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Allyson Cleveland

Hunger

1. Want

I am more than these hips, this nose, this stomach.
Am I no more than the hunger that echoes in my empty stomach, in my head?
When I eat with you I take no nourishment but cast this food on the waters of the American Standard.
You do not know the needs of my slimy, saliva mouth.
I stuff this urge down the back of my throat one hand on dirty toilet seat the other on a sanitary napkin disposal box
There is no fulfillment in a carrot, rice, or water.
I want to eat fat, to have grease drip from my chin.
My body wants starch and calories.
Let it eat itself.

2. Body

The body got to be too much.
The way the belly touched my waistband, folded and touched itself.
The way the thighs crept across the seat of the chair wanting to touch each other, wanting to rub together,
Heaven would be
dying on a bed of vanilla ice cream
and I, the toasted almond,
lying atop the satiny bed.
Slivered, tan, and sweet.

Every night
hunger wraps its arms around me.
Pulls me out of sleep
with starch puffs
of brownie air
too thick to breathe,
and drool on my pillow.

3. Cost

It is important
for you to know
that I did not
binge and purge
because of Barbie Dolls
or Bud Light ads.

I had not expected
that vomiting
would be so costly.
I know that this hospital
costs 270 dollars a day.
That number keeps me awake
after I have been called
out of sleep
by pangs of hunger.

As I leaned and heaved
into all those toilets
I never stopped to consider
the price of this disease.

In group,
the Staff stresses
that 270 dollars
is a small price to pay

for not dying
with rotten, loose teeth,
and an exploded esophagus.
Still, that number keeps me awake.

4. Snack

Lauren wouldn’t eat her snack
because when the staff
asked if it bother me
to hear her chew,
I said yes.
Every day
Alena will refuse
to eat food
that does not match.
Russ will laugh
and tell the same story
about dancing and shitting
on his father’s grave.
Beth will hide food
in her straw, under
her nails, in her napkin.
And I wake up
in the morning and
eat breakfast and
wonder why it was
that I could leave?
It was only when
Monica ran to the bathroom
during dinner
demanding that the door
be unlocked
so that she might
point to her stomach
by way of her throat,
and feed the toilet
like a mother bird
and when the door
remained locked
and she fell, in a heap, crying,
I saw that I was no longer
I dreamt last night of eating blue hydrangeas. Tiny petals, which together made puffy flowers. The blue was not that of berries or candy but a light, airy evening indigo that melted on my tongue.

Last night I dreamt of blue hydrangea blossoms gracefully swaying on webs of spit. Hanging from my lips like cheap trinkets. I dreamt last night of a small puddle of bruised petals, and a starved, tired woman whom I feared.

These are the shades of my sisters, sometimes delicate, intricate hue (how many shades of blue can you find in the sky/in my heart of blood and bone?) or there in the deep grain of my mahogany self when I am the me that soothes the raging sea beneath the surface or at times the yellow sorrow of dreams long since hushed or a Mississippi breeze skipping double dutched, sandalled feet to the original rhythm, or picking strange fruit from rootless trees while tearing indigo cloth from ebony bosom And there is the deep red of a sharecropped nightmare how many shades of black in a one roomed shack/ how many shades of blue? can one find in a cotton field that stretches like the middle passage of old or at times I am the gray of steel and pain where the multitudes have gathered to lick the wind clean of fear with hands on hips how much salt in a single tear? how many colors to a struggle? sing sisterMotherdaughterwifewomanQueen the beginning! should Mau Mau across the centuries that have become you how many shades of blue my beautiful black sister, how many shades of my sister

Allyson Cleveland, a Senior English major with a Creative Writing concentration, won first prize in the 1994 Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest.

Michael Bradford, a student at the Avery Point campus, intends to major in English.
Brian McGrath

The Light, the Stars, and Then the World

When I was ten years old my father left home. He went to a big university about 150 miles from our home to get his master's degree in city and regional planning. To be closer to his classes, to the computer center, and to the library, he found an apartment in Cambridge. He shared the apartment with two other students—two girls, who, he said, made spaghetti every night because it was easy to cook. Every night I called him long-distance before I went to bed. Usually, one of the girls answered. I said good night to my father, then gave the phone to my mother, who talked to him until after I had fallen asleep. It was the first time my mother and I lived alone, without him.

We were living on the first floor of a two-family house at the time, beneath the Rivera family. Our backyard was twenty feet above the train tracks. On the concrete walls beside the tracks were signs in black and white letters that read DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE. Every night at six o'clock a freight train rattled through, between the concrete walls and under the street, and shook the whole house. At the end of the block there was a bar with a plywood floor and a pinball machine, where the men got into fights in the middle of the night, spilling out onto the sidewalk, which was broken in spots where grass or weeds had begun to spring up. One night I ran into the bedroom where my mother was sleeping when I was awakened by the sound of three successive gun shots.

My mother kept the door locked at all times. Before he left for Cambridge my father had installed a sophisticated lock on our door at my mother’s insistence. A metal rod extending from the center of the door to the floor braced the door shut. In all the windows my father had also installed new locks. My mother had me arrange to go to my friend’s house after school. She picked me up at night after work. She worked eight-and-a-half hours a day for an insurance company, in a dry, air-conditioned office building. Every night she picked me up from my friend’s house and we went home together.

We watched television every night after dinner. I sat at the end of the couch under the reading lamp, my father’s favorite spot, where he had simultaneously watched Public Television and read systematically through a pile of library books every week. My mother and I watched the winter Olympics that year. The German speedskaters reminded me of my father’s story of when he was in prison in Germany, and every night he dreamed of a rat trapped in a bottle. The Czechoslovakian skiers reminded me of my father’s story of when he was stripped naked and questioned in a white room after Czech soldiers stopped the train he was on. My father had hundreds of stories that he used to tell me. Once he was attacked by a swarm of bees outside a monastery in Bethlehem. I told him I was going to do all these things too, get locked up in prison, thrown in a white room, and get attacked by bees. He told me to wait until I got older, and stick to reading books, for now.

