

I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE MISSION

The Random House, Inc. Creative Writing Competition recognizes the unique vision and voices of New York City high school seniors with scholarship awards. The Competition further supports student writers throughout the writing process with in-school programs and teacher training.

THE HISTORY

In 1993, immediately after establishing its world headquarters in NYC, Bertelsmann sought innovative ways to give back to the city that offered such a wealth of creative talent. Among its many philanthropic ventures was the Bertelsmann Foundation's World of Expression Scholarship Program, designed to encourage, support and reward young writers and musicians growing up in this cultural capital.

The program began with scholarship rewards for excellence in literary and musical expression and then quickly expanded to include programs that would foster that expression. Fall workshops in public high schools across the city offered a jolt of creativity to high school seniors, jumpstarting students to create original work. Classroom teachers in attendance clamored for materials that would help them infuse creative writing into the classroom; World of Expression teaching artists responded with a booklet of lesson plans and staff development workshops for teachers and administrators. A summer writing program for juniors offered an intensive course for developing writers. The World of Expression website provided access to writing and music-related resources for teachers and students year-round.

THE PROGRAM TODAY

Now in its thirteenth year and now known as the Random House, Inc. Creative Writing Competition, the program awards more than \$75,000 in scholarships to public high school students for original poetry, memoir, fiction and drama. It brings together prominent New York City educators, teaching artists, community leaders, authors and industry profes-

sionals, including Random House Inc. executives, to inspire, guide, read, judge and celebrate the work of 1,200 student writers discovering their own unique voices.

The Teacher Coordinator Program, now in its second year, provides creative writing materials and scholarship information for teachers at each participating school. These teachers then serve as a resource for all students and teachers within their schools. The Student Coordinator Program provides a way for students to help take ownership of the process as well, and both coordinators receive books and other creativity-fostering tools.

This year, weekly e-mails offered additional outreach for seniors and teachers attending fall workshops at seventy-five city public schools. The WOE Weekly Writer Web Tips were chock-full of ideas for writing and revising in every genre, as well as ideas for college applications and listings of events, competitions and publishing opportunities for young writers. The Weekly Tips also provided structure and contest deadline reminders for students at every stage of the creative process.

In addition to all of this support for seniors, this year marked the first year of a 5-week writer's residency held for one school in each borough. These intensive workshops, led by New York City-based teaching artists, enabled 125 juniors to develop and publish creative work. These young writers also exchanged work with students in Arizona through a pen pal exchange program. Upon completion of the residency, students celebrated their work and read the work of students from other schools. Students received books by literary greats and participating teachers received a class set of Random House titles.

THE FUTURE

Each of the thirteen years the Competition has spent working in NYC public schools has offered further proof for the need for such programs. Young people are hungry for the chance to express themselves, and to learn how to get the thoughts in their minds down on the page. Classroom teachers, often overwhelmed with trying to bring 150 students each up to the current standards, are equally hungry for new ideas and support. Administrators are eager for programs that will train teach-

ers to provide opportunities for student-centered student writing—and that will keep school culture centered on creativity. And Random House staff and authors are eager to not only bring their own skills and expertise to schools, but to learn from staff and students.

The Random House, Inc. Creative Writing Competition is devoted to enabling access to these programs, especially for under-represented student populations. As the program for New York City public high school students expands to reach more students—and, in some cases, to reach small groups of students more intensively—projects are in the works to bring these successful programs to other American cities who host Random House operations. In this way, each Random House office can not only be a center of creativity for its employees and authors, it can bring that same creative force to the schools and communities that surround it.

THE SPONSOR

Random House, Inc., the world's largest English-language trade book publisher, publishes many of the foremost and most popular fiction and nonfiction authors in hardcover, trade and mass market paperback, audio, electronic, digital, and other formats. Random House, Inc. (www.randomhouse.com) is the U.S. division of Random House, the book division of Bertelsmann AG, one of the world's leading media companies. Books published by Random House, Inc. have won the most major awards of any publishing company, including the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Newberry Medal. Among the dozens of Random House, Inc. publishing divisions and imprints in the U.S. are the Bantam Dell Publishing Group, the Crown Publishing Group, the Doubleday Broadway Publishing Group, the Knopf Publishing Group, Fodor's Travel Guides, Random House Children's Books, the Random House Publishing Group, and the Random House Audio Publishing Group. Random House's publishing companies in Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan, and Korea are publishing leaders in their territories. Today's leading authors include Dan Brown, John Grisham, John Irving, Toni Morrison, and John Updike.

2006 JUDGES & EVALUATION PROCESS

We are proud to continue a multi-stage judging process, which includes three phases of review. After meeting a specified set of criteria in Round 1, the top 20 percent of entries are moved on to Round 2. Round 2 of the process narrows the entrants down to 30-40 finalists in each subcategory by combining the scores from Round 1 and Round 2. Round 3, the final step in the process, determines the winners in each of the three categories by combining the scores of all three judging phases. These finalists are then reviewed and discussed by our judging panel and our final winners are determined.

Charlotte Abbott , Senior Editor	<i>Publishers Weekly</i>
Bonnie Ammer , Executive Vice President and Publisher at Large	Random House Worldwide
Harold Augenbraum , Executive Director	National Book Foundation
Mary Bringle , Novelist	
Billy Collins , Author	Random House
Mary Gannon , Editor	<i>Poets & Writers Magazine</i>
Desiree Gordon , Program Director	Urban Word NYC
Molly Jong-Fast , Author	Villard
Deborah Garrison , Poetry Editor	Knopf Publishing Group
Richard Hoehler , Actor, Writer and Teaching Artist	
Clarence Haynes , Associate Editor	Doubleday/Harlem Moon
Wendy Loggia , Executive Editor	Delacorte Press
Peter Olson , Chairman & CEO	Random House, Inc.
Evelyn Polesny , Writer/Educator/Performer	
Mike Romanos , Showcase and Children's Room Coordinator	Poets House
Barbara Rothenberg , President	NYC Association of Principals Supervising English
Celina Spiegel , Senior Vice President and Publisher	Spiegel & Grau
Nita Taublib , Deputy Publisher	Bantam Dell Publishing

2006 WINNERS

FIRST PLACE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS chosen citywide

Award	Name	School	Title
\$10,000 Memoir	Serge Morrell	Stuyvesant High School	<i>Avian Flu</i>
\$10,000 Poetry	Gizem Ozcelik	Stuyvesant High School	<i>I Remember</i>
\$10,000 Fiction & Drama	Maya Nathan	Midwood High School	<i>The Undertow</i>

SECOND PLACE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS chosen citywide

Award	Name	School	Title
\$5,000 Memoir	Crystal Lee	Hunter College	<i>Bird-Speak, Talk Story</i>
\$5,000 Poetry/Spoken Word	Elizabeth Acevedo	The Beacon School	<i>The Vicious Cycle*</i>
\$5,000 Fiction & Drama	Rebecca Cohn	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School	<i>Grey</i>

THIRD PLACE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS chosen citywide

Award	Name	School	Title
\$2,500 Memoir	Michelle Ting	Hunter College High School	<i>A.I.</i>
\$2,500 Poetry	Samantha Katz	Townsend Harris High School	<i>Considerations</i>
\$2,500 Fiction & Drama	Angel Rendon	A. Philip Randolph High School	<i>Goodbye Sydney Arnold</i>

ALL OTHER WINNERS BY SCHOOL

School	Name	Award	Title
Beach Channel High School	Shawn Bramwell	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Me</i>
Beacon School	Christopher Morales	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Escape*</i>
Benjamin Cardozo High School	Leanna Benenati	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>A Portrait of Peace</i>
	Amanda Boyd	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Jamie</i>
	Radha Radkar	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Blowback</i>
Bronx Leadership Academy	Ayana Mbaye	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>That One Moment</i>
Brooklyn School for Global Studies	Patrice Floy	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Bernie-Baby</i>
Brooklyn Technical High School	Jason Grant	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>A' Home</i>
	Ying Lin Louie	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Thrown Out of Reach</i>
	Anna Lindwasser	\$1000 - Fiction & Drama	<i>Pretty Girl and Medicine Boy</i>
	Albina Nasonova	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>The Girl; The Woman; The...</i>
	Mai Nguyen	\$500 - Fiction & Drama	<i>I Crave</i>
	Julisa Salas	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Tales of a Hard Boiled Egg</i>
Dewitt Clinton High School	Akasha Lawrence-Spence	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>I Am</i>
	Michael Castellanos	\$1000 - Poetry	<i>Love, Camera, Action!</i>
	Bakary Diaby	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>King Cornelius</i>
Dr. Susan McKinney Secon. School	Tahirah Dutton	\$500 - Memoir	<i>Untitled</i>
Edward R. Murrow High School	Charles Schwartzberg	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Who's Your Daddy</i>
	Vera Zukelman	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>I Had to be Strong</i>

ALL OTHER WINNERS BY SCHOOL

School	Name	Award	Title
Forest Hills High School	Natalie Contreras	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Passion Fruit</i>
	Klaudia Gladysz	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Enter—Has a Closed Door</i>
	Nadezhda Tamayeff	\$500 - Memoir	<i>Impact of My Grandmother...</i>
	Jelena Vlasisavljevic	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>A Second Chance</i>
Frederick Douglass Academy	Gaynelle Morgan	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Alphabetical Statement</i>
H.S. of American Studies @ Lehman	Amel Blake Batoon	\$500 - Poetry	<i>Under a Tree</i>
	Christina Chew	\$1000 - Fiction & Drama	<i>If Only Another Day</i>
	Derresha Harding	\$500 - Fiction & Drama	<i>No Way Out</i>
	Wen Wen Yang	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>My Father's Smile, My...</i>
High School of Art & Design	Alexandra Alcantara	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Lillies of the Valley</i>
	Carrie Tuccio	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>So, I Married a Liberal</i>
H.S. for Environmental Studies	Justine Gonzalez	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Mama's Wishes*</i>
	Alison Montgomery	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Half a Brother</i>
Hostos Lincoln Academy HS	Leshawna Johnson	\$500 - Memoir	<i>Saying Goodbye to Mommy</i>
	Kelvin Sanchez	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Always Fighting</i>
Hunter College High School	Zack Friedman	\$500 - Poetry	<i>Cartographer</i>
	Elizabeth Kiehm	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Spontaneous Combustion</i>
	Elizabeth Leshen	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>A Walk in the Park</i>
	Ariela Silberstein	\$1000 - Poetry	<i>October is Eternal</i>
	Katharine Uva	\$500 - Poetry	<i>This Hour</i>
John Dewey High School	Sylvia Lee	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>The Day I Left Me</i>
	Lily Mai	\$1000 - Memoir	<i>Running as Fast as I Can</i>
Lafayette High School	Anngillian Cruz	\$500 - Poetry	<i>I Remember</i>
	Mayya Glushankova	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>My Father</i>
Long Island City High School	Karina Baldizon	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>The Every Days</i>
	Diego Suarez	\$500 - Fiction & Drama	<i>Before He Was a Warrior</i>
Manhattan Center for Science	Jonathan Bueno	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Special News Bulletin*</i>
Marble Hill School For Int' Studies	Jodi--Ann Morris	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>The Game</i>
Middle College @ Medgar Evers	Patricia Abraham	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Toms Fatal Fetish</i>
Midwood High School	Christine Liaw	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>In the Cold, Cold Night</i>
Monroe Academy Arts/Design	Nekia Ayala	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Runaway Train 1138</i>
	Jaylecia Davila	\$1000 - Memoir	<i>Cold Winter Goodbyes</i>
New Dorp High School	Marina Svet	\$500 - Fiction & Drama	<i>Through God's Eyes</i>
New Utrecht High School	Joel Miro	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Just a Picture</i>
Port Richmond High School	Samina Ali	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Become More than Aliqrama</i>
	Shane Berliner	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Contents Under Pressure</i>
	Jennifer Blake	\$500 - Memoir	<i>I Guess this is Growing Up</i>
	Doreen Colon	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Happiness Lies</i>
	Michelle Cruz	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Shot Gun</i>
	Justiniano Estepan	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Punk</i>
	Jesmine Sanabria	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Playback</i>
	Jennifer Tousson	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Wounds May Heal, But the...</i>

School	Name	Award	Title
Qns HS for the Sciences @ York	Carolyn Lee	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Baby</i>
	Brian Lee	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>The Old Man and His Violin</i>
Science Skills Center HS	Ariana Radcliffe	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>The Dance</i>
	Torian Yancey	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Diary of a Revolutionary</i>
Secondary School for Journalism	Keith Nelson Jr.	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>The Lyfe Pt. 1</i>
Stuyvesant High School	Batool Ali	\$1000 - Memoir	<i>Thundering Silence</i>
	Daniel Chu	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Free Pork Fried Rice...</i>
	Rebecca Cooper	\$500 - Fiction & Drama	<i>Perfection</i>
	Rachel Ensign	\$500 - Memoir	<i>Traversing the Little White...</i>
	Emily Hoffman	\$1000 - Fiction & Drama	<i>Like My Daughter</i>
	Jackie Hsieh	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Echoes</i>
	Vadim Kurbatov	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Sleeveless</i>
	Amy Li	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Here, There, She Survived</i>
	Elizabeth London	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>A Job Well Done</i>
	David Mao	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>The Moon Walks, I Walk Too</i>
	Angelica Murdukhayeva	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>I Love You Mother, I Said...</i>
	Perri Osattin	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>One if By Sea</i>
	Innokenty Pyetranker	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Learning to Hear</i>
	Suzanne Rozier	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Superheroes and The...</i>
	Maxine Speier	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Noir Et Blanc</i>
Telecommunication High School	Chi Man Yeung	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Hazelnut Coffee</i>
	Christine Zhuang	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>The Art of A High Society</i>
	Nathan Zoob	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Songs I Wish I'd Written</i>
	Matthew Raphaelson	\$1000 - Poetry	<i>Wading*</i>
Thomas A. Edison High School	Sherrell Davis	\$1000 - Poetry	<i>If I'm a Mistake*</i>
Tottenville High School	Julie Chan	\$1000 - Memoir	<i>Unspoken Messages</i>
	Michael DiPrisco	\$1000 - Fiction & Drama	<i>CSI: Macbeth</i>
	Marianna Faynshteyn	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Pick Up the Phone...</i>
	Tiffany Gee	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>Astor Place</i>
	Antoinette Manfredo	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>A Young Girl's Struggle</i>
	Edward Menchavez	\$500 - Poetry	<i>A Book to Curl Up With</i>
	Ivy Mensah	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>All in Together</i>
	Frank Paternoster	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>The Risky Ride</i>
	Peter Shim	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>Road Less Traveled By</i>
	Alyssa Simeone	Honorable Mention - Memoir	<i>A Happy Day for My Mother</i>
	Eliza Wierzbinska	\$1000 - Poetry	<i>Only You and I Does Know</i>
	Christian Winston	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Shadow</i>
Townsend Harris HS	Christopher Amanna	\$1000 - Fiction & Drama	<i>A Good Send Off</i>
	Christine Arcidiacono	\$500 - Poetry	<i>The Monk's Herbarium</i>
	Debra Brass	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Sumerian Wheel</i>
	Danielle Hanson	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>The City</i>
	Muriel Leung	Honorable Mention - Fiction	<i>The Red Lantern</i>
	Kristyn Maiorca	\$1000 - Memoir	<i>Philosophical Reality</i>
	Molly Owens	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Language</i>
Lara Torgovnik	Honorable Mention - Poetry	<i>Mourning Intellect</i>	

*Poetry—Spoken Word Entries

The Undertow

By Maya Nathan

MIDWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

The ceiling is the only part of my room that isn't mine. It belongs to the stars, hundreds of stars, my father's creations with the help of a special glow-in-the-dark paint. He made my ceiling their home when I was four years old because I was afraid of the dark but couldn't fall asleep by nightlight, which seeped through my eyelids and kept me awake for hours. I used to have nightmares back then, and although I can no longer remember what any of them were about, I do recall waking up in the early hours of the morning to find my walls illuminated with an eerie azure tinge, and my sheets soaked in either sweat or urine, sometimes both.

