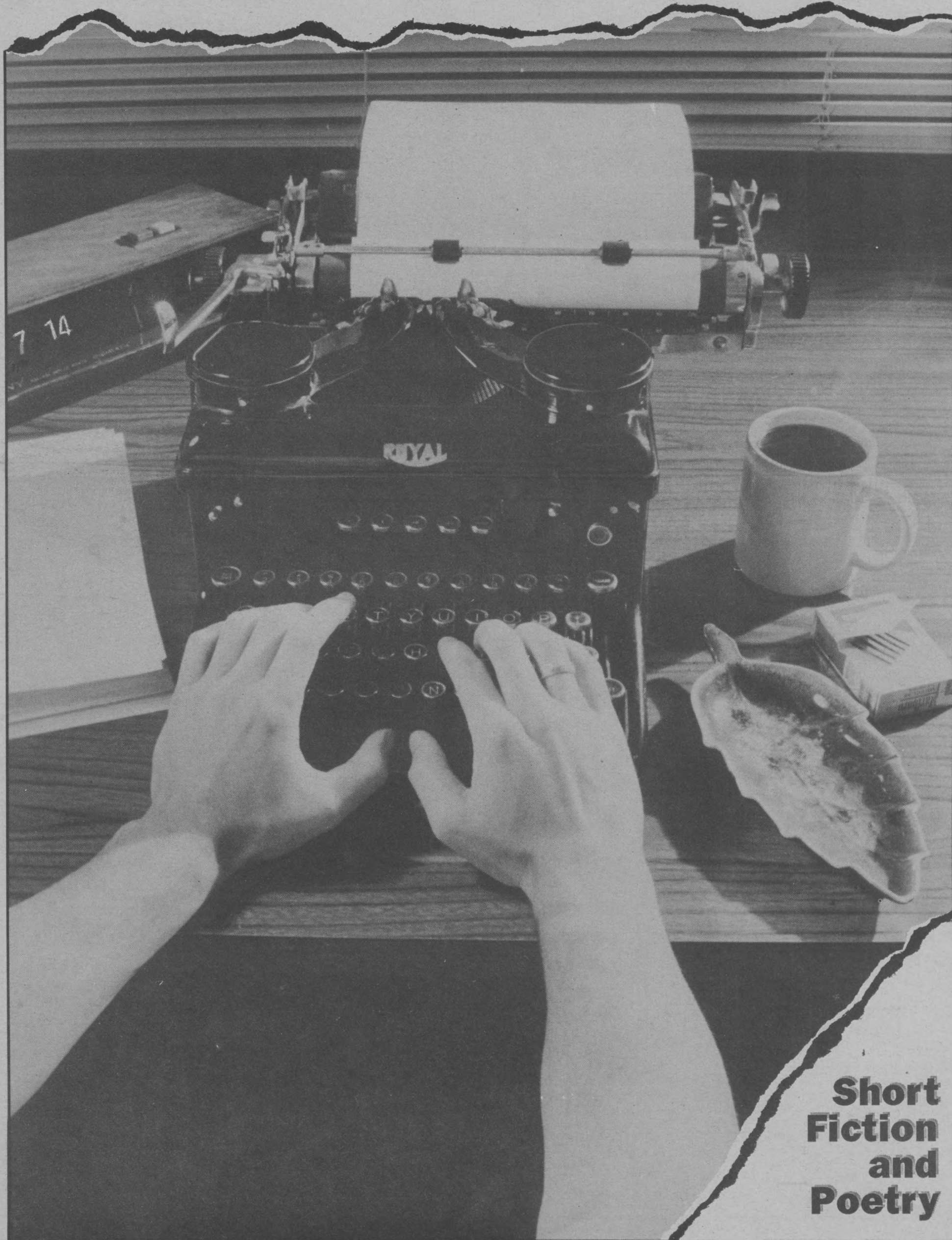


S.W.A.T.

The Daily Nexus Literary Supplement • February 25, 1992



**Short
Fiction
and
Poetry**

Dear S.W.A.T. reader,

It's Sunday night, at the tail end of more than two dogged months spent preparing this new literary magazine we call S.W.A.T. I'm sitting here drinking a warm Natural Light (a really mediocre beer) thinking of ways to tell you all, in one sappy little note, why we did this whole thing anyway. The Nexus is, after all, a newspaper. So what the hell are we doing publishing a literary supplement? Maybe we should just stick to telling you what happened to the Inside Wave at the last Leg council meeting or how Chancellor Babs Uehling sold her soul to Satan so that she could live forever (unconfirmed).

But that's all so exhaustively drab. Plus the funny thing about the Nexus is there are no rules and Barb never comes in to tell us what to do. She doesn't even like us very much. It's a shame, really.

With S.W.A.T. we want to give you all a great steaming mouthful of the written word as art. Something you can gnaw on, chew up and feed to your hungry brains. That's what writing is for and, frankly, there is simply a vast lack of the stuff these days. This section is meant to swat you all in the head and remind you that many of these people you see stumbling around campus are closet writers. They write about sex and fear and hating cops and things that mean a tremendous amount to everyone. Writing and reading is, after all, a pleasure—a thick icing on a sometimes less sweet cake—that is to be enjoyed by everyone. It is too important an element of life to be hidden in dusty journals with names like Swarthmore Quarterly Typographic Review and Journal of Intertextual Literary Trends.

Thank you, but no. That's not right. At the risk of sounding like some kind of preacher, literature belongs to everyone. As far as I can tell, that's the only way it works. This supplement comes in 12,000 copies—more than nearly every literary magazine in the nation. We publish works not on the basis of reputations or literary resumes, but on the basis of whether or not it captures that elusive chemistry that makes your brain twinge or your skin chill. From here on, S.W.A.T. will come out once every quarter (With the aid of your words). We hope all 12,000 people who read it are somehow tickled or moved by it. Enjoy.

Sincerely,

D.C.

Dylan Callaghan

cover photo
by David Rosen

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sometimes
I have to
go inside my
head

— BY NAOMI MARTIN —

My house isn't smooth and seamless like other houses. The wood is swollen and the windows jam open and I have to pound at them to get them closed, and wind whistles in the cracks anyway.

Green vines of morninglory insinuate themselves inside wherever they can. I'll open a cabinet and there will be a weak sprout of green in there, pale from the near-darkness.

My closet has no door. And not only that, it's not tucked politely into the wall by mysterious means like most closets; it juts blatantly into the room.

My house permits no secrets.

Most mornings, what wakes me is the sound of my roommate peeing. Some mornings before I am really awake I hear the cardboard sound of her putting in her tampon. I suppose it's the same for her. But after she is gone I go in to use the bathroom and the toilet is filled with shit and blood, and I'm not sure why but sometimes it's so awful that I start to cry.

My father called me eight months ago. Mother's day. It was the first time in six years.

"Hi, Honey," he said.

"Hi," I said, my heart so loud in my ear that I was afraid he could hear it.

"This is Daddy."

"I know," I said. I knew I was supposed to say Daddy, but I couldn't.

"Well I just thought I'd call to say hello."

When he finally got around to the real reason he called, he apologized for a lot of things. I had never heard him apologize before, not once, not to anybody. He apologized for not calling me for six years, just like that. I'm sorry I haven't called for so long, as if it was an accident. He said he missed his daughter.

He was afraid that he was getting old.

He said he would like for us to be father and daughter again.

"A girl can't grow up without her Daddy, right?" he asked.

And honest to God I thought I was going to cry.

After that I was so filled up with my childhood that I couldn't contain it all, the way it filled me up was like opening a window to a hurricane.

I lived with my father for four years when I was a kid. Every other year. Second, fourth, sixth, eighth. Eighth was when things really got out of hand. He took the knob off my door. He said he wanted to be close. He thought he did; that was the worst part. He imagined that if he took the knob off my door I would invite him in.

But whenever I did invite him in, he carelessly broke something, or wrote on the walls the things he wanted me to know, or smashed the windows, or tore off the roof. So to speak.

Like the first time I had my period.

When I woke up, I knew. I checked my underpants and there was a brown smear on them. This is it, I was thinking, this is really it. It felt like Christmas.

Then I realized that I didn't have anything — none of the equipment.

I went softly up the carpeted stairs. I knocked very lightly on my Dad's door, then pushed it open. The room was dim and gray with early-morning light, his clock glowing green digital numbers by the bed. He sat half up, his eyes bleary without his glasses.

"What?" he said.

"Um. Could you take me to the store?"

He stared at me. "What for?"

"I, uh, need to get some stuff."

"Stuff?" Still staring.

I nodded and looked at my feet.

"Is there something wrong?"

"No, nothing wrong. I just need some stuff."

His voice came out suddenly sharp. "Why are you being so secretive?"

I wrapped myself with my arms and closed my eyes. "I got my period and I need to get the stuff."

"Oh," he said. And "Oh," again. "OK, I'll be right down."

In the car he said to me, "So how does it feel to be a woman?"

I stared out the window at the foggy morning, aching with embarrassment. "Same I guess."

*He was mad now.
He pulled the car
over, crunching on
the gravel
shoulder.*

"Nothing different?" he prodded.

I shrugged, knowing better even as I did it. He didn't like shrugging. He thought it was insolent.

"Honey, I wish you would be more open with me."

"Dad," I whined. "There's just nothing different." The twisted oaks along the road were swathed in mist, their trunks dark with moss and wetness. A red squirrel scurried halfway up one and stopped, spread-eagle, to watch us as we passed.

"I just want to share the important things in your life with you."

"Dad ..." I kept my eyes outside, where everything was clean and still.

"I don't like this attitude." It was a warning. "Dad, please." The feeling of his eyes on me swelled into something like panic.

He was mad now. He pulled the car over, crunching on the gravel shoulder. "I expect you to be honest with me."

I moved my gaze to the gearshift. "I'm being honest," I said, limply.

"We're going to sit here," he said. "Until you tell me the truth."

"I managed to avoid both of my parents' sex talks," my roommate said, after I told her about this.

"Not me," I said.

"God, I would have died of embarrassment," she said.

There was a long pause.

"My dad told me about orgasms," I said.

"My God!" she laughed. Then I wished I hadn't told her, because it wasn't funny.

"How old were you?"

"Thirteen."

