

FORUM LITERARY MAGAZINE



FORUM

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FORUM

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Ryan Creel

Editor's Note

"And still deeper, the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life, and this is the key to it all."

-Herman Melville, Moby Dick

A Narcissistic fate (or an "Ahab-sistic" one, if we've made it all the way through Melville's masterpiece) easily intimidates; our curiosity, of course, sometimes has trouble taking the hint.

This year's edition of Forum demonstrates a continued yearning for the "key to it all" despite suggestions of impossibility. Like Narcissus, these writers are distracted by vague reflections of self. Their essays grasp at these notions of identity, and with their words and themes, they aim to articulate the presently indiscernible.

James Beaver grapples with racial identity; Cristina Dacchille explores love as an indicator of self. Katie Foster writes on body image, religion, and youth, and Peter Blair thinks golf says a lot about a person. Dayna Hill clarifies the aim, "...a moment cleverly captured. And how I long to be a part of that. To be simply a moment captured, framed and hung on a wall." There is a desire to take unclear reflections of self (whether the reflections

are emotions, theology, interests, et cetera), adjust their focus, and point to the answers.

Some convincingly argue that vanity drives this oversimplified plan of action; finding the "phantom" lies beyond human capability, and man is deluded in his attempt to discover it. No wonder that Narcissus and Ahab met fatal ends. But, can't one find satisfaction apart from clearer focus?

Grasping at the phantom adequately feeds an undaunted curiosity, and perhaps the quest for an answer, more than the answer itself, is the real key. To disregard the joy found in exploration and discussion *is* to mistakenly place a vain importance upon an answer. Unfortunately, Narcissus was frustrated by his unclear images in the water, but it is possible to find satisfaction in speculative discourse. Continued curiosity encourages continued activity; if we have the answer, what else is there left to do?

The authors included in this edition participate in a universal grasping. Participation extends to us as readers, and it seems that by partaking in a universal curiosity, we stumble upon at least one aspect of life's elusive phantom.

Enjoy Forum 2001!

-K. Barker

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DAYNA HILL

The Halls of the Baltimore Museum of Art

I wish I could live in an art gallery. I wish I could've been born into a world where time seems to linger on poised teacups, pirouettes, and curved lines. A time where moments don't exist, but eternity does.

What would I do in such a world? Well, I would begin by walking across Monet's footbridge, where I would stand in the streaming sunlight and watch lily pads dart beneath me. Then I would join the audience and watch as Degas' ballerinas fluttered across the stage. Then I would go and listen to my voice echo through the darkest circles of black paint. I would join Jesus for dinner, and enjoy the last supper that would never really be the last.

"Hey, Jesus," I'd say, "How about we do the dinner thing tomorrow? Same time, same place?"

"Sure thing," Jesus would say.

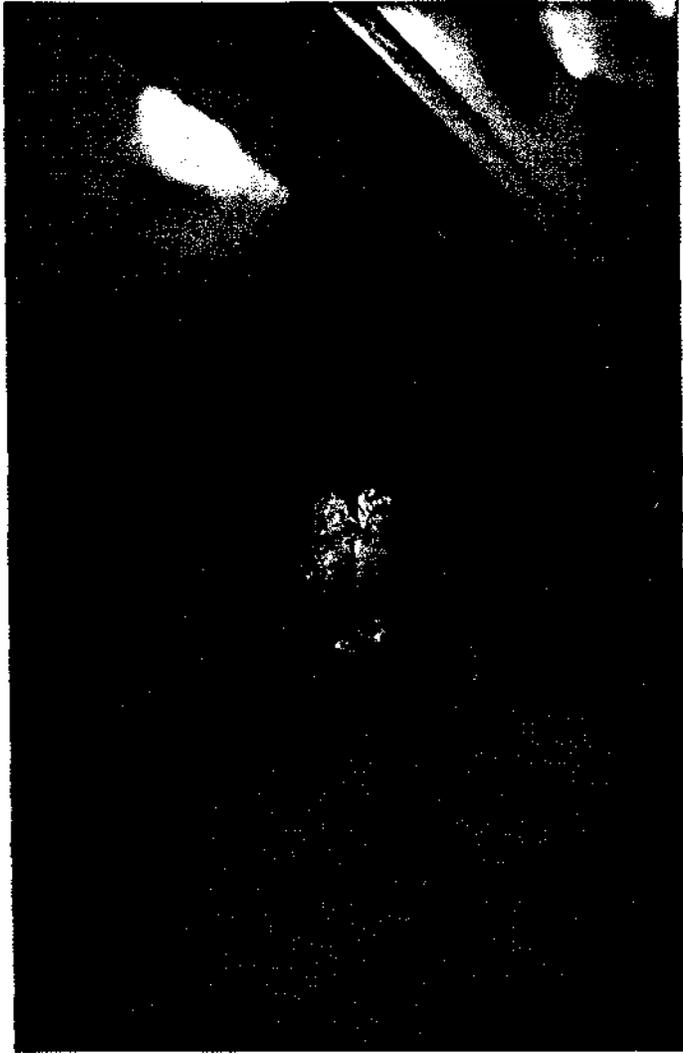
And then finally I would fall asleep to Van Gogh's stars and dream of reality.

I think I would settle myself in a place on the floor where circular walls could encase my dreams as they float outward in my sleep. That way I could never really lose my dreams. I would wake up in the morning and clearly see the paths my mind chose to take that night. I think I would frame these dreams as a reminder of who I once was. I would hang them next to Wyeth's self-portrait, and proclaim them to be a statement of my own self.

Then in the passing of a day, I would walk by them and smile. I would remember what idea inspired the creation that led to such a dream. I would never have to let go of these dreams. The force of reality would not be a physical property in my art gallery. Such an idea would not be created.

Some would complain, I suppose, that I wasn't really living. They would wonder how I could live in silence day and night. I would have to explain to them that my museum is not silent, and that it is actually full of noise. However, only those who are willing to hear it actually can. They can hear the way things are shouting and screaming to be noticed. Battles are being fought, and blood is being shed. The screams of the victims are forever crying out. Flowers are blossoming. Light is flooding out from the tips of their petals. God's sonata of creation is being played in the background. Mothers are cradling their children. Harp strings are being pulled. Loving words are being sung to lullabies.

There is joy in art. Of course there is. There is joy in beauty forever. Paint never fading, ideas never changing, and time never continuing on its dutiful course. Art is a moment, cleverly captured. And how I long to be a part of that. To be simply a moment captured, framed, and hung on a wall. To be declared as something honest, beautiful, and simple, but still to be full of meaning. To be a creation that would never fade. To be the being whose ideas would never change. To be the person whose time would never continue on its dutiful course.



Ryan Creel

JAMES BEAVER

On Satires, Racism, and the World in General

I can say this- it started as a kind of joke. I thought it was funny, strange, and just bizarre at some points. When I say this "joke," I am referring to what later developed into my essay on racism. Basically, the joke started as a radical idea of "killing off all of the races in America in order to end racism. I thought about it at first and said, "No way." No way could I write something so volatile, so daring, on a topic as explosive as racism. I personally feel that the racism issue in America is a powder keg. Most people want to "solve" it or take different approaches at understanding it, but we have to be careful not to offend anybody or come too close. Nobody likes to light matches next to dynamite.

Where can we find the answer then? How could I write something different? Something new? God knows it is easy for me, as a white male from South Jersey, to talk about how we should all treat each other fairly. I think of who I really am now, since I have written the essay. The answer is quite clear to me: I am comfortably white- I have experienced nothing directly that has led me to understand racism better. By comfortably white I mean that I have lived in a sheltered home- the "typical" white American home. By comfortable I mean that I never have had to sit in the back of a bus, never have had difficulty hailing a cab, and never have been mocked for slanted eyes (because I have "normal eyes"). I seem to always be in the majority, never really feeling outwardly different.

Racism, for me, is an issue- not a slap in the face; that is, it has never hit me. As part of the white majority in the United States, I have always observed how racism simply flies above me and always lands on "someone else." In fact, racism never fails to direct itself toward that "someone else," and not me. Not a white child from New Jersey. I feel typically white. Maybe I am wrong, but this is the feeling I had when I searched for something to write on racism. How could I write about this issue? I might have seen it, but I have never felt it or touched it (I have not delivered racist remarks nor been hit with them). I searched for ideas, but in the back of my mind I only discovered emptiness. I felt as if anything I could write would not dive into the problem- it would just float on the surface for me (and the reader for that matter).

Well, I could offer my suggestion on how I think we should "solve" the problem. Oh, here's a good one- let all the ethnic groups get together for a Sunday night dinner, talk, and become friends. Great. Surely, if I can think it and do it, we all should be able to come together. I think that it is obviously not so simple. Can you see what I mean? Do you know where I am coming from? If I suggested something like this, I would end up choking on the plastic of my own words and phrases. It would be so fake; even worse, it would be so simplistic.

So there it is- my justification for putting the "crazy joke" onto paper. Something different, I thought. The joke itself made me chuckle in an unsettling manner- was it really humorous? I decided that I would slowly show how to destroy the physical differences between people in order to attain racial harmony. That was not the funny part, though. The real humor, I thought, existed in the idea that no one would be left at the end of the plan. The destruction of all races would lead to an empty world, but racial harmony would be achieved. Now that I think about it, it may not be so funny. If that is the only way to achieve racial harmony on earth than I am certainly not laughing. But I was laughing before I wrote this essay, and instead of questioning the logic behind it, I spent many restless nights trying to determine how I could do it.

One of these nights, I remembered Jonathan Swift's "A

Modest Proposal"- the satire in which he proposes that the English make use of Irish babies as wholesome entrees. That was it. That was enough for me. A satire. A fresh perspective. Something different. Something that would knock the reader off his or her feet.

With this idea of writing a satire in a similar manner as Swift's work, I sat down at my computer around eight o'clock on a Thursday night. I had written nothing on paper yet, but then I guess that I had never intended to do so. The plastic letters on the keyboard were perfect pieces to convey my thoughts. In fact, I could not write the essay on paper first... writing with ink on paper to me is like a pouring of my soul, but this was not my "soul" speaking in the essay. So, I began to plunk away at the keyboard with deliberate mechanical clarity.

My mind wandered and my imagination embraced my fingertips. With Machiavellian coldness, I typed non-stop for hours on my modest proposal for the nineties. It developed into a horrible, detailed account of murder, imprisonment, and destruction of the human race. It is certainly disturbing to think just how easy it was for me to write this essay. On paper, my words actually appeared incredibly sincere, and the joke began to seem quite plausible, as if the author was presenting his true feelings on every page. I did not want the reader to brush it off as a mere joke, though. I wanted it to be engaging and to make the reader think at each point. When finished reading, the reader should realize that the proposal as a whole was anything but modest.

As for the proposal itself, it had two distinct parts. In the first part, I discussed the destruction of half the population of all races in the lower class. I continually used the wording "to better" to describe how I wanted to improve the situation of racism in America. I did not want to jump out and scream, "Kill, kill, kill; imprison; slaughter; murder; destroy." In my essay, "better" had the same meaning as those harsh words, but it seemed a bit softer in its tone. I stated the following:

The term "better" is quite ambiguous and can take on various meanings. I define "to better" as

James Beaver

improving the overall society in any way possible. By "bettering" the conditions of a certain people within the society, we can contribute to the health of the nation. At the same time we can be directed towards a goal of racial harmony. In effect, I am asking for an extreme betterment, or extinguishing, of about fifty percent of the lower class population (this immediately would help to alleviate the hunger issue). As for the other fifty percent, a less extreme betterment should be made (for to better "extremely" this group as a whole would cause a loss in the valuable works and services they provide). They should be confined in various places across the nation and forced to provide services for the country and the persons within the country.

Upon finishing the first phase of the proposal, I proceeded to discuss the second phase's dynamics. In this phase, I proposed to drastically reduce differences between the ethnic groups. I wrote, unnerved at the horror I had conjured in my mind, and described the killing of ethnic groups as necessary to lessen racial differences. For instance, I observed the trait of skin color and proposed that all those with obvious skin color differences be destroyed- dark and light. I read the list of people who would have to be "extremely bettered" in this manner. It read as follows:

The following (ethnic groups or descendents of the groups named) would all need to be eradicated, or extremely bettered due to their skin colors being too dark or too light: Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Jews, South Africans, Germans, Scandinavians, South Pacific Islanders, Caribbean Islanders, Hawaiian Islanders, Canadians, Vikings, Portuguese, Greeks, Middle Eastern peoples, Turks, Russians, Eastern Europeans, Western Europeans, Alaskan Eskimos, Australians, and all from the continent of South America.

After I had written the list into the essay, I laughed. Tell me that you are not laughing at least a little. Tell me that this is

not humorous. Isn't it obvious that no one would be left? I did think it was incredibly humorous, but perhaps a brash, white kid from New Jersey does not understand it all. I had little time to consider this; I was too caught up in the construct of the essay.

I finished the essay after this second phase, feeling comfortable that I had achieved my goal (but not really knowing what the goal was). I smiled and added a comment of hope at the close of the essay, which I inserted in order to clarify that the essay was indeed a satire. After all, I still felt hope on the matter of racism. This close was remarkably easy for me to write, as was the whole paper. Looking back now, I realize that the paper did not really challenge me in any way. After all, it had been merely a joke to me.

The test came Tuesday morning, the day of the workshop with my professor and the other students. What would the others think of this proposal? Would they understand what I was trying to accomplish? Would they laugh? My uncertainty in the early morning melted as the sun rose, and I even walked up the stairs to the third floor workshop room with an air of confidence. I met the other students outside the room, and we all greeted each other. There was a moment of brief silence while we stood waiting for the workshop to begin. Mike broke the silence, looking up at me and saying, "You're crazy" (referring to my plan for killing various races). I agreed. After all, I had been out on a limb. Soon after Mike's comment, the workshop began. We all entered the room and took our seats (later I discovered that he refused to sit next to me because of the essay). We reviewed the other essays, analyzing and commenting on each work, until finally, we reached mine- the last one to be reviewed.

Mike was losing a battle with silence and could not hold back his emotions. "Wow!" he breathed. That was the most he could say of his true feelings about the paper though. After this, he basically stumbled with his words as he went through the motions of critiquing the work. He offered some encouragement, pointed out some sentence structure errors, but seemed altogether confused. He kept emphasizing that it seemed extremely radical. I nodded in agreement, still feeling confident about the piece. Elizabeth followed Mike in the process. She also

expressed some confusion. Then, she stated that my proposal had some faults and might not really solve racism.

Wait a minute. Not really solve racism? But it was not meant to be real. This was, in its essence, a joke- not real. They all did know it was a joke, right? "Hold on," I said staring at the _ other students. "You all do realize this is a joke, right?" Following this statement, they all let out sighs of relief and smiled emphatically at me. The tension in the room, which I had not noticed until this point, dissipated quickly. They all relaxed and let down their guards, feeling safer that a sadist was not among them. Each student felt comfortable with me again and laughed at the misunderstanding.

Walking out of the workshop, I felt no such comfort. In fact, I was extremely agitated and uneasy. How had they missed the point? How did I not make it clear? The satire, the irony- it was all there in the paper. Still, each student had thought my words to be sincere. I shuddered as I walked towards the cafeteria. Strangely, the shuddering turned into bizarre laughter. And I kept on laughing, for the entire day. Even into the night I laughed- at myself, at their expressions of horror reading my paper, at the world in general.

The world? Has it gotten that bad? Has our world become so insane that the bizarre cannot be distinguished from the norm? Has racism itself become what we consider normal? I am not about to try to answer these questions. I can only imagine an outside observer looking down from the heavens and seeing the insanity of it all- burning crosses, church bombings, lynching. Surely, human beings should not consider this normal. Is it not bizarre? Furthermore, what would this outside observer think about the stories covered in the news headlines? We read the newspaper every day and become accustomed to it all. We think of the Holocaust as horrific and inconceivable, yet we sit and eat dinner in front of a news program describing the situation in Bosnia, or at least I have. In my essay, I described how I wanted to eradicate racism by "cleansing" America and destroying certain races. From my television set, I have seen the torture chambers in the former Bosnian hospital, the rotting corpses in the green fields alongside the road, and the blank expressions of the

masses as they hobbled along the muddy paths in endless lines. This is the reality of ethnic cleansing, so similar to the "bettering" I had described in my proposal. This cannot be something normal, can it? And yet it exists in our world; it is reality. Are we living the satire?

The comments written in the margins from the professor and the students only seemed to confirm my fear that my proposal was not so far from reality as I had thought. Worst of all, some comments show how I was even naive (isn't that a paradox- a naïve satirist?). I learned that my suggestions, in many cases, were not so original as I had believed. For example, the first phase of my proposal described the imprisonment of fifty percent of the lower class to provide services for the country. I read a comment beside this paragraph: "Is that not like the prison system?" I had not considered my idea as being similar to the prison system, but it was not long until I located information that confirmed the truth of this matter. An article entitled, "The Corporate Prison: The Production of Crime and the Sale of Discipline" by Karyl K. Kicenski states the following:

Within the booming business of privatization, the benefits and popularity of "owning" prison labor are great. The privatization of prison institutions serves as a contemporary illustration of the ends to which the "failure" of disciplining certain classes has successfully and functionally been put. The "failure" of the prison now pointedly and explicitly serves private corporate interests which transfers the handling of illegalities into their exploitation on behalf of profit. These profits are more than viable when inmates, who often earn between \$0.23 and \$1.15 an hour, have as their only competition foreign-based labor (who in some ways are becoming more costly to utilize) who have been exploited by corporate entities for decades on the basis of some of the same advantages offered by prison inmates: a non-unionized workforce, no minimum wage, no benefits, no healthcare, no Worker's Compensation, and finally, no commitment to employment longer than is advantageous to a clear profit margin.

Unknowingly, I had more or less described this privatization of prison systems and even the corporate benefits from the imprisonment of the lower class when I recommended the imprisonment of the lower class to get them out of the way.

And what about segregation and certain aspects of schooling? Aren't many people confined to certain areas merely to have them out of the way? In schools, the less capable are placed in rooms away from the others. Or worse, they are placed in special schools. I did not need to look too far for an example of this. My friend's brother basically had been forced to attend a special school because he did not meet the "academic standards" of the public school. And even when I was young, I remember waiting at the bus stop and laughing along with the other children as the "retard bus" passed, transporting the different children to the "retard school." These people have been essentially tossed aside and moved out of the way of the majority.

Likewise, segregation in the nation has confined certain ethnic groups, especially African-Americans, to ghettos, projects, backs of buses, etc. Yet those segregated (and those sent to special schools) still provide service for the nation. They are citizens, right? But "we the people" have separated those less capable in school. And "we the people" had written laws enforcing segregation of African-Americans until the late 1960s. This is the truth, not a satire.

This is a frightening fact for me, a sheltered boy from New Jersey. The words of the essay, in fact, are not a joke at all. In light of this, it is easy for me to understand how the other students misunderstood my essay. Many of the imaginative ideas I had suggested exist in our world. It was I who did not understand what I had written. I did not flinch when I wrote this cold, satirical piece. It did not frighten me then. But I am frightened now. The essay, the satire, is alive and real. I wrote it and read it feeling extremely comfortable that it was a good essay. Now, I read it, and my comfort level is shattered.

