WHATCHA DOIN'??

I'M TRYING TO WRITE A POEM FOR "WRITING UCONN."

HAVIN' A HARD TIME, HUH?

LOOK, JUST LEAVE ME ALONE, OKAY?!

English Department... Spring 1995
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Kristin Taylor

Women Is No Good For Poets

The attendant at the gas station was cold. He was covered by a thick brown jumpsuit, but his bare knuckles were red and chapped from the wind. He stood in the tiny lighted booth and rubbed his hands for warmth. The grooves in his palms were filled with the dark station dirt that seemed to get everywhere. His fingernails were cracked and rimmed with black. He ran his fingers across the surface of his greasy name tag, feeling the letters: N-O-R-M.

Another attendant walked out of the garage, flicking the light off and locking the door behind him. "Hey Norm, you set? I gotta get going."

"Yeah, Paul, I'm set. Get the garbage?"

"Yeah, got it. God, third shift. Don't know how you handle it."

"It's not so bad."

"What d'you do? Don'tcha get bored?"

"Nah -- I got my pad." Norm turned and picked up the grimy notepad next to the register. He flipped it open. "I'm gonna write a poem tonight."

Paul laughed. "Whatcha think, you're some Shakespeare, somethin?"

"Nah -- you just don't understand poets. 'Sides, women like it."

"Really? You get chicks with it?"

Norm cleared his throat. "Well, I ain't gonna tell stories. I don't kiss and tell. Truth be told, he had never actually shown a woman anything he'd written -- largely because he had never managed to finish a poem.

"No shit? Maybe I should try."

"Well you gotta find a muse first."

"A what?"

"A muse. It inspires you."

Paul snorted and wiped his nose with the back of his hand. "Who told you that?"

"Hey, I ain't stupid. I listen."

Norm had wanted to go to school, but his friends said guys like him could only go to technical colleges, so he never
even applied. He had a lot of respect for the college students who came to fill up at the station. They were smart; they talked about books and the news. They knew things. Most of the attendants just pumped gas, but Norm listened. Listening was how he'd learned the things he would have learned in college -- things like poetry and muses.

Two students had come to fill up one day when Norm was working. "I don't know what the hell your problem is, Spenser was incredible. He could have gotten any woman on the planet," the first had said.

"You're high. He couldn't write for shit," the other replied. "You know what Spenser's problem was? He needed a new muse."

As soon as he got home from work that night, Norm had pulled out his dictionary and looked up the word muse. It said: "a source of inspiration; a guiding genius -- traditionally called upon before attempting any great undertaking." He wasn't exactly sure what a great undertaking was, but he figured it had something to do with women since Spenser was having so many problems.

"All poets have muses, and mine's pretty good."

"What is it?"

Norm shook his head sagely. "Nope, gotta find your own." His own search for inspiration had only ended tonight when he had decided that women liked roses, so roses would be a good muse to win women. He wasn't about to tell Paul.

"You really get chicks with it?"

"I ain't telling stories."

Paul laughed. "Yeah, I bet you ain't. You been listening to them college kids too much, Norm." He glanced down at his watch. "Whatever gets you through third shift, I guess, I gotta go. Talk to you later."

"Yeah, later, Paul."

Norm watched Paul drive away and looked down at the notepad again. He felt sorry for people like Paul who never tried to broaden their horizons. "Just 'cause you ain't in college don't mean you can't learn," Norm muttered. "Bet Paul don't even own a dictionary."

He heard the roar of an engine and looked up to see a battered station wagon turn into the parking lot. Norm felt his confidence fade as a pretty, young woman emerged from the driver's side. She opened the tank and began to pump low grade gas into it. She leaned back against the car and brushed her hair from her face.

Norm stood uncertainly by the booth on the island and tried to think of something to say.

"Cold night," he ventured.

She looked up, took in his jumpsuit and red hands.

"Yes." She looked back at the gas tank.

"Roads okay?"

"Fine."

"Figured they might be a bit slippery, what with the snow and all."

"No, they're fine."

There was a pause. They listened to the steady sound of the gas flowing into her car. Norm shifted self-consciously and contented himself by examining what little he could see inside the car by the bright station lights. "Hey, what's that on your dashboard?"

She glanced over her shoulder to see where he was pointing and didn't answer.

"It's a rose, huh? A yellow one? Who's it from?"

She gave him a frosty stare. "My boyfriend."

"He give it to you?"

She nodded.

"Why you keep a dead rose? Don't he buy you live ones?"

"He's at sea." The nozzle made a clunking noise and gas sputtered out onto her coat. "Shit!"

"Aw, don'tcha hate it when that happens? Think I have some paper towels in the booth, hold on." He turned and moved quickly to a corner filled with oily rags and dirty cardboard boxes. He began to rifle through them. "Navy guy, huh?"

"What?" She began a search in her glove compartment for tissues.

"The one at sea, Navy guy, right?"

"Shit." She slammed the glove compartment shut.

"Yes. He's in the Navy."

"What's he, mechanic?"

"No, corpsman."

"Huh?"
Look, forget the towels, can I just pay you and get out of here? It's freezing.

He turned to look at her over his shoulder and smiled. "Oh, no problem, sure they're right here." He resumed rummaging. "Yellow roses are real nice. I'm a poet, you know," he added.

"You're what?"

"A poet. I write poetry."

"You write poetry," she repeated doubtfully.

He had been building to this point. "Yeah, your rose made me think about it. See, roses is my inspiration. My, he paused for effect, "muse." He glanced at her to see if she was impressed. Her face was blank. He decided he'd better clarify; not everyone was the literary type. "Roses help me write my poetry." He motioned to the plastic jar of fake roses for sale by the register. "They're okay, but real ones is better. Like yours."

