

YOUNG VOICES



2018

ANTHOLOGY OF STUDENT WORK
New York State
Summer Young Writers Institute

NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE

Letter from the Director

What you hold in your hands are the poems and stories – true and imagined – that the students of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute produced during ten crazily inventive days last July, interspersed with photos and student comments that help to chronicle the sights and emotions of our annual writing residency.

In its twenty-first year, the Young Writers Institute is held at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, so that our students can take advantage of the New York State Summer Writers Institute, directed by Robert Boyers, which convenes on the Skidmore campus for the entire month. Having the opportunity to work on their own writing in three classes each day, hear accomplished writers in late-afternoon craft sessions or at packed evening readings, and then try out their own works-in-progress during late-night reading sessions in the residence hall, means that our high school writers are thoroughly immersed in the writing life for every waking hour. And here's what we have learned to expect: they love it.

These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing. That common interest creates almost instantaneous bonding when they meet each other, but it also encourages them to revel in the writing atmosphere of our intensive workshop. More than one hundred applicants send original writing samples each April, and we choose the forty best writers to attend the Young Writers Institute. That ability to be selective pays off for us. Year after year, we offer these students respect and recognition for what they have already achieved, and in return we receive not only a committed, attentive group of students but also the dramatic, funny, moving, troubling, and remarkable creative pieces in this anthology. It was our pleasure to watch as these pieces unfolded during our Summer 2018 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick
Director
New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

"These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing."

—William Patrick





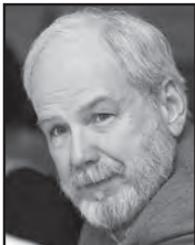
KATHLEEN AGUERO'S latest book is *After That* (Tiger Bark Books). Her other poetry collections include *Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth* (Cervena Barva Press), *Daughter Of* (Cedar Hill Books), *The Real Weather* (Hanging Loose), and *Thirsty Day* (Alice James Books). She has also co-edited three volumes of multi-cultural literature for the University of Georgia Press (*A Gift of Tongues*, *An Ear to the Ground*, and *Daily Fare*) and is consulting poetry editor of *Solstice* literary magazine. She teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Pine Manor College and in Changing Lives through Literature, an alternative sentencing program.



LIZA FRENETTE is an assistant editor at the monthly magazine, *NYSUT United*, where she writes features, human interest stories, articles about workers' rights, environmental education, and breaking news. She has won the Mary Heaton Vorse award three times, the highest writing award from the Metro Labor Communications Council of New York City, for feature writing. Vorse was an activist and writer, often covering workers' rights. In 2012, she won the highest national writing award from the American Federation of Teachers for a feature story. Frenette is the author of three novels for middle-grade children, *Soft Shoulders*, *Dangerous Falls Ahead*, and *Dead End*.



ELAINE HANDLEY is a professor of Writing and Literature at SUNY Empire State College. She is an award winning poet and is completing a novel. Her most recent book of poetry, written in collaboration, is *Tear of the Clouds*, published in 2011 by RA Press. In 2011 she was the recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching.



RICHARD HOFFMAN is author, most recently, of the memoir *Love & Fury*, which was a finalist for the New England Book Award from the New England Independent Booksellers Association. He is also author of the celebrated *Half the House: a Memoir*, and the poetry collections, *Without Paradise*, *Gold Star Road*, winner of the 2006 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize and the 2008 Sheila Motton Award from the New England Club, and *Emblem*. A fiction writer as well, his *Interference & Other Stories* was published in 2009. A past Chair of PEN New England, he is Senior Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.



BOB MINER worked for *Newsweek* and has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Village Voice*, and *Esquire*. He has published two novels—*Exes* and *Mother's Day*—and is finishing up the third novel in this series, *Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, as well as writing nonfiction about Istanbul, Turkey. Since 1980 he has taught writing for the University at Albany and Empire State College, as well as for Skidmore College, Syracuse University, Siena College, and the College of St. Rose.



WILLIAM B. PATRICK is the founder and director of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. His most recent book is *The Call of Nursing: Voices from the Front Lines of Health Care*. He is also the author of *Saving Troy: A Year with Firefighters and Paramedics in a Battered City*; *Roxa*, an award-winning novel; and *We Didn't Come Here for This*, a memoir in poetry, among several other books. Mr. Patrick is currently on the faculty of Fairfield University's MFA Program in Creative Writing, and he is also acquisitions editor for Hudson Whitman/ Excelsior College Press.

I'VE BEEN RAISED

By Tyler Blackburn

I've been raised from coconut trees and dirt roads,
From buzzing subway stations and the Beeline bus schedule.
I've been raised from reggae and British English dialect,
From street rap and city slang.
I've been raised from Sabbath on Saturdays,
From Mass on Thursdays.
I've been raised from clear waters and blue skies,
From muddy rivers and a gray atmosphere.
I've been raised from island comedies,
From Martin and Family Matters.
I've been raised from ackee and saltfish,
From fried chicken and mac n' cheese.
I've been raised from one island I hold in my heart,
From one city that I will never part.



"I wish I had heard about this Institute sooner. I loved spending my summer here. At home, I am surrounded by nurses and doctors but here I've found a sizable community that I can relate to. The friends I've made are real and supportive and are a bit like me. The faculty is super cool and responsive and doesn't preach at us as if we're still in school. Being a rising senior, this has opened my eyes that my dreams are not impossible. It was definitely worth it, and if I had the chance, I would do it again and again."

— Tyler Blackburn

WHAT PAPA WOULD'VE WANTED

By Dylan Blackman

I've never been one to pray for much of anything. I never believed in you as much as I'd wish. Perhaps, I just lost the little faith I once had in you; the light they said would lead me to you. All my life, all that papa asked of me was to follow your traditions and to keep the belief I once felt in you alive. He'd bash those who'd refuse to see what he saw in you. He'd worship you as though you were the key to all that thrived. You were the love of his life, his belief, and his soul. I swear he would have ruined me for the lack of faith I held within. To him, I was a good Christian girl, perhaps not of the highest extent, but still, he never doubted my love for you. He even said you'd do what was right when he fell ill, whether that meant his life or death.

I thought you wouldn't let papa die as he held my hand praying for another second more. His palm cold as ice in mine as his face turned awfully white. I swear you took the life of a saint, a man of goodness and virtue. I really thought you would have the sense to keep him around, knowing he was a true believer. Could you have saved him? Did you know he loved you more than he loved me? Would you believe that? He spent more time worshipping you than he ever did loving me. I really detest you for that, but I don't have anyone else to confide in. Grandpa doesn't want to talk about father anymore, and everyone else doesn't understand. Mama's doing boozes and grandmas hyped up on opioids. So now I have come to you because no one else has my back. But if what they claim is true you could save me from the pain papa left me. I don't know if I want to hate you or if I want to let you in. Because I do want to believe in you I really do, but how can I believe in the same God that sat back while my father died? As he grasped on for his every last breath until he could no longer hold on for air. I just can't comprehend how you would take the one person I had. What wrong did he do? Didn't pray enough? Didn't give you enough? He took you into his heart, gave you his love. And I know I shouldn't say this, I know I need to stop but I'm hurting so bad. Are you punishing him for the lack of faith I held within you?

Are you even listening to my cries? Laughing are you at my broken pieces, at how my words fail to seize the density I so desire. What should I do, because I can't think straight right now; I really do feel like quite a fool, to be honest. I try to spin my words, but they fall at my knees. My head gives out, and now I am yours. A good Christian? A believer in you? What other choice do I have? I'm reaching out to you, giving out my heart. Nurture it will you? Because it's nearly broken for father was my sanity. It isn't that he didn't have his shortcomings, don't we all? It was his motive to fix the broken, mend the wrongs he wrote. Opening his arms, giving his heart. So I beg you, God if you're real. Feel my pain, take my hurt. I'll give you my best, give me your light. Give me strength; give what papa believed you could. Forgive me for finding you a little too late. Above all I ask you will you take me as I am? Will you take my sorrow, fill it with found purpose? If I give you a chance will you let me be whom papa always dreamed? I don't need much, I just need hope. Are you listening to me, God? ■

REMEMBERING VACATION

By Timothy Borunov

The stars of the night appear
as if miniscule mice crossing the sky,
eclipsing the sheen of the crescent made of marble,
floating in an ocean created from hues of darkness and magic.

The air itself carries a scent of the violet shade,
the mystical embodiment of the royal color,
produced by the primeval elements
enveloping the ancient heroes strung across the sky,
forever fighting the same battles
again and again as the world rotates,
of whom only the dots remain,
and the grand stories are told.

Their heroic conquests are accompanied
by the orchestra of crickets
and the cadence of cicadas,
a musical cast in the spotlights of fireflies
upon the earthly stage covered by curtains of leaves
and upheld by columns of bark,
placed densely, sporadically in the foreground,
and yet still not obstructing the war on the heavens.

I absorb the ambience and allow my eyes
to feast upon the scenic panorama.
Where else can I see the stars so clearly?
When was the last time I breathed the moist smell of the forest?
How could I have lived without the feeling of a breeze
that itself is saturated with evaporated dew,
freshly taken up into the air
by the retreating warmth of the sleeping sun?
And how can I live after it has again departed from my life?

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I close my eyes
and listen to the performance of nature itself
from my cozy perch of wooden planks
and railings while staring at the illusory abyss
created from the interior sides of my eyelids,
a void in which freedom is a possibility,
an escape from reality,
comparative to that whole night itself.

Just another way for oneself to attempt to forsake
the trouble and turmoil of trying to become something unnatural.

Today is a segment in time
when I am not trying to become the facade
that I have to construct for the purpose of achieving a futile hope
that one day in the distant improbable future
I can be who I am.

I can with full faith be myself
and not care about the thoughts of those
who repeatedly connive to thrust metal rods
in between the spokes of the wheels
attached to the vehicle I steer down my own road.

Those insignificant hours
in the overall timeline of the present realm;
a temporal event which you use
to catch your breath from struggling to control yourself;
just a few moments when you are able to forget.
Why must those be the times which I most want to remember?

Dr. Peters stared down at her four o'clock appointment with calm, yet careful eyes. The patient sat small under her calculating gaze. His unshaven face twitched as he tried to ignore the blank piece of paper on the doctor's desk.

His tall frame had rolled into itself in the early morning light, curving like a rusted hook. Old stains scattered the cuffs of his button-down and khakis—the kind of stains mom would've taken care of at once, but not before making sure to poke fun at his messy habits. His eyes had aged in a matter of hours. Instead of their usual soft green, today, they'd been mixed with beer and panic, and after being vigorously stirred with sleep deprivation, looked more of a murky brown.

"Billy," Dr. Peters set down her glasses "how have you been?"

"Fine, I guess," Billy said, picking at the frayed ends of his jacket.

"I thought we trusted each other enough not to lie."

"Well, I'm not."

An unpleasant pulse shot through Billy's brain. Every part of him wanted to scream out the strange word fluttering at the base of his throat, yet his mouth couldn't yet form it.

"Have you written?" Dr. Peters asked.

Billy shook his head no. Lying came naturally to him now. It came more naturally than telling the truth, he sometimes thought.

Everyone said Billy was sick—his wife, his friends, even his children that somehow acted older than him ever since they hit adulthood themselves. They all tried to explain that the words

meant nothing, that Billy could stop if he wanted to. He would nod solemnly and agree, say he was trying, but he knew better. Billy couldn't stop.

He peeked at the paper in front of Dr. Peters. Still blank. Still disgustingly bare. Billy shifted in his seat, every particle of his body rushing forward, trying to pull him towards the taunting pen protruding from the doctor's breast pocket.

Dr. Peters face split into a wax smile. "That's good, very good." She pulled out a pencil from the desk drawer but did not write anything. Instead, she tapped the freshly sharpened tip against her desk in a dull beat. Tiny flakes of graphite flew off with each tap. Billy's self-control shuddered with every beat.

The unnamed muscle rooted in the back of his skull, the muscle only Billy seemed to have, gave another uncomfortable pulse.

Dr. Peters' continued to do what she liked best: talk. She jabbered on, her words combining and settling into one monotone hum, like a fly buzzing around the room. It took Billy minutes to separate and pull the words apart.

"Billy? Billy! Did you hear what I said?" She tilted her head, giving Billy a plastic expression of pity. "Is there something wrong?"

Is there something wrong? Billy repeated silently to himself. Yes! There was something terribly wrong!

Five letters, he knew that much. They pushed incessantly at his seams, struggling to be freed from their flesh-and-bone prison.

Finally, Billy mustered up the courage to ask the question that had been plagued him since the moment he'd woke up since he'd found the first three words carved into his bedside table. "Actually, I was wondering, is there a basement in St. Michael's church? You know, the one around the block?"

Dr. Peters leaned forward. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering," Billy defended himself. "but, is there?"

"Yes... I believe so. My daughter has her Catholicism lessons there."

Church. Basement. Fire. Those three ugly words bumped and crashed into each other, depicting countless scenarios Billy could not control but would sit on his shoulders for the rest of his life.

He knew the fire would not be an accident. Was it ever? There was only one word left to write. It was always last. It would be a name, a victim. One more person he could not save.

He could imagine it already. The flames crawling up the walls of the old church on Berry Street, illuminating the night. The smell of burning wood filling the moist summer air. And a blank face.

Dr. Peters' expression shifted from irritation to concern. "Really Billy, is something wrong?"

"I'm fine!" he snapped. His fingers ached for the familiarity of a pen between his fingers. He could feel the word. The horrible snake slithered around his skull. Behind it, it's venomous wake seeped into his brain, making it impossible to think or breathe or really do anything but feel it the word wriggle around inside.

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Billy saw Dr. Peters' mouth move, forming sentences he could not understand. The silent words were just as alien as the one in the back of his mind.

Before he could rethink the rash decision, one that his rational side would have vetoed immediately, he lunged forward across the large, mahogany desk.

The doctor's papers flew in the air.

She cried out in alarm as Billy's hand shot towards her chest. He snatched the ballpoint pen and tore his own file from her hands. He scribbled furiously, almost greedily across the blank canvas. Finally, he saw the victim's name. A word that he had written a million times before, but never like this.

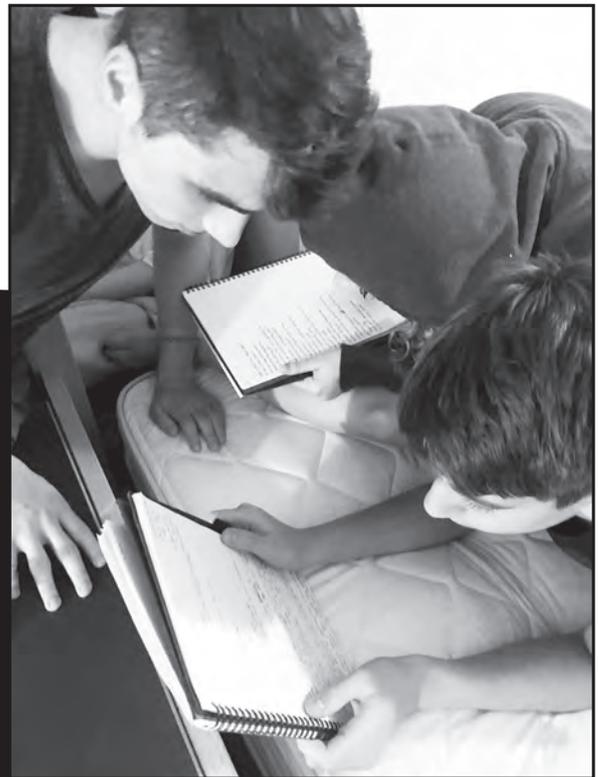
"Jesus, Billy!" Dr. Peters struggled to regain her usual composed expression. "You can't do this anymore!"

Billy did not look at her, half because he did not want to see the ignorant look of pity on her face, half because the word under his pen wouldn't let him go. He was right, it was a name. The word itself was only five letters. Five simple letters, yet they meant so much more.

Dr. Peters slowly took the paper from his shaking hands and read it. She furrowed her eyebrows and looked back at the petrified man. "Billy, why did you write your name?" ■

"It was as if I was working on an assembly line and then I suddenly saw another job open up that was not as mechanical. Before coming here, I wrote everything in a structured, rigid style, but now that I've been at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, I realize there are styles with more freedom. The Institute has opened my eyes to new possibilities and has greatly advance me forward as a writer. I will now finally feel able to push through any writer's block and continue being creative with the techniques I have learned at this program. Thank you."

— Timothy Borunov



TOY STORY

By Jordan Che

The toymaker approached the table, towering above our tiny town. His smile stretched across his face like a waning crescent moon and he slowly extended an arm out. We knew he was approaching from the telltale thump of his boots on the cobblestone steps and the way he whistled a song while coming downstairs, a melodic omen of our doom. Having enough time to prepare, we hid behind gingerbread houses and Lego gates, shrinking against knitted grass as the sky would grow overcast with his looming shadow. We performed the same cautionary measures every day, yet he always found us.

He always won.

I hid against the back of the building, facing the plastic tarp sea in hopes that he would be drawn to the city. But an extending shadow and a cold, fleshy finger grazing my face made me realize that my time was finally up.