My father told me something when I was a little girl. He told me

See HEAD, page 12



Naomi Martin
is a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Literature in the College of Creative Studies. Originally from Santa Fe, New Mexico, Martin's influences include Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich.

Art By
John Nevarez



That's Pat, me & Rachelle (top). Pat just had a chicken dinner. That's Rachelle, Pat, me & Shannon (right). Another chicken dinner for Pat.



Fiction from the heartland of Idaho...

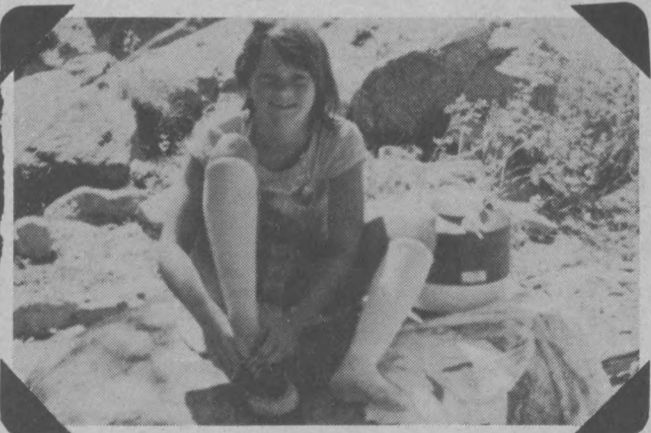
POTATO

In the unexploited frontier of '70s Idaho, "coming of age" can take all summer

BY J. CHRISTAAN WHALEN

Jeff Whalen is a 22-year-old literature major in CCS who hails from Long Beach, Ca. Shakespeare, Stephen King and John Kennedy Toole are among his influences.

Photos from the Whalen family album



That's me "waterskiing" (top). Shannon puts on her Vans (bottom).

In Idaho, the mountains look fake, like they're cardboard, like some scenery in a bad movie starring Robert Mitchum you watch in a motel at 3:00 a.m. A lot of things look fake in Idaho, but not everything.

I used to know a guy who could draw Robert Mitchum really good. He wasn't an artist other than that, though he tried. He could draw Robert Mitchum perfectly. In fact, that may have been all he could do really well. And what if that was his calling, the one thing in the world he was great at? What if, at the age of 14, he had found his calling and it was drawing Robert Mitchum? Only old people like Robert Mitchum. There's a lot of old people in Idaho. They don't look fake. They look "fleshy."

In the summer, me and my brother always went up to my dad's house in Idaho. We would jump off cliffs and watch TV with our stepsisters, Rachelle and Shannon, for six weeks. We always flew up on United Airlines into the Boise airport. On the drive from Boise to my dad's house, that's where we saw the "mountains."

Rachelle and Shannon were the adopted kids from my dad's second marriage, which was to a woman named Paula. Rachelle was the same age as me — usually 13 — and Shannon was a year younger. Pat was the oldest. We spent a lot of time unsupervised. We drank a lot of Kool-Aid. Shannon burned her hand in the Fry Daddy.

McCall, the touristy ski town of about 1,600 people, was a deep green in the summer, and the air was bright and moved with the sound of large, multicolored flying bugs. Its lake was rumored to be inhabited by a 100-pound tuna named "Sharley." It ate a man one time and its dung was as large as Twinkies. In 1973, a helicopter tried to pull Sharley out, but the helicopter was pulled into the water. The pilot was devoured.

Little sticky plants were everywhere — bold, leafy stumps of cabbage-like matter that splattered green juice when they were stepped on. If you weren't covered with the stuff after playing outside for an hour, then you were playing a dumb game.

My dad owned the McCall Pancake House. Their gimmick was to serve pancakes so big that they exceeded the edges of the plate. They were potato pancakes. It was an Idaho thing. We all worked there in the summer, washing dishes for \$1.50 an hour. It was pretty high-pressure work, and the kitchen was always needing something, like spoons or platters. Sometimes they needed forks. We all thought it was a pretty dumb job, and all of the pancakes came back half-eaten.

My dad's wife, his fourth, was named Gwynn. Gwynn had a lot of moles. I don't think she liked me and Pat and Rachelle and Shannon — kids from my father's previous marriages — coming up every summer. She worked at the state-owned liquor store, which was the only place in town to buy booze. In Idaho, you could drive with an open container of alcohol in the car, as long as you weren't drunk.

Rachelle was pretty cool. Her and Shannon lived with their mother in a nice house in San Diego, and we only saw them in the summer at dad's. One year, there was this kid who used to drive his motorcycle past the house everyday. He was about our age,

and we thought he was pretty funny because he always wore a metallic blue helmet with those '70s sparkles all over it. Rachelle started calling him the "Blue Pooh," and we'd laugh — "Oh, here comes the Blue Pooh! Ha-ha!"

Then we would go to the lake, to a place called "the cliffs," where the older local kids would sit on the top ledge and smoke pot and listen to David Bowie tapes.

The next summer, Rachelle started talking about sex and was always quizzing me and Pat about our sexual goings-on. We would make up stuff. I always said that I had done stuff that I had actually read in a book called *The Boys in the Mail Room*. The book had a lot of sex in it. I got it at a library book-sale. There was a part where this guy had a girlfriend who liked to have her nipples pinched. So I told the story about me and my girlfriend whose nipples I pinched and she loved it. Rachelle asked me what the girl's name was, and I said "Crystal" which was the name of the girl that played first clarinet in my junior high orchestra. I played french horn. I think I had only spoken to Crystal once, when I had said, "Haddagoofed?" which I intended to mean, "Would you like to go to the eighth grade prom?"

Rachelle would ask, "What base did you get to?"

"Oh, he didn't even get up to bat!" somebody would say.

"Choke up on that thing! Ha!"

"Get up on the mound and toss a slider! Ha!"

And then, inexplicably, "Base on balls!" and everyone would laugh — "Ha ha!"

I saw Rachelle's diary, so I read it. "I got together with Randy tonight again. He had another erection," it said. "He doesn't have the guts to ask me to Go With him."

It was a weird day, muggy, when Rachelle lost her virginity to 17-year-old Randy, the sheriff's son. He had feathered brown hair to his shoulders, but thin and straight. His face was oddly serpentine, his eyes sleepy and small. Blue jeans, Journey T-shirt, Marlboro Light 100s, Converse All-Stars and a moustache that looked — and was treated like — a small friend. He was a classic small-town early-'80s guy. When you looked at him, you felt like you had been smoking hash and listening to "Cashmere" by Led Zeppelin for three days straight.

Dad and Gwynn were at work and Randy was over, making out with Rachelle on the couch. A dozen or so flying bugs had gotten inside the house and were doing buzzy loop-de-loops about their heads. I remember that. After a while, Rachelle

See POTATO, page 5

August Twilight

I remember that summer
I used to go out
to the told green pond
just before sunset

I'd drag out the rowboat
and the evening birds
would start up in the windbreak,
the clock and the splash
of the oars
carrying into the corn

We'd slip, the boat
and I, out of the shadow fringe
and I'd row out to the middle,
where the snow geese
rested in Autumn
on their way to the warm places
past Uncle Eddie's farm
down the road

I can't remember how long
I'd sit there,
waiting for that one star
to come out overhead,
the one you told me to wish on...

Yes, I was still holding on
to you and this, and
to the way you left me,
quiet as the Moon
coming over the trees

- Chevaughn

untitled

entertaining
suffering
the same illusion
the airless step unmet.

christ in my bathtub
cleaning-up for the evening.

swallowing the totalitarian in my
glass
bliss piercing tempest
from room to room collapse.

thankful for the limits:
the end of my arm
my self restraining
my poisoning self.

caution, the wayside
the strand, the heat.

if we could never be leaving
then i could wait forever.

- David Triben

Kaleidoscopic

Excruciatingly drunk
we hopped the fence
at the retirement home
to swim in the dark
in the unlighted pool
swimming fast
underwater I ran
into a wall and everything
turned a deeper black

with good fortune
I reached the surface
to find an old man
scolding us
my face covered
in blood and now
the bridge of my nose is
a little
flat

- John Oliver

POTATO/Continued from page 4

and Randy got up and locked themselves in my bedroom and turned off the lights. Pat said he knew how to unlock the door from the outside and all he would need was the ink cartridge from a ball-point pen. We found one and Pat got to work. Five minutes later, Pat asked for a phillips screwdriver. I found one in dad's toolbox in the garage, a place that had Black Widow spiders and smelled like onions. We undid the

screws, but that only loosened it a little and made the door handle rattle when you shook it. We heard some talking from inside the bedroom and I went to find some pliers. By the time I got back, Pat had his ear to the door and was motioning for me to come over and listen. I could hear Rachelle making soft but eager-sounding "nnn"s at first, but she didn't seem to make much sound when Randy started grunting. We pulled

at the metal of the door handle but after a couple minutes it was just this twisted mess. We gave up after that and went and watched a boxing match on TV.

When the boxing match was over, Randy walked into the room, smiling, and went to the refrigerator and pulled out one of Gwynn's beers. He cracked it, went outside, came back in and said, "You guys get a

show?" Then he went back outside again, got in his white truck and drove away.

Me and Pat went downstairs, where Rachelle was talking to Shannon. "It's only skin," Rachelle was saying.

"That's how you get yourself pregnant," I said, kind of choking. My eyes were watering.

"I should have sold tickets to you guys," she said laughing, taking her cigarettes and a pack of spearmint


gum out of her purse. "You guys should fucking get a life," she said and walked outside.

She sat on a tree stump, smoking for like three hours.

A couple weeks later, Gwynn pulled a large clump of dad's hair out of his head. As we were driving to the hotel, that portion of dad's scalp looked like porous salmon. It oozed thick blood that was not quite liq-

uid, but more like ham gelatin.

We got a room with two queen-sized beds and dad took a shower while we watched black and white movies on the TV. After a while, when dad still hadn't come out of the bathroom, Shannon leaned over and whispered in my ear that Rachelle had had sex with the Blue Pooh earlier that day. Shannon laughed and I felt like a jerk because I felt so bad.



SNAKE ♦ O ♦ PHOBIA

— BY TABEA ALEXA LINHARD —

I have been afraid of snakes as long as I can remember. Maybe this phobia is part of my genetic code, or maybe it was something that just happened to me. The point is that I've always suffered from snake-o-phobia. If you are afraid that a snake might crawl out of the toilet every time you have to pee and take a bite out of your butt, you know what I am talking about. I've always kept an extra layer of fat on my behind, so if a snake happens to crawl out of the toilet, it would at least have a hard time trying to bite me.