On the nights when I wet the bed, I would slink out from between my sheets in shame and lie on the cold floor with a pillow, nightgown drenched and clinging to my bottom, too afraid of another nightmare to risk even closing my eyes, waiting impatiently for the sun to rise. Otherwise, I would run on the edge of panic to my father's room and wake him up, then force him to lie with a pillow on my bedroom floor until I fell asleep. He disliked sleeping on the floor as much as I did and after close to four nights of my disturbing his slumber, Dad decided that he'd had enough. The stars were a clever invention of his.

"Whenever you can't sleep," he had told me, "count the stars, and as you count them, say a letter of the alphabet. Then, think about something that makes you smile that begins with that letter, okay?"

I did this for three years, until doing so made me feel so childish that the personal shame alone was enough to end the nightmares

altogether. I had stopped even noticing the stars until now and this is only because my insomnia has returned, along with the nightmares that I thought would remain submerged forever in the sinkhole of my mind. I know that they will swarm like locusts the second I shut my eyes and so I'm trying to think about things that make me happy. I cannot remember this feeling, this *happiness*.

So here I lie, an amputee trying to move a limb that no longer keeps its company with the rest of the body. The stump twitches...

A is for anger

B is for broken

C is for catastrophe

D is for death

Happy. The name sounds so familiar. I just can't recall the face.

The other kids at school cannot smell the grief on me. I know it's there only because it haunts my bones and squeals in my joints when I move. It circles in my lungs, ghosting its way in and out with each mouthful of air. My classmates cannot see it seeping out of my pores in clouds of blue smoke. They ignore me. The boy in the desk next to me rises to open a window. He turns to his chair and his eyes fixate for a moment on the air behind my ear before he sits down again. A fly buzzes. Outside the window, a brown man in a white coat walks a black dog up the block and stops so that it can pee into the gutter. Little children play hopscotch on the naked sidewalk, little feet landing into little squares with precision.

We had a debate in class about 9/11 and the war in Iraq. A thoughtless business: politics. An endless chess game with words on a green and gold board. Terrorism, the king of all political jargon: Democracy, its queen. Their marriage is both an arranged and an unhappy one. The kids in the class talk Big Ideas, but I don't listen, only hear the darkness inside their hollow mouths, meaningless notes, unintelligible echoes.

"Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" is all anyone knows because no one reads the newspaper out of free will. I used to read the newspaper, combing the articles and pictures like the Rover on

Mars, searching for a shred of evidence of my father's existence. I didn't find any signs of life, just politics, a pathetic simulation, an illusion. Politicians talk and talk and talk and never get anything accomplished. The classroom discussion has all the brevity of a filibuster.

"Are you a Democrat or Republican?" They ask each other again and again, until my heart feels sick.

"I'M AN ORPHAN!" something inside me roars, but it can't break past the knot in my esophagus so I can only imagine the sounds of these words rolling off my tongue and shattering their eardrums with a pop, pop, pop, like roasting corn. I envision scarlet rivulets staining designer clothing.

About suffering they were never wrong.¹

My grandmother takes me to synagogue every Friday night because she thinks that I need to get in touch with God. She's an atheist but she believes in Judaism, believes that a little faith will heal my soul. My soul doesn't need healing. I'm fine, I tell her. I don't even miss him anymore.

"That's nonsense," she says, closing her eyes and her ears, and sings "kadosh, kadosh, kadosh" along with the entire congregation. With each "kadosh," she rises on her tiptoes and tries to touch heaven. I stay sitting, head bestowed, listening to the voice of Hitler inside my mind, which is pretty wrong, considering that I'm a Jew.

This is the one secret that nobody knows, that I can't tell anyone, because if I do, they'll wrap me in a straight jacket for sure. I whisper it to myself as I pretend to pray. I whisper quietly, "I am Hitler." I know I sound insane when I say it like this, but there really is no other way to put it. Were you expecting a dramatic build-up, some suspense, an intense revelation? I am Hitler and that's how it is.

I cannot really say when I first knew this. It was a slow dawning, like waking up from a deep sleep. I guess that it started a few weeks after the end of September, when all the news footage showed these fundamental Muslim-type people dancing and singing in praise of the murder of the American infidels in the towers. I never really felt hate until that moment. Sure, I hated that Tommy Something or other

when I was in Kindergarten and he knocked out my two front teeth with a baseball. But that wasn't real hatred, only the pretend child-type, characterized by puffy red cheeks and chubby, clenched fists. This was the real kind, the espresso IV, struck by lightning, organ-melting kind. This was a kiss from below.

My one coherent thought: *Let's NUKE them all.*

Right after he went missing, I used to ride the subway for hours looking for him. I would see him out of the corner of my eye and spin around, shouting "Daddy!" only to have ten strangers look back at me with a startled blend of irritation and suspicion. I would follow any man who walked with a heavy gait, who wore black suits and gray ties, smoky trench coats and Humphrey Bogart hats. I chased them down, heart pounding, darting in front of each man and then turning sharply and walking backwards, scouring the face, scouring a hundred faces, looking for his crooked smile and obsidian eyes, eyes that would haunt me later as I sat in the subway car heading home, pointing with the cruel claws of light that reflected in the pupils.

I don't dream anymore. I sleep with my eyes open and think about how tired I am. That's why last night was so strange. I never dream, but I did then. I was standing in the palm of a giant hand, eighty stories in the air. I looked down at the ground and the ground looked down at me and wrinkled its nose in disgust. All of a sudden, the palm tipped and I was plummeting toward the earth, air escaping from my mouth with an accordion's wheeze, hands like frantic sparrow wings. The roar and the screaming filled my head. When I woke up I was lying with my pillow on the floor and sunlight was just beginning to creep into the crevices of my quilt. "So this is death," I thought, and the stars above my head laughed at me too.

My father once told me that there was not a single person in this world who he hated, but I didn't believe him. It was impossible, I said, to have gone through over forty years of living without making a single enemy.

"Nope," he said.

"What about that dumb hockey player in high school who stole

your lunch money and beat you up every day for a year?”

“Not even him. And who told you about that?” He smiled at me.

“Why don’t you hate him?” I asked. “He made your life a nightmare. You told me that you were too afraid to go to school sometimes.”

He sighed and picked a stone from the sidewalk. It was round and gray and when he handed it to me, I almost dropped it. It was heavier than it looked. “This is an object lesson,” he said, “so bear with me.” I nodded. “Hate is like this stone. Don’t roll your eyes. I’m serious,” and here he folded his arms the way he always did when he wanted to let me know that he was being serious. A few moments later, “Does it feel heavy now?”

“No.” My wrist was killing me. I shifted it to the other hand. He raised his eyebrow. “Well,” I conceded after a couple more seconds had passed, “maybe a little.”

“Imagine this stone is someone that you hate.”

“Okay...”

“Now imagine that for each person that you hate, you have to carry a stone just like this one.”

“Yeah, so...?” He narrowed his eyes at me as I said this and sighed in exasperation.

“So, it would get pretty *onerous* wouldn’t it? Carrying around all that weight.”

Yes. “Maybe,” I said, dumping the rock on the ground and quietly rubbing my hands together. “Maybe a little.” He smiled at me, the look in his eyes telling me that he had read the look in mine.

“Of course it would hurt,” he said. My dad balled his fists up and shook them dramatically. “It would crush you.” I shrugged and stared at my shoes. There was a hole in the front of the right one and the white of my sock stared out at me from the darkness.

“So you understand? Hatred only leads to more hatred. I am aware that it’s a cliché, but you really can’t fight fire with fire. Hating an enemy only turns you into an even greater monster. It makes you the equivalent of that which you hate. *Understand?*”

That explanation had sounded rehearsed to me. To this day, it doesn't ring true. I love my father, but he was so naïve. Hatred is the most natural thing in the world for me, because anger burns with an energy that quickly extinguishes. I bet that even my father hated Hitler. Everyone hates Hitler.

Hitler. A heavy, powerful name; hideous, hateful, horrible, heinous...like me. I used to dream about destroying the world. No ambiguity necessary. I wanted to drop a black boulder on all humanity. I would feel guilty about this, first, because it's not healthy, not right in the mind to feel this way so much. Second, because I'd have to kill myself in the process and that would make me a martyr and I hate martyrs. Martyrs and hypocrites. Then I read this book in the library about reincarnation, and I knew that I had to be Hitler. Who else was such a monster? Who else deserved to be punished the way God punished me?

It was what my teacher likes to call a glorious epiphany. I was filled with a strange self-righteousness, this burden was delicious sorrow. The coffin at the funeral was every bit as wooden and hollow as my soul and I knew this and still I didn't cry out, immune to the pain of self-pity. I hated, will always hate, myself. But I am a smarter Hitler now. I do not have an ambition for conquest this time, not plots for a greater race, merely an unquenchable thirst for vengeance.

"I deserve this," I now say inside my head and although this thought should take some weight off my chest, as it has a million times before, this time it doesn't. I close my eyes and I see children plucked from tissue-paper hands, corpses of porcelain fires in the giant kilns. I hear millions begging for death and millions begging for life. I hear millions more crying out to be human again.

I am disgusted by my lack of disgust.

A giant python now embraces my heart. No matter how many times I lure him away, he always slithers back with a smile. I stare up at the ceiling again. If I lower my eyelids just slightly, the stars look like gasps of dusty sunlight peeking between large slabs of cement and charred metal beams. I close my eyes all the way. The lids seal

with the finality of a tomb and I allow myself to be buried alive.

My aunt comes to collect me in the morning. She's a nervous woman with high shoulders and a small waist. As I bend to pick up my suitcase, I see her pop an orange Tums into her mouth. She smiles at me with too many teeth and reaches down to pick up the suitcase herself and then stretches out her arm to give me an awkward, sideways hug. My arm bone presses hard against my ribcage. She turns her head to the side and tells me, with a silver voice, how thin I look.

I smile with the corners of my lips and reach back to shut the bedroom door. The stars retreated into slumber, imperceptible against the hollow shadows on the ceiling as if their existence had only been a figure of my imagination, only visual whispers in a dream. My aunt locks the apartment door with a clang that reverberates in the empty hallway.

The taxi doesn't take me far; just over the Manhattan bridge to an old apartment building on the Upper West Side. Hallelujah, I've moved on up. My new room is larger than my old one and is painted the color of a cow's nipple, a sour-smelling, starless pink that makes me feel so sick that I've no sooner unpacked my suitcase than I'm gone, out the door, feet taking me God knows where. It's only when I stop to catch my breath by the lake in Central Park that I am aware that I have been running. My marble heart pounds against my ribcage and the angry rattling it makes scares me. Maybe I should see someone about it. Maybe I should just let myself die.

I hear a male voice somewhere behind me. It sounds rusty and familiar, sends shivers down my spine. Hope bursts into flame inside me before I whirl around to see that it's just...a man. I swallow the cold ash in my mouth back into my stomach. "God," I whisper softly to no one special. "God, I miss him."

The world ripples in my gaze. The lump in my throat bursts. The sound and the fury² rushes out in my cry with so much force that it folds me in half. I cannot hear my own voice, only the stony wail of Niobe beside the heap of her children, the roar of Adam at the edge of the wilderness, a sound so hoary and primal that I cringe against a

tree trunk in terror, sliding down and curling up until my body is a trembling cashew in the dirt.

When I finally raise my head, the sky is stepping into the gentle hues of twilight. I prop myself upright against the tree, letting the earth support me. A few stars are visible, smiling overhead. Picking up a rock by my foot, I absentmindedly squeeze it in my hand until I can feel its hard edges cutting into my palm. I don't want to be Hitler anymore; my shoulders are breaking in his totalitarian grip. The sky is an untouchable blue and the stars in it are still smiling. The great stone in my chest cracks just a little.

"I hope that those terrorists did Daddy a favor," I say to nobody in particular. "I hope that wherever he is, he is a million times happier than he could ever be here with me." It's the only prayer that I have to offer and just saying it exhausts me. But in my heart, I think I believe it. I hurl the stone as hard as I can out into the center of the lake. It clings to the air for a few seconds before letting go and plummeting; the sound of water echoes in my mind.

When I can no longer see my feet in the darkness, I know that it's time to go back. A great beast is dying in the soft place beneath my heart, and as I walk I can feel it leaving me, my body growing lighter and lighter until by the time I'm within a block of my Aunt's building I have to shove my hands in my pockets, afraid that the wind will grab my wrists and carry me away. Soon there will be nothing left inside of me. This is alright, I suppose. Nothing is, after all, where everything ends. Then again, nothing is also where everything begins.

1 Auden (from "Musee Des Beaux Artes")

2 Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Grey

By Rebecca Cohn

FIORIELLO H. LAGUARDIA HIGH SCHOOL

“See you later, Mama,” I yelled, and waited for her to come over to the door with Nell.

“Nelly, getcha fingers out of your nose.” Nell took her hand away from her face, and wiped it briefly on her blue dress. I had to laugh a little then.

“And, Jade, where you think you goin’?”

“Meeting Billy and Ren,” I answered.

“What ‘bout those dishes in the sink? They gonna clean themselves?”

“No they ain’t, Mama.”

“Well they better have before you gone, and you ain’t leavin’ without sun block on neither.” Nell smiled up at me. She knew she was still too young to help with the dishes. I could see where there were boogers on her summer sunflower-patterned dress, but she looked so adorable anyways that it didn’t matter. Her shoulder-length, light, sandy colored hair was puffy today, like it is after she takes a bath. And I could tell she had, cause her face was so clean I could probably see my reflection in it if I tried.

Billy and Ren were sleepy that day, and we decided we’d just stay inside cause the sun was so hot anyway. I got home tired too, from being around tired people, which often happens to me even though I often got a lot of energy. I’d told my uncle that I’d meet him at his house though, so I brought Nelly along up the road, and he smiled when he saw us, like he always does.

“There’re my two favorite nieces,” he’d say, and I always want to tell him that actually I’m his nephew but then he offered us lemonade that Auntie Jen made and soon we were sitting by the road and watching as the cars drove by.

“What’s that on Nell’s fingers?” he said, and I noticed he meant the pink nail paint on Nelly’s fingernails.

“It’s nail paint,” I answered. “Billy’s sister put it on.”

“Nell’s too young for makeup.”

“It’s not makeup, really...” But Uncle Jeremy had called inside and Auntie Jen came out with some nail-polish remover. She gave it to me so I went to sit by Nell to take off the paint. Me and Uncle Jeremy started talking about cars, Jeremy smoking a cigarette slowly and lazily. He said how he would love the new Jaguar, and I said how he ain’t never gonna afford it, and he said he knowed he ain’t. The cigarette was getting smaller and smaller as we talked. Nelly giggled as the cool oil from the nail-polish remover bottle went on her hands, and she grabbed at the bottle, spilling it. Soon the oil was all over her sunflower dress. She didn’t seem to mind though, and kept playing with the oil anyway, like it was her own liquid toy.