On Friday nights my mother let me stay up after the late news to watch a detective show called “Mannix,” a show she watched as a teenager with her brothers and sisters. As a teenager, she watched a lot of television with her brothers and sisters, since my grandfather would not let them go out. Especially not his daughters. They lived in a scrupulously clean house of strict Chinese customs, where my grandfather presided over silent dinners in the kitchen, his seven children seated around the small pull-out table. My grandfather did not trust the Caucasians; when he first arrived in Boston in the 1930’s, speaking little English, he wandered into a coffee shop to ask directions. The men in the coffee shop could not understand what he was asking for, would not understand, told him there was no such thing as what he was asking for, that he should get the names right if he ever expected someone to tell him where anything was. When his wife arrived fifteen years later, after he served in the U.S. army during the war, he brought her to the house he had just bought on army loans, and rarely let her out of the house. He would not let her work. He would support her and their seven children by working in his laundry, which was down the hill from the house, on the main avenue. His children were to go straight to the laundry after school, and were to stay home on the weekends and do their school work. My grandfather made sure the house was safe from the outside, hermetically sealed with old customs and long work hours for him and his children. No matter what, he would hold his family together. That is, until my mother, the eldest of his daughters, dissented, and ran away with a Caucasian boy who had been a freshman in college four times. My father.

Every morning while my mother showered and dressed for work, I ate cold cereal for breakfast and watched television. When they announced the forecast nation-wide on Good Morning America, I watched for the weather in Boston, because Boston was next to Cambridge.

“Mom, it’s raining in Boston,” I would yell into the bathroom, over the sound of the running water.

If it was sunny in Boston, I imagined my father sitting on a big lawn with his books, picking his mustache, as he always did, wearing his worn tweed jacket that he wore on the weekends, a big university building behind him, some cars going by. When it was raining, I imagined him in his apartment, studying, with his head resting in his palm, as I did my math homework, and one of the girls he lived with would be cooking a pot of spaghetti.

My mother was only four feet-ten. When she drove me to school in the morning she had to sit on a couple of pillows on the driver’s seat, the whole front seat of the blue Checker Marathon moved up as close as possible to the steering wheel so she could see through the windshield. Every morning she had to sit on a couple of pillows on the driver’s seat, the whole front seat of the blue Checker Marathon moved up as close as possible to the steering wheel so she could see through the windshield. She always wore a white coat with a black hat, and high heels. She got out in front of the house, and inside, she always said, “God, I’m going to be late.” She worked eight-and-a-half hours a day for an insurance company, in a dry, air-conditioned office building. Every night she picked me up from my friend’s house and we went home together.
My mother had been on the phone with my father on Thursday night long after I had fallen asleep. I woke up after a couple hours and heard my mother speaking in the other room. I was thirsty and thought about getting up and going into the kitchen for some juice. But I was afraid my mother would draw me to her again, make me sit in her room all night while the wind came through the open window and made the metal blinds bang against the window frame, make me go to school the next day and have to think about the night all over again. She would ask me funny questions and I would answer I don’t know.

“Are we going to see Dad this weekend?” I asked her.

“Saturday,” she said. “On Saturday we’ll go see him.”

“Will he take us to the science museum?” I asked her.

“We’ll see,” she said.

On Friday afternoon, my mother picked me up from Tim’s house after work. In the back seat there was a suitcase packed with our clothes for the weekend, our toothbrushes, and my snow boots. We were going to Cambridge on a Friday night, not Saturday morning like she said. We were going to stay at my uncle Henry’s house, which was six or seven miles from Harvard Square, where we were to meet my father Saturday morning in front of the John F. Kennedy School. We would have breakfast with my father in Harvard Square. He would show us the campus, all the places that had become part of his daily routine. He would show us his apartment. On the phone one of the girls said she was looking forward to meeting me. Maybe we would go into Boston and have dinner in Chinatown. I hoped my father would take us to the science museum.

Traffic in Cambridge on Friday night was incredible. As soon as we got off the highway we were stuck. At the intersections we sat still for five, ten minutes at a time. Even if traffic moved, pedestrians walked in front of our car, streams of them, holding up the traffic even more. They passed in our headlights, dressed in long coats and gloves, scarves and hats. At one intersection my mother nearly hit a man in a leather coat.

“Why don’t you watch where the fuck you’re going!” The man looked through the windshield at my mother. People kept walking in front of our car. A horn behind us went off belligerently. The whole town was like this.

My mother did not like to drive. She drove only when she had to. She was nervous because she did not like to drive. She sat on her pillows with her back straight, staring through the windshield, sitting close with both hands on the steering wheel, bracing herself.

A man and a woman were about to walk in front of our car. It was near my father’s apartment. As she drove, my mother read the directions to the apartment, written in red ink on a scrap of newspaper. I saw the man and the woman through the windshield, about to cross the street. My feet were cold. The man was my father. We were a block from his apartment. He was with a woman with black hair, like my mother’s, but longer. The traffic stopped.

My father had already spotted the big blue car. My mother rolled down her window.

“Hi,” she said.

My father poked his head in the window and looked at my mother, then
at me. "I was going to the computer center," he said. "It's the only night the place isn't crowded," he said to my mother. "Come here and give me a kiss," he said to me. I gave him a kiss. Then he kissed my mother.

"Do you want to have dinner tonight?" my mother said. She was holding onto the knob that you roll down the window with.

"I thought you were coming tomorrow," my father said.

I looked at the woman. She was standing on the corner, waiting. Steam came out of her mouth. She was wearing clear shoes. I could see her socks. She was wearing big metal earrings that spiraled down from her ears and bounced against the sides of her face.

"I can't," my father said. "I have to get this stuff finished and printed out tonight. But we're still on for tomorrow?" It didn't sound like him.

"Yes, I'll call you in the morning," my mother said.

The traffic began to push us through the intersection.