This is indeed a powerful thing- the truth, that is. And it is true that the bizarre is very real and present in our world. Any proposal I can think of may not be adequate when juxtaposed with the events of history. We have witnessed far more terrible

proposals, and I fear what we may have to witness in the future.

I intended my essay to end with an emphasis on hope- to show that we must have hope in order to avoid resorting to proposals such as mine. But how could I discuss hope without really understanding the truth in the surrounding world? Hope without truth is for the comfortable. And the comfortable become complacent in their hopes. No, that type of hope is simple and easy to hold in your hands, but it is blind hope. I offer no such kind of optimism now as I did at the conclusion of my modest proposal. I have seen, and I admit to be scared. And maybe we all should see and be a little more afraid and a little less comfortable. Maybe it is what we do with this fear that can actually lead us to a better future. But what do I really know? For now, I'll keep hope in my pocket and truth by my side. And I'll pray for the day when someone may read my words and laugh at them, thinking of the essay as a joke- something inconceivable, unimaginable. It is not possible to read my essay as such now, though. Not now.



Ryan Creel

Pizza Love and Other Sacrileges

My first day of junior high, I fell in love. His name was Anthony. He had big brown eyes, adorable dimples and a smile that made me melt. That's all I really remember about him; or maybe that's all I ever knew. Regardless, I still thought about Anthony every night as I lay trying to fall asleep, about how cool he was and how cool I'd be if I were his girlfriend. All I wanted was for him to ask me out.

Surprising as it may be to some, the ever-popular Anthony never asked me (the class nerd) out (I know, I was shocked too). Instead, he asked out one of my best friends, and they went out for three weeks, which, to a seventh grader, is longer than forever! Well, anyway, they broke up, and five days later I fell in love with Ryan, the second most popular boy in my class. Eventually, though, Ryan asked out one of my best friends (the same one- I hated her!), and I discovered Todd.

And so the year went. I kept picking boys I wanted to go out with, and they kept passing me over for other girls. One day, I told my friend Jamie that, at this point in the year, I just wanted a boyfriend- I didn't care who he was.

That afternoon, Jamie was on the phone with Trish, and told her what I said. Trish went to the little league game that night and talked about it with Anthony. Anthony told Lina, Lina told Ryan, and eventually, through some distorted link, Frankie Giordano found out.

Frankie Giordano was the boy who sat in the back of the classroom picking his nose. You know the one. There's one in every class. They are really sweet, smart and interesting; but the fact remains that they pick their nose. And that makes them completely undatable. So when Frankie asked me out that night on the phone, it should surprise no one that I said no. I mean, come on- even I had standards.

Unfortunately, I didn't choose my words of rejection very tactfully. I crushed the poor kid. He spent an hour on the phone with me, crying and saying, "But Cristina- I really love you!" Since I did not have a response to this completely unexpected emotional outburst, I did what any self-respecting thirteen year old would have done- I hung up, not sure if the sound I heard was the click of the phone hanging up or the shatter of Frankie's heart breaking.

Some of you (especially the men among you) may be rolling your eyes at the moment, knowing full well that this is going to be one of those essays about first kisses and unrequited love and rejection. Guess again, boys (and you too, ladies!). No, I told you this story for one reason and one reason only: to demonstrate to you the way people so commonly abuse the word love. Have you ever noticed that any time people like something, even just a little bit, they feel the need to say they love it? "I loved that movie!" "Ohmygod, I am in love with that dress!" "I love the smell of white-out and permanent markers." Well, okay, maybe that last one is just me; but you get my point. People take the word love lightly. Once a word reserved for personal relationships and strong feelings of the heart ("How do I love thee, let me count the ways..."), love has become a word most commonly used to describe the way we feel towards pizza and chocolate ice cream.

While there is nothing wrong with pizza love in and of itself, it is my belief that if the object of your affection is incapable of caring for you back (such as a slice with pepperoni and mushrooms), then what you're feeling is not love. Then again, even if the object of your affection *is* capable of loving you back, it might still not be love. I mean, how many times a day do you say "I love you" to someone? I know I do it constantly, and so do

the people around me.

Last Saturday night, I was at a party with some friends. People who had a large supply of, *ahem*, alcoholic beverages were throwing this particular gathering. Many of the guests present were consuming large amounts of these beverages (except me, of course), and a number of them were becoming quite intoxicated. One boy came up to me, looked me deep in the eyes and said, "Katie, I love you." Then he puked all over my shoes. Now, my name is not Katie, number one. Number two, well, he vomited. I'm guessing on the basis of these two clues that his love for me wasn't exactly soul consuming.



Leah Kozy

Situations like these don't surprise many people. And yet, something deep down inside of us tells us that they should probably shock us out of our own skin. "I love you" isn't a phrase that should be used on just anybody... or is it? The answer to this question depends on what your definition of love is. If you're still in a junior high mentality, and to you, love is simply admiring big brown eyes and melting under the heat of a warm smile, then sure, it's okay to use it whenever you feel like it. Use it on your mom, your dad, your friends, your teacher- hell, use it on the mailman, it doesn't matter. If, however, you've grown in your understanding of the heart, and you believe (as I do) that love goes deeper than that, then maybe you should think

twice before you tell the fry guy at McDonald's how much you love him just because of his cool skull and crossbones tattoo.

If you're going to start taking those three little words more seriously, it's important to understand what you mean when you say them. In other words, you have to define love. Sound impossible? It's not; but it is rather broad. Every corner you turn, every web page you click on and every book you open has its own definition of love. So which one is right? That, my friend, is something you have to decide for yourself. Whether it comes from someone else or from you does not matter- what matters is that you believe in it.

My definition of love is not my own. It comes from the writer/philosopher Plato, and can be found in the dialogue, The Symposium. In The Symposium, several different men discuss (you guessed it) love. One of the speakers in the dialogue, Aristophanes, describes love through a myth. He says that when the gods first created human beings, they were created in such a way that each body was actually composed of two people, a male and a female. For reasons too long to discuss here, the gods decided that this was a bad idea, and sawed each person in half, creating two bodies from one soul, and leaving both bodies, male and female, in need of completion.

Aristophanes goes on to say that each person spends his entire life attempting to complete himself through his relationships with others. When finally the person stumbles upon "his other half," he is complete; he is in love. Love, therefore, is reserved for one person and is most extraordinary and unique in nature. Much like a fingerprint or a DNA sample, Aristophanes believed that whom you love identified quite precisely who you are.

I am aware that this definition of love is narrow. It applies only to romantic love, between a man and a woman, and it allows only for a person to have one "true" love in his lifetime. While these restrictions are certainly in need of correction (what about love between two friends? or a mother and a daughter? or a person and his God?), it is a beautiful story, and a good definition when attempting to explain the sacredness of the words "I love you."

The other definition of love that I tend to use is by Alexander Smith, and is a bit broader in its interpretation. Smith defines love as "the discovery of ourselves in another, and the delight in that recognition." For me, this definition takes Aristophanes' explanation and brings it a step further. In Aristophanes' definition, love is the completion of yourself in another person. In Smith's, it is the finding of yourself in another person and the joy of that discovery. The two combine very easily to form my own definition of love. That is, recognizing in someone else a quality you yourself lack, and through that recognition, maturing and growing into that quality yourself; *or*, discovering in someone else a quality that you yourself have and never appreciated, and, through that discovery, increasing your own self-knowledge.

No matter which part of my definition you use, love is not just some feeling floating around up there in the air. It is not all pink hearts and flowers, nor does it have anything to do with pizza. Love is real. It is not easy, nor is it always fun. In fact, sometimes, love can be downright nitty-gritty and hard to deal with.

My mother and I have always had a hard time getting along. I love her to death, but when I was little, I used to think she was out of her mind. Really. I thought that one day, men in white jackets were going to come to our house and take her away. This thought was especially prominent in my mind while driving with her.

You see, my mom would always have the radio on in the car when she drove my little brothers and me back and forth to school. She kept the radio on really low; that is, until one of her favorite songs came on. Then she would turn it up so loud the doors would shake. I would have been fine if the songs were "cool" (and by that, I mean Paula Abdul or New Kids on the Block, or whatever it was I thought was so great during the late 80s and early 90s). But it wasn't cool. It was 101.1 CBS FM- the oldies station. It was mortifying. I would slouch down in the seat, and cover my eyes, hoping no one would see me, that no one would know that the lunatic driving the station wagon was (gulp) my mother.

When my mom saw me do that, her playful nature would not just let me lay down and die in peace. No, that's when she started making the car dance. Yes, I said dance. She would take this route where there were never any other cars, and make the car do these little swerves. Then she'd yell back at me that the car was dancing, that I should be dancing too. I just slumped further down in my seat and prayed we would get home soon, before anyone saw me in this nut-mobile.

Most people would not think that this story has anything to do with love. I, however, disagree. In fact, to me, this is the perfect example of love as a force of self-recognition and appreciation. How, you ask? Relax, I'm getting there (remember: "Love is patient...").

A few weeks ago I went home for a weekend to see one of my little brother's big soccer games. The game was forty minutes away from my house, and I did not want to drive there alone. So, I piled my other little brother and my boyfriend into our family car (now a mini-van), and started out on what ended up being a very long trip. We got caught in an hour's worth of traffic. Frustrated, I began flipping through the radio stations. I passed 101.1 FM quickly, only to go back after hearing a snippet of "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me." I love that song. A smile immediately flew onto my face. I turned the radio on as loud as it would go, and began singing and dancing at the top of my lungs. After about a minute of that, I looked over to see my boyfriend and my brother sinking lower and lower in their seats. Puzzled, I began to try to make them smile too. Without even realizing what I was doing, I made the car dance, using the brakes to match the beat of the song. They still thought I was out of my mind, and soon I forgot about them. I was happy and I was having fun. Most importantly, I was making the most out of a difficult situation, something that my far too serious eighteen-going-on-fifty personality is almost never able to do.

Hours later, safely situated on my couch, far away from New Jersey rush hour hell, I remembered my childhood driving experiences with my mother. Looking back, I realized that my mom was not crazy; she was just trying to be herself, something that in recent years I have grown to appreciate about her. Her

playfulness, her carefree attitude and her young-at-heart spirit are all qualities that play a part in my love for her. And through this love, I was finally able to recognize a part of me that was lacking in development: my playful side, my ability to have fun doing anything. I saw it alive and in color through her actions, and no matter how crazy they seemed to me at the time, I recognized them later as qualities I wanted, and in fact needed to have. I grew. I changed. And I enjoyed every minute of it.

That, to me, is love. Finding missing parts of yourself in someone else. Appreciating who you are because of the people you love. Growing. Maturing. Changing. And that definition, unlike Aristophanes', fits almost every kind of love. With this definition, it is possible to love anyone: family, friends, and the poverty-stricken alike.

My friend Maria used to work at a soup kitchen near my house. One night we got into one of those deep philosophical conversations, and she admitted to me that she never knew who she was before she began working there. I asked her how that could be; I mean, how do you not know who you are? And she answered something to the effect of, "Cristina, all my life I have defined myself by the things I have: what clothes I wear, what CDs I listen to, what makeup I use. Meeting people who have nothing changed that because they still, despite their poverty, know who they are. And to me, that means I must not know who I am. Because right now, if everything I had suddenly got taken away from me, I wouldn't think very highly of myself."

Now, most people wouldn't say that Maria "loved" the people at the shelter, but I would like to argue that she *did* love them. She recognized something in them that she herself lacked: self-knowledge. And because of that recognition, she was motivated to dig deeper until she discovered just who she was. That is a form of love. That is just as sacred and inspirational as the love between a mother and a daughter: it is love between a person and her fellow man.

Another type of love that is commonly overlooked is the love of a higher being. I myself am Catholic. I believe that there is a God, and that He is up there somewhere, watching all that I do, and even aiding me in my journey through life. I also believe

that this God loves me. Why? Because He created me in His image. He sees in me all sorts of great qualities, and enjoys seeing me use them for His good. His love is parental in its nature.

Many people who have strong spiritual beliefs use the word "love" to describe how they feel about their God or how their God feels about them. This isn't wrong because it is something they believe deeply in. They are not just flippantly using the word; they mean it. And that's all that matters. Anyone who believes that what they are feeling is indeed love cannot be wrong. The problem comes when people who don't genuinely mean it use the word on people who do. That is a dangerous situation, one in which both people end up getting hurt. That's what happened with Chris and me.

I met Chris on a retreat that I went on a few years back. He was having a lot of problems, and I spent much of my weekend just talking with him. We spent that entire weekend together, comfortable in our new friendship and each happy to have found a confidante. When the retreat was over, and we returned home, we continued to talk to each other and grow in our friendship. Eventually, as happens with many boy-girl friendships, we both started to become attracted to each other. For the first month or two, I was in heaven. I had a boyfriend who was not only funny and cute and attractive, but who was also one of my closest friends. I thought that life couldn't get any better. Then the inevitable happened. He said it.

We were on the phone, talking about nothing at all, when all of a sudden, out of the blue, he blurted it out.

"I love you."

"What?"

"I love you."

I twisted the phone cord nervously. The moment of truth. Would I be able to stick to my own principles? Would I say it, even though I didn't mean it? What would happen if I said it? Worse, what would happen if I didn't? He'll think I don't like him, and I do.

"I love you too."

And with those four little words, I ruined a great friendship. Because eventually, Chris realized that I didn't love him.

My feelings, while wonderful, were just not that strong. He was not "my other half and I knew it. And so did he. And the day he realized it was the day he broke up with me, and the last day I spoke to him. He was hurt, angry and feeling incredibly embarrassed and humiliated. I don't blame him for not wanting to talk to me. I blame myself and my inability to be honest about my feelings and to think before using words so powerful when I didn't mean them.

The words "I love you" are three of the most dangerous words in the English language. Playing around with them when discussing food, hobbies and other frivolities is, in a way, irreverent because, by doing so, you are showing that you have no respect for the sacredness of love. Then again, saying them when you don't mean them, like I did with Chris, shows that you don't have the courage to really use the words correctly.

We all use and abuse the word love daily. I'm not saying that this is the worst thing anyone could have ever done. I'm not even saying that it is an easy habit to break. What I am saying is that I believe in love between two people- true love, without pepperoni or anything. And my beliefs are so strong that I try not to abuse the phrase "I love you." Through the vastness of the English language, the feat is actually possible. There are the words "like" and "care about," "lust" and "passion," "worship" and "adore," "compassion" and "understanding." With so many words to choose from, there is no need to say "love" that often. By using alternative expressions, you restrict love, giving it a certain level of importance. Kind of like that good silverware your mom has. Your mom would kill you if you ever tried to fool around with it. Why? Because it's worth its weight in sterling, it's more important to her than her own arm, and (to your mother) it's more sacred than holy water on Easter Sunday. You would never use it on any old Monday. You would never use it with just any old people. And, most importantly, you would never use it for any old pizza.

Pipe Smoke and Piano Tunes

It's an eight-hour drive to my grandmother's house in Suffield, Connecticut. My family has learned to endure this hardship with little to no complaining over the years. But we always breathe a sigh of relief when we spot the small gas station on the corner of River Boulevard, the landmark indicating that Gramma's towering white Colonial, with its black shutters and maroon front door, is just seconds down the road. The short stretch that follows has always been my favorite part of the ride—first, the sight of the tree-speckled hillside falling steeply into the Connecticut River on the right, and then to the left, the picturesque residences with their stately New England architecture and pruned front lawns. And then *we finally* make it to number 1007, pull into the driveway, and stretch our legs.

The smell hits us as soon as we make our lazy way through the mudroom to the kitchen. Gramma's Gatlinburlier pipe. The same smell that lingers in our clothes when we go home, and arrives in the mail along with the packages she sends. Before my grandfather passed away, it was hard to tell whether it was her pipe or his cigars we were smelling. But the aroma of fine tobacco has always been there, saturating the air and clinging to the upholstered furniture. I have always enjoyed the smell. It reminds me of what a unique and independent person my grandmother is. In all my life, I have never encountered another woman brave enough to smoke a pipe, or one with any desire to do so.

Kathleen Ryan

Gramma has never had any trouble disregarding social norms. She is content with living for herself. She doesn't feel the need to impress anyone because she enjoys her own company. In her bathroom, a poem by Jenny Joseph is framed, hanging on the wall by the door. "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple, With a red hat that doesn't go and doesn't suit me. And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves, And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter...I shall go out in my slippers in the rain, And pick the flowers in other people's gardens. And learn to spit..." That's my grandmother. She's a rebel. She is always sitting in the same wobbly wooden chair in the kitchen when we arrive. It creaks along with the door as she hoists herself up off the seat and greets us with her brightest smile. She gives the best hugs. Her gray head fits perfectly over my shoulder as she squeezes some life back into me after such a long ride. She is so happy to see us.

Usually after about five minutes of it's-so-good-to-see-you and you-look-good-have-you-lost-weight, I sneak into the great room where my grandmother keeps her Yamaha piano, and sit down to play. It is my favorite room in the house, with its pink carpeting and cathedral ceilings that make it seem so much bigger than it is. The acoustics in the great room are marvelous. The way the notes play off the high, sloping ceiling makes her small studio piano sound like a grand. Sometimes my grandmother will dance slowly into the room and hum along to the tune I am playing. My mother tells me that Gramma played beautifully before arthritis got the best of her hands and cataracts got the best of her eyes. I can tell that it is important to her that I love to play. And she encourages me with pointers on how to crescendo at this crucial point, or lets me know that I should be playing that phrase with more staccato. I look forward to playing her piano as soon as we leave for her house. Once I sit down I don't stop until one of my brothers turns on the television and the competition for airwaves is no longer worth it. Or when one of my cousins strolls into the room and we have to start the greeting process all over again.

There is always a handful of relatives stopping by during our visits. A few times my grandmother has attempted to host a

full-fledged family reunion in the backyard, complete with catering, and once, a magician. There are far too many of us for any such event to run smoothly, or for anyone to feel relaxed enough to want to attend another. So during the summer months my grandmother's house serves as the family time-share, and we all end up staying in Connecticut with her for at least a few days. My aunts and uncles who live closest will often come by for brunch, or a card game, or to play catch-up with their siblings for awhile. When everyone leaves, Gramma always looks exhausted and a little relieved to have her house back to herself again. But she clearly enjoys the opportunities she gets to mother her children and to play the role of "wise old woman" for her grandchildren.

Not too long ago, my Aunt Kate decided to move back to Connecticut to be closer to Gramma in her old age. For about a year, she shared the house with my grandmother, along with my Uncle Bruce and my cousin Sarah. While they looked for work and built a house of their own a few miles away, staying at Gramma's was convenient. The few times that my family visited during that year, the house felt changed to me. Every room seemed more lived-in, and less like it belonged to my grandmother. There was a copy of *Seventeen* lying on the coffee table, in place of the latest issue from the subscription to *Yankee Magazine* Gramma makes sure to renew each year. Yum Yum and Buttercup, my grandmother's striped tabby cats, were ignored in the presence of my cousin's two basset hounds. My younger cousins found puppies far more exciting to play with than ten-year-old cats. Normally, we spent our visits watching television and playing the tattered old MAD Magazine board game my grandmother keeps in the hall closet. But having someone our own age around offered my brothers and me many more interesting things to do. The smell of the pipe faded, and was replaced by that of Uncle Bruce's cologne and Aunt Kate's cigarettes. I missed the old smell terribly. It wasn't my grandmother's house anymore. The routine had changed.

