LAST SWIM IN AUTUMN

As she leaves the house
the wood duck explodes from the brush.
She watches for shafts of light
to brighten the trees.

But the day is of haze so thick
that trees are shadows,
birds are invisible in flight.

She walks toward the river,
feet bare in stiffening weeds
and frosting gravel.
She sits on the bank under cedar,
wonders what happens to roots
after the trees have died.

Rings from around jumping fish,
insects, falling leaves.
The river makes no distinctions.

She steps into the slow current,
slides over the rocks like hands over fish
and dives deep to the center flow—
disappears beneath
reflections of gray
and deeper gray.
there was no wind. Kim wasn't sure how long she waited as the corn held perfectly still. She didn't know how long she felt for a ripple in the stalks.

Then there was movement; it was Mother's hands shaking her and Mother's voice overpowering the corn. "We've been looking for you everywhere. We thought you were in your bedroom. You could have been hit crossing the street alone like that. It's dark out, and you could have been hurt. What are you trying to do out here?"

Even after Mother had brought her back and told her to go to bed, Kim wasn't upset about the reprimand. She knew if she lay on her bed long enough, still—like the corn—she would go to sleep.
when she'd done this for long, she forgot where the television set was.

The reruns drifted into game shows and soap operas. To Kim these, like any other show she hadn't seen once, were like imagining the characters of a book. Kim didn't like soap operas much. When they had taken complete control of the screen, she tried the stereo.

Mother had put all the records in order for her; Dad, however, was constantly mixing them up when he got albums out to play. None of it mattered much to Kim. She knew the feel of each of her records anyway. "Revolver" was a smooth slippery cover, "Abbey Road" had a long wrinkle like a furrow in the center, and so on. Kim chose one and started playing it.

In mid-August it seemed the house couldn't breathe. Air just hung in the rooms; the den was the worst. When she heard the squeak of the mail truck's brakes, Kim took the opportunity to go outside and get the mail from the box on the street. Sitting down in the grass that Dad had just cut yesterday, she speculated who the letters were to by what size the envelopes were. Kim ran her fingers through the rows of closely cropped lawn and imagined cornstocks instead of blades. Every ten minutes there was the roar of a bus from the local university. Kim had learned a short time ago to distinguish its sound from that of the city busses that came every twenty minutes. She heard the exploding noise as it passed, then the steadily dying hum as the bus went off. Kim felt, rather than actually heard, it stop a few blocks away.

The weather had cooled off, and Kim was still sitting in the front yard when Mother got home.

"Hello, Kimmy," she called as she got out of the VW. "Now, you should remember not to go much nearer the street than this." Mother wasn't pleased when Kim handed the mail to her. Kim sat in the living-room and listened to the sound of Mother making dinner. Dad came in about twenty minutes later, and they talked in low voices before he went upstairs to change clothes. Just as Dad walked into his room, Kim asked, as she always did at this time, "Can I help you Mother?"

"It will be ready in a few minutes Kimmy," was Mother's daily response.

Brenda, Kim, and I were standing by the flagpole in front of school when we saw Sue for the first time. Her mother drove an aqua colored car that made the rust on the door seem even darker. She stopped the car at the top of the U shaped driveway and we watched Sue get out. Brenda nudged Kim with her elbow and pointed. Sue was wearing an egg shell colored peasant dress, lavender socks, and clutched a small black shoulder bag close to her side. Her long brown hair was in two braids that hid her cheeks.

"My mother wouldn't let me out of the house in something like that," Brenda said giggling.

"She looks like a little mouse," Kim exclaimed. "I hope she isn't the new girl in our class." Kim's mother was president of the PTA so Kim knew everything. I hoped she wasn't the new girl in our class either for her sake. Sue began walking toward the front door of the school when her mother leaned out the window and called her back to the car. Brenda was busily talking about her new monogrammed sweater, but I hardly heard her. Sue's mother was leaning out of her car window and shaking Sue as if she were a rag doll.

"Come on," Kim said. "Let's go choose our seats. I want you two to sit next to me." I followed them through the big double doors. I could hear the coughing motor of the car starting and imagined Sue standing alone at the top of the driveway.

Brenda sat on Kim's left, and I got to sit on her right. Kim squeaked like a mouse when Sue walked shyly into the room. She sat in the back left corner on the boys' side, and Mr. Andrews had to ask her to speak up three times when he called roll. She was the only one in the class who didn't have all of her shots so they made her go to the school doctor. Whenever Mr. Andrews called on Sue, Kim squeaked. The rest of us giggled because she never gave the right answer.

On the third day of school, Kim decided we would be mad at Sue. Kim had asked Sue if she could borrow a pencil, but Sue
just ignored her.

"She's going to be sorry," Kim told us during morning recess. We were sitting on the stairs by the door; Kim on the top step and the rest of us huddled on the steps below her.

"She always wears dresses," said Brenda tucking her hair behind her ears. "I bet she doesn't even have a pair of Levi's."

"She probably can't catch a ball," Marcie said adjusting her Phillies cap. "All she ever does during recess is walk on those dumb nature trails. There's nothing back there but a bunch of bushes."