My first memory concerning my snake phobia doesn't really have to do with snakes, but with worms. To a snake-o-phobic like me, they are nothing more than smaller snakes. I remember, when I was just a little cute kiddie, one afternoon my mom had left me home alone. When mommie left that meant I felt I should do something I wouldn't do when she was home. Unfortunately, we couldn't make nasty phone calls to our teachers, because we had been caught doing that the last time. Instead, I decided to prepare some super hot-chocolate with my friend. Super hot-chocolate was normal hot chocolate, only with more sugar. As the expert super hot-chocolate cook, I put the ingredients on the kitchen table. Two mugs, water, hot chocolate mix and sugar, but ... uurrghhh ... there was something long and black and dry in the sugar bowl. I knew it could only be one thing, and that was a nasty worm, who after the last rain had found a home in my sugar bowl and had dried up and died. The sugar and the nasty worm found their sad end in the toilet, and I prayed that the worm would never crawl out of there as a grown up snake and devour me.

My friend left disappointed because I didn't feel like making any more hot chocolate. I didn't even feel like making nasty phone calls. I sat on a chair and waited till my mother came home, and then I said with a very serious tone that I had to have some words with her concerning the wildlife in our kitchen. Unexpectedly, my mother didn't praise me for my heroic deed. She just laughed and called me a little dummy. In silence I wondered if my mother actually liked dry worms in her sugar.

But I was wrong, she explained. That worm had not been a worm at all, but a vanilla stick that mom had put in the sugar to give it a better taste. Mommie wasn't mad at me, though. The stick looked like a worm — like a snake, and I had just discovered that I suffered from snake-o-phobia.

In its early stages, my phobia wasn't that strong. I guess that had something to do with the three brothers who were our neighbors. They were all so big already — about 10, 13 and 15 — and in my eyes they were heroes. They liked to go into the forest and catch reptiles — snakes. Sometimes they brought them home. I remember that I even touched some of them eventually. I guess I believed my heroes had a special aura that protected me from the evil snakes.

One fatal winter day that changed. I was playing around our pool, which in the winter-time turned into a green and dark something where many dead things and broken toys had been abandoned. All of the sudden, there it was — a little tiny snake, swimming lively in the green, smelly water. The oldest brother, who didn't know anything about my phobia, called me over to see it. I stood there unable to move, unable to say a word.

"Pretty gross, huh?" I remember him saying. "You better be careful and don't fall in the water, sweetie."

But it was too late. I was standing too close to the border and was feeling really sick. Then I thought I was struggling with a giant snake who was about to

Tabea Alexa Linhard

is a 19-year-old student from Barcelona, Spain. Born in Germany, Tabea is a junior majoring in English/Creative Writing. English is her third language. Her influences include Isabel Allende, Saint Exupery and John Irving.

Art By
John Trevino

swallow me, but it was my friend who was trying to pull me out of the water. Somehow, he helped me out of that nightmare where monsters shaped like snakes were waiting for me. I ran home as fast as I could. I will never ever forgive some members of my family who burst out into laughter when they saw me at the door, crying, wet, dirty and mumbling something about snakes and monsters. My mom threw me in the shower and tried to comfort me. But I was so scared and angry that I decided never to speak or to walk out of the house again. This lasted about till dinner time. Only my phobia lasted longer.

Fortunately, we moved to the city a couple of years later and suddenly I discovered more interesting things than being afraid of snakes, like Rob Lowe, gossip, lipstick and bars. I guess it had to be in a bar where my next snake episode occurred.

I remember the place very well, it was meant to look Polynesian. The decor consisted of fake palm trees, bamboo furniture and fake Polynesian religious figures. There was also a huge tank with exotic fish in all sorts of bright colors and a smaller tank with what I thought was a fake snake. They served exotic cocktails that all tasted the same and old popcorn and peanuts usually wound up in the girls' cleavages.

I was 15 and in a very giggly mood because one of the boys who was about to attack me with popcorn seemed to like me. After one and a half exotic cocktails, I stood up from my fake bamboo chair and leaned on the tank where the fake snake was curled around a fake branch. I gave that special boy my special look and asked him to come. He put his hands on my waist and I wondered if he was about to kiss me. Instead he said:

"Watch out or that snake will bite you, ha, ha." Oh Lord, he was childish. I looked at him triumphantly.

"The snake is fake, you idiot!"

"What the hell are you talking about? That creature is as alive as you and me, look, it's moving."

Very slowly, I turned back to find he was right — that snake wasn't fake at all. It was alive, and long and huge and moving towards me. Once again, I was unable to move or to say a word. Suddenly I felt the humid snake in my face, around my neck, it was all over me — even in my ear. It was saying:

"I want you, baby, you are so sexy ..." I screamed and started to cry.

"It is alive and it can talk, and it wants me ..." I pushed my friend away from me and he wondered what he had done wrong. He bumped against the glass tank behind the snake's. The snake had meanwhile fallen back asleep again into her lethargic existence.

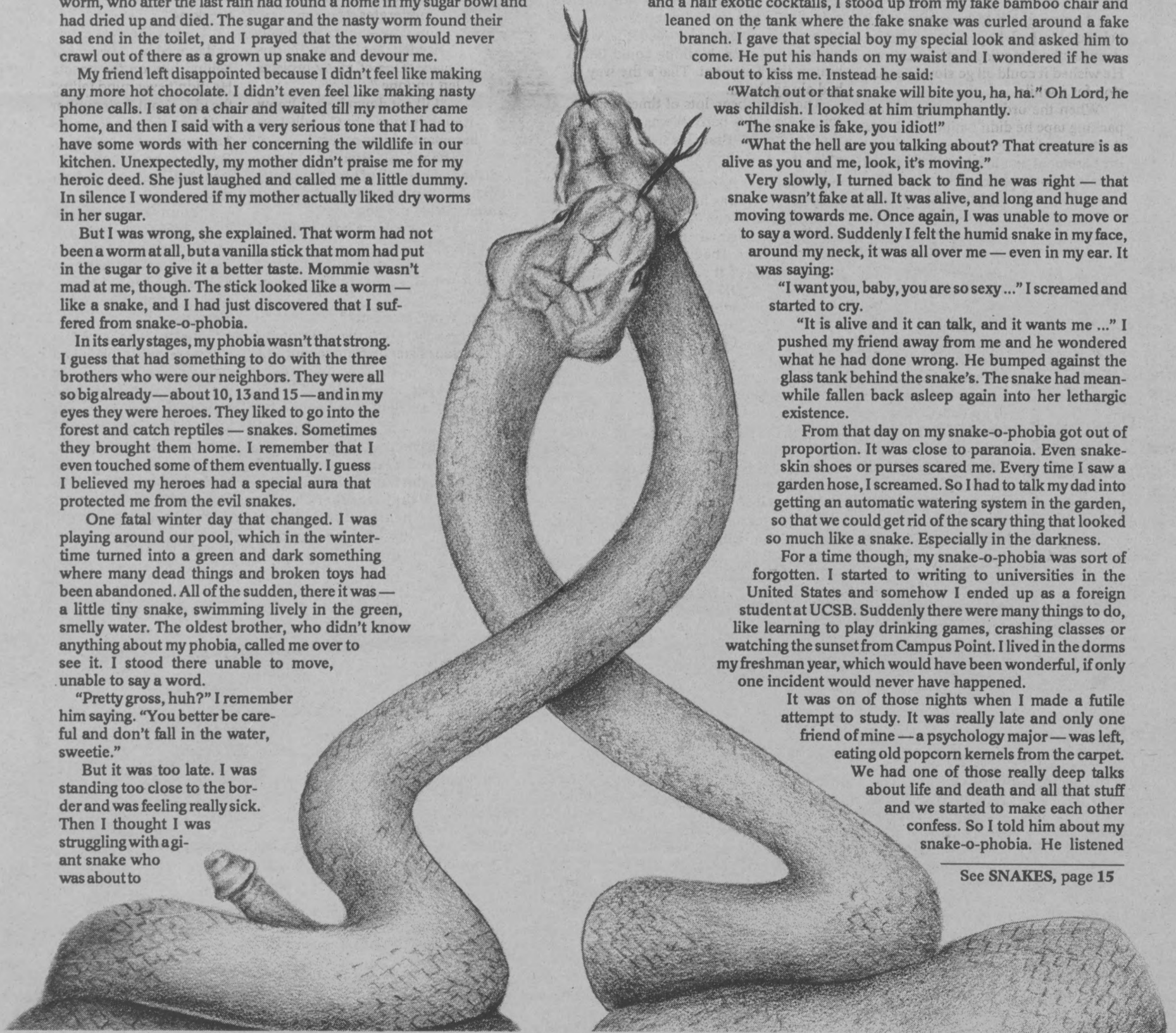
From that day on my snake-o-phobia got out of proportion. It was close to paranoia. Even snake-skin shoes or purses scared me. Every time I saw a garden hose, I screamed. So I had to talk my dad into getting an automatic watering system in the garden, so that we could get rid of the scary thing that looked so much like a snake. Especially in the darkness.

For a time though, my snake-o-phobia was sort of forgotten. I started to writing to universities in the United States and somehow I ended up as a foreign student at UCSB. Suddenly there were many things to do, like learning to play drinking games, crashing classes or watching the sunset from Campus Point. I lived in the dorms my freshman year, which would have been wonderful, if only one incident would never have happened.

It was on of those nights when I made a futile attempt to study. It was really late and only one friend of mine — a psychology major — was left, eating old popcorn kernels from the carpet.

We had one of those really deep talks about life and death and all that stuff and we started to make each other confess. So I told him about my snake-o-phobia. He listened

See SNAKES, page 15





TORNADO

— BY DYLAN CALLAGHAN —

Brad Poterfield was getting sick of folding together cardboard U-Haul boxes, when his father asked him to get more packing tape. He was getting sick of it because he hated moving — this was the first time he ever had — and because it was Saturday afternoon and there was no air conditioning.

