drama. Over meat loaf, mashed potatoes and salad she filled him in on the
morning's event. They passed the evening in front of the boob tube and were in bed before Robbie got home. He knocked on their bedroom door and said, “Good night.” She didn’t answer but her husband sleepily responded, “Night bud.” Another twinge of annoyance, but who was she really mad at?

She left for work before Robbie was awake. He was not there when she got home but was due in at six o’clock. This morning his father had left him a note on the kitchen counter, “We need to talk. Be home for dinner.”

And so they had talked, and talking became yelling. Faced with the consequences for his behavior, Robbie fumed, “I was just kidding around. You’re ridiculous. None of my friends’ parents treat them like this. I’m outta here.”

“Well, don’t think you’re taking your car,” her husband replied. This was the straw that breaks the camel’s back. The 1987 Camaro was Robbie’s pride and joy. He worked all summer, saving, squirrelling the money away. But in late August, he was still short and had asked them to loan him the rest, afraid the car would be sold to someone else.

“Fine. just sell it and give me my $750 then and I’ll buy a motorcycle,” he was unflappable, stubborn pride was getting in the way of reason.

“We can talk about that after its sold. Remember, we paid the insurance and excise tax. You’ve had a pretty good deal out of this,” her husband was calm. She stayed quiet. “We expect you to let us know where you are staying and to go to school,” was her husband’s last retort.

Then Robbie was gone and the silence in the house threatened to overwhelm her.

“What will you do if he doesn’t come back?” she asked her husband?

“I don’t know. He’s almost eighteen. He’s got to learn to compromise, to see that if he wants to be treated like an adult he has to act like one.”

She wandered through the house, too jittery to sit still. Finally, she stood outside his room. The closed door was covered with signs, “No Trespassing.” “Crime Scene-Do Not Cross.” “I’m Into Fun & Games.” She entered the inner sanctum of his space. The walls are covered with posters of rock bands - AC/DC, Pearl Jam, Mighty Mighty Bosstones - and scantily clad women - Cindy Crawford and innocuous blondes with pouty lips and come hither
poses. Maybe they should have been more strict about what was acceptable in here. But, it had always seemed like the room was the one place they shouldn’t have total control, shouldn’t censor.

A pile of dirty clothes huddled in the middle of the hardwood floor - tangled Levis, socks and boxer shorts. The red light of his stereo, their Christmas gift, glowed. Had it been left on all day she wondered as she switches it off. He hadn’t taken many tapes or CD’s. That was a good sign. Best of all though, the frame was there, sitting on the corner of his dresser, facing the bed. It was the first thing he saw in the morning and the last thing at night.

It held a collage of photos of Robbie and the girlfriend, Cathy, taken in one of those cheesy booths with a curtain and coin slot. They sat cuddled together, smiling at the camera in one shot, at each other in another. In the last photo they were kissing, his hand wrapped in her long brown hair, eyes closed. The shots were playful, sweet, winsome. They captured a moment in time, a time when he was full of joy, of youthful exuberance.

The photos were in a 5 x 7 inch double frame. Robbie brought it with him when they visited his grandparents in February. She hadn’t even known he’d packed it, placing it carefully in his carry-on bag, unwilling to risk its loss by checking it. He had shown it to everyone, aunts, uncles and cousins, sharing a piece of his life proudly. It seemed to be Robbie’s most valuable possession, for now. She breathed deeply, a sense of calm settling over her. Closing his door, leaving the room undisturbed, she started down to tell him. Robbie was coming back.

It was midnight when Robbie returned. He stood awkwardly just inside the back door, not out but not really in. He returned empty handed and she wondered if he had just stopped by to tell them where he was staying.

“What’s up?” her husband asked.

“I forgot I have to work tomorrow,” Robbie said.

She realized that he means his second job, grunt work for a contractor, a job which was inaccessible without the precious car, too far to walk and no public transportation. She saw his dilemma. He needed to save face. She told him, “I’m glad that you remembered. That shows responsibility.” A look of relief passed over his young face. But the uncomfortable silence hung in the air.

“So, Robbie, are you sleeping here tonight or what?” asked her husband.
"Well, are you going to work tomorrow?" Robbie asked his dad.

"No, I'm going fly fishing with Ted," he answered.

Robbie shifted his weight, hands deep in his pockets and said, "Well, I need the money for the prom. And it's not fair to my boss not to show up at the last minute."