He picked me up with one hand and my feet dangled helplessly, sticks of stuffing and patchy fabrics swaying frantically against the wind. As I laid on his wooden work table, the artificial heat from his desk lamp nearly burning my skin, I waited to see what would happen next. He went to get his scalpel from upstairs, probably ready to remove my safety eyes. Theoretically, I could run away and strive for a great escape, but the way the heat made my threads stick to the splinters of the table prevented me from going anywhere. I waited for what seemed to be an eternity for him to come back. Time passed quicker in my hometown, so I was plagued with visions of my funeral, a gray Lego block newly stationed in the cemetery with the others. I would be nothing more than another victim.

I waited and waited some more. A distant thump came from upstairs, waking me from a short nap and bringing me back to a harshly lit reality. Although the dancing shadows of his boots didn't creep along the walls this time, I couldn't manage to swallow the lump in my throat. The sky outside blinked from light to dark to light again as if a desk lamp was positioned over Earth the same way one loomed over me. I could hear distant sirens getting louder, and I wondered what had become of the man who had control over my life less than a few sunrises ago. The lamp flickered off by itself, the battery drained to the point of exhaustion. I blinked away sunspots and stretched my legs, popping back to life one limb at a time. The toymaker wasn't coming back and I'd be the first one to return home alive. I was free.

As I trudged down the table and journeyed to town with surprising speed, there was nothing that could have prepared me for what greeted me back home. The streets were barren and stripped of their cheap paint, not a toy car in sight. There were pieces of clay and cotton strewn around the sidewalks, remnants of ancient apartments that were no more. I passed my own neighborhood, trailing along the dry gardens as if I was nothing more than a gust of wind. How long had I been gone? When did my beloved town become a ghost town? Reaching the cemetery, I could no longer see the grass. It was covered with identical gray blocks, a sea of stories that I never got the chance to hear. And in the middle of the cemetery, an empty stone waited with my name on it. There was nothing underneath the patch of grass that laid adjacent to it, but my musings had come true-- everyone thought I had died. I sat down against the headstone, resting my head on its sharp corner. Closing my eyes, I wondered if the toymaker had chosen me because he knew I was nearing my end. A bittersweet smell filled the air, the mellow scent of cotton corpses that somehow put my mind at ease. Dying in a crowd of familiar faces was the better fate compared to rotting on a tyrant's dry torture table, after all. I took my last thoughts to the grave with a smile, a thin curve of thread that was more human than any crescent moon mouth could be. ■

TO MY UNBORN CHILD

By Mia Cheung

Today would have been your 10th birthday. I can't believe how much I miss you after all this time. You would have made double digits today. I would have braided your hair and even laced in a delicate bow and I would have made you blueberry pancakes with a whip cream smiley face. I would have ordered the most expensive chocolate layer cake from the restaurant you love down the street and spoiled you with a banana split.

—even though my mother still does not know of you today.

My darling, they told me that it would get easier. It is not easier to say "sorry" ten years later.

The clinic doors were always open but I promise you there was no simple way in. You must know that my whole body shook when I entered the room that day. They told me to close my eyes; but I couldn't get used to the darkness. Count to ten, masked mouths breathed into my ear. I felt my senses grow dim and my thoughts drown out. One. Am I wrong about this? Two. Please forgive me. Three, four, five, six, seven. Eight, you must understand. Nine. It isn't your fault. Ten.

Saying goodbye wasn't easy. It was bone-breaking and tear-churning and it left my body a graveyard. My darling, sometimes I wonder if it was wrong for me to play God. There are people who slash my body with their split tongues, and slap the words "baby-killer" or "slut" upon my barren insides. Are they right about me?

To this day, I still can't go to the toddler sections of stores or look at my own childhood photographs. I guess I am afraid to see you in the frame. I walk past daycares with my head down and flinch when I see babysitter ads stapled to trees.

I want you to know that it was a choice that swallowed me inside out. But if I didn't, my darling, I don't know if you would have made it to age 10 in the first place. I wouldn't know how to explain that you were created even though "no" was my answer when he pushed himself on me, screaming "Don't you love me?" or "You were asking for it before." I wouldn't know what to tell you when you asked me why we never had any food, why I never had any money, why you never had any father. I wouldn't know.

What I'm trying to tell you is that you are not any less special or any less of a miracle. Baby, I did it because of all the love I had for you. My body is not a warzone. My choice was not political, it was made of heartbeats and your pulse which still runs through my veins. I didn't want to surrender your beautiful breath to the hands of those who lack knowledge in creating you. I wanted you to grow up to feel alive rather than just breathing, I wanted the best for you. Yes, I had showers of kisses and hugs to go around, but you needed more to build a better tomorrow. That is why I couldn't be your mother. At least for right now.

Baby, I love you.

GIRL TALK

A Play by Kaitlyn Coffey

CHARACTERS:

EVIE: A 14 year old freshman, inexperienced with life, thus leading to uncertainty and insecurity.

COLUMBIA: The same age/grade as Evie, albeit feeling more confident and mature. She cares for her friend but doesn't know how to help her with her self-esteem.

SCENE: EVIE is stalling in the bathroom, bored. Her friend, COLUMBIA, enters. Throughout the entire play, the two do various busy tasks; i.e.: washing hands, re-doing makeup.

COLUMBIA: Hey

EVIE: Hey

COLUMBIA: You havin' a good time so far?

EVIE: Yeah, it's pretty good for a superhero flick

COLUMBIA: No, I mean, like, with the date and everything.

EVIE: Oh, you haven't noticed.

COLUMBIA: Noticed what?

EVIE: He's been on his phone all night, Columbia.

COLUMBIA: He probably likes you a lot, so he's nervous.

EVIE: Come on. We both know he's not interested.

COLUMBIA: Well, if that's true, he's an idiot

EVIE: No, he just has eyes.

COLUMBIA: He's just some douche, okay? Some guys are like that.

EVIE: Yeah, I know that. It just kind of sucks that the guy that you set me up with happened to be a douche.

COLUMBIA: It's 2018. You don't need a man.

EVIE: Yes, I know that, too. I'm just saying, -like, I'd like to. Like, y'know, dating and guys and all that stuff is like... that's a part of being a normal teenager. And like... if I don't do it, there's something wrong with me.

COLUMBIA: There's nothing wrong with you. This is just one bad date.

EVIE: I don't think it counts as a date if you don't actually talk.

COLUMBIA: Regardless... it's, like, a luck thing. He just wasn't right for you. There'll be plenty of guys in the future.

EVIE: Yeah. Yeah, I know. Well, I mean, not really. I don't really know anything. Like- y'know- like, there's one side of me that's like, 'oh, you're being irrational' and then there's, like, the other side of me, that's like-

COLUMBIA: -being irrational?

EVIE: I'm just looking at it scientifically, right? Scientists base their conclusions on the information they already know... and so far, I'm pretty much batting zero.

COLUMBIA: Any respectable scientist would say this is too small a sample size.

EVIE: Well, I- (at a loss for words) let's not get into semantics here.

COLUMBIA: You're the one who brought up science.

EVIE: Whatever. Fuck science. I'm gonna die alone, okay?

COLUMBIA: Okay, well, now you're being a little dramatic.

EVIE: Of course you're not gonna get it...

COLUMBIA: Alright, don't- let's not start with this

EVIE: But seriously though. Look at you, look at me. There's a difference. You can't just chalk up our varying degrees of success to luck.

COLUMBIA: Evie-

EVIE: Seriously. People like you. People don't like me. They're like, 'Oh, Evie? She's okay...' I'm the second choice.

COLUMBIA: No matter what I say to you, you're not gonna change your mind.

EVIE: Well, I'm not gonna deny facts.

COLUMBIA: It's not- (sigh of frustration) - you wanna hear a secret?

Beat.

COLUMBIA: No one likes themselves. You can tweet 'yas, queen' and 'slay, bitch' as many times as you want but it doesn't really mean anything... we're all lying to ourselves, until you start to believe it.

Columbia begins to walk to the door, turns back, looks at Evie.

COLUMBIA: So are you coming or not?

BLACKOUT

ESCAPE

By Lucy Cumming

He can hear It behind him, growing closer. What is It? He doesn't know. He used to know. When he started running he had known. But now, when he no longer knows—perhaps it would be worse to know.

His breath comes in large gulps as he runs. The bleak hall stretches as far as he can see, doors at constant intervals. The only color he can see is gray. Dark shadows run across the floor. He smells mold and dust, and he can hear the sound of his feet slapping the floor. It is light in the hallway, but he doesn't know where the light is coming from. No window since—forever ago.

Something is there. He needs to run.

The chase goes on.

He doesn't know when it started, or why.

He just runs, his feet kicking up clouds of dust.

He notices the doors out of the corners of his eyes as he runs past. He does not have the time to devote to thinking or wondering. Each one looks exactly the same. Should he open a door? Or would that allow It to catch him?

None of the doors are open. No sounds come from beyond them. It is always the same.

Run.

Run.

Hear It behind him.

Run faster.

His mind cycles through the same thoughts. Should he look back? Should he open a door?

Should he look back? Should he open a door?

Something moves. Something ahead of him. His eyes widen as he sees an open door down the hallway. *What is that?*

He sees a color. Auburn. Skinny strands.

Underneath, purple. Underneath that, blue. The auburn strands turn toward him.

Two brown circles, in a triangular paleness. He meets the gaze of the circles.

For the first time in many years, he hears the sound of a voice. "Come here." The voice is gentle.

He stares and slows.

The heavy breathing of It behind him spurs him on to speed up again.

What is through the door? And what is this triangular paleness surrounded by the auburn strands, above the purple and blue?

"Come here," says the triangular paleness with the auburn strands again. "I understand what's going on."

He doesn't know how to respond. He has not used his voice since he entered the hallway.

He is rushing toward the triangular paleness with the auburn strands. What should he do?

If he stops, It might get him.

"Take my hand," says the triangular paleness with the auburn strands. It reaches its hand toward him. The hand is small. The tips of the fingers are painted blue.

He races toward the door with the triangular paleness with the auburn strands. He can hear It still, behind him.

The triangular paleness with the auburn strands' hand is getting closer. Its fingers are spread.

The triangular paleness with the auburn strands gets closer and closer. Four doors away. Three. Two. One.

What should he do? Stop? Keep running? Look behind him? Pass the triangular paleness with the auburn strand? Run through the door? His mind begins a new cycle of thoughts.

He has very little time. There are only a few more steps before he reaches the triangular paleness with the auburn strands.

Stay in what he knows, his hallway and It?

Go through the door, to the triangular paleness with the auburn strands?

His feet pound the floor. His ears hear It. He smells mold and dust. He sees the never-ending hallway before him, doors stretching away into forever.

He makes his first noise in forever. "Ss-st-st—"

The triangular paleness with the auburn strands grabs his hand.

He feels its fingers as they close tightly around his hand. He smells a fresh smell, like an ocean breeze.

The triangular paleness with the auburn strands pulls him through the door.

He looks back into the hallway as the triangular paleness with the auburn strands does this. He sees It for the first time since he began running.

And It does not look scary. It is only half the size of him, a light gray color. Hunched over. Limping. It raises its head and fixes him with a hungry look.

The triangular paleness with the auburn strands lunges forward and slams the door. It disappears. The hallway is gone.

He is lying on the ground. One hand rests in the grass. He sees trees, and a small purple flower. In front of him, a flowing blue sea rushes on toward the horizon.

His hand is clutched in the hand of the triangular paleness with the auburn strands.

"Get up," the triangular paleness with the auburn strands says. He is pulled to his feet and she does not let go of his hand. ■

SIXTEEN

By Jael Davis

Sixteen is the beast I seek to kill.
I have beat,
slapped, and
shot her,
But she survives.
She thrives on cruel games she plays.
Drawing me close with
kind looks and soft promises,
She captivates me
And I go to her no matter the consequences.
But she always hurts me.
The calm flames become a raging inferno
She sinks razors into my arms and
Drove teeth into my neck.
The blood she draws twists my stomach.
To her, the life that drains from my body
Tastes of victory.
I drag myself away.
Aching, and heartbroken,
I escape Sixteen.
My body is now stained
With scars, tears, blood and bruises.
I want to go back to her.
To plead, beg, pray she may leave me be.
But I will not go back until I kill her.

Within me a small voice,
Though it is barely audible among others
Reminds me I cannot kill her.
She is my past.
Forgetting her means returning
To bad habits we shared.
Now I understand that I am left with one option:
To make peace with her.
And so, to the beast that is my sixteenth year I say this;
You will forever be a part of me

Forever remain scarred into my memory.
Forever be the reason I wake in the night scared of my thoughts.
Forever be the year that robbed me of
My sanity,
My happiness,
My pride,
But you do not define me.
And so to you,
I offer peace.

MINNOWS

By Hannah Frazer

you are the quiet flutter
and the raging storm
of schooling minnows
never sure in which direction to travel
always obsequious to those
surrounding you

but I ask
what will you do
if one day
you find yourself isolated?

no school in sight
no longer able to hide under the thick blanket
of the collective identity
no longer able to seek comfort
in a sea of familiarity

and what will you do
if you remain in your school?
will the risk of infection
become your fate?

or will you perish
while scurrying and scavenging
in a lethal battle for survival?
it's you and me, anxiety
and only one will fall victim to Darwin's cycle.

These questions are irrelevant
because you couldn't even make the decision
if you had a choice

MONOLOGUE

By Katherine Goldblatt

All the kids will be coming out to play soon, so I'm going to make this quick. Nobody can know I'm here. James would kill me. So listen to me now, and listen *well*.

I've always prided myself on being smart. My intelligence has been the hallmark of my personality. I've gotten top grades on every test, been to math camp; I've done the whole nine yards. I was on track to move up to high school a year early! I've always been the smart kid, and now that's changed. My grades this year have tanked. They've gone kaput. They're all gone! I don't know what could've happened. If only my father hadn't lost his stupid job. If only we didn't have to move in with my mother's *insane* Greek family. If only they would respect that I lock the door when I pee, or that I like to keep to myself sometimes. I swear, I'm going to lose my marbles!

Anyways, enough of my ranting – let's get to the point. I'm losing my grades, which could've gotten me into a good college, which could've gotten me a great job with lots of money. Basically, I'm losing my livelihood before it even begins. So, I need to figure out what the hell I'm supposed to do! That's why I'm here with you. My big brother, James, who's in your grade, always said to stay away from you. Apparently, you benefit from your parents being pharmacists in all the wrong ways. But you're kind; I view you more as a Robin Hood for people without access to what they want. Plus, you've made a *ton* of money; you're rich! You're the only high schooler in our small town to own a car. You can get to school on your own terms instead of having to catch a bus! Even though James says you have terrible grades, you must be making it big somehow. And I want in.

Now, don't say I'm "too young" or that it "isn't a girl's job". I get along well with people. I had to become class president somehow, right? I know what people want. I can give them what they want if I work with you. In return, you'll get a whole new market: bored preteens with an appetite for something new. I tell you, you could sell dog shit to them and they'd buy it with all of their college savings. They're *that* bored. I see you nodding. I knew you'd agree! You know the value of a good market.

I do, too. We'd make a great team. We'd be rich, and then my father wouldn't need his job, and I wouldn't have to live with my crazy Greek family, and I'd get my own space, *and* I wouldn't need my grades to live! Plus, you'd gain insightful business tactics, and more market – which means more income.

So... what do you say?

(Pause.)

You can even start working with me tomorrow morning! I'll meet you right here at ten o'clock sharp. I'll bring my Greek aunt's pills, and we can hide them between the swings and the sl-

(Pause. The girl looks off into the distance, and her eyes widen in fear.)

Oh, shit. I think that's James. ■

CHARACTERS:

Danny, 27

Harold, 31

TIME: 2018, afternoon

PLACE: Danny's apartment

(It is dark with the shades down and empty pizza boxes and beer cans.)

DANNY: *(sighs)* I want to be alone right now.

HAROLD: You've been alone since the funeral, living in this shithole. And Jesus, when was the last time you showered.

(Danny doesn't respond)

HAROLD: Come on Danny, you can't just shut everyone out of your life and expect to feel better.

DANNY: What do you want me to do, go on living regularly, as if nothing happened?

HAROLD: I want you to be reasonable, you have a son now-

DANNY: *(interrupted Harold)* NO! Do not call it my son.

(HAROLD moves an empty pizza box off a chair and sits down)

HAROLD: You cannot blame him for what happened.

(DANNY gets up from the couch and begins to pace the room)

DANNY: Well why can't I? It was his birth that killed her.

HAROLD: Come on man, you and I both know he had no control over Michelle's death. Sometimes bad things just happen.

DANNY: *(emotional)* Does that really matter? I can't even bring myself to visit him without remembering Michelle. Without remembering how alive she made me feel or how she's gone now. Forever!

(DANNY sits down next to Harold)

(quieter)

Forever. Oh, we had so many plans.

(Danny yells and throws a vase which shatters on the wall)

HAROLD: Goddamnit Danny, that vase was a gift from our mother. Now listen, I know you don't want your son to have the same childhood we did. To have a dad walk out. He left us Danny, just like how you are leaving this kid who ain't done nothing wrong. Look, you grew up hating our father even more than I did. It's funny, you're the one who ended up more like him.