"Okay," my father said. "Tomorrow at nine o'clock."

"Okay," my mother said. She gave him a kiss. She was holding on to the knob you roll down the window with.

"Okay," my father said. He took his head out of the window, and walked toward the woman on the corner. A horn went off behind us.

My mother rolled up the window. It had gotten cold in the car. My feet were cold. My father and the woman walked in our headlights and onto the opposite corner. She had clear shoes on. I could see her socks. I waved to my father, but I don't think he saw me. The walked down the street together. The traffic began to move more quickly. We were pushed into the intersection.

I did not ask my mother who the woman was. She must have been the one who cooked spaghetti in a pot. I did not ask my mother. She was watching them walk down the street together too.

The best time I ever had with my father was in Chicago. My mother was attending a class that she was required to take for her job at the insurance company. The company paid for the trip, the hotel room, the rental car. My mother kept it a secret that she was bringing her family with her family with her so that the company would permit her to go. In the hotel room my mother and father slept on the bed, and I slept on the floor, rolled up in the spare blankets with a pillow. One year it was Philadelphia, twice Atlanta, and one year it was Chicago.

My father and I went along for the ride. We like to see new things. I told my father I was going to do all the things he had done. I was going to do all those things too. It is how you learn, he told me. Experience. There is a lot to see, a lot of people to meet you could learn from. "And a lot of books to read," he said. Always books. But books weren't enough. You needed experience.

In Chicago, while my mother was in class, my father and I drove around the city in the rental car. My father was interested in cities. He worked as a city planner for the City of New Haven. We drove through the poor sections of town, and ate lunch in small restaurants, sitting on stools at the counter while my father read the map. We found bookstores where the pages were yellow and smelled damp. My father bought a box of books from an old man who ate a sandwich in the corner, behind a pile of old books. In one there were pictures from World War II, pictures of dead children, dressed in little suits, but their eyes were open. Their eyes were staring at me, at the person who looked at the picture. I looked at the pictures, the same picture, over and over again. My father took me to the zoo, where I saw the orangutan. But after this, in the car, I went into the box of books again to look at the picture of the dead children. Their eyes were open, they were staring at me, at the person who looked at the picture.

"Even kids get hurt," my father said.

He took me to the science museum in Chicago, a big white building with columns, and a hundred steps to the iron doors. Banners hung out front, in different colors, announcing the current exhibits. The museum was a labyrinth, many of the rooms dark, lit only by the light of the displays. My father and I rode the small carts that moved along a track through one of the exhibits, an exhibition on the solar system. The carts moved through dark tunnels. In the glass I saw the reflection of me and my father sitting beside each other in the cart. Then the illusion was shattered by the light of the earth, and then the immense sun behind it, the atmosphere radiating blue against our white tee shirts.

"You should study science," my father said. "It will teach you to think correctly. You will read books, stories, but science will make you think correctly."

I made my father take me to the museum three times, until I nearly memorized the narration coming over the speakers to the exhibit in the tunnels. In the hotel room, wrapped in a blanket, I thought about the sun and the earth, the images of my father and me superimposed over them in the glass. We were walking under the train tracks downtown, the old man was eating a sandwich behind a pile of books, the train rattled overhead, the Sears Tower was the tallest building in the world.

At Christmas, just as my mother had promised, my father came home from Cambridge. He would be home for five weeks. During that time he would take me to the movies to see "The Empire Strikes Back," take me to city hall where he worked, and build cities with me in my room with my Girders and Panels set, something as tall as the Sears Tower, with a highway going through it, and an elevator that took people all the way to the top.

It was the first year we ever had a Christmas tree. It was a small one, about as tall as I was, but when my mother put the white lights on it, it looked pretty good. She decorated the tree with glass angels and red bulbs until it looked like a display at Bloomingdale's. Underneath she put a white blanket with silver sprinkles on it, to lay the presents on. She went to the mall and bought us all presents, wrapped them in different kinds of paper and stuck little silver bows in the corners. She put all the presents under the tree so that they would be ready when my father came home, three days before Christmas.
On Christmas morning we sat on the rug in the living room in front of the tree. My father had turned on the stereo and found an oldies station, which was playing mostly Christmas music. Beside him, on the rug, was his mug of tea with milk and sugar that he made himself in the morning when he was not working. His hair was still wet from the shower. I had been up early, before anyone else, and was eager to open presents. My mother was dressed in her weekend clothes that she wore around the apartment, a grey sweatshirt and jogging pants.

My mother handed out the presents. The ones for me were marked, "From Mom and Dad," even though my mother had bought all the presents before my father had come home. There was a present for my father that I had wrapped myself, a picture of the three of us, taken the past summer in our backyard by Mrs. Rivera. Behind us you can see the metal towers rising up from below the street, connected by electrical wires. My father had an awkward look on his face.

He brought me a present from Cambridge, a book on dinosaurs. He gave it to me unwrapped, with the price sticker still stuck to the back cover. It was not really a Christmas gift. He gave it to me as though it were any other day of the year. (I never, since that day, finished reading that book. Somehow it got mixed up with my father's books over the years, and had been boxed and donated to the Goodwill by my mother, who, many years later, set out to unclutter my father's office of his old, useless books that he hadn't yet read, in an attempt to wipe out those years of our lives during which my father had been at the university 150 miles away.)

My mother had been silent for most of the morning. The week before my father came home she went up and down. One day it was all she could mention, the next I thought she would hide herself in her bedroom again. She spoke to me in her normal tone. "Do you like the present? Is it the one you wanted?" She did not say a lot to my father, who sipped his tea and picked his mustache. The only time he spoke was when he gave me the book. "It's a good book," he said.

My mother had gotten my father a v-neck sweater. He unwrapped the package and took the sweater out of the box. He examined the fabric, squinting, as if he were examining his stamp collection, each individual stamp, one at a time, its minute detail, under a small lamp.

"What's it made out of," he said.