Outside it was hot July. The air hung like a smoldering wet blanket around the frame house where Brad grew up. Under the roasting sun the house smelled as if it were baking — like the old wood floors and the layers of paint and plaster were stewing out 100 years of smells. Some of the smells he recognized. Between the familiar hot smell of his home in his nose, and having all his possessions piled together into flimsy boxes, he felt full of the past and sad that he was going to have to leave it behind. He had hoped he would be stronger about moving, but he was tired. He wished it could all go slower or just stop for a while.

When the order came to get more packing tape he didn't mind. He knew the tape was in the basement and that the basement would be cool. He loved how cool the basement was. It was like a tomb. Down there he would be able to regain himself. Down in the quiet cool of the basement he wouldn't have to worry about all his things piled up in boxes or the heat that was bleeding him of his calm.

So without a word to his dad, who stood hunched over an open box marked "Kitchen," Brad got away. Odorless cool air surrounded him like pool water as he descended the glossy red cement steps. Once his foot hit the gray rock floor he couldn't hear Mr.

Martin mowing his lawn anymore. He couldn't hear the Neil Young tape his sister was playing on her compact stereo upstairs or the droning buzz of the summer day. It was so peaceful he almost immediately forgot about the packing tape his father was waiting for upstairs.

With a soft crush Brad sat down on a large box filled with sporting goods — his baseball mitt, a couple basketballs and his old helmet. The sweat on his skin chilled against the subterranean air and Brad let go a long sigh. It wasn't so bad, he thought. He felt settled and soothed and all at once distanced from the 16 years of living that was being chopped up, boxed and moved away upstairs. In the act of leaving the house, Brad realized he was separating himself from everything — all the times and events that had passed under this roof. That just seemed like too much to ask. So Brad sunk deeper into the basement's quiet and hoped the whole mess would pass. Nothing could touch him in the basement. That's the way it had always been.

There had been lots of times when things were this hard. It was just the three of them — Brad, his sister Leah and Dad. Just three people in this

home for as long as he could remember. That was hard for Dad — raising kids alone — and Brad knew it. It was hard for him too. But they did it. The basement was just one of those places that made it OK because it closed out everything else.

"Brad? Are you down there?" His father's voice surprised him. He came down the stairs just as Brad was pulling himself to his feet.

"What the hell are you doing? Did you find the tape? Come on Brad, I know it's hot, but we gotta get this done." Brad wondered if his dad could understand wanting to rest in the basement for a while.

"Yeah, I was just going to get it," Brad said, trying to sound as if that was the tape was the first thing on his mind, but failing.

"It looks to me like you were just sitting here in never-never land."

Brad stared at the pocked gray floor and listened. His father sighed and walked to-

ward the workbench. He switched on the overhead lamp and began searching. He spoke as he looked for the tape.

"Believe me, I don't like this any more than you. It's hotter than hell. Not a good day to be working."

"It's really cool down here," Brad offered.

"It is nice. The ground around the basement moderates the temperature, ya know. We really needed central-air in this place. One of many projects left undone."

"I like it down here. I know it sounds stupid, but I really love basements. They're safe."

"There it is!" Brad's dad brandished a fresh roll of brown packing tape. He turned toward Brad and paused. "What did you say?"

"I said it's safe down here and cool and I like it."

"Do you remember the big tornado? The one you and your mother were in down here?"

"No. When was that?"

"Well you were only two. I was gone picking your sister up from school and you were here with your mother."

Brad felt a rush of blood in his ears. He hadn't heard about the tornado or being alone with his mother.

"Yeah, it was real bad," his father said leaning on the workbench. "It nearly leveled the Terlaps' place across the street and it ripped a huge elm from the ground

right in our front yard." Brad stared at his dad's face. He was half smiling and shaking his head as if he still couldn't believe it.

"Are you serious?" Brad blurted.

"Yes, I'm serious. That was the worst one we've ever had. And your mother ... let's see, she was only about 23, and she was in hysterics. When she heard the warnings on the radio she came down here with you. She said she was sobbing like crazy. She thought for sure you would both die when the windows started breaking."

He put the tape down and braced both his hands behind him on the bench. He didn't ever mind telling the kids about their mother but he could never hide the fact that it still hurt him. Brad chewed on his lip and squinted, waiting to hear more.

"You two had to wait down here for a couple of hours, I think, and she was crying the whole time with you wrapped up tight in her arms." He sighed and shook his head.

"What was strange is that you were only a baby and she said you just stared at her the whole time without making a noise. You just looked at her and you never even cried. Here she is sobbing all over the place because she thinks it's all over, and you didn't make a peep. It even calmed her down, she said."

"Really?"

"Yes. She must have told

See TORNADO, page 15

Dylan Callaghan is a 22-year-old English major originally from Lake Forest, Illinois. Dylan Thomas, Bob Dylan and Matt Dillon are among his influences.

Art By
John Nevarez

Carving My Past

carving my
past once again into a knot
of memory.
the hungry hours the cold
of days
alone above me she writes
of failure's ways.
countries of blue celebra-
tion to ruin,
our hand broken inside
bloated laceration
souls buried beneath
coalhill confides.

the distrust of cannibals,
lightning
moths' fury and flutter turn-
ing headless
incessant. our ankles col-
lapsed against obstinacy
stones
airless streets, rooms of
cracked plaster damnation
anger-lust spat copulation.

we agressed against our
lives embraced
in toothed compassion
slanted hopes
conflated eternal con-
spiracy. hand behind hand
grinding splinters bloodless
nights,
silent stabbing insufficiency,
struggling
opaque stance solidarity.

landed exhausted shallow
complacency
caressing the hairbone of
indirection
buried in the glacier sculp-
ture. the glacier eye
revealing cactus truth, rime-
aborted spooks
the severed tension of disil-
lusioned throat-cut lies.

in anguish freedom resigna-
tion
we half-cart hell ourselves
through exhilarated haze,
the pleasure of our afterclap
play-dead
creation.

-David Triben



BUG

— BY RYCH DAVIS

I wake up and I am still not a bug. How long must I wait. I am awake. I do not like waking up. It carries too many burdensome responsibilities. I must eat. I must bathe. I must primp. I must study for the exam. I must take the exam. I must attend Skarvna's birthday party.

I wake up and Vurma lies next to me. She never awakens. She is lucky. They say that she has caught a mild dose of death. "She was a nihilist. She committed suicide because she didn't believe that life existed," they say. But I don't believe them. She is my love, after all. Love cannot die. This I was told.

I wake up and Vurma lies next to me. She is not a bug. Skeermo, I remember, was a bug for a while, until that something went wrong and he became just Skeermo again. "It was a learning experience," he says.

I am awake and Vurma lies next to me. I think of the exam. I will be tested today. I am afraid.

I am eating now. If god is everywhere, then he certainly is in my frozen microwavable beef and bean burrito and my processed american cheese food. The more I eat, the closer I am to god. Perhaps if I eat enough, god will show me the path. He knows everything, after all. Bugs, exams and why. Skeermo, I remember, was very fond of digesting and therefore consumed much god. "All god is good god," he said. This was before he became a bug.

I am still eating. Whilst the monotonous task of mastication continues, I think of the exam. I wonder if it is objective or subjective or objective in its subjectivity or subjective in its objectivity. I hope for True/False. I am afraid.

I am eating. Vurma, it seems, has given up on god. But I love her anyway. It is not the digesting she despises, I think, but rather, the opening of her mouth. She has never opened her mouth as long as I have known her. But I love her anyway. They say that she never opens her mouth because she doesn't see the point. "She was a nihilist. She didn't believe that she existed," they say. But I don't believe them.

I once asked her to say something. She would have said, "I love you, too," if she didn't have the mouth problem. I know this because I love her. I love her and I can read her mind.

I am bathing now. I am naked. If god is everywhere, then I must wash him off my epidermis. If I am to become a bug, I want to start by being a clean bug. Then all of the dirt and grime and stench will belong to my bugness and not my hopefully-soon-to-be-prior selfness.

I am bathing still. I was wrong. Vurma has not given up on god. I can smell her godliness from here. She has much god. She has more god than I. But I love her anyway. I must make a note to myself to get economically exploited at the local AM/PM mini-market and purchase an air freshener. Due to modern technological advances, I find many of the air fresheners available on the free market system highly aesthetically pleasing, both visually and olfactorally. I will be exploited, but I love her.

I am bathing still, paying particular attention to my feet. Skeermo, I remember, had very clean feet. This was before he became a bug. Now his feet are dirty. What can this mean? I want to be a bug, but should Skeermo be my model? He is no paragon of bugs, especially since the fall, but he is the only bug I know. Besides Skarvna, of course. But I do not find her to be a very pleasing bug. She, too, may have failed. Besides, her path is closed to me. I lack the proper chromosomes.

I am bathing still. I look at my feet. The exam nears and I must study. I am not ready. Physically, I lack the necessary implements. Mentally, I lack focus and direction. If only the

lectures were more interesting. I never had motivation to attend. I am afraid.

I am primping now. Vurma never primps. She is so profound. I love her. She is making a symbolic statement. They deny her genius. They say that non-primping is still primping, that it is still a mask. "She was a nihilist. She didn't believe that statements existed," they say. But I don't believe them. I love her. They fear what she doesn't do. They fear what she will continue to do. She is so deep. I love her.

I continue to primp. On my left palm I inscribe, "Get Explo." I am not done inscribing. If I stop now, I wonder, will the message mean anything different? Will its essence change? Will it infringe upon my free will? Too many questions. I inscribe "... ited." The message is complete, yet I am no happier. Were my actions in vain? I despair.

I continue to primp. Skeermo, I remember, does not believe in free will. "Even if LaPlace's demon is slain by the quantum arrow, we still have no free will," he is fond of saying. "Our actions merely switch from being transient and predetermined to transient and randomly-determined." Skeermo learned much from being a bug. She is a pretentious bug. Sometimes I doubt that she is a bug at all, but rather a fool in a very clever costume. I make a mental note to myself to yank Skarvna's left antenna when I see her at her birthday party.

I continue to primp. God remains in my belly. He was momentarily off my face, but I now apply more god on my left eyebrow. Applying god is tedious, but I desire to look sensitive and repressed. This brings me closer to Art

Rych Davis

is S.W.A.T's mystery writer. He submitted "Bug" over 6 months ago and no one is sure where he is now. Perhaps he's gotten his wings and become a bug.