DANNY: You don't understand.

HAROLD: Don't start with that bullshit, before Michelle was your wife, she was my friend and before that, she was someone else's friend and even before that she was someone's daughter. Her death didn't only affect you. It was a tragedy shared by many. But, do you know what's an even bigger tragedy?

(Harold leans forward, elbows on his knees)

Her greatest wish being unfulfilled.

(Pause)

DANNY: *(quietly)* She always wanted a family?

HAROLD: Listen closely Danny, that kid is your son, you hear me, and you will raise that boy, raise him better than our parents raised us. And as cliché as it may sound, it's what Michelle would have done.

DANNY: *(pleading)* But, I promised myself that I would make her life perfect, did I do that Harold?

(Harold gets up and grabs his coat)

HAROLD: I believe that the value of a person's life is not determined by the time spent living, but by the time spent in remembrance. Make of that what you will, little brother.

(Harold leaves Danny's room. Danny looks at the shattered vase on the ground)

DANNY: *(under his breath)* He's got a point

(Danny begins to walk towards the door)

DANNY: Harold, wait up!

BLACKOUT

LOVERS IN THE LIMELIGHT PREGNANCY AND PINA COLADAS

A Play by Abigail Hasselbrink

CHARACTERS

JACK, 28: *A young man of questionable morals. He is lost in life but has finally found love.*

KEVIN, 30: *A former bad boy, but now a devout Christian. Sensible and in love.*

LAUREN, 30: *A devout Christian who loves her husband but has made some mistakes.*

VERONICA, 28: *Bailey's sister. An engineer who loves Jack but does not want to take him back.*

BAILEY, 26: *Veronica's sister. A barista who is in love with Jack and will do anything for him.*

BILL, 70: *Jack and Kevin's father. Retired and traditional. He thinks he fought in Vietnam, but did not.*

KAREN, 68: *Jack and Kevin's mother. Typical housewife role that she has been raised to be; dedicated to her husband.*

TIME: *The present, evening*

PLACE: *A hotel in Hawaii.*



SCENE ONE: *(The lights come up. VERONICA rushes outside the hotel and calls an Uber. JACK runs outside and meets her there.)*

JACK: Veronica, wait. Please don't go.

VERONICA: Jack, you've made yourself very clear what you want. Goodbye.

JACK: Veronica, Bailey means nothing to me! I thought I loved her, but the only reason I invited her here is because I was trying to get over you. It didn't take long to realize that that's impossible. Veronica...

(He holds her hands in his.)

You are the love of my life. Please, I will go and break up with Bailey right now if you can tell me that you won't go.

(VERONICA looks down, then looks into his eyes. She is about to cry. The lights fade out.)



SCENE TWO: *(Lights up to a gift shop at the hotel. We see KEVIN shopping, looking sharply dressed for his father's birthday dinner. Enter JACK, rushing in, looking frantic.)*

KEVIN: Jack?

JACK: *(notices his brother for the first time)* Huh? Oh, hey man. *(he continues to search)*

KEVIN: Dude, what are you doing here? You aren't even dressed. We have reservations in fifteen minutes!

JACK *(looking to avoid the question)* Well... well what are you doing here?

KEVIN: *(he exhales, disappointed in himself)* I forgot to buy Dad a birthday present. I thought he would assume that this whole trip was the present, y'know, but then he was talking earlier today about how this rainy weather is the worst thing ever and how he just hopes he can get some good presents.

(JACK, noticing what he was looking for, which is a ring, quickly picks it up and takes it to the checkout counter. He purchases it.)

What did you just buy?

JACK: Later, man. *(He exits, leaving KEVIN confused. Lights fade out.)*



SCENE THREE: *(JACK enters his hotel room to see BAILEY waiting impatiently on the foot of the bed.)*

BAILEY: Where the hell have you been? We have reservations at seven!

JACK: I know, Bailey. I'm going to go get ready.

(He exits. A knock on the door. BAILEY goes to answer it. Enter VERONICA.)

BAILEY: What the hell are you doing here?

VERONICA: *(storms in; rising tension)* Has he told you yet?

BAILEY: Told me what?

VERONICA: You and him? It's over. You never meant anything to him and he was in love with me all along.

BAILEY: What? Jack wouldn't do that. We love each other. He told me.

VERONICA: Yeah? He was lying. He's picking me.

BAILEY: What makes you so sure? Couldn't he have been lying with you? You're just trying to break us up. What makes you think that he's going to pick you?

VERONICA: Because, Bailey, I'm pregnant! *(Several beats.)* I haven't told him yet. Bailey,

(she goes over to her)

I'm going to be a mother. And Jack is going to be the father. It's time for you to stop. We are a family now.

(She exits, leaving BAILEY in shock. Enter JACK.)

(continued on page 18)

(continued from page 17)

JACK: Veronica—I, I mean Bailey, what's up?

BAILEY: (to herself) I cannot let her take him from me. (In a panic) Jack, I'm pregnant.

(JACK is shocked as the lights fade out.)



SCENE FOUR: (The scene of the birthday dinner party. A fancy restaurant. JACK, BAILEY, LAUREN, KEVIN, KAREN, and BILL sit at a table.)

BILL: Good lord, doesn't this place have any good service? I tell ya, the last time I waited this long was back in 'Nam, when--

(A Vietnamese man jumps out of nowhere and holds up his hands like a gun, pointing towards BILL. BILL proceeds to do the same, as he believes he would have done if he had fought in Vietnam.)

KEVIN: Whoa, whoa, whoa!

(A waiter gets control of the Vietnamese man while KAREN and JACK help their father come back into the present space, so to speak.)

Are you okay, Dad?

BILL: Whew, yes, thank you, son. Still got those fighting instincts, I suppose.

(He does a military salute to no one in particular.)

KEVIN: Okay. Maybe we can all just have a nice, calm, war-free birthday dinner. Happy birthday, Dad.

(Motions to the waiter)

Can we get a round of pina coladas for the table?

(He looks at his wife and smiles.)

Well, all for the table minus one.

KAREN: (she smiles hopefully) Lauren? Kevin?

JACK: Make it minus two.

(He looks at BAILEY and, taking a deep breath, knowing he is making the biggest mistake of his life, gets down on one knee.)

Bailey Anderson, will you marry me?

(KAREN looks absolutely giddy. BILL is disappointed that his birthday dinner is being upstaged. KEVIN looks shocked. BAILEY looks ecstatic.)

BAILEY: Oh, of course I will, Jack!

(She kisses him passionately, and the entire restaurant applauds. JACK kisses her back, but with a lack of passion. The lights fade out.)



SCENE FIVE: (VERONICA is waiting patiently outside of the hotel for JACK. She believes that he has broken up with BAILEY. Enter BAILEY.)

BAILEY: Hello Veronica.

(VERONICA turns around.)

VERONICA: Hello, Bailey.

BAILEY: Are you enjoying your evening?

VERONICA: I guess you could say that.

BAILEY: Wonderful. Me too.

(VERONICA looks at BAILEY, confused.)

VERONICA: Didn't you just get dumped?

BAILEY: No.

VERONICA: (Stumped; she thinks her boyfriend hasn't done it yet) Oh.

BAILEY: But I sincerely hope you'll consider coming to the wedding.

(VERONICA does not register this at first. Then, it hits her. She sees BAILEY exit, waving goodbye, flaunting her gift shop engagement ring. She is shocked and heartbroken. She crumbles to the ground.)

BLACKOUT

RESCUE MISSION

By Dori Hoffman-Filler

My mom said he was tall. I imagined he was a skyscraper, touching the tips of the clouds with the breaths he took when he told me he loved me. My mom said his eyes were green, the kind of green that sort of looked like late spring. She said he wore oxford shirts with the collars folded down, but I knew he only wore them to make her happy. His favorite was the tattered Beatle's top he had bought at a concert who knows when. My mom said he smelled like home but I knew better. He smelled like gasoline, soil, and sweat. He smelled like Nam.

He was tall enough to be a target. His eyes were uniform green- he tried to become a forest. His Beatles t-shirt sat folded on my nightstand exactly where he had left it. He stopped smelling like home a long time ago. I don't know when it happened.

Now he's small. He cries in my mom's arms late at night when he's convinced the rest of the world is sleeping soundly. But I hear him. Wrapped in a blanket made in the country he's running from, I listen silently. He's afraid of his own shadow. Or maybe ghosts are hunting him.

The Beatle's shirt won't fit him anymore—at least, that's what I imagine. Now, he only wears Mom's robe, he's skin and bones. He's stopped eating. He smells like sad. Or tired. Or lonely. Dad stopped being Dad and I don't remember when.

Sometimes, I play pretend. Pretend that he comes to my soccer games. Pretend that he sees me get accepted into college- his alma mater. Pretend that he has watched me grow and become a woman he wants to know. I pretend he's the same strong soldier as when he packed his bags and went away.

I'm tired of playing pretend.

The day he was supposed to come home, I was ready. Ready to hug him. Ready to love him. Ready to tell him: I'm so proud of you, Dad. But he didn't come home. Sure, his body came back, but his mind was *trapped* in a war zone. He jumped at small noises. He stared, waiting, watching something no one else could see. He flinched, as if my touch would wound him. Grenades were falling behind his eyes and my mom and I couldn't rescue him. I couldn't save him. ■

BACK OUT OF THE DUST

By Ray Hovis

When I was a boy, my regular preschool would sometimes close for a day if Suzy, the woman who ran it, was sick or out of town. When this was the case, I would spend the day at another preschool in a rural area occupied only by farmland and wilderness. A long drive through thick forests brought me to a mansion built of round stones and cement with a thatched roof. Two of the sides were entirely covered in ivy, with a third becoming so. The property was owned by a mysterious family of Scottish descent, and the preschool run by the mother, a tall woman with grey frizzled hair who we referred to only as Ms. Mary. She would watch me and several other children as we played with balls and frisbees or wandered the spacious fields. This family had a very old dog named Merlin. He hobbled around with us children, and I loved petting him, for he seemed so kind and wise. I was aware, even at my young age, that Merlin was an ancient dog, and likely had little life left in him, but still, after several years of going to Ms. Mary's preschool from time to time, I invariably found Merlin, old, but well.

One day, I was waiting for my mother to pick me up from this preschool, but she was running rather late. All of the other children had been picked up. To a child so young, this was very distressing. I looked around for Merlin for comfort, but he was not outside. I decided to enter the stone mansion to ask Ms. Mary why my mother had not arrived.

The inside of the mansion was quite odd, having one wall decorated with tribal masks and another bearing antlers tied together with twine and dangling from hooks. From my abbreviated perspective, it created quite the occult atmosphere. Keeping my eyes on the floor, I walked into the living room, hoping to find Miss Mary there. I did not, but beside the raging hearth, Merlin lay on his side breathing heavily. He tried to raise his head several times, but it always fell back down after rising but a few inches. His breathing got steadily more ragged and soft, until finally, it stopped entirely. I had expected this to happen, but to see it in front of my own eyes was disturbing to say the least. I took a small step toward Merlin, then backed away bumping into a chest of drawers with devils carved into it. At that moment Ms. Mary entered the room. I was going to say something to her, but could choke nothing out. She did not see me huddled next to the drawers, so she casually approached Merlin's corpse and knelt beside it. Laying a hand by his until recently beating heart, she muttered a few words, and with a jerk, Merlin struggled to his feet and hobbled off. Ms. Mary still had not seen me, so I stumbled out of the mansion, breathless, to see my mother waiting in the car. We drove home in silence.

In coming visits to Ms. Mary's preschool, I would find a place in the fields to hide until the day was over, avoiding Ms. Mary and Merlin, but by my last day, I had concluded that I had simply misinterpreted what I saw. My mother came to a stop before the mansion, and I approached Merlin, sleeping on the threshold, to pat him good-bye, but as I touched his head of matted grey hair, he did not wake, and I noticed his chest was still. I reeled away in disgust and horror, and quickly slammed the car door behind me. As we drove away from the stone mansion for the last time, I saw the door open and Ms. Mary drag Merlin inside. She cast me a final knowing look before shutting the door behind her. ■

MY GIRLFRIEND SUCKS

By Emma Hua

OW! That hurt a lot! It stung like a mother effin' bee! Honestly, who hits that hard?! I know that I get too much into character, Lacey, but you know how much I LOVE LOVE LOVE acting. Just imagine it! Jason Brad Thompson, THE NEXT LEONARDO DICAPRIO! You know how I like getting into the role of characters and acting to all of their breaks and their conflicting emotions and how stupid and oblivious some people can b-

Oh? What was that? You don't like my decision of being Pennywise? BUT YOU LITERALLY TEXTED ME THAT YOU WANTED TO GO AS A COUPLE, AS GEORGIE AND PENNYWISE A FEW WEEKS AGO! You can't just change your mind now! ESPECIALLY when I spent over NINETY dollars on this damn costume! You know how I don't like clown costumes, especially after I watched that movie *Clown*. I don't like the idea of turning into a freakin' demon clown. It's so scary and I don't wanna EAT children!

Oh, yeah. Say that I'm a hypocrite because I'm being a child-eating demonic entity from the Metaverse in Stephen King's universe! YOU wanted to do this couple Halloween-costume bullshit for this effin' costume contest that won't even give the winner a fifty-dollar Amazon gift card. You said you wanted to do PENNYWISE and GEORGIE and that I SHOULD get into the role of Pennywise for it to be authentic. I practiced and practiced for MONTHS for this, just to make YOU happy, at the expense of MY happiness. I even did the LIP thing that Bill Skaarsgård, who you have a massive celebrity crush on, did. And now you wanna go and get dressed as fucking Robin and Starfire?!

No. Don't get me wrong, Lacey. I love the Teen Titans, obviously not as much as you. But you CANNOT tell me this LAST minute, a week BEFORE the Halloween costume competition. Besides that, don't you think that I deserve something after everything I've done for you for the sake of your happiness? I guess my dad was wrong when he said that I should appease a woman in order to be happy.

(Truth be told: I AM SO FUCKING MISERABLE! I HATE LACEY WITH THE PUREST INTENTION OF MY HEART! Actually, I did love her. I did. She was a shy girl and my best friend, really wanted me to get with her, so I was like, okay. Don't give a flying f, but whatever. And Lacey was actually a cool girl. EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT SHE'S EXTREMELY SELFISH AND I CAN TOTALLY SEE WHY NO GUY WANTS TO DATE HER! I honestly feel like she's Satan himself (herself in this case?), especially after she punched me in the effin' face. I swear, she broke my nose. I can feel the effin' blood dripping down my effin' nose!)

Know what, Lacey? I'm just done. Honestly. Like, one more word out of you and I WILL THROW MYSELF OUT OF THE WINDOW! That's it. Yeah, see if I fucking care! You can cry as much as you want. BUT I DON'T CARE! I'M OUTTA HERE! SAYONARA, BITCH! ■

ON THE BREAKFAST TABLE

By Claire Hyde

And on the breakfast table beside the sausages lies the plum.

And it is wrapped in its mauve cashmere scarf
in its nakedness, in its reflectiveness.

And this is a plum because there is a hole
like a belly button where it was connected,
where it used to become itself.

And this is a plum because when I tear into its flesh
my teeth scrape against each other and my tongue
tells me that this does not taste like a goldfish.

And this is a plum because the pit like the wood of the cedar tree
clings to the shred of its former self like the nucleus of an atom.

And this is a plum because it is neither a radish nor a red brick house.

And this is a plum because when I look at you and tell you
that this is not a red brick house you nod your head.

But most of all this is a plum on the breakfast table because with a voice
like the flame of the stove or the feeling of flour against my skin

This plum declares itself to be true.

GOODBYE

By Ben Kimmel

The steep street is gray and bumpy
And the boys descend it
Like a staircase.
As they go further and further down,
So does the sun,
Shrouding them in shadows
And dim pink-orange light.
The sun rests on the horizon,
Digging itself a hole
To hide from the moon
That slowly brightens.
It watches the boys as they walk deeper
Into the night.
Feet clapping on the ground,
Their mouths stay pursed
Like stuck zippers
On an old worn jacket
That sits lonely in a closet
Waiting to be thrown away.

Arms hanging at their sides,
Eyelids drooping
Like dusty curtains dangling
Over small panes of glass
Holding back a flood.
They turn into the empty parking lot
And lumber towards
The thick metal door
With locks tighter than zipper lips
And a window smaller than glass pane eyes.
They both stop
Look at the door
At the peach colored sky
At their deformed shadows
Crawling and writhing
They sit down on the cold stone stoop
Trying to plant themselves
Deep into the ground
With roots that can't be cut
Or burned
Or torn.

THE DIARY OF A DISASTER

By Sofia M. Lauzurique

September 20, 2017: first day

It was five a.m. I woke up to a loud thud that day, there was something on the roof that fell. I knew what was out there, I knew that it was nothing good. But I was still surprised when I opened the door and left the safety of my room. I listened and I heard wind gusting and roaring like a feral animal. The rain was pattering violently on the storm shutters. The lights were already out and there wasn't even a sign of sunrise. It was complete darkness.