That’s when it happened. Uncle Jeremy had finished his cigarette. He had just said, “Well I might be able to get me one of them Volvos then,” and he threw his cigarette to the side. He’d forgotten that Nell was there. And I remember it perfectly. The cigarette, instead of going out like it does when he throws it somewhere else, got a little flame in it. The oil was dripping from Nell’s dress, and the fire lunged at it, as if it was a vicious cat and the oil a mouse. The fire was spreading over the sunflowers on my sister’s dress so quick that it took her a moment to realize what was going on and then she started shrieking so loud that we probably didn’t have to call the ambulance, she might have called it herself. Soon her body was nowhere no more, so much not there that I thought maybe she had wandered off, and something else was ablaze. But I knew that wasn’t true as I stood there watching the flame and hearing the tremendous ringing echo of Nell’s scream in my ears. I also heard Jeremy yelling faintly and running all around

with the hose that shot out silent water and Auntie Jen slamming the door softly behind her as she rushed out and started whispering at the top of her lungs. In a few hundred hours, the ambulance showed up and took Nell away forever.

Uncle Jeremy swore to everybody he ain't never gonna smoke another cigarette again. I told him I wouldn't either, if I was him.

"But you ain't me," he said for some reason. He kept his word through the winter, but then spring came, and I actually seen him smoking. I would sit in my spot of dirt near the highway, just out of view from Jeremy's house, and I seen him smoking, his eyes wide, and holding it like someone holding a joint, like Billy, who sometimes does. I went over to him one day, and he tried to hide it, like everybody does when they see me coming. They just stick it behind their back leg, trying real hard to not make it seem like they're trying real hard to hide anything.

"You didn't keep your word!" I yelled at him, suddenly real angry that he didn't, not 'cause he was smoking but cause he didn't keep his word. He turned away for a minute, but then looked back at me.

"You been sitting over in the spot where Nell died, ain't you been? Why don't you sit in a different spot on the field, where there's grass?" I didn't answer. I just stared hard at a spot on his leg, where the cigarette was hiding behind. And then he whipped it out and held it in front of me.

"It don't matter anymore," he said. "I ain't gonna kill anyone. The only one I'm killin' now is myself." He paused for a second. "And I don't mind killin' myself." I looked at him for a minute and then ran away, in the opposite direction from his house, and mine. I ran as fast as I could, and as far as I could along the road before I had to stop, and I collapsed on the ground by the side of the road.

A couple months later, the immediate shock of Nell's death was gone, and I had made a good friend in school, who often took my mind off Nelly. Her name was Cam, and over the past month I thought I had fallen in love with her. After school Cam and I would sit on the porch in front of her house, which was small and white, and

overlooked a huge meadow, with the road to the side. One day I told her, “Math class is so boring that I always look at you ‘stead of the teacher.” She looked at me for a minute, but I didn’t think I could look back at her so I didn’t know if she was smiling or frowning, crying or just plain.

“I know,” she said. And then she turned her head again, and looked across the field where I had been looking. I turned to her.

“But how did you know? You always face the other way.”

“I always know when someone’s looking at me. I don’t know how or why, but people look at me a lot, I might just be really good at it. Or maybe it’s a fact that there’s always someone looking at me, and I figure in Math, it must be you.” We sat for a few minutes, looking across the field that was green but looked yellow from the bright sunlight. I turned to her, and she was squinting her eyes from the sun. Her hair was long and usually so dark that it looked black, but since we were in the sun, it looked almost red. She turned her eyes toward me, and smiled a little.

“Actually,” she said. “I think I’m psychic.” I thought about that for a bit.

“Maybe,” I said. I didn’t believe her but if I believed anyone was psychic it would be Cam. I looked into her eyes, which were grey. I wondered how grey, such a boring, dull color, could look so deep and full of life. The grey in eyes shouldn’t be called grey, I thought. I tried to think of another name for it. I thought that “Cam” might work, but “Cam” was already my substitute name for a lot of things.

I walked a little past my house on my way home, to my spot at the edge of Jeremy’s property. Sitting down on my spot, I looked out at the field, which was really green. I always notice how green the grass is for some reason, whenever I sit in my spot. I mean, grass is obviously green, but the trouble is, I don’t see where it gets its greenness from anyway. Then I looked down at where I was sitting, and contentedly examined the small pieces of grass that I had noticed coming up from my spot a few weeks ago. I picked at the dirt around the grass, which was so dry that it didn’t even seem like dirt, more like sand,

and I wondered how grass even grows in something so dry and desolate.

“It sucks the water from way down below in the ground,” Mama told me once.

It was raining that night. So hard that I thought that maybe if it kept up, the whole town would collapse and become a sea instead. I thought that if that happened, I would build me and Cam a raft out of things made out of wood we could find, like beds and planks from the porches that would be all torn up. I decided that maybe Billy and Ren could join us too if they didn’t make a raft of their own, but I wouldn’t allow them on, I decided, until they gave me their word that they’re not gonna try to take over the raft, or take over Cam, which I knowed they might try, since they’re real competitive. And I would leave them in the water ‘til they gave their word. I stood by the door. Usually, when it rains me and Nelly would play on the deck. I sometimes would read to her there, she would sit on my lap on the chair we got out there, and the big umbrella would be up so we wouldn’t get wet. But if it was raining as much as it was now, Mama made us stay inside. She could tell I wanted to go outside now.

“If you go on out in this here weather,” she said quietly, “The lightning gonna hit you and then I’m gonna hit you.” She looked at me for a minute, seeing if that made me wanna stay inside or not. I thought about what she said for a minute, and then asked, “Really? Cause if lightning struck me I’d probably be dead, and wouldn’t that be a bit like beating a dead horse, except more like beating a dead boy, cause that’s what I am?” She shook her head at me, like she does a lot, and went to the kitchen.

I went outside anyway, because I realized that it was Nelly’s birthday, and I had to lie down in my spot for a bit. I was lying outside in the rain, and the rain was making me feel sad. I think the rain reminded me a lot of Nell, because she loved the rain more than I did. I remembered that a year ago at that time we were celebrating her third birthday—it was raining, but lightly, and me and her ran around on the field. We used to play a version of tag where I chased her but

never caught her. She would squeal every time I got near enough, and it gave her so much pleasure to outrun me, even though if I had wanted, I could have caught her in a second. I used to count the number of times I could have caught her each time we played, and it was twenty-three one time. As I thought about that, my throat started tightening, and I could feel the tears in my eyes, but I didn't know if they came down my face or not. Actually, it was possible I wasn't crying at all and my face was only wet from the rain, or maybe I was sobbing and the rain mixed in with my tears. Maybe, I thought then, maybe I was raining and the sky was crying. Or maybe we were both raining. Or both crying.

I saw a light figure come toward me. It was hazy and very grey, and blurred from the rain or fog or tears. I looked around, and the sky was light and dark at the same time. And the ground—I could barely see where the sky stopped and the ground began. But I knew there must be a ground and that I wasn't floating in the sky because of the moist smell of dirt, and the fact that I could feel my legs shivering against my warm spot in the grass, which looked more grey than green, since everything was grey, including the sky and the rain and the smell of dirt. I supposed I was grey too right then. The light grey figure was closer now, and I saw it was Cam, and I wondered as she got closer if she knew I was crying or thought that maybe it was just the rain. But I realized I was crying out loud now, and felt a little ashamed.

"Jade," she said my name softly, but I could hear it loudly as if she was saying it right in my ear, even through the pounding of the rain against the ground and against us, and the loud thunder that boomed every few seconds and the throbbing of the rain and the pounding of the thunder, and the rain and the thunder, and the rain. Cam took me in her arms and both of us were holding each other in that one spot in the grass. I thought, maybe she didn't realize it, but I knew, even though we were so close I couldn't see her, that she looked beautiful even though she was soaking wet. I thought then that Cam won't ever love me as much as I love her, and that made me cry even more. And then I realized that actually I was supposed to be crying over my dead

sister, which was such a better reason to cry, which made me cry even more, and when I thought of Nell again I cried more than ever.

“It’ll be okay,” Mama said to me that night. I had changed out of my sopping clothes right when I got inside, but I think she must have known I was outside anyways but didn’t really care ‘cause I was safe now. I hated the fact that she said it’ll be okay, because I didn’t know how she knew that I thought things weren’t okay.

In the morning I wanted to go outside and see my spot of grass. I thought that the grass might have died when it rained so much, and that maybe my tears soaked into the ground, and the salt might have poisoned the grass. As I walked to my spot, the rest of the grass seemed fine, as green as ever, but very wet. I got to my spot, and stared at it for a minute, and then sat on it, even though it was so wet that it soaked through my pants and underwear, which was real uncomfortable. But I needed to because I swear, my spot of grass must have been two inches taller, and a whole shade greener than it was yesterday.

Goodbye Sidney Arnold

By Angel Rendon

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH HIGH SCHOOL

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

“In a Station of the Metro”

Erza Pound (1885-1972)

A set of park benches forms a modest triangle at Christopher Street and Seventh Avenue. In the center of the space stand rough, white sculptures of life-sized people. One of the statues sits on one of the benches. Short, black fences enclose the area. Just outside the entrance a young man meanders, trying to make a phone call. His friend will be another ten minutes. He looks around, walks a few steps, and then succumbs to the park benches. The air in the city is cold enough to keep many inside but not so cold that he cannot sit on the bench. An elderly man enters the scene. His gait indicates the seat beside the young man is his destination. The old man says something but the young man does not hear it. The young man shifts leftward and they sit side by side, the old man on the young man's right. The old man's cane rests between them, like a third member of their party. The young man can sense a conversation coming, and just as he senses it, the old man turns to him. The young man removes his earphones.

“Do you live around here?” The old man has an old Queens accent, the sort that seems almost to no longer exist.

“No, I live up in the Bronx.”

“Oh.” The old man looks ahead. The cold air has made his nose run. The very tip of his nose is damp.

He adds, “Do you come here often?”

“Not really, I mean I end up in this area on a lot of weekends. But I don’t necessarily come here. I’m meeting a friend.”

“I dated a woman up in the Bronx. A very nice area, the Bronx. Do you know Perry Avenue?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Oh, that’s up by the – uh, Botanical Gardens. Beautiful.”

“Oh yeah, well I live up there by the Gardens and the Bronx Zoo.”

The old man thinks for a moment, then adds, “Do you work around here?”

“No, no I don’t.”

“I used to work here years ago. This morning I decided to take a walk because it looked nice out.”

“It’s good to get out.”

“Yeah, well it got so cold. It’s terribly cold. This morning I had to wait for the cable company to come in and fix something with the box. The man told me from nine to twelve, to wait in the house.”

“Oh yeah, they’re always late.”

“He shows up around ten and boom, he fixes the box in five minutes. I don’t know what he did, but it works. I just use it for movies. *The Wizard of Oz* was on last night. What a lovely movie. But how many times can you see it?”

“It’s a good movie.”

“Shouldn’t you be at services right now?”

On the young man’s left a woman and her daughter are passing. The mother is at least in her late forties and the daughter appears just slightly younger than the young man on the bench with the old man. The mother is a naturally fast walker; her stride is a poised stampede. The daughter is different; she double-steps, long-steps, scurry-steps, whatever need be to keep up with the quiet rush, and she is saying something.

“Mel, you don’t understand.”

“What don’t I understand? You don’t understand. It’s not in the budget.”

“My future isn’t in the budget? Do you hear yourself?”

“Your future? Don’t be so melodramatic. We can afford a state school but nothing more. And your future? You make it sound like you’ll be doomed if you don’t go to a brand-name college.”

“I don’t want to go to SUNY-Binghamton. You don’t know how this feels, Mom.”

The woman casts a sideways glance at her daughter.

The daughter adds, “You just don’t understand, Mel.”

“Your father agrees. We just can’t do it. You think we don’t want to do it? We want you to be happy. But it’s entirely impossible to do so in this situation. We just don’t have the money.”

At this point they have left the triangle of benches. They are standing at the curb waiting for the herd of yellow blurs to speed across the intersection. The vapor billows out of their noses and mouths and passes off into the oblivion of the atmosphere like a tragic, once known, once great hero.

“But look at my scores. I can get into one of these schools. And they say they meet all financial need. They say that, Mel, they do.”

“That doesn’t apply to us. That applies to people who have it worse off. You should count yourself lucky; I didn’t have it like you when I grew up. I grew up on Crotona Avenue and we had to go to Herman Ritter Junior High School, not Horace Mann.”

“So why did you put me through Horace Mann – to watch me languish at Binghamton?”

“We put you through Horace Mann because they gave us some money and because we wanted you to have the opportunity.”

The woman stops suddenly. They are standing before the flower display in front of a Korean deli.

“So you wanted that opportunity for me but not this one? Why did we stop?”

“I left my wallet at your father’s office. We have to go back.”

“Is it okay if I just go home?”

The woman stares at her. The daughter stands tall but her shoulders slump downward behind her loose hair; her eyes are round, and stuffed in her coat pockets her fists are clenched and trembling. The woman thinks for a second then agrees. On her way back to her husband's office, she feels a powerful sinking feeling. Her daughter watches her for a moment, then turns around and continues. She passes a frail Indian man sitting on a stool beside the flowers.

He normally sits left of his flower display because his right ear is the good ear. His left ear is an artifact of birth, and act of God he supposes, one of life's burdens. Now he sits to the right of his flowers; his stool bathes in the sunlight and he sits on it because the sun eases the bite of the cold wind.

His mustache turned silvery-gray years ago and his eyes bear the branches of age around their openings. His wrists are dainty and his body is very thin. His oversized winter coat hides his body in a cave of warmth like the fur of a famished black bear. His skin is supple and dark bronze. Atop his blank eyes lie bushy eyebrows and atop those his forehead is perched, sloping and wrinkled. He has been balding for several years but the fact is hidden under his black hat. A man and his date approach the flowers. They speak for a moment to each other and the woman points to the lilies. The old Indian man is watching two boys playing by the curb.

"Hello? How much are these?" The young man asks the Indian. The old Indian man does not hear. He asks again to no avail. Then he stridently moves a little closer.

Louder, the young man practically shouts, "Hey, Ali Baba, how much are these lilies?"

The old Indian man turns but still cannot make out the young man's words. He notes the gesture and holds up ten fingers—ten dollars for the bouquet—would he like it wrapped up or as is? Pay inside.

He sits down again at his stool. The playing boys are gone. His thoughts arrive at his daughter. He wonders how she is doing at her university. His dreams rest with her. For her he sits on his stool. He will sit on his stool until she no longer needs him to sit on this stool.

She will realize the fruits of all his labor, his life a half a world away from home, all the stools, all the flowers, pay inside, pay inside; she will live the life he works to give her, and he will die happy, he thinks. This he thinks, while he sits on his stool, in the sun. The couple exits.

“These are your favorite, right?”

“Sort of. My favorites are Calla lilies.”

“Oh. Here, let’s cross here.”

They come to the curb and they wait for the cars to pass. Two boys play near them, the couple can hear their laughter. It rings clear for a moment until it is submerged in the raging tide of traffic, rolling laughs against the sea of car horns, screeching brakes, and growling engines.

“Why did you call that man ‘Ali Baba’?”

“What? Oh. What do you mean?”

“Isn’t that—well, wasn’t it rude?”

“Look, the guy wasn’t listening to me. I was just getting his attention is all. I don’t think we have to make a big deal of the whole thing. It was stupid, just forget it.”

She looks into her bouquet. She concentrates on her lilies. She tries to forget.

The playing boys come closer. One of them throws a packet of ketchup under a speeding car’s tires. It explodes and squirts the woman’s pants.

The young man says, “What the fuck are you kids doing?”

One boy freezes and the other gets set to run. The other pulls the frozen boy away as the man begins to walk toward them.

“Baby, just forget it,” the woman says, “they were just playing.”

“It’s all over you!”

“It’s okay, it’ll wash off.”

They begin to walk across the street and the young man wonders what she thinks of him.

The boys run at full speed, faster than need be, and farther than required. No one chases them but the feeling of the chase is exhilaration. The boy who froze is eleven years old and the boy who ran is

ten. They run past a fast food restaurant.

