

Spring 2002



14 MANUSCRIPTS

Manuscripts

*Damn, we are awesome
I mean, think about it man.
We really kick ass.*

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Mara Keller

55 Miles Per Hours Along State Road 27

The moon hung like a spotlight
Over a graveyard where the earth was
Reclaiming wrought iron and headstones
with tall grass
And the thick roots of a magnificent Elm. I
tried

To imagine my own death—not the gory
details
But the process itself, and the end—but I
couldn't. It was like
Lighting a candle to try to see darkness.
Instead I saw
The completion of a cycle, a transformation,
and the earth

Churning with life around the impenetrable
coffins that
Harbor the dead like secrets, stuffed with the
Sawdust and formaldehyde of some
ritualistic denial
Of a truth that's as solid and tangible as a
headstone.

Joseph Welch

Ashtray

I'm sitting by the window at 3 a.m.
as the rain pours outside.
The crisp autumn air
cuts through the screen
and the fiery, red tip of my cigarette
isn't enough to keep me warm.
I could crawl in beside you
as you lie sleeping in my bed,
but instead, I'm drawn to this cold.

You wish I didn't smoke
like you wish to win the lottery,
hopeful, doubtful, wasting words
like dollars. I inhale deeply, and hold in
the toxic air that I have created.
I sit by the window and wonder if I'll ever
stop,
and put my thoughts out
in the dirty ashes.

Laura Seng

Eating Lunch by Myself

Eating Lunch by Myself is a monster with red eyes. It follows me down hallways, drooling, grinning, licking its lips. Every time I glance backward I catch sight of it in my peripheral vision. It tries to remain behind my head, always just out of my sight with its red eyes rolling. For years it has been coming and going. It has been following me for nearly two weeks now, but it was first born shortly after the deaths of King Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette. It is standing right behind me as I write—its hot breath on the back of my neck.

It just swallowed a bird. In one gulp down it went, fluttering around in its huge, furnace belly.

Eating Lunch by Myself keeps me caged in nervousness—I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't read.

Eating Lunch by Myself annoys me—it laughs and rolls its eyes, its blond hair pulled back so tight it's loose, wrinkled skin is pulled flat. It is stupid—it doesn't have enough of a brain to think what it is doing to me.

Eating Lunch by Myself is bumming quarters from me. It is angry at me for writing this—I refuse to stop—it will have to get used to it.

I had to spend the entire weekend with Eating Lunch by Myself. I thought about

killing it several times, but each attempt only made it stronger. It sat on its throne and made me a slave to it. It shoved its pointed breasts in my face. It waved its cock at me.

It makes me drive it around the city and then tells me I'm a bad driver. It steals car keys and drives off when I turn around—leaving me stranded in deserted parking lots.

Every night while I sleep Eating Lunch by Myself comes to me and steals a pint of my blood, which it uses for its bizarre experiments. Last night my mother and grandmother saw it peeking through the living room window, while I slept on the couch in my clothes. I awoke in a cold sweat. Sometimes I wake up soaked in its drool.

While I peered from the third story window I caught Eating Lunch by Myself sneaking up on me. It wanted to push me out—onto the concrete below. I turned around to look at it and tried to pretend it was only joking around with nothing but good intentions.

It is licking my ear as I write this. It is only a matter of time before it swallows me up completely. It will eat me in two big gulps. First it will bite me in half, right down the middle, and swallow my head and arms and torso. Then it will snatch up my legs before they can run off. One toe it will

leave as a memento. Then I will have to write in the dark because there is no light inside Eating Lunch by Myself's monstrous stomach. But that hasn't happened yet, right now it is content with licking me and sniffing me—and bathing me in hot soapy water.

Teege Braune

At wits' end is calm

As the day prepares for dusk, sun
breaks the drear, spreading
a glow we'd resigned to do without.

Amy Vaerewyck

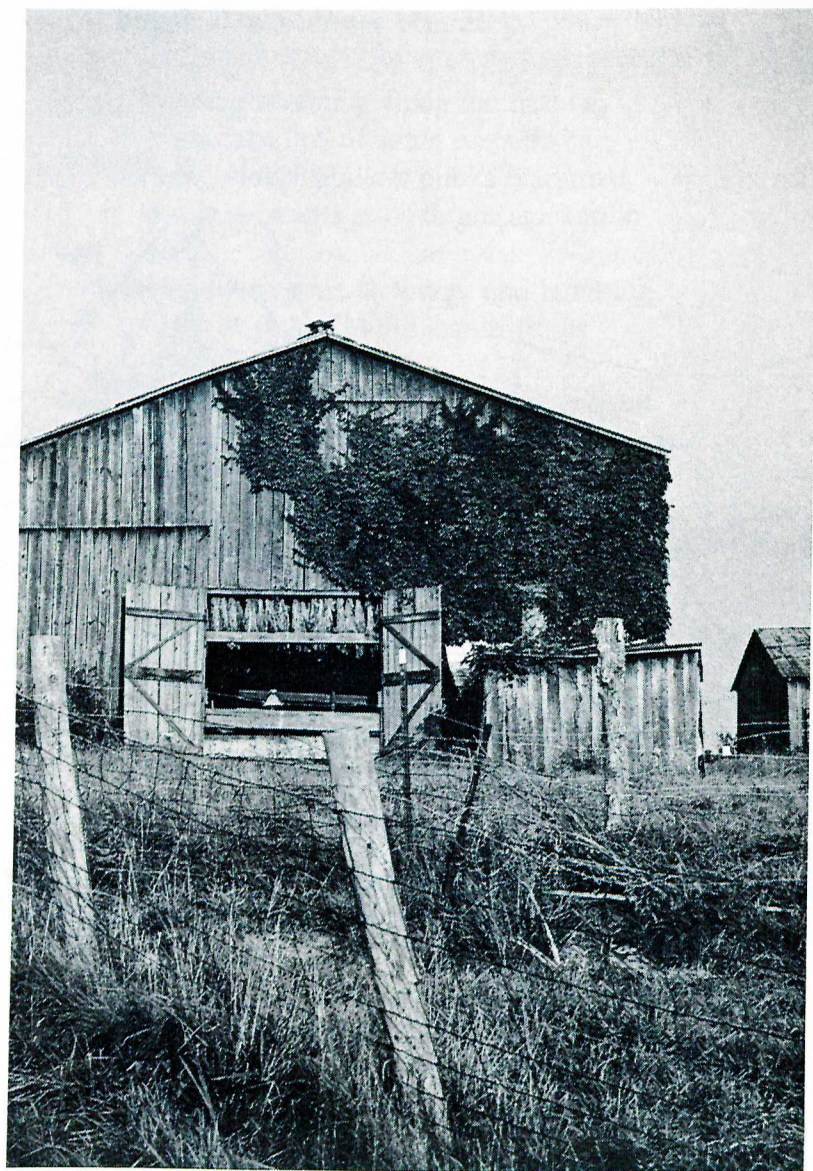
Feast of a Vicious Revelry

The hearse is reeling along the freeway
toward the hell of some eastside bar,
Fifteen drunken godless punks crammed
in—legs breasts arms thighs stacked in
and
Jutting out singing, shouting, and laughing,
a few of us horizontal just to fit: as
Mary's above,
Ann's below, full flesh singing, belting out
the top of the lungs that have breasts into
me,
"Come all you rambling boys of pleasure,
and ladies of easy leisure," her pupils are
Big black dilations; affections come like a
birth and rush in—a tidal rush to
Blow away trees mobile homes houses
skyscrapers continents planets singing
and
Singing into that rush, the magnetic tense
vibrant shock of the vicious fanged lust
that
Drives the hearse to the next shot belted out
like a banshee commanding the living to
sink
Teeth into the crux of life, to wake your
fucking souls or die pitifully: hoarded
and unspent.

Joseph Welch



Mara Keller



Courtney Parker

Church

In these big stone walls
Where I spent all of my youth
Visions of a little girl in a yellow cotton
dress

Running and laughing
Haunt me

Because now there is silence where there
used to be singing
And it echoes more loudly
Which worries my heart
It makes the memories all the more poignant

I am scared
Because, Beauty, you are dying here
in this place.
Slowly, sadly sinking
With a pastor who cares not for his people
And even less for my God.