I went to my parents room hearing the loud thuds, bangs and crashes. We couldn't even imagine what was happening out there. Water was out and the phone signal also. There was no way of knowing how my other family members were doing; there was no way to know if they were safe. Even if we had each other as a family, we were alone.

Three hours into the storm my brother, my father and I decided to check the outside of the house, even though Hurricane María hadn't completely calmed down. The feeling of cold wind pushing against me was the same feeling of being overwhelmed by fear of what we would see. The rain was like needles stabbing and pricking at my skin, while small twigs and pebbles would scratch at our skin. Everything looked grim and dark, we have never a silence quite like this.

Twelve hours in: Everyone is slowly emerging from their houses to see the damage that was caused by her hand, everyone grim and weary. No communication and the main road was blocked with 8-foot trees and once-green leaves. My family separated, to find a way out. There was no warmth in the sun during that time, just a gray hue around us. Driving through makeshift rivers to get to the people we love, and wondering if they were okay. No way to feel reassured.

November 15, 2017: two months after the hurricane

There was no light because the generator stopped working. We were three weeks in without the generator. The heat was unbearable and there was no way to escape it. Because our house did not have windows that could open. Two of our five dogs would pant non-stop, the other three ran loose out the backdoor. We had to go get chinese and pizza take-out form the restaurants that were available. No fans worked, only our little wind-up radio where we would hear the voices of people calling out to their families. The pleas were too hard to hear; it made my heart churn and got my mood to a lower level than it was.

School had started up again, but it was the same heat as in my house. Those days where the sun was forgiving, during the weekend, my brother and I would go to the trees in the backyard and start chopping all the trunks we could. Many of the rainbow eucalyptus trees had been ripped and tossed by the storm. It was the only thing we could do because we were tired of playing cards and board games. It was funny because it was a great bonding moment between me and my brother, for the fact is he would teach me how I could chop the trunks and we would threaten each other with the hatchets and almost had play fights with them. But my mom caught us just in time, before we could get hurt like some dumbasses. We would throw branches at each other or he would argue with me because I wanted to make coasters out of the tri-colored trunks. I got the coasters in the end. Families bonded throughout this disaster, because we couldn't use our phones and text people constantly or be in social media. We laughed, we cried and we argued but we were stronger like this. And we needed to be stronger.

One of my favorite moments, even though those were extremely slim, was when my dad would come from work at night. He would always try and restart the generator. I would always go with him to be able to sit on the roof and get fresh air. I helped him most of the time but the moments where he would rest I would look up at the stars and try to make out constellations. And there were moments where bats would fly above us and made eerie noises. And I could see the small forest near the river behind my house. It was a moment of peace, with crickets and coqui's singing their constant song that soothes me to the core. ■

HOT BUSINESS

(IN WHICH BEING IN HIGH SCHOOL DOESN'T MAKE INFORMATION BROKERING ANY LESS CREEPY)

A Play by Nicole Lee

CHARACTERS:

ELISE: *youngest child of four, senior editor-in-chief of the Callaway Beacon. A freshman at Callaway Academy, she recently revived the newspaper with a group of friends and has been approached by Allen with a story pitch.*

ALLEN: *photographer for the Callaway Beacon. A junior at Callaway Academy – photographed the financial records and brought the information to Elise. He wants the Beacon to report on the scandal contained in the information given, and he clearly has personal motivations behind this all.*

SCENE ONE.

LIGHTS UP ON THE CALLAWAY BEACON OFFICE. *Elise is speaking to Allen. The lights are dim, as it is nighttime outside, and most people have gone home for the day. Allen has a camera slung around his neck and is holding a flash drive in one hand. The atmosphere is tense.*

ELISE: I don't appreciate having my time wasted, Allen. Tell me what you want so we can both go home.

ALLEN: I wouldn't be so impatient if I were you. The information I've got could make or break the Beacon.

ELISE: *(skeptically)* And I should believe you *because...*?

(She taps her foot against the floor, barely able to contain herself. Allen looks on, amused.)

ALLEN: Your brother trusts my judgement.

ELISE: I'm *not* my brother.

ALLEN: You're right, you're right, you're not. Sean has *much* more patience than you.

(Pause. Allen raises an eyebrow.)

ALLEN: *(cont'd)* And, he knows how to play the game. It takes two to tango, little sis – and this info I have? You're going to want it. *Trust me.*

ELISE: Fine. Give me the flash drive.

(Allen holds the flashdrive over his head)

ALLEN: Uh, not yet. Man, you're raring to go, huh?

ELISE: Didn't I *just* say not to waste my time?

ALLEN: Did you actually think I'd be giving you this info for *free*? No way. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. If you want the records on this drive, you've gotta do something for me.

(Scowling, Elise leans back onto her desk.)

ELISE: I figured.

ALLEN: That's cute. And a lie, but I'll let it pass.

(Allen leans forward. Something shifts – tension rises between them.)

ALLEN: *(cont'd)* If I give you this information, you write an article on it. I don't *care* if you suddenly decide you don't want to, I don't care if you get a threat on your life. You *write* me a fucking article.

(Elise shoves him backwards.)

ELISE: No way! No deal. How am I supposed to know what problems you're going to start for me with whatever's on that drive?

ALLEN: And if I say it's worth your time?

ELISE: *(scoffs)* Then I'll say you sound like a used car salesman. What, gonna pitch me a Toyota Camry next?

ALLEN: The family resemblance

is getting fuzzier and fuzzier. But *seriously*, Tanaka. You're going to want to take this deal.

ELISE: Give me a preview of the files, or it's off. If *you're* this desperate, there's no way I'm going in blind.

ALLEN: What's with the emphasis on *you're*? I'm hurt.

(Elise rolls her eyes and pulls out her phone.)

ELISE: I'm not dumb.

(Reading from her phone,)

Allen Gray, junior. Mainly art focused classes, with the lowest grade being a C in Pre-Calc. But that's not what I care about. You're an information broker, and people like *you* -

(Jabs a finger towards him)

- don't get nervous unless this is *personal*.

ALLEN: So it is. Sue me.

ELISE: So, you need me just as much as you *claim* I need you. Easy as that. Give me a preview of the files, and *I'll* take it to a vote during club hours.

(She checks her watch)

ELISE: *(cont'd)* Which start at six thirty am, by the way. Not seven thirteen at night.

ALLEN: I take it back – you're Sean's little sister. We've got a deal, little Tanaka. Give me a desktop to plug this into.

(Elise gestures to an old modem in the corner)

ELISE: Be my guest.

ALLEN: Cautious. I like it.

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(He plugs the flash drive in and types for a short while, before gesturing Elise over.)

ALLEN: Come take a look at these.

ELISE: Wait a second...are these... budget fills?

ALLEN: Yeah. Budget records from the past 20 years of Callaway Academy. Notice anything fishy?

ELISE: Yeah. These numbers don't add up at all. (Beat) Are you implying what I think you are?

ALLEN: That Callaway is balls deep in an embezzlement scandal? Yes, yes I am. This. I want you to blow this case wide open.

(Another beat. Elise pauses, considering.)

ELISE: ... We'll take it to a vote at the breakfast.

ALLEN: So you see where I'm coming

from. Who cares that every kid here has a parent with a salary well into the millions? It doesn't mean that the person behind this should get off scot-free.

ELISE: No, I do. I'll push in favor of the article, but if it falls through, I'll go to my brother.

ALLEN: No!

ELISE: (startled) Why not?

ALLEN: Little Tanaka, Sean is in administration's pocket – he's the student council president. If he goes to administration with this info, it's never going to see the light of day. We keep this between us and the rest of your breakfast club.

ELISE: Student-run newspaper. And fine. But don't get mad when I finally get to say I told you so.

ALLEN: I wouldn't dream of it.

(He hands her the flash drive, beginning to walk away.)

ELISE: Allen, wait.

ALLEN: Huh?

ELISE: Six thirty am. Same room – we're meeting to discuss pieces for the month. Sit in on it.

ALLEN: I'm...not a part of Beacon staff.

ELISE: (she holds up the flash drive.) Maybe not before, but you are now. Sit in, I don't wanna make it mandatory.

ALLEN: Okay, okay. I'll sit, I'll sit.

ELISE: Great! I'll see you tomorrow then - bright and early.

BLACKOUT



"Being a part of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute really helped start my summer on the right foot. I was able to grow and develop as a writer alongside people who share the same passions that I do. Without this program, I wouldn't have been able to step outside my comfort zone."

— Jordan Che

DECOMPOSITION

By Mitchell Leung

There is a computer in me. Calculating, constantly seeking connections with other devices of humanity. Downloading, processing, streaming, replaying. Making decisive actions & movements. But sometimes, it crashes. It takes long times to buffer and load. Glitches overrun it rampantly and I oftentimes I am not sure where my personal data has been secreted away. But I operate, and execute.

There is a treasure chest in me. It hides well, not seeking companionship & discovery but avoiding it. Its jewels are whispers; its contents only know darkness. The wealth is dangerous—some is of appreciable value but too much of it brings the curse of knowledge. The chest sits proudly—a sturdy vessel, sparsely but masterfully designed, to dwell and contain.

There is a moon in me. Every night it climbs as high as it can and rests there, alone. Every dawn, it sinks again, wistfully watching from the shadows. For even in darkness—the solitude of the night—it raises itself high and faces upon the sleeping world, the dormant universe. It is enough that it can cast some spare bits of light onto the world & give those down below a guide through the dark; it is enough for itself.

There is a dinosaur in me. It roars, it stamps, it champs. It is old, ancient, & knows a few things. It is hardy, it is strong, it does not bend. It knows that it is out of time. It doesn't fit in. Terrorizing a world of the fearless, dominating a world of leaders. It will keep going, but for how much longer?

There is a staircase in me. Each step is a level, a different complex. It winds through & branches off into many different sectors of my body. My steps are choices—the results thereof or the genesis of, I'm not sure. Trips and falls on this path bring you to soft places, spots of recovery. You fall, I will catch. There is no corner where you cannot come back from. Ascendancy and descendancy on here are all equal; no matter where you go, you end up in the right place.

There is a monster in me. Filling me out. Bulging at the seams. Looming. Threatening. Each movement is an act of concentration, of will. A puppet master, a marionettist whose fingers are slipping. My loose scarecrow façade is worn, beaten. A darkness that cannot be locked up rails and screams against the restraints, the feeble shell shielding the world from its torment. Hateful pale purple streaks and flares emanate from this suit of armor, this shelter constructed to contain the storm inside.

There is a question in me. A burning question, that gnaws at its tightly woven cage of rope, tethering and containing it. A question like this yearns to roam free, to dart out into the world and spread. Viral proliferation to extend its lifespan, the duration of its existence. Soon, it would consume the entire world, and shut out any answers from finding their way home.

In me is a house of artifacts, a museum of mystery and absence. You're welcome to walk around, find the featured exhibits, the stationary acts, the taxidermied lives. Admission is free—you pay the price of walking out later on. Even I am a tourist, a guest within the museum. I cannot curate presentations, or generate new attractions. My only options are to stay away from the interior—skip the museum, the lines are too long—or to explore every archive and unearth every piece of the puzzle to put the picture together now. I am not just a man—I am a young adult and a teenager and the child. You have been here every day, yet something different always changes the dynamic of these rooms. Maybe it is because there are new wings, now, that you have not explored yet. And these old ones soon will no longer tell you who you are. ■

STARLESS SKY

By Mairead Levitt

Smoke formed a trail through the night air, drifting from Arman's cigarette. The red solo cup filled with cheap beer in his hand was held as elegantly as if it was a fine whiskey. His feet dangled from the side of the roof of a rundown motel a few towns away from where he had lived his whole life. He put his head back, inhaling deeply, hoping to dispel his troubles with the tobacco.

The bright, neon sign advertising The Riptide Motel: Best Rate in Miles shown through the starless night sky, illuminating him with its red glow. Staring at the endless darkness through his smoke, Arman was reminded how humans made the stars disappear. The stars, which had been there for more time than humans could even comprehend, were seemingly gone. He couldn't comprehend how his race could make the things naturally lighting their lives vanish, for the shallow reason of needing more light themselves.

A deep base vibrated the entire roof from the party where he supposed to be, shaking him from his existential trance. His best friend Chris told him he should come because it would be fun. It never was, yet Arman came to this particular one with some hope.

While he had stayed in his usual place in the corner, he eventually struck up a conversation with a guy who he didn't know. Neither Arman nor Chris knew the guy throwing the party. Chris was friends with a friend of a friend, and Arman didn't know where he fit in, not that he ever did.

Like always, background came up. The first question the man asked was where Arman was from. He answered that he was from five miles away. It was true.

The next question was the dreaded "But where are you *really* from?" And Arman snapped. While he didn't do anything drastic, he did turn away without responding, and he left the party entirely. He ended up on the roof and didn't plan to go back to the party.

His nickname didn't distinguish him. To make life easier on everyone, he always went by Ari. The man he was talking to didn't know his real name or anything else about him. Arman was born and raised right here in Nebraska. The only thing about him that stood out was the way he looked. His grandparents were refugees, fleeing to America when his mom was an infant. His other grandparents had already been settled in America as their parents had been the ones to escape from Iran. He was an American, despite the fact that he looked a little different.

He got asked where he was *really* from on almost a daily basis, but it seemed worse at that moment, maybe because he thought the man would be interested in him as a person. He should have known not to expect the best. It always disappointed him in the long run. The starless sky bothered Arman because of how much he related to it.

"Fuck!" he shouted, anger swelling up into his chest. He chucked the half empty cup as hard as he could. As he was only up two stories, the cup spilled when it hit the empty parking lot, but it bounced away. It was destined to become one of the many pieces of trash that were left around. The motel was the main place where teenagers went to hang out, as it was far enough away from parents, so the number of beer bottles, cigarettes, and half-smoked joints was somewhat amazing.

"Why'd you leave?" Arman didn't realize that Chris had climbed his way up to the roof. He was actually surprised because the slur in his voice and stumble in his step made it clear that he had drunk more than enough for the night. In order to avoid buying a room, Arman knew he would be the designated driver, a slightly scary thought considering he had been drinking but less scary than Chris driving.

"Do you ever find it stupid that to be who we really want to be, we have to wear a mask for most of our life?" Arman didn't think he wasn't drunk, so he didn't know why he was getting so deep, but the question occurred to him and he couldn't shake it.

Chris blinked once, and Arman realized he found the worst person to ask. "I don't know dude. What do you mean?"

Arman paused, not sure if he wanted to actually share his thoughts. Drunk Chris was one thing but telling Very Drunk Chris anything was dangerous because he would pass it on to others. Arman took a drag from his cigarette and paused to watch the small glow emanating at the end of the cigarette. He didn't know why, but he felt connected to it. There was a spark in him that, for a moment, burned brightly. He had a purpose on the mortal plane. Also like the flame, he realized, he was slowly burning out as well. Maybe he was a little drunk. He knew he shouldn't rule out his drunkenness yet.

"Uh, nothing, man," he shrugged.

It wasn't nothing because it was never just nothing. Nothing was what he told his father when he was watching porn when he was fourteen and his dad

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asked what he was doing. Nothing was what he told his mother whenever she asked about his love life. He couldn't bring himself to tell her that he didn't like girls. Nothing was what he told security guards when he was pulled over in airports and they asked if he had anything dangerous on him. Just because his skin resembled his parents' dark skin. Of course, he looked Iranian, he descended from Iran, but that didn't mean that he was a terrorist. "Nothing" meant there was something that he wanted to say but he couldn't bring himself to say it.

He wanted to be a philosopher, but no one wanted to hire him or admit him to college because of how he looked. If he said his name was Ari over the phone, he was fine, but as soon as he showed

up, they had filled the spot. He didn't know how he would tell Chris any of the conflicts inside of him. He was a dreamer, but he was a twenty-three-year old with only a high school diploma and no plan on where he was going in life. He had to pretend to be a white man to get anything. To become who he wanted to be, he had to pretend to be someone else. It screwed up his mind, but not in anyone else's.

Chris belched and drained what was left in his cup. Arman regretted throwing his cup away. His deep moods usually turned into existential crises, which were always better to deal with when he had alcohol.

"I'm gonna go get something to drink," Chris grunted, and Arman nodded. He wanted to be alone at the moment.

He saw a star twinkle and for some reason felt hope blossom in his chest. The star blinked, and, with a sigh, he realized that it was a plane. The sky was still starless. He felt like he was the sky. He, like the endless dark abyss, had potential inside him, but no one could see it. He was too afraid to apply for college and too terrified to come out to his parents. He knew he could be strong, but he didn't even try to be.

He stood with a yawn and stretched. His shirt, which was too small, came up over his growing stomach. With no job or anything to do, he had been eating more than he could work off. He dropped his cigarette and stomped it out because part of him was mad that it could have a spark when his had gone out. ■

"These two weeks have been an amazing experience, both for working with wonderful, like-minded people and for exploring my creative freedom. Meeting these teachers and these other young writers has really helped me develop my writing and has made me feel more confident to let my creativity run loose. The experience of having to live in a dorm, as well as having to take the initiative with my writing, has really helped me."