My grandmother was not herself. Her little comforts had been displaced. Other people sat in her wobbly wooden chair. And the heat she liked to keep on year-round had to be turned off during the summer. She had to be considerate of other

Kathleen Ryan

routines. Gramma wasn't as excited to have us visiting and seemed more relieved than usual when it was time for us to go. She missed her peace and quiet.

Finally, Aunt Katie's family moved into their new home and took all the changes they had made with them. The last few times we've been to Suffield, it has seemed as though there had never been anyone sharing the house with Gramma—everything is back in its original spot, and the undisturbed quality of life has returned to the place once more. But now, the routine will change again. Last spring, my grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer.

I haven't been back to Connecticut since learning of my grandmother's illness, and the thought of it scares me a little. Everything I have loved about our visits is going to mean something entirely different to me from now on. The place has already changed dramatically in my mind. Even now, I can feel my stomach turning at the stench of her pipe greeting me at the kitchen door. I have grown to hate the smell of the smoke that has turned my grandmother's lungs black and made her feel miserable. I am glad, now, to have Aunt Kate so close by, on-call in case of emergencies.

My grandmother decided to give me her Yamaha in August. My father made the trip up, and had a very difficult time trying to fit her prized piano into the back of his Ford Explorer. Gramma needed the space in the great room for a bed, so she wouldn't have to fight the stairs every night before going to sleep. I am thrilled to have the piano, but now it sits against the long wall in our basement. The thick green carpet soaks up the notes, and the sound just isn't the same. The smell of pipe tobacco is stuck to the wood.

PETER BLAIR

Plop!

*This is the substance of our Plot-
For those who play the Perfect Shot,
There are ten thousand who do not.*

-Grantland Rice ¹

"Foooooore!" The echo of my voice can be heard through the green fairways of Stone E. Lea Country Club as my ball lands on the wrong green.

"Oh well... there's always next hole," shouts my partner Murph, whose ball is lying 250 yards away in the center of the first fairway.

"Easy for you to say." I can tell that it's going to be a long day.

As we walk away from the tee and I walk through the woods to find my ball, I begin to think. Why exactly do I love golf so much? I'm really not very good. I've been playing for seven years now, and I have yet to show any drastic signs of improvement. It's looking now like I never will. I'm starting to lose hope. But, I'm still out here, and it's certainly not the \$25.00 green fees every single time I want to play a round.

I look through the dark green rows of pine and oak at Murph, who is smiling from ear to ear. "I'd like to wipe that smile right off his face," I think as I find my ball on the next fair-

way and line up to hit my shot. Silence. I pull the club back and swing as hard as I can only to have the ball skim 100 yards along the ground, bounce off a rock, and land smack in the center of the green. Just as I planned! I look over and see Murph laughing hysterically.

"Hey, no one's taking pictures!" I shout.

"You should be thankful no one's taking pictures," he calls back.

I finally hit a shot with a good result, and it looks anything but pretty. I'm certainly no Tiger Woods, but I'm still out here; I'm still trying. Again I ask myself, "Why?"

Most of my friends think golf is pointless. They tell me that it's a waste of energy. My friend Alex says, "It's stupid. Such a waste of time. You spend 3 hours of the day walking around, bullshitting, and about 15 minutes actually hitting a golf ball. And it costs an arm and a leg. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid." Alex used to be a golfer himself. He wasn't very good either; I suspect that's why he feels this way. Popular comedian George Carlin once said, "Watching golf is about as exciting as watching two flies have sex." He's obviously not a golfer. A golfer would realize that there's more to golf than the simple art of hitting the golf ball and more than merely walking around a golf course for three hours. Golf is about fellowship and camaraderie and building relationships.

According to my dad, "Nothing beats taking a day off from work to hit the golf course with your friends. We always seem to learn new things about each other and the winner always buys everyone else a round of drinks." According to author John Updike, "Golf expresses the man, as every weekend foursome knows." ² They are both right: golf can teach us a lot about each other and about ourselves. Even though Murph may be my opponent and, on the outside, I'm rooting against him, something inside of me still feels happy for him when he succeeds. We can't look at golf as being a battle between the two of us, because ultimately we both have the same goal: not conquering each other, but conquering the golf course itself.

Conquering the golf course requires creativity. I can't

even begin to tell how many times my ball had been stuck against a tree, or under a branch, or buried in a bunker, with almost no hopes of hitting a great shot. But I've never given up or picked my ball up. I've always used my imagination to create a shot that would meet my needs. Golf has helped me realize that I can be creative. I remember a few years ago, when I was out on this same golf course. My ball was lying right up against a tree, right where my body would ordinarily be to hit the shot. Instead of pitching out or dropping the ball away from the tree, I pondered for a moment, and picked up my putter. I stood on the opposite side of the ball, as though I was left-handed. I pulled back and — and using the backhand side of the putter- forced the ball about 80 yards up the fairway, just short of the hole.

Now I've finally reached the green. I'm here in two shots and this is Par 4, so I have two putts to try to make par. I notice that my ball is lying only 20 feet away from the hole, so I try to take my time. I bend down, line up my putt, and concentrate. I visualize the ball falling right into the bottom of the hole, and I imagine the plop I will hear as it falls in. I stand over the ball, watching it intently. I pull the putter back slowly, pause, and swing at the ball harder than I had planned, sending the ball rolling another 20 feet past the hole.

"Son of a —" I begin to scream.

"Shh!" Murph reminds me to keep quiet.

"Why?" I ask him, "Why me?"

"Don't worry. We've got 17 more holes to play," he replies. "Don't get yourself upset now."

As I step back to gather myself, Murph steps up to make his putt. His ball is lying about 5 feet from the hole in perfect position. With seemingly no effort, he steps right up to the ball and knocks it into the hole. I hear it strike the bottom! "Plop!" That was supposed to be my sound. Instead, now I am struggling to make par. If I miss this shot, I won't be able to let myself live it down. There is no worse feeling than the discontent of working hard only to have your goal elude you. At the same time, playing well is rewarding because there is nothing better than the feeling of accomplishment after knocking a shot in the hole.

I step up once again, concentrate, and strike the ball

Peter Blair

beautifully. The ball rolls right toward the hole. I'm starting to get excited. With a smile on my face, I pump my fists in the air. The ball approaches the hole. Two feet away. One foot away. The ball hits the lip of the hole and bounces out. My spirits drop.

"That's not fair," I whisper to Murph, being careful not to get too loud this time.

"No one ever said golf is supposed to be fair," he says.

"Look at you, with your words of wisdom," I mutter facetiously.

*When drives are all hole-high and straight,
And every yarn we tell is true,
Golf will be wearisome and flat,
When there is naught to grumble at.*

-Thomas Risk³

We've been on the course for about 15 minutes now, and we've done nothing but argue and grumble. I've never had so much fun with Murph though. There's nothing like a great argument on the golf course. It helps to get the frustration out of our systems. It helps us keep ourselves from going crazy about the game, and it adds a little excitement at the same time. Both of us know that when the day is over, we'll each go home and forget about it completely. This is what separates golf from other sports in my opinion. Golf may not have the flashy brawls of hockey or the wild head-to-head battles of football, but it does have its own unique squabbles found within the quiet competition of a day on the golf course. These squabbles are different because at the end of the day, usually no one can even remember what they were about. But during the round, they help relieve stress and keep everyone relaxed.

All of these aspects of golf could tell us why, according to Alec Morrison, over half of middle-aged American men play golf today, compared to a mere 15% in 1975.⁴ There has to be something that has drawn all these people to the sport in the past few years. Has it been the camaraderie? Has it been the dominant professional golfers- Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, and Tiger

Woods- over the past three decades who have influenced and inspired them to take up the game? Has it been the fact that golf gives them the chance to relax and withdraw themselves from the busy rigors of everyday life?

Most likely, it's been a combination of all of these things. I started to play golf seven years ago because I needed something to do. I've stuck with it because I have fun playing it. I've learned so much about myself from playing golf. For instance, I've learned that I'm really creative, and even when I'm not good at something, I don't have to quit doing it. Just as I didn't count myself out when my ball was stuck against the tree, I don't have to count myself out when I'm faced with a problem in life.

I've also noticed that golf brings people of all different backgrounds and abilities together. Anyone, of any ability, gender, or background can play golf. Just last year, a blind man got a hole-in-one on a Par 3. Nothing stopped him from playing golf, and nothing should stop me either. Inspirational stories like this one encourage me to stay out on the course and to keep trying, never giving up. Even if I'm not the strongest or most talented golfer on the course, I still get out there. And even though sometimes I get frustrated, golf keeps me humble. Golf shows that I can do something even when I'm not the best, and I can still enjoy doing it.

Well, now I am faced with a short two-foot putt to salvage my 5 on this hole. I've looked it over for about a minute, and I feel pretty confident about this one. I step right up to it, line the club up, pull back, and putt. "PLOP!" There it is! The sweetest sound to any golfer. That sound- the sound all golfers love to hear- that's what keeps me out here; that's what keeps me trying. Just because it took Murph three strokes to hear his "Plop!" and it took me five to hear mine doesn't mean that mine is worth any less. In fact, to me, it's worth more. It proves I can do it. Hearing my "Plop!" proves that I have accomplished my goal. My dad agrees with me. "Golf really wouldn't be the same if the ball went into the hole silently," he says. The more I think about it, the more I realize how true it is. A baseball player hears the "crack" of the ball hitting the bat; a basketball player hears the "swoosh" of the net as his ball goes through. Golf is no different.

Peter Blair

The sound we hear represents the same feeling of accomplishment that other athletes feel when they succeed at what they're trying to do.

Now I know for sure why people golf: they golf for that sound. Not just the sound, but everything that's behind it: the fellowship, the accomplishment, the pride, and adrenaline that all originate in the one sweet simple sound. I guess now I know why George Carlin and so many others hate golf then. They haven't heard the sound. They haven't stood there, with golf club in hands, eyes fixed on the hole, hearts pounding in their chests, ears ringing with the harmonious "Plop." The feeling never gets old. Every time I hear the sound, I feel just as fulfilled and excited as the time before. I wish that everybody in the world could hear this sound for themselves just one time, and then maybe they could see what they're missing out on. Until then, I feel like I'm in on a secret, because I get to hear the heavenly sound 18 times every time I step out onto a golf course. It is clear to me that golfers are truly blessed in a way that only they can understand and appreciate.

"Ready?" Murph snaps me out of my daze.

"Of course. We've still got 17 holes to play," I respond.

"Well, then, what are you waiting for?" he asks.

I smile at him, realizing once again how lucky I am to be out here, pick up my bag, and walk silently toward the second tee. My ears are still ringing.

¹ Rice, Grantland. "Dedicated to the Duffer." The Impossible Art of Golf. Ed. Alec Morrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

² Updike, John. "Sam Snead and Arnold Palmer." The Impossible Art of Golf. Ed. Alec Morrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

³ Risk, Thomas. "The Golfer's Discontent." The Impossible Art of Golf. Ed. Alec Morrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

⁴ Morrison, Alec. "Introduction." The Impossible Art of Golf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

JENNIFER CASEY

A Bittersweet Journey

What do I want to be when I grow up? Ordinary. Stereotypical. I don't want to be a princess or an actress. I want to be something normal. Maybe a teacher. I am six years old, biting my lip as I concentrate to maneuver my absurdly thick pencil about my writing tablet. My desk-mate, my best friend Jason, tells one of the other boys that he's going to be a baseball player for the Orioles someday. I want to tell him he is wrong, but my teacher says no talking during seatwork.

Mrs. O'Connor corrects papers at the front of the classroom and glances around to hush the noisy kids. As she returns to her grading, I watch her red pen move rhythmically around a paper, then onto another. This repeated action appeals to me with its methodical typicality.

I am only a child, but I have already given up the lofty ambitions my other classmates cling to. I don't yet know why I don't want to be an athlete or a superstar. I just know that most people don't do that, and that's a good enough reason for me. I want to be like Mrs. O'Connor. Not until I reach my sophomore year of high school will I understand teaching as something more than a routine, mechanical job. For now, I strive to embody conventionality, and I still have much growing to do before I can appreciate the value of individuality.

My eyes burn with tears as I sit on a cold examination

Jennifer Casey

table at Johns Hopkins Hospital, listening to an ear-reconstruction specialist explain surgical procedures to my parents. I am ten years old, and I don't understand what he is saying.

"Jennifer will need to see Dr. Bert Brent at *The Ear Institute* in California. He is a world-renowned specialist who has performed various operations..." He speaks to my mother and father as though I'm not even in the room.

"California!" I exclaim. "Mom, I *cannot* miss school to go all the way to California to have my dumb ear fixed." But my mother silences me with a look, and my father continues to nod at the doctor's words. They listen to him as though he actually says something intriguing. I feel hurt and completely alone in this cold, sterile room. My right hand reaches up to shield the ear that is the subject of this awful meeting. I feel the soft flesh and shudder to think that someone is going to change it. Affectionately calling my right ear my "little ear" for some time now, I've grown accustomed to its smallness and its seashell-like inward curl.

In their concern for my well being, my parents have decided that I will undergo surgery to correct this deformity. I hate them for this. None of the other kids at school have to give up their Saturday mornings to sit in a doctor's office, facing the reality of an abnormal appearance. My eyes close, and I see Sally at her horseback-riding lesson, Rachael and Sara, in their black leotards and pink slippers, giggling in the church basement during their ballet lesson. My friends don't have to sit here, in a dull examination room because, unlike me, they all look normal.

I don't like having a deformity, but I am used to it, and I have learned to conceal it. Unlike the other girls in my fourth grade class, I don't wear my hair in ponytails or braids, and I don't have piercings to display cute token earrings. My long thick hair trails down my neck, day after day, covering my ears. I long to pull it away from my face, but I don't. I cannot forget that boy's hurtful comments from years ago, and I keep my ear hidden so that no one can make fun of me ever again.

My preschool teacher, Miss Doris, says it's time to go outside, and we, the "butterfly group," grab our jackets and hurry to

the playground. Miss Doris retreats to the bench to converse with the other teachers, and I am left alone with my classmates. We play our usual games of tag and hide-and-seek, but today is different. Kyle, a mean, nosy little boy, notices my ear.

"What's wrong with your ear?" he cries out. I don't know how to respond.

"Come on. Answer me. Why does it look different?" He comes closer to me. "I said, 'Why does it look different?'" I don't answer him because I don't know what to say. I have never thought of my ear as different before. But today, I am mortified. For the first time, I realize I am abnormal.

Later, at our preschool graduation, we recite a poem.

"I know numbers, I know shapes, I know that purple stands for grapes," I repeat in a singsong that blends with the other four year old voices. Everyone smiles, excited to stand on the stage, but I feel insecure under my lopsided grin. I've learned more than numbers and shapes in school: I've learned that it isn't any fun to be different.

As my reconstruction surgery date approaches, I don't hate the idea as much. After my deformity is corrected, I won't feel as insecure anymore. I step timidly into my science teacher's classroom, and through her window, I can see my classmates chasing a ball on the soccer field.

"May I talk to you for a minute, Ms. Madeline?" I ask.

"Of course, Jennifer." She smiles at me. "What do you need?"

"I just wanted to remind you that Friday is my last day. I will be out for two weeks because of my surgery." My face reddens as I call attention to my flawed ear.

"I'll have your assignments ready on Friday morning," she says softly. I thank her and leave to remind my other teachers of my upcoming absence. They receive me kindly, promising to have my assignments ready, but I still feel humiliated. As I return to my classroom, the other kids enter the building.

Sally walks in, tucks her long blonde hair behind her ears, and calls, "Hey Jen. Where were you? You missed a great

game."

"I had to talk to some my teachers," I say, looking down at the linoleum floor. The other girls approach to share gossip with us. I smile as Rachael and Sara take turns telling me about the fight on the playground. Their story is not particularly funny, but I smile because I know that soon I won't be different anymore.

"Rachael, it's ninety degrees outside today. Why are you dressed like that?" I ask one of my closest friends. The girl who only last year wore pastel dresses and ribbon-tied ponytails stands before me in a long-sleeved black shirt and thick, heavy combat boots. She scowls and ignores my question.

On this warm August day, I am dismayed with the friends with whom I reunite at my sophomore orientation session. They haven't changed since June. They've decided that it's time to adopt Thoreau's ideas and "march to the beat of their own drummers." I am baffled. I have watched these girls act habitually since kindergarten, and I can't understand why they now want to set themselves apart from everyone else. Sally and Sara have darkened their sunny hair and Rachael has cropped her long, flowing curls. They have abandoned colorful clothing for apparel of the darkest hue. Color is out, black is in. Blackness- darkness- is the absence of light, and light is certainly now lacking in their lives. They skip pep rallies to write haunting poetry, and they despise the popular crowd because of their conformity.

I am torn. I have worked for years to achieve normality, and now my friends are shedding the type of shell that I have labored so hard to create. As I survey my newly changing friends, I am transported back to that cold examination room from years before. Once again, I am alone and defeated in my quest for normality. Almost five years have passed since my reconstruction surgery, and I no longer view my ear as an abnormality. But now I face a new obstacle- maintaining my sense of normality amid my friends' newfound identities. Although they are beginning to define themselves as individuals, I have not yet realized the beauty in individuality.

On Sunday, the first of August, I stand in my bedroom trembling as hot tears roll down my cheeks. Diagnosed with uterine cancer five months ago, my mother has endured hellish radiation and chemotherapy treatments throughout the summer. Now she is dying in the next room, and my heart is breaking. I can't bear to imagine life without her, but my twelve-year-old mind cries, "Things like this don't happen to people my age. Why is this happening to me?" I despise myself for being so egocentric, but I am in an awkward adolescent stage where it's hard enough to maintain any sense of self-assurance, let alone endure a major calamity.

Rachael is an altar server at the funeral mass, but I cannot bear to look at her. I stare ahead at the grainy wooden pew, hearing the priest droning faintly in the background. Looking past Father Callahan, I count the bleeding hearts on the wallpaper behind him. My eyes trace the outline of the white marble altar. I glance at the stained-glass windows, scowl at rejoicing angels and panes inscribed with words like "peace" and "hope," and turn away. Looking down at the rack of hymnals, I see the same blue books I used when I attended elementary school masses here. I think of my first-grade prayer partner and of my favorite church songs. I think of everything except the fact that my mother has just died. I cannot yet abandon the illusion that I am a member of a typical family.

To celebrate my best friend Sara's seventeenth birthday, my closest friends and I gather at Chi-Chi's. We munch tortilla chips with salsa and chat idly. Our conversation centers on Sally's new boyfriend, and, being ever so modest, she turns the discussion to college, which gradually leads to vague speculations about careers and marriage and the four of us living together when we're old ladies.