He is his own god
His alter, himself
As he clutches with righteous
possessiveness that pulpit
Where the word of God is not shared
But bestowed
Like a secret only he knows

So the people slowly drift away

Their souls in want of love
And the church stands empty
And my walls crumble
And the little girl in the yellow cotton dress
Fades away
Like the memory of laughter in the sun

Old building, aging beauty, bells silent
Memories are all you hold now
Songs to my God have ceased

Danielle Steele



Courtney Eddy

Being Belgian

For all I know, it's only waffles ... and mustard (that's supposedly from the Netherlands anyway). "It'll put hair on your chest," father shoves the small, bad-smelling jar in my face. Maybe so but I'm not into that – or the truncheon rule of the Congo, enslavement of natives for one more bloody barrel of wheat. Visions of bare-breasted women and whittling men beating into Euro-shape. And I'm not much into being short, stupid, and stingy. This is what I've heard but what do I know? Gaggling on cold Brussels sprouts doused in child-proof Hollandaise. Grandparents close-lipped and grumpy with shingles. One night on the train station floor, sipping peach-flavored gin, in the capital of my heritage. So what's good about being Belgian?

Amy Vaerewyck

Clear

He has this way
of talking. We're on the phone
but I know he's doing it.
Feet spread a little more than
shoulder width, weight
shifting left to right, hips
swinging back and forth. His hands
teasing the air, fingers
bending, trying to explain,
moving like they do when he puts them
against me. His movement
causing mine. I have to shove him
away from me; the pleasure
unbearable. He laughs. His eyes
crinkling, my will
melting away, his fingers again, his
hands, his entire body suddenly makes
everything
clear.

Becky Fox

When he said
I want to make love
To you forever
I knew he wasn't
The one.

Jessica Wills

burning mood

i see you like rain
skidding alongside gutters and gravel
(collecting parts of me)
then leaving
winding beneath the blacktopped skin of
earth
you move like the blood of a lesser city
crumbling behind the
only wall of soul left standing
in this delicate world of me.
"I just... miss you, that's all."
((empty nights in the
city of a burning mood))

Casey E. McGrath

Oral Fixation

Beth hated the smell of the packaging
that her birth control came in. It reminded
her too much of the Planned Parenthood
clinic and the tiny room in which everything
was sterile and cold. As she tugged at the
foil packaging she thought of the cotton
swabs, sticky jelly, and latex gloves that had
all been a part of her first visit to the clinic.
Looking down at the 28 teeny-tiny pills in
the oval shaped plastic dispenser, she

wondered what the little things actually did to her body.

She clicked the clear pill cover to the notch that read "Sun," and wondered how many more Sundays she would take the pill. She figured that this would be the first of many. When she had gone to the clinic she had had dreams of Ortho-Tricyclen and Trojan brand condoms. But the lady that gave her the pelvic exam wrote her a prescription for something called Triphasil. Beth was sure that she had never seen a commercial that advertised three youthful women making dinner and talking about how great Triphasil was. The exam had been embarrassing enough and she had not wanted to make it worse by asking the lady what the difference between the two pills was. She hoped that she had made it clear to the nurse that she wanted the pill that would protect her from pregnancy, not just balance her hormonally and clear up her acne. Beth distinctly recalled hearing a girl in her chemistry class tell a friend that she had gotten pregnant despite the fact that she was on the pill. Her friend had asked her if she was sure it wasn't just a hormone supplement. Beth didn't want to make the same mistake as the girl in her class, so she had made a point of telling the nurse that, yes, she might, possibly, have sex sometime, maybe.

She turned the plastic container over in order to dump the brown pill into the palm of her hand. The little disc hit her open palm, bounced off it, and rolled under her dresser. Still clad in her bathrobe and nothing else, Beth kneeled on the carpet and searched frantically for her magic bean. Gliding her fingers over the scratchy cheap carpet, she prayed to feel the pill's smooth, rounded edges. When she had almost given up, the tips of her fingers stumbled across what could have been a tiny pebble. But Beth knew without seeing it that it was not bumpy at all- too perfect for it to be a pebble. Victoriously she pulled her fist, encasing the tiny treasure, out from under her dresser.

Rising to her feet, Beth happily blew on the pill in order to get any lint or dirt that could have collected off of it. Slowly she lowered her bottom jaw and slid out her tongue. Watching herself in the mirror, she used her thumb and index finger to place the pill gently in her mouth. She snapped her lips shut and forced herself to swallow hard.

Later, sitting at the kitchen table with her mother and brother, Beth thought of the pill that lay in her stomach and wondered how such a little thing could make such a big difference. Beth reasoned with herself that, unless she found someone to have sex with, it really wouldn't make much of a difference at all. Raising a spoonful of Cheerios to her

mouth, she thought resolutely, I will find
someone.

Megan Eley

Faith is like a tree
Big, strong roots grounding our
lives
Long branches reaching
Lost souls longing for pure truth
My soul rests in His beauty

Erika Warren

Magnolia

Something about magnolias

the deep pink,
hidden behind thick white
 rubbing petals
I want to be immersed.
Looking, touching
isn't close enough.
 Isn't enough.

Rub the petals on my neck,
where hot breath makes my knees give in.
Devastation in the destruction—
 —of the beauty.
 —that I have caused.

My urge is almost violent,
and I regret its passing.

Becky Fox

Vast sky overhead
White speck gracefully sails through
The baseball is caught

Jeff Carvell

Moral Patients

Darlene could've rubbed the lotion in herself but the feeling of sexiness that flowed over her stomach and thighs made her hold the Jergen's bottle out to Vincent.

"Will you rub me down?" she asked. She tried to seem seductive, spreading her legs some and tugging at the elastic of her purple polka-dotted panties.

"Did you know there are horse hooves in lotion?" Vincent grabbed the bottle from her and began reading the label.

An unintelligible noise, like the sound a cat makes when you step on its paw, came from Darlene's mouth. Her legs prickled into goose bumps.

"Well, it wouldn't be the first time we've used a product with nasty stuff in it," she said. Darlene tried to keep the edge out of her voice. She didn't want to make an argument out of the stupid lotion. Arguments with Vincent always exhausted her before they even began.

"Precisely my point, Dar. We can't proceed with this immoral behavior. I read a piece by Peter Singer tonight, in which he discussed intolerance of animal cruelty. He proved, rather irrefutably, that no animal cruelty is acceptable or necessary."

Vincent turned the bottle in his hands as he searched for the ingredients.

A scratchy futility rose in her throat. "Could you just rub it in for me, please," she cooed, searching his face for signs of softening. There were none.

He paced the room, moving his hands in circles as words like "cogent" and "moral patients" spewed from his lips. She lay on the bedspread in her underwear, watching his left eye, which twitched when he got really excited about something.

"Why? Why can't you just do this for me?" she begged, feeling like one of those humiliatingly brainless girlfriends in teen movies about getting laid.

She'd always told him how much she loved the way he thought so deeply about things, examining them from every angle before he made a decision. But, as the left eye began to twitch and his voice took on the tone of a cross-examining lawyer, she thought she might have to run to the bathroom to throw up.

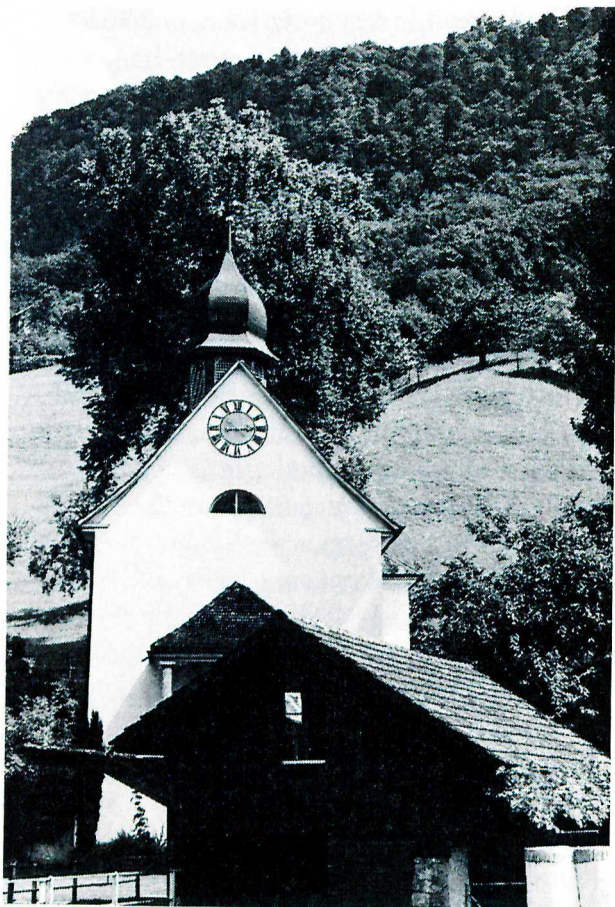
"Oh man," Vincent said, his eye twitching furiously, "This has really got me thinking. I've got to go type this up. Be back in a few, Dar." He jogged out of the room, tossing the bottle on the unmade bed.