"Wool," my mother responded, defensively. "I wouldn't buy that cheap stuff."

"Your mother always sends that cheap stuff," my mother added. She was referring to the oven mitts, the fake gold jewelry, the polyester blouses my grandmother bought at an "indoor flea market" in Cape Coral, Florida, and sent to us every year.

"I tell her not to send that cheap stuff," my mother said. "Every Christmas I tell her not to send anything without calling first."

"She wouldn't have anything to do if she couldn't send her family presents at Christmas. It makes her feel important," my father said. He was holding the sweater in his hands.

"I don't know why she's so cheap. She has such bad taste," my mother said. "and her house," she continued, "look at what a mess it is. That's why you're so sloppy, because you grew up in a messy house. Maybe that sweater will make you look a little neater."

My father dropped the sweater into the box. The tissue paper made a crunching sound.

"I don't like v-necks," he said. "They're low class."

Then he said it again, that they looked low class. He did not like v-neck sweaters because they were low class. My mother was sitting beside the tree, under the white lights, the glass angels and the red bulbs. She was staring at the rug.

"Don't you ever have anything nice to say?" she said. "They're not low class, I see a lot of men wearing v-necks."

"Oh, really." My father was unconcerned.

"You really should start caring about what you wear," my mother said. "Sometimes you look so sloppy."

"Who gives a shit?" my father said. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it. "You should. You don't have to be such a slob. Maybe people would have more respect for you if you didn't look like such a slob. And you're so critical. You'll never move up in the city because you're so critical of everything. That's why the mayor doesn't like you, you know. That's why you won't get moved up."

"Fuck you."

"You never have anything nice to say. You're such a shit head sometimes."

My father did not look at her. He was out of place on the living room rug, opening presents. He took his glasses off and began rubbing his eye with the palm of his hand.

"Leave me alone, will you." His cigarette was burning out in the ash tray.

"Leave you alone?" my mother said with a bit of irony. She was calm. "I left you alone before. I let you go, and look."

My father stopped rubbing his eye. "You're such a shit head sometimes," she said. She was red. Her face was wet.

My father put on his glasses. He looked at me as he got up off the rug, a look that made me think of our reflection in the glass, us sitting next to each other in the cart, moving through a tunnel, our reflection superimposed over the earth until the sun shattered it and it was gone. He walked out of the living room and into the kitchen.

My mother was staring at a spot on the rug. She had forgotten I was there. I was afraid she would grab me, pull me to her and make me feel like I
didn't know what to do, the way I felt in school when I thought about her and me in the bedroom as the metal blinds banged against the window frame, and the teacher had to take me out of the room at school because the other kids were getting scared. My father would see us, and he would leave us forever because he would think I loved her more than him.

She got up and went into the kitchen. There was wrapping paper on the rug, all of it torn up. The little silver bows were getting stuck to the rug. I tried to look at the book about dinosaurs. Inside there was a picture of a man pointing to a black stripe cutting through the side of a rock wall. "A layer of irridium left behind, scientists say, proves the Big Bang theory," the caption read under the picture.

I heard my mother talking in the kitchen. I know she was talking so that I would not hear her. But I heard her talking. I was afraid to go into the kitchen. I wanted to stay in the living room because the rug was warm, and in the kitchen there was no rug and my feet got cold. I wanted them to stay in the kitchen and not come back.

"I was never going to mention that. I'm sorry, I was never going to say anything. I'll never mention it again, I promise."

My mother had her arms around my father. Her face was looking into his. I could not see my father's face. He only held my mother with one arm and did not speak. I could not see his face. All I saw was the reflection in the glass, the light, the stars, and then the world, which at that moment, grew bigger.

Matthew Christianson

Bad Blood

So many years have brought us here
to this table after dinner:
father and wife the poles between which
my sister and I spin dizzily.
The talk coming around to that playful jest
masking deeper, poisonous hatred
for my mother.
This new wife,
so cruel to us in our youthful reluctance
to accept her, still she carries hate.
You'd think she'd have learned when
the vengeful fire lodged in her breast
drove cells there to mad repetition.
And you, my father, there in dull subservience
before your dark queen, have you so forgotten
that first love which made me?
Is this small, bitter creature
much better than the woman who might
have led you across seas of understanding?
You wrong her in my presence
I sit and wait the day when
I shall stand and haul you thrashing from your chair.
Winn Van Horne

Fall Weekend

And so we break from the car
like a hatching. Spread our arms
to the orange tree tops, ruffle our fingers
through our hair, shake static out of skirts and jackets,
and swallow the sweet
of decaying leaves.

The mountains look like boobies,
Damon laughs, and he sticks his lips up and out
and sucks on the hazy autumn swells.
And as our parents turn their backs,
I join him.
The two of us sucking and swelling with each drink until
we explode from giggles.

A foothold just
there, where that
root split the rock a little
yeah.
And fingers can inch
up like worms to
find something to grab hold of.
Dad or Mom throw me your ropes and
I'll make sure not to step on them and
then, I promise to throw them down to Damon—
as long as he's willing to catch.
Hey,
don't fall up there cause we'll all go down with you.

When I'm on this horse
I am so high up I can live forever.
Flying like a Pegasus
under and over orange, red, yellow, and
fir-green umbrellas.

Winn Van Horne is a graduating English major with a Creative Writing concentration. She won the Hackman award last year and is currently working on a novel. She wrote this poem in English 246.
William Tanski

(Untitled)

I look outside, and it’s beginning to snow. 
Who says that it means peace, or innocence, 
or ice crystals?
All I know is, it hides the old snow, 
that slumps like dirty socks in the corners 
of the ground.
And the snow gets in the way, 
but can you really blame it?
I don’t think snow means to cause accidents, 
all it does is fall and cover, 
and we can take it any way we like.
The funny thing is, 
I can’t write and watch the snow 
at the same time; I’m always going on memory, 
which is cluttered.
it gets wound up in 
the sledding skating skiing sitting-by-the-fire cycle 
of years, so that each new snow 
is a repeat, even if I'm looking 
down on it and noticing the corners.
And the mood I’m in always changes 
the things I see, turning them 
red or white or blue or gray 
depending on who I talked to just now, 
or who I didn’t talk to, 
or who might talk to me but I can never be the first one 
to say anything.
But the snow covers that, too, 
and I eventually settle down 
and accept the way things are turning out. 
It’s not every day that it starts to snow.