"So, what I hear you saying is you have come home to sleep and plan to work in the morning. Am I right?"

"Well, yeah, I guess so. But am I gonna be able to use my car to get to work?"

"Yes, but you still have to be punished for being fresh to your mother. I won't have you being disrespectful. Is that clear?"

"So how about if I'm just grounded from using the car tomorrow night instead?"

My husband looked at me for approval and I shook my head yes. "Ok, it's a deal."

"Well, goodnight then. I'm going to bed," Robbie started up the back stairs.

She longed to grab him, hold on tight and kiss him goodnight, to tell him that she's glad he is home, to say, "I'm sorry." But she just said, "See you in the morning."

Jere O. Hinds
The Rage

Shut your eyes against the blame.
Protect yourself anyway you can.
All too soon the rage will come.
Never doubt - it will destroy you.
Shades of truth stifled by disbelief.
Quiet was my last defense.
You tried way too hard to know me.
Futile effort - it was never your choice.
Moving close to the most dangerous truths.
Your dark eyes, they were so deceiving.
You violated my soul while I watched in awe.
There is nowhere you can hide from The Rage.

Juli Stuart
Unrequited Lovecrap

And if I could say what my heart longed to
You'd lie - in uneasy denial of the same
My hand lay on your back as you vomited all
your unbearable emotions
Your sickness of soul... illness of mind
The deep terrible disturbance of self that cloaks the brown red
Haired distant unmoved you
The night was frigid - I shivered while hearing
the Alcohol tear you into rhythmic retches
Painful... seeing the price you ext on the self deemed
Unworthy... Hours earlier walking backwards away
from me "I am nothing"... "I'm a loser" ah the alcoholic's lament
Were it so easy to label this maltreatment of your heart
Hands yearning forever to touch
To smooth out the unloving wrinkle in time that messes
You up.
Mind wishing to share - heart aching to simply love
You - those gaping wounds obviously needing attention
But I am not Her am not this elusive shebeast you pine for
The muse of the past... I think that for those two nights, Jeff,
You were poisoned by drink and Prozac, while my body was the vehicle
to try to reach the part of yourself you cannot
These cynical droplets fall because cheap is how I feel
Unrequited I accept... may you find what soothes
Not what you think you want, crawling out of a pint glass.

Eliza Packard
Hostage

I have been waiting for the right time to tell you something
I guess now is the right time to spill the beans,
Everyone else has left me and I am all alone
I don't know what to do.
I have kept this thought inside of me
Hoping this problem might go away,
Have you forgotten to come and get me?
Because I cannot find you.
I was just with you and now you are gone
I was coming to apologize,
Because I thought I did something wrong.
A high tide is approaching,
I will be looking for your ship.
I just looked outside my tent,
The cold night is coming
I will cuddle near the fire waiting for your arrival.
If you survive the rought current around the other side of the island,
I am just waiting around the corner.
The rough waves slow down near the shore
So you can take me upon your boat,
Now is a good time to start your journey
You will arrive when the tides are less rough.
In the daytime I feel like a prisoner stranded on an island with nobody around
Living is not an easy task when you have to hunt for your own food,
Why does it have to get dark? It makes me feel even more lonesome,
Maybe your world should be filled with darkness since you are making me suffer,
I want to see a familiar face
None of these trees or water do I know, they are all strangers.
I want you to come and get me, where ever you are
I'm thinking of you, but obviously you are not thinking about me,
'cause you would have been here by now.
Maybe, I will go swimming to pass some time,
But then my clothes will get all wet.
There's no one here to play with,
I am not sure what to do to keep myself occupied,
Many days have passed since you left me
Do you still remember who I am?
Is my message being heard?
Are you going to free me?
I just saw a boat go by,
But it was not yours.

Shannon Brovermann
Mutilation Nightly

Take the knife and hook gently inside the still pulsing hole, slit with an upward movement, over the mound, following the seam along the belly, parting the rib cage, (a pair of hands clasped around the heart, fingers barely touching). Stop at the solar plexus. The work should fall open now, an elegant vent.