Darlene closed her eyes and chewed on her lower lip.

"Self-centered bastard," she said aloud to the empty bedroom. Then, tears came, adding more polka dots to her panties. "But someday, he'll see me."

Sucking in a sob, she picked up the bottle, squirted a dime-sized drop of lotion into her palm, and began rubbing it into her now-freezing legs.

Amy Vaerwyck



Courtney Parker

Favorite Fruit

My favorite fruit
is your kiss.
It beckons to me,
eat me, devour me,
two to three times a day.
Its smell is sweet and tender
like strawberries at a summer picnic.
Its taste is ripe like wine,
making me drunk if I have too much.
Its skin is soft and smooth
except where it's raw in a few places
that were nibbled on for awhile.

Liz Sidley

Autumn

A delicate
blue vase

holding a stem

with one last
red petal

reaching out
like the hand of summer

for one last day.

The breeze shakes
its head

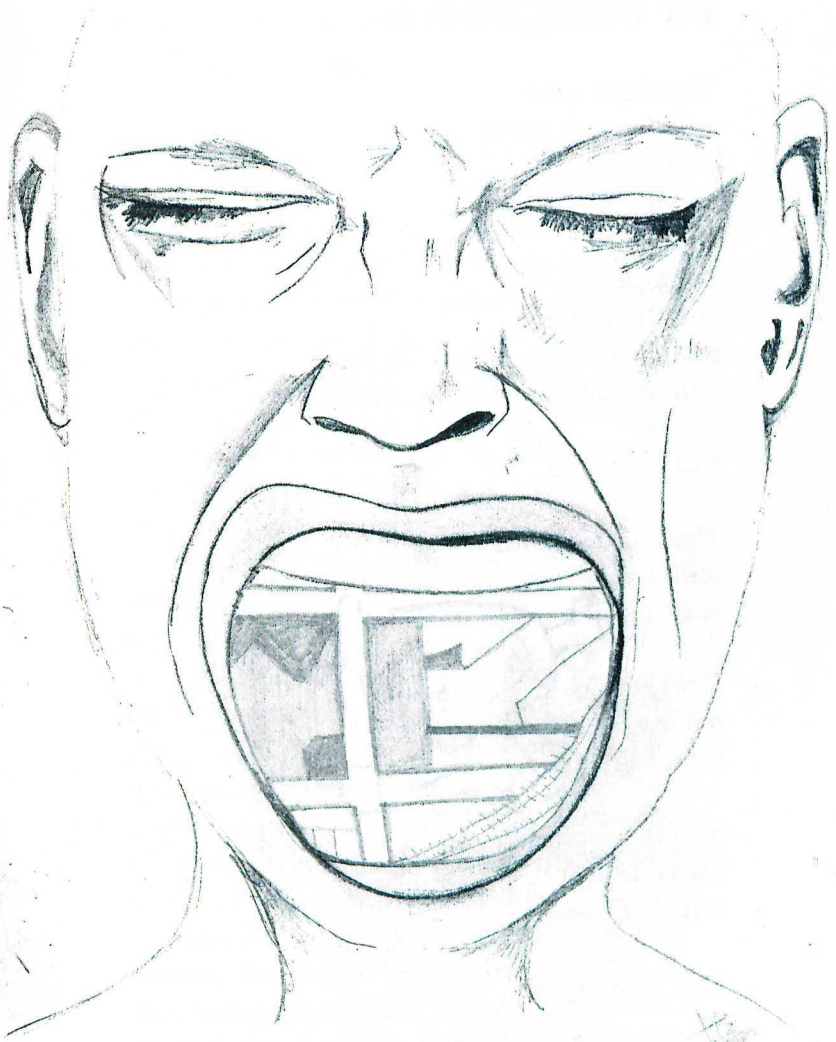
and lays

the petal

on the gray

marble desk.

Jessica Wills



Mara Keller

For Want of Flowers

The night aches
with banged knees,
soggy garbage,
and the slip of mud.

Forty-degree rain
and I'm limping,
still choking on raw pizza, laced
with mushroom sludge and stowaway olives,
firm
and sickening.

There is no more
milk and no new moon
and jagged toenails to tame.

Works waits inside the door
but the flowers there were for
somebody else.

Kiss my forehead, please.
I need to feel
somebody else.

Amy Vaerewyck

Captain Cook and the Biggest Brilliant Noplace

The fields were pristine, flat, white, like virgin paper; the frost-capped mountains appeared as raw marble. The silence of this place was so powerful that Cook felt he could hear the snowflakes hit the ground, each with its own delicate *piff*. Whirls of whiteness scoured his bare feet and face like strands of steel wool. Even the sky had yet to be filled in with any color. The suns hid behind the great white cloud stretch, their colors failing to seep into the sky. Cook knew it as the biggest, most brilliant noplace on the entire planet – it had not so much a name.

On the planet Heaven, nobody but madmen and their dogs ventured out of the pastures and into the wilds. Doing so left one susceptible to sickness, physical injury, and other perils normally muted within the Gates of Paradise. Saint Peter always gave Cook a funny look when he left.

Cook's sidekick, a former track and field athlete, Ben, never looked at any of this. Ben looked at his feet, or the three meters of ground ahead of him, or at Cook; right now, Ben was looking at the fire before them, taking off his socks.

"I really hate stopping and making fires in bright daylight like this," Ben said,

rubbing his legs nervously. "And I *really* hate it when you make me dry my socks."

Cook secretly liked playing the Holmes to Ben's sniveling Watson – it was why he took him on this expedition. Any kind of company will suffice in this nothing. "I suppose you never knew of it before you ascended; but outside the gates, there again exists a thing called frostbite. And if your feet succumb to it, they'll turn black and fall off."

Ben muttered something unintelligible and probably obscene.

"You knew we had to cross that stream. There was no way around it." Cook's socks were already roasting. "Rub some snow on your feet and stop whining. Think of your Florida, or whatever you call it."

"Florida. You British are alike in any life: always viewing the world as a collection of non-British nationalities."

"I prefer to view it as geography."

Ben savagely dug his feet into the snow. "You aren't on Earth anymore, Limey."

It wasn't that Cook wanted to be back on Earth, or that he really missed the place. Ben, being more perceptive than he looked, still knew that all he need do was mention the little wet rock to silence his partner. Cook always regretted that he didn't live long enough to see it all, and the thought sobered him instantly.

Ben continued to huff, "We've been marching around on this tundra off and on for over a year now. All I have to show for it is an uncanny knack for repairing snowshoes and some dry socks."

"Patience. We'll find the egg; and when we do find it, it's all yours." Cook squinted to discern an unfamiliar cloud shape in the distance.

"I still don't understand what is in this for you," said Ben, voicing his most nagging thought for, what seemed to Cook, the one-hundredth-and-something time.

Cook had to smile. "Does it really matter?"

Ben squinted his Cautious Squint. "A fella has to wonder."

"What hatches from a Faberge Egg, Ben?"

"More Faberge Eggs, I'd hope."

"The last of the pearl-winged nothings, that's what." Cook's face cragged up with frown lines as he realized the cloud was moving toward them. "Pack up your things, Ben. We have to find a good reference point before that ripcloud reaches us."

A ripcloud is like a snowstorm, but a variety that can only take place on the tundras of Heaven. It was merely a wide spiral of rotating winds that zigzags across the tundra, of little danger or importance, save that it completely erases every footprint and buried landmark – two essential tools in

navigating the otherwise perfect white plane. After starting back in the wrong direction, it could be hours before travelers realized they were going east instead of north, upsetting the grid system Cook had been so busy mapping for the last year.