Sara, always wondering about her future, asks, "You guys, what should I be when I grow up?" We avoid each other's glances, and an awkward silence looms over our table for a

moment.

"Well," Sara says with a sigh, "What about you, Jen?" I don't hesitate because I feel quite certain about my future.

"I want to be the epitome of stereotypical normality. I think I want to be a—." Rachael's silverware clatters to the floor, and other restaurant patrons stare as she bends to pick up the utensils.

"Uh, here they are," she says, "Sometimes, I just don't understand you, Jen." I am somewhat taken aback by her comment because she is the one individual who amazes me with her eccentricity and uniqueness. Nevertheless, I don't really care what my friends think, because right now, I still crave normality.

"Here is your assignment."

"Thanks," I reply, uninterestedly flipping through the lab manual my Advanced Placement Biology teacher had handed me. It is mid-fall of my senior year, and I have enough to worry about with college applications and three other Advanced Placement classes that I can't think about biology right now. I abandon my assignment to converse with my lab partner, Erica, the embodiment of normality that I have somehow come to despise. She shares a story about last night's family dinner. Uttering a half-laugh, I say, "Oh, that's interesting. I skipped dinner last night to study history."

"Oh. My parents don't allow me to skip dinner, even when I am not hungry," she replies. For some reason, I feel the need to explain myself to her.

"Well, I used to eat with my father and my stepmother. But last year I gave up meat during Lent, and they eat meat almost every night, so I'm not really into family dinners anymore."

"You know what, Jen?" she starts, "All of the things you say... I'm really glad I'm not you."

Images of my conflicts with normality race through my head. I feel the tiny soft flesh of my "little ear." I hear my friends droning on about the importance of not following the crowd. I see my blank face at my mother's funeral. But I

remember both the incredible insight that has accompanied each adversity and the self-confidence that I have gained over the past few years. When I graduate later in the year, I will articulate more clearly my transformation from an insecure young girl to a self-assured young woman.

My voice shakes as I deliver a speech to the many people crowded into St. Joseph's Monastery for Baccalaureate Mass. I have earned the honor of valedictorian, and I share with my fellow graduates, not a typical farewell speech, but a personal anecdote.

My words honor my sophomore English teacher, Margaret Kenney, the woman whose confidence in my abilities has allowed me to find my own self-confidence. As I speak, I remember my older sister's words after hearing an early version of my speech. She had recalled that only our mother had ever instilled the same sense of confidence in her that Mrs. Kenney has implanted in me. I smile, grateful that I have experienced this motherly gift, despite the loss of my own mother. I once envisioned teaching as an ordinary profession, but having experienced firsthand a teacher's extraordinary ability to change a student's life, I now view the vocation differently. Traveling far from the child who deserted lofty dreams for normality, I have begun to dream of remarkable possibilities for my future.

Erica stares at me, waiting for a reply to her comment. I return her gaze and smile.

"You know what? That's really great, but the funny thing is, I would really hate to be anyone but me."

KATIE BAIRD

Three Women

Memory: It is July. I am at Bethany Beach with my grandmother, my mother, and my sister. Their obnoxious laughter drowns out the piercing whistle of the bronzed lifeguard and the shrills of little tykes taunting the peaceful ocean. They must be playing their version of "I Spy," finding old men in Speedos pretending to be ten years younger than they are, or a woman whose bathing suit top has been stolen by a strong wave. These poor people have no idea. My mother's cackling is the excited language of seagulls finding a turkey sandwich next to an oblivious sunbather. I wonder what is so funny. My grandmother is beginning to laugh uncontrollably, forcing herself to cough the thick mucus coating her black lungs and throat. She should really stop smoking. My sister cannot be heard. She must be laughing silently as she always does with her mouth wide open, inviting in the hungry mosquitoes for a juicy lunch. Their laughter is so taunting, I put down my summer reading to join these three women, hoping not to have missed anything. I become a participant and immediately spy small tears melting down my mother's sun-kissed face. As my stomach hardens with this contagious chuckle, I lovingly embrace my grandmother. I can feel her aged muscles alive with her ageless energy. My sister's red face and bulging veins from her neck cause even more ruckus. We are all alive and enjoying life.

Dream: I am in Smyth's, a jewelry store near my house.

As often as I have shopped in this jewelry store for my sister's bridal showers, engagement gifts, and now wedding gift, the atmosphere is different, almost dismal. It feels like the first minutes after a heavy rainstorm with a dense fog surrounding the room. I cannot see anything. I feel alone. My grandmother has died, and my mission is to find a piece of jewelry that will remind me of her. I break through the fog as if opening curtains to look outside. I tenderly palm a pearl pendant, rubbing the white balls in between my fingertips. Memories of my Confirmation six years ago flood into my cloudy mind. I took my grandmother's name for my Catholic name. Her name Rebekah is warmly whispered into my ears. Yes, I am certain, this will definitely remind me of her.

I wake in my bed suddenly, rubbing my fingers together, searching for that precious pearl pendant. But there is nothing there. I have an undeniable desire to call my grandmother and wake myself free from this horrible thought of her death. Summer trips to Bethany Beach, listening to books on tape, learning how to do stitch work, listening to stories about boarding school. With the death of these lessons, her smoking voice would be silenced, and her manicured hands would no longer play with my hair. I can only dream of this horrible feelings of longing and sadness that would take over my life, bringing me into a deep depression of groggy and unrecognizable motions. I glance at my fingers once again and slowly move them together, hoping to recreate those snow-white jewels. I fear the day that she is not with me physically, but only spiritually through a piece of jewelry.

Mornings I plunge into the cold pool, allowing the chlorine molecules to have a delicious snack on my skin and hair. Goosebumps tickle my freshly shaven legs, bringing the rough, undesired hair follicles back to the surface. My arms and legs shake as if electrified with current. I immerse my sleepy arms into the bed of blue ahead of me and let my legs naturally start to kick water, pushing me forward. I become a swimmer, wide-awake in this blue world of motion and movement while I swim faster and faster away from the inevitable. Death is the shark in my ocean of love and family. Each night its knife-like teeth clench onto my heart and young life. We all die. We all will experience loss. Fear of these dreams becoming a reality speeds

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my heart rate to an extremely high speed, pushing blood and life to every outpost of my body. Anxiety, worry, fear. These take over my lively body and soul during the night, when death visits. Death is the alarm clock of my sleep when I suddenly become aware of the loss I will feel. Yet I continue to swim, pulling my arms faster into the water ahead, frantically kicking, making a trail of white bubbles. When will the shark surface again, warning me of the fate of these three women?

I'm driven in a small blue car with my father and his girlfriend. My life is interrupted again. Now within my dismal dream dimension, I find myself recuperating from my mother's recent death. I am ready at any time to scream and attack, in hopes of stealing the life out of this woman. I am a prisoner of my father's selfishness, banging on the bars of a jail cell, demanding to be set free. He knows that no one could ever replace my mother and her angelic ways. Pulling onto my street, I escape out of the blue prison to call my grandmother. Never would I have dreamed of this happening. Flashes of my mother zip through my head. A filmstrip of my mother with her four children, lovingly holding our small innocent hands, walking us to the school bus, kissing us goodnight in our beds, images that serve as the igniter of my internal fire of hatred towards my father. I begin to cry.

When I jerk back into reality, awake, I again feel angry and bitter towards my father. How could he have replaced my mother so easily? My parents have an undying love for each other; it will last forever. Without my mother, my teacher, my friend, my role model, I am brought back into childhood as a lost little girl in the grocery store, confused and scared. My world is strange and foreign without her. When I am sick, I yearn for her soft touch. When I am sad, I yearn for her warm kiss. When I am troubled, I yearn for her gentle and reassuring words. Our faces wrinkle in the same place while we laugh, our faces redden out of embarrassment in the same blotchy manner. We are the same. We have a mother-daughter bond that has the power of an active volcano. Our relationship constantly erupts with love, admiration, and trust. With death, this strong bond would slowly turn into cold molten rock, freezing in the last shape of life.

Permanently, my relationship would be hard, cold, after such a disaster.

Just when I feel safe, the shark of death visits again. I find myself on a cruise. It is dusk, the end of a beautiful day. My sister Laurie and I are digesting the purples, blues, and oranges served by the descending sun. The shark takes his first bite. My sister tells me that she has breast cancer and is expected to live only two more weeks. In order to make her lifelong dreams a reality, she is going to have her wedding on the boat in two days. I will be maid of honor.

And once again, I cry myself into reality. In just a matter of five minutes, I dreamed the death of my only sister. My sister has signed a living contract to be my best friend for life. Laurie and I have shared everything together, from the same high school to college clothes. We have shared dreams and aspirations with each other throughout our entire lives. Our memories of playing house, playing school, and riding our bikes with Whitney Houston filling our throats would die. I too would die with her death. Now that the real wedding plans are under way, and I am really her maid of honor, the thought of her death seems impossible.

Fearing the loss of these three women, one or all in a coffin with her eyes and mouth sewn shut is a revolting thought. Me, in a black wool coat with the lapels tightly wrapped around my thin neck as I walk away from their gravestones. With Mother Nature blowing her chilled breath in my face, my tears freeze permanently onto my grief-stricken face. Who will I look up to for lessons and advice? Kneeling tenderly and desperately onto the moist grass, begging for their return. And them in the world above, with white dresses on, still playing "I Spy," with me, the sole survivor, completely alone.

I have pictures, I have memorabilia, and I have memories. I will go to Bethany Beach and want to play "I Spy," preparing my lungs and stomach for a hearty workout. I will see three empty beach chairs webbed with the homes of spiders and chipped of their original white paint. I will only hear echoes. The silent laugh of my sister will resound in the footprints of the wet sand. The tears of my mother will remain heavy dewdrops on

Katie Baird

the banister of the porch after a summer rain. The sickening cough of my grandmother will sound in the crashing waves onto the ocean floor. I will be alone, struggling to hold onto these remarkable women.

I am a sister, a daughter, and a granddaughter. A dreamer.

I wait.



Ryan Creel

Meet Her

Tucked down a long, winding dirt road, over a wooden bridge that rattles as the car bounces, between fields lined with grazing cattle, lies a crystal kingdom. Clear blue water flows over rocks, around rocks, and through fallen trees from somewhere in Pennsylvania down through Maryland before emptying into the Potomac and making its way to the Atlantic. Tall oaks and maples stand in rank silently. Leaves flourish with spring budding or slowly die and participate in the red, yellow, orange, and brown falls of autumn. The stream, she talks. Speaking softly in bubbles, changing pitch with each ebb and flow. "Can you hear me?" she questions. "I'm here," she murmurs from under a rock. "Relax," she pleads in the passing breeze. I love when she talks to me. She knows me for I am the admirer who loves to stare in marvel, as the sun sets on her chest, reflecting brilliant oranges and reds and purples in a shimmering diamond glare.

She is the elegant stream, fit for kings and queens and knights who understand their chivalric duty to her. She offers lifeblood to the valleys. She is nurturing and loving, watching over her inhabitants with the care and attention only Mother Nature could afford her young. She is beautifully tranquil, a place devoid of time only balancing daylight and dark. The morning brings with it a low fog, covering the water alone, clothing her for the length. Then as the fog lifts, the sun ascends to stand and deliver warmth and light, wrapping the water in blues and greens. Then finally as he begins to grow weary of his task, he slowly slips down, sliding into the water and finally disappears

Kory Lemmert

with only his reflection to guide the night. By moonlight, animals emerge for a drink of water as gray shadows. She never rests, constantly moving, rushing over rocks, around a bend, leveling off, winding down between mountains and hills; she steps away from the main current, only to spiral and rest, gathering energy before once again starting the quest down, down, down stream. I am only a fortunate observer. Only from a distance do I stand to stare as she elegantly dances past, whirling and smiling. She taught me much. She gave to me the secrets of life. That is her tale. Here is mine.

For My Father

Some days I just walk, jumping from rock to rock like a child, relishing the contrast between the hot summer's sun and the cool stream's water. Catching crawfish from under their rocks or wandering, finding simple treasures lost along the banks. Sometimes I find little skeletons of life's inescapable cycle, other times rocks imprinted by ferns or plants from long ago, and other times there are fishing lures of a fisherman who lost his lure to a rock or a faulty knot or a large fish. Surely, the fragile skeletons make me stop and ponder the intrinsic nature of life, and the fossils force me to once again remember the history and age of our earth, but the small fishing lures, so trivial in my recent list, that someone lost upstream seem to make the largest impression upon me. I wonder why the man came to the river to fish? Does he fish for sport or does he keep the fish for dinner? Does he respect the world that encompasses him, or is he simply oblivious to nature? Maybe he is just trying to escape from his nagging wife. Perhaps it is a boy learning to fish with his father. Maybe his father's father fished, and like all good lessons in life, the child has come of age where the art of fishing is handed to him like a form of religion. I fish. My father taught me like his father taught him. In retrospect, it is probably one of the greatest gifts a father can give to his son. Fishing is not about catching the 'big fish'; rather, it is a lesson in patience and appreciation. I speak not of the crass act of tossing a worm on a hook, dangling

from a bobber, and waiting for a fish to get hungry. No, this is fly-fishing. The elegant dance. Perhaps the rhythmic forward-backward motion of the rod seems to correspond with the pendulum-like harmony of nature.

The rod arches with a rhythmic to and fro, front then back, a forward now backward flick of the wrist. Then the line flexes over the water dropping softly into the bubbling stream. Landing just past an oval rock jutting out of the fresh water, a subtle plink releasing a few small ripples. Bouncing above, then below, dancing upon the surface before diving under once again, submerged under the vivid glare of the sun that has just risen and peeks through the leaves of the towering oaks flashing brilliantly off the water. Sunglasses cut through the white and yellow, allowing a glimpse of the underwater habitat, slick with mossy slime, dark pockets protected by hanging stones and fallen logs, crayfish scurrying from rock to rock, and finally the beautiful rainbow trout. The tip of the wooden pole traces the path of the fly down around the rock until the current carries it along a fallen tree. A trout rises and grabs the fly, then rolls, showing its shimmering side and dives back down into the depths. The rod flexes, and the line draws taut under the surprising pressure of the slender fish. The hook sets, and the fish realizes its fault. He runs, diving deeper. The rod tip raises pulling him towards the surface. He takes off downstream before exploding from the water, nearly two feet, before splashing back down ready to run again. Then slowly he wears down, giving way to the line, the closer and closer it pulls him. A hand pulls him from the water, admiring the blues and reds and greens and purples glimmering from his side in the sunlight. The hook is removed, and he is returned to the water where he gasps and fills his gills and drifts back into the current before swimming away. This is why I fish. Understand?

My father taught me how to fish when I was young. He grew up in an era without televisions to ruin children's minds. His father ran a small gas station in the middle of a small town in the small end of western Maryland. The only thing that wasn't small was the passion for the outdoors that encompassed everyone. I often wonder about my father's relationship with his

father. I've never talked to my father about my grandfather. I know from my grandmother that my grandfather was a hard-working man, dedicated to his family. He served in the First World War and died before I was born. He died fairly young; all men in my family die young. I'm amazed that I have never breached this topic with my father; it seems like something that would come up over the course of time, but there is an understanding in our relationship. My father is not very emotional. I saw him cry once at his mother's funeral. We do not talk openly about anything and everything; rather, it is a very reserved arena that consists of politics, religion, sports, and the outdoors. My father is a Republican, and I am currently a Marxist. My father attends a Presbyterian Church every Sunday, and I am an atheist. My father dislikes most professional sports, and I still want to play professional baseball (ha!). We both agree on fishing. All the stories my father tells me from his youth are fishing stories. How his uncle would drive them to West Virginia at five in the morning to beat the sun. The most vivid is the image of a quaint church in front of a stream where my father told me he fished many days. The image has never escaped my mind; it is etched there as the pinnacle of my father's humanness.

So many times in our lives it seems that my father and I serve only to offer the other reassurance. I find solace in the thought that he prides himself on the way he raised me. In high school, when he would go to meet with my teachers, he never bothered to ask about my grades or performance in class. His first question was always, "Is he a good young man?" My teachers were the ones that told me this. My father was an elementary school teacher, and he knew there was more to growing up than grades. Regardless, I brought home paper after paper and report card after report card decorated with bright red 'A's, but that never seemed to impact my father. I always thought that he would be proud of me. I just wanted to impress him. He just wanted to see in me the foundation of a responsible man who was going to be a good husband and father. I have tried my entire life to convince him that he has succeeded. Often I think that I have failed in convincing my father that he was a good parent to me. I always imagine his relationship with his father was much

the same. It is in his eyes. When he looks at me, it means something; I can hear the meaning being bestowed from generations past. I know that one day I will have a son, and the same relationship will prevail. The relationship isn't necessarily bad; sometimes it just isn't fulfilling. I just take refuge in the good times. In the times that he knows my love, and I feel his.

The first time I went fishing with my father was the type with worms and bobbers, maybe some corn and marshmallows. I used a little blue fishing pole. After my father got off work, or maybe after Little League practice, we would drive to the darn and fish from the bank; Dad in a lawn chair, me running around leaping from rock to rock, picking up trash, skipping stones, and all those child games. Fishing for little sunfish with marshmallows could not have been exciting for my father. In retrospect, he probably just watched me. I wonder what it feels like to watch your own flesh and blood smile and grow. Then the sun would dip below the mountains and we would climb back into the truck and go home to recount the stories to my mother. Sometime around my tenth or twelfth year my father introduced me to fly-fishing.

I would stand in the back yard with a pole that dwarfed my small frame, looking more like a circus act than a fisherman. No hook tipped my line, rather just a blunt sinker to help carry the weight. Start forward, then roll the pole back, and now forward again, gently feeding line with the left hand before returning back and, finally, forward with a subtle flick of the wrist, allowing the line to cascade onto the ground, letting the leader flop over the length. Like a waltz, a patterned dance, the pole gracefully glided over the imaginary water. Usually I ended up with a pile of line coiled in front of me, or with my sinker stuck in the tree or bushes. My father would watch, arms folded, offering an occasional pointer before turning and going back into the house. I can see his father standing and watching him. Just waiting for the child to learn on his own. I am an independent kid. I can't really complain about my childhood. I wish I could. I wish I could blame a good bit of my faults on a rough or difficult childhood, but I can't. Everyone usually stood back and let me figure things out for myself. I hurt myself many times, but that is how I

wanted life. I wanted to prove to everyone my intellect, my skill, and my independence. I wanted to impress my father. I wanted him to see how well he raised me. I don't want the reward, but I want to see him rewarded. I want others to see me and respect my father. Maybe that will show him how much I love him. Fishing did not involve anyone else only my father and me.