Art By Todd Francis

'She is a nihilist. She doesn't believe that statements exist, they say. But I do not believe them. I love her. They fear what she doesn't do. They fear what she will continue to do. She is so deep. I love her.'

Psychotronic Sonnet

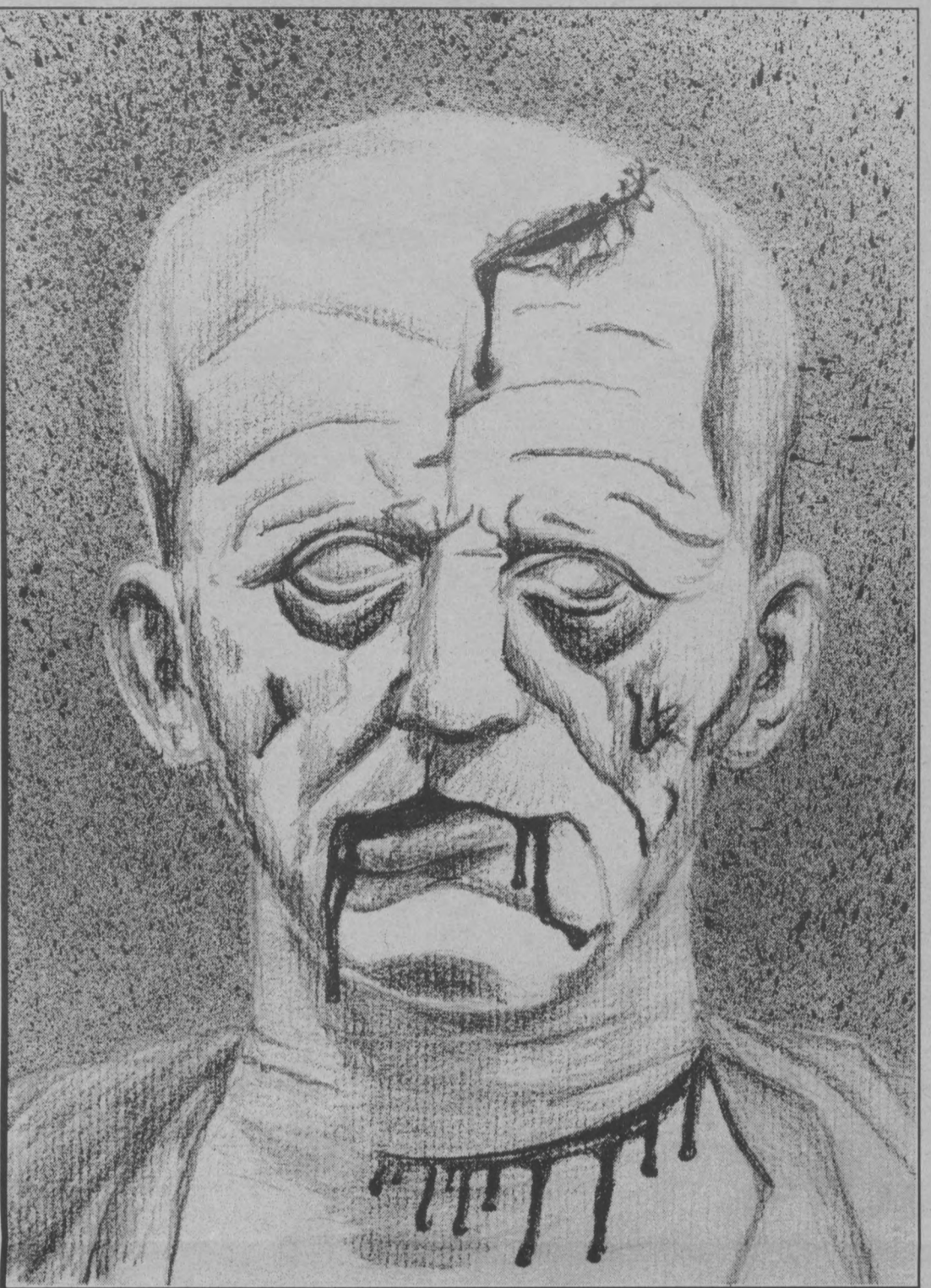
The creatures rise, and slay, and then they fall:
Zombies and ghouls, wasp women,
lizard men,
We case their chaos and our safety, all
In iron pentameters of myth. But then —

As the set cools and we snuggle, we
can wonder
(Could be a twitch, could be a hinted
glory)
If all that ludicrous and creaky thun-
der,
The bad f/x, the clumsy speech, the
story

That made no sense at all, but to de-
liver
A wince, a shock, another ketchup
killing,
May not be more: a religion, say: the
quiver
Of the holy Odd that saves our Even:
unwilling willing

To trap, in monsters, gods; and in
gods, man —
Our human most pentameters never
quite scan.

- Frank McConnell



ART BY PAT STULL

Aunts

Coming in from the cold in furs,
laughing, asking questions, teasing,
they teach a boy what he needs to
know:
that looking in mirrors will freeze a
face
to a single, fatuous expression;
that girls will envy curly hair;
that waltzing goes: one, two-three.

Aunts are always offering cake,
certain you couldn't have had
enough.
How proudly they check you over,
assessing
your readiness for a teenage date,
adjusting the set of a tie, saying
"Hold still, please!
Please, stand up straight!"

To a boy, Aunts are an Order of
Angles,
the sort that gossip of humans, their
voices
a subtle sweetness on the air.
There's something mildly scandal-
ous,
you slim and grown, at a cousin's
wedding,
something exciting and dangerous,
waltzing with your youngest Aunt.

- Barry Spacks



Mortal Coil

All of our trouble's from having one
life,
only one...I'd rather have many,
devoting
years at a time to nothing but breath-
ing

(the green-scented air of Brown
County,
Indiana, I breathed for a while —
in my breathing-life I'd go back
there).

And friends? lovers? listen, my God,
I'd spend at least one whole life with
each
(two with you) — it's many lives

we want, and all at once, only
this one sweet life
will not console us,

this life where we hum
when the soup is thick,
where we cast off our shoes as a
greeting and hug

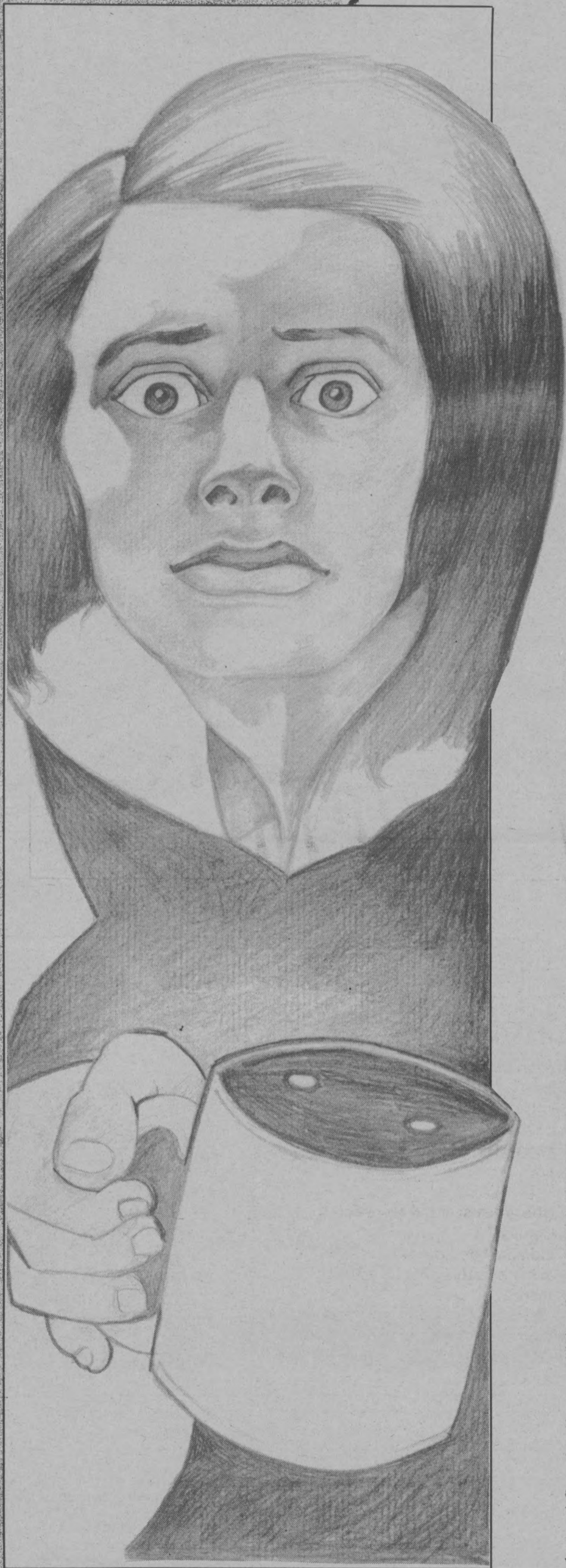
a new friend
for the very first time
as if already remembering.

- Barry Spacks



BLEED

— BY NICK FRENCH —



Nick French is a 21-year-old English/Creative Writing major from Lodi, CA. Joyce Carol Oates, Raymond Carver and Amy Hempel are among his literary mentors.

Art By
Debbie Urlik

She turned off the shower faucet and squeezed the water from her hair. Steam enveloped her; it made her warm, clean, good. She wanted to stay there. She was comfortable there. Through the glass shower door she could see the murky, twisted image of David brushing his teeth. Outside of the shower. Outside of her. She waited until he was finished, and left. Then she opened the shower door, and in a rush of swirling, escaping steam, she stepped back out onto the blue floor mat.

She pulled two towels off the rack. The first one she wrapped around her head. The second one she used to dry off with.

She checked herself with her hand. Most of the bleeding had stopped. The doctor had told her that would take at least a week. But, it would take much longer for the pain to go away. Much longer.

She combed her hair, then put on her robe and walked out into the living room. The television was on. David sat at the coffee table, eating a bowl of cereal. He looked up at her and smiled his winning smile.

"Hi, babe," he said.

"Good morning," she said.

"You're not mad at me, or anything, are you?"

"No," she said. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, you got up so early this morning, without saying anything." He said. "I guess I thought you were upset 'cause I came home late last night."

"No," she said. "I'm not upset that you came home late last night."