"According to the grid here," he said, already in motion, "there are some caves nearby in the northeast. We just have to get them within view before the ripcloud sweeps over us, so we can keep a steady direction."

Ben wanted to curse his reliance on the snowshoes. If only he were on solid ground, he could easily run the distance to the caves. That would shut the old buzzard up. "So you don't think we'll actually make it to the caves before the rip hits us?"

"Not likely, lad."

"Don't call me lad."

The four snowshoes churned up puffs of snow like pistons in a combustion engine, bound for the northeast corner of the snow desert with no intention of reaching a destination in that direction. Cook just wanted to hear *Land Ho!* Before his face was blasted and his eyes blinded by the ever-nearing ripcloud.

But nature doesn't have to play by the rules outside the Pearly Gates. Cook and Ben clasped instinctively as the ripcloud blustered upon them, smothering their ability to see and hear. For the next forty

minutes, it was going to sound like one long, forever howling sensory train wreck. The two had the tacit understanding that they must either try stay perfectly still for the duration of the storm and run the risk of their muscles freezing up, or start dragging.

Dragging is what Cook had come to call his technique for maintaining steady course while deafened and blinded by a ripcloud: each man would take turns dragging the other by the feet. The dragged man would both act as dead weight, anchoring the dragging man to a reasonably true course, and also served as a human compass, since the winds can't blow over a man who is level to the ground. The physical exertion would keep their muscles loose and bodies warm; the slow movement would make sure that they couldn't get too far off course.

This is how they did it, alternating Ben dragging Cook, Cook dragging Ben, changing every ten minutes.

After two such rotations, it was Cook's turn to drag again. His muscles were still burning from his last turn. He rarely had motivation problems during even the hardest trails; but ripclouds were always discouraging to him. Even the nothing ceased to exist, and his normally keen senses were at the mercy of a seemingly uncontrollable force. Blankness upon blankness created a feeling of directionless futility inside Cook. When the horizon

never stopped, it was inspiring; but now, in the less-than-nothingness, Cook could only seek a direction and heave. It was drudgery. It was work. It was not an adventure.

In these times, he tried to project his senses ahead of him like a sort of probe, or hunting dog. He searched for anything present enough to signify that the less-than-nothingness was only an illusion and that his struggle was amounting to some end. His probe looked, felt, heard, and sniffed at the void.

Something.

Something.

Something? To the amazement of Cook's nose, he picked up a light, Earthly odor through the sensory train wreck. His face shuddered. Feces. Maybe *dog* feces. A dog sled? Ben may have been asleep, since he did not kick to signify that he felt his direction changing. Cook followed the smell, picking up speed, kicking up snow like a two car locomotive wrapped in furs. Soon, the smell disappeared, but the deep tracks of a dog sled could be felt beneath Cook's feet. The locomotive picked up steam.

A thrill oozed through the explorer's veins, stoking his furnace and warming his ambition as if he had just received a blood transfusion of boiling black coffee. He was charging toward a guess, his eyes and ears filled with snow. It was like every great

discovery in his career had never happened, like the seconds of his life had been piling up to reach this moment of anticipation.

And it hit him in the head. A rock. He felt: rocks, a very large rock, an opening inside of them, space, shelter. Ben must have been awake because he was moving the furry bulk of his arms and legs in unsuccessful efforts to roll himself upright.

Cook pulled Ben up and forcibly moved Ben's hand over the rocks and into the mouth of the outcropping. The two crawled in, getting lower and lower to the ground, trying to squeeze their large backpacks into this shelter for all it was worth. Soon, the two could see again, as they were several feet into a long cavern.

"Do you see tracks?" Cook yelled to his partner.

"What?" The continuous white train wreck was either echoing into the cavern, or had made them temporarily deaf.

"Tracks! Foot prints!" His voice was dry from the extended silence. "Let's go deeper!"

The cavern gradually opened up, getting more spacious, and curving deeper inward for several yards before revealing a large room, roughly the size of a high school gymnasium, with a hole in the ceiling the width of a basketball hoop that caused the winds to make a jug-blowing sound every few seconds when they hit it just right.

There was a semi-frozen lake consuming half the room, with a chiseled ice waterfall leading down the wall behind it. It was a natural place, a palace of a kind rarely seen on Heaven.

There was a man and a team of snow dogs waiting for them.

Cook removed his scarf and did nothing to hide his childish grin. "I must admit that you've always had a certain flair for location, old boy," he said, laughing.

Ben tried to question. "Who is-"

The other man, indistinguishable from Ben and Cook beneath the piles of furs and coats, emitted an unusually loud sort of chortle that lingered in echoes for several seconds. "You know I can't just make X mark the spot, James."

Ben looked like he had just woken up for the third time in two minutes. "Who is this?"

"Yes, of course, this is Ferdinand Magellan. He was an idol of mine before back on Earth, and now my colleague in this hunt of ours." Cook untied his snowshoes and strode to meet Magellan. "You did well on this one!"

"Yes, yes; what was it, two years?" Megellan's beard was not encrusted with ice, signaling to Ben that there must be a fire somewhere near. "And who is this with you? A new partner, I presume?"

"Yes, that's Benjamin. As soon as he warms up, he'll want to have the prize, you know."

"He'll keep it, you think?" The old Portuguese frowned in anticipation. "You know why I say not to take a partner along."

"Well," Cook looked at his feet, "he was able and interested, and I love the company."

"That's why I suggest dogs, James."

James Cook said nothing, waiting for his fellow explorer to reveal the prize.

Magellan noted the silence and hunched over to unbutton one of the many packs adorning his dog sled and carefully lifted a Faberge Egg from a leather pouch. Ben's eyes opened wide enough to tear their lids. "This is mine?"

Cook was half relieved by the journey's end, half disgusted with the inevitable explanation he would need to make for his partner. "If you really want it, Ben."

"What do you mean, if I want it?"

Magellan sighed. "So this man knows nothing of our Game of Hemispheres?"

"I didn't, um," Cook was struck with the compound shame of the sudden realization that he had deceived, as well as the shame of having to realize that in the company of the deceived person. "I didn't think he would join me if I told him."

Ben didn't seem to care.

"Dogs, James. Dogs," Magellan muttered.

Cook took the rudeness as a cue to repay his debt to his duped companion.

"Hemispheres is a game we have been playing since we ascended to this planet. We thought it was a waste that there was so much undiscovered land and so little exploration."

"Of course, with the way time passes here, it wasn't long before we felt we had seen everything there was to see." Magellan wasn't altogether interested in the explanation, devoting more attention to trying to light a cigarette. His lighter just sparked and smoked. "Lighter must be running out of fluid," he announced.

Cook ignored the rudeness. "So we invented this game. We each hid a Faberge Egg on one hemisphere of this planet, give a few hints to the other, and go about the task of finding them."

"And when we do find them," Magellan having given up on the lighter, fumbled through the mounds of pouches on his sled for a matchbook, "sonuva- where are they?" The matchbox was found, the conversation continues. "And when we find the eggs, we hide them again. We don't keep them." Magellan lit his cigarette in triumph, took a puff, and finally made eye-contact with Ben. "You don't get to keep it."

"Well!" Ben's forehead convulsed.

"Well, what's the point? If you're-"

Magellan erupted as if he had stored his anger from the moment he first saw Ben's lips move: "And what good would it be to keep them? Should we just place our eggs on the mantle back home, invite people in and say, 'Oh, of all the riches on Heaven, I have the only Faberge Egg!' But don't you want that? Something that would require no more work and not more *finding*?"