I remember the first time my father and I went fly-fishing. Standing beside my father as he meticulously picked through his fishing vest, showing me the flies that his father had given him. There was an understanding that one day they would be mine. It was never said, but there was a sort of father-son pride that can only be found in rare instances concerning baseball cards and tie tacks. These are material things that pass from generation to generation as reassurance of the elder's legacy. They shouldn't be necessary, but I understand the comfort, the memories. That day exists only as a feeling. Beside the stream, father and son forming a bond that transcends time. He remembered his father, and I learned something about mine; one day the cycle will repeat itself with my son. The scene is painted in my mind like a Van Gogh, harsh brushstrokes piling paint, an image that looks like nothing up close, but after a few steps, it becomes a wheat field, flowing and living in the winds of time. Damn the fish. They really didn't matter. What mattered was the moment and the elation and the fulfillment.

During my teenage years my father and I spoke little. Only the basics and very rarely upon those. I tried to emerge from his shadow as my own man, I suppose. I wanted to prove I could learn on my own, and I recklessly disregarded my father. We no longer fished together. Maybe on a rare occasion here and there over the course of a summer now or then. I don't remember any particular instances. I never intentionally stopped fishing, but I became so caught up in life and school and sports and girls that I lost the feeling for the water. There was no defining moment in my life where I stood and told my father that I no longer wanted to fish with him. No, it was just a gradual distancing that he seemed to respect and understand. I'm sure he never stopped watching, but he quit giving me pointers and that was what I wanted. He no longer waited for me to learn; he just

knew that I eventually would. I lost much peace of mind in frantic high school antics. I daydreamed about living in a city with lights and concrete and clubs. They were tough years, the type where you look back and think to yourself what fun you had but at the same time how much trouble you had getting it. Then I finally left for school. Then something changed.

I don't remember it happening. I woke up one morning during the summer after my freshman year and got in my car and drove to the stream. A warm morning when you can feel the sun gaining strength and know that your arms and neck will be red before the day is complete. The morning breezes sweep the smell of manure across the countryside. Standing there, the same place I had years before, looking at the same water, framed by the same trees, with the same rocks, and everything made sense. I picture the day like a bystander, sitting on the bridge with my legs dangling effortlessly, watching a young man wade to the middle of the stream. He feeds the line, through the hook's eyelet, now up, around, around, around, around, around, around, then back through the loop before cinching it tight, a knot. The rod tip stretches skyward as the line dances backward, then forward, then into a tree. Frustration abounds in the steps towards the shore, thrashing violently in the water. It takes time to remember. After freeing the little red fly, the fisherman resumes his task. This time the line becomes tangled and lies before him in the water, spiraling in the currents made by his legs. Then the rod flexes back and forth, before extending over the water and landing with the familiar plink. I fished for four hours that day. I watched the birds swoon and dive in the winds and listened as they serenaded me from treetops. Squirrels bounded across the ground and stared inquisitively at me wondering where I had been. I can imagine Frost or Thoreau or Emerson sitting along the side of the stream, writing effortlessly as the peace encompassed them and delivered their thoughts to paper. Everything was simple. Everything was clear. My father had given me a priceless gift.

I fish by myself for the genuine calm that pervades the water, allowing me to stop and evaluate life and see things at their most pure. I simply interact within the sphere of nature.

Kory Lemmert

The calm that comes from the water is an understanding of the insignificance of my life. There are no voices, no cars, and only other insignificant animals that don't ask questions or make judgments or have expectations. Somewhere during these times by myself, I came to realize that my father gave me peace of mind. He showed me the pure elation that stems from knowing our own insignificance. The reassurance that emulates from the outdoors and frees you to love without questions, without expectations. I realize that some day, like the skeletons in the rocks, my father and I will both die. My father gave me the opportunity and the encouragement to understand something about life. Somewhere in our relationship there is the great beauty that is only found within Mother Nature and family. I love my Dad, and I wrote this to thank him not to impress him. Maybe I'll take this home, but unlike the trivial papers of my youth, this means something. It's just easier to write some things. So here is a paper about the outdoors. Read it and understand, please.



Leah Kozy

Children and the Internet: A Dangerous Combination

"Last Sunday our home was taken over by the computer. One child sat behind the screen mesmerized by the battle he was fighting. My older son was on my laptop engrossed in chat room conversation. High-pitched laughter from the 14-year-old mixed with moans and pleas for mercy from my 10-year-old."

For Richard Breyer, chair of radio and film at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, the above scene is a constant source of argument in his home. In an October 1999 article for *World and I* (a psychology publication) called "Two Sides of the Screen," he shared his own experiences of computer overload displayed by his two sons to document the obsessive nature of the World Wide Web among many children today. In recent years the main concern for parents regarding the Internet has been the danger of exposing their children to pornography, along with other inappropriate sites and chat rooms. Overuse of the Internet by children today is just as severe as the negative content found on the Web; however, the problem has yet to be fully explored. There is a growing need to look into this dilemma because of the addiction that can result when too much time is spent in front of the screen.

Research on the subject continues to grow with the number of people "logging-on" at a steady increase. One thing

is for certain, though. Internet Addiction Disorder (as the phrase has been coined) can be viewed as both a psychological and physical loss of control. Even more shocking are some of the consequences that go along with the illness. This is one of the reasons why there is such a concern about the young age of many who spend such an extensive time browsing the Net.

It is important to first look at the general history of the disorder. Kimberly Young, professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, began doing her homework back in 1994 with a three-year study on Web addiction. At that time, there was no solid proof of the disorder, so her first aim was to question its reality. After testing 396 subjects who were labeled "Internet junkies" because of the amount of time they were spending online (the average time was 38 hours a week), Young found that there was indeed a reason for alarm, and she consequently recommended the phenomenon be added to medical books as a real illness. She felt that the Web was serving as an "escape mechanism for some users." It became an exciting prospect because it allowed these people to break free from the routine pace of life for a little while. Whether it is an online chat, or some kind of surreal game, many Americans were becoming tangled in the "Net," and it was proving to be more and more difficult to get out.

When her ideas were first presented to the American Psychological Association in 1996, the reception was luke-warm. In an October 6, 1997 interview with *Computerworld*, Young stated, "I have a lot of supporters out there. I get a lot of people from the computer science world [who] concur. They recognized it as a problem years ago, but no one took it seriously until it hit the commercial market. Other people say I'm blowing it out of proportion."

Three years later the story is very different. Dr. Ivan Goldberg, a New York City psychiatrist, finally took Young's findings and provided a clinical name, Internet Addiction Disorder. The official medical claim came about because of the destructive nature of its symptoms. Many times, doctors are skeptics when specialists apply psychiatric terms such as "addiction" or "dependence" to what seems like a harmless

hobby, but in the case of IAD, the consequences go beyond a fondness for going online. According to Goldberg's findings, overuse continues despite knowledge or persistent physical, social or psychological problems caused by Internet use. Goldberg highlighted some of the dangers in his documents, including sleep deprivation, neglect of occupational duties and feelings of abandonment in significant others. The stakes are high in the world of IAD, and many times such people are not aware that they are in fact abusers

So where do children fit into the dangerous world of overuse? Many psychologists have failed to look into how this illness affects young people. This is a frightening prospect considering the results of a recent Stanford University study. When 16,000 people between the ages of 16-22 were asked whether they were spending more or less time socializing due to the Internet, a fifth of the adolescents responded that they spent more time socializing because of convenient chat rooms. In a similar survey of adults from 10,000 American households, however, the majority replied no to an increase in socialization. These results may only look at one aspect of Web surfing; however, they raise a very important question. If overuse is so common among young adults, what will happen to these same adolescents over time if they keep up with a pattern of obsessive behavior on the Internet?

"It's 4 a.m. and Steve is engulfed in the green glare of his computer screen, one minute pretending he's a ruthless mafia lord, the next minute imagining he's an evil sorcerer or an alien life-form."

The above is a case study from child psychologist Jane M. Healey's book Failure to Connect. According to her research, Steve is far from unique. More and more students are facing addict status. According to Healey, "Social lives and studies suffer as a result of forty to sixty hours a week in MUDs [Multi-User Domains], often from midnight until the sun comes up." It seems that many children recognize that they go on-line to escape life's pressures, but they can't stop because of the increasing fidgety and nervous feelings they get when they are off-line. Some kids

even forget to eat. Not only does this alternative reality offer escape and pleasurable feelings, but it may also produce changes in the normal functioning of the brain by stimulating deep "pleasure centers." This is the main reason the disorder is likened to the use of addictive drugs.

Maressa Hecht Orzack is another one of the few to take a closer look at IAD among children today. In fact, she has a good deal of experience in this field of study as the director of computer-addiction services at McLean Hospital of Harvard Medical School for the past 15 years. As an ex "Web-a-holic," Orzack became aware that she had a problem with the Internet when she started noticing a similar pattern in herself to many of her patients who displayed dependent behavior in other areas of their lives. She decided to start reading up on the illness and soon began to diagnose some of the people she counseled with IAD. Many of these patients happened to be children.

Dr. Orzack lays the blame on the individual working the computer rather than the machine itself. In the case of young people she finds it becomes a tool for procrastination from schoolwork. The areas that provide a high source of interaction and enjoyment are the intended destinations for these web surfers. Chats, e-mail, browsing, and of course games allow for the feeling of instant gratification. One of the principle themes behind IAD is the sense of isolation that many of its sufferers deal with. For this reason alone it is easy to pick out exactly what types of young people are susceptible.

"Among the most vulnerable are children who are lonely and bored or from families where nobody is at home to relate to after school," Orzack said in a recent article for the Philadelphia Inquirer.

If certain children fall into this category, it is important to know the warning signs for Internet Addictive Disorder. Many parents fail to see that their child has a problem; rather they view their child's constant computer use as something fun to pass the time. For this reason, Dr. Orzack has compiled a list of questions for parents to ask themselves when they see the possibility of a

disorder:

- *Is the child preoccupied with spending money for new software?
- *Is the child missing school or falling asleep in class?
- *Have the child's grades dropped?
- *Is the child getting on the computer earlier and earlier each day?
- *Are there any signs of dry eyes, caused by not blinking when looking at monitors?
- *Has the child been neglecting personal hygiene?
- *Does the child have strong headaches?
- *Is there a lack of interest in eating?
- *Is the child lying to the family about time spent online?
- *Must the child have a game or laptop along when he/she should be interacting with people?
- *Is the child spending more and more time around computer activities?
- *Has the child risked losing real-life relations?
- *Is the child able to be away from the computer without thinking about it all the time?

If the answer is yes to more than five of these questions, this may mean the child needs to seek therapy.

So, let's return to Richard Breyer and his two preteens who are fascinated by the Internet. He realizes that this form of new media and its seductive images can be exciting to his own children and their friends. "They are in that uncomfortable stage of

life in which they feel everything is out of their control. So naturally they are drawn into their screen worlds, where they are in charge."

Breyer tries to fight the battle over the Internet in his own home by stressing the importance of outside interaction so that his sons do not head down the path of addiction. He recognizes the saturation of this kind of entertainment for children today by the responses from his own kids who justify their time on-line by stating, "Wake up and smell the coffee. Things were different when you were my age!" While this may be a casual way for kids to put things into perspective, there is a sense of danger behind these words.

In the past, psychological studies focused on media forms such as television and video games as the culprits that drove children to spend hours at a time glued to the screen. With this new media of the Internet, however, there is a new level of severity that comes primarily with America Online and other Internet servers as a way for children to connect with others. Dr. Healey views Internet social interactions as "more addictive than television because they offer contact with other people. Children begin to assume new identities and they begin to believe they are loved for their new "selves."

As a media expert, Breyer knows how to handle the growing unrest over the role of the Web for his own children. Like many parents, he simply wants his children to be able to grow up into adults who can function normally in the world.

"Let them spend all their leisure time in front of a computer and they'll never have to figure out ways to fill empty moments. Let them use the Internet chat groups to meet new friends and they won't have to figure out how to live with their height, width, hair or skin color, or whatever else they think is right about themselves."

He finds salvation in the fact that his oldest son actually agrees with many of the points he raises in his writings. It lets Breyer know that despite the enjoyment his children find in the Internet, they still realize that life does not revolve around a computer screen, rather they engage in many activities that are a part of healthy mental development.

What about the parents who can answer yes to the majority of the survey questions set forth by Maressa Hecht Orzack, though? Does this mean that therapy is the only answer as their kids have already crossed the line of Web fondness and instead moved into the realm of IAD? Orzack was able to limit herself when she became aware of her problem. "I would actually look at a clock and say, "I'm going to quit at such and such a time." While this may be an effective approach for many adults, she realizes that children often have more difficulty with this type of control. Therefore, she recommends professional help, specifically family therapy, because it is a good way to help children cope with the problem of addiction by allowing them to have a direct dialogue with the other family members as well as the psychologist. Orzack believes there is a good deal of optimism for this kind of therapy as it is much easier to quell the problem when the patient is younger. This is because their minds are much easier to shape than adult sufferers of the disorder who have already reached the point where reality is completely blurred from the alternate world of the Internet.

Fortunately, the problem of computer overuse never goes as far as a clinical diagnosis of IAD. For such families where there is a growing concern in the child, however, there are many ways for parents to set boundaries when it comes to their children and the Internet.

Dr. Goldberg, the same psychiatrist who gave a clinical definition to this kind of obsession, constructed a five-step method to curb the affliction in children before it turns into a dependency. First off, he urges parents to recognize overuse patterns. "Pathological computer use" can be identified by obsessive need. Parents must pinpoint underlying troubles. Depending on the age of the individual child, issues such as uncertainty about the future, pressure to perform academically, or problems in social relationships can all cause a youngster to flee to "ever welcoming virtual-worlds." It is highly important to tackle the real problem as well. Avoiding stress only makes it worse. For example, Goldberg suggests finding a tutor to help with schoolwork if that is the problem. He also feels it is important to confront the social difficulties, such as telling the child to write about what is

bothering them rather than turning toward the Web.

Computer use should be controlled. While it is not necessary to make the child quit "cold turkey," on-line time must be limited. Activities should be prioritized and no on-line chatting should take place before homework and other obligations. Even if the child is on-line, emailing friends should be stressed before entering chat rooms. Finally, parents must help the child distinguish between on-line fantasy and helpful uses of the Internet such as doing research for school. By letting the child see the positive aspects the Internet *does* have to offer, he/she may begin to use the computer more for education and less for entertainment purposes.

The Internet is indeed flooded with an abundance of images to keep kids busy for hours, and not all of it falls under the category of entertainment. Breyer's 14-year-old certainly realized this when he informed his dad that, "The Internet isn't just chat rooms. There's tons of other stuff on there, some you like, some I like, some we both like." These words were uttered as he headed out the door to meet up with a few friends for a game of basketball.

Breyer's son seems to have the right idea about the increasing phenomenon that is the World Wide Web. This new form of media presents our society with a quick and efficient way to get information, keep in touch with others and even slip into the excitement of a virtual reality game. There is a responsibility, however, that we all owe the first generation to "grow up under the Net." It is important not to get caught up in a false reality, rather we must all learn to shut down the computer once in awhile and go on with our lives. This kind of positive influence will teach children to do the same.

KRISTIN LASH

Afghanistan Connection

"As radiant as her name, which means "an oil lamp" in Pushto, Diva is a stunning beauty. In the privacy of the store's attic, she throws off her tattered burqa to reveal a beautiful blouse and an ankle-length black Afghani skirt. Diva's shoes are worn, but peeping from underneath the hem of her skirt is a shimmer of gauze stockings. Her neatly trimmed brunette hair falls straight in tresses to her shoulders. Her eyebrows are plucked thin into perfect arches, and there is no make-up to mar her glowing complexion. Though she looks barely 20, Diva claims she's 28.

'I graduated from college in geophysics and used to work for the government,' she says. But, life changed dramatically for Diva in 1995 when she was abducted and raped allegedly by some fighters of the Hizb-Islami in the southern Chilstoon district of Kabul. 'I returned to work for a brief period, but in September 1996 the Taliban overran Kabul and ordered women to stay at home.' Left without a dependable source of income, Diva was forced into prostitution."

- An excerpt from an article appearing in *The Washington Post*.

For the past two decades, Afghanistan has been in a constant state of turmoil and chaos. Originally under Soviet communist rule, the country bore through several resistant conflicts, and an estimated one million people lost their lives in the struggle. However, life within urban areas such as Kabul was starting to improve.

In the Eighties, women were allowed to pursue both education and employment in non-traditional roles. According to the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), they accounted for nearly half of the collegiate student body at the University of Kabul and roughly 60 percent of its faculty. Women were also achieving success in the medical field with a growing number of female doctors employed at numerous hospitals and practices. However, by 1992 with the advent of Islamic fundamentalism, the state of human rights within Afghanistan took a dramatic turn. The Taliban, an ultra-conservative sect of Islam, overthrew communism and began moving into two-thirds of the land. By 1996, as primary military force, they controlled 90 percent of Afghanistan. Shortly thereafter the exclusively male forces imposed a strict set of laws which focused directly upon women citizens. The enforced laws are consistent with their view that all women are seducers and the downfall of men. Women are no longer participating members of the Afghan society. Instead, they have been reduced to simple tools for procreation and household duties, no longer able to economically support themselves. According to the State Department of the US in their Human Rights Report, they are sub-humans.

The women of Afghanistan, even those holding prominent positions in medicine and education, have been forced to leave their jobs. Young women have also been forced out of school systems, and the majority of home schools still remaining in the country were converted into monasteries. According to FMF, "One woman who dared to defy Taliban orders by running a home school for girls was shot and killed in front of her husband, daughter, and students."

In accordance with the absence of women doctors, hospitals are also banned from treating females. While sanctions have been provided to allow for one single hospital in Kabul to remain open for women, their primitive conditions have only further worsened cases. Taliban law states that no male may touch or see a woman to whom he is not related; thus, many injured females are forced to suffer and/or die from treatable illnesses, unable to receive proper care.

Mahram is the Islamic term that refers to those men with

whom women may come in contact. Restricted to only relatives or a husband, a woman must travel with a *mahram* at all times. If she is found by herself or with someone not fitting the regulatory standards, she will be subjected to stoning. This was the case for one woman, according to FMF, who was found fleeing Afghanistan with a male companion. Both were accused of adultery and killed by a local Taliban commander.

One of the most outlandish aspects of the Taliban law concerning women is the mandated order of public apparel. A *burqa*, in some areas known as a *chador*, is more or less a bag of fabric that covers a woman completely from head to toe. One opening, a mesh screen, is haphazardly stitched upon the front of the garment for vision. A woman's flesh may not be seen by anyone in public and in the case of one elderly woman whose ankles were accidentally showing from underneath her burqa, "she was brutally beaten with a metal cable until her leg was broken," states FMF.

Being the sole economic providers, only *mahram* can afford to buy their female counterparts a *burqa*. Therefore, those with disabilities or a widow with no remaining male kin are forced into a life of seclusion because they can not cover themselves. Aside from the appearance of women in public, domestic situations for women are also restricted. The windows of all houses and hospitals containing women must be painted black so that others may not see them.