"Good," he said. "After the game, we all kinda just sat around and drank beers, that is, until Ann told Jimmie he had to kick everyone out."

"I see," she said.

She watched him shovel the soggy flakes into his mouth.

"How did your visit with the doctor go yesterday?" he asked her.

"OK, I guess," she said.

"Did he get you started on the pills?"

"Well, he gave me enough for three months," she said.

"So everything's OK now?" he asked.

"We're safe now?"

"He said it takes two to three weeks after first starting on them before it's effective," she said.

"So then you started today," he said.

"Well, no," she said. "I was going to wait until ... I was going to give my body a chance to recuperate, before I started doing anything to it again."

"Lanie," he said. "If it takes two weeks, you should start now."

"I just don't think it would be a good idea," she said. "You know, confusing my hormones and all, when my body's so messed up right now."

"I think it would be a good idea," he said. "To get started as soon as possible, today."

He poured more cereal in his bowl, and began spooning more large, sloppy amounts into his mouth.

"You know," he said. "They say women get all emotional and stuff after going through something like that. But it'll pass."

He looked up at her.

"Trust me, babe, you'll feel better."

She turned, and walked to the bedroom.

I walked into the bedroom, and closed the door. I don't want to be in here. It's the only place I can be on my own, and yet, David's still here. I look at the photos on the dresser. We had them taken of us a year ago, when we first moved in together.

Have I changed that much since then? I walk over to the full-length mirror on the wall, and I check to make sure that it's still me. I remove my robe, and let it drop to the floor. I don't look like I've changed that much in a year. Not that much.

I lie down on the bed and close my eyes.

"I love you, David," I say.

"Me too, babe," he says.

He kisses my neck, then moves down.

"David," I say.

"Yeah, babe."

"Let's not do this right now," I say.

"Let's," he says.

"Come on, David," I say. "We don't have any protection or anything."

"Don't worry, hon," he says.

"I'll be careful."

"I don't know ..."

"I'll pull out," he says. "Trust me."

I open my eyes and look at the white ceiling fan, revolving lazily like an old clown turning cartwheels. The image swims in a sea of tears, and I blink to push them away. The motion is mesmerizing. It pulls me back into the warmth of last night's bed, last night's sleep. And then the dream comes back to me. The doctor told me that one of the signs of depression is consistently bad dreams. But this one was different.

"David," I say. "I had the strangest dream last night."

"Really," he says. "What was it about?"

"It's hard to explain," I say.

"Well try," he says. "Now you've got me all interested ..."

"I had this dream," I say. "This dream where my mom kept calling me to warn me about you."

"Your mom?" He says.

"Yeah, you see, she kept trying to convince me that you were a vampire."

"That's utterly absurd," he says. He fixes his tie in the full-length mirror on the wall, then turns to look at me.

"You know that's completely ridiculous," he says. "You know that ..."

"She kept calling me, warning me," I say. "She told me you were sucking my blood at night, when I was asleep."

"I want to saak your blaad," he says to me grinning evilly.

She told me you were sucking my blood last night when I was asleep.

See BLEED, page 15

venus de la tierra

The gods
 don't choose our lov-
 ers
 anymore.
 We do, we break
 our fall.
 Can you hold it in your
 hands
 (love)
 could you freeze the
 hot volte
 in her eyes
 as proof?
 I think
 your fist is empty,
 your memory
 gone cold.

- Stacey Teas

untitled

The road is so flat and even, clean by grime
 and deadlines, endless.
 If I'm lucky, there may be slow curves and passes
 to climb. Maybe at a gas station the guy
 in the pickup notices, smiles, buys me a coffee.
 Cream and sugar? I take it long and sweet;
 his hands are shy in their good-bye.
 I am driving again.

I rather country roads, hairpin bends, crazy
 grades.
 My heart beats, then,
 like I was really going someplace.

- Stacey Teas

HEAD/Continued from page 3

a lot of things, but one especially has stuck.

Guys always have good things their fathers told them, an inheritance of wisdom. My inheritance is one of dread.

He told me that when I grew up I would most likely be frigid. "That means incapable of having an orgasm," he said. This was because I had such a bad relationship with my father, and if you have a bad relationship with your father it's impossible to have a good relationship with a man.

"Just like your mother," he said.

What did I know? For all I knew this was common knowledge.

I sank without struggling into the despair of it, because my Dad was telling me, and he knew more than me, he knew practically everything. I resigned myself to my inevitable fate, and the resignation was gentle and familiar as warm water.

How could I know that he shouldn't be saying this to me? And what could I do

about it anyway? It's not like he was touching me or hurting me. Not my body.

Incidentally, I'm not Frigid. But I'm still not sure about the good relationship thing.

When he called me, he told me about his new wife and their four new kids. Four kids in six years. Four fresh children who would not disappoint him.

"They'd all love to meet you," he said. "I've told them all about you."

What did he tell them? "I'd really like to meet

them, too," I said, and I wanted it to be true so badly that it almost seemed like it was.

I said I'd call him, and then, I don't know, I just didn't.

My house is small and it is made of chinks and gaps. My roommate's breathing presses in on me when I'm trying to sleep. I hold my own breathing tight to keep it quiet. When I walk I lay each foot down carefully so that nothing will rattle loose.

Sometimes I have to go

inside my head just to get some privacy.

I imagine that someday I will live in another kind of house. A house where all the doors have locks, if I care to use them, and the windows glide closed with a click, and the roof is tight as a drum. In that house I will have a bedroom which is shadowy cool and quiet, where I can leave my journal right out on the table without even thinking about it. I will be able to lie on my bed all afternoon if I want, and

just watch dust falling through a shaft of late sunlight, or if I feel like it maybe cry, right out loud and without having to stuff my face into a pillow. Or maybe laugh. Or sing. Or just be. When the shadows of the room spread into dusk, I will wash my face and go downstairs for dinner. And I imagine that there will be somebody there to share dinner with. Someone with big gentle hands, who won't ask what I am thinking about, because he'll know that when I'm ready, I'll tell him.

untitled

Naked You're not as pretty as i had
 imagined
 But
 That's not what really bothered me
 Words
 That were not spoken but loudly
 heard
 Echo
 In my thought filled mind that's rac-
 ing

- Pat Stull

Juan Les Pins

Not a soul was in the station
 To hear me silent breathe

The hum of nothing in my ear
 Waiting at a door
 When quiet is sucked and
 shattered
 All over the floor

Ripping throught the night
 The massive creature tore
 Straight into the station
 And straight out of its core

Still and cold I stood
 Bathed by the beast's air
 A fleeting, cruel companion
 Feeding my despair

I met a wooden bench
 With emptiness to share
 Below a wall of posterboards
 Wounded with a tear

The train cut sharp and fast
 Setting tears on fire
 Not carrying me, not carrying
 me
 But stealing my desire

Sitting there alone, I was
 Torn in dusty bits
 Like tattered posters waving
 As the train's last echo hits

- Morgan Freeman

(w)ri(gh)te

if i were naked and yellow like
 little patches of sun that come to
 visit
 from 11 o'clock 'till about noon-thirty,
 i'd want somebody naked and yellow
 with jaundice to eat a pear
 in me and then decide
 to keep the other one 'till later

if i were a black hole
 i'd probably want people to go away.

if i were a comma
 i'd probably feel neglected in this
 sentence
 and i wouldn't be able to figure out
 why my invisible rival
 the end paragraph
 was so much more desirable than me
 (i might even become bulimic)

if i were a serif
 i'd probably feel guilty
 about the world
 using too much ink which is probably
 bad
 but only 'cause there's books about it

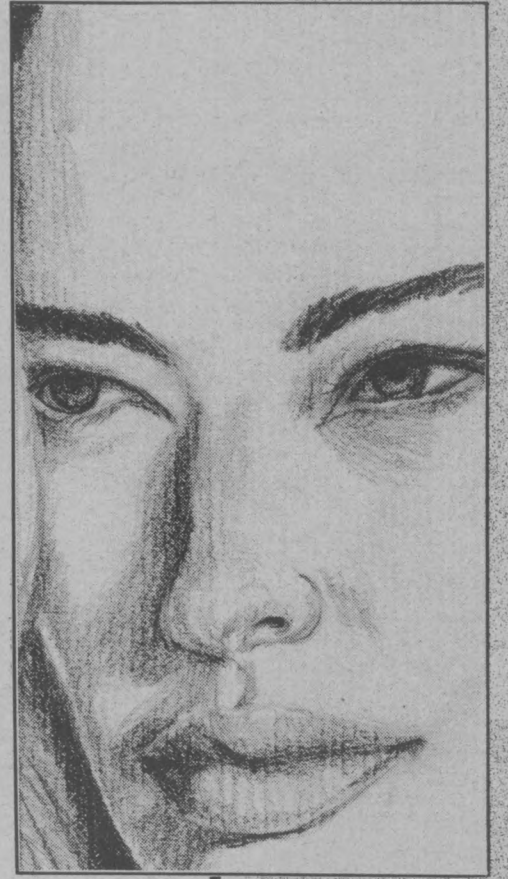
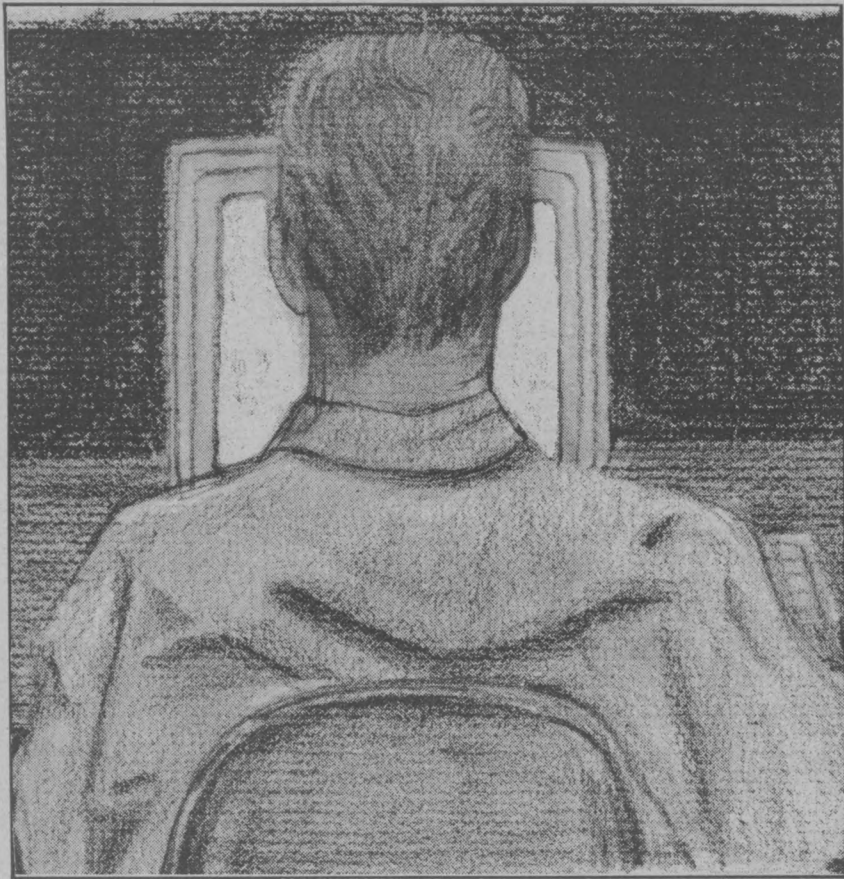
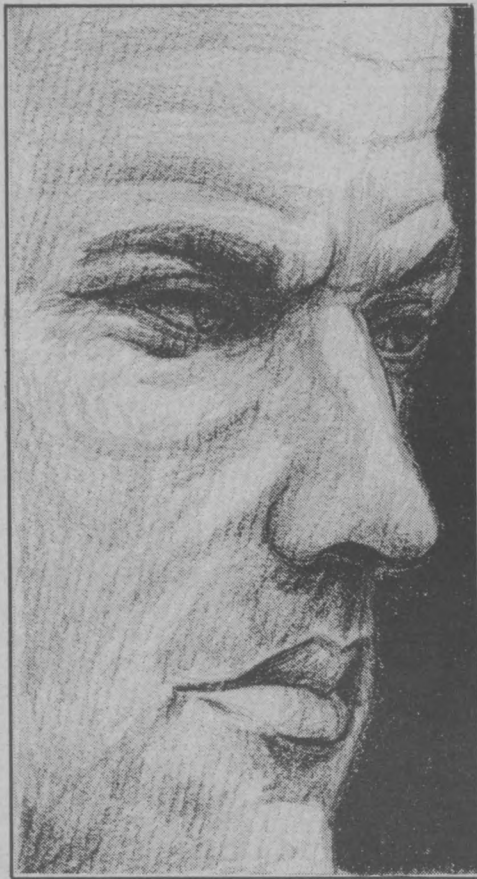
if i were a person writing
 this write now
 i'd probably have a selfreflex
 and decide to quit thinking about it