She got in her car and started the engine. Norm whistled tunelessly as he pushed aside a box. "Here they are!" He pulled a dirty roll of paper towels from the greasy corner and walked over to the car. "Here you go, ma'am."

"No thank you, I'm fine. Here's twelve dollars, okay? Keep the change."

Norm sighed as her car drove away. He tucked the rejected towels under one arm and walked to the register. The open drawer revealed stacks of dirty, wrinkled bills. He looked down at the crisp bill she had handed him. He felt wrong putting her clean money on top, so he neatly ripped off a paper towel and covered the dirty money. He closed the drawer, pleased, and picked up the notepad beside the register in a sudden burst of inspiration.

Women is like roses, he wrote neatly across the top. Beneath, he drew a wobbly rose over a coffee stain left from the morning shift.

Norm wondered why women like the one in the station wagon always looked at him like that. He was a poet, weren't women supposed to fall for poets? He even had a muse! Maybe she just didn't understand. He shook his head sadly. She was no better than Paul or she would have understood.

The sudden glare of headlights on his face startled him into dropping the pad. He bent to pick it up.

"Excuse me."

He looked up and saw the old wagon idling a few feet away.

"Excuse me, I know I was in a terrible rush a minute ago, but I just realized I forgot to call ahead. Do you have a phone I could use? I didn't see a pay phone."

"Nope, no pay phone, but there's a phone in the booth here. Local?"

"Yes."

"All yours!" He smiled winningly.

She got out and left the motor running. He showed her the phone, then strolled back out to the car. He peered in the open window. Despite its shabby appearance, the car was almost spotless. On the faded grey seat was a black leather purse and a pack of cinnamon gum. The dashboard was empty except for the rose. In the half light, it looked bright and healthy. He stared intently at it. It didn't look dead, the petals looked soft. It almost seemed to glow in the streetlight. Maybe the problem wasn't that she didn't understand -- maybe it was that he hadn't been inspired enough! He glanced furtively back at her, then reached slowly into the car. If he could just touch the petals, he was sure he would be inspired to write a poem that would make her want to stay with him. This was the best muse -- it was hers. She had touched it. As his greasy hand inched closer to the rose, his head filled with images of her looking at him with adoring eyes. This was what Paul could never do, this was why poets got all the women. He was inches from inspiration for his great undertaking. Just a few more--

"Hey! What do you think you're doing?"

He spun around guiltily. "I...I--"

"Were you trying to steal my purse?"

"No! I was just--"

"I should call the police!"

"Please, lady, I just wanted to touch your rose!"

"You what?"

"Your rose, I can't tell it's dead, it looks alive! I just wanted to touch the petals so I could write you a poem! I
swear, lady, please don’t call the cops!"
"God, you must be disturbed or something! I told you it’s dead, what’s your problem?"
"No problem, I swear! I’m sorry, I—"

"Never mind! I don’t have time for this bullshit."
She stepped around him and into the car. The door slammed.
"Just keep out of other people’s things, will you?"
He watched her drive away this time painfully. He picked up the notepad and looked at the top sheet angrily. He ripped it off, crumpled it into a ball, and stuffed it in his pocket. On the new page, he wrote quickly and angrily, Women is no good for poets.

He dropped the pad on the counter, sat down on the old chair, and glared bitterly at the fake roses. Third shift was endless. He picked at the grime under his fingernails and waited for morning.

Kristin is a sixth semester English major.

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Michael P. Flagge

Silence Like a Lake Beneath the Sound

Do this:
find a chainsaw
or a bell, or a radio
or a gun, alarm clock
cymbals, drum, anything
that makes a noise and is made

(but maybe a chainsaw is best:
it has teeth, a gas engine
and it rends)

take it to the woods
go inside them
go far enough to lose the sounds
of cars and streets and sirens
and then go farther, just a bit.
Then make the noise
really do it:
gas the saw till it screams
blast the songs
clash, clang, bang, thrum
until your nose bleeds

Then stop.
Sharp.
Like a
Slap.

and Listen.

Michael is an eighth semester English major.
Ingrid Proescher

Second Sense

When I meet with my sister for the first time in years, she sits beside me and asks me to smell her hair. It smells like strawberries. She describes the new shampoo she is using as she would describe a lover. It is this way with women, this animal affair with scent and hair.

When women meet we smother ourselves in each other's hair, our embrace of flower, berry, musk, our wildwood selves; we walk in clouds of lavender, mandarin, violet and lemon.

I know a woman who sleeps with her hair wet and burns incense beside the bed. In the morning she is sandalwood, champa.

I know a woman who rinses her long hair in mixtures made from her herb garden. She is thyme and sage, she is wise and wild things growing. She is earth, mint and rosemary.

We can smell sickness and loss in our hair, we know the smells of oil and the love we don't give ourselves.

When a woman is grieving we run our hands over her hair to restore her. When a woman is in love she asks her lover to brush her hair for her, to scatter her scent on his hands like pollen, claiming him.

Ingrid Proescher

Revenge

I am dreaming about the other woman. She enters my dreams secretly, the way my lover entered her body; the smell of her body on his hands the night he came home afterwards. In my dreams that smell is cinnamon, salt. The foggy sweet smell of wine.

In my dreams, she asks me to hold her, she begs, please don't leave me, please don't leave.
Her eyes are wet, dark moons.
I run my fingertips along her eyes
to close them.

Her breasts, her throat,
the slick blushing of her thighs;
I tell myself, he touched her
here, and here, and here.
I imagine my kisses taste
like him. We roll together,
infinite. We are warm and round
and slow. I tell her I will
keep her safe, I will love

her as no one has loved her.
I whisper, I stroke.
I make promises.