— Ben Kimmel



DINNER BREAK

A Play by Liam Mackey

CHARACTERS

VLADISLAV IVANOVICH

SOKOLOV: *a rail-thin man in his thirties dressed in a grey suit and wool overcoat.*

ANDREI PETROVICH EGOROV: *a shorter, older (40s) man. He wears a wrinkled brown suit half-unbuttoned over a rumpled white shirt.*

TIME: *Late at night, 1972.*

SCENE: *A run-down Moscow café. It's nearly empty except for the two men, aside from a clearly nervous bartender wiping down the bar and casting glances over at Vladislav and Andrei. The décor is the sort that must have once spoken to the modernity of the postwar Soviet Union – white and red, tastefully accented in dark woods —, but is now faded and scuffed. Three posters in Russian hang upon the walls, one haphazardly pinned over a landscape painting.*

(As the lights come up, ANDREI is chain-smoking, one cigarette in his mouth and two more stubbed out on the table. VLADISLAV looks entirely calm and composed, his hands folded over a battered wool hat on the scratched table in front of him.)

VLADISLAV: I would normally speak of this in my office, but I confess — I love the food here. After a long day, to settle down with another loyal Soviet citizen and eat, drink... ah, the small pleasures. Have you ever eaten here?

ANDREI: *(pauses a moment.)* ... No, comrade.

VLADISLAV: *(shakes his head, smiling indulgently.)* Truthfully, it's some of the best in the city. Don't tell anyone, or it might be far more crowded than I'd like!

(He drums his fingers upon the hat.)

So, business before pleasure.

How is it that you ended up with unregistered typewriters and an unlicensed printing press in the basement of your shop, Andrei Petrovich?

ANDREI: *(His hand drifts up to the collar of his shirt, and he unconsciously pulls at it.)* Well – the resale, you see-

(ANDREI is interrupted by the approach of a waiter.)

VLADISLAV: Yes — two plates of black bread with caviar, one for myself, one for Comrade Egorov. Throw in a bottle of pivo too, and one of Russkaya vodka for the good Comrade.

So, comrade, your resale...? What of your resale?

ANDREI: We are — I was simply picking up and refurbishing discarded typewriters and such! They fetch a good price with the government offices and the printing agents, and...

(He takes his cigarette out of his mouth, wiping the back of his hand across his brow before he stubs the cigarette out and lights a fresh one.)

It is... it is a very tough time, you know. General Secretary Brezhnev hasn't bowed to the capitalists – as well he shouldn't! —, but even then, my family needs just a bit more food; you understand, of course! Just a little extra to carry them through the winter -

VLADISLAV: *(laughs.)* Comrade, please. I have my own family – I know what we have to do to support ourselves in these times. Why, going out and reusing discarded machines keeps our great Soviet machine efficient, and

shows drive and ingenuity; after all, did not Marx say that the driving force of history is human ingenuity? There's no need to be nervous.

(The waiter sets down ANDREI's bottle of vodka, as well as a glass, and does the same for VLADISLAV with his beer.)

VLADISLAV: *(cont'd)* Drink to Comrade Brezhnev. Be calm.

ANDREI: To Comrade Brezhnev, yes!

(ANDREI nods before pouring himself a glassful of vodka and knocking half of it back. VLADISLAV does not touch his beer.)

VLADISLAV: So, Andrei Petrovich. Why were copies of dissident literature found with those writing materials? Surely, I should have only seen examples of patriotic Soviet work used to test them, or machine tools for the work of repairing them.

(ANDREI eyes the cafe door, but does not get up from his seat. VLADISLAV's hands are still folded atop his hat.)

(The waiter brings two plates of thick, dark bread topped with black caviar, then. VLADISLAV picks up his knife.)

VLADISLAV: *(cont'd)*

Go on, comrade. Eat.

(ANDREI looks to his knife, but makes no move for it. VLADISLAV tuts in disappointment before cutting into the bread himself and picking up half, speaking through a mouthful of food.)

VLADISLAV: *(cont'd)* Shame. This is good.

(He finishes his mouthful and puts down his fork.)

It's uncultured to refuse food. *Eat.*

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(ANDREI hesitates a moment more before obediently cutting off a corner of bread and eating the tiny piece.)

VLADISLAV: (cont'd) Like I said. Excellent. So — you were explaining the presence of dissident literature in your humble shop, Andrei Petrovich.

ANDREI: I was... collecting it for disposal by the State. Of course, the paperwork must simply have... been lost somewhere...

(VLADISLAV nods, smiling understandingly. ANDREI knocks back the other half of his glass of vodka and lights his fifth cigarette of the night.)

VLADISLAV: Of course, of course. I understand. Why... no matter how high you are within the Party, the State ends up having one paper or another fall through the cracks. The capitalists and

their helpers are always undermining our system.

ANDREI: (nods eagerly.) Yes, Comrade Sokolov! I agree with you entirely.

(VLADISLAV pauses a long moment. He reaches down, picks up the other half of bread, and starts eating again in silence. After a few bites, during which ANDREI visibly pushes back his chair, VLADISLAV speaks again.)

VLADISLAV: I wonder, Comrade Egorov, at you.

(ANDREI says nothing. He scoots his chair away another inch.)

VLADISLAV: (cont.)

(stands from his seat, one hand on his worn hat, the other tucked into his wool-lined overcoat. His beer still lies untouched on the table.)

Come. Let us... go for a little walk. Down to Meshchansky District.

(Slowly, as if he knows what will come, ANDREI stands from his seat and walks to the door, the empty vodka glass still in his hand, and the cigarette burning out to nothing between his lips. VLADISLAV follows, taking his hat with him — but leaving something behind.)

(The glitter of the KGB Fifth Chief Directorate's emblem shines on the table, where the hat had been covering it. The bartender stares at it for a long moment before abruptly turning around, leaving his cleaning rag behind.)

(VLADISLAV wraps his arm close around ANDREI's neck, almost protectively, as he walks ANDREI out of the cafe's door.)

BLACKOUT

"Before these two weeks I spent at this writing camp, I thought that I was only capable of writing fiction. However, this program has opened my eyes to the fact that I can try my hand at any genre I want. The most important thing I have learned during my time here was that I should not censor my work for the comfort of others. This is a lesson that I hope to carry with me and apply to other areas of my life."

— Jael Davis



HOWDY, I'M MISERABLE

A Play by Isabelle Mercado-Leon

CHARACTERS:

LEONORA "Leah", 24

MARIA, 43

TIME: *The present, noon*

PLACE: A diner right off the highway at a rest stop.

(The lights come up. Two women, a mother and a daughter, are seated at a booth. The mother, MARIA, is intently staring at her menu as if it were the most interesting thing in the world. The daughter, LEAH, is wearing jeans and a flannel. She looks like she's been wearing these clothes for at least a month, and that's because she has. Next to her, by the front of the booth, is a big gray hiking backpack. LEAH has her arms crossed, the menu has not been opened. She's looking around and looking at her mother trying to appear cold, indignant and annoyed.)

MARIA: So what are you gonna get, huh? *(stares intently at the menu, she's nervous)* The uh, clam chowder, the clam chowder looks good...

Oh look, only 7 bucks, hmmm must be a special...

LEAH: *(has a pained expression on her face)* Mom...

MARIA: Oh, wow, there's an, uh, there's a special deal they got goin' on... Two meals from this list... *(slides the menu over to her)* for the price of one! I could get the mac n' cheese, you could get the quesadillas, I know those are your favorite.

LEAH: *(Pushes away the menu)* Mom, could we please not do this?

MARIA: *(eyes open wide, her face has an expression of mock surprise)* Do what? What? Can't I just have a nice

dinner with my daughter? Is that too much to ask?

LEAH: *(chuckles bitterly, drops the menu, grabs her bag)* I'm leaving. *(walks away)*

MARIA: Oh no... Please? I'm sorry. Please? Just sit down, I'll stop.

LEAH: *(she turns back, before she sits down she looks directly at MARIA and says)* I can't do this, I can't do this, alright?

MARIA: I know.

LEAH: *(still standing)* This is why I left! Look at you, trying to pretend like everything's okay. NOTHING. Is. Okay. Nothing. And you just sit here and ramble about clam chowder and specials and quesadillas and you act like everything is okay.

MARIA: Honey, I know, can you sit down?

LEAH: Nothing is okay, Mom. Nothing is okay.

PEACHES: *(just then a bubbly, happy waitress comes down in front of them with a pad in her hand and a smile on her face)*

Howdy, my name's Peaches! How are you folks doin' today?

MARIA: *(wearily)* Good.

LEAH: *(annoyed, groans into her hand, snaps her head up and looks to PEACHES and says with sarcastic contempt)*

Miserable. Howdy, Peaches, yeah, I'm doin' awful.

PEACHES: Oh! *(looks genuinely surprised, like a deer in headlights)*

Oh, well I'm sorry to hear that. Is there

anything I can do for you?

LEAH: Yeah, yeah you can —

MARIA: Leah, please.

LEAH: Please... Just tell me honestly how you're doing, Peaches.

PEACHES: *(her voice is peppy and upbeat)* Well I'm —

LEAH: *(she sits down)* I said honestly, dude. Seriously, like you work in this shitty roadside diner, you must get harrassed like 50 times a day from shitty truckers who call you names and you have to smile back and say "Howdy!" and ask "What can I do for you" and what? What? They give you a \$1 tip, if even. More likely than not they probably ask for your number or just walk out anyway. And I'm sure you get paid shit too. So, seriously, Peaches, how are you doing?

PEACHES: I'm... miserable

LEAH: There we go!

MARIA: Oh, Leah...

(puts her head in her hands)

PEACHES: *(her eyes widen, she repeats herself, this time louder)* I'm... I'm miserable...

LEAH: *(PEACHES is still in shock, LEAH grabs PEACHES' hand and high fives it)* See that's what I'm talking about, Mom. *(Grins)*

She's miserable! Peaches is fucking miserable! I'm fucking miserable. And you, how are you doing, Mom? Honestly.

MARIA: *(her voice gets stern)* Leonora, I'm not doing this. I'm not playing this game with you right now.

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PEACHES: *(she's still frozen, she's muttering to herself very quietly. Slowly she walks away, in a daze she takes off her apron, drops her pad to the ground and walks out the front door.)*

LEAH: Why? *(her voice is pained, she's pleading with a new vulnerability)* Why can't you just say it? Why can't you just admit it, Mom?

MARIA: I'm not —

LEAH: You're miserable! Mom, you're miserable! You'll never allow yourself to say it but you're miserable. Fucks sake, I got it from you. And I was about to become just like you, I was about to marry Todd, end up just like you and Dad... I was just about to become just like you two and I didn't. I did what you couldn't do, I said I was miserable and I walked away! Why... Why didn't you ever walk away?

MARIA: Leah, it's not that simple —

LEAH: Of course it is, I did it!

MARIA: Leonora, it is not that simple. You do not know what you're talking about, you should stop now.

LEAH: No, I do know what I'm talking about, I'm not like you anymore.

I made a *choice*, I made a *choice* to not let a man take control of my life, to abuse me, to treat me like a peice of shit. I made a *choice*.

MARIA: *(she is very stern, her words are cold and sharp)* I made a choice too. I made the choice to be there for my child, for you. I did the best I could and I'm still doing the best I can do, Leonora. I am trying. I have always tried to do what was best for you, and what was best for you was to continue living with me and your father. What was best for you was for me to continue

living there, to continue working all-night shifts so that one day you could go to college, so that you could have a better life than I was able to. I made a choice. I made a choice, Leonora, and it was for you.

LEAH: *(there are tears in her eyes, the anger in her voice is gone, she sounds like a child)*

I never asked for you to make that choice!

MARIA: You never had to, Mija. You're my daughter, I'm your mother. I would have done it either way and I would never wish that I ever did it any differently.

LEAH: That's not fair. That's not fair, Mom. *(she wipes tears from her eyes, she's vulnerable and insecure, but still tries to sound angry)*

So what? I guess it was all for nothing wasn't it? What, are you lying again?

(she looks at MARIA)

I dropped out of high school, Mom. I'm a fucking homeless, dirty hippie without a job or a diploma. I guess it was all for nothing, huh? I was supposed to be something and now look at me, I'm nothing. Look at me, Mom. Look at me! I don't know what the fuck I'm doing, and neither do you. I'm a mess, and so are you. I'm fucking miserable, and so are you! You're saying that you did this all for me, that somehow that was actually good for me, good for US? That's bullshit. You wanted me to have a better life? You weren't anything but a hardworking mother who worked shitty jobs and long hours and then would return home to a bitter, lazy alcoholic man-child. And me? No one gives a shit about my art. I'm fucking homeless, I'm miserable. Hell, I'm just like you and who knows, maybe I'll be just like him.

I honestly don't know which is worse or better at this point...

(wipes her snot and her tears)

Don't you see, I had to leave. I had to leave. I made my choice. I didn't want to be like either of you. And now...

(she starts sobbing)

MARIA: *(compassionately)* Mija...

(She walks over and sits beside LEAH, she puts her hand over her shoulder)

Shhhh... It's okay.... It'll be okay.....

LEAH: This is who I am, Mom.

MARIA: This isn't who you are, Mija. Shh... it's okay....

LEAH : I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I don't know what's — I just...*(takes a deep breath)* I love you.

MARIA: I love you too, Mija.

GINGER: *(Just then, another bubbly waitress appears in front of the booth with a pad in her hand)*

Howdy, my name is Ginger! How are you folks doin' today?

MARIA and LEAH: *(They look at each other. They have tears in their eyes but they're smiling, amused by the absurdity of the situation.)*

We're doing alright... We're gonna be alright.

(MARIA grabs LEAH's bag. LEAH smiles and hands GINGER \$10 as a tip, and together LEAH and MARIA head out of the diner. The door behind them swings shut. Ginger stands in front of the empty booth with her pen and pad in hand, ready to take the order. She watches LEAH and MARIA leave.)

BLACKOUT

MY TRUTH

After Jon Sands' Truth Parade

By Rorie Newman

My fingernails are rose petals
I paint them
To conceal the withering

My eyes are geodes
I shatter the crystals
Rearranging them into a pattern and others look on with envy

My lips are heavy curtains
I keep them drawn down across my gaping mouth
To prevent my words from shining through

My hair is a mess of ivy vines
I plant seeds of violet
That overrun the ivy

My arms form a clock
And I force the rigid hands to skip 12:30 and 6:30
So, they never look too long or too short

My legs are chopsticks
I continuously break the delicate wood
Praying for a fork

My skin is a canvas of granite flecked with quartz
I shield the quartz from the rest of the world
And drape myself in silver faucets

My body is an inkless pen
I yearn for my body back
Because being ugly is better than being useless

I beg to be someone else
Because only then will I be content
With who I am

June 8th 2016

Mother's been dead for seven months. With each passing month, I've sunk a little lower. Gone outside a little less. Gotten out of bed a little later. In bed is when it gets to me. I'll lie there for hours, reminiscing about the giggles we shared and the memories we made; thinking about the final goodbye I never got. Maybe she would have cried, or spilled to me some grand, life alerting secret. Maybe we wouldn't have said anything, but just lay there together in silence. Or last, maybe we'd discuss my childhood together: When I just a little girl and she would still help pick out my clothes - help me get dressed. I wonder if mother would remember the pink dress with the white spots. I imagine closure: something which should be unachievable now. But then I heard about it: lucid dreaming. A close friend - who shall remain nameless at their own discretion - recommended it to me. They used it to talk with their deceased daughter, I think. It might have been a boy. Anyways, let me explain.

Lucid dreaming isn't some supernatural seance bullcrap, or a stupid parlor trick: It's a form of therapy. To lucid dream is to control the actions and occurrences in your dreams. It is absolute power: Power that can be used for anything. You can achieve your wildest ambitions, finally get that promotion, or maybe just do something silly, like fly through the blue sky. But I don't care about any of that. I want to use lucid dreaming to talk with people. To talk with mother. To get that goodbye. Now becoming Lucid, that's where things get tricky.

First, you have to think about lucid dreaming non-stop. It must be on your mind twenty-four seven. Then, you need to constantly press your pointer finger against the palm of your hand. Lucid specialists call this a check. Eventually, you'll get used to doing this check so much you'll do it in your dreams: But then it will be different. Then, in your dreams, your finger will go through your palm. That's when you'll know you're lucid.

June 17th 2016

I was downtown when it happened. Cars sped past me and peresdriats mindlessly rushed by. Birds sang and trees rustled in the wind. It all felt so alive. But then I checked. At last, my finger pressed through my palm, and it all went black. I felt numb in the darkness: My body tingled from head to toe. Dare I say my body stung. But I didn't care. I cared about mother, and I thought about mother. Sure enough, in a matter of minutes, there she was - Alone at a wooden table in the void of black that stretched before me: That stretched

before both of us now. I'd like to say I cautiously approached mother, but that'd simply be false. I sprinted to the seat opposite her. When I was at least seated, all I could squeak out was a timid "Hi."

"Long time no see," mother responded, a wry smile upon her lips. That was such a *mother thing* to say. Mother always had her wits about her.

"I just wanted to say-"

"No, me first," Interrupted mother. "I know you've missed me, and I *certainly* know I've missed you, so there's simply no point in covering that formality. Instead, let me ask you something."

"Anything," I begged.