"She probably likes John," Kim said accusingly. "She sits right next to him."

"Maybe John likes her," I suggested.

"You'd better watch out Kim or she might steal him from you," Brenda warned. "I know you've had a crush on him for years."

"That's not true," Kim snapped. "And so what if I do? John could never like Sue. She probably still plays with dolls."

Marcie sighed. "We're wasting the whole recess. What should we play?" She pulled her gum out of her mouth, wrapped it around her finger, and waited for an answer.

Kim smiled. "I know what we'll do," she said. "We'll play Sue instead of Spud. We can play near the nature trail. Spud was the game we always played during recess. We were all given numbers. When your number was called, you had to catch the ball and try to hit someone else with it. If you missed or were hit, you got a letter. The first person to get Spud lost."

"We need a fourth letter," said Marcie.

"Sue," said Kim slowly. She thought for a moment. "I know," she cried. "We'll call her Suey. That's a perfect name for a mouse." Brenda and Marcie giggled. "Come on," said Kim. "I get to throw the ball first." As we were walking toward the nature trail, Kim turned to me. "By the way, Kelly," she said. "I want you to walk me home at lunch time today."

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IN A CORNFIELD

Kim liked sleeping. When sleep covered her body, dreams uncovered her sightless eyes. In dreams she could see the corn field across the street from the house where she'd grown up. If Kim looked at the field long enough, her family would emerge from it. Sometimes their faces would grow large, one at a time, embedding themselves in her mind. Sometimes she would watch her mother set a picnic lunch among the stalks. Yet, no matter how they started or what they were of, the dreams always ended the same way. The images would begin to move as if wind were blowing; then everything would go blank.

One August morning started with that image. It was just after Kim had become blind. The stalks had twisted and been blown into one another almost all night. Then Kim could feel the sun on her face and knew it wouldn't come that warmly through her window if it weren't at least nine. She rolled quickly out of bed and ignoring the set of clothes that Mother had set out for her, took shorts and a top from her dresser. The house was silent; Mother and Dad would have left for work over an hour ago.

It was one of those days, Kim thought, when a person could tell, by the feel of the air at nine o'clock, that the temperature couldn't help but climb above a hundred. She left her room and counted her steps to the stairs. This self-devised method would work for her around familiar places she had decided, until Mother changed her mind about getting a cane.

On the kitchen table was a box of Life cereal, and a glass of orange juice that Mother had gotten out before going to work. By now the juice was as warm as the rest of the room, but Kim drank it anyway, and had some of the cereal right from the box. Taking some more juice from the refrigerator, she went to the den where the TV was. This time of morning there were old reruns on, and if Kim didn't think about anything while watching them she could let pictures of these shows fill her mind. Sometimes
"But you live on the other..."

Kim looked at me sharply. "I'll meet you when the bell rings" she said. Kim stuck her neck out the way she always did when she was mad. "You give the numbers, Marcie," she directed.

We stood in a circle while Marcie whispered a number in each girl's ear. "Number two," Kim yelled throwing the ball off toward the swings. I had to dodge someone who was swinging to retrieve the ball. By the time I got it, the other girls were so far away that I knew I could never hit anyone. I took three giant steps and threw the ball anyway. Marcie picked it up, and we gathered in a circle again.

"You have an 's'," Kim informed me.

"I thought you had to throw the ball straight up," I protested. Kim just looked at me and smiled saucily.

"Number four," I yelled, tossing the ball straight in the air. When I stopped running, I was relieved to see that Brenda was closer than I was. Kim took five giant steps toward me so I was within a good range.

"You can only have three..." I began.

"You have a 'u'," Kim said as the ball hit me in the side. "Squeak, squeak, squeak. We almost have another mouse in school," she said, laughing.

I wasn't going to call Kim's number again. As we were getting back into the circle, I looked over toward the nature trail. I could see the top of Sue's head and glimpses of her dress. And I realized that she could hear us.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak," the other girls were yelling.

"You guys, be quiet. She's right there," I said, pointing at the bush.

"Look at the mousey hiding," Kim sneered.

Sue turned and ran down the trail.
"Come on, Kelly," Kim said motioning to me. "You aren't afraid you're going to lose, are you?" I shook my head and joined the circle.

Suddenly I felt kind of sick. I had been new at school two years ago, and I knew how hard it was. I knew then it was going to be even harder for Sue.

Brenda didn't hit anyone so she had an 's' too. The next time my number was called, I reacted quickly so everyone was within good range. Kim was the closest so I took three giant steps toward her. She looked at me with her piercing blue eyes and I missed by a long shot.

"Kelly has an 'e' now. Kelly has an 'e' now," she chanted.

"She's almost a Suey," Brenda said sounding horrified.

"I'll never be a Suey," Kim said vehemently. "I don't even want to be friends with her."

At that moment I didn't want to be friends with Suey either. It was her fault they were mocking me, and I hated her for it. I was glad when Marcie hit Brenda in the legs.