“Wait!” The younger boy calls out. “Let’s reload.”

They walk into the restaurant. The garish reds and yellows, the fluorescent lights, the Siren song of the food’s aroma, they search for their ammunition inside.

“When you gotta’ be home?”

The younger boy replies, “When the lights go out, you?”

“Three.”

“That sucks. Look, those are the packets. Grab ‘em.”

“Why don’t you do it?”

“You’re older.”

“So? What if I get caught?”

“What if I get caught?”

The older boy feels stumped. The younger boy adds, “Odds n’ Evens.”

The older boy agrees.

Odds n’ Even and shoot. Mine. Odds n’ Even and shoot. Mine! Two in a row. Odds n’ Even and shoot. Mine! Two to one. Odds n’ Even and shoot. Mine! I win.

The younger of the two wins the contest.

“Now get the ketchup.”

The older boy complies, and they leave the restaurant. They go to the curb. Their pockets are stocked with dozens of packets, small one-by-two inch greasy packets of Heinz.

“You hafta’ throw this time.”

“Why!”

“Because...I threw before.”

The older boy retorts, “Yeah but only twice. We didn’t have as many.”

“Well, throw two then we’ll split them.”

“What if it splashes someone again?”

“Are you afraid?”

“No, but I don’t want to get it on anyone...”

“Just do it. Do it or you’re a fag.”

“What’s a fag? I’m not a fag!”

The younger boy pushes the older one. A bike messenger swerves violently to avoid the fallen boy. The younger boy throws his packets into the older boy’s face and stalks off. The older of the two starts up and feels like he wants to cry.

On the sidewalk near the older boy, a man and woman in their thirties enter an apartment building. They are siblings.

“Can you believe she asked me to ask dad for money? If she needs money, she should ask herself, and then maybe take an interest in what happens to him.”

They climb the stairs to their father’s apartment on the fourth floor.

“Did the cable people come?”

“Yeah,” she replies, “He called me and told me they came. It’s working now. Christ, I forgot his mail. Here, take the key, I’ll be up in a minute.”

She runs down the stairs to retrieve his mail. Outside the front entrance she sees a little boy crying. He looks up and sees her smiling. He runs off out of view. She opens the mailbox and there’s nothing inside but three stained aluminum walls. She climbs the stairs again. Upon entering her father’s apartment, her brother calls from his bedroom, “Where is he?”

“He’s not here? Sometimes he goes for walks. For Christ’s sake it’s so cold out, what is he doing outside? Look outside the windows, he doesn’t usually go too far.”

“I see him. He’s on that bench across the street. He’s talking to some guy.”

“He does that all the time. We should go get him. He forgets where he is and he gets upset.”

Out the window, down the stairs, across the way, and on the bench sits the old man beside the young man.

The old man says, “I like you. What’s your name?”

“Victor.” When he says it he feels something.

“It’s getting too cold, but do you come here often?”

He lies this time, “Yeah, I do.”

“Well, maybe I’ll see you here again. Do you like coffee? I’ll take you for coffee next time.”

“That’d be good.”

“The old man rises slowly, like a statue coming to life, and begins to walk away. The young man watches him go. His phone rings.

He answers, “Hey, where are you? The strangest thing just happened to me.”

“Listen, I’m gonna be another half hour or so, is that OK?”

“Uh—yeah, it’s fine. Listen, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“This is sort of weird but have you ever been somewhere, like somewhere in public, surrounded by people—and for just a moment you *see* them? Like you *see* them...for the first time. They stop being a series of two-dimensional images, backs of heads, jackets, bags, sides, shirts, faces, they...become something. You see them. And then it goes away. Have you ever felt that?”

His friend says nothing but on the other end of the line she closes her eyes and tries to imagine it.

“I was just wondering; I just wanted to share that. I’ll see you in a bit, I guess.”

They say their goodbyes and hang up. The young man springs from the bench. His left leg is asleep but he forces it to run. He catches up with the old man. He has only made it a block away. He rests his hand on his shoulder.

“Hey. Listen, did you want to take that cup of coffee now? My friend is still running late.”

“Who are you? What do you want?” Fear crawls across the old man’s face. The young man examines him for a second but finds no sign of recollection. He is a blank, petrified canvas.

“From the bench. It’s Victor.”

“Who are you? I don’t know you. Get away from me.” There is something helpless in his voice. The young man takes a step forward and begins to say something.

“Stop!” He lifts his cane and swings it. It strikes the young man on

the forearm.

“Alright, alright.”

The young man gives up and apologizes.

The old man turns away. The young man lingers. Just as he is about to turn he notices that the old man dropped an envelope. The name reads: Sidney Arnold. Sidney Arnold. Goodbye Sidney Arnold.

The young man starts to cross the street and a cab screeches to a violent stop. The driver yells at him. Someone nearby watches and thinks to himself, “What is it with people?”

Like My Daughter

By Emily Hoffman

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

Gina

Sarah and I sit down at the table and I have to say it right away, tell her before the man brings the menus because I'm anticipating that infinite second between speaking and comprehension, when the words well up but she doesn't know yet and if I don't get a running start I'll lose momentum and the gap will become an abyss into which the words will tumble, unheard and irretrievable, transient and un-examinable.

She said she'd thought he was dead, that when she saw him she thought it was a ghost because we didn't talk about him and we hadn't seen him in years. And I knew I had to tell her. Sometimes you forget for a while, because these things go in cycles. You never really forget, but it's just not that important until you see him and she thinks he's dead and you think about what happened to her and then you know you have to start it all again.

"The reason you haven't seen Richard," I say in that infinite moment before I say it and before she knows but when it hovers above the table, like the air knows or something, like maybe if I didn't say anything she'd just know because I'd started the shift and it would reach her and she'd have to end knowing, because of the air or something, "is that he had sex with me when I was younger, *when I was twenty-five and he was fifty-something and he was my father's first cousin and best friend and I didn't tell anyone for twenty years and I was scared and it wasn't rape, not exactly, but I didn't want it and he was my*

father's best friend and I was so scared that they would blame me, that it was my fault, because he didn't actually rape me, I mean he didn't hit me or anything, but I didn't want it, God I didn't want it, and I convinced myself it was just a physical thing and I didn't tell anyone for twenty years, especially not while my father was alive, because I was so scared it would ruin everything and it would be my fault so if I just didn't tell anyone it would be okay But then I went to therapy and it came out in a really important way and I realized I had to tell people, that was five years ago, so I wrote a letter to him but he wouldn't apologize, wouldn't admit he'd done anything wrong and I was so infuriated and hurt but I told Mom and I told my brothers, your father and Uncle Peter, and I told his children; that was probably the hardest I told Tammy when we were in France because we were talking about her father, about how he'd slept around so much but "Thank God it was never anyone in the family," she said "Thank God it was never anyone in the family" and so I had to tell her, I had to tell her but she was devastated And then I found out that his wife, she blamed me just like him and I wanted to set it straight, I had to make her realize that it wasn't my fault and I hadn't wanted it, God I didn't want it, but I realized she needed to believe that, needed to blame me, so I let her. So I let her.

Later, she is lying in my lap and I am stroking her hair, and then she is me lying in my lap and speaking; she is me and she wants to be me and *She looks like my child*. Her own shame, I recognize so well, and when I told her she cried but she says she never cries. I hold her, her wanting to heal me and me wanting to fix her, to make her not-me, to make what happened to her no-me and what happened to me not-her but *She looks like my daughter*. She says later that she is sixteen and I am fifty and she cries because she loves me and she cries because I do not need her support but *She looks like my child, like she is my daughter*.

Sarah

I am sitting on the couch and watching TV with Lilly and Hannah. They are in first grade and I am older, but we are watching *Rugrats*. Molly is not watching with us. Mommy and Daddy are downstairs in the kitchen making dinner with Uncle Peter: spaghetti with meat

sauce, I think. Molly is upstairs. After dinner Daddy will read to me from *Our Great Century* and tell me about the stock market crash and how banks work and what “buying on margin” means. I hold the book in my lap and turn the glossy pages while he reads. I like when he reads to me, even though none of my friends’ dads read to them anymore. I will tell him what we learned about the Civil War in school today, and I will practice reciting the Gettysburg Address. Will is upstairs with Molly. “Four-score and seven years ago, our fathers laid forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Daddy and I have a funny voice we recite it in, like we’re old country men with funny Southern accents. I bet Uncle Peter would think it was funny. I hate Molly. Uncle Peter only comes to visit once a year because he lives in Hong Kong, where he and Daddy and Aunt Gina grew up. I want to visit one day but I don’t want to stay with Uncle Peter and Will. I don’t want to think about it. I want to get my *Harry Potter* book but it is upstairs. Molly is not watching with us. Molly is upstairs. Will is upstairs with Molly. I hate Molly. I don’t want to think about it.

Molly

Sarah is my sister. Uncle Peter is Will’s father. Uncle Peter is Will’s father but Will does not look like Uncle Peter because Will is Chinese and Uncle Peter is not. I told Sarah that Will kissed me and she said “That’s not as bad as what he did to me.” But I didn’t tell her that he didn’t just kiss me. Sarah is my sister but I did not tell her. Hannah and Lilly are my sisters but I did not tell them. Mommy is my mother but I did not tell her. Daddy is my father but I did not tell him. Uncle Peter is my uncle but I did not tell him. “That’s not as bad as what he did to me,” Sarah said. But I didn’t tell her. Sarah is my sister but I am upstairs and she is downstairs and I didn’t tell her. I hate Will.

Sarah

Will and I spent all morning collecting clay pigeons from the field where Mommy and Daddy and Uncle Peter were shooting them

down. We washed them and lay them on the bathroom floor in the hotel room between two towels so that they would be clean and dry. They are orange and round and made out of clay. We tried to find the best ones, the ones that were circles still, but a lot of them are chipped.

The clay pigeons are drying in the bathroom. My sisters are far away: back home in Brooklyn because they are too little to go on vacation with us. Daddy and Uncle Peter are downstairs. I don't know where Mommy is. Will and I are alone in the hotel room and the clay pigeons are drying in the bathroom. There isn't much space in the room because the couch is pulled out into a bed but I am little and I can squeeze underneath, between the mattress and the floor. So can Will. The clay pigeons are drying in the bathroom. Will tells me to pull down my pants and I do and he does too and he touches me and my tummy hurts and the clay pigeons know, the clay pigeons are drying in the bathroom between the two towels on the floor. I don't know where Mommy is but when she comes back later she walks into the bathroom without looking and she steps on the clay pigeons that are drying on the floor between the two towels.

Mommy steps on the clay pigeons and I hear them break. "I didn't seem them," she says, "I'm sorry."

Sarah

It is eleven years later and I am writing. I am writing and I am trying to understand.

Will

My mother is sitting there and telling them she doesn't want me. She is sitting there and saying she can't take care of me and.

Will

Peter is not my dad, but I live with him and he takes care of me and I call him Daddy. He is Sarah's Uncle.

Will

I hate Sarah.

Will

I love Sarah.

Will

Molly is little. She reminds me of Sarah.

Will

They don't want to see me anymore. I'm sorry.

Will

They don't want to see me anymore. I don't Care.

Will

Grandma still talks to me but I know it is hard and she's not even my real Grandma. She is Sarah and Molly's real Grandma like Peter is their real Uncle.

Will

Gina still talks to me.

Aunt Gina talks to him still. I ask her how she has sympathy for him, especially after what Richard did to her. "I don't know," she says, "maybe it's because he said sorry and Richard wouldn't. Richard never said sorry to me but Will said sorry to you."

Aunt Gina told me about Richard three months ago and I started crying because it's so strange how things turn out, how these patterns form and it seems as if life is mocking itself. She told me and laid bare the intimacy of her secret and I think about her and I think about Molly and I think about me and that vulnerability we had and we share and how I can't fix her and I can't fix Molly and maybe I can't really fix me and she says I have to forgive myself. And I squeeze her hand tightly because that's all I can think to do and the waiter says, "Do you and your mother want some dessert?" and I say, "No, just the check," and she smiles.

The Art of a High Society

by Christine Zhuang

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

“The privilege of committing [murder] should be reserved for those who are really superior individuals...now mind you I don’t hold with the extremists who think there should be open season for murder all year round. No, personally I prefer to have cut-a-throat week, or strangulation day.”

—James Stewart as Rupert Cadell in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*

A boy stood on an autumn lawn in a laid-back fashion reminiscent of privileged kids who just don’t care. He wore big and heavy headphones and bopped his head up and down to the music as he wondered if he had downloaded the catchy new tune by the Strokes. This was a typical routine for the boy every Tuesday morning: listening to music as loud as the sounds made by the leaf blower in his right hand until he is no longer capable of using the gift of Mother Nature that is the opposable thumb, which presses the small on/off button on the leaf blower and/or his IPOD if it needs to be recharged. Just as the catchy new tune by the Strokes that the boy had indeed downloaded late last night began to flow through the boy’s headphones, a bullet entered the boy’s forehead and left annoyingly small pieces of flesh and splatters of blood on the boy’s face as well as his IPOD. A man standing across the street wrapped a blue handkerchief around the tip of his still smoking sniper gun, placed it in the backseat, and proceeded to drive his five-year-old son to kindergarten.

Miriam Arbus, a fifty-three-year-old lump of a woman, strapped on her gun with the custom purple and green polka-dot paint job as she saw the limp body of the boy slowly become ensconced in the pool

of blood.

“Jimmy!” she screamed.

“Gee, would you mind not screaming for once? Aren’t peace activists supposed to be into the whole; ‘let’s talk it out nicely over a hot cup of chamomile tea?’” said a young man as he stepped lively down a narrow staircase. “Or has that all gone kaput ever since you guys started toting .44 magnums along with your homemade picket signs?”

“Don’t get on me about that again, Jimmy. Besides, we’re trying a new campaign this year,” Miriam said as she tapped the shiny lacquer finish of the gun hanging near her waist.

Jimmy inspected Miriam’s bulbous waist. “Very nice. Did you pick the colors out yourself, Mother?”

Miriam lightly smacked Jimmy’s cheek. “For your information, I did. All the other girls wanted hot pink, but I told them no. I said, how do you expect to gain the attention of the Governor if you got your tits hanging out and carrying guns that make you look like *Femme Fatale* meets *Barbie*?”

“That doesn’t sound too bad to me,” Jimmy said while fixing his tie.

“Well, that’s why you’re not the Governor,” Miriam said as she grabbed hold of her son’s tie. “Anyway, with these polka-dotted guns we’ll be able to show the Governor that his policy is making murder into a joke.

Murder is supposed to be something—well, for the lack of a better word—special. Now, every idiot on the street thinks he can do it. It’s not glorified anymore. And that’s just not right. By the way, this has nothing to do with the fact that I can cut a throat better than that cheap slut Joy down at the 7-11.” Miriam tightened her son’s knot.

“You’re choking me,” said Jimmy as he pushed his mother’s hands away from his neck.

Jimmy took his time to get to work that Tuesday morning. It wasn’t because he got up early enough to stop and enjoy the scenery before he had to voluntarily confine himself to what can only be called an agoraphobic’s paradise. And it wasn’t because the Smiths had just

re-done their oh-so-lovely garden. Jimmy didn't want to take in the smell of freshly harvested butternut squash; it was the dismembered hands and heads lying between the patches of fresh pumpkin and tomato plants that had caught Jimmy's eye.

Jimmy arrived at work slightly later than usual, for he had a mildly unpleasant run-in with a soccer mom, a pair of dirty gym shorts, and a pick-axe.

"Jimmy Arbus! Great to see you!"

A large man with unusually red cheeks and two ft. tall hair walked spiritedly towards Jimmy.