"Was I a good mother. Honestly?"

"Mom, you were the best I could -"

Good," mother interrupted, again. "Because you were, you are, better than the best daughter I could have imagined."

At those words, mother was gone. Both she and the table shattered into a flurry of ashes and disappeared into the nothingness: Just like that - like a snap - mother was gone as abruptly as she'd appeared. My mind returned to consciousness and I awoke. The morning light was blinding; I went from seeing only black to seeing only white. Mother's and my conversation, although brief, was intoxicating: Sweet like a glass of Moscato d'Asti. But I still wanted more - I need more.

July 3rd 2016

The last two and a half weeks have been the best weeks of my life since the accident. I've done it each night, and each night's been better than the last. I've had so many conversations with her: I've learned so much. I honestly feel we're closer than ever before. It's all can I think about. I spend each day waiting for bed. Mindlessly doing a job I hate. Talking to people I could care less about. It all just makes me want to sleep. But I I've figured out the solution...

I skipped work today. It was the first day I'd skipped in a while, but I have a feeling it will be well worth it. Instead of work, I went to the drug store. That's where I picked it up, the solution. I'll talk to mother today, and any day at any time from now on. I picked up some Eszopiclone: Sleeping pills. Don't worry mom, I'll be there soon. ■

I WANNA GO TO HELL: A PLAY OF COMEDY AND FORGIVENESS

A Play by Joaquin Orozco

SETTING: *The Underworld in 2018*

CHARACTERS:

RACHEL MACKILLIGAN: *a 19-year old teenager*

CHARON: *the ferryman for the River Styx, responsible for guiding souls to the judges of the Underworld*

MINOS: *a Eumenides judge of the Underworld, and an old friend of Charon*

SCENE 1: *Begins with Charon riding the River Styx. Having just finished delivering recently deceased souls to the judges of the Underworld, he decides to have a chat with Minos, an old friend of his.*

CHARON: Hey, Minos? Can I tell ya something?

Charon takes a cigarette and smokes it.

CHARON: Y'know, Minos? Being the ferryman of the River Styx sucks. It really does. I have no idea why living people imagine it to be amazing, or badass, or whatever. What's so badass about being a delivery boy for passed souls and bringing them to judges, where they can either be disappointed by being sent to Hell or Limbo?

Nothing, that's what I say. Heaven, Hell, Limbo, the Great Beyond, whatever.

No matter what, you're still dead.

Yeah, Heaven has you get closer to the man upstairs the better you are in life, but if ya do one wrong thing, you're screwed. For that guy's sake, look at this dump! Some say that life is crappy, but there's nothing alive here! No plants or animals, just souls with no distinction! It's just so freaking depressing. One of our main tourist spots is watching a guy fail to reach a McDonalds. Damn, I need a beer.

Charon manifests a beer into his hand and chugs it, before manifesting the empty glass over to wherever. Minos rolls his eyes in secret, before shrugging due to a lack of finding the words.

MINOS: Man, you're such a *deadbeat*, ya know that? Why can't ya just stop being so *grave*? Eh? Eh?

Minos finger guns at Charon when saying his puns, like that one annoying friend you have that you have no idea why you love them, but you do. Charon can only facepalm in annoyance.

CHARON: Ya just had to do it, didn't you?

MINOS: Puns aside, ya seriously need to lighten up. All ya have to do is bring souls to us. And beers and pizza, while you're at it, because you and I need to party like we did in the good ol' days.

Charon chuckles.

CHARON: I'm not into partying now, Minos. You know that. Being the ferryman just kills me on the inside. Well, figuratively. There's not really any joy in doing it since people die literally every, single day.

MINOS: Well, take a break. Ya can afford to take a breather every once in a while. I'm pretty sure the guys upstairs will be fine with you taking a break, getting blackout drunk, and putting your dick in Succubi, or whatever.

Minos gets a notification from his phone.

MINOS: Hold on a sec, lemme get it.

Minos reads the notification before closing it.

MINOS: Ya got someone. Says it's urgent.

Charon groans before getting in his boat again.

CHARON: I'll be back in a few.

MINOS: Try to bring some pizzas and beer while you're at it. Don't want ya to *die* on the inside.

Charon groans before ferrying away to the entrance to the Underworld. A 12 year-old girl in a black dress and blonde hair, Rachel Mackilligan, approaches him.

RACHEL: You're Charon, ferryman of the Underworld, right?

Charon groans like an annoyed teenage employee of McDonald's.

CHARON: Sadly, that's me. What is it?

SCENE 1 ENDS



SCENE 2: *Begins with Charon and Rachel at the entrance to the Underworld.*

RACHEL: I want you to take me to the lowest and most tortuous circle of Hell.

Charon's eyes widen in surprise, showing that practically nobody ever asked that.

CHARON: Are you being serious? Are you dead serious?

RACHEL: You heard me. I want to suffer in the lowest and most torturous circle of Hell.

Charon calls Minos.

CHARON: Minos?

MINOS: Did ya get the pizzas yet?

CHARON: I think I got the craziest request yet.

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MINOS: What? Does someone want your dick to dance?

CHARON: You wish. Someone requested they suffer in the lowest and most torturous circle of Hell.

Minos stops talking for a moment before speaking again.

MINOS: Are you serious?

CHARON: That's what I said!

MINOS: Oh, boss. Well, just take them to me. And make sure they don't start anything.

CHARON: Of course.

Charon hangs up and gestures Rachel to get in his ferry.

CHARON: Get in.

RACHEL: Will you take me there?

CHARON: Just get in.

Rachel gets in.

CHARON: Why do you want to go to the most torturous part of Hell, anyway?

RACHEL: I ran over my mom with a car. I was drunk. I started doing drugs and beer when I was 15. Being dead just made me realize all the mistakes I made. So this is what I deserve.

Charon glances at Rachel surprisingly.

CHARON: You are full of surprises, aren't you?

RACHEL: Stop joking and get me there already.

CHARON: Sorry, lady, but I'm not doing that. Everyone deserves a fair trial, even in death.

Rachel growls angrily before hitting Charon in the head, with him reeling back in pain.

RACHEL: Well, I'll just go there myself!

Charon grabs Rachel's ankles.

CHARON: You're not going anywhere!

Rachel struggles.

RACHEL: Lemme go! Lemme go right now!.....

Charon chloroforms Rachel, and binds her with rope.

CHARON: Damn. I may actually need those beers and pizzas.

SCENE 2 ENDS



SCENE 3: *Begins with Charon dropping Rachel's bound, unconscious body in front of Minos. Rachel wakes up.*

RACHEL: Uh...where...am I?

CHARON: Minos, take care of her.

Rachel angrily gazes at Charon while being dragged away into a courtroom by Minos.

RACHEL: You! You said you'd take me to Hell! You lied to me!!!

Charon sighs.

CHARON: Everyone deserves a fair trial, even in death. Them's the breaks.

Rachel stares at Charon furiously before the door closes. Minos slightly opens it.

MINOS: Mate, you're needed too.

Charon groans in frustration.

CHARON: Seriously? Fine.

Charon heads in. The trial begins and it is long and arduous. After a conference from many judges, Charon, Minos, and the man upstairs himself, Charon and Minos face Rachel.

MINOS: Alright Rachel, here's the deal. Good news is you've been a devout and kind Christian for 14 years of your life. Bad news is that you betrayed your mom for the other 5 years, and betrayal is a *big nono*. But all your virtues and vices are about equal, so you're basically gonna go back to living, and make up the mistakes on the day you killed your mom and died of a car crash. *But only once. If you fuck up, you fuck up big time, capiche?*

Rachel solemnly looks at Charon and Minos.

RACHEL: So, what if I succeed?

CHARON: Then your life will continue. We'll have some angels make you go to rehab.

Rachel sighs.

RACHEL: It was...unique meeting you.

Rachel disappears from the Underworld, and appears in the living world. Minos sighs.

MINOS: So, what, you're gonna sulk again?

Charon manifests a bounty of beers and pizzas.

CHARON: Maybe after 10 parties.

Minos jumps in the air in excitement.

MINOS: Let's do this!

BLACKOUT

THE MEN WHO RUN

By Anushri Radhakrishnan

Lights lined the road like mini UFOs, midway in landing, with the light underneath fanning out onto the newly tarred road. One blue car stood out against the black due to its luminescent jean skin of the car. It rolled slowly along the road allowing multiple impatient cars to pass angrily. The driver strained to keep his eyes open, so much so that his veins started popping up against his cornea and touched the darker brown rim of his iris. Increasing the volume of the radio station music, he begged each traffic light to be green, so he could fall dead onto his bed sooner. The music followed out the open car windows like silver and gold streamers and into the streets to ribbon off each light post.

The music stopped suddenly, replaced with the ringing of a phone call. The driver's father's face lit up the screen and the boy's shoulders immediately raised along with the hairs on the back of his neck. He shivered for a split second causing the wheel to misalign with the white marks of the road. After taking a breath, he put the call on speaker. The voice carried a sense of worry and impatience, hidden behind the vibrating commands and insults which filled the car with hot air, sticky and almost unbreathable. The son apologized for tardiness, trying to explain that an extra shift was needed to pay for rent and paused before-

A storage truck rammed its big head into the ribs of the blue car just as it made a left turn. The father, hearing the deafening shatter of car and tires squealing, dropped any mask covering his worry and shouted into the static of his phone. He heard more metal crunching and no voice from his son. The father immediately abandoned the dining table made of old oak and one uneaten plastic bowl of cold Kraft Easy Mac. He grabbed the watery thin blue jacket hanging at the door and ran out. He did not know where his son was, where the hospital was, yet he ran into the dim lit street and listened for sirens.

A passerby had called 911 after witnessing the wreckage on his late-night run. The blue car looked almost flattened, metal bones splaying out at weird angles, the glass weaving a spider web of cracks, and an unconscious body waiting with an airbag pillow for emergency doctors to wake him. The blue paint laid like crumbling nail polish on the pavement, the newly tarred road now scarred. The passerby watched the truck driver open the door with nothing more than a scratch and proceed to sprint into the darkness of a neighborhood street. The sirens grew in intensity as they approached, but it was too late. He ran.

Few hours later, the doctor called the father into the room addressing the boy's conditions. The now conscious boy suffered a couple of scratches on the temple and a small concussion, but no costly injuries. The father's relief escaped his mouth, and he thanked the doctor before walking into the hospital room. The boy turned his head slightly to the incoming figure, the hair on his neck straightened and his heart rate started sprinting up a hill.

To the boy, who had blurry vision and an unadjusted brain to the bright overly washed white walls, the figure approaching felt more like a punch than a father. There were bruises in his vision, but he saw clearly a deceptive look in the figure's face. It looked happy, almost relieved, and the boy only saw a facade. He winced, ready to hear the rebukes and feel the hot sticky air again. When the father saw the fear in the boy's eyes, something he never really noticed before, he felt the distance he created throughout the years of hurling sharp words, and cigarette burnt anger. He opened his mouth to say those three words he never said, but the boy had already run away. ■

MAPLE MARTYR

By Lulu Rasor

I saw they'd cut down
the old maple tree across
from our house you know
the one in front of the Catholic
church with the red-velvet
silence and jeweled windows
that almost makes me want
to be religious the one our parakeet
fled to all those years ago when
we left the door open and it felt
freedom beneath its misplaced
tropical wings we followed
it with nothing but butterfly nets
and determination weaving our
way through the summer festival
booths of hand-made pottery yard
sales and hot dog grease clinging
to the air like bad perfume it didn't
make it far we found it surveying
bargain bin deals from its perch
in the maple half obscured by
leaves brighter than any stained glass
we captured it and I almost wish
we could have left it among the gold
green summertime halo of the maple
when I heard the growl of chainsaws
some part of me wanted to throw
myself across the tree like a martyr
save it from those metal teeth
but like I said I'm not religious
so saints aren't really my thing
it didn't look sick to me but maybe
I just saw the healthy autumn leaves
swelling in glory like a choir in song
each leaf a voice ringing out red-gold
and ignored the sickness roiling
at its roots there's not even a stump
left just a bald patch of grass soon
overgrown how quickly reality
crystallizes into memory isn't it funny
how I never gave a second thought
to that majestic maple anymore until
its descent echoed through the neighborhood
an earthquake dislodging forgotten ghosts
roosting among still-flourishing branches but then
sainthood is reaped from corpses after all.

ONE LIGHT

A Play by Hannah Stelben

CHARACTERS:

GEORGIA, 12. JUNE and ROB's daughter
JUNE, 42
ROB, 41

TIME: *The early 2000s, after sunset*

PLACE: *A rural farmhouse with antique interior decorations.*

(As the lights come up, GEORGIA and JUNE are sitting at the kitchen table at the front right of the stage, relaxed and eating dinner. GEORGIA faces the audience; when she is looking at them, she is really seeing out of the kitchen window. JUNE sits at the end of the table to her right. After a few peaceful seconds, GEORGIA's face suddenly drops, and she leaps out of her seat)

GEORGIA: MOM! I just saw a light out there. I just saw a beam of light, moving.

JUNE: *(getting up and looking at GEORGIA)* Was it behind the fence or in front?

GEORGIA: In front.

JUNE: *(looking outside)* Are you sure?

(GEORGIA nods, still staring outside)

JUNE: Did you see it again?

GEORGIA: No.

JUNE: But you did see it?

GEORGIA: *(looking at her mother)* I did!

JUNE: Oh my god.

(JUNE gets up, and GEORGIA follows. They swiftly move farther away from the audience and crouch behind a large dresser at the back left of the stage. Translucent curtains are pulled out behind the kitchen table, signifying the

transition to a different room in the back. Within the audience's sight is the dresser, a hanging light up above, an orchid in a glass vase on the dresser, a landline telephone on the dresser, and a clock on the back wall)

GEORGIA: *(making her face visible to the audience)* Mom. When is Dad coming home?

JUNE: He said 7.

GEORGIA: *(her voice shaking)* Well what time is it now?

JUNE: *(standing up to make herself visible to the audience and turning to see the clock)* It's 6:45.

(JUNE quickly sits back down, and she and GEORGIA are both out of the audience's sight)

GEORGIA: If someone's out there, they'll get him.

JUNE: He's got the car.

GEORGIA: *(pausing)* Who do you think it is?

(GEORGIA and JUNE sit in silence for a moment)

Mom! Answer me. Are they going to rob the house?

JUNE: *(audible panic in her voice)* I DON'T KNOW.

(A moment of silence passes; then GEORGIA leaps up)

GEORGIA: Oh my God, the floor just moved.

JUNE: WHAT?

GEORGIA: It trembled!

JUNE: *(pausing)* I didn't notice.

GEORGIA: *(making her face visible at the side of the dresser)*

Mom, can we leave? Please!

(JUNE doesn't respond)

MOM!

JUNE: No. We're staying here. Your father has the car, and he will be home soon. Have you seen the light at all again?

GEORGIA: No. *(pausing)* I might have imagined it. But what if I didn't! Oh God, are we going to be here forever?

JUNE: Maybe we're just panicking.

(GEORGIA moves her face back out of the audience's sight. The two sit in silence for a moment. Then, out of nowhere, the hanging light crashes down on the dresser, breaking the glass vase and crushing the orchid. GEORGIA and JUNE both leap up, finding each other unscathed. Through the commotion, they don't notice that the telephone is gone)

JUNE: *(Cont'd)* *(shouting)* Shit!

GEORGIA: Mom! Something's really not right. I want to leave. Please, please, can we go?

(A car door slams)

GEORGIA: *(Cont'd)* *(panicky)* MOM!

JUNE: *(with visible relief)* It's your father, Georgia! His truck probably made the house shake enough to break this old thing.

(GEORGIA's expression softens slightly, but she still doesn't look convinced. JUNE starts to clean up the mess. The door unlocks, and ROB enters)

ROB: *(loudly)* I'm home!

(GEORGIA and JUNE slowly walk back to the front of the stage. ROB glances at the table)

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Why didn't you finish dinner?

(ROB then notices the fallen lamp and broken glass)

Oh my God the lamp! Wow. Now I know why you called.

(JUNE frowns)

Sorry I didn't pick up. I figured there was no need since I was just pulling up.

JUNE: *(with a puzzled expression)*
We didn't call.

ROB: I got a call from home.

(He pulls out his flip phone and shows it

to JUNE. GEORGIA cranes her neck to see)

See. Here it says 6:45, just a few minutes ago.

GEORGIA: But we were hiding then.

ROB: Hiding? Why were you hiding?

JUNE: Georgia thought she saw someone outside. In the backyard.

(she pauses, putting a hand on her head)

I just can't remember... Georgia, did we call then?

GEORGIA: *(her eyes are wide)*

We didn't call. Oh my God. What is going on?

(ROB's flip phone starts ringing loudly)

JUNE: Who is it?

ROB: It says HOME.

(GEORGIA, JUNE, and ROB turn around, noticing that the telephone that was on the dresser has disappeared. They turn back to the audience, and there is enough time to see the expressions of horror on their faces.)

BLACKOUT



"Being at Skidmore and spending two weeks solely focused on growing as a writer has been an experience I will never forget. It is amazing how quickly you can relate and be inspired by fellow young writers and be able to create these friendships which will last far past our two weeks here. The classes we take are really different than the academic ones we take in school, in the sense that here the teachers are teaching skills and idea-building, and they're inspiring us to love writing even more. Thank you for the wonderful experiences and memories."