"Oh, no," Brenda moaned. "I've got an 's'. I'm almost a you-know-what."

I ran for the ball as soon as Brenda called my number. I didn't know what Kim would do if I got a 'y'. I looked around to see who was closest. Kim was. I turned the other way and took three giant steps toward Brenda. I felt my stomach drop when I missed.

"Suey, Suey," Kim yelled. "Kelly is a Suey."

I could see Suey heading back up the trail, but this time I didn't care. "I am not," I retorted. I felt my eyes begin to water.

"Suey, Suey," Kim yelled again. "Kelly is a Suey."

"Squeak, squeak, squeak," Marcie said laughing.

I wished they were mocking Suey instead of me. I almost told them that she was standing at the top of the trail, but the bell

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**LEAVING ESTENFELD, GERMANY**

I stand at the village-edge bus stop. But there is no bus, just the highway stretching between two ripe fields. I walk the roadside for miles before putting out my thumb.

A cream Mercedes stops, and the driver, opening the door, says, *Wissen Sie das dies gefährlich sein konnte?* I pretend not to understand although I am not afraid. Trees fringe the road with shadows. Behind us, in the side mirror, I see the village, a circle of distant lights and tiled roofs. And to the right, in the dark stubble outside Würzburg a cluster of pigs stand around a wooden trough. We pass farmhouses and church spires spiking the dark sky. Miles away, lightening brightens the vineyard hills. For a moment before it rains I stare at the driver whose gloved hands close tightly around the white steering wheel.
Years ago I started throwing salmon into the swamp. I wanted only to sit at a distance without gun or knife, thinking she might lift on the full length of her spine, come grunting toward the strong odor of fish in the dark.

I did not want to touch her or find her in late fall hungry and circling the house, the dog dead on its chain, the laundry torn from the line. And I did not want to wake one morning to the taste of berries feel her rough tongue coming out of my childhood to lick the salt from my mouth.

I was not in love though I followed her one night across a clearing, her heels turning up clumps of sod in the new snow. I thought if she turned I would crawl into her den, unclothe completely and suckle all winter under the lonliness of her thick fur. In spring I would call mother over and over, kiss the cold light of this world so deep her black lips would open and she would feel me rise in her empty belly terrified and alone. At that moment entering an abandoned farmhouse I would drop my belongings, pull back the curtains on a life I have cradled for thirty years in these cracked glass hands.

When the bell rang dismissing us for lunch, I ran out of the room as quickly as I could. I didn't feel like walking Kim home. I ran around to the other side of the building to hide, and there was Suey, sitting beneath the window of the second grade room.

"Hi, Kelly," she said softly.

"Hi," I mumbled. "What are you doing?"

"There's a hole off to the side of the nature trail," she explained. "I'm waiting for everyone to leave so that maybe the mouse will come out again. I saw it this morning. I'll show you where the hole is," she offered. I didn't want to go, but I felt like I should because we had been so mean to her that morning. I looked around to make sure everyone else was gone.

"Ok," I said nodding. In my mind, I could hear Kim and the others yelling and jeering as we walked across the empty playground.

I followed Sue past the bush she had been hiding behind and then down the trail. She pushed aside the tall grass and knelt by a small hole.

"This is where I saw it," she whispered. She clicked her tongue against her teeth to coax it. I stood next to her with my arms folded across my chest. The hole didn't look like a mouse hole to me, but I hoped something would come out of it for her sake.

"Come here, mousey," she whispered. "Come on out," I knew nothing was going to come out of the hole. Sue began to dig the hole deeper with her hands. "He'll come out," she told me. "Come out, little mouse," she coaxed.

"This is stupid," I told her. "I'm leaving. That isn't a mouse hole." I started walking back toward the playground. I was mad at Suey and even madder at myself for bothering with her.

"Wait a minute," Sue called. "Come back." I turned around and Suey was motioning to me with her hand. I looked down at the hole, and, sure enough, there was a small brown field mouse poking his head.
out. "See," Sue said excitedly, "I told you there was a mouse." Sue and I watched the mouse creep out of its hole. It was light brown except for a white patch on its tummy and forehead. "See," Sue whispered again. I nodded and smiled. The mouse was standing on its hind legs and looking around curiously.

"He's cute," I whispered. Sue smiled at me. We watched the mouse dart off into the tall grass and then creep back to the hole. Before we knew it, lunch time was over and we could hear the other kids playing on the playground. I looked up to the top of the trail, and I saw Kim walk past with Brenda and Marcie. I knew she was looking for me, and I knew she would be mad. But I really didn't care. Maybe Sue and I would even come down and visit the mouse at recess. Kim would never come down the nature trail. She thought it was dumb. The first bell rang meaning that we should line up at the door.

"Good bye, little mouse," said Sue.

"We'll be back this afternoon," I told it. "Come on," I said looking at Sue. We started up the trail together for school.

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Julia Silverman

A LIFE SKETCH FOR DEENA

I Gesture

Her body senses age approaching. Black hair dyed by Jim, curls over her collar in a way she doesn't like. She'll never go back

Her body senses age and responds to Howard's breathing with a heavy smile and a long kiss displaying to his tongue, perfect teeth yellowed with nicotine and coffee. Eagerness strips open her mouth; she makes her lovely eyes.