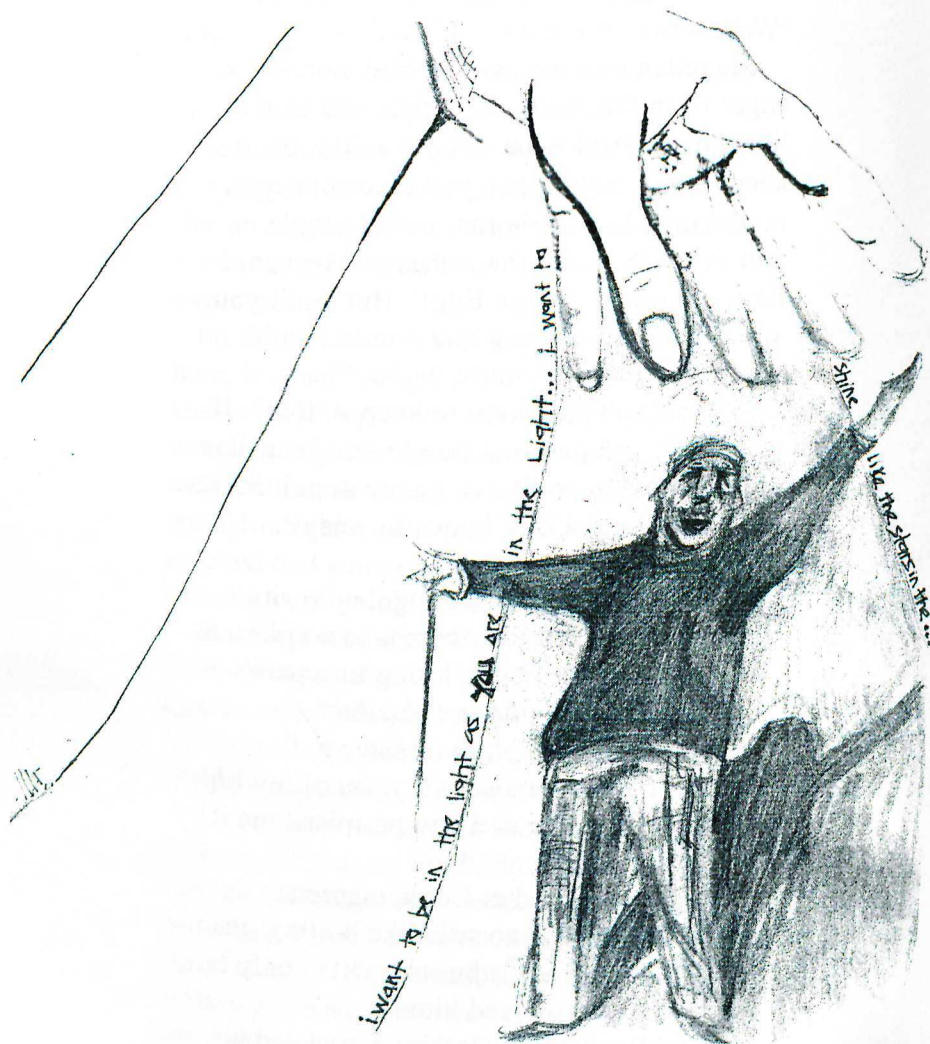
"So do you still want to keep it, Ben? If you don't you can feel free to join Magellan on his quest to re-find it, or my search for its hiding space." Cook knew the answer. He tried not to cringe.

Ben acted as if he were going to sit down, but noticed that there was no place to sit. He stood, thinking, trying to separate fact from too-ridiculous-to-be-fact.

"No," he said. "No, you have to be joking. I spent almost two years of my life trying to find this, and you promised me it would be mine."

Magellan glared at Cook, cigarette smoke exiting his nostrils like boiling steam jets. "I did," Cook admitted. "It is only fair, Magellan. I promised him."

Magellan's thick clothing translated his wild gestures into a frantic waddle. He waddled within two inches of Ben's face. "I refuse! Your reward was this journey! It



Mara Keller

was the freedom from that mundane life inside the Gates."

Ben shoved Magellan, knocking him off balance, standing him with limbs splayed, belly-up on the floor. "Cook, don't do this to me. You promised. I *earned* this."

"You earned nothing!" said the beached Portuguese.

Cook stooped to help him, "Ferdinand-"

"No." Magellan fumbled back to straightness. "No no *no*. He earned nothing."

"Ferdinand, please. We can hide something else."

Magellan snorted at both Ben and Cook. "Okay," he said. He dropped the egg back into the leather sack, tightened the draw cord, and spun it around like David's sling. "If this is your reward, you are free to claim it." Magellan let go of the string and let the relic fly. He did not look. Cook winced. Ben gasped. The sack plunged into the half-frozen pond with a *kerplunk*.

Ben, too shocked to yell, jolted to retrieve it, jumping from a ledge and diving into the pond. Magellan watched with delight as he landed flat on his face in the shallow water right next to the sack containing the egg, which Ben thought would be lost forever.

The cavern echoed with the tremendous thunder of the explorer's laughter. "You

win, you win!" laughed Magellan, as he applauded his spectacle. "You win!"

"Yes, good form there." Cook was also chuckling, but his guilt slowly caught up with him. "I take it you won't be following us out Ben?"

The soaking track runner refused to answer, concentrating, instead, on his beautiful prize. It was something worth more for its rarity than monetary value – by far the most prestigious trophy ever awarded him. He *earned* it.

"Very well." James Cook's wave of guilt passed, realizing that Ben, even as he sat drenched and shivering in that pond, was as happy as he'd ever seen him. "We'll keep the fire going."

Magellan was still laughing. "You win! You win!"

The two partners in the treasureless hunt mounted the dogsled and charged into the big brilliant noplac. The ripcloud had passed. The land and the sky had resealed themselves. And again, everything was blank.

Brad Latino



Courtney Eddy

Manhattan

The encroaching corporate thicket
Grows ever denser around you,
But you never seem to become
Ensnarled
In its thorns.

You blatantly declare your
Crunchy,
Tree-hugging nature
To a world that doesn't accept it.
You keep a compost pile.
You recycle and only buy organic.
Your lawn mower is muscle powered.

The years spent in a cubicle never killed
your
Dream of ducks in the front yard.

You may be buried under the
Burden of
"Responsibility"
But nevertheless remain a
Flowerchild
In the midst of
Manhattan.

Kitty Rodney

On Looking Back

Sometimes, late at night,
when I curl up on my mattress,
too comfortable to give movement
consideration,
I write poetry in my head.

Great poetry,
the kind you wish you could write
when you hear a good poem of someone
else's and feel
Jealous.

They never last.
They fade in the moment.
Forgotten in the blank darkness of the room,
or the sleep so full of dreams that none
are remembered in the morning.

On looking back,
you realize you had something,
something special you lost.
It's frustrating laziness, you say,
denying that it's meant to be lost
in the moment;
refusing to believe She'd let you waste
your talent.

Ryan Lancaster

Love Letters

Love has never come easily to me; then again, I've never come easily to love. From an early age I've been in constant protest of the romantics. Their commercialization of Valentine's Day, mushy songs on the radio, and the entire movie genre of "romantic comedy" made me gag. I became jaded at a young age. In second grade, there was a boy named Greg Woodhead. He was a head shorter with brown hair, a ready smile, and the polo shirts and khakis of a miniature executive. We both liked grammar and hanging upside-down on the jungle gym at recess. Whenever I passed by his desk, my palms got clammy and Stride Rites fumbled over each other. I was in love, so like any enterprising seven-year-old, I pulled out some gray paper (it had the dashes in the middle of the line to show where to cross the t's) and started writing him a love letter. *You are the cutest boy in school*, I wrote in my best handwriting. *I like you lots*. I finished the letter with a few swirling flourishes and hearts at the bottom. My best friend Julie Oleson looked over my shoulder and nodded approvingly. "You're writing Greg a love letter?" she asked, adjusting her splatter-painted glasses. I nodded, busy proofreading. "But aren't you going to sign it?"

"No way! Are you nuts?" It was too big of a risk to associate my name with a vow of eternal love; *Love from Your Secret Admirer* was more than enough information. After drawing a few more hearts with arrows through them, the letter was ready for stealthy delivery. When Greg asked Mrs. Kerrins for the bathroom pass, I stuffed the letter halfway up the sleeve of my hot pink Espirit sweatshirt and walked casually up to the pencil sharpener at the front of the room. I forced myself to breathe regularly while I ground the already-sharp pencil to a nub. When there were only three inches left of my pencil, I knew I had to quit stalling: in the game of secret love letters, hesitation is death.

I wiped my palms on the thighs of my turquoise stretch pants and nonchalantly walked my customary route back to my desk, which just happened to go by Greg's desk. As I passed, I let my fingers brush the corner of his desk and I dropped the crisply folded note. I hurriedly returned to my desk and slid into my chair.