Women are also prohibited from wearing high-heeled shoes so their footsteps are not heard, and they cannot wear bright-colored clothing or wide pants under their *burqa*. While there are restrictions upon the male population of Afghanistan, they prove to be more lenient. The requirement of Islamic clothes and a cap, along with rules regarding the length of one's beard, seem to be the only laws that are solely applicable to men. Overall, the citizens of Afghanistan are not allowed any form of media outside of one Taliban-controlled news source. It is no surprise that the US Department of State would consider the human rights situation in Afghanistan to be poor. In their 1998 Report, they stated that the American Embassy in Kabul has been closed since 1989 because of security reasons, and several

Kristin Lash

non-government organizations are continually harassed in their efforts to supply aid to those still remaining in the country, leaving most women in a state of helplessness.

The Physicians for Human Rights have found that "out of the women surveyed, 97 percent showed signs of severe depression and many have attempted suicide by the ingestion of household cleaners in avoidance of the Taliban oppression." They also found that children suffered drastically from the effects. The majority have witnessed the death of their own family. The infant mortality rate was quoted as 250 out of 1,000 births with 250,000 dying yearly from malnutrition. Also in a recent study performed by UNICEF, "90 percent of the children examined suffer from acute anxiety and the majority will die before reaching adulthood." This is the repulsive, bleak future for the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan who are unable to seek refuge in neighboring countries or abroad.

The condition of Afghanistan has been grossly underestimated and suffers from lack of exposure because of the strict limitations on the international press. However, organizations such as Amnesty International have combined their efforts with FMF to raise awareness and aid for those currently oppressed. Most recently, President Clinton in conjunction with the FMF has agreed for several colleges and universities to provide refugees with scholarships so that they may continue their studies. FMF also has held numerous marches, including April 28th's Washington, DC rally, to expose the Taliban's atrocities. Still, the notion of peace and the restoration of stability within the country remains a dim prospect.

CNN, MSNBC, and streaming news reports filter daily into the homes of western cultures with access to both domestic and global coverage. With the advancement of technology, individuals do not even need to leave their houses. All they have to do is simply click on the Internet for frequent updates. Seemingly, our culture is constantly informed, but sadly, most continue unaware of the grave oppression affecting women in Afghanistan. The UN equated the horrors to those of Kosovo, and the National Defense Council Foundation nominated Afghanistan as the "world's most unstable state for the year

2000," according to AP reports.

Unfortunately, issues such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and the fate of Elian Gonzalez have gained imperative precedence in the media. Others have even faced the issue with an element of skepticism, somewhat tolerable considering the Taliban's quoted defense. One official in response to the human rights condition adamantly denied the accusations. The Taliban correspondent claimed the accusations were "products of propaganda," further negating warranted attention.

What is most alarming is the level of apathy displayed among western cultures. A veil of optimistic ignorance is favorably worn when encountered by the oppressive pessimism of reality. And despite promises by Madeline Albright, there is little trace of intent with foreign diplomacy to once again lend a hand to impoverished countries, in this case, Afghanistan. Still, reputable feminist and humanitarian organizations worldwide have posted emergency alerts on their websites, hoping to diminish the lack of hope further plaguing Afghanistan women. Disheartening enough, such information has seeped through the cracks, and most college and university campuses across the nation are void of concern.

While Tibetan Freedom movements have gained popular support through the advocacy of musical artists with the initiation of numerous student chapters, the plight of Afghanistan is continuing largely unnoticed. There are no annual concerts to raise money and awareness, nor are there rock stars voicing their opinions from coveted podiums. In particular, Loyola College of Maryland is one such institution where students remain uninformed.

"Dave," a freshman lacrosse player at Loyola College in Maryland, spends most of his spare time between practice and the classroom out with friends at local bars. Currently undecided about his academic pursuit, he remarked in a recent interview that he felt "cut off from the news and stuff in college." Living in the infamous bubble that seems to encapsulate most undergraduates, "Dave's" only source of information is fed to him through television. However, even with cable access made available by his private Jesuit college, the chances that he may tune

in are slim to none. With over forty channels offered, he admitted that he usually tunes into entertainment shows such as the infamous Jerry Springer Show and wrestling extravaganzas. However, after being briefly informed about the current oppressions women are facing in Afghanistan, "Dave" was immediately shocked. "It's absurd," he flatly stated, "that something so extreme could be happening. I mean, I just didn't think stuff like that was part of today's society. With so many equal rights groups all over the place, I just figured stuff like that didn't happen. It is important and I should know about it. I guess I thought everyone was like us." Unfortunately, Afghanistan is not like the democratic United States.

"Bob" is another student at Loyola College who was unaware of the problems overseas. A junior working towards a major in Journalism, has a much more cynical response to the events, "I wouldn't really give it a second thought," he stated. "It's true and pretty basic; I don't think we should get involved with those problems. I feel bad, but it's not the US's duty to play 'big brother' all the time to every suffering country. I would rather be concerned with things here than something that doesn't affect me at all."

True, "Bob" and others may never be directly affected by global conflicts. Gas prices and taxes on oil may increase and if the situation worsens, they may have to bear through unavoidable newscasts. Still, the attitude and ambivalence concerning the welfare of other humans seems a daunting picture of an otherwise ambitious and educated generation.

With over thirty percent of its student body enrolled in the Sellinger School for Business, Loyola College's academic efforts to prepare individuals for corporate America has become quite popular. Students are increasingly attracted to relative statistics of job offers and openings upon graduation. Money and promised economic success in a nation willing to provide is a growing priority among most students. Somewhere, humanitarian concerns seem to be pushed onto the back burner.

As "Bob" states, "I worry about me. With so much stuff going on, what are you supposed to pick and choose? Which one is more important and how do you decide? It sucks, but I would

rather not do anything in that case." One can not help but wonder how many others feel the same and to what extent their opinions will carry over to other matters.

One sophomore transfer student was slightly more attentive to the situation. "Jess," a nineteen-year-old political science and economics major, had a somewhat different view on the situation of Afghanistan. "It's a tough call." She contemplated, "Second and third world countries tend to rely on the US to solve their domestic problems. Still, it's important. I don't believe in oppression, I think humans were all created equals. But in the same sense, I don't know how much a change I could make. I would if I had the means."

Being an active voice is means enough. Both NOW and FMF have sample letters to send to government officials for individuals opposed to the state of Afghanistan under the Taliban rule. The amount of time that it takes for one click of a mouse to generate a print out of one of these letters is inconsequential to the amount of time the women of Afghanistan have been suffering.

Imagine female students suddenly beginning to wear uniformed veils en route to class and social gatherings. Constantly searching for a male companion, some would be excluded from daily responsibilities for fear of traveling alone. Imagine the oppression of Afghanistan women transforming into a US reality, now consider it in terms of self-infliction.

"Women are manipulators, plain and simple. They utilize every inch of their bodies to get what they want. They use their sexuality as a weapon, their language and words as ammunition, and men as their targets.

The major downfall of men is that they are stimulated and aroused visually. Women can capitalize on the opportunity. Clothes, makeup, and hair are worn to make men drool. Women are able to seduce men... it's controlling, it's fun, it's power...it's merely another fact of life."

-*"Women: Just Smile and Show a Little Cleavage,"* an

opinion piece appearing in the *Loyola College Greyhound*.

The words screamed from the page of our weekly newspaper, the writer suggesting that all women were alike in their ploy to snare men for materialistic and superficial gains. I read the article several times, becoming more and more agitated. I sought out the writer; I wanted to know who exactly he was. Why did he have to further objectify women as slutty bar patrons, gold-digging for self-gratification? What I found in return was defeating.

The writer was revealed as a senior Communications major, a female. "If any woman thinks that she is empowered and intelligent because she has learned how to 'boost her assets' for some good ol' lager," I retorted in a letter printed a few weeks later, "she really needs to start reevaluating her efforts and ideologies concerning gender equality. How classless can you be? Or more so, how womanly are you-when you are helping to degrade yourself?" I was baffled yet grounded by realism when I heard this woman further perpetuate the silent oppression-affecting women today in a democratic society. All I had to do was look around me to find truth within her statements. We were successfully wearing the veil of conformity, but of another kind. It could be found any weekend night in front of my dormitory as cabs lined up to haul off hordes of female students - all dressed to kill.

"They put on their little black pants and tube tops, go out to the bars, get drunk and hope to hook up," "Jess" stated bluntly when asked of her perceptions regarding Loyola's female student population. "Dave" had a similar reaction, "I think a lot of the girls here are trying to impress someone when they go out. They get dressed up so much and go out as much possible." And "Bob" too, "They definitely act like they have some type of expectation to live up to."

It was the classic yet redundant scenario written by the staff contributor that I hated but could easily recognize. "The writer's pseudo 'Vindication of Women's Rights' needed to be reexamined if she thought her gender equality ideals were gaining her advancement on the social totem pole," I retorted.

"There was more to a woman's identity than a free beer." The worth of intelligence, the purpose of our educational pursuits had all seemed lost when this writer further degraded her own kind. She had made the problem that much more apparent.

She steps out of the shower and begins to apply her make-up. First comes the concealer, generously daubed under her eyes to hide the circles from the last night's cram session. Foundation comes next, a bronze tint to accent her tanned complexion she received from the salon up the street just hours ago. Glitter and heavy mascara then cover her eyes, drawing attention to the plucked arch of her eyebrows.

Her outfit has already been ironed and laid out. Her spandex top hugs her upper body and one swift sucking in of her stomach, her pants are on for the night. Pulling her hair back into tiny clips, she checks one more time in the mirror at her perfected appearance.

Tonight she will be a blond; a far stretch considering her medium brunette hair, but she laughs knowing the bouncer would take a library card, just as long as she flashed her cute smile. Rushing to the elevator where her friends are patiently waiting, her chunk-heeled boots pound on the hallway floor. She is now ready, and they can hear the confidence in her footsteps.

Every night could be like this for a female coed. It was as such freshman year, but the excitement had worn off and the pressure thus applied when her final grades had arrived. Now she was restricted to just three, maybe four nights a week at the local bar. Still, she was able to have a handful of guys swarm about her each time. She had worked hard for their attention and was dutifully repaid.

As a woman, I have constantly been placed into whichever mode of labeling seemed most convenient and appropriate at the time. I was the 'tomboy' growing up when I chopped the heads off my sister's coveted Barbie dolls, opting to utilize my imagination skills while I climbed a tree. As I entered high school I won the title of "slut" for a good two years when the intimacy of one of many fleeting relationships was revealed. Soon I would become a "butch" when I chopped my long wavy hair into a more stylish and time-friendly pixie cut. Lastly, I became the

"crazy feminist bitch" when our newspaper printed my rebuttal. Only someone off-kilter could write such words, such declarations of independence and then be scornfully reimbursed with slander. Perhaps that is what it came down to. I had spoken against the norm, against the oppression many of my fellow friends had endured and now my punishment surfaced again in public humiliation. I had shown the power of my womanhood, the gift of a voice, and now my flesh was naked as well, to receive their incoming assaults. I had furthered my education, and now I would become banned from certain conversation circles. And I had chosen to walk, not beside the comfort of my male friends, but alone and my independent reputation was receiving restrictive looks of disapproval.

For a woman at the collegiate level to submit herself to the passive role of just another random "hook-up," another pretty face to look at with beer goggles, and a silent voice among a rowdy crowd is a further perpetuation of oppression through the tool of conformity. Voices that argue are silenced out of seductive fear that words may permeate the superficiality and dig deeper to find one's intellect. We are admonished for our sympathy and attention where pervasive apathy is a more convenient, popular train of thought requiring almost none at all.

Those not willing to think out of the box and recognize their educational achievements are no better than those who disregard thought of global affairs that could never directly affect them. We as women following a growing trend towards the return of domestic conservatism with the promise of an engagement ring are equivalent to those Afghanistan women who are reduced to sub-humans because if different, we may pose a threat to established male dominance. Our footsteps may be heard as tumultuous waves forcing to erode at the shores of oppression. Our radiating faces free of impurities and frustrations may be seen as an alarming light of hope, the constant danger.

The voice of students concerned with the plight of others, sympathizing with those not in their immediate social circle, but more so divided from us by a body of water and land - should be loud. They should echo by both males and females in optimism and support for those restrained. Those women in Afghanistan

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may not feel the vibration of our voices, but they hear us as a distant call for salvation. Perhaps mine is a Utopian view, one that does lie oppressed within a Western culture accustomed to liberty that it stifles our own morality, but perhaps I will make a subtle change with or without the means.

"In this city, self-preservation is a full-time occupation. I'm determined to survive on this shore and I don't avert my eyes anymore. In a man's world, I am a woman by birth and after nineteen times around I have found, they will stop at nothing till they know what you are worth. I played the powerless in too many dark scenes. I was blessed with a birth and a death and I guess I just want some say in between. Don't you understand, in the day to day of face to face, I have to act just as strong as I can just to preserve a place where I can be who I am- talk to me now."

-Lyrics from independent folk singer Ani Difranco

Kate Moss, Barbie, and Me

"Incoming," he yelled, "I'm hit, I'm hit."

Ryan organized the miniature camouflaged soldiers in order of ranks and marched them off to war. Ryan and I transformed the basement into a military base. We lined old paperback bestsellers in two rows to form a road connecting the war on Ryan's side to the apartments on mine.

I dressed my Barbie and her daughter Skipper in white paper aprons with red crayon crosses across their chests and drove them to battle in a combat jeep to collect the wounded. My brother would toss the soldiers in the bed of the jeep and Barbie would nurse them back to health. Some were missing arms, legs and uniforms and even more had lost the paint off their eyes and mouth.

"Barbie, you have the most beautiful smile," one soldier commented, "can I take you on a date?" Barbie's white teeth shined in contrast to her blood red lips and replied, "Of course, let's say 7 tonight." Barbie wrapped his arm in a sling made from cotton swabs and tissues and drove home to await her dinner date.

I selected a tight yellow dress that fanned out at the waist and a pair of pink high heels to match. With a thumb size brush, I combed her long blonde hair and then tied it with a pink embroidered ribbon so that the curled ends of her locks fell just below her shoulders.

The doorbell rang and Barbie danced on tiptoes to answer it.

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"Hello Joe, how's the arm?"

"Just fine, thanks to you."

"Come in, please. Would you like a drink?"

"No thanks."

"We'll let's go sit down to eat then. I made your favorite."

The two sat on 80's pink plastic chairs next to a matching round kitchen table. Their plates were filled with sprinkled cupcakes, which were larger than their heads, cooked earlier in my Easy Bake oven. They discussed politics and current events during the meal and then danced together to Tiffany and Jem tapes.

I admired Barbie. She was beautiful and perfect and the exact person I wanted to become. I learned to follow my gender roles from her; I learned how to please others and how to be pleasing to look at as well. Unfortunately I did not realize until later that her smile was painted on and her body was plastic.

In childhood, I was a classic American girl surrounded by Barbie dolls, Easy Bake ovens and Wonderwoman underoos. The trend continued as I grew older, but rather than plastic dolls, real women in magazines and on the runways became my new influences. Flipping through the pages of *Seventeen*, *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*, I found girls my own age or younger provocatively showing their bodies as if their skin and fat had shrunk in the dryer. Even my adolescent peers joined this underground sorority of models, as they, too, rapidly developed hourglass figures, while I was left to watch my body fold and expand in all the wrong places. My self-esteem sank in a thick swamp of thin, impossibly beautiful women on television, in the movies, in magazines, and even in my own classes. Channel after channel on my 42 inch Sony TV displayed plastic cleavage chests and liposuctioned thighs on such programs as Baywatch, House Of Style and 90210. The influence and stress grew so great that soon eating, my favorite pastime, became my everyday nightmare.

It was a cool autumn Saturday in 1994 and I was sitting on my father's company boat in the San Francisco Bay. I was in the eighth grade, adjusting to the foreign state of California and all of its tan, flat-stomached bodies. I slouched uncomfortably on

a padded bench in the cabin of the yacht staring at the black and white pictures of antique boats hung along the wall, while fidgeting with my silver basketball ring. Basketball was my sport of interest at the time and my favorite conversation topic. Needless to say, when an acquaintance from my father's office stepped onto the yacht and began chatting about basketball, my face immediately brightened. "Oh I just rushed here from my daughter's game," he began. My parents hastily added that their precious daughter also plays for her school basketball team. Without any hesitation, he looked me over with smug eyes and burst out saying, "Oh, you play basketball, too? Woah, you're an awful lot larger than my daughter." I sat there frozen, unsure of how to react to his thoughtless comment. Suddenly, the tears began to form a thick glaze over my eyes as I stared away at the feathered clouds now blurring into cotton clumps swimming across the sky. My mom, who also had struggled with her weight, noticed my discomfort and guided me through the hall and into the claustrophobic bedroom. I burrowed my face in her bosom as she stroked my windblown hair and tried to explain, "Honey he meant you were tall, not fat. Why do you care anyway? He's a jerk!" Unfortunately, I could not be consoled, I believed deep down that he was right; I was fat, fatter than everyone else and I needed to change.

On the following Monday in Biology, we watched a video about the diet and nutrition routines of selected Olympic hopefuls. Mr. Hori clicked the power button and began to lecture, "Okay you guys, I probably shouldn't tell you this, but the real way to lose weight is to just eat less calories than you exercise off. It's simple." *Simple. What a brilliant idea. I'll start tonight.*

I searched through the pantry and refrigerator that night and calculated the calories for the food I would be consuming. No more than 1500 calories I decided to be a good limit. Quickly 1500 turned into 1000 and 1000 became 500. The months faded with the fat and soon it was December.

Ryan was home to celebrate the holidays after recently completing his very first semester at Southern Methodist University in our old hometown of Dallas, Texas. His return from college was a difficult adjustment because we were forced to

share the most important teenage necessities- the phone, the bathroom and the remote control. If living together wasn't torture enough, we also needed to adapt to each other's newly formed personalities; freshman year, both in college and in high school, had reshaped our attitudes and opinions. His new life consisted of drunken frat parties and condoms, while I lived in a world of constant exercise and hunger. For fifteen years, Ryan had been my great and powerful protector from all hardships, whether breakups, lost games or parental disputes, but in the fall of 1995 he had disappeared and I was left to fight my battles alone. He was not living at home to watch me exercise myself to skin and bones or to see me black out from fasting. I even spent late nights sweating through endless sit-ups and push-ups, and he was nowhere to be found.

On Christmas morning, the crisp wind was blowing against my nose and cheeks as I strapped on my Rollerblades and headed out the garage door on my way to the track. Although it was winter and most of the United States were wearing earmuffs and wool caps to cover their ears from the bitter cold, I pulled on my headphones and blasted my mix of Madonna, Cyndi Lauper and other 80's artists under the warm California sun. Ironically, as "Girls just wanna have fun" began to play, my brother raced out of the front door and blockaded the driveway before I could escape. After a few questions such as, "Whereya goin'?" and "Whacha doin'?" most of which he already knew the answers to, his expression changed and his face reddened. "Why do you always have to exercise, Kate? Come on, just stay home this once and spend the day with me," he pleaded. I wanted to appease and spend the day with him, but I simply could not resist my obsession. I declined his offer and rolled on my way as he stood there defeated.

"Katie Foster."

"Yes."

"Come right this way." I stood and followed the nurse to an isolated room at the end of the hallway. She flipped through

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the papers on a clipboard, scribbled a few words, and then said, "Okay, Katie, the doctor will be here in a minute."