Her eyes are wet, dark moons.
I run my fingertips along her eyes
to close them.

Butterfly Season

Lifting themselves out of coffins,
silently everywhere
tiny legs crack
chrysalids of green,
black, and gold
poking the shell that they
have slept in for a
quarter of their lives.
The pulsing blood unfolds
wrinkled, wet wings
that fan the air for strength
and new life—
and, pushed upward like leaves
rising from their branches,
cradled by the shifting air,
they flutter above the clutch
of scarecrow trees that rattle
in the yellow twilight.
Bold, in regal sleeves,
they take their course
in laughing cadence
despite the coming storm.

What memory governs
the erratic flight of a monarch?
I have waited long for this moment.
But, now hasty and
hard pressed to beat the rain,
my callous hands lash out.
In vain, I take inventory,
but find only a swarm
of thoraxes and divided wings,
and the mis-shapen ugliness
of things, worming in the
pit of my net.

Jason is a seventh semester English major.

On the day my stepfather was admitted to the hospital, I began to study facial expressions. I didn’t want to be startled into learning that someone was dead. I wanted to see it coming. Only then could I run from it and hide. Bury myself under my covers until they told me it was all right, it was all a mistake.

We were supposed to go to Mohawk Trail in Massachusetts that day—"to see the foliage," my mother said. My stepfather must have heard her mention it because he came storming into the kitchen wearing his maroon robe with the torn maroon pockets, tied just below the bulge of his belly. His face was half-shaven, his razor dripping water and foam on the cracked orange and brown tile floor. "No one's going with us," he said. "We're going alone."

He sounded ruder than usual. I felt my face get hot. I looked at my mother. She shrugged as if to say: "Don't look at me. I don't know what's wrong with him today." I wished she would say something. But she never did. It wasn’t so much that I wanted to go with them. In fact, being home alone after living in a house full of seven kids was a rare treat. The only ones living at home now were my brother Anthony and I. He was thinking about joining the Marines, so he would be gone soon as well. I, on the other hand, would only be eleven in four months, so I had a ways to go. I thought when my brother was gone, my Mom and I could start buying those cute little cans of corn, peas and string beans. Maybe even some sweetened cereal since there wouldn’t be anyone home to eat the whole box in one sitting. Anything would be better than those huge boxes of Corn Flakes and Cheerios my mom still bought out of habit.

That night, while I was doing my homework at the kitchen table, the phone rang. My brother answered it. I could only get bits of the conversation: "Which hospital? Is Ray going to be all right?" I tried to ask him what was wrong, but he didn’t hear me, wouldn’t hear me. Immediately after hanging up the phone, he dialed my sister. He spoke in hushed tones, but I got the gist of it. My
stepfather had a heart attack, and my mother was at the hospital with him.

My brother made some more phone calls. Then he left, telling me it would be better if I stayed home. They'd be back soon. Don't worry.

When he shut the door behind him, the apartment seemed unbearably quiet. I had never really thought about death, and I didn't want to start. I tried to get back to my homework. I was supposed to memorize the Apostle's Creed. Sister Marjorie, my fifth grade teacher, said she was sick of seeing us mouth the words during Mass, pretending to know it. She said it embarrassed her. I began memorizing the words, concentrating on each one, hoping to forget about everything else. When I had memorized more than half the prayer, all the way down to "He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead," I couldn't go any further. As I concentrated on the words, the prayer became filled with dark, marble churches, massive stained glass windows, swelling organ music and old rumpled priests smelling of incense and pipe smoke. Prayer scared me.

When my mom and brother finally came home, I was waxing the living room floor, trying to keep busy. I thought that would make my mom happy. The wood floors were the only thing she really loved about our apartment. Probably because it was the one old thing in the apartment that you could actually make shine. I had the T.V. on loud so I could hear it at the other end of the living room as I waxed. My mother looked tired. She cringed when the noise of the T.V. hit her.

"Why do you have to watch these shows? You know all that fake laughter gets on my nerves."

I wanted to tell her that I wasn't watching it, that I just wanted to hear something, anything. But I kept my mouth shut. I knew she had a lot of things on her mind. Mostly money, and my stepfather.

When my mother tried to persuade me that her marrying Ray was a good thing, she told me: "Now we will have two incomes. Now we can do some extra things. Buy you nice clothes. Take you places."

I was not convinced. She had been married twice before Ray. The second marriage, to my father, ended when I was two. All that I knew about him I heard from my brothers and sisters. They said he looked just like Beretta, on the television show. They also said he had a terrible temper. I could see that temper in my brother Anthony. The smallest thing would make his face turn bright red. When he clenched his teeth, and his hands began to shake, you knew to stay away. My brother would hit and break things. My father, on the other hand, would hit my mother. They said they tried everything to lock him out of the house for good. One day, they were nailing boards across the front door when they heard a laugh behind them. They turned around to see my father leaning up against a built-in wooden bookcase, his arms folded in front of him. He usually entered the house screaming when he was on a rampage, and that was their cue to hide down in Mama Theresa's apartment on the second floor. At least until he sent someone down for my mother. But this time it was different. He looked amused, and for once they thought he was just going to let it go. He walked over to my mother as if he just wanted to put his arms around her. "Then he beat the crap out of her" as my oldest sister told me. And they ended up hiding down in Mama Theresa's apartment after all. They told me I was lucky I couldn't remember him, and that I should be as happy as they were when he went out one day to buy a pack of cigarettes and ended up in Reno, Nevada.