"Did anyone see?" I asked Julie.

"Nope. You're home free," she whispered. "But he's coming back!"

Greg seemed to walk into the room in slow motion, as if he knew the next few moments would determine our second grade destiny. He handed Mrs. Kerrins the pass with graceful confidence and turned back to

his desk on the right side of the room.

When he noticed the note, I forced myself to turn towards the windows and get the play-by-play from Julie.

"Oooh! He's reading it!" she squealed as I desperately shushed her. Although she was my best friend, she truly didn't understand the nuances of discretion.

"What's he doing?" I tried to talk through the corner of my mouth, which must have made me look like a distorted cartoon character.

"Well... he's going like this," she said, curling her lips in an Elvis imitation gone wrong. Not exactly an expression that said, *I hope Laura sent this to me, I'm in love with her*. "Now he's looking around."

"Don't look at him! Look somewhere else!" I begged, sinking lower in my plastic seat. Eye contact could ruin everything. Julie looked quickly around the room, searching for somewhere else to look. Choking under pressure, my best friend was halfway under her desk looking at her scrunch socks when Greg glanced our way. I put my head in my hands and mumbled, "Great Jules. That's not obvious or anything."

Still under the desk, she tapped my leg. "Don't worry! He's standing up," she reported.

"What? Where is he going?" I hissed. Commanding myself to stare at my desk was

becoming increasingly futile; I was desperate to see what was happening.

"He's...going to the back of the room," she said as she straightened up.

"Oh...my...gosh."

"What is he doing? Is he throwing it away?" I wailed.

Julie shook her head. "Worse. He's giving it to Mrs. Kerrins."

My head turned in the direction of Julie's horrified gaze, confirming that my deepest emotions lay naked in the hands of my fifty-year-old teacher. And while I loved Mrs. Kerrins with her short salt-and-pepper hair and perpetually misapplied red lipstick, I could not fathom the repercussions of this. Would she call a parent-teacher conference? Would I get a detention? Worse, would she laugh? My impeccable school record was unraveling before my terrified eyes. Julie patted my arm in a vain attempt at comfort as Mrs. Kerrins read the note with curiosity. Suddenly Julie whispered, "Wait, Laura. You didn't sign it!" Of course! I breathed a sigh of relief and congratulated myself on my foresight. But Mrs. Kerrins' loud voice floated from the back of the room.

"Well, no one signed it, so we can't tell who it's from, can we?" she said.

"But...hmm...that's interesting." She put on thick black reading glasses and pursed her lips. "Part of this is written in cursive,

and we don't learn that until spring. But I know the one girl who knows cursive already: Laura Navaratil. I'll bet she wrote it."

My jaw dropped. This had to be some huge cosmic joke: my teacher was a detective disguised in knit sweaters with shoulder pads. My head fell to my desk, whose whorls and nicks I was beginning to memorize.

"Um—Laura—" Julie stammered.

"What?" I moaned.

"Uh—"

"What? Nothing you could say will make me feel—"

"Mrs. Kerrins is coming over here," she whispered.

I could sink no lower. Pivoting on my forehead, I turned my face toward the back of the classroom. A broad, brightly colored sweater and gray-tinged teeth flecked with lipstick approached with surprising speed.

"Laura?" Her red makeup had never looked devilish before that day. She towered above me, clutching my letter with crimson claws. "Did you write this letter?"

Racing through all the possible responses and their ramifications, I took the safest route; a bald-faced lie. "No," I said looking at my desk.

"But it's in your handwriting, isn't it?"

"No..." I stalled, searching for something more to sound believable. "Julie

wrote it." Perfect: she'd written him a love letter two months earlier; besides, she was my very best friend. I was sure she'd take the heat for me.

"I did not!" she yelled in protest. I gave her a look telling her that I would sell my soul if she would agree, but saving her best friend wasn't worth the embarrassment. "I saw her write it," she told Mrs. Kerrins matter-of-factly. Any hopes of a love life swiftly ended underneath my teacher's raised eyebrow. I put my head back on my desk.

Greg Woodhead moved away at the end of fourth grade, but nearly a decade and a half later he lives on in my mind as the beginning of my failure with the opposite sex. Time didn't improve my skills. I attempted to woo Brad Spencer in fourth grade by giving him a dollar on Valentine's Day. I even handmade his valentine, complete with bees, honey pots, and a message to "Buzz, buzz, bee mine." Brad apparently didn't appreciate my artistic skill or my seduction technique. Even his mother found out about my attempt. I wish I'd asked for my dollar back.

While other girls in elementary school got boyfriends, broke up with them in a week, and got new ones, rejections continued for me until seventh grade. My first boyfriend was an eighth grader who

went to a different junior high, which greatly increased his coolness factor. I didn't tell my parents I had a boyfriend: instead, I went out with girlfriends and met him at the mall or the movie theatre. We had our first kiss on the corner of Washington and Main streets; his mom was waiting down the block in her minivan to take him to run errands. He called me from the parking lot of the grocery store half an hour later to ask if that was my first kiss.

"Yeah," I replied, and quickly kicked myself for sounding immature.

"I thought so," he said. I dumped Mark three weeks later because I could not go out with someone who implied that I was a bad kisser (even if I was).

At the end of seventh grade, Adam and I went out. We went to an amusement park together during the summer; when I preferred to go on roller coasters with other friends, he thought I was being distant. I broke up with him a week later because he was too clingy.

Once I left the junior high soap opera, my luck didn't change much. I dated Matt during my sophomore year. We listened to ska music in his green Ford Tempo and ate Wendy's chicken nuggets and Frostys. I thought I could save him from his abusive family life and lack of academic motivation. My dear friend Julie (yes, the same one from second grade) keeps in touch with him; she

told me that he is currently an illicit drug user, failed out of college and talks about moving with his weird girlfriend to Arizona. But other than that, he's doing well.

The next serious boyfriend was Dave. We both did theatre and dated for a year and a half. Dave recently started his own theatre troupe at his college and is presently writing a book that will be published in a few months. We went out for dinner a few months ago, and he told me that he is writing a play about his dating experiences. I demanded compensation for the use of my name and/or likeness. He thought I was joking. I think I need a lawyer.

Two years have passed since I've been willing to go into a relationship, partly due to the extreme slim pickings at Butler University. Currently, there are approximately nine guys on campus: two are gay, four have girlfriends, and three are grossly undateable. You do the math. As a freshman I lamented why I didn't research the guy-girl ratio more thoroughly before I applied, but I have learned to use it to my advantage. I can be good friends with guys without worrying about dating them. Since most girls are unattached, we joke and complain about the lack of quality males together. Competition is so ridiculously fierce that I've given myself over to fate and turned off the "radar."

Being alone—no, *independent*—has also given me a much more realistic perspective on love. I patiently help friends through the angst of inattentive boyfriends, smothering girlfriends, distrust, endless questions of motives and pain. Many are only in the relationships to combat loneliness until a better offer comes along. Despite my privileged vantage point, I've also had to watch Hallmark holidays pass with no stuffed animals on my pillow. The whole genre of "romantic comedy" had to be banned from my movie library for months. And although I am hesitant to admit it, sometimes I *like* stuffed animals and romantic comedies. I also refuse to lower my standards and succumb to the myth that women are incomplete without a man. I developed a personality in the last two years instead of being an offshoot of a guy's personality. Too many women in unbalanced relationships become like babies on a spider plant, derivatives of their partners with no identities. When the relationship ends, they have no root, no soil, no self-awareness in which to anchor themselves.