Katherine Hanna

Fourth Ring at a Three-Ring Circus

The oldest barker and the biggest freak: 
Cupid himself in a red and white striped suit, 
calling them all under the tent 
to see the bearded lady, 
the alligator boy, 
and my two-headed heart in a jar.

I am a Russian bear on a tricycle 
I am a chimpanzee in overalls turning somersaults 
I am a five-foot stack of plates on a ten-foot pole 
I am beginning to spin 
in the first ring.

There is a Volkswagen full of clowns in the second ring. You keep swearing that there can’t be anymore, but they keep coming. There are dozens and dozens of clowns.

In the third ring, 
The spangled tamer 
puts his head in my mouth, 
unafraid.
He bursts the hoop of my heart 
into flame and sends me through it.

You pick up on the fourth ring; 
my heart no circus, 
but a bamboo cricket cage 
of leaps and chirping.

Katherine Hanna, a Senior English major, won a Third Prize in the 1994 Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest.

William Tanski is a Senior University Scholar.
Michelle Lemieux

Funny Cowboy

She loves your warm eyes, the million smiles on your face. Her lips flutter like soft, pearly moths across your smooth cheeks. The petals of your heart strain to open as cool, violet whispers sneak into your ear. You bite the girl's nose and tell her yellowed memories of a tiny boy crying to his teddy. While you explain the dark blue roses that blossom in your brain, your silly eyebrows dance. You take her fishing for emerald green wishes. Don't dent your knuckles trying to break down the wall. Just lose the hat, Funny Cowboy, and jump on that wild, orange pony with the black velvet ears.

Michelle Lemieux, a 6th semester English major, wrote this prose poem in English 246.

Theresa Rutz

Went to Gill's

Went to Gill's.
It's a diner and they open at three in the morning.
Yeah.
So I asked her, I said
"Mom, do you mind if I smoke a cigarette?"
I reminded her that she used to be around smoke all the time.
"Yeah, but that was years ago," she said.
I saw a roach but I didn't want her to see it.
She would freak, you know?
So I grabbed a newspaper and swatted it.
"What was that," she said.
"Oh... you know, nothing."
I was all nervous.
The bus comes right there
to this little town.
A couple times I been to the "Trading Post"
and a head shop called "Wasteland".
It's kind of a city, not really a town.
It's been years
Oh yeah!
We used to live right up there
now we're in ding dong.
Years ago!
I was trying to think of the last time I was there.
Trying to think what was there.
At least ten, twelve years ago.
Yeah!
Yeah.

Theresa Rutz is a second semester music major.
Amanda

We both had the same. Every day in our lunches we had sliced peppers in a ziplock bag, and a small package of thin pretzel sticks. The only difference was that Amanda’s mom would make her bologna sandwiches, on Wonder Bread. I got peanut butter and jelly on wheat, or ham, mustard, and iceberg lettuce on white (but not Wonder Bread). Amanda’s mother would always cut the crusts off the bread for her. She had the cleanest, neatest sandwiches I ever saw. Mine were sloppy. I didn’t care. As long as I got my chewy chocolate chip granola bar I didn’t care. Amanda didn’t care either.

My mom wanted me to eat healthy. She didn’t realize how much fun peppers were. They look like caterpillars, after you gnaw them into little bits. “Hey Amanda, a caterpillar!” I’d say, squirming the pepper across the table. Amanda began to ask her mother for green pepper slices, too, and together we created and devoured caterpillars every day at lunch. Amanda wanted pretzels like mine, too, because they made great arrows.

Amanda and I were the same fifth grade class. Our last names both start with an “S,” so we were always in the same class. Amanda had glasses and straw blond hair that was flat and slippery. I had a face full of freckles and stringy blond hair always tugged to the sides with barrettes. Amanda’s mom dressed her plainly. She looked like, inside our minds. We saw strange, colorful wings and magic beaks. We saw something more than the others. But the deal was, when recess was over, we had to transform back into real people. We stood in the lines to go back into school, our bright wings dissolving and our beaks turning into 11 year old lips.

We had a club—“The Zooney Birds.” You had to be secretly initiated. You had to collect a lot of those long pieces of weed with the puffy spawns at the top, and scrape it off into a ziplock bag, until you filled it up. It looked like marijuana, now that I think of it. Sometimes the teacher would come around and watch us, looking puzzled. To us, it was just stuff Zooney Birds liked to have around...lots of weed stuff in little ziplock bags. It was magic stuff. It sat in our desks before and after recess for good luck.

The Zooney Bird club was pretty successful. We got 4 or 5 members, but only Amanda and I lasted. We were the only ones who understood the complex splendor of it all. We knew what Zooney Birds looked like, inside our minds. We saw strange, colorful wings and magic beaks. We saw something more than the others. But the deal was, when recess was over, we had to transform back into real people. We stood in the lines to go back into school, our bright wings dissolving and our beaks turning into 11 year old lips.

When we didn’t go to Zooney Bird Island, we played hopscotch. The pavement had hopscotch boards written right on it in white paint. Taking turns, we tossed gravel or stones at the hopscotch board. Our scuffed sneakers hopped across the rough pavement. It was actually a really dumb game. We never kept track of who was winning. The part we liked best was the jumping around. Later, we tried to make the game more creative. I found the biggest rock I could. We giggled as it clumped to the ground, rolling off the boundaries of the board. Then we’d try to throw a tiny pebble. Then we’d try a bottle cap, or a paper cup. We just liked to toss things around. When we were bored, Amanda and I sat beneath a tree and talked. I can’t remember a word we ever talked about, but I never remember being happier.