Proceed, knife clean. Insert in the shadow of the arm pit among glossy hair. From here, trace lightly one single paper sharp cut, one red line, a thread along the soft inside of the arm. Slow on the elbow curve, then strike strong over worked muscles to the wrist. A skater’s trace over black ice..
The face now, 
cradled in two hands, 
thumbs tucked behind the ears. 
Round it is, this face, 
though she always ticked oval on the teen tests. 
Take this face, let the blind palms cover the eyes. 
Let the fingers curl back 
into a harrowing tool. 
Her blunt gardener's nails scratch, 
harvest skin and oil 
in straight spaced furrows, downward.

Courage fails across the eyes, 
she can't not see, 
but the grimace offer up 
resistant flesh for the scrapers.

Finally now it hurts. 
Finally now there is blood 
and shame and permission to die.

*Marion Knox*
Under the pear tree
(in memory of Lizzie Borden)

Father, Oh Father.
I am not as Emma. I can not be Father's hackney
dour drudge chaste barbed brush waste. Sister,
so good in her withered way. Father's spinster
she will stay. Not I.

I no longer will sway swoon or tremble
as a bough bought owned stalk as I am of you.
Sapped sapling, I bled enough. I will be more
than menstrual rags cold on closet basement floor.

Father, no running water comforts to depend
in riches squalor. Blood excrement parent rot
I can not even flush away. Cracked china chamber pot
of horrors it shall stay not, in unfinished-cherry
wood coffin's Pandora's box with skeleton keys
in sight tormenting me.

Father. Oh Father.
I was budded carved a wooden doll crafted and entombed.
I shall arise surprise you all as a lumberjack in the box
whose handle is taunt to strike and free
during "peculiar spells" attributed to me.
Poor, poor Lizzie.

Father, in household strain you preyed upon me
a matriarch beheaded, I would only call Abby.
Hatchet faced in her disapproval of my flair
sheen biting edge so keen short-handle worn wear.
Her blunder, in unrest ascending, as unwelcomed guest.
Tripped, battle-ax bitch, three axe handles wide
at your honing she tried to cut me down to size.
Stepmother, I did not bleed her with my birth
only with her demise, now washed clean.
Father. Oh Father.
Three sheep repast you damned for your last not I.
Always I wanted choice cuts. No more rancid venison smut,
summer spoiled mutton in my mouth. I will not grace
your miserly taste grudged upon my plate.
Consume it as your own.

Father. No more yankee bag pipes played in my face
washed white in corseted obedience-tight.
Bone-staid virgin-intact in dutiful blacks browns
drab grain-by-grain dark-green blue stained
finery without the flair, sparked only by hair
of spanish moss terrain, pulled back contained
so you believe.

Father. Oh Father.
You lovingly would bark "Lizzie, do not ever leave me."
I listened for I could not see forest through the trees'
white birch will breached birth stilled me with promises
you would not keep.

Barked scars marred me. Petrified trunk tree
With nursery rancor you pruned me barren bare alone.
No branching allowed to reach my own rings of growth.
Gold-ringed daughter worn 'round your finger, you
around mine, too tightly bound; separate, we ceased to be.
Only a jeweler could cut us free
cut us free.

Father. Oh Father.
I lay you for rest. You cut a fine figure in suit of best
dying with your legs too long. How fitting miserly undertaker
taled of using coffins so small to bury the dead and buy
the living with coins you save. Skinflint in all
that you strike, penetrate, pare, trim, fell, hew, tear
apart in needless greed.
Father. And I, like you would rather kill than lose loosened pigeons heads left behind. Everything you destroy if it is mine with love you say. I know for I love you, bleeding blue blood in infancy true. My immaculation will not stain or tale. No slay sprayed you on me. I am clear and bare as hatchet-head freshly snapped-seared free from its limb of short temper. For our rights it lashes, losing its head in bone and ashes, laced to leave no traced blood father. Oh father

M.L. Morgan
A prayer of Courage

I want to turn away from it
this holocaust
this hate
that keeps returning
to obliterate
the sons and daughters of our race.

I want to say
that that was then and this is now
...it's done.

The open graves where death-stink lay
are gardens
in the sun.

The ovens
only photographs.

The broken people
gone.

But a woman with a number
on her arm remembers.

It's not enough to read the words
in history books
cleaned up
for children who might never know.

The woman with the number knows
...too many people looked away.

I can not fix that horror
that WAS then, and this IS now,
But I don't even want to look the other way
not even a little bit
God help me,  
...not even once.