— Anushri Radhakrishnan

CHARACTERS:

CHIEMI, 23

SOPHIE, 18

TIME: *The present, January- early morning.*

PLACE: *Inside an airplane. There is a constant murmur of people talking in the background. It is slightly too chilly.*

(At rise: CHIEMI is shuffling through the magazines tucked into the seat pocket in front of her. Her small backpack is placed on the empty aisle seat beside her. As people file into the plane to their own seats, CHIEMI occasionally looks up, uneasy from the crowded feeling of the plane. SOPHIE bounces up to CHIEMI.)

SOPHIE: *(In a friendly manner)*

Could you move your bag, please? That's my seat.

CHIEMI: *(glancing up)* Oh, yeah, sure. I'm sorry.

(Places the bag at her feet)

SOPHIE: *(plops down into the seat and grins at CHIEMI)* Isn't this exciting?

CHIEMI: *(lifts her eyebrows)* Hmm?

SOPHIE: It's my first time flying, you know. Can you believe it? I'm eighteen and I've never flown in a plane before. Is it scary? Are you scared? I mean, probably not, right, since you look like you're in your thirties or something? And you've probably flown lots of times. Have you ever been to Africa? I'd like to go to Africa, but we're going to Japan instead. And not even for winter vacation. At least, I'm not going to Tokyo for vacation. Are you?

(pulls the armrest up and down absentmindedly)

Hey, as I was coming up to this seat, I saw this guy throwing up already.

(wrinkles her nose)

SOPHIE: *(cont.)* Isn't that gross? Don't get me wrong, I feel bad for the guy- I mean, we haven't even started moving yet and he's barfing all over the place- but I wouldn't want to be the one sitting next to him.

CHIEMI: *(quietly)* Um. I'm actually twenty three. And, uh, I've never been to Africa? *(a long pause)* Well, then, why are you going to Japan?

SOPHIE: My father's funeral. It's no big deal, I didn't even know him. He didn't raise me, so.

(looks down, tugs at her hair)

No big deal.

CHIEMI: *(softly)* I'm sorry for your loss.

SOPHIE: *(shrugs, still staring at the floor)* Wasn't my loss.

CHIEMI: I'm sorry for your family's loss, then.

(CHIEMI turns so she faces the window and not SOPHIE. She sighs. The airplane begins to move forward on the runway. There is a long pause between them.)

SOPHIE: So, are you from Japan? You look like you are.

CHIEMI: *(frowns at SOPHIE's constant chatter)* Yeah.

SOPHIE: I'm half-Japanese. My father was Japanese- you know, the father I was talking about ten minutes ago? So it's really like I'm not Japanese at all, since he was never around to teach me stuff. My mom says they stopped being in love pretty early in their marriage. I don't believe her, though. She sometimes gets really sad about it even though she says they were still, like, friends-ish after that. Not sure, though.

CHIEMI: Hmm.

(reaches into her bag and pulls out a book.)

SOPHIE: You speak really good English for a Japanese person.

CHIEMI: Well. I live in America. I moved there for college.

SOPHIE: Oh. So why are you going to Japan? Are you moving back? Are you visiting your family? Are you-

CHIEMI: *(slightly annoyed)* Why isn't your mom with you?

SOPHIE: She's in Japan already. She left like two weeks ago as soon as she heard the news, and midterms were still going on, and she told me I could come to Japan after I finished taking them since the funeral won't be until a day from now anyway.

(widens her eyes in awe as she looks out the window, leaning close to CHIEMI to see the clouds.)

Wow! That's so pretty.

CHIEMI: *(smiles a little)* Yeah, it is, isn't it?

SOPHIE: So... why are you going to Japan?

CHIEMI: *(closes her eyes)* My stepfather's funeral.

(opens her eyes)

(SOPHIE and CHIEMI fall silent as they watch their city shrink beneath them. The sky fills their view.)

SOPHIE: I'm sorry.

CHIEMI: It's okay. He was a good father. He... he'll be resting now, I guess.

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(taps her fingers against the cover of the book. She fights back tears.)

SOPHIE: (quietly) Sorry if I'm bothering you.

CHIEMI: (flatly) It's okay.

SOPHIE: I'm just kind of nervous. And I... talk a lot in general, even more when I'm nervous. I annoy the heck out of my teachers at school. If you can't tell.

CHIEMI: I can. (narrows her eyes)

SOPHIE: S-sorry.

CHIEMI: (sighs) I'm nervous too, because my stepfather's first wife is supposed to be there, as well as his real daughter.

SOPHIE: Real daughter?

CHIEMI: Yeah. I mean. His first daughter, the daughter he's actually related to? Unlike me?

(sighs again)

SOPHIE: Oh. Well. I wouldn't worry about it. I'm sure they're nice people, and mourning just like you are, so.

(pauses)

I'm just scared that... like, this'll be the first time I'm gonna see him in years, so I don't know what to expect. My father moved to Japan to be closer to his family right after my parents divorced. I mean, they kept in touch sort of, but he left before I was born, and he had no reason to meet me, you know? I've seen pictures, but the first time I'm seeing him is at a funeral- his funeral. I'm not even sure if I'm sad about it. I don't know.

CHIEMI: If you didn't know him... then it's understandable, I guess, that you're not feeling any sense of loss?

SOPHIE: I guess so. It's also just weird since I'm gonna be meeting his second

family there for the first time, so that'll be awkward, and like, he married a woman with a daughter named Chiemi or something, according to my mom, and... I don't know, I just... I don't know. I hope he was happy with his new family.

(laughs a little)

I am so sorry for dumping all of this onto you. You're just a stranger, and... yeah. Sorry.

CHIEMI: Wait. What was his stepdaughter's name?

SOPHIE: Uh... Chihiro? No, Chiemi? Yeah. Chiemi, I think.

CHIEMI: (laughs nervously, almost dropping her book.)

I, uh- That's my name.

SOPHIE: Holy crap.

BLACKOUT



"These two weeks have been a lot of fun. I've met many new people and learned many new things. I have had some trouble fitting in at other places but here things just clicked. Everyone was so kind, accepting, and mostly free-thinking. It truly was a wonderful experience with other writers in a beautiful setting. I didn't even feel homesick!"

— Zach Terrillion

ANXIETY

By Andrew Tachman

You know you have to raise your hand. Not only do you have a question to ask, but you also need to use the restroom. You *know* that nobody will care if you raise your hand. You know that your teacher will listen, answer your question, and give you permission. And yet, the hand stays on your desk. You start getting antsy. You no longer hear anything the teacher is saying, your thoughts block all sound. You dread how people will laugh if you stutter while asking. How they will shun you for asking a dumb question (that everyone already knew the answer to, of course). How this will be just like that time you asked your waitress for another menu, then said “I love you” on accident. It’s been three years and you haven’t lived that down. And that was just in front of your mom, who tends to be slightly less judgemental than the typical high school kid. Imagine how bad it will be when you mess up. Just think about it.

The more you think, the more the river of thoughts flows into an ocean of despair and irrationality. You start to shake. You now think that they *know* that you need to ask something and go to the bathroom. Everybody knows, duh. They’re just waiting for it. The moment you raise that hand, and embarrass yourself in front of the whole class. It will be the only thing they talk about for the rest of their lives. Their children will hear it as their bedtime story, about the time that stupid kid in English class tripped on his own words and then proceeded to piss his pants (yes, in this scenario, you’re also fearful that you will piss your pants from terror). Your heart beats, the wings of a hummingbird fluttering throughout your chest, making it difficult to breathe. You’re desperate though. You have to do it. Do it. You’re already a loser anyway, might as well make more of a fool of yourself. Go ahead. I *dare* you. ■

"Where I come from there are few aspiring writers, and many who do write are not very passionate about it. This is the beauty of The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute: here you can spend nights with others, simply writing, and all the people around you will be doing the same. They will provide feedback. They will offer ideas. And you can return the favor. It is a great place to form relationships that will help you in growing as a writer."

— Andrew Tachman



DANCING ALONE

By Angela Tanzer

The room unfolded before William - the red velvet seats, the dark, patterned carpeting, the elegant chandelier at the center of the ceiling with its layered, iridescent crystals. He hadn't been here before, but he'd been to places just like it: spacious, grand performance halls where dancers and musicians took the stage, captivating their audiences with a single note or movement. William's parents always took him to performances like these, since he'd been a child. While other children were riding scooters and playing with blocks, his parents were educating William on the complexities of Bach suites, the brilliance of Beethoven symphonies. Not that he understood what they were teaching him about the mood of the songs, crescendos, shifts in rhythm. Rather than being like a sponge soaking up their words, it was as though they were splashing water on a stone that just slid right off. When he indicated his disinterest at times, his mother grew angry. "We want you to be *cultured* sweetie," she told him at seven years old. At the time, he hadn't know what the word meant, so he'd asked his 1st grade teacher, who wrinkled her eyebrows, tilted her head and asked where he'd heard it. "My mommy," he answered, and she chuckled.

He now surveyed the enormous space as he and his mother entered it. Elderly couples dressed in suits and silky blouses laughed and chatted, creating a low, almost soothing murmur that rested above their heads, rising and falling. William's mother pulled him along the aisle, searching for their seats. When they finally settled into them, it was in a row in which no person was within three decades of William. His mother held his hand firmly - so firmly that the skin of her knuckles became white. She held his hand everywhere: school, the supermarket, art class. He'd never admitted it out loud, but it made him feel like a helpless dog being pulled along by its owner. At five, it was fine - every mother held her son's hand at that age. But at twelve, it was simply humiliating, and William had fallen into the habit of keeping his head down in public.

He waited for the curtains to draw back. He would rather have been home, reading the coveted Percy Jackson books that resided on his night table, waiting for him to open them. He would have rather been in the quiet comfort of his room, with words on the page communicating to him rather than the sounds of voices around him. William's father had backed out of going to the performance at the last moment due to a work commitment, leaving William to go alone with his mother. He picked at his cuticles. He watched dust particles floating around in air, and heard the rhythm of loud

conversations in his row. He rapidly tapped his left hand on his leg. His mother was still holding his hand, and though he did not try pulling their hands apart, he turned himself so his body faced away from hers and buried his head in the program. On the third page, he noticed the title of the first piece that would be performed: *Sorrow*.

He was halfway through its glossy pages when the curtains finally drew back. William breathed a sigh of relief. A woman and a man were on the stage. The woman wore a long white skirt, its fabric flowing down in cascades of ruffles. The man wore leggings and a shiny black leotard. Slow music began to play, a soulful, deep man's voice filling the room. The man and the woman started to dance with long, flowy, languid movements. William imagined them holding brushes in their hands and painting the stage in warm colors - deep reds, oranges, yellows - paint strokes that swirled and melded, forming a breathtaking sunset. Each reach was a stroke, each *développé*, each *penche*, each extension of the arm. At one point, the woman extended her leg completely straight and the man tightly wrapped himself around her waist, gripping her bony hips, lifting her, and slowly spinning her around. There was no indication of strain in his body or expression: he was so unhurried, so purposeful, so tranquil in the way that he moved and handled her. As though she was a porcelain vase, a small child, or a tray full of dishes - something to be handled with meticulous care and caution, something precious.

William held his breath. Feeling poured out of the woman's pained eyes, radiated off of the man's gripped hands and travelled down the hills of his muscles, which were strong and sharp with definition. Energy glowed from the woman's skin and through the ruffles of her skirt, bounced off of her pointed feet. After a few minutes of them being together, the man exited the stage, leaving the woman to dance long, flowy, languid movements alone. William raised his hand to his face to scratch an itch. It was wet with tears. They were trickling down his cheeks and gathering at his jawbones. He looked to the left of him, at his mother's wooden, unreadable expression. It never moved, it never changed. There was no suggestion of joy, or frustration, of anything. She viewed art objectively, with remove. He never had the words his parents did - sharp, polysyllabic, daunting words that didn't sound right to William. They always analyzed the specifics of the technique, the choreography. During these conversations, William fell silent. But in that moment, the dancers moved inside of him. He didn't need words. ■

We wait on the top of a mountain to watch the reflections of the fireworks tickle the dark lake beneath us. The fireworks are the second act of the night for the community's Fourth of July traditions. Like always, the annual barbecue has already spilled out of the town hall, across the slippery patch of floor where someone's great-aunt spilled a glass of wine, past the foil trays of corn on the cob and the old lady who asked for her hamburger bun to be toasted. It was all rather overwhelming, especially for Mark, who had impressed the parents and the cousins and the guests and the friends through the calamity of new-boyfriend introductions.

We had hoped that we could escape the traditional noise for the mountain's peacefulness, but the boats right beneath us rumble over the quiet beauty I want Mark to hear. Quietly, he asks, "Who is that out in the middle of the lake?" Over the course of a weekend, he is trying to learn the names it has taken me seventeen summers to learn. A bluetooth speaker on the boat pumps out a loud, monotonous song that I don't recognize. The people are speaking loudly, almost yelling at this point, drunken voices piling up on top of each other.

I know who is in the boat. I know the boat's dented edge from tracing it with sticky ice cream fingers on trips from the marina. I know the way each of the girls prefers her grilled cheese with tomato soup after swimming lessons on cold, rainy mornings. I know that Ben, one of the silhouettes at its stern, always managed to knock something over when we went out to eat, but it was ok, because it's a small lake and inevitably one of his cousins would be our waiter.

"It's a whole crew. You'll probably meet them tomorrow." I know they'll visit once they hear I brought a boy.

"Anything I should know about them?"

"Not really. We all used to be friends but not so much anymore."

"You were friends?"

I don't like the surprise he can't quite smother in his voice. I answer with a little bit too much indignation, "Yes."

The fireworks begin and punctuate my answer with deafening pops. We can't hear the boats, the people, or the laughter anymore. We can only hear the piercing crackle of sparks, a noise too much like the muskets of revolutionary muskets or the pop of unregulated gun fire to be anything but an

American celebration. This is the first time Mark and I are celebrating together, on the Fourth of July. I don't want to let my answer stay hollow because I trust him more than I had ever trusted the people on that boat. So I keep talking, even over the sputtering explosions of the fireworks.

"I don't know when we all stopped being friends. Maybe it was the summer when I was studying in London for the first few weeks, and so we started the summer later—again, together, like always. But by the time I got back, they were off at a different house every night, partying or whatever. And at first they invited me when I got back. Most of my old friends were a year older than I was, and that summer, the year was a bigger deal than when we all were toddling around a beach. After the first bonfire, my hair smelled like smoke and my hands shook from rejecting so many cans of beer. I had sat right next to the fire all evening. I couldn't seem to say anything interesting—I knew what I wanted to say, but somehow I couldn't. They were too different."

I pause to watch a young spark trace the smoldering ghost of an older firework that had already exploded. The clear July air has a tinge of acrid smoke like it did on that bonfire evening that the others probably can't even remember. Mark murmurs something. I'm not really listening to him. I just keep talking, "And then the summers just got busier, and soon whenever I came up I would stay with my parents, or bring friends from home or get busy with work. And I was happy, no really, really happy. But I still kinda wondered if I was missing something."

Mark's kiss grazes my cheek, surprising me out of my thoughts. He whispers, "Yeah, you're missing something: the fireworks show. Stop staring at the boat people. Stop thinking for a minute." I look at his blue eyes and then the blue fireworks that blaze through the sky and over the bay. The new sparks light up the ghost trails of the earlier fireworks and burst into more vivid colors: the reds of the geraniums my mother kept on the front porch, the whites of a pressed summer dress, the blues of summer berry cobbler drowning in ice cream. I watch the fireworks illuminate the whole lake, not just the one boat that I chose not to board years ago.

The fireworks shimmer in a bold finale before tapering off into the dark night. The only lights on the lake are the red stern lights on the boats that buzz away from the bay as the lake became silent again. It is the kind of night when voices carry, the entire lake in conversation with itself, clinking

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cutlery from the inn across the lake answering the creaking boards of the docks made from old boards fastened with rusted hardware. I want Mark to hear this Adirondack conversation, the sounds that make this place beautiful. I want him to love this place because that would mean he loves me, blond hair from the summer sun and long legs from swim lessons with kickboards in the shallow water along the lake's edge. I don't want him to hear only the roar of the boat engines ripping across the silent night. And as the lake quiets again, no more fireworks crackling in the hot summer air, I

can hear the young loon calls and the lapping water along the shore and the rustling of tall white pine trees behind me.

Mark breaks the quiet: "Thank you for showing me all this." He raises his arm to the lake, and lets it fall back across my shoulders, holding me closely. "Even if you aren't cool enough to be in the boat."

My laughter meets his response, echoes over the lake, and traces the scars of a happy childhood and the beauty I loved in that summer night. ■



"Coming from a town in Ohio, this has been a vastly different and eye-opening experience. Being able to meet and work with published authors has really been a dream for me. Finding a group of kids who are excited about reading and writing has become rare. But I think that only made the bond of our community stronger. Being on a great campus with great food and a taste of freedom has really kicked me in the butt to take my future as a creative individual more seriously. This environment has encouraged me to generate more content than I ever expected. Thank you so much for creating this program. I can honestly say that nothing will ever be the same."