Sometimes I went over Amanda’s house after school. She lived in a large neighborhood—a place that used to be a forest. The long bus ride was an exotic adventure. Her house was like another planet. It was clean and perfectly in order. The board games in her closet were even stacked immaculately (and probably filed in alphabetical order). The clean plush carpet felt like a cloud beneath my feet. In Amanda’s spotless room, we’d sit and invent new words for songs we heard on the radio. We recorded our corny songs onto a tape. Our friend Jennifer had a great burp that finished off every performance. Amanda’s mother would call us into the kitchen in the evening for spaghetti and meatballs. It was like eating at a restaurant: “Amanda’s Mom’s Kitchen.” I gave it 5 stars.

There was a candy store a couple of miles away from Amanda’s house. During the summer we would make the long hike there, so we could buy gummy bears, gummy worms, and gobstoppers. Walking through the heat made me feel faint, but Amanda never seemed tired. I gained strength walking next to her. A couple of times Amanda’s mom drove us to the nearby beach. We made tall towers out of sand, and ate sandwiches (on Wonder Bread). One time, we were constructing a sand tower and having a great time. At the exact same moment, Amanda and I blurted out the exact same words: “I’m going to ask my mother if we can
have a sleepover!" We stared at each other from across the pile of sand.

Amanda and I hardly ever argued. The few times we did, I'm positive both of us thought that the other person was the most stubborn, selfish person alive. Once, on Halloween I went to Amanda's neighborhood to trick-or-treat. It was a cold night, and when I got too cold, I pleaded with Amanda for us to go home. She thought I was a wimp, and made me walk back alone. I went to her house and, in tears, made her father drive me home. I arrived home in despair, figuring I'd lost my best friend. The next day in school, Amanda apologized to me, and everything was fine.

I remember the first time Amanda was different. (I was different, mostly, but I blamed Amanda.) We sat in eighth grade homeroom together. I spent a lot of time looking in a pocket mirror, checking to see if I was gorgeous enough to go to science class. The problem was, I wasn't "gorgeous" to begin with! I decided to try some Cover Girl cosmetics. I would read the directions on the back of the makeup packages, and the glamour articles in teen magazines. I dreamed of a flawless face and long eyelashes to bat. What I got was a 14-year-old with a messy face! When would I wake up and look like a magazine picture? In the back of my mind I wanted to just be a kid again. Amanda never wore makeup. Her mother wouldn't let her wear it, I suppose. One day Amanda looked over at me with a new determination. I looked into my mirror, trying to fix my too-red lipstick. "Robin, I don't like your makeup," Amanda said. "You wear too much of it. It looks bad." I looked over at her. I looked at her steady face, knowing she was right. But then anger came. "How dare she!" my mind blazed. "Look at her—she doesn't know anything about it. She should start trying to be more grown up, like me!" I looked at Amanda's perfect ivory skin. She was beautiful, without anything. I wished I was, too. I wished she wouldn't notice me trying to hide under my makeup. I was ashamed, but I pretended not to notice her words. She had never really criticized me, until that day. It hurt. What hurt wasn't that Amanda gave me an honest opinion, but the agony of not knowing what she was thinking. For the first time, she was in charge of me. She knew the answers. She defeated my imagination, and we became two separate people.

Now she's in Alabama. Her family moved after we graduated High School. We stayed friends during High School, though I had many rivals for her attention. We still had fun, laughing at little things, like blowing paper straw covers into the air at Pizza Hut, or about the way our chemistry teacher used to take off his glasses and pick his nose with them during lectures about chemical properties. I don't think the important parts in Amanda and me changed at all. Inside, we were still two skinny kids hanging upside down from a jungle gym. When Amanda told me her family was moving to Alabama, at first I assumed it was a gag, or just a passing fancy of her parents. But it was true. Her father had an offer for a better job. A "For Sale" sign went up in front of their impeccable house. When I looked at Amanda, I could almost see a "For Sale" sign pitched up on her forehead.

I remember one day in sixth grade, when Amanda told me something strange before Mrs. Quimby's science class. We were arranging our chairs in front of the projector screen, where we would see what things looked like in dinosaur times. It was after recess.

"I love you," she said.

It sounded funny. It sounded wrong. I thought people would think we were queer, or something. I turned all red and the puzzled Amanda looked at me with her big hazel eyes out from under that straight straight ashy blond hair, and said, "What's the matter?"

I quickly looked at her, and then down at the ugly chair I had to sit in. "Nothing—I don't know," I said, half whispering. The matter was, I loved her too, and she was the one who had the guts to say the words. I didn't know that it was okay.

Amanda looked at me, even though I wouldn't look at her. "You're my friend, and I love you," she said, trying to make things clear. Amanda knew something that I was afraid to see. Maybe I saw it on the inside somewhere, but Amanda showed it to me from the outside, making it real. I went home that day feeling two days old. Everything was new, and I had to figure it all out. The big yellow bus I rode home seemed smellier and noisier. The walk up my driveway seemed miles long. I skipped my favorite cartoons and went up to my room, flopping onto my rainbow colored bed.

Every once in a while, Amanda sends me a letter from college—the University of Virginia. She hates it there. I try to imagine myself in her place, so far away from Connecticut—so far away from anyone she considers a real friend. Amanda also hates to write. I feel flattered that she endures writing a letter every now and then, for my sake. Reading her letters, I realize that she is more fragile than I ever knew. "I think I'll be happy when I start living. I hope you understand me when I say I am sure that I am not living yet." She sounds so broken.

How can I make her laugh, as I used to? She is hundreds of miles away. It feels like a million miles. I look out the window of my dorm room, watching drunk kids stumble through the night. I close my eyes and think of what Amanda might be doing. Getting drunk? I can't imagine her drunk. She has been, though. I think she's trying to forget her old life, when she didn't need to drink to be loved. Everyone at UVA is a fake, she says. Not convinced of this, I write her back, assuring her that someone must be 'real,' and not to give up looking.