I perched on the cot, swinging my legs through the air like an ice skater, and starring at the collection of Ansel Adams photographs on the wall. I focused on one with an immense black sky and a low horizon line with a few distant white houses. The photograph was still and quiet and calm. The full white moon looked like a far off planet as it tunneled through the dark sky. The land was rough textured and cold, but the sky had power and emotion. The entire piece was a collection of contrasts; the black sky compared to the white land, the smooth clouds compared to the rough landscape, the darkness compared to the bright moon, and the unknown compared to the civilized. I wish I could be traveling through that dark sky headed towards the bright moon. I wish I could travel to that unknown, to that world where life is smooth and calm and infinite. I wish I could escape the stresses of civilization and the powers of control. I wish...

"Katie, hi I'm Dr. Wisink. Let's just take a look at you today and see if we can figure out why you haven't gotten your period in over a year and a half." She told me to lie on the cot and proceeded to gently push and rub my stomach and hips.

"Okay, you tell me if anything hurts," she said as I nodded my head to answer, "you seem a lot thinner than the last time I saw you. When was that? About three or four months ago?"

"Yeah I think so," I replied with a nervous smile.

"All right, I don't really see any physical reasons other than you are very underweight. Katie, I want you to be honest, have you been counting calories or taking diet pills?"

I choked on the question and searched for a believable answer. "No, no, definitely not," I quickly responded.

"Well, if it's not a result of an eating disorder, then my guess would be it is due to growth and stress," she started to explain. I kept smiling and shaking my head and trying to hide my relief; I had fooled her and my mother. "If this continues in three months, please come see me, okay?" I shook my head in agreement.

Three months later, I still didn't have my period. Six, twelve, twenty-four months went by and still no signs. Dr. Wisink never knew. And neither did anyone else.

I finally did get my period one-month after I came home from Spain. The combination of the constant traveling from town to town in Spain as well as the intimidating personality of my host mother changed my habits. My host mother, Maria, was a short, burly woman with a well lived in face and a trademark cigarette stuck to the edge of her bottom lip. When she scratched out her words in a raspy, forceful voice, her cigarette hung from a small piece of dry skin on her lip and jumped up and down.

Lunch was a revolting experience of greasy, fried, and oily foods. One day, I made the mistake of watching Maria cook a mystery meal in her unsanitary kitchen whose walls were painted with a thick coat of black flies that devoured the old infested meat on the counter. I held my fingers over my mouth as she poured more melted butter and oil over her unknown concoction. She peered over in my direction and noticed my nausea. Unfortunately, she tried to heal me with her own remedy of a whiskey shot, which made me even more ill. Still drunk from the shot, I stumbled to the handcrafted redwood table in the left corner of *Meson Los Trillos* and fell onto my chair between Mama Maria and her eldest son, Martin. The meal began with a hefty bowl of gazpacho and an inconspicuous sliver of bread. Even the lettuce in the salad, my one safe haven, was floating in a thick, oily dressing. I picked at the options in front of me and pretended to enjoy the meal out of hospitality. Mama Maria, however, noticed my disgust and asked between coughs from her cigarette smoke why I chose not to eat. In my embarrassing struggle to reply I blurted out, "No como mucho," a simple answer meaning that I don't eat much.

She tapped on the end of her cigarette and dropped the ash in the salad. I looked in the bowl and watched the gray clumps bob in the dressing and finally disintegrate into tiny morsels. In her rapid Spanish dialect she explained that it was important to eat and develop a voluptuous figure. She continued

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to say that guys like larger women, as she smiled to her husband across the table and rubbed her own padded hips and stomach. I just smirked and looked outside at the kids playing soccer on the street, hoping to find a stray dog that I could pass my food to. There was no escape. I had to eat to survive.

Years after my trip to Spain, at three in the morning on a Saturday, I watch my quad-mate struggle with the same difficulties I had for my entire life. She complains about her elephantine thighs and balloon-shaped butt while critiquing her reflection in the window, "Katie, Katie...I just don't know what to do with myself. I am so hideous right now. Look at this, look at this fat all over me!"

I deny her comments and reach for another handful of wheat thins. In that one moment, she grabs a strange container of medicine from her closet. "What's that?" I ask. She taps on the side of the bottle and two pills slide into her palm as she replies, "Oh these? They're diet pills. I take them with another set to help increase my metabolism while I workout. Katie, I have to do anything and everything to avoid the freshmen 15."

I stare into her transparent eyes and for the first time I see the mirror image of the person I used to be and hope never to become again. "Oh please don't try to be like me. It's not worth it. You don't want to be like me."

She didn't listen. She couldn't listen. She was lost as I was lost in a lonesome dark sky searching for a guiding light and searching to be safe on stable ground once again. Society may have brought us to the sky, tumbling through the air like a feather lost in the wind, but we have to hit the ground again and face the realities of life. The media and toy companies portray unreachable goals for beauty, but it is our job to know what we find beautiful in ourselves and not in the outside world. We are the stability and we are the reality. It's our choice.

Forgive Me Father for I Have Sinned

"Come on. Get up. Let's go to church."

"No, I am so tired. Let me sleep some more."

"Get out of bed you lazy ass. My parents are going to be pissed if I don't go."

"Okay, okay. Hold on, let me go get ready."

I stripped and slipped a floral sundress over my head and watched in the mirror as it showered my body and landed around my ankles. The flowers danced and played around my shins as I hurried to the chapel with my roommates. Inside, we sat next to a young family with twin girls and one older boy about seven. I stared at the one twin coloring a picture of her family. The stick figures were each different heights, but all shared the same size heads decorated with two dots and a half circle in black marker to form a smile. The mother had a bluebonnet in her hand. The colors looked familiar.

"Purple, yes purple is the color I need to finish my masterpiece," I mouth to myself while searching for a purple crayon. I rub the color deep into the construction paper until the crayon is dulled flat and the paper is dented. I begin to sign my name in a newly sharpened green crayon when Ryan, watching over me like a cat just waiting to pounce on his prey, elbows me in the forearm and directs the crayon out across the purple petals and into the turquoise clouds.

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The area between my collarbones begins to burn and sizzle until that area becomes my neck and that turns to my throat and finally reaches my tongue and larynx. My mother covers my lips before I can speak and leaves my mouth tasting of the cinnamon brown Estee Lauder perfume bottle that stands guard on her dresser with a tiny bow tied around its waist. With my voice hindered, I grab my brother's arm instead and pelt him with punches. He fights back, but my mom separates us. "Kate, you sit between me and your father and Ry, you sit on the end."

My eggshell summer dress fans out like a napkin over my lap displaying my bruised legs dangling in the air and tapping the pew in front of me. I try to listen to the priest and decode his sermon filled with words I do not understand, but I am distracted by the grandness of the architecture and the bright basket of flowers on the carpeted stairs pointing to the altar. There are windows on either side of the church with various scenes portrayed in colored glass. I stare at them. I am watching a play, no wait, a movie. A man in a white cloth diaper is dragging a cross in front of an audience. He is now on the cross and men are driving nails into his hands. My palms begin to ache so I rub their centers to make sure I'm not bleeding as well.

The last frame leads me to the wooden cross hanging from the ceiling. Father Morris looks so small in comparison. He's wearing a dress that reminds me of the one my great aunt Mary wears, except that hers usually have bright floral prints or geometric shapes on the fabric. My mom calls them muumuus, but I don't understand why my aunt would wear clothes that remind people of cows.

The priest is now holding up a wine glass in the air and closing his eyes. His lips are moving quickly and I wonder if he is going to cry. He puts the chalice down and holds a silver plate to the sky. I know that is communion and I am not allowed to have that until I complete Sunday School classes like my brother. I can't wait for my First Communion because I will get to wear my favorite white dress with a silk collar and a bow covering my backside. My mom will even curl my hair and maybe let me wear a trace of her lipstick.

I don't think I ever did curl my hair that day. And I still don't wear any lipstick. Nothing has changed, yet everything is different. I see the mirror under the table, I see the ace up the sleeve, I see the one-sided coin spinning in the air. Magic tricks. Illusions. Altered states of reality. Church has no more meaning to me than Penn and Teller or Barnum and Bailey. The stained glass windows are not a movie reel, but arranged bits of colored glass. They do not sparkle from the moonlight, but instead reflect 600 watt bulbs shining from the floor and ceiling. The carpet covering the floor is torn and frayed at the edges. The flowers hide cords and outlets behind their plastic leaves.

Father Morris is old now. His eyes crinkle around the corners and his neck is thick and heavy. As he speaks, the skin connecting his neck to his chin swings and sways like a lab shaking water off his fur after a swim in the lake. A voice that was once so deafening now needs a microphone to form a whisper. "I believe in one God," he begins. The whole arena explodes,

"Father, the Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
Of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
The only Son of God,
Eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
True God from true God,
Begotten, not made,
Of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made."

I've forgotten all the words. I haven't been to church in over ten years. I move my lips in unison with the priest and hope that no one notices. The people in their sport coats, pressed slacks and silk blouses stand upright towards the altar. Their mouths are moving so fast I can't understand what they are saying and I wonder if they even know. I expect to see people raising their arms in a Hitler salute, blindly shouting *Sieg Heil* slogans or even more marching in unison with rifles across their chests. No

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one deviates from the mean; everyone is the same, knowing the words from years of conditioning and practice. There is no meaning to the words anymore. Just speak. Just go with the flow. Just be normal.

In my ninth grade history class, I watched a video called *The Wave*. It was an after school special to teach us about the dangers of conformity and authority. A young teacher mimicked the rise of Hitler and Nazism with his students because they did not believe Hitler could rise to power in current society. The teacher began slowly with only a few simple rules to start: stand up when you want to speak in class, sit up straight, and wear this patch on your shoulder. But soon the demands became much worse. The kids were told to segregate themselves from other kids in the school and even other kids in the class. Friendships were broken, households were disturbed and violence ensued, but the students in *The Wave* continued their discrimination. After a few weeks of the experiment, the teacher called an assembly in the gym. The members of *The Wave* dominated the room and marched with a sense of superiority over the other students and faculty. Once the room was filled with people, the lights turned off and a movie screen was lowered to the floor. Hitler's face came into view and the sound of his audience screaming "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler" echoed in the room. Members of *The Wave* looked down at the patches on their shoulders, ashamed. "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler" kept repeating in the background, "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler."

I watched the same unconscious obedience in a Dave Matthews concert last month. "We want Dave, we want Dave," the audience chanted while waving florescent glow sticks and lighters in the air. Thirty-five minutes after scheduled, the band came onto the stage. The crowd cheered and whistled until the first chord of Dave's guitar vibrated throughout the amphitheater. A smoke cloud layered the sky and hid the stars from clear vision. "Hey my friends," he began and the crowd finished, "It seems your eyes are troubled, care to share your time with me." I can't hear Dave's voice anymore, but rather the choir surrounding me. Everyone is facing the stage. I watch their mouths move to the music and their eyes reflecting the spotlights. Everyone is

the same. No deviation.

I find myself singing along even though I've never heard their music before. I know the words. I am no different than all the rest.

It's like when I drive to Reno with my parents and listen to Oldies 105.7 on the radio. Songs I don't remember ever hearing in my life seem so familiar. I can recite all the lyrics and even tap the headrest of my mother's seat perfectly in sync with the beat. *"If you want to be happy for the rest of your life/ Never make a pretty woman your wife/ Go for my personal point of view/ Pick an ugly girl to marry you."* I close my eyes and sing along. I tap the leather headrest. It's no longer soft and yielding. It feels hard. It feels hollow. I open my eyes and find my parents are gone and the car has disappeared. I am in church. My ears burn and my cheeks flame in embarrassment. I take my hands off the pew and cup them in my lap.

A warm tiny palm gently squeezes the top of my cupped hands. I glance at the young twin whose hand sits atop of my own and feel transfixed by her smile. With her free arm, she directs me to her artwork. Her finger lands on a female stick figure standing far to the left of the page with a floral dress and brown hair similar to mine. Her lines have shape and movement unlike the others who are standing erect like soldiers in an army. She is different and happy and content with herself.

My thoughts are interrupted by Father Morris' whisper in the background. "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord," I hear him say as the people gather their jackets and purses in a rush to leave the building.

The night is crisp and dark outside. Under a lamplight the young twin and her family stand together holding hands on their way to the parking lot. I offer her a toothy smile and admire the scene that surrounds me. The trees wave under the power of the wind and the stars glisten amidst a deep purple sky. With each new breath, I feel refreshed and energized, and with each new thought, I am cleansed. I do have shape and movement like the figure in crayon. I am different. I am at peace.

KATIE FOSTER

"These are days you might fill with laughter"

-10,000 Maniacs

The room was ink black and cold. The phone rang.

"Hello."

"Hey Nicole, how's it going?"

"Nicole, Nicole who? It's 5:00 in the morning, man.

You have the wrong number."

"No Nicole?"

"No, Nicole doesn't live here."

My limp wrist dropped the receiver onto the floor. I heard a loud clang as it hit against the answering machine, then a muffled thud against the carpet, and finally all was silent. I turned over and sank back into my pillow.

The window above my bed smashes from the tornado winds outside. The glass pieces burst into the air like those of foam escaping from a crashing wave, but then the bits disappear. I struggle past the furniture in my room on into the hallway towards the front door. The door is broken into wooden pieces that are now flying in circles by the power of the wind. My hair is swirling in the air as I walk onto the cool pavement of the driveway. My father's car alarm is echoing in the garage. The phone is ringing. Why doesn't anyone answer the doorbell?

I wake up to the rhythm of the phone off the hook. The clock on the night stand flashes 12:00. I glance over at Lauren

asleep in the next bed with her down comforter swallowing her body like quick sand. Every once in awhile the wind strengthens and blows my posters up from their bottom edges. Even the petals on Lauren's birthday bouquet wiggle and curl from the brute force of the breeze. Her friends from high school sent her a dozen mixed roses, with babies breath stretching out their snow tipped ends from beneath a dozen long green stems, for her 19th birthday. The roses lost their scent slowly throughout the week like a used scratch and sniff sticker. The wind picks up again and a few petals fall from their stems onto the dresser, waltzing through the air on their way down.

The smell of bacon and onion bagels mixed with the fragrance of thawing grass and burning mesquite logs invade the bedroom and thicken the air. My stomach empties with each sniff through my nostrils as I lay under the covers unable to escape the odor. I jump off the bed and let my tangled sheets and blankets drag behind. I pull at my pajama pants that have twisted in the night and then slip on a pair of leopard print slippers. The floor feels uneven and the walls keep blocking my route into the kitchen.

As I turn the corner into the den, the furniture and wall-paper look different from the night before. The paintings on the wall remind me of those hanging in our beach house off the Pacific. A Sears portrait of my older brother Ryan and I, wearing matching holiday velvet and plaid outfits sitting on carpeted blocks of varying heights, is framed on the table beside the couch. Bacon still hisses in the distance, but the aroma of spiced cinnamon slaps me across the face. A bowl of cinnamon potpourri stands tall on the coffee table with a melting vanilla candle in the center. The Temptations' melodies sound from the radio as I enter onto the linoleum floor. My father is busy whipping eggs with a wire whisk and my mother is singing as she squeezes oranges against a glass bowl.

"Well, good morning sleepy head."

"What is going on here? I don't know how you guys wake up so early. You are nuts!"

"What can we get you madam? Over easy, poached, scrambled, or how about a cheese omelet with onions?"

Katie Foster

"Oh yeah, that sounds good. Can I have that, Dad?"

"Of course, anything for my girl...my girl, talkin' 'bout my girl, my girl." My dad grabs hold of my arm and dances with me around the kitchen. "Doug, Doug, be careful. Watch the stove. It's hot. Doug, watch out," my mother shouts, but her voice is lost somewhere in the music.

My head settles on his cotton sweatshirt and my left arm wraps around his back. I can feel his chest vibrate from singing and his breath warm the top of my head. He smells of Old Spice and toothpaste, with a touch of earth from mowing the lawn earlier that morning. He is taller than I remember and my slippered feet keep tripping over his decaying Reeboks. He spins me in dizzying circles and holds tight to my right palm as we sway back and forth like water in a teapot.

The song fades away and my dad returns to the frying pan. I sit at the kitchen table and sip orange juice from a mug. I concentrate on the wooden table in front of me and listen to the clanking pans and scuffling feet in the background. The different shades of brown lines rooted deep in the wooden table race across like buffalo running through the plains somewhere in the Midwest. I imagine a blend of dirt and fur and slobber all mixed together in a speeding tornado sweeping past the table.

"Kate, are you okay? Do you still want an omelet?"

"Yeah, sure." I raise my eyes from the table expecting to find my mother, but my roommate stands there instead. I touch the table searching for wild animals, but the tips of my fingers stick to the surface. It smells of peanut butter, alcohol and banana peels. The trash is piled in the corner with water bottles and plastic food containers sticking out in all directions. I stare at my roommates dancing in the kitchen to Madonna's "Like a Prayer," using their spatulas as microphones. I leave my drink on the table to join the excitement; beads of moisture sliding down the mug leave a messy circle on the wood. Bacon scents the apartment.

Rachel spins Carrie in circles, Kristin shakes her hips and points to the sky, and the rest of us interlock arms and rotate partners. Sarah grabs hold of my wrist and swings me around like a

ballerina. The tip of my nose, numbed earlier from the cold air, warms above the steam and smoke of the bacon sizzling. I close my eyes and feel the slight breeze from the window play in the thin threads of my hair as I soar through the kitchen and into the den. Trying to regain my equilibrium, I wobble by the door and let the weight of my head shift from left to right and back again. My blurred vision focuses on a poster tacked on the wall in front of me. Its colors shout at me in reds, yellows, and blues as scribbled figures dance in a circle and a dove sails in the center holding an olive branch in his mouth. Below the Picasso hangs a framed collage of friends and roommates reflecting the dim light of the room. We are all linking arms and hugging and laughing. Our complexions are red and happy, in sync with our lively eyes.

I stand away from the photographs and explore the den. The tables are covered in magazines torn around the edges, plates with leftovers molded to the surface, and glasses stained from drinks that filled them before. The carpet curls on the sides by the table and has crumbs sprinkled on it like pepper on potatoes. I step over the backpacks and jackets on the floor and into my bedroom, still dancing along the way. Inside Lauren strikes a match that explodes in a giant flame as it touches the incense standing tall in a clay holder. The smoke swims to the ceiling like a snake slithering from a twig basket in rhythm with his master's flute. It leaves the room smelling of the cool mornings in the beginning of winter; the sweet smells that remind me of family and holidays.

Sitting on my unmade bed are my other three roommates talking and braiding each other's hair. I join, finding a spot in the middle of them all and lie against Kim's thigh. She pets the runaway tendrils of hair off my face and back where they belong behind my ear, while I comb Jennifer's curly blonde locks that spread across the length of my waist and hips. The four of us sing to the rest of Madonna's greatest hits sounding from the kitchen and talk about our crushes and our family and our fears during the songs we don't like. During the chorus of "Material Girl," the phone rings.

"Hello."

"Kate, hey it's Mom. How are you doing Hon?"