Of course, my mom had many boyfriends in between my father and stepfather. One of them, Eddie, was a milk man. He was also a Jehovah's Witness. Whenever he came over all of my brothers and sisters and I had to sit around the kitchen table while he taught us about his religion. He would place his opened briefcase on the table as if the neatly stacked pamphlets filling it were some kind of exhibit in a museum. He read us stories from these pamphlets which had pictures on the covers of huge trees with rays of sunlight piercing through them. Then he would ask us questions to make sure we were listening. He was my mom's longest lasting boyfriend. I think he was around for about a year or so.
The last time I ever saw him he had my mother's arm twisted behind her back. My mother was screaming. We all went running into her bedroom. My eldest brother had a baseball bat in his hand. When Eddie saw all of us looking at him, he let her go. He walked out, and never came back.

I didn't mind my mother having boyfriends so much. It was the living in the apartment with us part that I didn't like, and a husband meant live-in. So I told her that if she married Ray, not to expect me to talk to her. Everyone laughed at me. They said I was cute. They liked to repeat that line: "Don't expect me to talk to you if you marry this one." But she married him anyway, and it didn't take long for everyone to stop repeating that line. After a while, even I forgot my reservations.

I actually learned to like Ray. The poems that I wrote for my mom on holidays soon included him. And my mother was right, we did go a lot more places with Ray around. My mother hated to go to the beach, yet when she married Ray, we went practically every weekend during the summer. We also went out to eat a lot, and I probably had too many hot fudge sundaes at Friendly's with him. He even found out which Nancy Drew books I didn't own, and began buying me one each week. He took me to the library with him all the time, and while I looked for teen romances, he searched through books on real estate and insurance. I think my mom was relieved when I finally felt comfortable with Ray. When he and I went places together, she had time to herself. She even found time to take a painting class at the community college, something I knew she always wanted to do.

After about a year or so, however, Ray decided that we could go more places, buy more things, even move to a better neighborhood, if he could just get started in the real estate business. He told my mother that he was going to get his real estate license. Until then, my mother assumed that all the meetings he was going to and all the real estate books he was reading were just a hobby for him. Ray had a very different view on the matter. He began arguing that he could make more money in real estate if he had more time to devote to it. He always used the same line: "If I just had more time, I could really do something."

"Why can't you do real estate and your job, too?" my mother tried to reason with him.

He leaned back in a chair at the kitchen table, his hands folded behind his head. "Carol, I drive a truck all night. I sleep all day. How can I do anything?"

"Look, there are a lot of things I want to do, too. You don't see me up and quitting my job." She threw the supper dishes into the sink.

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on the kitchen table. He spoke loudly to make sure she heard him over the running water. "But there are so many things I could do. So many things the general public doesn't know about. Did you know we could buy an apartment building for one dollar, even no money down? The tenants would be paying us rent every month."

She put down a large frying pan she was scrubbing to turn around and look at him. "I don't have a pot to piss in, and you're talking about buying apartment houses?"

"I'm telling you, there are ways. If I just had more time."

She went back to scrubbing the frying pan. "Look, Ray, do what you want."

My stepfather began smoking cigars, sitting at the dining room table with earphones on, pen in hand, yellow legal pad on the table in front of him, listening to his "How to Buy Real Estate with Absolutely No Money" tapes. He also read a lot of books which told him how he could buy property with one dollar or no money down. He took notes from such books as: How I Turned 1,000 Into Three Million in Real Estate In My Spare Time, and Bernard Meltzer=The Man Whom Millions of Radio and Television Fans Know as the Authority on Almost Everything Solves Your Money Problems. Within a couple of months he had passed the real estate exam.

He tried the techniques in these books. He really did buy an apartment house for one dollar down. But the books did not account for people not paying their rent or for my stepfather having a heart attack. And my mother, who never listened to the tapes, nor read any of his books, or even discussed these matters with him, might now have to settle these matters. My mother looked worried, and I knew this
was the reason. I didn’t dare open my mouth when she looked worried, even though I wanted comfort. I wanted someone to tell me everything was going to be all right.

I began thinking about death so much that I couldn’t get to sleep at night. I’d keep the lights on and just stare at the brown paneled walls, covered only by my poster of Tom Schneider. That poster with his red car in the background really brightened up the room, I thought. That, and the white bedroom set my eldest sister had given to me. She bought it second hand, and painted it white when, for the first time, I got to have a room of my own. No more standing in the middle of the bedroom, set of bunk beds on either side of the room, waiting for someone to claim me—allow me to sleep with them. So I thought having my own room would be great. Of course I also thought it would be great when everyone had finally moved out of the house. But when my stepfather went into the hospital, I actually wished that my brother would stay home more often instead of hanging out with his friends all night. Nothing really seemed to bother him. He just went on as he usually did, which meant he was never home, and the house was in constant silence. When I got my own bedroom I didn’t count on the long nights of listening. Wondering when I was going to hear the sounds of death coming from the room next door where my mother slept. Wondering when she would cease breathing, and leave me there alone. Every morning at 3 a.m. I breathed a sigh of relief when I heard my mother’s door open. I listened to the sound of the water running as she took a shower. I listened to the noise of the blow dryer. I liked these sounds filling up the silences of the apartment. Only then could I get to sleep.

I always felt better when I woke up in the morning. I never really felt afraid in the daylight. School seemed to keep my mind away from my problems at home.

A couple of days after Ray went into the hospital, I came home from school and found my mother lying on her bed, wrapped in a blanket. She was still wearing her blue work uniform with the red and white patch on the left shoulder that read, "Hostess Baking Co". Above her bed hung a painting she had done at the Community College. It looked like a painting of springtime with its tall trees, wildflowers amidst overgrowth, and a single bucket swinging from the branch of a tree. My mother looked so small wrapped up in that blanket. Her skin looked pale, and more wrinkled. She had dark circles under her eyes as if her mascara had run. She looked so still that I started to panic. Her mouth was closed. I couldn’t see the rise and fall of her chest. I shook her—hard. She awoke, startled.