"Nice to see you too, Mr. Egerson. I see you're excited about today."

"I said it before and I'll say it again, call me George. Actually, you know what? Call me 'Red G' for today. The fellows in accounting came up with it, seeing how I just decimated Larry from the mailroom twenty minutes ago," Mr. Egerson laughed and nodded towards five men all wearing immensely heavy glasses.

"You should've seen it, Jimmy. You'll believe in God too once you take a look at the Red Sea in the break room!"

Jimmy smiled and nodded politely and wondered if biblical stories would be the theme for Mr. Egerson today. Jimmy also shuddered disgustedly as he thought about last year when a flower delivery boy met his fate; a frightfully giddy Mr. Egerson who had no tolerance for yellow tulips and a penchant for strangulation with high-end silk kerchiefs.

"Jimmy!" muffled a lanky man stuffing a Boston cream into his mouth.

"Hi Carl."

"I'm ready for it this year," said Carl.

"I'm sure you are," Jimmy said and took a donut.

It was filled with jelly, the donut was. Jimmy was never too fond of jelly donuts; he thought them to be too sweet and the texture just wasn't right for him. He could never get a hold on the cream ones with Carl around, Jimmy thought. As Jimmy pondered over what life

would be like to start the day off with cream instead of preserved strawberry jelly in his fried dough, a knife flew past his face and hit the Liza Minelli calendar behind Carl.

“Ha ha,” bellowed the 85 inch tower of hair and musky cologne that was Mr. Egerson. “Good job dodging that, Carl!”

“Oh, thank you Mr. Egerson. I try to do my best,” Carl said and smiled proudly.

“Maybe you aren’t so inferior,” chuckled Mr. Egerson. “Say, boys, why don’t you two hurry into the meeting room? We’re having a little ceremony.”

The meeting room looked as if the streamer fairy had just exploded inside. The chairs were wrapped in old Christmas holly, balloons hung in every corner, a sign that said “Happy C.A.T. day!” hung from the ceiling, and deadly weapons from knives to ropes to guns covered the meeting table. For added effect Cheryl from Management had made an axe-shaped cake.

“Wow, look at this! This is spectacular!” cried Carl.

Just then, Mr. Egerson wheeled in a television and turned off the lights. Jimmy had seen the film before; it was like a sort of re-education film with the patriotic music and cheesy speeches, not to mention the man starring in the film has quite a cult following.

“Hi,” said a balding man who looked like he was greeting his grandchildren instead of someone who was trying to lead the revolution in changing Man’s very moral nature. “My name is Edgar Giles. I’m your Governor and I am an American.”

The old man flashed his warm smile and his eyes twinkled.

“Someone who’s not an American, and definitely not your Governor, is Adolph Hitler. He was a terrible man who killed millions of people and created suffering and hate in this world.”

Ah, the gratuitous images of anorexic Auschwitz prisoners, thought Jimmy as reels of historical images appeared on the screen.

“But even evil started out as something not so evil,” the old man continued. “You see, Hitler based his philosophy on the thinking of a great man. His name was Nietzsche. He had this little theory, he

believed that in this great world of ours most people are sheep and are simply weak beings. These weak, inferior beings need moral guidance such as good and evil. However, according to Nietzsche, there are a few super-men among our society who are above these silly moral boundaries. And I believe there are plenty of these super-men in our great country that is America.”

Cue laughing babies, the White House, and the Army, thought Jimmy.

“I mean, just think about it! We put the first man on the moon, we saved Europe from fascism, and we even introduced the world to Elvis. So why shouldn’t we be the first nation to commit murder without the complications of guilt and morals?”

The old man sat down on a leather chaise and picked a tabby cat up to his lap.

“Imagine! You’re in the subway station waiting to swipe your card at the turnstile. But there’s someone preventing you from doing so. He is someone who isn’t bright enough to swipe a card successfully and is the cause of not only a turnstile jam but of you arriving to work late. But with a swish of your trusty Swiss Army blade that you usually open cans of peanuts with, that person is now eliminated and you’re on your way to a cramped and uncomfortable train car. And what about that pesky mother-in-law? You hate her and her husband is probably just as annoyed. Why not take a piece of rope and strangle her so her annoying ways will no longer be a burden to you nor to anyone else. And if your wife gets upset, taker her a tissue and tell her about the insurance package. This is why we need C.A.T. day!”

The cat on the old man’s lap looked up.

“No, not you, Mr. Whiskers. C.A.T. Cut A Throat. Why let things get in your way when you can simply eliminate them? For, once a year, everyone—well, everyone that is superior enough—can take matters into their own hands and show no remorse to those who don’t deserve it. It’s time for America to stand up and above moral fairy tales of kindness and tolerance and eliminate the weak once and for all. C.A.T. day will give us a better society, a stronger society, an

American society. I'm Edgar Giles, and I'm an American!"

The old man saluted as the camera panned in on a picture of a blade cutting into a neck on a red background. The logo makes sense, thought Jimmy. It's so much more artistic and elegant than just a gun.

The lights were turned on and everyone in the room clapped loudly as they cheered. Carl walked up to Jimmy and grinned widely.

"I'm going to do it!" said Carl.

"Really? Before lunch, Carl?" said Jimmy.

"I'm not kidding this time," said Carl as he took a bite into a piece of Cheryl's axe cake.

"We've talked about this before, it's never worked. It's in our very blood. Your mom didn't do it. Your dad didn't do it. My mom didn't do it. And my dad was killed. This is why so few people have actually ascended to the superior class. Because of how their parents raised them! You can't change the way you think after thirty-something years."

"I can do it! Forget about my parents. They are the inferior ones, not me. I would kill them if they didn't pay my rent."

"I don't know. We're cocky just for being outside today," sighed Jimmy.

"That's exactly how an inferior thinks. But that's not what you are. We can do this, Jimmy! Anyone can. Not just rich bastards like George. When I went to get my mom's prescription at the pharmacy this morning, I saw Paul cleaning up a small pool of blood before getting me the pills. Paul the pharmacist, Jimmy!"

"The same guy who writes comic books about 'Mortar and Pestle: Super Duo'?"

"Yes. I think he stuck the side of his glasses into his assistant's neck."

Carl laid out two handguns on the meeting table, each tied with a pretty lavender ribbon.

Jimmy touched the ribbons. "Nice."

"I thought it would give it a more ceremonial feel."

"And the reason you picked guns is because you figured we would

be too chicken to actually touch someone while killing them.”

“We can do that next year,” said Carl.

“Hypothetically speaking, Carl, even if we do have the ability to murder with the most extreme callousness, who will we kill? We don’t find anyone inconvenient and we can’t possibly say we are superior to anyone.”

“What about your mother’s friends?”

“The Catnappers? What did a bunch of 50 year old suburban peace activists ever do to you?”

“Well, they get rather noisy with their little protest chants. You know they are going to picket right outside our firm today before their little trip to the Governor’s. Apparently we hold the record for the most cubicle worker deaths.”

Jimmy tasted some of the raspberry icing on Cheryl’s cake. “So what? They have a right to be mad about it. You know, after years of thinking of killing people as something of a bad thing to do.”

“But think of all the extra space we got after those guys were killed. We wouldn’t have a break room without their help.”

“Come out of there, you murderous bastards!” shouted a husky voice through the megaphone. “I’m waiting for you to shoot me, stab me, choke me, poison me, whatever you want baby, I’m all yours!”

Jimmy looked out the window and recognized the lumpy shape.

“Mom, why didn’t you tell me you’re protesting my firm today? Unlike the Mister Frostee truck drivers, these guys have weapons more deadly than a really cold creamsicle,” Jimmy said as he walked to his mother and her polka-dotted, gun-toting friends.

“I didn’t want you to get upset. Your firm needs to know that murder isn’t something they can play around with. A lot of us are upset over this. Whatever happened to ‘Employee of the Month’ awards and bonuses as work incentives?”

“Yeah, and we’re not going to have some paper-pusher with a grudge and a sharp pencil ruin the sanctity of murder!” yelled a protester.

Jimmy sighed and looked up at the picket signs which said ‘No

more C.A.T.s, how about a D.O.G. (Do One Good)?”

Carl ran out of the firm and stood at the door’s steps. He reached inside his pocket and pulled out the gun. After fumbling with it for a couple of seconds he shot Jimmy in the head.

“Damn it,” said Carl as he wondered how he could’ve possibly missed the dumpy suburban protestors.

I Remember

By Gizem Ozcelik

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

1

You stand in the kitchen, your back to me,
A cracked wooden spoon held by the thin skin of your fingers,
Roads and highways of lines on each hand, face-
It will bring you nothing, leading you nowhere.

2

I watched you in your world of lemon juice and olive oil, feta cheese
and olives.
The rolling pin-your pen, and the soft Borek dough-your paper
Because you were a girl and your father did not allow you to go to high
school
Become a hodja like you wanted and teach young girls
About God and religion and Oruc and Duas.
You just taught me.
What a permanent mark you left.
I remember one time you told me about religion,
Talked so much I fell asleep in your arms staring up at your partly-
closed eyes-
Of God's ninety-nine names, the seven levels of Heaven,
Jebrail, the angel of death.
What women should and not wear,
Which body parts they should cover, what women should not eat,
How they should sit, smile, laugh.
That they should listen.

3

You don't know, but I remember the red neon plastic of the bendable chairs

In Dede's shoe repair shop that would break easily.
You say I was too little to remember.
The way he looked in the back,
black polish staining his dirty skin, pieces of wood sticking to the glass
of his glasses, so bad,
he sometimes couldn't see what he was doing,
his fingers feeling the broken heel of the shoe, the ripped sole
of the black leather in his rough hands,
twisting and molding and shaping and cleaning and polishing
until the nice white man who brought them to him can tell him what a
great job he has done.

Better than what he expected from a family-owned hole on Mercer Street.
Better than expected.

And you behind the counter by the metal register smiling at people
And speaking to customers in your broken bits
Of Turkish and English rolled together into one
Thank You-accent on the you-
Always telling them where you came from if they ask
And if they don't ask.

You thought I didn't see you when you left the front of the shop
To wipe off the sweat from your husband's forehead,
Touching him on his arms that stood as mountains once,
Whispering to him that the rent is due soon
And that he shouldn't spend so much time on one man's expensive shoes.

I still remember the pink of your gums when you smiled
As sister tried sweeping up the lost particles in the light blue of the tiles.
Everyday we were there to help out,
So that you could want us back
And let us come back here
And sit in smoke
And breathe the dust in the air
because we wanted to.

4

I still remember the night you let us stay up past ten o'clock
Because DeDe had already gone to sleep
and you told us about your mother.
The way you cried and cried and cried
On the blankets in the living room that we slept on,

The way the blue television light flickered and bounced and reflected
From your eye sockets to my eyes,
As I sat there and watched and all I could do was watch.

Crying over how no one wanted to marry your mother because she
was crippled in one Leg,
And no one did marry her until she was thirty years old when your
father did
Because he already had three girls of his own and couldn't find
another wife.

The way you cried as you told me all she did for you-
How she saved you sugar in the palm of her hand from prayer every
Saturday,
Walking back home in the unbearable heat of summer sun,
The crystals turning into sweet liquid, dripping and running from her
fingers,
just so you could taste the sweet on your lips.

The reason you married DeDe was because you listened to your mother,
you had never even seen him before,
marrying a stranger you should have loved first
because you were too in love with your mother
to say noNono.

I remember the way you wiped the tears of your cries with the scarf
around your now white hair
Until sister brought you a tissue.

How you cry when you remember the image of your mother running
after you on your wedding day,
Running hard, her toes digging into the soil of the ground because she
couldn't say
good bye just yet,
She loved you too much to let you go,
She loved you too much.

I remember the way you rubbed the skin on your eyelids
over and over that night
until it was time to go to bed.
I remember because it was the first time I saw
the strongest woman I know-
break.

The Vicious Cycle

by Elizabeth Acevedo

THE BEACON SCHOOL

I ain't shit
I never was shit
And I ain't never gonna be shit
But she, she tried to make me "The Shit"
But that shit ain't work
And I told her
So I ain't even gonna be the bad one
Everyone wants to point fingers,
"You're the deadbeat father"
"You're the parasite of the communities"
But I told her...
I never promised pieces of rainbows,
Or glints of sunshine
I never promised her anymore than what I could give
I never asked her to forgive,
Or even to live according to me
And she was fly, wifey to the "T"
Beautiful, smart, and she held me down
She was destined for Brown, Yale, or some other Ivy
Poison was I

And sometimes I think,
I think I was like a project for her
A goodwill deed
Change the piece of shit into gold
But little did she know
You can't surround shit in gold
But you sure as hell can smother gold in shit

She didn't realize that
I am
Who I was
And who I will be

My momma couldn't change me
These streets couldn't change me
And she wouldn't save me either

But she said she loved me
Her pink lips forming the words
I had never heard directed at me before
But before she could say them again I kissed her
Hoping to take some of the love she held
Hoping to take some into myself
But I was a fool
How could she love me, when I didn't love me?
Still don't

But even thought I didn't love her
And I know she lied,
'Cuz she didn't love me
We still made love, made like, made lust
Her playing the martyr, the sacrificial virgin
I searching for something in her with no name
And at times, I could almost see it
I could almost snatch heaven
I could almost steal God
But moments like that don't last
Nah, moments like that don't last

'Cuz she cried when the line came out blue
A deep blue,
Not like the poet's "The sky" and "the water"
But like five-day-old bruises blue
Like faded but never healed bruises
And her tears made me mad
Because if she loved me so much
If she held all this affection for me
Then how come my seed in her belly made her cry?
So she could carry me in her heart, but she couldn't carry me in her womb?

So then forget her, forget it, and forget us
She could kill it if she wanted to or keep it
Same shit
She called me,
Her belly big, her feet swollen, her voice tired
Said, "You could be a man if you choose to"
She told me,
It was half mine
And could I get through my mind that I owed her
But I told her,

"I never promised pieces of rainbows
Or glints of sunshine
Baby girl, I've never even seen the sun shine
I'm the bastard child of a bastard child
The offspring of pussy for sale
You can't ask a man, who never saw the sun, to give you a piece of it
And you can't tell a man, who never wanted a son, that he is a piece
of him"

And I'm not making excuses,
But I told her, from the get-go I told her
I ain't shit
I never was shit
And I ain't never gonna be shit
But maybe, if I'm not around, she can make baby... "The shit"

Considerations

by Samantha Katz

TOWNSEND HARRIS HIGH SCHOOL

“For our silenced people, century after century their beings consumed
in the hard, everyday essential work of maintaining human life.
Their art, which still they made—as their other contributions
—anonymous; refused respect, recognition; lost.”

—Tillie Olsen

I.

Their voices sometimes escaped
Through cracks in the coliseum.
They stood behind columns
Watching the men,
Tending to the children
Tugging on their stolas.
Their raw faces watching
As the ownership baton
Was tossed from their father
To another man.
Their lips never dared
To allow their voices
To carry beyond the cracks.

II.

She lives alone,
Her eyes give this away.
They come to life
When they meet
The eyes of another.

Once in a while
The solitude
Forces her outside.
She watches children play:
The twins progress from strollers to bicycles,
A little girl from toys to boys.
Her aura dented
When a neighbor dies,
Expands
When another is born.
Sometimes the quiet
Camouflage into our backgrounds.

III.

A woman on a bus
Frantically searches her bag.
She looks foreign yet
Her uneasy facial expression
Mirrors my own.
Thoughts and memories,
History and ideas
Inscribed in her head
In a language
Other than mine.
Her face changes
As she pulls out a phone.
She speaks to another stranger,
I hear her say,
“I’m almost there.”