I'm afraid my entire case might make me sound like I am some crazed anti-male-overly-righteous feminist, which I don't intend. There's nothing wrong with dating or love, but something is wrong when society says that a single woman isn't a

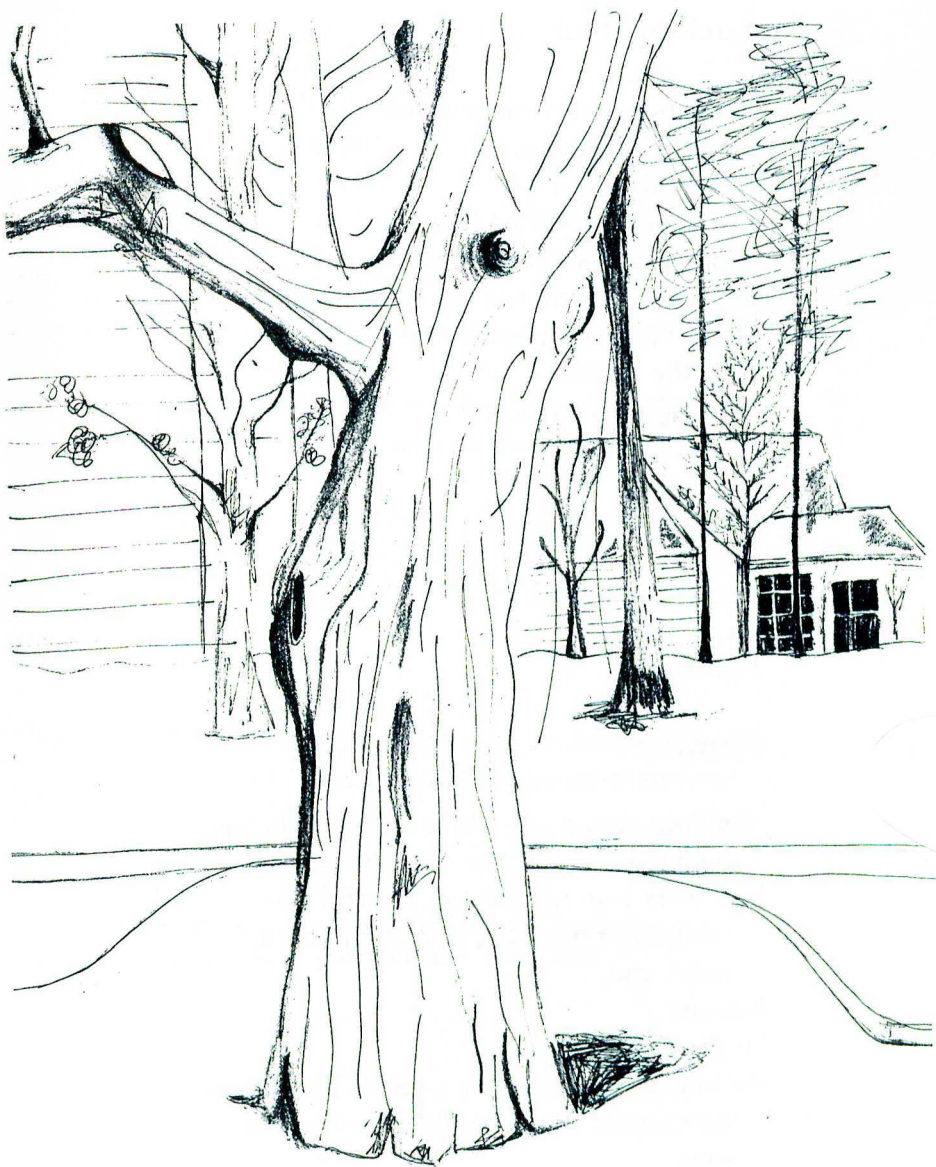
whole person. At family reunions the first question relatives ask are "Who are you dating now?" with a confidential nudge of the elbow. And while my relatives don't have a whole lot to talk about before they hit the open bar, I still wish that the concern wouldn't be who I'm dating, but who I am and what's going on in my life.

The worst part of all this ranting is that recently, I've actually found someone who might be worth the trouble of dating. The unplanned two-year hiatus might end. He doesn't seem to mind that I'm addicted to Diet Coke. He likes to play Dr. Mario with me on the Nintendo I bought on eBay. We go to Perkins Restaurant at two in the morning to eat banana nut muffins and debate whose animal slippers are better: his gorillas or my rams. He writes me poetry but he can also cut down a tree with a chainsaw. His soccer-mom Volvo has windshield wipers on the headlights (How are those necessary?) He has an aversion to regular showers and sometimes wears the same pair of bright red socks two days in a row. After being his friend for months, I know firsthand that he's not perfect. Case in point: the boy wears moccasins. I didn't know they still *made* moccasins. I think his IQ is higher than mine, but I beat him mercilessly at games of skill and I pretend to be smarter. He likes it when I play with his

hair. I give him my good pillow while we watch movies, and when he leaves I can still smell him on it. I just like to sit next to him, even if he's just doing homework. He rarely shaves, and I can't decide if I like the stubble after one day or two. We go to parks to play on tire swings and schlep around in the mud. He writes random lines of poetry during class and doodles bees, the only thing he can draw. I am also starting to see signs that he's one of those die-hard romantics that used to make me gag.

For the last two years, I cocooned myself in solitude: part of the payoff of avoiding dating was that I couldn't get hurt. Breaking out of warm seclusion is terrifying; after all, a gamble in second grade resulted in my heart squashed under Mrs. Kerrins' critical gaze. The chances I took in second grade seemed just as monumental then as the ones I take now. I guess it's time to roll up my hot pink sleeves, break out the lined gray paper and write another inexperienced love letter.

Laura Navratil



Mara Keller

Lack of Heat

In the two-bedroom apartment,
the whirl of the heater
is the only guest.
I sit at our oak table
with nicks from day to day life
dreaming of then: not as I am here now
alone, no, you were with me. And we
were the rhythmic
blowing heat, expected
and unnoticed.
Hot air
Intertwined

with the cold.

Laura Seng

Captive

The door closed our secret breathing behind
a window taped over with recital posters.
You trace your hand along my arm and
whisper of how this story could, turn, .
twist, and
become
"if you were mine"
the blue of your sweater screams against the
darkness of the air depleting coughing
stars
against the untouchable pillows of my

feminism, dripping beauty
"I wish you were mine"
yours so you could tear my
clothes like paper,
like rain
*("You will stand behind me, your breath
warm on my neck, my ears...")*
"...and then we'd, uh..."
on top of me now breathing quietly as I
tremble
your hand fumbles against me and inside
there is screaming and flying orgasms of
pain
*("You will ask if I know what your thinking
and I'll just breathe silently...")*
your fingers travel with care and your eyes
bear into me
rhythm dancing
and panic nude
*("...bitch you are meat, you are something
to grind...bitch, you are meat you are
something to grind...")*

Casey E. McGrath

Parenthetical Excerpts from Nicole Blackman's
Blood Sugar, "You Will" and "Backstage"

Yeats and Elkhounds

You went to MIT and rowed crew,
On weekends gallivanted with friends,
Only coming home to roughhouse with your
elkhounds.

You put on a brave face,
But at night you read Keats,
Coleridge,
And Yeats,
To take your mind off the pains of chemo.

I married you and slowly watched you
Slip
Away.