Amanda's coming to visit this summer. She's only coming for a couple of weeks. It's been so long since I've seen her. I wonder if—when I see her, it will be like the day we met, in Mrs. Straighten's kindergarten class. I sat next to her at a round table, playing with building blocks. I turned to her. She looked like a little old lady, with glasses too big for her face. "Will you be my friend?" I asked, examining her symmetrical face. She didn't squirm, or move an inch. "OK," she said. And together, we built a tower of blocks.

Robin Searing, a 4th semester student, wrote this autobiographical essay in English 146.
Saw people again
just as I was
about to stop looking
relaxed and
staring at the lights
the oily liquid
changing shape
and I saw a face
surprising
how it appeared there
this time
looking at me
staring
drifting to the top
do not go
and then a girl
looking out the window
what what what does it mean?
see nothing
for so long
begin to forget
what it’s like to see
wonder of simple play
ideas in my head.
But then
I see
and it all seems there
waiting to be understood
just beyond my reach
just out of grasp
tilted chair
about to fall
the moment between
here and there
catch yourself
just beyond the point
of falling freely.

Amy Gentile, a sophomore majoring in English Education, wrote this poem in
English 146.
village in the desert
Rodrigo (my age) always sat in the middle
Grandmother on the other side
quiet and sleepy and smiling droopy-eyed
I had to sleep in the same bed with her at a motel
in the Mexico night
the sheets were cool but smelled a little like fish
I slept with my back to the grandmother and neon flickered
through the night

We stayed at one really nice hotel
palm trees, big lawns——I played on these vast lawns with Rodrigo
all the kids spoke English, except
the poor ones, they didn’t
I took a photograph of Rodrigo and his beautiful Mexico City
schoolteacher-mother
on the grass
but the flash went off the sun so bright I couldn’t see my shadow
it didn’t develop
All the hotel walls were white
bridges crossing streams
black railings on patios where we ate dinner beneath giant trees
waiters served us
I had rice with chicken everywhere I went
it tasted so good
arroz con pollo I learned how to say in 6th grade Spanish
(with Mrs. Greenia, who Derek Johnson commented had a
“nice butt”
——the same Derek Johnson fired years later from Stop & Shop
when his cashiers tray came up $50 short too often)

Arroz con pollo always
some restaurant in Mexico City——
(or was it outside Mexico City?)
we went through brick arches
plants hanging in tunnels

---
A photo
Rodrigo and his mother
beside the pool
Holiday Inn, Guadalajara
She's got heels and long legs
dressing a skirt bobbed hair lipstick
smiling her arm around her son
Rodrigo's smiling too with slacks
brown shoes short black hair & collared shirt
Side by side
blue skies wispy clouds
green grass and palm trees curve around the pool
in Guadalajara
Like the ladies selling flowers wrapped in newspaper
their children on their backs watching the traffic
pass by
passing along the boulevards under trees

Mexico City
January 1983

Robert Irwin

Make Me Famous

Make me famous.
I want to be respected
and revered,
A household name like Cornflakes
And as durable as Tupperware.
Someone Had to Be Perfect Enough

Under the spell, love or money,
we will fall for it.
The conditions:
paint me, pose me
saddle me and hose me down.
Put an oven mitt on my hand,
a bible under my mattress, an apple between
my teeth and a gold cross around my neck,
mocking the death of Christ in fourteen karats.
Tell me it is my fault, the weaker one;
this is the hell to pay for my evil.
Then worship me,
call me an angel, bow to the
great white lily of my wicked pussy.
Put a crown on my head and call me
the most beautiful of all the dolls.
Fuck me blindfolded
Fuck me screaming
Fuck me with your friends watching,
your nation rallying behind you
thousands of maniacs in the bleechers
cheering you on to victory.
Hide them in black robes, blue uniforms,
behind tall oak cabinets and silver badges;
give them gavels and guns and rosaries and kiddie porn
so they can molest your children while you rape your wife,
in the white walled temple of God.
Hide it in the books
where no one will ever doubt its righteousness;
cover the eyes of justice
who overlooks the great marble edifices,
just as you bound and gagged those staring into nothingness.

Kristin M. Kapsis

The Heat In Nam

He answers my personal ad.
We get together.
He stammers, talking in low tones
lacking the percussion
of a man with teeth.
He tells me in Nam
the sun’s heat could
kill a man,
asks if he can take off
his clothes.
I tell him I’ll give him a
rubdown instead.
We spread out a sheet.
He takes off his shirt,
lies down.
I squirt lotion into
my hands,
rub them together.
My hands glide on his back
like penguin bellies
on the rime.
I knead his parched skin.
He doesn’t sigh
but says,
“Your good hands help me.”
I say, “You can tell
a whole world under water
by looking at the ice-berg.”
“You’re right,” he says,
“I’ve sweat and shed blood
like a glacier on fire.”

Michael Snyder, a B.G.S. student at the Hartford campus, won Honorable Mention in the 1994 Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest.
Michael Bradford

SCENES FROM A FRONT PORCH IN JUNE/#4

She watched the sun disappear, begging dusk. The sky began to cry soft magenta streaks—but it was not a melancholy thing. She wiped the sweat from the back of her neck, used the toe of one foot to scratch the other. She watched his back and thought how beautiful it was—how beautiful his back was with sweat rising and running, glazing smooth brown-ness. How beautiful his back was in the summer when sweat is your best friend or worst enemy. In the winter the all of him was cold; like father time on the steps of death cold. But in the summer, you could make love to his back—trace your name in the sweat and make love.

“You ever want to go back?” she asks.

“Sometimes. Sometimes, but I wills myself awake,” he says without smiling, though he is quite proud of his honesty.

“You remember—” she begins, but his look is something new, undiscovered. She is much too afraid of this uncharted place to continue.

“I remember things they ain’t got language for,” he says.

He smiles. “But I also remembers that sweet cracklin’ bread you used to send out back.”