- Charles Hornberger

Bacon for Breakfast

Bacon sure is expensive these days,
 yep. But it doesn't cost me much any-
 more. I love my bacon in the morning. I
 just couldn't face the day without that
 good greasy sizzle and smoky taste for
 breakfast. Yeah, and it doesn't cost me
 much at all anymore. Just 29 cents for
 about 175 pounds of it. I figure 29 cents
 is the average cost for each slug in that
 box of .38 calibre bullets I bought. Just
 29 cents for the bullet it used to kill that
 cop. Now I keep the pig in my backyard
 in the cooler. Every morning I go out,
 roll a little more of his khaki uniform
 back and cut off lean, juicy slices of
 him. More slices to fry up when I have
 guests. Yeah, everybody gets bacon for
 breakfast at my house.

- Mitchell Smith



About My Writer-Friend

— BY JEREMY S. KURSHNER —

You see, I'm at my writer-friend's house. He's talking nonsense, brainstorming out loud, trying to overcome his writer's block. I catch bits and pieces: the Metro ... bunkbeds ... Meister Eckhart ... green tomatoes ... a bidet factory in Schenectady

I'm glancing through a shelf of his books. We're both waiting for his wife so we can leave for the evening — dinner and then a movie.

I catch more of his bits: Yevgeny Zamayatin ... Japanese erotica ... chaos ... Tralfamador ... the perfect 10

I see these book titles: *The Fall*, *The Immoralist*, *The Idiot*, *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Trial*, *The Castle*, *The Wall*.

I interrupt my writer-friend's bits: Which one of these books do you recommend?

At that very moment my writer-friend's wife walks in the room. I immediately lose interest in the books. You see, I want to screw my writer-friend's wife. He doesn't know this but she does. What's nice is that she wants to screw me too.

Three weeks ago I told her: I want to screw you.

She didn't answer yes flat-out but she did grab my crotch. I took this to mean yes.

All of this happened while my writer-friend was in his study, attempting to write. Unfortunately for him, ever since he finished his last novel six months ago he's been unable to write a single word. You see, my writer-friend has really bad writer's block. Really bad.

So anyway, ever since that day my writer-friend's wife grabbed my crotch I haven't been able to keep my eyes off her. In fact, seeing her gives me an instant erection. You see, my writer-friend's wife is 24 and beautiful. I'm 49, divorced and in the later stages of balding. The way I see it, it's about time for a mid-life crisis.

The problem with my desire to screw my writer friend's wife is twofold: 1.) My writer-friend never leaves the house because he's always trying to write. This in itself is no problem, and in fact is a blessing. When he is writing we can be fucking. So every time I go over there to bang his wife, what is he doing? He's not writing. He has extremely bad writer's block. Some writer-friend. 2.) My writer-friend's wife can't come over to my place. The reason for this complication is that my 22-year-old good-for-nothing son is always there watching television. Some son. My writer-friend could write a three volume epic about that loser.

This one day my writer-friend's wife calls and tells me to come over. She says: He's busy in the study. He thinks he has a breakthrough. He says he doesn't want to be disturbed for several hours.

I hurry over there and she lets me in. I get an instant erection. In fact, it's so hard I prematurely ejaculate inside my boxers. Some erection. My writer-friend should write a book about my sexual failures. He could stretch it out for a good 500 pages.

Another time I rush over and just as I get there my writer-friend decides to get a snack and sees me walk through the front door. At that point I'm so revved-up with anticipation, I'm close to exploding. I claim I feel sick and rush to the bathroom. Behind the locked door I drop my pants and yank for all it's worth. I leave a mess on the Monet print hanging above the pot. And guess what? No toilet paper or Kleenex so I have to wipe the evidence with my handkerchief and shove the slimy thing back in my pocket. Definitely prime material for my writer-friend. Grade A.

After I leave the bathroom I find out my writer-friend is still struggling for an idea to write about. I start to wonder, what kind of fucking writer is this writer-friend?

You see, my writer-friend's last novel was a commercial failure. It got poor reviews and no one bought it. I attribute its failure to the fact that no one wants to read about characters going through existential dilemmas. People want escapist literature with plenty of violence and a ton of explicit sex. I

think the failure of my writer-friend's book has really discouraged him. His writer's block is proportionate to his depression. I think he's really depressed.

So anyway, returning to what I was saying in the beginning: I'm reading the book titles and he's brainstorming out loud when his wife walks in the room. Instantly my prick's up and at 'em.

My writer-friend's wife glances knowingly at my crotch and says: Are we ready?

We decide to walk to this restaurant that is near their house. The whole way there my writer-friend is so absorbed in his thoughts that he doesn't notice me and his wife fooling around: I grab her ass, she grabs my crotch.

My writer-friend's wife says this to my writer-friend when we are almost there: What are you thinking about so intensely?

He stops, turns and looks at us. His face is bright red and he looks pissed like he knows what me and his wife have been doing. He yells: THIS GOD-DAMNED WRITER'S BLOCK IS DRIVING ME INSANE!

We get to the restaurant, sit at a table and order drinks. My writer-friend is sitting with his head in his hands, not talking. He appears to be thinking or maybe sulking.

My writer-friend's wife says: I'm going to the bathroom.

I say: Me too.

I follow behind her and she pokes her head in the ladies room and then grabs me by the arm and pulls me in. We enter a stall and start kissing. She is wearing a dress so I reach beneath with both hands and grab her ass, pulling her towards me.

She says this: Not here. Too risky.

I say: When then?

She says: Soon, I hope.

Some affair.

When we return to the table, my writer-friend is staring into space. He looks really pale and sick. He looks like death.

After we sit he says: I'm too depressed. I'm just going to go home and sleep. I'd be miserable company tonight anyway. This writer's block is really destroying me.

I glance at my writer-friend's wife. She shrugs.

My writer-friend leaves and says: You two

will have a better time without me tonight.

Some writer-friend!

After he leaves I tell my writer-friend's wife: Let's get a room.

She says: Yes.

We have another drink and then go to a nearby hotel. In the room my writer-friend's wife undresses me real slow. My problem is this: The whole time I'm thinking about that deathly look on my writer-friend's face. I feel sorry for him and his writer's block. Writer's block must be a really bad feeling.

My writer-friend's wife tries to arouse me. You see, thinking about my writer-friend's predicament has made me limp.

She says: What's wrong?

I say: I can't forget that horrible look on your husband's face.

She says: Just forget it. This is our chance.

We start kissing and I move my lips down her body. She gets really excited.

She says this: Take me now.

I try to obey but I can't get an erection. My writer-friend's face is cemented in my memory. I can't forget his face no matter how much I try. His tragic, sickly face.

We both leave the hotel disappointed, and I can't help but think what a great story this whole thing would make. Damn his fucking writer's block.

You see, thinking about my writer-friend's predicament has made me limp.

Jeremy S. Kurshner

is a 21-year-old English/Creative Writing major from Sunnyvale, CA. Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett are among his influences.

Art By
Pat Stull

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attentively and then he said that there was no such thing as a snake-o-phobia, that it was all in my head, and that he, as a psych major, could cure me.

"Are you serious? That means never being afraid if I had to pee in a dark bathroom, no screaming if I look at somebody's belt, shoes or purse?"

"It's easy, just follow me into my room."

I wondered why I couldn't be cured in the lounge, but I didn't say anything. He kicked his roommate out and told me to lie down on his bed and just relax. Then he picked up a huge volume that said FREUD. He read something to me which I didn't understand at all. As he began to take off his clothes, he explained:

"See, you are not really afraid of snakes, your real problem is a fear of the masculine—namely—the male anatomy." Uhh-huh. So it was that simple. Boy, I had never thought of that. But I wondered why he had to explain me that in his underwear.