Katie Foster

"So great. I love it here."

"Oh, that is so good to hear. I miss you though."

"I love you too, Mom."

I hung up the receiver and heard a gentle click as it fell back into place. I returned to my friends and stared at the strains of sun streaming through the window onto the bed where we were lying. The room is bright yellow and warm.



Ryan Creel

What They Say About Redheads

Outside on the corner of Eutaw and Lombard, in neon yellow, hard-angled "Greek" writing is the Goddess. Behind its oak double doors is a bar/showroom. That is, according to the neon sign. As to what kind of showroom, that's given away by the lack of windows. Inside and out, the place has a vibe about it that I want to call "shady chic." The jukebox near the dressing room door is set to play Janet Jackson's "Tonight's the Night." Flanking the long, oval-shaped bar on either side are booths and mirrors. In the corner, on a diagonal line from the jukebox, a TV is cued to ESPN. In the center of the bar is a miniature stage and pole.

It's already half past midnight, and there aren't many patrons. Between the bar and the booths, there are about ten men. Uncharacteristic of a Friday, one would think. Scantly clad women hang around, and talk amongst themselves if not with one or two of the few customers on hand. "Kitty Kat" and "Moneybags"¹ are off to the side, having a drink together. They seem particularly bored, tonight. For one lady in particular, Janet's vocals are a cue. Toned, tall and slender, with long legs and wavy red hair to match, her outfit is a gold halter-top and a matching skirt, down to the ankles and slit both sides back up to the waist; an enticing ensemble that shows off the barbell in her navel, and the circular tattoo on the small of her back. After spritzing the fiberglass pole with a blue liquid and wiping it

down—*who knows* where the previous dancer's been—she goes into her routine, her green eyes focused on nothing in particular. At that moment, it probably wouldn't matter to her if there were five or fifty people watching. The soft lighting of the place erases her freckles, as though they were some unsightly blemishes. The skirt disappears. She rolls her tight stomach like a one woman harem...the top is gone...her body has become almost serpentine... hypnotic... there used to be a thong, there...I was saying something about freckles before...wasn't I?

Her spins, twists and turns reveal 13 years of classical training. Her style has a Cinemax level of quality, as opposed to most of her colleagues whose style would be more suited for public access, or even Spice TV. The way she incorporates the pole into her routine could raise firefighting to an art.² It's all the more impressive when considering this is all done in a tight space, with plastic high-heeled platforms. No wonder she hates shoes. Her set concludes—appropriately so—with Lauryn Hill's "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You." As she recollects her costume from the corner of the stage, the clientele and staff give a deserving round of applause to the redhead³ known only as Savannah.

Born and raised in Arbutus, southwest of Baltimore, Holly Jean Mahoney was adopted at age 2 by a maternal cousin and her husband. She also had a stepsister two years her senior. Holly characterizes her 'mother' as a judgmental, conservative woman with a penchant for labels, one of many things that prompted her to set out on her own. "At least I got along with my sister," she says with a laugh. Since meeting her real mother three years ago, she's learned that she has three additional siblings, ranging from ages 10 to 26. But from the sound of things, including her own admission, that doesn't change Holly's role as the black sheep of the family.

"Red-headed stepchild, if you will," she adds.

Although she works mainly as an exotic dancer, she has had a wide variety of jobs, the worst of which was her first. She ran a snowball stand, which being bereft of a screen, left her and the assorted-flavored syrups at the mercy of bees.⁴ She also bartends at the Goddess, and has bartended before. She has thought

about opening an Irish pub and call it Mahoney's—in tribute to her stepfather—having found a talent in the business aspect of running such a place. She's also done demolition work, she's been an optician, and recently she's started daylighting at her friend's smoke shop, Tobacco Road on 46 East Cross Street.

Located in Federal Hill's Cross St. Market—highly reminiscent of equal parts South Bronx, Greenwich Village and Park Slope, Brooklyn—for a store its size, it boasts an international selection of cigars, cigarettes and other smoking paraphernalia; including skillfully crafted pipes, lighters and bongs so immense that, to paraphrase what she told some passing browsers, they require a team effort. Here she hangs back with an Indian cigarette in hand, barefoot and clad simply in a brown hippy dress; her disguise as a mild mannered store clerk. After closing up shop at 10, she usually gets a ride from her friend, who is the actual owner of Tobacco Road—a hunky dude in a wife beater and leather jacket and carpenter pants, an alpha by the name of Ben.⁶

While she waits, a homeless man comes by the store and asks to wash her car. "No, sorry baby," she tells him (She calls *everyone* "baby," the same way someone else might use "dude"). She lets him have her last Newport, though. After he leaves, she goes back behind the counter and takes out a small paper bag. Then she resumes, speaking on how she first came to know Goddess three and a half years ago:

"I had moved back from Florida," Holly says. "My ex had just passed away. We were never married, so he had a lot of my money in his bank account in his name so I got it and I was in a lot of debt...I was bartending in Paradise Tavern, a little shitty dive bar in Catonsville, and went down there to tip the girls—I knew a couple of girls that worked there from the Marriott, they were moonlighting, and put some dollars in their G-strings. Kim, our manager at the time, said 'you should really work here, you're tall, you got long legs...' and I'm wearing baggy jeans and a baseball cap—I was such a tomboy—and she talked me into it. I said I'd give it a shot and they told me I wouldn't have to dance my first night, I could just watch. Just get dressed up and watch.

I got there, and the male bartender at the time, Gus, decided I had to get onstage because I was the only girl there, and they had a full baseball crowd. So my first night there, rather than getting to sit and watch, I was stuck up there in front of fifty people, and was shaking *so* bad, I was terrified...but after that, it just came naturally."

From snow cones to striptease, she certainly feels as though she's come a long way from her former status as "one of the boys. The one girl that never got attention from the guys but always hung out with them. Pat on the head, kiss on the cheek, loved me to death, partied with me like Hell, but never woulda dated me." ⁷ After a quick peck for Ben, and his promise to stop by the club later, she stops at the neighboring convenience store to give that paper bag to another homeless man who hangs around the block often. It's the rest of her chicken chow mein lunch from earlier in the day. Then she rescues me from the \$9 cover charge. What a woman.

After reassembling her outfit, Savannah Mahoney takes a lap atop the bar, stopping at each patron for a tip. The first person she comes to, a balding, middle-aged endomorph declines, which just *has* to be against etiquette in this sort of establishment. "He tells me some girl in here pissed him off before," she says when she gets to where I am. "I ask him, 'so what're you still doing here?' 'I'm just leaving,' he says. So I go 'Fine, bye, you're an asshole, by the way.' 'Jeez.'" She shakes her head and chuckles, incredulous, as if to say *what nerve*.⁸ I kiss Holly's hand, and tip her for both of us.

¹ A blonde, 30-something veteran of the club, named so after her E-cups. If they didn't look fit to burst, one could swear that puberty was especially kind to that one.

² Adam West and Burt Ward wouldn't have a thing on her.

³ *natural* redhead

⁴ She'd regain a slight measure of revenge for the bee stings, with her

invented pastime of capturing bees in the bottles and shaking them up.

⁵ This is where the interview was conducted.

⁶ I don't know if this was the proper attire for such weather, but more power to him.

⁷ I could comment on how familiar that whole situation sounds, and as a matter of fact I did, but this isn't about me.

⁸ Yeah... *Mas burro que mandado hacer*, as my mother would say.

Don't Be Afraid of Their Love

From the outside, 1003 E. Pratt Street is almost enigmatic in its simplicity. The utter plainness of that façade takes on a much more unsettling air for the first-time patron at nightfall; a foreboding of what is yet to come once the portal opens. It's been described by *the Johns Hopkins News-Letter* as "a cinder block" with "a column of light with its name blazing upon it"—Club Orpheus. The muffled sounds of Goth and Industrial through that ominous, metal door bring to recollection the post-Apocalyptic visions of urban American nightlife, circa '80s science fiction. It is Saturday night, and the darkest sector of the American counterculture has congregated here. *Bound* has come to Baltimore.

Established in Baltimore in March of 1998, *Bound* is the industrial/fetish dance party that calls out to the modern-day Morlock. On the other side of the door is a sweet, old woman in black leather that checks IDs and marks the patrons accordingly (18 to party, 21 to drink). At the register is Master Meckle, a soft faced, heavyset man also adorned in black leather and killer sideburns. When not in submission, his other interests also include his cat, history, art, literature and his 1970 Ford Torino. Tonight, he's decided to go with the vest rather than the cloak. At the bar is a 60-something gentleman, who could easily be a member of Loyola's faculty, perhaps even the School of Business. This is before panning back, of course, to reveal the cocktail dress and poorly applied eyeshadow. All around are people in various modes of dress; the elaborate unique Gothic Glam kitsch all

intermingling. A man dressed as Artemus Gordon shares a laugh with a woman with the gaunt frame of a schoolmarm and the accoutrements of a succubus. At one of the back tables across from the restrooms, a teen with inflatable bat's wings converses with a girl in a patent leather bathing suit with matching thigh high platform boots—pausing only to accept a piece of fruit from a harem girl. Missing tonight is a local artist who is usually in attendance with her bounty of ceramic, painted and leather masks, and other knick-knacks to which the term "unique" barely does justice.

Atop the steps that separate the lounging area from the dance floor, is another lounge and bar, plus the DJ's booth on the far end of the floor, where Rammstein's 'Du Hast' blasts throughout the club. The merchant downstairs may not be here tonight, but those who typically claim the second floor are in attendance indeed. A couple dressed in garb reminiscent of the short-lived Mortal Kombat series man their wares beside a large wooden rack (used mostly for photo-ops)—a display of collars, chains, claws, whips and various other gateways to the world of the erotic gothic psychotic.

Behind the Gypsy woman with henna designs on her hands is the balcony, giving full view of the dance floor below. Men, women, in couplings that need make sense only to themselves, entangled in each other like the living statues that adorned Al Pacino's mantle in "Devil's Advocate." Those without partners embrace themselves, or reach out to the invisible; they are almost childlike, as their bodies sway lurch twitch to music only they can hear. They are in that happy place first erected years ago—the haven within, built when there was no place on earth to belong; when the taunts of their so-called peers seemed unending. Who knew that happy place was on the corner of Pratt and Exodus all this while?

Also behind that woman is the 'movie wall.' Normally, film clips of the bizarre, surreal and sometimes outright brutal are projected upon that far wall. Pornographic cartoons from Japan, music videos by such twisted minds as Aphex Twin, Rob Zombie or Type O Negative, and obscure films containing material that probably wouldn't ever see the light of network programming are

projected. However, "Kama Sutra" is this week's theme, and as such, the feature 1997 film of the same name plays throughout the evening, much to the delight and distraction of the multitude. Other Saturdays come and gone have seen evenings devoted to religious sects, slave auctions using play money, human buffets, poetry by Evil Boy (Drew Carey's...well, *evil* twin) and fashion shows where models male and female sport the latest in fetish, latex, leather and "accessories"—to say nothing of demonstrating the best ways of using them.

To the left of the movie wall, there used to be a whipping bar; a wooden plank suspended from the ceiling with wrist cuffs attached thereupon. In all likelihood, it's been moved to the new dungeon in Orpheus' basement, which has yet to be unveiled. Where there is now a glass dance floor lit up like a game of Simon was the place where anybody who so wished could ask one of the professionals in attendance—or their date—to strap them in and do with them as they pleased. Such extra-spicy acts of depravity ranged from something as simple as nipple clamps and ice cubes down one's Speedos, to all out sado-hedonistic warfare, with candle wax and the cat o'nine tails. In any case, whatever the participants' predilection, there always seemed to be one thing people can count on: *someone will get naked*. In the face of that, it isn't as surprising to see a black woman being beaten into orgasmic bliss by a white man...historically ironic perhaps, but not as surprising.

This is *Bound*—a place where abnormality can take charge. This is where Maryland's freaks and geeks can come together and simply belong, if only for five hours of the week. Regardless of generation, orientation, pigmentation, all comers are welcome. There are always those who stumble upon the place, ignorant of the delights that await them, but they too are tolerated. Interestingly enough, it's a toleration that is a few degrees warmer than that which they are familiar with, beyond that single steel door. Here, the transvestite will extend a kindness to the 'norm' that most likely would not be reciprocated at a place like Gator's. Definitely not like rain on a wedding day.

Last call. As a curve, the DJ has thrown on '80s pop, and the lights come up, brightening the small club as the mood fol-

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lows suit. As the song ends, and the dancing stops, people take time to finish their drinks, smile, shake hands, hug, kiss new friends made, and touch base with their traveling companions. Thanks are extended to Master Meckle for another fun-filled evening of sado-masochism, sexual anomaly and the occasional mosh pit. Flyers are taken from the nice old lady, promoting upcoming themes. Winter coats cover form-fitting vinyl and stilettos, platforms, combat boots echo in the night, clomp away in several directions, fading. Time to return to the dull, unimaginative, real world. Until next week.

Let Every Man Examine Himself

Under overcast November skies, I watched an age-old mystery unfold before me. I watched him, standing alone away from the crowd. He stood, a man falling apart at the seams, trying to hide behind a black suit and tasteful blue and silver tie. His hands were jammed deep in the suit's pockets and his attention was directed towards his freshly shined shoes. He kicked at the green grass that surrounded them. His tie blew violently in a light wind that barely swayed my dress. I knew him well. He was my friend, but I never saw him quite like this before. It hurt me to see him suffering alone so I began to work up the nerve to walk over and comfort him. Before I took the first step, another friend of mine grabbed my shoulder and said, "Let him be a man. Leave him with his dignity." I looked at him, not knowing exactly what he meant. What in the world did being a man have to do with anything? Wasn't it human for everyone to feel pain? Wasn't it normal that everyone be in need of people sometimes? All I wanted to do was help, and I thought it was stupid to let pride get in the way. I stood among the crowds of people alone in thought. I *was* helping him. I was "leaving him with his dignity." A man has to be a man.

Memories of past circumstances helped me figure out my place in the world as far as "things like this go." My family always explained issues to me that way. "Things like this go

ways like that." The oldest of my grandmother's grandchildren and the only girl at the time, I knew things were unbalanced from the start. I played with my younger cousins and first friends, all of them rough boys. I'm a female, then expected to cry and whine if I wanted to, but my male peers couldn't do the same. They could only cry over their wounds to a certain extent. Eventually, they grew older and were not expected to cry at all. It was cowardly, unmanly and weak. It was a gradual process. The boys in the family began to cry less and less until, eventually, they became as hard and unmoving as their fathers were. Gaining the approval of a father is important to a boy seeking someone with whom to identify. He has to grow up sometime and model himself after someone he admires. "Things like this go ways like that," it was explained to me. Friends last forever, unless you are one sex and your friend is the other. Then they only last for as long as you both are "children" because one always wants to change to fit the expectations of his same-sex peers. It's like the Bible says, "When I was a child, I [spoke] as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Corinthians 13:11). I guess I was the "childish thing" that was being put away for the boys' initiation into a reputable group that they didn't really understand.

Males definitely have it worse than females. We never worry about being women because it usually comes naturally. We don't have to worry about belonging to any exclusive group in order to affirm how "womanly" we are. It still didn't give me any comfort knowing that I was "the lucky one." I lost my first friends.

As one grows older, he or she sees things in the appropriate light for his or her age. My grandmother continued to shed light on things for me, helping me understand that relations between the sexes are always going to encounter problems. They involve tension twenty-five percent of the time and miscommunication the other seventy-five percent of the time, no matter whether the males are family members or not. Grandmas are never wrong. They foresee everything and never gloat when they're right.

My senior year of high school was full of family-oriented

tension because I had dreams and goals. My two uncles, the only adult men born into my family, didn't graduate from high school. They were proud of me and envious at the same time. They weren't envious because they wanted to be as I was, but because they thought I "thought I knew everything." Every time I answered a question, they looked at me resentfully as if I tried to hurt their pride or mock their lack of education. If that isn't the truth, it felt as such, and once again, I felt entirely responsible. I soon found out it was not my fault.

"The anger that your uncles sometimes feel is not a reflection of their feelings about you. They just ran out of time... or wasted it ...either way. Things like this go ways like that" Grandma said. Once again, that was just the way things had to be. Someone else's loathing for the misuse of the same opportunities I had was just one of those things that happens.

When I graduated from high school, my uncles were there, their eyes red from tears. On that occasion, tears were okay because they were happy tears and "every man has the right to be happy," as my oldest uncle put it. My uncle's voice quivered as he said the word "man" as if he didn't even believe it himself. He sounded as if he was told to "stop crying and suck it up" too early in life. His voice promised unhappy tears.

Later my oldest uncle spoke to me. "You know what, you can be anything you want," he slurred through drunken breath. His eyes became teary, but he swore it was from the alcohol. His dignity flew out of the window.

I wish my uncles had cried more. I wish they had cried longer. I wish just to make them happy, that I was not a woman. I have no distractions from feeling, no pressure to hold myself anything. No one ever smacked me in the face and emasculated me. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I have nothing to prove. My dream is truth. Their dreams were their downfall, but they are men. I forgot everything that could possibly hold me back from my dreams and they carry everything with them. The "curse" of manhood weighs heavy on my uncles' shoulders. They push back their tears with alcohol. They distort the world so that their illusion of happiness can live.

All of this was accepted and cemented in my family's

creed: The men ran out of time (or wasted it) and the women beat the clock. The male grandchildren don't cry. They have dreams, but have fun with life; they live. The head female grandchild is the only one of age to be in control of her own destiny, and she doesn't live. She is the first to go to college since her mother, and she is going to graduate. She does whatever she is asked because she is a "good child" and, at the smallest hint that anyone is disappointed in her, she will fall apart at the seams and work twice as hard to win back the respect she lost. She knows that, as a woman, once respect is lost, it's hard to earn it again. That's why she's so smart and can be anything. The boys are just boys on their way to becoming men.

"They have to do what they do," my grandmother explained. "I mean, they *will* do what they do. Things like this go ways like that."

I believe her

and because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in [my] mind. And as with all retold tales that are in [my] heart, there are only good and bad things and black and white things and good and evil things and no in-betweens anywhere. ¹

There are no questions that I can ask. There are only extremes. You are either a man or a woman. You are either a dreamer that dreams or one that achieves. You are expected to do what is right and end up a disappointment or to do what is right with little encouragement. There are no in-betweens.

I continued to watch my friend from a distance, understanding the need for the preservation of dignity, angry that it spilled from my family creed to my personal relationships. He soon felt my eyes watching him while his watched God, searching for an answer. He turned to meet my half smile. I didn't feel sad until that moment.

He walked over to me and said, "How do you feel?"

I held him close to me and said, "You can cry if you

Tyauna Bruce

want to."

He laughed nervously as a tear ran down my cheek.

"Why would I want to do that?"

I cried because he couldn't, or maybe because he wouldn't. I pictured his father telling him to "suck it up" at a young age. I remembered how he was so determined to play football when we were younger, even though he was too little. He wants to be a "big man" now, a politician. He is either a dreamer or an achiever. There are no in-betweens.

Steinbeck, John. The Pearl. New York: Bantam Books, 1968.



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