II Incompletion

She only cries over the phone when, in a basement cubicle four hundred miles away, I can't stop her. I draw her picture over and over, seeing in her wide hips the curve of thinness, the small bite in her cheek's skin hurting me.

She picks at my brain: How do you know this? What would you have me do? Tell me secret tell me Screaming: Julia! four hundred miles away and crying on the phone. I can't stop her. I continue sketching. I am her daughter and that is our only secret.
This morning our kibbutz suffered a terrorist attack. I guess the war was never so real to me as it was in those few moments. Three arabs infiltrated the border, apparently from Gaza. Although we have fifteen pairs on guard duty every night, the terrorists almost reached the children's houses. Thank God the children sleep in bomb shelters! The terrorists' fire alerted the guards and all other adults. Two young mothers who were on duty were shot before the terrorists were. This war is senseless! Won't we ever be allowed to live in peace? Are we asking so much? Those arab boys were also somebody's children.

At a general meeting today, a proposal was brought up that would exclude parents with children under 18 from guard duty. We were voted down. Many of the kibbutzniks have children but they refused to exclude themselves from guard duty. A child needs his parents. I wonder if we shall lose a generation in the war?

My dearest brother, how I wish you were here. I need you, we need you. If only you could understand. Please remember, I love you. Give my love to Mom and Dad.

All my love,
Betsy

November 26, 1973

Dear Betsy,

I received your letter today. I am asking you again, will you come home? Do you value your life so little as to stay? I cannot bear the thought of my baby sister carrying a sub-machine gun.

You are brave. You have done a good job and payed whatever dues you feel you owe. Please reconsider. I too am Jewish, but I stayed in Boston. That doesn't make me any less of a Jew. I sent a check to the Jewish Defense Fund to help Israel. Neither of us are saints and have no reason to be martyrs. Of course, I sympathize with the Israelis and I wish that I could.

Dan Spica

THE STORM

The farms were green in Ohio, but that night the storm painted everything black. I was 10 and afraid.

"There's probably a motel just a few miles ahead," my father snapped. My mother glared at him as lightening flashed a threat across the horizon. I sat silent in the back, paralyzed and thinking the rain had poured through the car window onto my eyes.

I stared out. As if under water, headlights struggled towards us turning red as they passed.

My parents' sharp voices drifted under the current, the road flowing out behind us like a river growing dark.
Judi Shulevitz

IN THE WAKE OF ASPEN

The moon travels in the reeds along the lake. I feel it, there, full in the water, and follow in the wake of aspen trembling dark in light glowing like the skin of a mother's belly.

These aspen, tremulous on a strand of wind, lead me to this old bus its rag curtains billowing like wings paused and spread and to these young thrushes on the window's edge thin heads cocked high and listening, holding me still in the flat, aware discs of their eyes.

be foolish. Don't ruin your life as a result of your childishly idealistic and sentimental notions. I must go. I have a meeting with Donaldson of Donaldson Electronic. Then a board meeting. I can't be late.

All my love,

Steven

November 17, 1973

Dear Steve,

How can you suggest that I leave? We are fighting for all Jews, not just ourselves. And if we don't, who will?

Things are worse every day. The fruit will never be picked in time. Our crop is rotting. We can't use the arabs from Gaza and we have few healthy men left on the kibbutz. We all work as hard as we can, and then some more. The next morning we have more work than ever. The children are tired of the bomb shelters but we haven't time to entertain them so the older children try to keep them amused. I wish I could do more. I feel so helpless. Zipporah (who lives next to me), cries all night. Everyone tries to be brave but I don't feel the part. The pain and sorrow show on my face. I have begun to doubt my country's survival.

Your loving sister,

Betsy

November 19, 1973

My dearest Steven,

The full impact of the war has hit us here. I am afraid. I am afraid for the children. I am afraid for their parents. I am scared to read the newspaper yet too scared not to read it.
Of course the wedding is postponed...indefinitely. It is Yitzhak I worry about most. He is in the Sinai and I hear things are not going well. I pray that he will come home safe. You have never met Yitzhak but you will someday, I hope. I promise that you will never be ashamed to have him for a brother-in-law.

I won't ask you to come to Israel and help us because I know that is not your style, but please, pray for us. Try not to worry. I am much safer than many.

Your loving sister,

Betsy

November 2, 1973

Dearest brother,

My heart is breaking. The first wave of casualties has been announced. Yitzhak was included. The war has dealt a hard blow. It is much easier to give up one's own life than the life of someone you love. I am not the first person to suffer, nor the last. Many families have had worse times. I like to think that Yitzhak would have been proud to die for Israel.

I repeat these brave words to myself but they are no comfort. I find myself thinking of our plans. My life is a void. Can I go on?