"You can only be helped with a direct confrontation with the object of your fear, not of snakes, but of a part of the male anatomy, which due to its form, must somehow remind you of a snake. But tonight you are lucky." He smiled at me, as he slipped his boxers down.

"I want to help you, because your fear will disappear once you actually touched and felt a penis inside you."

"Wow, really ... just let me check with Dr. Freud for a second," I said.

I grabbed the book and

threw it at his head, and ran away as fast as I could. I was afraid of snakes, but that didn't mean that I was stupid.

By the way, my fear didn't disappear at all.

I moved into Isla Vista the following year and in one of those wild parties where some people were slam-dancing to the sound of a band with an obnoxious name and others were trying to empty the kegs, I met Jonathan. It was love at the first sight. We went out and after a while we were a couple. I was so happy that I forgot everything about snakes. After a year and a half, we decided to move in together. One afternoon, while I was trying to write a

Josephine is neither my old girlfriend nor my mother. Josephine is a python—a snake."

I was about to faint, this was worse than any mother or old girlfriend.

"Are you alright? You don't look so good. You know, I got Josephine as a baby, her mother had been killed, and so I raised her. I love Josephine as if she was my own kid. She is the best pet I've ever had. She is huge, and beautiful, and totally tamed. She will do you less harm than a kitten. You'll love her, too."

"Jonathan, I am afraid you don't understand me. I can't live with a snake, I am afraid of them. I will drop dead if she ever comes close

thought of my boyfriend loving his snake more than me.

"Wait, I might reconsider ..."

"That's wonderful. You'll see. You'll love Josephine as soon as you get used to her." Well, that's what Jonathan believed, but I needed some time.

The day Josephine arrived in a huge tank that was put where our TV used to be (who needs that thing anyway, now that we have Josephine to entertain us, Jonathan said) I hid in the bedroom and pretended that I was sick. But before Jonathan went to bed exhausted (after all Josephine and he had so much to "talk" about) I swallowed a

at Josephine and she was looking at me, and then she stuck her thin and parted tongue out and made that characteristic snake noise; that repulsive Shh-shhh. It was too late, I was going to die. Josephine was crawling out of the tank and twisting and turning, first only around my hand, but then around my arm, until she was all over me. She was snuggling against my skin. I couldn't move, nor make a sound. I believe I even stopped breathing. Silent tears were running down my cheeks. This was it. I was going to have a stroke and die. And Josephine was laughing at me. She had a deep, manly laugh.

Josephine was now com-

would have crushed Josephine, or even worse, she would have crushed each other. Maybe I should just take a deep breath and then count till 10. Finally Jonathan decided that it was time to do something. He stood up and tried to take Josephine away from me. But, believe it or not, Josephine refused to leave me. She didn't even want to be touched by him. Puzzled he looked at me and Josephine, satisfied around my neck.

"I can't believe that Josephine seems to like you better than me. That's not fair. I was the one who raised her. I was the one who fed her. I was like a father to her, and you ... you don't even like snakes." Was it true? Was there a tone of jealousy in his voice? If so, I couldn't consider Josephine my enemy any longer. The creature that was wrapped around my whole body could help to wrap my boyfriend around my little finger. I had never thought of Josephine this way. Besides, after this shock therapy I wasn't that afraid of her anymore.

Though Josephine and I didn't become "friends", we did become sincere allies. Without Josephine, Jonathan might never have given me that engagement ring. I'm not sure though, whether I like the ring, because it has the shape of a snake. However, engagement is engagement, and I can thank Josephine for that. I tolerate snakes now, although I still check every toilet twice, and I always look closely at every sugar bowl, just in case a little worm had hidden in there. You just never know.

.. I felt the humid snake in my face, around my neck, all over me - even in my ear.

paper for my English class, Jonathan came home really, really excited about something.

"Darling, there is something I have to tell you. Josephine, my dear Josephine is coming, and she'll stay with us ..." Josephine?! Who the heck was Josephine?

"What? Did I hear that right? Who is that Josephine? Do you really think I am going to put up with some old girlfriend of yours?!" Jonathan just laughed and said that Josephine was not some old girlfriend.

"Then worse, Josephine is your mother!" Jonathan was cracking up now.

"You are just too cute.

to me. I am afraid you have to make a choice, either that Josephine or me."

He looked at as if I had really given him a hard choice. In my eyes, there was no choice. That Josephine was to stay where she was, out of my and Jonathan's life and our happiness.

"Honey ... I never thought

"Honey I never thought you would leave me over something like this. I better go now so that you can pack up your stuff. I am sorry," Jonathan said.

I wondered if I was hearing right. Was I was going to lose my one and only boyfriend to a SNAKE? I began to panic. I couldn't bear the

valium and a child aspirin just in case. When my lover was deep asleep, I slowly went down the stairs. I didn't dare to look at the tank. I knew it was watching me. I opened the door that led to the garden. I also opened the windows. I took a deep breath.

"You'll be free, my dear Josephine, free as a bird. Just crawl out of my house as soon as I take the top off the tank. Disappear from my life."

Slowly I walked toward the tank. I didn't look down at Josephine. I could feel how HUGE she was. Oh, Lord. Then, I did it. I lifted the top part and committed one fatal mistake, I looked

fortably situated around my neck. Maybe she was about to fall asleep. Very slowly and carefully I turned around, and there was Jonathan, sitting on the stairs. Of course he was the one who was laughing. Instead of trying to save my life, he was sitting there in his boxers and holding his stomach. He didn't even pretend that he was worried. He only said:

"See, I told you she would like you. She never does these things with me." I couldn't believe that. That beast liked me and I was about to die. Well, not die, maybe just faint a little bit. But I didn't feel like falling to the floor. I probably

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"I don't know," I say. "David, she really scared me ..."

"I thought I was supposed to be the scary vampire," he says.

"She was so adamant," I say. "She said she was afraid that you would suck my blood until there was none left, and then you would let me die."

He walks over to me and grabs me by the shoulders.

"Look at me," he says. I tilt my head up and look into his deep, blue eyes.

"You know that it was just a nightmare, it was just a bad dream," he says.

"No ...," I say.

"Yes," he says. "It was just a dream."

"No, David," I say. "This morning, when I was mak-

ing breakfast, I cut my thumb, really badly."

I show him my thumb. An angry, inch-long slice runs across the tip. It's so deep, the stark white bone is visible.

"And David," I say. "I didn't bleed ..."

He looks at me, and smiles.

The spinning fan comes back into view. Except it looks like the fan is still, and I'm the one that's spinning.

This makes me feel nauseous, so I get off of the bed. I pick up my robe and lay it across the bed. Then I take my clothes out of the dresser and lay them on the bed: underwear, bra, jeans, T-shirt, socks. I put them on in that order. As I dress, I keep thinking, what should I do?

I take a pair of boots out of the closet.

Should I count the number of tacks in the bottom of my shoe?

I pull them on.

What should I do? I look around the room, my room.

Should I count the pieces of tape it takes to hold up a poster?

Should I count the stitches in the comforter at the foot of the bed?

What should I do?

David opened the bedroom door without knocking. He stood in the doorway for a moment, a cup of coffee in his hand, staring at Lanie. He took a sip of his coffee.

"Hey," he said. "Watcha

doing?"

"Oh, nothing," she said.

He set his cup down on top of the dresser, and walked over to the closet. He flipped hangers aside, one after another, as if he was flipping through pages of a book he wasn't really interested in reading.

Lanie walked over to the dresser and picked up the cup of coffee. She took a careful sip. Then she walked out of the bedroom and into the bathroom. She closed and locked the door behind her. She opened the bottom drawer below the sink and pulled out a paper bag. From this bag, she took a pink, circular, plastic case. She opened it and laid it on the counter. Inside the container was a disc with pills

enclosed in clear plastic along the edge. The days of the month were marked on the inside of the plastic case.

There was a knock at the door.

"Lanie," David said. "What are you doing in there?"

"I'm using the bathroom," she said.

"Do you have my coffee?" he asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said. "I just wanted a sip. I'll be out in a second."

"Hurry up," he said. "I want to finish it before work."

"I'm hurrying," she said.

She rotated the disc and matched the first pill up with the first day, Monday, like the doctor had shown her. A white, oval pill

dropped into the palm of her hand. She placed it on the counter and crushed it with her fist. She brushed the powder into the cup and swirled the black liquid around with her forefinger. Then she remembered, if you accidentally skip a day, take both pills the next day. So she rotated the disc to day number two, Tuesday, and another pill fell into her hand. Again, she pulverized it with her fist, and mixed it into the coffee.

David knocked at the door, a second time.

"Lanie," he said.

She closed the case and put it back in the drawer. Then she picked up the cup of coffee and opened the bathroom door.

TORNADO/Continued from page 7

the story a million times." "I thought she left when I was two."

"She did. It was about four months later I think. The tornado was in September and I think she walked out ... I'm pretty sure it was in January. I don't know."

"You never told me that story. How come you never told me that."

"Oh, I'm sure I did. You just forgot."

Brad's father watched the confused look on his son's face.

"So no, I don't think you're stupid. Basements are safe."

His father grabbed up the roll and switched off the light. "Brad don't worry ab-

out moving. You're gonna like it in California. Now come on, let's wrap this up and we'll order a pizza or something, OK?" He started for the stairs but before reaching them, turned back toward Brad.

"But they don't have basements in California," Brad said.

"Nope. They don't need 'em. No tornadoes. No snow, no rain, no hot Julies and no tornadoes. That's why I'm moving there. I've been here my whole life and I'm tired of the weather."

"Yeah, I know."

"Listen Brad, do me a favor and sweep up a little down here and then we'll get some food, all right?"

"Sure. I'll be up in a few minutes."

Brad went over to the wall and picked up the pushbroom. He looked out the small ground-level window dotted with mud at the rich green backyard. He put his hand to the glass and felt the seeping burn of the hot afternoon on his fingertips.

He moved his hand to the grainy mason wall and felt its cold. To most people, he thought, basements and tornadoes were things they could do without. He thought of California as he swept bits of dust and trash from the floor into a neat pile. He thought it would be good to leave the basement clean.

'What was strange is that you were only a baby and she said you just stared at her the whole time without making a noise. You just looked at her and you never even cried.'