"What in the hell are you doing? Can’t you give me a moment’s rest?"

My face felt hot. My stomach felt a little queasy, but I was relieved to get a response, any response. I mumbled an apology, told her I had something important to tell her, but had forgotten what it was.

She readjusted the covers. Before going back to sleep she said, "Wake me in an hour. We’re going to see Ray in the hospital."

I didn’t want to go. I was afraid to go. But I knew I couldn’t make an excuse.

After I woke my mother up, she took another half hour to actually get out of bed. She walked out of her bedroom as if every movement pained her, and began rummaging through my stepfather’s things, which still covered the dining room table, a frown on her face.

"What are you looking for?" I asked. "Something for Ray?"

She didn’t answer me, and I didn’t feel like asking again. She picked up a book from a chair in the dining room, Supermoney. She handed it to me. She grabbed a rock hard piece of Milleti’s bread from the kitchen, and began gnawing on it as we walked out the door.

Outside, I noticed she was still wearing the blue uniform. Black grease stains covered the front of her shirt where she rested the cake-filled metal trays before loading them onto dollies and wheeling them into warehouses and supermarkets. Her hands were dry and hard, grease embedded in the cracks of her skin. I knew if I got close enough, she would smell like a mixture of plastic bags and the stale dusty air of the truck she drove.
"Aren't you going to change?" I asked.
"I don't have the energy," she said.

When we arrived at the hospital, Ray was on the phone, pen in hand, legal pad resting on his lap. If it wasn't for the plastic tubes running up his nose, he would have seemed fine.

I sat down in the chair on the far side of the room, and opened up my social studies book, *The World and Its Peoples*.

Ray looked at me. "Hey Tubbs. Shy today?"

"Don't get her started," my mother said.

Illness hadn't changed him. I looked down at my social studies book, and pretended to be engrossed. I had a quiz the next day, and I needed to catch up on my reading. But I couldn't concentrate. I ended up flipping through the pages, just looking at the pictures. On page 24 was an illustration of an Indian woman laughing, her baby in her arms. She sat on a hammock in the middle of an otherwise empty hut. I imagined the woman's husband out hunting or gathering food of some kind for them just like in *The Little House on the Prairie*. I thought they looked very happy. I tried to concentrate only on the illustrations. I didn't want to hear what my mother and Ray were talking about, but I listened any way. He was quizzing her:

"Now who do you have to call tomorrow?" he asked.
"Tom Mastrianni, your lawyer, and the bank."
"Do you have all the numbers written down?"
My mother said yes.
"Oh, and can you type up these letters for me? Try to mail them by tomorrow morning if you can."

She took the letters from him. "Should you really be thinking about all this stuff? I mean, you just had a heart attack. You're supposed to be resting."
"Carol, what other choice do I have? Am I supposed to just let everything go?"
"And exactly how long am I supposed to do this for? I do have a full-time job, you know. I don't see why this can't wait until you're out of the hospital."

"I asked you to do a few things. If you don't have time, I'll do them myself."
"I didn't say I wouldn't do them. I just said I don't understand why it can't wait."

Every once in a while I stole a glance at the black screen with the jagged green lines moving across it next to my stepfather's bed. The hum from the machine seemed to vibrate the floor. The steady movement of the lines had me entranced. I didn't pull my eyes away until it was time to go.

When we got home that night, my mother immediately began typing letters for Ray. I sat in the living room, pretending to do my homework. I listened to the sounds of her typing. When she finally went to bed, she forgot to tell me to go to sleep. So I stayed in the living room. After a few minutes, when I knew she would be fast asleep and unable to hear the sounds of fake laughter, I turned on the television. I listened to the voices on the screen until I fell asleep.

The day was the only time I felt unafraid. I had my friends, and my schoolwork to catch up on. Every day, before class began, we said a decade of the rosary. As we prayed, we faced the statue of the Virgin Mary. I really concentrated when I prayed. I thought maybe then my prayers would be answered. I really thought about each word—words I had previously just rattled off. The prayers didn't seem quite so scary to me under the bright fluorescent lights of the classroom.

One day, after we finished the decade of the rosary, Sister Marjorie told us that whatever we asked of the Virgin Mary, she would give to us as long as it was not materialistic or selfish. I prayed that Ray would get better. That he would come home. Then my mother could concentrate on other things. Then she would remember to answer the notes I slipped under her door every night as she used to. Then she wouldn't have so many things on her mind, and she would be in a better mood.
The next time we went to the hospital to visit Ray, however, they were wheeling him out of his room and he was crying. We found out later that he had had two more successive “minor” heart attacks. He was in I.C.U. He needed rest. There was nothing we could do for him there. I wondered if my mother was going to cry the way I wanted to. But she didn’t. She never did. She simply took my hand, and drove us home. She didn’t say anything when we got to the apartment. She simply sat down at the dining room table, and began typing as if nothing happened. So I pretended nothing had happened as well. But when she went to bed, and the silence began, I could no longer fake it.

I turned on the T.V. and flipped through the stations. I stopped when I saw a singing minister. He looked different from the priests at my school. He looked friendly, for one thing. He had a big belly and wore a big cowboy hat. The songs he sang were upbeat-country gospel I guess it was. I liked sitting there, and listening to the sounds of his voice. It blocked out the thoughts, the silences of the apartment.