He grabs her foot and begins to knead it like dough, like still warm crystal. He begins at the underside, from the heel to the toes—pressing, soothing, caressing, kneading. He could forget the unspeakable in these feet that had spread so much dust and waited for him in this place. Just knead them open, place in the dreams he no longer had use for, then knead them closed.

“Woman, I knew I had what they calls a passion for you ‘fore I ever put eyes on you. It was that sweet cracklin’ what did me in.”

“It’s going to rain soon,” she said. “I can smell it.”

She traced her name in his back, through the sweat, over the scars and raised skin that put her in the mind of a tree, a rain tree. And it was all she could do not to cry.

Had it not been for the rain, though, he would not be here now, on this front porch, begging time to rest his weary self. But he could no longer bring himself to give praise to the downpour for it had become an egotistical thing. It squeezed through conscious to subconscious—prying, bending, shaping a comfortable place to lie forever whispering, how many times you try to run without me, boy—remember, remember the dogs—you gots a strong scent, boy—they tracked you like they owned you, treed you like a coon—remember—but the night I come for you, hah! came in torrents, washing away tree limbs and shingles, gutters and gussets, drowning dreams for you, boy—washed away your scent and three layers of earth for you, I moved the earth for you and left a tree to remember me by in seasons when I am less than redolent—remember, remember, remember...

“Let’s go inside,” he says, ceasing to knead, rising.

“But it’s going to be cool rain, Baby. Feel good to stretch your neck way back and drink it fresh, straight from heaven.”

She smiles and he is willing to forget how to breathe.

Her hands are everywhere now, teasing. “Baby, let’s go and make a pallet underneath yonder tree and make love in the rain. Don’ nobody come out this way, ‘specially this time of the day. You can do these kinds of things when you gets to be a free man,”

He leans back, wanting to smile but forgetting the mechanics of his mouth. He looks at her out of the sides of his eyes. “Freedom is one thing, Sweet Pea. Heaven is another.”

She takes him by the hand, leading off the porch and into the rain. She thinks how wonderful it is to have conquered this small piece of life, but she says, “You better hope not.”

SCENES FROM A FRONT PORCH IN JUNE/#5

They left the front porch for the shade of a magnificent willow tree that stood sentry over the yard. In the mid day the heat moved and talked like an unpleasant man, someone they both were sure they had known—intimately.

The quilt they carried had traveled more extensively than they and the woman wondered how many other trees had looked down upon its hand-woven glory. The man unfurled it in the country breeze and laid it out perfectly. She lay down and buried her nose in the muskiness that never seemed to leave, no matter how many washings in clear creek water and dryings in morning sun. She most often thought of a grandmother she had never known, whenever she smelled this heady, musky scent of time.

“You see this piece,” she whispered. He was always so close to her.

“Yes, I do. Come off the inside lining of your great-grandmother’s skirt. And this piece here—

“Hush now! I ain’t saying this for you.”

“Well Sweet Pea, who else you talking to?”

“Me. I’m talking to me. You just happen to be somebody I don’t mind being privy to the conversations of my life.”

He smiled and was again amazed he had found such a woman in such a place.

“And just what does a half a piece of paisley off of someone else’s dress you t’aint never met have to do with your life?”

She rolled over and wondered why such a beautiful thing would ever want to weep, such a willow time had allowed to usher in this piece of sanctuary. And then she understood, for she wept nearly every sunset.

She held up the piece of cloth for him to see, smell.
"It's not what you see now, but what it was and where it was that makes me what I am. Could have been my great-grandmother come by this by some headstrong missus who discarded it, could have been she come by it brand new-fresh and stiff, store-bought. Could have been she dug her nails in this here yellow, screaming and hissing, giving birth to my mother. Could have been she wiped the dust of her children's feet on this bit of purple here. Could have been she woke in the morning and shook the chafe of fields out of this little patch of blue here. Could be if I took a notion to lick this patch of red here I'd taste the salt of my mother's tears so deep in the print that a thousand years and the rain of Noah could never wash it away. Could be it makes me think of you and wonderful places you might want to take my heart."

"Well, in that case, let's us see what we can find in that pretty slice of maroon over there."

They both laughed and she knew there would be many days like this, days her mother never told her about since her own days had refused to carry the weight of such a graceful time. Cold milk spilling over the lips of a crystal pitcher was what she had a taste for in the shade of this magnificent willow.

"My mother had her a dress the color of this yellow here, said the overseer's wife give it to her to marry in."

"And I suppose you wanted yourself a Sunday-go-to-meetin' shirt made out of that gay piece?"

He smiled. "Pair of pants! Sho'nuff. Whut'n't nothing like what we knew when we met on Thompson's place, mean as he was he didn't hesitate to give us a snide taste of God. On the Morris place my mother and the rest would steal away into the woods to pray and sing and what not. Couldn't one soul read nary word but somebody had a bible and that was all they needed. My mother wore that yellow dress every time she went and I never seen it dirty. A patch of something cut out of the woods where she knelt to pray and I never seen it dirty. I never seen my pants neither. She was wearing it when Morris caught 'em coming back to the quarters. In the middle of the night she looked like a piece of the sun. She begged to let herself change before she was strung up and whipped. Morris's youngest boy, Toby, ripped the front out and overseer's horse whip took the back, took the dress, her underclothes and skin—laid her back open under a full moon. Old folks say peoples in Africa jes' commence to throwing dust in the air when that kind of pain come visiting."

"She was holding the front up when they sold her to the traders the next morning. So yeh, Sweet Pea, I done seen some quilts in my day, done seen me some quilts time can't do nothing with."

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Our objective remains the publication of the best student writing done at UConn, and we once again invite undergraduates to submit work for consideration. Regrettably we cannot print all the good writing we get. We wish we could. But we promise to give each submission a thoughtful review.

We hope that through the pleasure WRITING UCONN gives, all students will come to make good writing a real part of their lives.

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