Betsy

November 8, 1973

Dearest Betsy,

Please come home. You might get hurt. You are twenty years old and should be at school, dating nice boys and having fun, not in the midst of war. I sympathize with you but you must come to your senses. What sort of life can you make for yourself? How can you be happy as 'farm labor'? You are fiercely loyal to Israel, I know, but couldn't you do as much good in the states selling bonds? Don't

Nick Bozanic

TAKING FLIGHT

Almost sober my father breaks into his favorite aria, while high in the hayloft my sisters discover their wings. At any moment mother will enter from the yard, hugging the first scent of lilacs. There is sunlight everywhere.

Hurrying up the drive, the mailman stumbles, lets loose a handful of letters that flutter like small white birds above the stones. And suddenly it begins to rain, releasing the fragrance of leaves in the wind.

Unnoticed the steaming barn has fallen asleep on the hens and the hay and the horses. Upstairs in their room my father and mother cling to each other for life. Even my sisters, whispering their feathery secrets, slowly settle down.

I have wandered onto the porch to stare at the moon. The door left open inhales a mouthful of moths. Across the meadow there is a stream echoing the laughter we hear in dreams.
Dear Betsy,

You should be thinking about coming home soon. I hear that there is tension on the borders and the possibility of heavy fighting. Besides, you are still a child and very naive. You ought to finish your education, get a degree in something useful. Twelve dollars a month, that's chicken feed. As a professional you could earn thousands. I worry about you, really I do. I only want you to be happy and safe but you don't know the meaning of those words.

The firm is going well. I finalized a contract today. The firm now represents all Xerox subsidiaries on the East Coast. That should be very lucrative.

Please come home soon, we all miss you. Best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely,
Steven

October 30, 1973

My dear brother,

I am writing you by the light of a shabbat candle since we mustn't keep our lights on after dark. Life is hectic and I haven't had time to write. Most of the men are gone from the kibbutz so we women must work twice as hard. I would rather be fighting. I feel so useless here, not being able to help directly.
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Lynda Field
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I received your letter today. I am asking you again, will you come home? Do you value your life so little as to stay? I cannot bear the thought of my baby sister carrying a sub-machine gun.

You are brave. You have done a good job and paid whatever dues you feel you owe. Please reconsider. I too am Jewish, but I stayed in Boston. That doesn't make me any less of a Jew. I sent a check to the Jewish Defense Fund to help Israel. Neither of us are saints and have no reason to be martyrs. Of course, I sympathize with the Israelis and I wish that I could...
out. "See," Sue said excitedly, "I told you there was a mouse." Sue and I watched the mouse creep out of its hole. It was light brown except for a white patch on its tummy and forehead. "See," Sue whispered again. I nodded and smiled. The mouse was standing on its hind legs and looking around curiously.

"He's cute," I whispered. Sue smiled at me. We watched the mouse dart off into the tall grass and then creep back to the hole. Before we knew it, lunch time was over and we could hear the other kids playing on the playground. I looked up to the top of the trail, and I saw Kim walk past with Brenda and Marcie. I knew she was looking for me, and I knew she would be mad. But I really didn't care. Maybe Sue and I would even come down and visit the mouse at recess. Kim would never come down the nature trail. She thought it was dumb. The first bell rang meaning that we should line up at the door.

"Good bye, little mouse," said Sue.

"We'll be back this afternoon," I told it. "Come on," I said looking at Sue. We started up the trail together for school.

Julia Silverman

A LIFE SKETCH FOR DEENA

I Gesture

Her body senses age approaching. Black hair dyed by Jim, curls over her collar in a way she doesn't like. She'll never go back

Her body senses age and responds to Howard's breathing with a heavy smile and a long kiss displaying to his tongue, perfect teeth yellowed with nicotine and coffee. Eagerness strips open her mouth; she makes her lovely eyes.

II Incompletion

She only cries over the phone when, in a basement cubicle four hundred miles away, I can't stop her. I draw her picture over and over, seeing in her wide hips the curve of thinness, the small bite in her cheek's skin hurting me.

She picks at my brain: How do you know this? What would you have me do? Tell me secret tell me

Screaming: Julia: four hundred miles away and crying on the phone. I can't stop her. I continue sketching. I am her daughter and that is our only secret.
BAITING THE BEAR

Years ago I started throwing salmon into the swamp. I wanted only to sit at a distance without gun or knife, thinking she might lift on the full length of her spine, come grunting toward the strong odor of fish in the dark.

I did not want to touch her or find her in late fall hungry and circling the house, the dog dead on its chain, the laundry torn from the line. And I did not want to wake one morning to the taste of berries feel her rough tongue coming out of my childhood to lick the salt from my mouth.

I was not in love though I followed her one night across a clearing, her heels turning up clumps of sod in the new snow. I thought if she turned I would crawl into her den, unclothe completely and suckle all winter under the loneliness of her thick fur. In spring I would call mother over and over, kiss the cold light of this world so deep her black lips would open and she would feel me rise in her empty belly terrified and alone. At that moment entering an abandoned farmhouse I would drop my belongings, pull back the curtains on a life I have cradled for thirty years in these cracked glass hands.