Wading

by Matthew Raphaelson

TELECOMMUNICATIONS HIGH SCHOOL

Stagnant waters gape.
Bodies start at the sound of it splintering.
Possums flicker one way and bolt the next,
Beating scared paws against the mulch of
The forest floor.

The wings of faulted flyers pound
And stumble into the sun;
Enamored by the heat of the candied horizon.

Sand is husked by the water
Where the waves reach for the city.

The ocean smells proliferate,
Waiting for patients.

Free Pork Fried Rice with the Purchase of this Poem

by Daniel Chu

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

- L. Lunch Special, 12-1, Monday Only.
- L1. Hey. Thanks for joining me for lunch. We have to talk. \$1.25
- L2. Let's be real honest here. No MSG. No bullshit. \$2.60
- L3. I'm not a boneless chicken, a dumbstick anymore. \$5.45
- L4. Thankfully, my noodle which had been stir-fried by your charm kicked back in. I can think for myself again. \$4.00
- L5. We were a Happy Family. It started out sweet and soured up so quickly. Now is the time to end it. \$3.25
- L6. Now, don't spring up and roll up your sleeves just yet. My reasoning makes even Buddha Delight-ed. \$6.70
- L7. First of all, you want a ton of gifts. It's been a month and I'm out a grand. \$1.05
- L8. Besides, I don't care if you throw out the twenty gifts that I gave you. I've made dumplings of the two gifts that you have given me already. \$2.00
- L9. Second Reason: She's been with Bob, says Quan, my best friend/spy. I'm sorry that I resorted to such lo meins, but those busy weekends were just getting too suspicious. \$4.50
- L10. Quan ducked down and saw all the saucy behavior. Told me all about it. \$0.25

- L11. Thanks for that house special filled with peppered stakes into the heart.* \$5.70
- L12. Oh, stop the waterworks. A sprinkling of salt water isn't going to help squash this beef.* \$3.20
- L13. And finally, I'm tired of you ribbing me in your spare time. \$4.50
- L14. Why can't you do this? Why can't you do that? I tried to. Fu too! You know everything I'm saying is true! \$2.45
- L15. Didn't your mom ever teach you manners?
She needs to give you a good Kung Pao until you see pieces of pork fly around your head. \$6.75
- L16. From now on it's war. Even General Tso and his chicken army won't be able to help you.* \$7.70
- L17. Wow, look at the time. It turned out to be such a happy hour. For me, anyways. I finally delivered my feelings into that mental house of yours.
Don't worry, you don't have to tip.
Free delivery w/purchase over \$10
- L18. Crack! Even the fortune cookie is with me: 😊
Our first and last love is...self love. 😊 \$0.50
- L19. Well, Chow. I'm going to have some Fun on my own without you. \$4.45

*Hot and spicy

Love. Camera. Action!

by Michael Castellanos

DEWITT CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL

Willfully conforming to lust's commands,
He failed to realize the script was in his hands.

One heart, with rind of glass.

One passion, with force of stone.

I became the costar in this scene, alone.

“Forever?” his lips had read,

Plainly projecting the film inside his head.

Black negatives then made me blind.

Uninvited critics appeared,

As the act was maligned.

Ironic how as darkness grew,

Clarity came, with things anew.

Subtitles spared no time to reveal,

The deadly plot becoming surreal.

Love had made a start of me,

The protagonist of a tragedy.

Hence, love itself had lost its meaning;

Lust left without another screening.

Now, I rise and take my leave,

Drowned, as they jeer, while I grieve.

Songs I Wish I'd Written

by Nathan Zoob

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

Dylan always struck me as the kind of guy who hemorrhaged ideas
Like some singer-songwriter hemophiliac
Words pouring out of every open cut
'Till finally he had to retreat to Woodstock to lick his wounds
And I always envied that about him
I, the sort of man who struggled for every line
Every rhyme, every rhyme
Who had to slash at himself with a pencil
To squeeze out those precious few drops of genius
Who studied the twin arts of contrivance
And second guessing
Dylan refused to worry himself with questions of originality
Thinking instead on questions of legacy
Not why he would be remembered
But how, and for how long
For those of us without this luxury
Who cannot afford to shun the outside world
Who, in fact, feed off its approval
This seems like a magic trick
The man who encases himself in glass
And saws the world in half
And shows us what we look like on the inside
It's too late now to be throwing stones at the establishment, though
Men like Dylan have long since fallen victim to
The rigidity of a system
They once thrashed so wildly against
And all that is left for the idyllic

For the bright eyed
For the young songwriter
Are a few lowly crumbs
Known as the iniquities of the Father
Born out by the son

Avian Flu

By Serge Morrell

STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL

The mere thought—of taking the phone and dialing the number—was sickening. As if yesterday’s hamburger, half-digested inside, was coming up my throat.

Beating off nausea, I went to the bathroom, leaned on the sink in front of the mirror and looked at myself. This is how it can be. This is how it sometimes is. A pale, freckled face was looking at me, so familiar and so foreign. Blue-gray eyes. Rurik’s family eyes, that now did not mean anything. Anything special, anything meaningful. A straight nose with a distinctive small protuberance. Nothing stood behind the protuberance now. Nothing, other than emptiness. Two days ago my mom told me the truth...She told it to me over a hamburger, in a cheap Turkish eatery on First Avenue. Well, actually—she let me finish the hamburger and waited till I started drinking my Coke. She waited till I drank more than half. And then she told me. “This is a bad place. A wrong place.”

“Oh, please, don’t worry.” I thought that she was apologizing for not having invited me to a better place. “I always wanted to go with you someplace. On a Friday night. Does it make any difference which restaurant it is? The food is good here.”

“This is a bad place,” she insisted. “And a bad time. But we do not have another one.” I kept looking at her still not understanding what she was talking about.

“See, you always thought you had two fathers—Dad and Papa. But in fact, you had a third father.”

She said the name. Something burned in the kitchen. Through the stench rising from the oven and filling the entire eatery, I hardly deciphered the words: “he has only days to live...maybe a week...he might still make it through the Old Russian New Year if...I thought you need to know...” My stomach tied into a knot.

She was telling me something about the times, about the époque, for a long time, or maybe she did not, I frankly don’t remember. The hamburger stuck in my gullet.

“I understand,” I said and got up from the table.

We left the eatery and went home. Or better say, we ran home. I was running and she was running behind me. It seemed like she was expecting some other words from me. Probably, she thought I was insensitive and callous. A cynic. I did not even shed a tear.

I was stoic. I was not struck by thunder, I did not scream and I did not cry from sorrow. The fact is that I already had two fathers and my life has been torn between them since I was six. And now—there is a third one. Which is the real one?

One father is Papa. He is my father according to the papers and my Russian birth certificate. All my earliest memories of life—sun, river, ice-skating rink in the Gorky Park, tanks shooting at the Parliament next to our house in Moscow—all of the history books in the portraits of the Princes Hovanski, his great grandfathers. Dad and Papa. This, third one, did not even have a name. He did not have a name, or a face. He, simply put, did not fit. All of that made perfect sense if...

...If his brother had not called today and said: “He already lost his vision. The doctors said, a week, maybe. Please, ask Sergunya to call him, he is all that he has left. Let him talk to him, one last time. Please.”

Apparently, he had cancer. In the last, fourth stage. Cancer was everywhere—in his brain, in his lungs, in his bones, in every single corner of his body. He had been paralyzed for a year now, only the fingers of his right hand still moved. That was the story. And now I had to call him. Tomorrow. Because the day after tomorrow might be too late. After midnight, when everyone went to bed, I searched the

Internet. I quickly found the name. A few articles, a few pictures of low resolution, all black-and-white, even sort of yellowish, all taken in the 80's when his name was omnipresent in the papers. He was a famous scientist, a demolition engineer, who was trying to divert some of Siberia's mightiest rivers to the parched former Soviet republics of Central Asia. He started building a canal some 200 meters wide and 16 meters deep. Going southwards for some 2,500 kilometers, from the confluence of the northern-flowing rivers Ob and Irtysh, to replenish the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers near the Aral Sea. The diversions would water the desert sands of the Kyzylkum desert in Central Asia. All of this was so strange, so absurd and so far away from me. This was a foreign man from a foreign world whose life, even though praised in dozens of articles, had nothing to do with mine. But even so, there was something that did not let me just turn off the Internet and go to bed and sleep. This man, even in the black-and-white and a little bit yellowish images, was a perfect copy of me. Or, maybe I was the perfect copy of him. "A perfect clone," was what those pictures were screaming to me.

If I only hadn't seen those pictures. But now, as I saw them, my life was gone. Everything in what I believed turned out to be a lie. Everything I was proud of was not mine any more. In a matter of a second, abruptly, unceremoniously, my life was taken away, forever. The tombs I was taking care of in the summer, all the ancient tombs in the shade of three-hundred-year-old oaks, were not mine any more. And the beautiful marble buildings in downtown Moscow that belonged to my grandfather before the Revolution immediately lost their connection with me.

And the eyes—blue-grey Rurik eyes and protuberance on the nose turned out to be just a mere coincidence, a joke of nature.

And now I am asked to call him. And what do I have to say? That I am sorry? That I am deeply sorry that he has appeared in my life? That I sincerely regret the fact that my mom had met him some 18 years ago on the shores of the foggy Enisey in Siberia?

How wrong can we be thinking that having understood some-

thing, one can forgive anything. I tried to calm down and sort things out. But nothing came out of it, other than nonsense. He did not want me to be at all. He left my mom because he had some duties of a grander importance. And now, all of a sudden, he needs me.

Why do we love and care for the distant, faraway, remote and invisible ones? Why do we neglect the ones who are so near and close?

I found two more articles on the Russian Yandex.

This is what The Red Driller of Novosibirsk was writing about him in the year 1980: “He has a plan...a simple plan...to water the desert...to dry up the swamps...he wants the tropical gardens to blossom in the deadly sands...he lives a life of a Spartan, he even chose not to have a family of his own to be able to sacrifice all his life for his Motherland ...”

Here you go. He loved his Motherland so much that he chose it over me. It was justified. And praised in the media. And now things just went wrong. The Motherland he loved so much collapsed. The country he was sacrificing his life for does not exist any more. It is even no longer on the map. And now he needs me. I understand.

In the morning my mom told me in a whisper, so that no one else could hear:

“When you reach him, don’t tell him anything about cancer. He does not know anything. In Russia they don’t tell people such things because it is inhumane. Pretend that you don’t know.”

Of course. I was lied to all my life and now I am asked to lie on my own. Because it is humane. I was sitting in my room. My computer, portable TV and my Iron Horse trophy look at me with the same expression. As if they are all saying the same.

“This is just a call. You call tens of people every single day. Come on, call him.”

I take the handset in my hands. The battery is almost dead. Very good, I think, the conversation will not last long.

I dial the number. 7 for Russia, 095 for Moscow...and hang up. I just can not do it. And again, I go on the web, and search, jumping from one search engine to another. Awkward scientific magazines.

Explosions. Ecologists. Progressive ecologists fighting against the diversion of the great Siberian Rivers. Progressive mankind is protesting against the river diversion which would threaten the Ob basin with eco-catastrophe and socio-economic disaster. Demonstrations in Novosibirsk. This is the year 1991. These articles have a different tone. Nothing is said here that he is a patriot, a genius and almost a saint.

This is how it turned out. Rivers stayed unturned, deserts did not blossom with tropical flowers, swamps kept on being swamps and he is dying from cancer.

This is how it happened. He was left alone – by his friend, by media, by his colleagues. With no family or children, alone – face to face with death.

And that’s exactly why I am asked to call him now.

I hear several different voices in my head, talking at the same time, interrupting. “So, what exactly might his conversation change? What will be different?”

“Nothing will change. Everything will be exactly as it was.”

“Everything will be as it was. Except he won’t be here.”

“You don’t like him because you don’t know him.”

“But if you know him, if you win some time to know him, then you might like him. You might even love him, who knows?”

Ok, ok, I’ll call him tomorrow.

“Tomorrow? What does it mean—tomorrow? Today! Call today!”

I am dialing the number.7-095-...Long long rings. I feel a temporary relief and I am almost ready to disconnect. And all of a sudden, on the other end:

“Yes...”

Silence. It lasts forever. Then it finally occurs to me that I have to say something.

“This is me, Seriosha.”

“Hi.”

This time the pause lasts even longer.

“I was not sure you would call. I was afraid that you won’t call.”

Pause.

“How are you doing? How is life, how is school? You don’t have school today?” His tongue is stumbling. He speaks slow, too slow.

“Today is Saturday.”

“Is it Saturday? I lost the count of days...Is it cold now in New York?”

“Pretty cold.”

“Is it snowing?”

“Not anymore.”

I will never see him. I will never know him in a way that I would have known if everything went right. I will never remember him, never. Even this will not be. And what will be? This telephone conversation, short and senseless.

“I want to know everything about you.”

What does he want to know about me? What can I tell him other than bare facts? Senior of the specialized science school, 96 average. I play trumpet for the school orchestra and piano for my own self... However, I do not have to mention about the piano...

“I would like to know what you look like.”

“I’ll send my picture to your brother, I have his e-mail.”

That was rude. He can’t see. How could have I forgotten that?

Slow, as if it was a humongous piece of ice melting, our conversation continued. But the sun—a short polar sun—was not strong enough to melt down such a huge amount of ice. It dripped a little bit and froze again. And then the sun hid behind the horizon. It got cold again. Cold and silent.

I imagined how our conversation was squeezing through a black cable stretched across the bottom of the Atlantic ocean, in the absolute darkness and silence, underneath the megatons of salty waters. And you are expecting this conversation to be humane?

Isn’t it clear that such a forced conversation would not lead anywhere, it will stay formal and empty as a ping pong game when it is played not to score, but out of boredom?

At times the silence was such as if we were sitting in the very depth of the missile silo on the eve of the nuclear war.

“Are you still there?” I asked.

I felt how he squeezed the phone. I heard how he dropped it. I heard how he was trying to find it in his bed. How blind fingers were crawling through the weary sheets. They crawl and are unable to find what they are looking for. He groaned.

And all of a sudden, I realized how hard it was for him to talk. Some minutes ago, it seemed to me that we were playing ping pong, throwing light and meaningless words at each other. And now, all of a sudden, I realized how hard it was for him to lift up any of those words and throw them at me. Each of those words was not a light empty plastic ball, but a heavy cast-iron weight. He gathers all his energy to throw it, but there is no energy left.

He still does not have a name. “I am here...” he echoed and fell into a cough attack. He was coughing and coughing, endlessly. I wondered if there was anyone there to help him? A doctor? A nurse? Hello! Is anybody there? What if he chokes? What if he dies? And at this point, I realized that I was the only one who was next to him. There was no one else.

“Calm down,” I said. “Just breathe slowly, not so fast, and it will be fine. Just fine.” Whether my words worked, or not, he stopped coughing.

“Talk to me,” he said.

He wants me to talk to him. And I think I know now why. He is afraid to die. Everything, almost everything has already died in his body, but he is still afraid to leave. To go—where? He does not know. But neither do I.

I recently ran across a line by Francis Ponge that absolutely struck me. Something like: “it’s not enough to live the life, it takes to live a death as well.”

And it happens to be that I am his only companion on the way to the other world. Why me? And what should I do? What should I say?

Something about immortality of a soul? But he is an atheist, he does not believe in God. What about energy conservation law? If you think, there is no way for all this energy that has been generating and

accumulating in him for the last 55 years to just simply disappear. This energy was sufficient to divert the mightiest Siberian rivers...If the energy conservation law exists then it should not disappear. If the energy conservation is true then not everything is lost irrevocably, then there is still hope there.

I hear him breathing heavily in the phone.

“Say something,” he whispers.