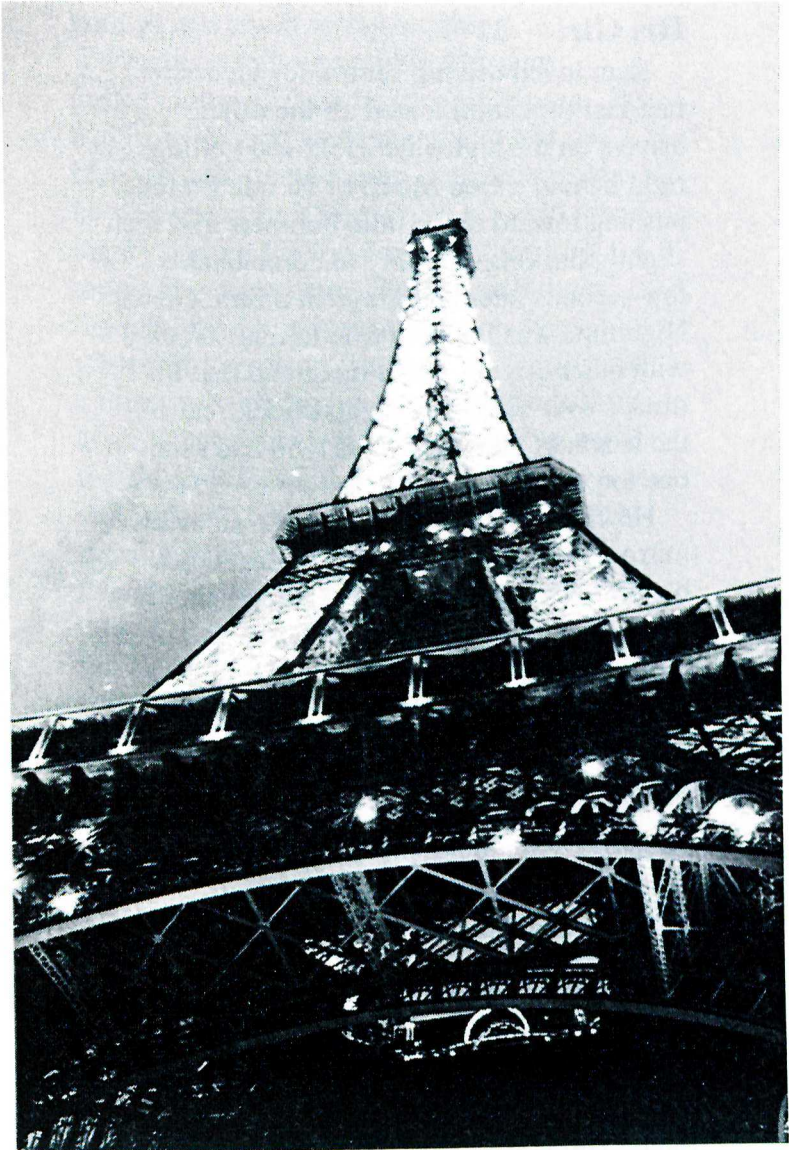
A widow at 26.

The volumes still sit on my shelf.
I don't read them.
I've never owned an elkhound.

They were yours.

But you were mine.

Kitty Rodney



Courtney Parker

His Girl

Rem loved driving semi-s for the mere fact that they intimidated all the other drivers on the highway. He loved getting right behind a Geo Metro or Honda Prelude, pushing toward those little bumpers and then slightly backing off, only to come back a few seconds later and move in a little closer. Nighttime was the best time to really fuck with other drivers. Rem imagined that his truck's over-sized headlights struck fear in the hearts of many travelers who had seen one too many horror movies.

He checked out his smile in the sideview mirror. Seeing a little piece of meat stuck between his yellowed teeth, Rem reached for a postcard of the Grand Canyon and used it to fish out the gristle. Hoping to find some hooligans on a road trip, he eyed the contents of each passing car. His favorite victims were teenage girls, out for the night in daddy's car. The exaggerated nature of teenagers made it easy to see their reaction from where he sat in his cab. Girls usually pulled at each other's shoulders, threw their hands in the air, and whirled their heads around trying to get a better view of the automotive assault that he was inflicting upon them. As cars sped by, Rem saw a few potential opportunities- a new white VW Beetle with a license plate that said "doozer," and lime green Neon with a boy driving, two girls as passengers. He let them

both pass without trying anything.

Finally, a red convertible Mustang pulled alongside him in attempt to pass. He had been driving since noon, and had no idea what the temperature outside was, but he was pretty sure that it was too cold to justify having the top down, but the girls didn't appear to care. There were three of them in the car, singing obnoxiously to whatever they were listening to. The driver, a brunette with big breasts, must have been tapping her foot on the accelerator because the car shot forward and backward rhythmically. The blond in the backseat was thrashing to the music so hard she looked like she was having a seizure. Peering down into the passenger seat, Rem realized the third girl was staring back up at him. She was decent looking, not great. Her hair was pulled back in a bun, her breasts barely there. *The girl does have some nice legs*, he thought. She wasn't smiling or bobbing her head as fiercely as the other two. She kind of nodded to the beat that he couldn't hear and let her eyes trace his truck and then his face.

Rem thought about pulling out his 8 by 11 poster board that said in lazy handwriting, "Show me your tits." But it somehow didn't seem appropriate when he glanced again at the girl, so he left the sign on the floor of the passenger seat. The look on the girl's face was almost dreamy, as if

the truck and its driver represented some deep desire of hers. Rem realized the amount of bullshit this idea contained, but he held on to it for a second. What if she had always wanted to travel cross-country in a miniature mobile home, delivering sacks of starch to food suppliers? Or maybe she just really wanted to have sex in the cab of a semi.

Unfortunately, Rem had given up on the idea of sex on the road. Ever since he read that article back in 1989 about the rapid spread of AIDS due to truckers fucking whores state to state, he had tried to abstain from this bad habit. The girl looked fairly clean, sitting in that Mustang, swaying to the music, staring up at him. For her, he would make an exception. Suddenly the girl was smiling as if she had had the same thought as him. The brunette driving apparently did not realize the transaction that was happening between Rem and the girl, because she rudely interrupted it by pushing the gas pedal and finally passing him. Once clear of the truck, the Mustang yanked itself into the right-hand lane and continued to speed along.

Rem could no longer see the girl, except for when she occasionally leaned over the armrest that divided the car and twisted around in order to talk to her friend in the backseat. For some reason he didn't want the mustang to slip away from him, he

wanted to hook his truck to their back bumper and just drag behind them. For once, he felt bad that his headlights were aligned at the driver's eye level, their reflection blinding the user of the rearview mirror. Rem could tell it was bugging the brunette because she kept reaching up to adjust the mirror and deflect the light. It had been about fifteen minutes since his girl had made herself visible to him by leaning over. He swerved a few times, trying to glimpse her face, but his timing was never right. She was always looking the other way or hunched over messing with the radio.

Rem was starting to get frustrated and thought about giving up when he noticed the red and blue lights swirling behind him. Realizing it was him the cop car was trying to wave down, Rem stared sadly at the taillights of the mustang as it sped away and he pulled over. The officer approached the truck slowly and tapped on the door. Rem pushed it open a little.

"Why don't you step out here for me," the officer said.

"Was I speeding, sir?" Rem asked in his best wholesome truck driver voice.

"You were following that other car pretty close, weren't ya?"

"Was I? I guess maybe I was. I've been on the road awhile. I think I was just tired."

"You know, I was following you for quite some time. You were swerving a bit. You been drinking?"

"Uh, no sir. Just tired, I think." Rem rubbed his eyes with heel of his right hand as if to feign fatigue.

The officer eyed him for a few seconds and then shook his head.

"There's a truck stop about five miles down the road. Why don't you stop there and get some sleep?"

"Yeah, good idea. Thanks for the tip." The officer handed back his license and dismissed him with a little wave. Rem turned and dragged his feet back to the truck. He actually felt tired now and just wanted to reach the truck stop.

Five minutes later, he pulled off the highway and parked his truck with all the others in the gravel lot to the left of the building with the sign that advertised clean restrooms, strong coffee and cooking comparable to grandma's. Rem got out of the cab and headed for the well-lit diner, suddenly overcome by the need to relieve himself. The bell above the door clanged as he entered. The place wasn't so much a restaurant as it was a typical gas station with a hamburger joint attached. He kept his head low and headed right for the restrooms. Finally the urinal was in front of him and he let out a big sigh as his bladder emptied. The nasty, little comments on the wall

before him seemed less entertaining than usual. Rem liked to add his own touches in each restroom he visited when traveling, but he just didn't have it in him tonight.

He tugged his zipper back up and exited the restroom still fastening his belt. Over the top of the rows of junk food and cheap souvenirs, Rem saw the back of a girl's head. Her hair was pinned in that newly familiar bun and she was standing beside two other girls. *This is it, it's her*, his mind raced. The blond and brunette were scanning the candy quickly, moving fast down the aisle. But his girl stood staring down at the food that lay before her. Rem walked up next to her, pretending to look for something specific. She paid no attention to him, not even glancing up from the corn nuts selection she was perusing. Her friends were heading for the door and she would be gone any second. He remembered the smile she had given him on the dark highway. He spoke to her.

"Hey there, pretty thing."

The girl slowly raised her chin, allowing her eyes to meet his. The corners of her mouth lifted as if to give him back the smile. Eyes twinkling, she replied.

"No way, fat-ass." Her left hand reached down and grabbed a bag of barbeque corn nuts. She turned to look at him one more time and then walked away.

She was standing in the checkout line
with her friends as Rem walked to the door.
He heard her say,
"They were out of the ranch ones."

Megan Eley