When the bell rang dismissing us for lunch, I ran out of the room as quickly as I could. I didn't feel like walking Kim home. I ran around to the other side of the building to hide, and there was Suey, sitting beneath the window of the second grade room.

"Hi, Kelly," she said softly.

"Hi," I mumbled. "What are you doing?"

"There's a hole off to the side of the nature trail," she explained. "I'm waiting for everyone to leave so that maybe the mouse will come out again. I saw it this morning. I'll show you where the hole is," she offered. I didn't want to go, but I felt like I should because we had been so mean to her that morning.

I looked around to make sure everyone else was gone.

"Ok," I said nodding. In my mind, I could hear Kim and the others yelling and jeering as we walked across the empty playground. I followed Sue past the bush she had been hiding behind and then down the trail. She pushed aside the tall grass and knelt by a small hole.

"This is where I saw it," she whispered. She clicked her tongue against her teeth to coax it. I stood next to her with my arms folded across my chest. The hole didn't look like a mouse hole to me, but I hoped something would come out of it for her sake. "Come here, mousey," she whispered. "Come on out." I knew nothing was going to come out of the hole. Sue began to dig the hole deeper with her hands. "He'll come out," she told me. "Come out, little mouse," she coaxed.

"This is stupid," I told her. "I'm leaving. That isn't a mouse hole." I started walking back toward the playground. I was mad at Suey and even madder at myself for bothering with her.

"Wait a minute," Sue called. "Come back." I turned around and Suey was motioning to me with her hand. I looked down at the hole, and, sure enough, there was a small brown field mouse poking his head.
"Come on, Kelly," Kim said motioning to me. "You aren't afraid you're going to lose, are you?" I shook my head and joined the circle.

Suddenly I felt kind of sick. I had been new at school two years ago, and I knew how hard it was. I knew then it was going to be even harder for Sue.

Brenda didn't hit anyone so she had an 's' too. The next time my number was called, I reacted quickly so everyone was within good range. Kim was the closest so I took three giant steps toward her. She looked at me with her piercing blue eyes and I missed by a long shot.

"Kelly has an 'e' now. Kelly has an 'e' now," she chanted.

"She's almost a Suey," Brenda said sounding horrified.

"I'll never be a Suey," Kim said vehemently. "I don't even want to be friends with her."

At that moment I didn't want to be friends with Suey either. It was her fault they were mocking me, and I hated her for it. I was glad when Marcie hit Brenda in the legs.

"Oh, no," Brenda moaned. "I've got an 's'. I'm almost a you-know-what."

I ran for the ball as soon as Brenda called my number. I didn't know what Kim would do if I got a 'y'. I looked around to see who was closest. Kim was. I turned the other way and took three giant steps toward Brenda. I felt my stomach drop when I missed.

"Suey, Suey," Kim yelled. "Kelly is a Suey."

I could see Suey heading back up the trail, but this time I didn't care. "I am not," I retorted. I felt my eyes begin to water.

"Suey, Suey," Kim yelled again. "Kelly is a Suey."

"Squeak, squeak, squeak," Marcie said laughing.

I wished they were mocking Suey instead of me. I almost told them that she was standing at the top of the trail, but the bell
"But you live on the other..."

Kim looked at me sharply. "I'll meet you when the bell rings" she said. Kim stuck her neck out the way she always did when she was mad. "You give the numbers, Marcie," she directed.

We stood in a circle while Marcie whispered a number in each girl's ear. "Number two," Kim yelled throwing the ball off toward the swings. I had to dodge someone who was swinging to retrieve the ball. By the time I got it, the other girls were so far away that I knew I could never hit anyone. I took three giant steps and threw the ball anyway. Marcie picked it up, and we gathered in a circle again.

"You have an 's'," Kim informed me.

"I thought you had to throw the ball straight up," I protested.

Kim just looked at me and smiled saucily.

"Number four," I yelled, tossing the ball straight in the air. When I stopped running, I was relieved to see that Brenda was closer than I was. Kim took five giant steps toward me so I was within a good range.

"You can only have three..." I began.

"You have a 'u'," Kim said as the ball hit me in the side.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak. We almost have another mouse in school," she said, laughing.

I wasn't going to call Kim's number again. As we were getting back into the circle, I looked over toward the nature trail. I could see the top of Sue's head and glimpses of her dress. And I realized that she could hear us.

"Squeak, squeak, squeak," the other girls were yelling.

"You guys, be quiet. She's right there," I said, pointing at the bush.

"Look at the mousey hiding," Kim sneered.

Sue turned and ran down the trail.
just ignored her.

"She's going to be sorry," Kim told us during morning recess. We were sitting on the stairs by the door; Kim on the top step and the rest of us huddled on the steps below her.

"She always wears dresses," said Brenda tucking her hair behind her ears. "I bet she doesn't even have a pair of Levi's."

"She probably can't catch a ball," Marcie said adjusting her Phillies cap. "All she ever does during recess is walk on those dumb nature trails. There's nothing back there but a bunch of bushes."

"She probably likes John," Kim said accusingly. "She sits right next to him."