In Russia I knew a girl who photographed the death of her mother. The mother was dying of cancer and the girl was photographing the process—three hundred pictures every single day. She was doing it for a year or so. In the end she had ten thousand pictures in her portfolio. Later on she made an exhibit in downtown Moscow. She was a very honest and fearless girl. I am not like that at all. I don’t have such courage. I am afraid.

What should I say?

“You know,” I hear my own words with an echo, as if it is not me saying it all, “our neighbors bought three tons of flour, rice and dry beans. They think it’s just not enough for them and they keep buying more.”

“Why?” he asks.

“Because they are getting ready for H5N1. Haven’t you heard of it?”

“Sort of.”

“Well, it’s a pandemic strain of flu. Everyone is going to die.”

“Really?”

“Yes, of course, I thought you knew. This flu will erase the entire planet. Everybody is talking about it now. It will kill seventy percent of the population in America. And in Norway. And in Australia...” I omit Russia. “We bought only four big bottles of water and two kilos of rice, do you think it’s enough?”

“I don’t know,” he says. “I really don’t.”

“There will be a quarantine. There will be no water, no food, no nothing for a year or so. You have to prepare well to survive. Only those, in their confinement, will get a chance.”

He is in a confinement.

I am telling him that the flu will come soon, in the very beginning of February, at the latest. He will not be that scared if he knows that it is not only him, not only...that everybody...almost everybody... And if he is in a confinement, he might have a chance...

He tells me that the scary flu will not come. That it is all Hollywood. That nothing bad will happen. That I should not be afraid.

I am trying to console him, and he is trying to comfort me.

"I would like to see you right now," he says. "I would like to be with you."

"Me too."

"Let's start from the very beginning."

"From the very beginning." I repeat after him. "Let's just do that."

He is tired. He is falling asleep.

I tell him good bye: "I will call tomorrow."

But there may be no tomorrow. During the night his sleep may smoothly go into death. And his world will go on without him. I don't know when it happens.

It's after midnight again. And it's snowing now. Our street, so busy during the day, is now empty. I am sitting at my window and looking at the snow falling. If you look for a very long time, you will start seeing someone in the distance, walking in the snow towards you—quietly, upright, from far away.

Bird-Speak, Talk Story

By Crystal Lee

HUNTER COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

I would like to be reborn a crane—long neck, long legs, long wings—and fly past the graves of my relatives, fly straight into the setting sun with gold wings outstretched, and for a moment, forever immortal. If I fly far enough, I might reach the sacred firebird of ancient Egypt, the Benu, the heron-like soul of the god Ra. We would fly side-by-side, a heron and a crane (although most people will be unable to tell the difference between the species and mistakenly think that I must have been born from a feather of the magnificent heron). Or rather, I would follow its early morning flight, my golden glory only a pale imitation of the brilliance of the firebird, the sunbird, the divine being made of sun and earth and time.

In Western mythology, the equivalent of the Benu is the Phoenix, a firebird of gold and rainbows and peerless beauty. There is only one such wonder in the world, and it rises in the east, singing a sweet song that enchants men and causes them to abandon everything to forlornly chase after the elusive bird. (Why does the firebird rarely captivate women? Is it that women are too busy being weighed down by housework and chores to be love-struck heroes reaching for their dreams?) I would follow the firebird. I would track it down to the western corner of the earth and watch its feathers flicker as they fall upon the ground. But because the feathers are magical, they do not burn the grass and the trees and the houses. Instead they burn into the memories of dreamers, who are never the same afterwards. These

dreamers always taste fire in their mouths and seem to be searching for something they will never find.

Why is it that all those who see the firebird seek to catch it and make it sing in their gardens, a splendor like nothing else in the world? I would set out tomorrow, follow many false trails and then start again. I would seek the bird until I found it nesting in a tall but leafless tree at the end of the world, a lone tree on a mountain. There would be no wizards, no princes, no witches, and no wolves. It almost seemed simple, too simple. There were no favors to be won, no triumphs to be had, and no evil to vanquish. But I would climb to the tree and approach the firebird with empty hands. No net, no cage, no rope, only wishes. I would ask the firebird to make me a winged bird so I could fly home. A falcon perhaps, or a hawk, but I couldn't be too ambitious. Most preferably not a vulture, and not a tiny sparrow or I would be so battered by the winds by the time I reached home. With one shrill cry, a beautiful note of an unfinished song. I would feel my wooden heart burn and pump fiery blood through my arteries. I would feel myself burning, my body disintegrating into ashes, until I was reborn.

In Egypt, the bird is the soul of the deceased that sustains the boy with substances necessary for the afterlife. But I would have no body left behind to bind me to this earth, instead, I would fly home, my charred black wings flapping, neither a crane, nor a hawk, nor a sparrow. My feathers would be many shades of grey, tipped at the ends with black, as if smeared all over with ashes. I would arrive home and cry out for my mother, who would not understand me. She is wary of crows, which are said to bring bad luck. But I would yell, "No Mother, it's me! I'm back and I have a story to tell." But she would not believe me, because she could never understand me, and just shoo me away. I had been the only one who listened to the speech of birds.

We never understand each other completely, my mother and I. It must be a mutual misunderstanding. Not only do we speak different languages—I, the self-centered first generation American, she the wistful mother who still yearns for Korea—but we have a game of say-

ing things the other won't comprehend and giving an exasperated sigh when the other misunderstands or asks for an explanation. My mother never tells stories; she rarely talks about her life before; she seldom confides in me any deep secrets. I am the one who tells stories in the family, stories that are often too complex for my mother to understand. I am the one who writes stories in the family, stories she takes hours to read, stumbling over English words, unable to comprehend the subtleties and symbolism from my bad translations. Then I would ask her, "Tell me about the Korean firebird. There's nearly one in every culture, isn't there?" And she would reply in Korean, "I don't know. Perhaps there is no story associated with this bird."

I think that she rarely tells me stories because her mother never told her stories. But in America, we are told to tell stories all the time—stories to please people, stories to make excuses for ourselves, stories that offer simpler explanations than the real truth. My mother tells me to tell stories so I could avoid giving anything away about my family. "Why did you tell him that your parents were home? Don't tell him that! Speak to him yourself and tell him not to call again. Pretend you're eighteen." On the phone, I am eighteen (I need to deepen my voice). In person, I am fourteen (making it easier to explain my stature). My teachers tell me to write stories and essays all the time, which my mother must never have done when she was in school, because she always glares at my projects, the ones that require a lot of overdue library books, and she won't help me on family projects. For school she had to draw pictures and kill rats and learn math. Teachers didn't pry into the affairs of other families as long as the students paid their monthly dues. "Mom, they're not prying. It's a family history thing. It's supposed to be fun," I always tell her, but she refuses to give me the simple facts about our family. I still don't know who my grandparents are, beyond that they are my parent's parents.

For one essay about my grandmother, I had to pretend I interviewed her and invent the gory details of what happened to her as a result of World War II. I merged whatever bits I knew about both my grandmothers and looked up the accounts of other war-struck Korean

women online. I created a patchwork chimera. I made my grandmother be a willful rice farmer, in a time of bad harvest and sickness. I made my grandmother cling to her courageous nature as the Japanese destroyed her surroundings and random relatives tragically died off, one after another. I made her be shrewd and assertive, cleverly disguising herself as a pregnant woman so that she wouldn't be snatched away with the other young girls. Most of it was fabricated, but it's easier to tell a story than to nag my mother, who is stingy with her memories. Ironically my teacher loved it; I was able to laugh about my made-up family account, but it always troubled me. I didn't know anything about my family history. I still don't know where my ancestors are buried. In Korea, people are buried under huge mounds, instead of thin, long, flat rows like the graves here. In Korea, people do not trample on the corpses of the dead.

I would like to fly as a bird to Korea. In Korea, crows are considered to be bad luck and cranes mean longevity. I would like to perch on the windowsill and speak to my cranky grandmother, who I have never spoken to face-to-face, who has a broken back and can only stare at the ground and not at the sky, where all the birds are. I would ask my grandmother if she would like to see the sky, and she would say yes. She would tell me the story of how she broke her back; perhaps she was trying to be Atlas and hold up the family's burdens. And we would fly together, side-by-side, and watch the dusk melt into dawn. And she would start to sing that song, that ancient Korean folk-song, about the bird-woman who left her husband and her children in order to fly back to the heavens and rejoin her sisters. And once I understood the words, I too would sing a song about a solitary fire-bird that was all alone at the edge of the world.

A.I.

By Michelle Ting

HUNTER COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

He and I were never supposed to have anything to do with each other. We should have been complete strangers with nothing and no one between us forcing the quasi-relationship that we ultimately came to have. We were not destined to meet.

Fate, however, never said anything about our grandparents. And so I take you, as well as myself, back about twelve years to the schoolyard of Public School 144. My grandmother picked me up from kindergarten every afternoon and walked me home, and I suppose she grew quite bored waiting the ten minutes before three o'clock for me to be dismissed. Who was she to turn down conversation with a fellow grandmother, especially one who also spoke that same uncommon dialect in some uncommon city thousands of miles away in the mother country? I didn't blame her – my family had just moved to the neighborhood and my grandparents desperately needed some sort of social activity.

It was a face-off, that one afternoon. A battle of Asian etiquette. I clutched my grandmother's hand and he clutched his, and when the signal was given, we'd fight. *Puo puo, hao*, we both rang out ceremoniously. But *ho*, I'd said it first! *Hurray* for me! I was cheering inside my head until I saw that he had not finished his move.

He bowed.

He BOWED to my grandmother. What is this, I thought, China? What kind of kid bowed anymore? I couldn't believe it. Immediately,

my grandmother unleashed the compliments. Oh, what a polite boy! I hear you are so intelligent! You must make your parents proud!

He'd beaten me.

If I knew any curse words at that age, I would had no trouble spewing them one after the other, completely throwing caution, as well as my behind, to the wind.

David Jiang was now a most important part of my life, and there was nothing I could do about it. Our families had become friends, and the torment had begun.

David was incredibly smart, a bona fide genius. My mother and grandparents loved to track his progress as a child prodigy, and they dragged me along with them. However, I had to play the active role in this unhealthy obsession with the boy – I had to work hard to beat him down. I was reluctant at first because I honestly did not care about his accomplishments. I deemed perfecting my penmanship more worthy of my time and energy.

Then there was the nagging. The yelling. The complaining. The frequency of all those combined. It drove me insane. It seemed like everyday my mother had news to report on David's academics and brilliance in the art of piano playing, and with the news came, Michelle, why can't you be like David?

Why couldn't I be like David, indeed. Why couldn't I? He was my age, he looked like a sissy boy and please, I was smart! I could handle anything! I accepted my mother's challenge.

God, this memory just proves how stupid I was as a kid.

The battle began officially the first day of third grade. I was in class 3M and David was nowhere in sight. Could it be that he'd moved over the summer? I grew excited just considering the thought.

Yes, he'd moved, but not to another state.

He'd skipped into the fourth grade.

Oh, how I wanted to die. How could I possibly surpass advancing a whole grade level? I was bright for my age, but not enough to leave my fellow classmates and join the upper crust. Life was not good, and that one day in the fall of 1996 wasn't even the worst of it.

It seemed like nothing could stop him from excelling in everything nor could anything bring an end to my mother's eagerness to perfect me into the female David. When she heard he played the piano, she went out and bought a baby grand, and I began lessons the next week. When he received full scores on the dreaded Citywide Assessment tests, I attended prep school on the weekends. In sixth grade he was admitted to Hunter College High School, and I entered the year after.

I never noticed how I seemed to follow his footsteps – I was the no-good clone that the scientists were intent on fixing by having me live the same way as my predecessor. It was an experiment – which sex did better in life? The conditions under which we grew were similar to those of closed-off environments developed for research. David and I never communicated. We knew of each other's existence, but really nothing more than that.

Eventually that point in time came when I learned to totally disregard my parents' opinion. My mother did not stop singing his praises, but I learned to shut her out of my head and, of course, my room. I still loathed the boy, my self-proclaimed mortal enemy, the bane of my existence, the crumb in the cookie box of life. I despised everything he stood for: my parents' disappointment in me, the Asian stereotype I had tried to fight off, and the brick wall that I'd never be able to climb.

Plus, he had a British accent. What kind of American kid, born and raised IN New York, spoke the same way as Prince Charles himself? Did he think a typical New York accent wasn't good enough for him? That by speaking like an Englishman, he'd be even better than the rest of us?

At a time when being a nerd was considered a bad thing, I'd flaunt my knowledge of him everywhere at school. Oh, David Jiang? Yeah, he got his accent because he watched too much BBC as a kid. Oh, I know David Jiang! He's a real momma's boy!

I didn't tell lies—I spread truths. I knew his secrets and shared them with whoever in his grade would listen. It satisfied me, know-

ing that somehow I was damaging his reputation, which would then ruin his will to be great.

Then I forgot about him. I never saw him at school and I wasn't interested in making his life miserable anymore. I had better things to do. In September of 2004, my mother gave me some rather chilling news. David had been hospitalized with a collapsed lung, and according to his memoir written months later, he was dead at some point before being resurrected by the doctors.

The fact that he had almost died scared me. This boy who had always been there, who was like god in the world of academics, would have been gone from my life had modern medicine and technology not saved him. Everything would have changed.

I was different after that incident. I realized that the boy whose triumph I'd grown up trying to match was actually human. He was no robot, nor was he an abnormally intelligent abominable snowman, as my brother and I dubbed him. He was capable of death just as much as he was of scoring a 1600 on his SATs. David transformed into someone else before my eyes. Or maybe it was my brain that changed him for me.

I visited him during that whole semester of school he'd missed and he didn't seem so great anymore. He became sick because he pushed himself too hard from the combination of vigorous fencing training and a harsh summer semester at Cornell University. Talk about working yourself to death.

When he did return to school, no one cared and that saddened me. To make up for the rest of his grade, every time I saw him walking down the hallway I'd wave my hand and greet him. It was my way of saying, I'm sorry, I don't really hate you, I'm really glad you're back. Hopefully he got the message.

Our families grew closer the past couple of years and they've been trying to get us to do the same. I know David has no interest in befriending me (does he even have friends?), but ever since he got better, we've made an effort to get along. I had my first real conversation with him the summer before he left for Harvard, and despite beg-

ging him to shut up when he went on and on about economics and foreign policy, I think we had a good time.

I've learned that under that cold, British, stuttering, intellectual exterior is a typical teenage guy. He enjoys bloody movies, and loves steak and burgers. He fidgets and hums when he watches movies. When I mention the name Angelina Jolie, he blushes and attempts to change the subject.

David and I will never share a close friendship, and I accept that, but there must be more to what we have considering we've been connected in an eerily spiritual way since we were five. We can't escape each other—our parents will make sure of it—and I'm sure neither of us wants to. The only thing we can do is live, as fate intended us to.

Cold Winter Goodbyes

by Jaylecia Davila

MONROE ACADEMY FOR VISUAL ARTS

The winter of 2003-2004 was reportedly the coldest winter in the history of documented weather. I turned 17 just before that winter began on December 15th. My father turned 36 that winter on January 8th. The next day he passed away. He had been in the hospital for over two months and I'd only seen him three days before. My sister Jenny and I were staying at the house by ourselves because my mother was living in the hospital day in and day out never leaving dad's side, being his rock. My great aunt Titi Cecce came over to the house that day to pick up Jenny and me and take us to the hospital to see him. At the last minute I decided not to go because the last time that I'd seen him he was so sick that he barely looked like himself and I didn't want to see him in an even worse state than that.

