

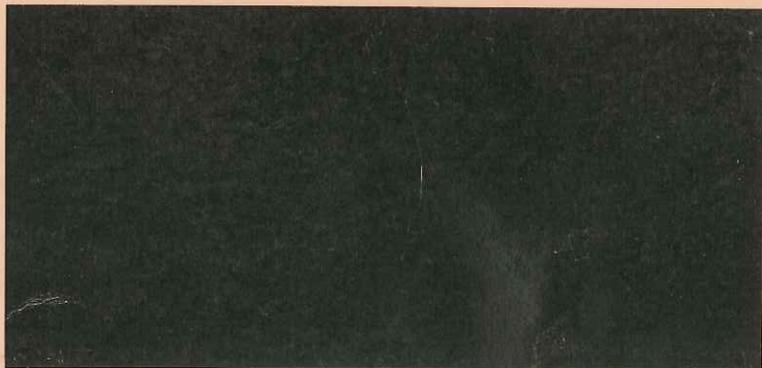


THE JOURNAL OF

The Writing & Publishing Apprentices

HUMMINGBIRDS & HARBINGERS

VOLUME NINE • WINTER 2011



WHAT HAVE I DONE?

by *Madeleine Felder*

She opens the door and finds the two of them sitting on ugly brown chairs with stained coffee cups in their hands. The girl gasps as she realized who they are. One is the principal, and from the way he looks at her, the girl is sure she is in trouble. The other—she doesn't want to think about him, with his grayish brown hair and colorless cheeks. She makes her way to the third ugly chair. She feels the heat of the brown-haired man's gaze and takes out her compact. She perches gingerly on her seat as she reapplies lip-gloss while thinking, for what has to be the hundredth time, *I don't want to be here.*

She looks around, waiting for someone to talk. She stares at the principal. He lifts his head and rearranges his glasses.

"What are we going to do about this, then?" the principle finally asks, his voice hoarse and grating. He sounds like he needs to cough, and the girl winces.

The brown-haired man looks at the balding man with hatred in his eyes.

"It's not what *we* are going to do but what *you* are going to do." Rage and desolation are thick in his voice.

The girl looks down at her hands, admiring her black nail polish, and thinks, *I'm such a rebel for wearing this nail polish even though my mother told me not to.* She looks at the angry man for the first time but quickly looks away. She doesn't deserve his look of hatred. But something, perhaps the nod from the principal, causes her to mutter a quick "Sorry," still staring at her gorgeous Prada shoes she got at the mall the other day.

"You're sorry?" he says, his voice shaking with malice. "You should be sorry, you heartless girl. She came home crying from what you did to her every single day. I told her it would get better, that you would mature." His voice rises now, and the girl shrinks back in her chair. "But you didn't, and then you finally took it too far. She'll never go to college, never have a family, never travel, never do anything, because of *you.*" He breaks down at the last part.

The man recovers while the girl sits in her chair, stunned. She listens with clogged ears to the man's rant, thinking, *What have I done?* The man says to the principle, "And you. I wrote you letters. We had conferences, but you never did—" the man breaks off as the girl's compact plummets to the ground. *Crap*, the girl thinks, hurriedly bending over to pick it up. The man continues, "Anything. You never stopped her! You killed my daughter as much as she did. And you both will be hearing from my lawyer."

The girl sits lower in her chair. Her head is in her hands. *What have I done?* she thinks over and over again as she listens to the man and the principle argue. She can feel her heart pounding and her guilt rising, rising into her throat until it's choking her, she can't breathe, and finally the blackness engulfs her.