In choosing life  
I chose responsibility

protecting  
worth and dignity  
of other living beings  
that share this earth  
with me.

This is not a silent task  
or easy.

the voice of cruel intolerance  
still speaks:

in bigotry  
and racism

in gender bias

in hunger  
in poverty

in violence  
and death  
to innocents  
only there by chance
...when hate exploded.

I can not sit in silence
or turn away
unless in shame
...because I did not speak.

Oh God, who gives the gift of life,
Now give me
the courage to be fully present
to the task
of keeping my brothers and my sisters safe
in body and spirit.

I am my brother's keeper.
I am the planet's keeper.

Give me courage and faith to face the fear,
in others
...and in myself.

The woman with the number did

Amen

Judith Cambell
Dear Water

The world exists because you're in it
I can see the horizon behind you.
The bobbing up and down upon your surface
They are the most loveliest bobs imaginable
Of all things you are the greatest
Greatest in power, you give and you take life.
To see the sun as it sets on your horizon
Melted in your womb, how colorful is
Your picture.

Madeleine Ostling
Driftwood

(A twisted tribute)

You began as a lifeline,
   turned and shaped by nature's sculpturing hand,
Agreeing with the world, supporting its wonder
blooming proud and wild.

Then... some twisted turn of fate
breaks the bond.
You fall
and

Splash

swirling dangerously, diving below,
trapped churning under pressure...

Lost

A sudden lift, free again
resting on the river flow
gracefully twirling on this water tour
to who knows where.
You don't know.

Along for the ride,
you absorb all,
seeping in and out
becoming one with the thousands of drops
that make your way.
It's not you.
It's not your nature...but
Is it your fate.

Held Captive,
You whisk and whirl and roll
until another eddy,
and the river releases its grasp.

Secretely, you slip away
wafting forward and back
on earth's guarded rim,
guarded from the force that erodes...
Has it happened to you?
Are you what you once were?

No... no, much heavier,
saturated
swollen
smothered
only what the water has spurned.

A remnant,
you lie
stranded on the earth
abandoned and worthless.

Cried dry in the scorching sun,
Whittled away by time,
Overlaid by others whose fate is as yours

...Forgotten.
One hand reaches, sorts, clears the way, touching the dead dry.

You cringe at the thought of your deteriorated form and brace for the worst. Another who will cast you aside.

But the eyes see the tragedy, the hands caress time soften descent, the heart reaches to understand the struggles, to discover the beauty within the Twisted Driftwood.

Beth Reed
Spy Pond, October

At first, birds wheel and scream over the water, splash into the silk of it, sharp-pointed in the wind that pushes from the west.
The colors of the day are blues, whites, soft grays - birds and water and the sky seen through gold-fused willows falling-flashing, dipping spangles in the storm-deep pond, falling down towards winter.

Then the foldwinged birds slip among the waves on silence water, feather, down... unseen feet ply the full deep world beneath, the whirlpools and the gnarled weed...

Lambent and extreme as healer's hands, they glide the wind-ruffed pond, their secret movements tracking wakes of light.

Kate Hallen
I cross my legs in wonder
feet welded to the ground

And as I turn my torso
I pull myself around--
my roots, they pull and tug
and tug like an old wet rug--

I remember, I remember--
reveries of long ago--
my limbs were lightning bolts,
secured me in the Holy Sound--

I remember, I remember--

*Dorothy Scotten*
One Time

One time
I took the tambourine
and stroking the tautness
rasped rhythm
like the coyotes' panting
sunrise
after the night lope
gazing
over the rimrock
clean fatigue
warming our ribs and thighs.

The dawn downslope westwind
the cool passion
where we ran
authors a sharp ponderosa nostalgia.

Ray Davis
CONTRIBUTORS

**Jon’s Allison** is a sophomore in the Women’s College. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

**Carole Brandon** is an Assistant Professor and Field Placement Coordinator in the Education Division of the Women’s College.

**Stephanie Bouchard** is an undergraduate senior from Cambridge majoring in Social Sciences. *Commonthought* gave her the opportunity to expand upon her writing with literary experiences.

**Shannon Brovermann** is an undergraduate student in the Women’s College.

**Judith Campbell** teaches art and is an ordained Unitarian minister.

**Melanie Campbell** is in the Masters program in Counseling Psychology. Her story comes from a yet unpublished novel. Thanks to husband, Jamie O’Keefe and her family for support.