They were gone for hours. My cousin Tiffany came over and kept me company for a while and we laughed and joked and watched TV together. Then that night at around 11:30 or so my mother came home. I was surprised to see her because she had only stayed at the house a day or two since dad had gone to the hospital more than two months prior. She pulled me into her and dad's room and told me that dad had gone home to be with God. She was so calm, so strong. I only allowed myself to cry for a second. Then everyone started to come into the house: my sister Jenny, my Aunt Nelly, dad's sister, my Uncle Frank, dad's brother who had been living in the hospital helping mom take care of him, and my grandparents, dad's father and

stepmother. They only stayed for a little while. No one was overflowing with emotions. No one was crying, everything was so calm. I guess it hadn't yet registered. That night me, mom and Jenny all squeezed onto the same bed and slept together. The bed that my parents shared. I guess none of us wanted to be alone.

Days later my grandparents picked us up in their car and drove us to Vineland, New Jersey, the town that I was born in and where my father grew up. The drive was three hours long, give or take, and we chatted the whole way. The mood was light, almost cheerful and mom talked about memories that she had with dad. She only cried for a few moments when she talked about how amazing Titi Cecce had been to her throughout the whole difficult time. We stayed at my father's Aunt Daisy's house. She'd visited him a few times in the hospital although she'd never really been present in his life the entire time that I was growing up. I guess when you know someone you care about is running out of time you try and do everything you can to make up for the time that you'd lost.

For the first few days it was fun seeing family. All my cousins and I slept in the living room of Daisy's house and stayed up to all hours of the night talking and laughing together. I played Scrabble and watched movies and met members of my family that I'd never met before. We'd hug and kiss and say how we wished we could have met before, then they would say, "I'm so sorry for your loss" and I'd remember why I was there.

One of the days before the funeral when all the family was at Daisy's house, Titi Nelly asked me and Jenny to write something that would be in the program for the funeral. Jenny isn't really a writer so I said I would take care of it. It took me hours and several drafts before I was done. I wrote about how unreal it still seemed to believe that my father was gone. I wrote about how it was when I was little, how I never wanted to leave his side and how I was daddy's little girl. And I wrote about how I can't imagine him not being there to walk me down the aisle at my wedding and not there to see me graduate. I know how bad he wanted to see me graduate.

The funeral went on for two days. There were two ceremonies, one at the funeral home then one at the church that my father grew up in and then there was the burial. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to be there because it was all too real and I knew there was going to be a lot of emotions and tears and I didn't think I was up for it. But everyone kept saying that I had to take care of my mother so I went to be strong for mom, when she was really the one who was strong for everyone.

The first day was harder than the second. My cousin Starlyne cried before she even went into the building. Fernando cried before he walked into the sitting area. He girlfriend Nicole comforted him. My sister Jessica cried on mom's shoulder and she wasn't even blood related to dad. I guess dad was more of a father to her than her own father. My mother cried on and off through the whole time. I only cried for a minute when they read the letter that I wrote. I don't even remember who read it.

The next day was a little bit easier. The pastor from the little Spanish Pentecostal church spoke in Spanish and Daisy translated. Titi Nelly cried when she went up to speak and when she came back to her seat my mother wrapped her arms around her and comforted her. We left before the closing of the casket. Mom didn't want to see that. Neither did I. After the second ceremony everyone packed into their cars to drive to the grave yard. We were sitting in Titi Ita's car when my grandfather, Tio Morris and Sammy and a few other men carried the casket into the hearse. Titi Ita broke down because she felt so bad that they didn't really know each other as adults. My mother hugged her and comforted her.

It was raining when we got to the graveyard. The casket that held my father's body was sitting on a green felt fabric that would be lowered into the ground. There were four seats where the immediate family would sit. Mom, Jenny, dad's stepmother Blanca and I sat in those seats. I don't know how far we'd gone into the ceremony before it happened. The pastor, who was speaking in Spanish, said something, something about dad being in the casket. I don't know what it was because I don't speak Spanish. It was never quite explained to me

clearly, but it was something about dad being in the casket because my mother broke down. She'd been so strong up until then that I'd developed an admiration for her that hasn't diminished since, but in that moment all the hurt that she was feeling released. She said he's not in the box. She kept repeating it and crying so hysterically. "He's not in the box, he's in heaven, he's in heaven. He's dancing with Jesus." Crying harder than I'd ever seen her cry in my life and for the first time since he'd died I let myself cry uncontrollably and without fighting. It's funny how people allow themselves to cry for the pain of the people that they love, but they won't allow themselves to cry for their own pain.

Daisy and my Aunt Norma, mom's sister, held her until she calmed down. A few minutes later the pastor said that they were going to lower the casket, but mom didn't want to see it so we left early and walked back to Titi Ita's car.

There was a wake at Daisy's house after the burial. Everyone from my father's family was there; even more people than were at the funeral it seemed. We all laughed together and chatted about everything and nothing and ate some of the best baked ziti I'd ever had. I played Scrabble and watched movies and it was fun and lighthearted again. Everyone went back to celebrating life though we were mourning death.

When we went home mom moved out of the room that she and dad had shared and it became Jenny's room. Jenny's room became mom's. I went back to school with the note excusing my week away from school. Everyone went back to their lives and although it wasn't normal life as we knew it without my dad there, we created a new normal and continued our lives. The dreams I had just after he passed have stopped. Jenny doesn't cry herself to sleep anymore. Mom is still the strongest person I know and we've all moved on the best we know how. Two years have flown by so fast and I still think of him everyday.

Half a Brother

By Alison Montgomery

HIGH SCHOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

I see my friend, Jessica, my sister and myself. It was when we were living in Montana, in the little red log cabin. The backyard is smaller than I remember it at that time. We had one of those large trampolines, the ones that can fit at least five people at a time, if you chose to ignore the rules. We were flying; each bounce brought us closer to the sky, and we wished gravity would fail for a moment just so we could fly away. Thinking about it, I wish I still had the trampoline so I could fly away now. I did my best thinking there. I would walk out back and bounce for an hour or so, and everything seemed so much better.

While we were bouncing that day, off in our own world, my mom came out and approached us. She walked up and said quickly, “Richard is dead.” She turned and walked back inside. We were still smiling, still laughing from our games. The news still hadn’t registered. One minute it was fantasy, the next minute a kick in the stomach to bring us back to the real world; I felt like I was falling headlong and couldn’t stop it, being pulled down by an inescapable force. It was no wonder we were caught in between two realities. My mom’s delivery didn’t help; it was blunt and cold—in a way, unfeeling—but she had never liked Richard. He wasn’t her son, only my dad’s from his previous marriage, my much-older half brother. I don’t blame her for how she presented it; I don’t think that at the time she was thinking about disliking him. She was too busy thinking about my dad, who was now inside, sobbing on the phone. No amount of bouncing

would make any of this better.

I didn't know Richard well. I was young when we left Massachusetts, where I was born and where the whole family had lived before my mom hauled us out to Montana. (It was on a whim.) I only have a few memories of him, and they are shadowy, half-second freeze frames. I remember being in his truck and having him set off fireworks for me. I didn't like the sound of the explosion, so he would drop them in a pond to mute the sound. Another is a still shot of him in my dad's store with a sandwich. Finally, there is a dimly-lit basement, with Rich rolled in a sleeping bag on a table. Three brief memories, as fast as a camera's flash, with the attached feelings remaining like the small rectangle you see afterwards.

I remember going inside, through the screened-in back porch, seeing my father at the kitchen table. The phone was hung up and he was crying, in the quiet way my dad still does when he wakes from a dream with Richard in it. I had never really seen my dad cry. He had, but not like this, not like an entire piece of his world had ended. I cried too, though mainly out of sadness from seeing my dad like that. I didn't know Richard well enough to cry about never seeing him again. That would come later.

It was a few days later when I learned why Richard had died. He had overdosed on heroin. He had been doing drugs for a while, and was in withdrawal when he called my dad to try to get methadone; it was to no avail, and a few days later he had died. He used the same amount of heroin he had used before he had tried to stop, the amount his body had been used to, but he could no longer handle it. His girlfriend had found him, and then she had called my dad.

Funny how adults tell you not to do drugs. You don't, avoiding peer pressure, and having pride in defeating something that is more real, more tangible than some think. The pressure can claw you apart, because you want to be friends with people you thought were friends, but you can only do that by taking a hit. At least the hit seems like the only way at the time, the only way to be "cool" or "in." Yet even if you stand up and say no, drugs find a way into your life anyway.

Richard's death hadn't affected me beyond feeling bad for my father. We moved a year later from Montana to Missouri and then settled in New York, where we have been ever since. It was then that his death started affecting me more. I learned more and realized people in Montana and Missouri think that the Big City is a place of sex, crime and drug use—though compared to the drug use in those two states, it's nothing. At least there are other things to do here—theater, museums and parks—things to do so that you aren't so bored you resort to drugs. So many people in rural areas do drugs simply because there's nothing better to do. It's similar with Richard and his brother, my other half-brother, Jonathan. There was nothing better to do in the small towns in Massachusetts except get high. And once marijuana was tried, they traveled up the steps until they got to heroin. I digress....

This knowledge helps me when I think about Richard's death and why he did drugs. He wasn't a bad kid; he was a bored kid, and things happened to get out of hand. I often talk about him in class discussions if drug use is mentioned, or with friends if drugs come up. People ask me if I have ever tried any drugs, and I say no. If they ask why, I tell them about Richard. He has gotten a lot of people off my back—a guardian angel of sorts, keeping away the bad influences that people have tried to push on me.

Once in high school, I found his death affected me more and more. I would, and still do, joke about drug use. But suddenly lines would be crossed in conversations. If someone laughed about overdosing on drugs, I would become quiet, and then lash out at the person for his ignorance. I didn't mean it threateningly; I just didn't want people laughing about something they had no idea about.

This summer I was watching the movie *Trainspotting*. It was fine, I could even watch the heroin injections take place. But then it showed the main character in withdrawal and the horrible things he saw from hallucinations and his body being in shock. I sat and stared as he was screaming and thrashing from the symptoms, crying out for help when there was nothing anyone could do. I saw my sister get up and

leave, and a few minutes later, I had to leave too. I felt sick to my stomach; I couldn't stop crying once I left the room.

Knowing his nerves were on fire, and that he saw all these horrible images, I wondered what it was like for Richie in his last few days. I wonder how he felt, if he was shaking and seeing things, if he was screaming in the same way, calling out for people who weren't there and couldn't help him if they were. If it was even distantly similar to what the movie portrayed, it was no wonder he gave in and took his last hit. It was the only way out, the only way to get away. Richie used to joke about how he would never see thirty. He overdosed at twenty-nine.

The fact that he is gone gets worse when my other half-brother, Jon, comes to visit. He and Richard were best friends. They did everything together, camping, hiking, work—and eventually, drugs. Jon blames himself for Richard's death, because he had been with Rich that night and had left him to his own devices, which included a syringe. My brother will still go out, get drunk and then come home depressed. He cries for hours, saying what a horrible brother he is to my younger sister and me, but I know he isn't talking about us.

He sometimes lashes out at my sister and me. When my brothers were growing up, my dad didn't have a lot of money, so the boys had to get jobs too. My sister and I have never worked a job, and my dad wouldn't have it any other way, since he wants us to focus on school. Jon never finished high school. My brother is always taking my hand and testing my grip and seeing how rough my skin is. It's just to prove that I am pampered. He feels my sister and I took our dad away when we moved to Montana, but my dad came to take care of us. I was in second grade, and my mother really isn't the mothering type, so I can't imagine what it would be like if we had gone without my dad. Jon also constantly asks if I remember Richard. I have told him the three memories many times over, but he forgets. He has a horrible memory, mainly because of his own drug use.

The one thing my two brothers and I have in common is artwork. Both of my brothers were always great artists. Rich was so talented

that, around the time of his death, he was getting ready to show his artwork in galleries. He could have been the next M.C. Escher; his drawings defied the laws of gravity and motion in ways I never could on my trampoline—all black and white, with geometric shapes becoming something else, just as moving as a piece that was in color. He also did amazing collages, so well done that you couldn't see the lines of where one magazine clipping ended and another began. Both my brothers worked with metal, making weaponry along with sculptures. Jon and he would sit for hours and draw together, filling sketchbook after sketchbook with both fantasy and real life figures. My artwork turned out to be similar even though we had never really seen each other's art. We both loved drawing dragons, depicting characters out of mythology. Jon moved down to Missouri while we were living there, which was when I realized the similarity in our choice of topics. Jon was fun to draw with, mainly because he had so many art tools, especially one 0.3 mm mechanical pencil.

I had used the pencil and fell in love with it because of the detail I could get out of it. I asked Jon if I could have it. This caused an argument because it turned out to have been Rich's favorite drawing pencil. I eventually convinced him to let me have it, as long as I didn't lose it. I never lost it; I could produce it every time he came back to visit and would insist on knowing its location. But recently, on one of his visits, he demanded to have it back. I kept asking why I couldn't have it, and he just went on about how they used to draw together with it, and that it was Richard's favorite. I didn't say anything, but I found it unfair. Though Jon was undoubtedly closer to Rich, he got all of Richie's things. Every piece of artwork, every photograph, every handmade weapon, all his jewelry—everything, including Richard's ashes, my brother now owns. I gave it back to Jon, but while he was out, I refilled it and stole it back. I had to, it felt only right.

I sometimes lie awake at night wondering how it would be if he were here today. I realize that I would probably be a different person and that my artwork would be different because I could get tips from him. I wonder what it would be like to talk to him, to hear his side of

the stories I have heard from Jon about their forest adventures and what it was like for him growing up. I like to hear the stories from my dad of them working together, or of when Rich would entertain me at my birthdays by blowing bubbles inside bubbles inside bubbles. Jon is always telling me stories, and I wonder what it would be like to have Richie sitting with us, laughing just as hard. And I would like to hear his own stories, the ones Jon may know but never told us, maybe even the ones he didn't tell Jon. I try to imagine what I would have to sacrifice for a chance to hear the stories from his mouth, and whether or not I would sacrifice it. I don't remember his voice, and I only know his face from photographs. All I have are images I made up with what I have heard from others or seen in home videos, and in the end it isn't enough.

Realizing such a destructive force exists in the world, and only being eleven years old when it is unleashed, is something that shouldn't happen to anyone. What is a child to think? And whom can a child really ask for answers, since only faith exists, not answers? I still wonder if maybe, because Rich is dead, there might actually be a heaven, or a hell, or paradise, or nirvana. I wonder if he was reincarnated. Perhaps he really is just a pile of ash and bone in a box in my brother's house.

I picture it as if my brother's car had flipped over in the middle of the road. Everyone he knew had to swerve to miss it. Some came out of the accident with more damage than others, and the type of damage each person received was different. Having seen so many people affected so negatively by one person's actions is an inspiration to me. I think more about the consequences that will not only affect me, but also others in my life who care about me, whether the decision involves drugs or not. As hard as it is to think about and discuss, I am a lot stronger because he was gone. I have more insight into how one's actions affect others.

I am caught between having the knowledge I have now because of his death and possible having something completely different if he were here today. I am left wishing he were still here, especially if I

could have the knowledge I have now, knowing what his being gone would do to my family. I would like to see my brother happier, not the guilt-ridden man he is now; I want to quit arguing about the pencil. I want to see my dad calling Richard on his birthday. And I don't want my dad to wake up crying in that silent way he did the day he learned Richard was dead, dreaming about the son he will now see only when he sleeps. I want to see how my sister and I would be if he were a part of our lives, to know if my artwork would be better. I want to be free to fly again, to bounce away into my fantasies and not come crashing down. I want to go back to the day when my sister and I were bouncing before we were forced out of the sky forever. I don't want to see another five-car pile-up with injured people on the side of the road, people scarred for life. And in the end, if I could wish for anything, I would just like to see him one more time, just so I could say hello, so I could say goodbye.

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