When he prayed, his prayers were not filled with dark, marble churches, or swelling organ music. His voice was soothing. I closed my eyes. I could hear him praying, inviting others to pray with him as I lay back in the leather recliner which was pushed up too close to the T.V. I prayed with him for the twenty-nine passengers on the Boeing 757 who were shot down by Soviet fighter planes after the plane strayed into Soviet air space, we prayed for the five hundred people who died in an earthquake in Columbia, we prayed for the three hundred who died in Egypt when a ferry caught fire on the Nile, we prayed for world peace, reduction in arms, and the steady rise of the Dow Jones Industrial Average. I imagined the flashing light of the television on my face was the beatific white light of Heaven, covering me, protecting me. In the middle of our prayers, I fell asleep dreaming of distant lands and peoples.

Monet’s Garden

Renoir paints Monet painting
a never-ending afternoon
in Monet’s garden at Argenteuil.
The day’s colors are muted,
perhaps by clouds, perhaps by Renoir’s eye.
The sun strains to burn through
in the distance, too far away
to illumine the red and yellow roses
that hold Monet’s attention as Monet holds Renoir’s.
Monet’s garments are all subdued as the afternoon.
Perhaps to soften a summer chill,
he wears a black cap, gray trousers, a dark blue coat.
Though the roses bloom, green prevails
in Monet’s garden at Argenteuil,
sometimes a green just the other side of yellow,
sometimes a green just this side of black.
Monet concentrates on the garden.
Renoir concentrates on Monet.
The scene emits no sound,
except, perhaps, the brush strokes.

From a painting at the Wadsworth Antheneum

A graduating senior in English, Brenda received this year’s Hakeman Award for best short story.

A graduate student in the English Department, Kenneth tied for third place in this year’s Wallace Stevens contest.
Pilar A. Stewart

Seductive Clothing

Every year
when I was a teenager
my father sent me a box
of clothes.
He never included a letter
so I read the clothes like hieroglyphics.
I thought that he was courting me:
What does he mean?
What is he trying to say?
What does a white satin jumpsuit,
a skintight off the shoulder shirt,
headbands with bangles,
multicolored leg warmers,
short shorts
mean?
Was he disappointed
with my dark East Coast persona--
did he think that he could transform
me into a blond tan California girl?
That somehow we would be closer
if I dressed like the children he saw?
Did he think I was too layered
that if I wore less
that we could be more open?
Did he not know how a child dressed?
Did he think these clothes were pretty--
something in which you dressed a little doll?
In his mind, was I
still so small?
I failed as an archeologist.
I did not read the signs--
When I was older
he told me that
he flirted with the girl
at the department store
and that she picked the clothes out.

A graduate student in the English Department, Pilar tied
for third place in this year's Wallace Stevens contest.

Though I've been good,
no bright green sapling leaves
wreath my crown each morning.
When will you deliver the promised
hoven cattle for my shining machines,
when peach trees and sheets of aluminum?
I wait for the yellow water to drop;
for gypsum to chalk lines
across my weary fields;
cement and boards
to raise walls, a tin
of coarse flour.
I already know their fertile odors:
hard brown bread arriving in a stained
headcloth. I promise to comfort your messengers;
I will say, Rest, my Lovelies. Lay your herbs
and shrubs around the black stumps
of my plowed trenches and burnt woods.
Twist hemlock fencing around our hopes.

I regret to say, dear finch,
your plans for stone houses with wide porches
won't do: I need a pile of stones, voices,
flickers of hands stacking stones all day
and raising unlabelled bottles all evening,
voices, gray plank floors and a chair,
a few chairs, a table to hold a candle,
hot candle stripes rising with the wine vapors,
a candle to see the voices by,
a group of voices on the porch
talking long into a stupid evening
about their work, and one sitting there
describing a falcon he'd seen
hovering spread in the air over a skulking
prey on a spring killing-frost day.
Jaime McGrath

The Old Believer

Because the disc in the electricity meter turned slower than a children’s record, five daughters left their beds, their five ivy-green bedrooms, and dropped like nightgowns onto grass frozen black in the mansion’s rounded shadow. The sisters scudded toward the arbor. Curtains strained out five windows left open, strained after their humming and twirling songs, as six sisters ran under bare fruit trees: five turning their imitated graces in the dull, bounding, dark, one sister whispering and turning in her bed.

The New Believer

Those trees are tall. Pines surrounding bare maples on a hill where cars face forward coming around the corner between shallow rises, rolling straight on. There must be a limit to how tall a tree can grow. Their height can be measured by standing away and measuring the angle from ground to tree tip; plugging the figures into the equation of a triangle; solving for the missing side.

I practiced this method on my sister and a wall.
Then I drove out to Hollow Park and slept with my head on huge flexed roots. A still pond swarming with small fish, frogs, and algae-eating insects. Stony sand and weeds.

While I slept, I slept dreaming my next dream.

A graduating senior in English, Jaime received second place in the Wallace Stevens contest. His poem "Petition to a Finch" was the winner of this year’s Collins award.
Wendy Goldberg

Holocaust

There is this documentary talking about the place down in Japan called Hiroshima. Its people were walking in the downtown, walking with their purchases through bicycles when they were targeted by the bomb. A radio blared somewhere and the high whistle of a plane specked the open sky. There was only an intense light, a blinding light like Zeus shining his glory on Semele, parting his mortal robes, dropping them to the floor, turning the poor lover to ashes. It was as if the entire awfulness of the light, or the thought of the light was enough to consume the people walking to their houses, and only their shadows were slapped against the walls—so thin the shadows entered the buildings.

Shadows of leaves haunt the sidewalk I walk on left over by the casual rainfall, and the cold air struggles to move the flimsy matter about. Shoes slide them aside revealing, leaving a thin layer of black to show something—

maybe to the sky by sending patterns upward towards the sky which are repeated in a negative image of the night and of the stars created by the blasts of what is unimagined or what is untold.