"Maybe John likes her," I suggested.

"You'd better watch out Kim or she might steal him from you," Brenda warned. "I know you've had a crush on him for years."

"That's not true," Kim snapped. "And so what if I do? John could never like Sue. She probably still plays with dolls."

Marcie sighed. "We're wasting the whole recess. What should we play?" She pulled her gum out of her mouth, wrapped it around her finger, and waited for an answer.

Kim smiled. "I know what we'll do," she said. "We'll play Sue instead of Spud. We can play near the nature trail. Spud was the game we always played during recess. We were all given numbers. When your number was called, you had to catch the ball and try to hit someone else with it. If you missed or were hit, you got a letter. The first person to get Spud lost."

"We need a fourth letter," said Marcie.

"Sue," said Kim slowly. She thought for a moment. "I know," she cried. "We'll call her Suey. That's a perfect name for a mouse." Brenda and Marcie giggled. "Come on," said Kim. "I get to throw the ball first." As we were walking toward the nature trail, Kim turned to me. "By the way, Kelly," she said. "I want you to walk me home at lunch time today."

Tina Ament

IN A CORNFIELD

Kim liked sleeping. When sleep covered her body, dreams uncovered her sightless eyes. In dreams she could see the corn field across the street from the house where she'd grown up. If Kim looked at the field long enough, her family would emerge from it. Sometimes their faces would grow large, one at a time, embedding themselves in her mind. Sometimes she would watch her mother set a picnic lunch among the stalks. Yet, no matter how they started or what they were of, the dreams always ended the same way. The images would begin to move as if wind were blowing; then everything would go blank.

One August morning started with that image. It was just after Kim had become blind. The stalks had twisted and been blown into one another almost all night. Then Kim could feel the sun on her face and knew it wouldn't come that warmly through her window if it weren't at least nine. She rolled quickly out of bed and ignoring the set of clothes that Mother had set out for her, took shorts and a top from her dresser. The house was silent; Mother and Dad would have left for work over an hour ago.

It was one of those days, Kim thought, when a person could tell, by the feel of the air at nine o'clock, that the temperature couldn't help but climb above a hundred. She left her room and counted her steps to the stairs. This self-devised method would work for her around familiar places she had decided, until Mother changed her mind about getting a cane.

On the kitchen table was a box of Life cereal, and a glass of orange juice that Mother had gotten out before going to work. By now the juice was as warm as the rest of the room, but Kim drank it anyway, and had some of the cereal right from the box. Taking some more juice from the refrigerator, she went to the den where the TV was. This time of morning there were old reruns on, and if Kim didn't think about anything while watching them she could let pictures of these shows fill her mind. Sometimes
when she'd done this for long, she forgot where the television set was.

The reruns drifted into game shows and soap operas. To Kim these, like any other show she hadn't seen once, were like imagining the characters of a book. Kim didn't like soap operas much. When they had taken complete control of the screen, she tried the stereo.

Mother had put all the records in order for her; Dad, however, was constantly mixing them up when he got albums out to play. None of it mattered much to Kim. She knew the feel of each of her records anyway. "Revolver" was a smooth slippery cover, "Abbey Road" had a long wrinkle like a furrow in the center, and so on. Kim chose one and started playing it.

In mid-August it seemed the house couldn't breathe. Air just hung in the rooms; the den was the worst. When she heard the squeak of the mail truck's brakes, Kim took the opportunity to go outside and get the mail from the box on the street. Sitting down in the grass that Dad had just cut yesterday, she speculated who the letters were to by what size the envelopes were. Kim ran her fingers through the rows of closely cropped lawn and imagined cornstocks instead of blades. Every ten minutes there was the roar of a bus from the local university. Kim had learned a short time ago to distinguish its sound from that of the city busses that came every twenty minutes. She heard the exploding noise as it passed, then the steadily dying hum as the bus went off. Kim felt, rather than actually heard, it stop a few blocks away.

The weather had cooled off, and Kim was still sitting in the front yard when Mother got home.

"Hello, Kimmy," she called as she got out of the VW. "Now, you should remember not to go much nearer the street than this." Mother wasn't pleased when Kim handed the mail to her. Kim sat in the living-room and listened to the sound of Mother making dinner. Dad came in about twenty minutes later, and they talked in low voices for awhile before he went upstairs to change clothes. Just as Dad walked into his room, Kim asked, as she always did at this time, "Can I help you Mother?"

"It will be ready in a few minutes Kimmy," was Mother's daily response.

Brenda, Kim, and I were standing by the flagpole in front of school when we saw Sue for the first time. Her mother drove an aqua colored car that made the rust on the door seem even darker. She stopped the car at the top of the U shaped driveway and we watched Sue get out. Brenda nudged Kim with her elbow and pointed. Sue was wearing an egg shell colored peasant dress, lavender socks, and clutched a small black shoulder bag close to her side. Her long brown hair was in two braids that hid her cheeks.

"My mother wouldn't let me out of the house in something like that," Brenda said giggling.