**King Kwan K. Cheng** is currently working as a pre-school teacher at the Blue Cross Blue Shield Center for Children in Quincy.

**Ruhiyiyih Comack** is an eighteen year old poet who has dreams of becoming a hundred year old poet. She would like to thank her father for feeling small below the sky.

**Marcela Correa** is alumni who graduated in 1992, from the Independent Study Program. Her interests include writing and dancing as forms of expression.

**Amanda Daniel** is an undergraduate student in the Women’s College.

**Lindsey Davelaar** is a first year student. She stared for hours into the computer screen for the sake of this magazine.
Ray Davis received his master’s in Creative Arts in Learning last year. He lives and teaches in Southern Colorado.

Beth Enos is an undergraduate education major in the Woman’s College. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Jackie Foschia is an adjunct faculty member of the Human Services Division of the Women’s College.

Ellarwee Gadsen is an LICSW and Adjunct Professor at Lesley College. She also teaches at Wheelock College. This story is about Ellarwee’s daughter who is a law school graduate, and her 77 year old mother.

Jennifer Hancock is a sophomore majoring in Human Services, and minoring in Psychology. She has dreams of someday opening her own homeless shelter.

Kate Hallen is a graduate of the IRO program, and now works in Creative arts in Learning. Writing continues to comfort, challenge, and inspire her.

Jere O. Hinds is a student in the Adult Baccalaureate College with an individually designed major of Writing and Literature, and a minor in Elementary Education. She is married with two children, one of whom is in the Woman’s College.

Rebecca Irvin is a sophomore in the Women’s College and was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Becky Kinney is a junior majoring in Education. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Marion Knox is a student in the Adult Baccalaureate College who lives in Portland, ME.

Kara Lamoureux is a freshman majoring in Early Childhood Education. She enjoys writing both creatively and analytically.
Jennifer Lee was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Margaret Krell is working on a Masters in Independent Study. Her field of specialization is memoir writing.

Marie Elana Mangiamele is second semester junior interested in Early Childhood Education. She is often displeased with writing, but thanks Dr. Szamreta for her input, because she recommended submitting her piece.

Kathy Marino graduated from the Master’s Program in Creative Arts in Learning this year. She lives and teaches in Colorado.

Maureen Morgan studies expressive therapies. Her book of poetry, *Inscription*, will be available this spring; look for her at local poetry readings.

Melissa Nelson is a sophomore, and an Elementary Education major specializing in the Natural Sciences.

Coleen O’Connell is a Ph.D. candidate at Lesley College, and lives in Freedom, ME.

Madeleine Ostling is an exchange student from Sweden, where she is majoring in Communications. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Eliza Packard is a Second Start junior majoring in the Humanities. Her interests also include folk dancing, art, poetry, and hiking.

Beth Reed received her master’s in Creative Arts in Learning last year. She lives and teaches in Southern Colorado.

Luisandra Reynoso works at Lesley College in the dean’s office of GSASS. She is 36 and from the Dominican Republic. She enjoys dancing, earrings, and people.

Lisa “Riz” Risley is one of the founding mothers of the Oxford Street Players of Lesley College.
Jennifer Roberts is an undergraduate student in the Women's College. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Erica Rogers is a junior majoring in Education and Social Science.

Richard Rogers is an Instructor in the Women's College. He teaches courses in technology and computer graphics. Before coming to Lesley, he was freelance graphic artist.

Dena Rosenberg is an undergraduate student in the Women's College.

Alejandro Rojas Salazar is originally from the barrio of Pecan Park in Houston, Texas. He studied Sociology at Colorado College and is currently in graduate school at Boston College. Alejandro also serves Lesley as an admission's counselor and ALANA student recruiter for the Woman's College.

Dorothy Scotten is a Ph.D. candidate here at Lesley. She is a clinical Social Worker, and artist, and is currently writing on pre-verbal trauma.

Pam Steinkamp is a junior in the Women's College and was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Juli Stuart is a sophomore Humanities major. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Natasha Taylor is a junior in the Women's College. She is studying Special Education. Her home is in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.

Barb Webb graduated from the Master's Program in Creative Arts in Learning this year. She lives and teaches in Southern Colorado.

Robyn Leigh Weer is a junior majoring in Human Services. She was a member of the Creative Writing and Magazine Production course last fall.