A graduate student in English, Wendy was first place winner in this year's Wallace Stevens contest.
Marianne felt very behind the times and girly as she sat in her turtleneck with flowers all over it and her purple corduroy skirt, trying to continue her letter.

"Sheila, how does it feel to be a big sophomore?" No, thought Marianne. She didn't want to sound like she was kissing up. She drew an x through that page and flipped to a clean one.

"Hi Sheila!" began the second draft, "How are you? How is school now that you’re a sophomore? I'm only a freshman! Pretty soon you'll get your license and you can come visit me! You’re invited, anytime you want. Anytime!" she underlined anytime heavily.

Marianne didn't know what else to say. Too much of what she really wanted to say was under the surface. What she really wanted to write was, "Dear Sheila, how are you? I am so lonely it's pathetic and I miss you so much I could die. I just want a friend I can sit with at lunch someone I can be with after school." Marianne didn't know what to say after that, but the class was filling up with whispers and hair tossing and bookbags, so Marianne put away her notebook and concentrated on looking like a friendly person, a person whom people would want for a friend.

Then, a few weeks into the quarter, the seat next to Marianne became occupied. The body sat, full and nervous, next to Marianne. Marianne had been sitting by herself for so long she was almost afraid she had forgotten how to speak to people, but she suckered up her nerve and turned to look at this person. As she turned, the new girl also turned and broke out into a relieved smile.

"Hullo," said the girl, in an accent that sounded English and Dutch.

"Hi," said Marianne, "are you new?" Finally, thought Marianne, a person to talk to! And a person who knows less about this place than I do!

"Yea," said the girl, "I'm Cathy. What’s your
name?"

"Marianne. I'm new too!"

"Really?" This seemed to put Cathy at ease. "Where are you from?"

"Illinois. Where are you from?" She couldn't wait to find out where Cathy's exotic accent was from. Marianne guessed Australia, but Cathy said, "South Africa. Pretoria, actually."

"Wow!" said Marianne admiringly. Talk about being a long way from friends!

The bell rang and after letting in the stragglers, the teacher, Mr. DeLeon, shut the door. The whispering in the classroom continued, but at a lower decibel, and for once Marianne was taking part! It felt good, normal. On the blackboard Mr. DeLeon had written, "The Structure of Feudal Society". Cathy had already written it in her notebook.

"Is it your first day?" Marianne whispered.

"Yeah," Cathy signed.

"How's it going so far? Do you like it?" Marianne wanted to hear Cathy tell the truth, that Brockport was filled with a bunch of rich snobs, and it was hard to make friends. Then, they could band together and...but Cathy didn't answer. Evidently, Cathy was used to more classroom discipline than Marianne was, as Cathy was busily coping down the terms on the chalkboard. King, Lords, Lesser Lords, Knights, peasants and townspeople. Marianne turned quickly back to her desk and began copying the board also.

Once or twice, when Marianne found the courage and energy to eat lunch in the cafeteria, she ate with Cathy and a couple of other new girls. They quietly ate their sandwiches and talked about the places in town they had been to for the first time. Marianne spent much of the lunch looking over her shoulder at the kids at the other tables.

Marianne wanted to figure out the social structure of this place, so she could know which groups she had the best chance of getting into. So far Marianne decided there were the cool kids, of all ages, who by their coolness were able to transcend class divisions. Then there were the nameless others. Among her own, freshman, distinct groups set off by unseen similarities. Marianne didn't know what tied these groups together. Academics? Athletics? Art? No, art belonged to the group of nonconformists, all lined up against the cafeteria wall, sulking and wearing black. No one really knew what to make of them.

Marianne wanted to fit in with the Brockport kids. A bunch of them sat at a big table in the corner of the cafeteria. Unfortunately, Marianne noticed that the new people who fit in with the Brockport people right away were all very skinny, and wore expensive clothes. Marianne had gotten some new clothes, but nothing very expensive. She looked over at Cathy, eating her yogurt. Cathy was wearing Bonjour jeans with white pinstripes, and a pink sweatshirt with a print that had to be two years old. Marianne winced, but then she thought, I'll cut her some slack, she's new. Besides, they're probably a little behind the times in South Africa. Still, thought Marianne, I wish that Cathy would just wear normal plain jeans and a plain sweater like everyone else. Maybe if Cathy looked more American, more normal, then.... Wait a minute, thought Marianne, am I turning into a snob? She could not answer this question. Instead, the words in her brain were drowned out by cafeteria noise and she began to wolf her turkey sandwich.

After a month or so, not all Western Humanities classes were covering the same subjects. Not all of them moved chronologically, and not all of them even focused on the same latitude and longitude. It was all according to the teacher's taste. But every week at least a day was devoted to current events, and these current events were related to different historical concepts.

On November 3rd, 1986, there was a quick bite on the evening news about the deproclamation of the Oukasie black town ship in South Africa. Residents were no longer
legal and were officially considered squatters. At this time, Marianne and her family had been sitting around the dinner table, with the TV muted. Marianne had been debating whether or not to get a second helping of her mother's chicken during the news bite. Three days later, 40 black schools along the Eastern cape were closed, to punish misbehaving students. Like every other day, Marianne made it early to class that week for current events.

She sat scribbling in her notebook and waited for Cathy. They did not talk much, but at least they said hello. I wonder if she likes me, thought Marianne. I wonder if she thinks I'm the popular sort of person....

Cathy walked in, with her striped jeans and fluffy blonde hair. Her cheeks always had color, although her face was thin. She reminded Marianne of a lion. Her green plasticized trapper-keeper was folded under her arm. "Hullo!" she said. Today Marianne thought she might invite Cathy over after school. She was tired of doing nothing at home until dinner.

Marianne's stomach tightened as Cathy sat down. "Hi Cathy!" she beamed nervously. "What's up?"