"She looks like a little mouse," Kim exclaimed. "I hope she isn't the new girl in our class." Kim's mother was president of the PTA so Kim knew everything. I hoped she wasn't the new girl in our class either for her sake. Sue began walking toward the front door of the school when her mother leaned out the window and called her back to the car. Brenda was busily talking about her new monogrammed sweater, but I hardly heard her. Sue's mother was leaning out of her car window and shaking Sue as if she were a rag doll.

"Come on," Kim said. "Let's go choose our seats. I want you two to sit next to me." I followed them through the big double doors. I could hear the coughing motor of the car starting and imagined Sue standing alone at the top of the driveway.

Brenda sat on Kim's left, and I got to sit on her right. Kim squeaked like a mouse when Sue walked shyly into the room. She sat in the back left corner on the boys' side, and Mr. Andrews had to ask her to speak up three times when he called roll. She was the only one in the class who didn't have all of her shots so they made her go to the school doctor. Whenever Mr. Andrews called on Sue, Kim squeaked. The rest of us giggled because she never gave the right answer.

On the third day of school, Kim decided we would be mad at Sue. Kim had asked Sue if she could borrow a pencil, but Sue
They had ravioli that night. Along with that was some potato salad from a picnic that Mother and Dad had gone to last weekend. Mother dished up the food and set a plate in front of Kim.

"Here," Mother said. "Let me show you." She picked up one of Kim's hands and said, "Your lettuce is at six o'clock, and your potato salad is here at eight." As she said this she pushed Kim's fingers a little too far down and they slid first into the salad and over into the ravioli.

"Oh, Kimmy, I'm sorry," she said, letting Kim's hand go. Her own hand was now trembling. "Why don't you go wash that off?"

Over the sound of the water Kim could hear her parents voices.

"It's just too soon," said Mother.

"But, doesn't life have to go on?" said her father.

Mother said, more audibly, "Only not yet."

After dinner Kim sat in the den and listened to the television news with Mother and Dad. She'd always done this since she had been little. Tonight the den was still too warm. Air from the afternoon seemed to be wrapping itself around Kim. They were talking about farming on the news.

Kim left the den before the evening news had ended. She went to the stairs as if she were going to her room. Turning back toward the front door she went quietly out, waiting just outside to see if Mother would call her back. Following the stone walkway out of the yard, she crossed the street listening for cars or busses. Her feet were careful when she neared the other side. The curb touched one of them easily; she stepped up onto dirt.

Kim sat down in the black earth just in front of the first row of corn. She forced her hands into the dirt and brought up clumps of it. The corn was still. Kim listened, but could not hear it move. The smell of it filled her lungs. With her fingers at the base of the stalks she could not feel them move;
there was no wind. Kim wasn't sure how long she waited as the corn held perfectly still. She didn't know how long she felt for a ripple in the stalks.

Then there was movement; it was Mother's hands shaking her and Mother's voice overpowering the corn. "We've been looking for you everywhere. We thought you were in your bedroom. You could have been hit crossing the street alone like that. It's dark out, and you could have been hurt. What are you trying to do out here?"

Even after Mother had brought her back and told her to go to bed, Kim wasn't upset about the reprimand. She knew if she lay on her bed long enough, still—like the corn—she would go to sleep.
Nick Thorndike

PLANTER'S HOUSE

In New Hampshire, the planter's house,
swooled by dried leaves, rises
through the veins of trees.
Many branches shadow
his windows. A front door
like a trunk grows
on one wall. The planter steps
outside;
watching his feet trample
the new snow. All the ground pipes,
below his house, have become
frozen roots. Here, the planter passes
an old shed, searching
for a pail. He comes
to the crooked maple, and takes
the pail strapped to its bark.
Going back, he sees his curled sugar fields.
Soon the planter
lurks inside his house. The pail
straddles a heated stove; gallons
of snow, melting
into water
that always has
the sweet taste of sap.
Amanda Holmes

LAST SWIM IN AUTUMN

As she leaves the house
the wood duck explodes from the brush.
She watches for shafts of light
to brighten the trees.

But the day is of haze so thick
that trees are shadows,
birds are invisible in flight.

She walks toward the river,
feet bare in stiffening weeds
and frosting gravel.
She sits on the bank under cedar.

wonders what happens to roots
after the trees have died.

Rings from around jumping fish,
insects, falling leaves.
The river makes no distinctions.

She steps into the slow current,
slides over the rocks like hands over fish
and dives deep to the center flow—
disappears beneath
reflections of gray
and deeper gray.
Nick Thorndike

PLANTER’S HOUSE

In New Hampshire, the planter's house, shoaled by dried leaves, rises through the veins of trees. Many branches shadow his windows. A front door like a trunk grows on one wall. The planter steps outside; watching his feet trample the new snow. All the ground pipes, below his house, have become frozen roots. Here, the planter passes an old shed, searching for a pail. He comes to the crooked maple, and takes the pail strapped to its bark. Going back, he sees his curled sugar fields. Soon the planter lurks inside his house. The pail straddles a heated stove; gallons of snow, melting into water that always has the sweet taste of sap.
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