"Nothing much. I was stopped in the hall by my sister pleading for some money and food cause she forgot hers. She's a bum!"

Marianne laughed. She would invite Cathy another day. Instead, she said, "Aw, it sucks when you forget your lunch and everyone else is eating..." She trailed off as Mr. DeLeon shut the door and headed for the front of the room. I said sucks, Marianne thought. I hope she doesn't think I'm rude.

"We're gonna start off with current events," announced Mr. DeLeon. He held up a newspaper and passed it to the desk next to him. "What's going around is a little story in today's New York Times about South Africa. You don't have to read the article, but you can look at the picture while I talk. The big problem right now in South Africa is something called Apartheid."

Next to her, Marianne felt Cathy stiffen as if she was in a dentist's chair. Mr. DeLeon wrote Apartheid on the board. "This is a policy of apartness, in which blacks and whites are separated in the same way they were in this country for most of this century.

"Blacks are allowed to live only in designated townships. They are restricted to go anywhere else, as we restrict you from wandering the halls without a hall pass. In a sense, the blacks are imprisoned in their own country. They are South Africa's source of cheap labor. They are the diamond miners. If the whites can keep the South African blacks under their thumbs, if they can pay the blacks a very small amount of money and use the product of black labor for their benefit, they will continue to grown rich.

"So you see, there is a lot at stake in Apartheid for the white South Africans. Am I going too fast for anyone? Are there any questions?"

For some reason the entire class had gone quiet. Next to Marianne, Cathy was flushed, and her jaw was clamped shut. Mr DeLeon pulled down a white screen in front of the blackboard and produced a videotape from his briefcase. "I want you to be aware of what's going on in the world," he said. He nodded for a boy to turn out the lights.

When the lights went off Marianne grew excited, as she always did for movies. She looked around at the class conspiratorially. She always felt like a spy with the lights off.

The first image on the screen was of tropical South Africa the Baobob trees, the blue sky, the lush grass. (It's beautiful! thought Marianne) There were white people in straw hats with linen pants and blouses playing cricket. "Oh blast!" one of them exclaimed as they missed the wire arch. "You think you're so hot," teased another. Marianne forgot what else they were saying. It was how they were saying it, in beautiful musical Dutch accents. Their stately white mansions poked from between green hills.

Then there was a funeral. Suddenly, the air looked
dirty, the sky was hazy, and there was no green. There was
dust like a subway station, and houses that looked like they
were made out of flapping cardboard. There were black
bodies inside sooty torn clothes. Masses of black people
converged around a tiny church, where the funeral had turned
into a political rally. Again, Marianne could not remember
much that was said. About the only things she did
remember, as the movie went on, were the demonstrations
held by black people as they stood at the end of the road,
jogging in place and chanting. Then the tanks came for them
like green monsters. "Teaching ancient warrior tactics,"
Marianne remembered the narrator saying. Then the street
was lined with singing black people in front of a metal fence.
Their fists were raised, and they were dancing as the camera
moved away Marianne could see that they were dancing right
up to the tanks parked in the road, with their fists close
enough to touch.

About a week before Thanksgiving break Marianne
sat in the cafeteria in late afternoon, at an empty table. A
notebook was open in front of her, with its pages blank.
Marianne wanted to write a letter. She tried to imagine
Illinois, but lately it had become harder to conjure it up. It
was fading like the whiteness of the notebook paper. Now
she was stuck here, in Connecticut.

Popular kids leaned against the cafeteria wall and
milled about, fake-punching each other and talking. Through
the windows Marianne could see the jocks playing hacky-sack
in the courtyard. Around the corner from the popular kids,
against a white brick wall of their own, were the actors, set
designers, and people in their own rock and roll bands. The
non-conformists. This group seemed a little more tolerant
than the other groups, Marianne noticed the presence of some
slightly overweight girls.

Marianne tried to ignore the kids sitting and standing
along the wall, who were laughing and joking and flirting
obliviously. She drew squiggly lines on a blue-lined page.
"But how could your country tolerate that?" asked one of the girls, who had risen from her position against the brick wall.

"It's sick," said Vanessa scornfully.

Alex was glaring, "How - could - anyone - do - that?" he asked.

Marianne watched from her cafeteria table, and waited for Cathy's response. Would they pounce on Cathy? she wondered. Would Cathy run away? Marianne was beginning to feel a little angry herself. She thought of the fists and the tear gas and the ancient warrior tactics and the white people playing cricket. Alex and Vanessa have a point, thought Marianne.

The nonconformists were locked in a single glare of contempt towards Cathy. Alex waved his hand at Cathy, in disgust and dismissal, and the group turned into itself again and began to ignore her.

Cathy clenched her juice money in her hand, and took a step forward again. "But it's not me," she pleaded. "It's my country! Just because I live there doesn't mean I approve-

But it was too late. They had already closed her out. They weren't listening.

That was that. Marianne had barely shifted in her chair as she watched the whole thing. Marianne didn't really understand why the nonconformists should care where Cathy was from. If here and there were separate, and existed separately, why should they care about over there? Cathy was here now, so why should it matter?

But it did matter.

And suddenly it didn't make any sense to Marianne, this here and there she was so confused by. "It's not me," Cathy had said, but judging from Alex and Vanessa and the others, Marianne thought maybe it was Cathy, after all. Maybe, thought Marianne, there is no such thing as here and there.

Cathy's guilt washed over Marianne like black paint,
This 12th issue of WRITING UCONN was made possible by funds from the English Department and The Aetna Chair of Writing. We are also grateful to the Connecticut Writing Project for past support.

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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"O, ANGST! O, DEATH! O, DESTINY!"

"...THE CREATIV..."