— Claire Wylie

SOMETHING IN THE DARK

By Zach Terrillion

One day I chose to walk
It was that of darkness
Grids of trees
Below an eternal sky
It was like the whole world
Had a sleep button
I walked through the darkness
It was peaceful
Serene
The cobblestone lane
Winded down the rolling hills
Leading who knows where
My feet moved across
One after another
And so it went on again
The homes that lined the park
Were enveloped in darkness
Only the occasional light
Provided the very hint
Of life
In the dark
Life was there
Accompanied
By the songs of crickets
And other melodies
Of the night
I never felt alone
The mystique of the houses
Rows of suburbia
Enveloped by greenery
Helped me feel at peace

What stories did these
homes tell?
Who lived inside?
How were those who lived?
I continued my walk
Step. Step. Step
I soon reached the old
schoolhouse
At that point
Things grew quiet
I had stepped from the realm
of civilization
The only sounds
Were those I made
It was fantastic
The school stood
Like a lone monolith
Amidst a lush field of grass
And me of course
I looked through the windows
Chairs stacked atop desks
Their outlines
Traced in the dark
And the shadows
Of the children
Ever so present
I felt sorry for the school
So lonely
So empty
No children
No teachers

I continued my walk
Step. Step. Step.
I reached my own home
The little cottage on a hill
With this darkness it was hard
Sight would not help here
I stopped
I looked out
The sound was gone now
Just the dark
But it wasn't fear
Or loneliness
It was peace
Beauty
The subtle shapes
In the great black void
They danced and whizzed
In a perfect symphony
Something so beautiful
Not even the moon could
comprehend
But no one came out to see it
Only me
But I wasn't saddened
The dark needed no audience
It was its own storyteller
Its own fool
Its own light
It always had something
Anything

VERY NICE

By Anna Tjeltveit

CHERARTES: I am very nice. I swear to you that the only people I ever killed needed to die. So, I hope that you do not mind me meeting you here outside of your daughter's school; instead of during your customary office hours. Oh, please do not walk away. I will not kill you. Well, truthfully, I have not yet decided if I am going to kill you. That is why I am here, to seek your guidance. But of course, if you walk away I will have to kill you, and that would be terribly sad. Come, sit down.

We had shamans where I am from too. Of course, they did not wear nearly as many crystals as you do, and I do not think any of them carried bags that said, "Boss Ass Witch." However, we did have many priests, who gave out guidance to those who sought it. They were the... how would you say it... the "middlemen" between the people and the gods. I always enjoyed hearing petitions from the priests. If they were interesting, I would even answer them. As I told you, I am very nice. Most of the time though, the petitions were boring. They would always say, "Cherartes, my family is dying," "Cherartes, I have no food," "Cherartes, let me go to the afterlife, it's been seventy years." Very dull. I preferred the simpler petitions, like "Cherartes, let my papyrus dry flat," "Cherartes, kill this annoying bug," "Cherartes, don't let my tool fall off the pyramid." Those were much easier to answer.

I did very much enjoy being a god, despite the responsibilities. The praise was wonderful. My people loved me. They left me the most delicious sacrifices, the fattest fish and the best risen bread. Sometimes, they even starved so that I could eat. I grew very fat off those sacrifices. And they sang the most beautiful songs for me, full of lyrics about how glorious I was, and how unworthy they were to speak to me. Many times, they would sing to me the whole day, until their voices were ragged and sore. My voice was always smooth as honey in those days. Of course, it's no wonder my people loved me so much; after all, I was always very nice to them.

But as the centuries passed, things began to change. Barbarians moved into our beautiful homeland, barbarians who called themselves Romans. And they had their own priests. They preached of only one God, and they told my people that I was nothing but blasphemous fiction. Soon, my own priests left me to worship this God. The sacrifices stopped, and the songs. Even the petitions to me stopped. They were sent to another, and I was left abandoned and neglected. Not only that, but I saw my own people suffering and dying because they were praying to a God who wouldn't listen to their prayers. Their bellies were empty, and their voices were scraped raw. I knew that such loyal and hardworking people deserved more than a barbarian God who had led them astray from their true savior. And so, I took action.

At first, I planned only on killing the invaders who had brought lies to our land. But soon I realized that my people, too, had been corrupted. If I did not act, they would continue to misguide others towards the pseudo God, and away from me. So I killed them all. Oh, how they screamed and bled, and called out for a God to come and save them. It grieved me terribly, but you see, they needed to die. Otherwise they would have continued leading others away from me. I could not have had that.

That is why I am here today. I travelled 2000 years to make sure that I completed my job, and Madame Shaman I am very disappointed. It seems to me that there is not a soul on this planet who has escaped this plague. Everywhere I go there is a church to this false God, or one of His false bibles. And the few untouched places I have found have their own false religions. Not a soul on this planet knows the name of Cherartes anymore. So, you see the quandary I find myself in. How can I rid the world of all these imposter religions? I don't want to kill anyone, but it does seem that the world needs it. Its people are all so misguided, so turned away from my truth. Don't you see how much everyone is suffering?

I fear my mind is made up, but I wanted to come to you for a final confirmation. The woman at the drugstore said you were the best shaman in all Wichita. I hope you do not mind me interrupting you as you wait for your daughter. Oh, here she comes now! I will get her for you. After all, I am very nice. ■

SANKOFA

By Taylor Tompkins

I am from the melanin rich African kings and queens
I am from the strong endearing Maryland slaves
I am from the cotton fields and human auctions
I am from the tribal dances and hymns
I am from the segregated streets and the back of the bus
I am from the soulful tunes of James Brown and Marvin Gaye and Ray Charles
I am from the funky grooves of Chaka Khan, Donna Summers, and Aretha Franklin
I am from the musical royalties of Tina Turner and Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston
I am from the powerful and justice seeking black men and women who had dreams and wouldn't
tolerate insolence
I am from the fried chicken eatin' watermelon devouring country folk
From the "Jesus be a fence" and "Jesus take the wheel"
From the God fearing women of the church
I am from the kinky curly knotted hair of young girls
the bush and the fro
The tangled mess where mom yells "stay still, baby"
while combing out my coils
I am from the natural golden glow that everyone chases after
I am from the beautiful and plump lips that cost me nothing but give me everything
I am from somewhere
Somewhere filled with soul and culture and meaning
and purpose and intelligence
With strong leaders and caring mothers and protective fathers
I am from the first black president and First Lady
I am from sacrifices made for your child's education
I am from sacrifices made for a child that not your own but grew to be
I am from sacrifices to support a parent that never supported you
I am from sacrifices made for a father that was locked
long enough to forget his children's names.
I am from sacrifices made by brothas and sistas, beaten by policemen
who care nothing about the lives of African American citizens but that
of the white man's
(Beat)
you can't go forward without looking back. You must
honor the teachings of your past experiences
I am.

SPITTING IMAGE

By Amelia Urquhart

It was the scar she noticed first. The one through my right eyebrow. I think about that scar now, how my mother had slashed her long, manicured fingernail across my face. How I just sat there, still as a statue, until our bed was stained crimson. "A battle wound," the girl had said. "It makes you look tough," she said. I was handing her drugs at the time—pharmaceuticals I mean. Not drugs drugs. I'm a pharmacist. I should have seen it coming, I can't believe I didn't. Haloperidol; used to treat psychosis. But she was so beautiful. She had huge emerald eyes and a laugh like wind chimes. I was so young and with my job, people never gave me the time of day. Especially not girls like her. So when she willingly started up a conversation, I was shell-shocked. The second I handed her the bag, I forgot what was in it. We talked for a while, mostly her talking while my mouth hung open like an idiot, and before she left, she scribbled her number on the back of my hand. It was unknown to mankind for this to happen. She made people stop and stare. I was affectionately coined as "eh" by everyone I knew. Pretty average looking guy that lives a mediocre life with a mediocre job. What did this enigma want with me?

It soon became clear that she wasn't right in the head. I knew it for sure when I saw the bottle in her bathroom cabinet. Haloperidol. Completely full and her last prescription was ages ago. She told me they made her feel normal, boring even and she hated it. Something should have clicked in my head that said this isn't right. But frankly, I didn't really care. I was truly, madly, deeply, head-over heels in love with her. She knew it too. She could string me along like a puppet. Every wish was my command.

She was an addict. Adrenaline was her drug of choice and she always needed a fix. It started out with little things. She would spend hundreds at the amusement park and steal gum from the gas station. But it wasn't enough. She had to move on to "bigger and better things," she said. She had always wanted to rob a jewelry store. She never shut up about it. Rambling on and on about the

thrill of it all and how pretty she would look all decked out like a queen. Emeralds around her neck that matched her eyes. What a sight that would be! Soon she started to become a danger to herself. One night she chugged a bottle of wine and starting walking the perimeter of the roof. I was begging her to come down from there, with my head out the window, wincing every time she wobbled to one side. She ended up falling off and cracking three ribs. As soon as she was discharged from the hospital, I came home to her sitting on the edge of the roof, bottle in hand, trying to kill herself all over again.

After that night, I told her we had to break up. She refused. Punching and kicking me. Swearing and yelling. I turned to leave until she started to cry. It was guttural and loud and heartbreaking. It stemmed from pain, like a dog who had just been run over. I hated it when she cried. God, she looked so much like my mother. It just about killed me watching her fall apart like that. I told her I would stay and do whatever she needed.

I remember it so clearly. The night it all went to shit. When I returned home from work, there were pumps sitting at the door. They were the color of maraschino cherries. "The Devil Pumps" she called them. Strictly reserved for her worst behavior. I heard the wind chimes tinkling in my bedroom and I rushed in. A man with saucers for eyes pulled on his clothes and bolted out the door. With her ivory skin wrapped up in the sheets, she looked like an angel, though I knew she was anything but. "The potential of being caught was such a rush," she gasped. She began to laugh. Her eyes met mine. It was a cold laugh, a harsh laugh, one that I had heard before. White hot rage clouded my vision. Memories began flooding back. My mother in bed with some guy. I was crying. "You stupid, stupid boy. You really thought I was yours?" The same sinister laugh. I lunged on top of her, she was still laughing. I pushed the pillow over her face and screamed, letting all of my pent-up rage loose. She was kicking her legs and clawing at my skin. She threw her finger on my eyebrow, running her hand over my

scar. The same scar that my mother had created all those years before, dying the same sweet death under the weight of a pillow. She stopped thrashing. Her arms fell to her sides. "Oh my sweet baby. What have you done?" I whispered. "You just looked so much like Mother I fell for you at once. I was hoping you wouldn't make the same stupid mistakes. You stupid, stupid girl. We could have had it all. Mother and I, we could have had it all."

I never thought I would be this stupid, this reckless. Yet here I am, pointing a gun at this weak, little girl. She's sobbing uncontrollably. SHUT UP, SHUT UP, SHUT UP! I can't think. "Just shut up!" I say, gritting my teeth. I'm a victim in this crime. The crime of love. The crime of obsession. I laugh at myself, thinking these dumb thoughts. She's profiling me I can tell. I can see it in her eyes. From all of those years of watching crime shows, she thinks she knows me. She thinks she can anticipate my next move. I laugh again. This is what my girl would have wanted. She doesn't deserve it after her sins, but I love her still. The tiny mouse is dumping the jewelry in a bag. "The money too!" I yell. She yelps and empties the cash register, her little hands shaking with the effort. I grab the bag and begin to walk away. I hear her let out a sob. A sob of relief? She thinks she knows me, doesn't she? Thinks I'm just another bank-robbing lowlife. The scum of the earth. No. I'm smarter than that. Better than that. I tum around and shoot her once in the head.

I dress her up beautifully. Like royalty. My honey will be treasured the way she would have always wanted. I slip on a gorgeous dress and nice heels. I adorn her limp body with jewels and diamonds. Big earrings, bracelets, and a stunning emerald necklace to match her eyes. I peer into them, still frozen with a look of terror. They're turning milky now, no longer a brilliant green. I gently shut them with my fingertips. "Goodnight mother," I whisper into her ear. ■

THE DANCE

By Isabelle Weiss

A girl
Dropped to the floor
It was me
It wasn't me
A girl
Danced herself to sleep
On the floor
It wasn't me
The people gathered
Around her
I feared for her
I looked at her
She was asleep on the floor
The floor was dirty
When we arrived it was seven
When she fell it was eight
When we arrived it was seven
There were girls
They wore dresses
Some wore heels and boots
The dresses were purple, red, and blue
No green
The room was green
The room was rainbow now
But it was usually green
The school was green
The room lit up rainbow
It's called strobe lights
A boy whispered
There were boys
Only ten
The boys were young

The girls were younger
The girls were more
The girls were twenty
They swarmed the boys
All but two
Swarmed the boys
One sat in the corner
The other stood in one
I stood
I watched the girl in the corner
She hugged her knees
She wore a blue dress
She had heels
I had flats
The girls buzzed around the boys
Too young to love them
Not too young to be interested
They poked at the boys
They danced with the boys
All but one boy
He went to a corner
He went to a girl in a corner
Not me
Her
He asked to dance
They were only nine
He took her to dance
They just wanted to dance
I watched her stand
She wobbled
She couldn't dance
She looked faint then, too

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She was sick
She was bald
She was pretty
She wore a blue dress
She wore heels
They wobbled as she stood
I left my corner
I gave her my shoes
She slipped me hers
She danced with a boy
Only one song
Then he moved on
To me
I wanted to dance
I took off her heels
She was still dancing
I was barefoot
She was in my shoes
I danced with a boy
She danced alone
I wore a purple dress
He had a purple tie
We were nineteen
Not nine
She danced with him first
She danced alone
She never should have danced
Alone
I danced with him next
The song was loud
I moved with him
She danced alone

She fell
She fell at nine
She fell at nine
She fell at eight
She was nine
She shouldn't have danced alone
I'm nineteen
I'm dancing with a boy
He danced with her first
Left her alone
She stayed dancing
She fell
She woke up in a room
A white room
No lights
She left the room
Alive
She went to another dance
He was there
He danced with a girl
He danced with me
He danced with her
She fell once
I fell once
I woke up in a white room
I danced on
Ten years
I was nineteen then
I went to a dance
I danced with him
I didn't fall

THE TOWN WITHIN ME

After "Wilderness" by Carl Sandburg

By Claire Wylie

There is a sky scraper inside me... forty stories high... filled with a thousand people who are all terrified.. that their desk job is eating their life... knowing that it's hard to be grounded when you're so high up.. taking comfort only in the horizon.

There is a catholic church inside me.. red stained glass windows give rose colored glasses to the whole crowd.. virgin Mary beloved mother... lay down for your sacrifice... come back to me when we take the blame off Eve...

There's a campsite inside me... some place to get away and feel like there isn't the same sky scraper five miles away..thick brambles and fruit trees and mosquitoes.. none of that RV bullshit we all know that's not camping.. put away the sustenance so the clawing bears don't get it... they have a hunger, too..

There is a bank inside me.. exchanging a currency of fear.. if that's any different than actual currency I don't know.. but a bank none-the-less.. opening the vault for those who are granted, and indebting those who have done wrong...indebting myself for the same.. all the bank tellers are counting down the days until retirement... I'm counting with them..

There's a old folk home inside me... a cinderblock building with tired aids... scrubbed white, and squeaky clean.. blocked away from outside color.. mixing primary colors on Thursday for fingerpainting won't do the vivid hues justice... bingo won't pop the lock.. in that building they will die waiting for their magic calling card...

There is a river inside me... something free and not laid on the foundation of concrete... unbound, unchecked and uncontrollable... gushing and hissing... paramount to the structures it envelopes... with time and with reason.. the river will cut through the stone, flood the basements and rot the foundation.. of the man made constructs within me... until I can firmly fit...blend... and rest... lying down next to mother earth. ■

YOUNG Voices

"Here I have made friends for life. The people I have met here are truly my biggest inspirations. When it comes to my writing, they have made me a better person - in and out of class."

— Mia Cheung



"The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute allowed me to learn and to be guided while still feeling like I was in control of my writing."

— Isabelle Weiss

"I've learned not only how to be a better writer and expand my understanding of literature, but also how to look beyond technicalities and put more thought into observation and emotion."

— Elizabeth Breen

"This was a great experience for young writers. We were able to exercise our abilities and be creative thinkers."

— Sofia Lauzurique

NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE 2018 PARTICIPANTS

STUDENT	CITY & STATE
Tyler Blackburn	Yonkers, NY
Dylan Blackman	New York, NY
Timothy Borunov	Norwell, MA
Lisi Breen	Charlotte, VT
Jordan Che	Bayside, NY
Mia Cheung	New York, NY
Kaitlyn Coffey	Delmar, NY
Lucy Cumming	Rensselaer, NY
Jael Davis	Indianapolis, IN
Hannah Frazer	Highland Park, IL
Katherine Goldblatt	Dix Hills, NY
Brian Francis Xavier Granville-Smith	New York, NY
Abigail Hasselbrink	Danville, CA
Dori Hoffman-Filler	Penn Valley, PA
Ray Hovis	Cooperstown, NY
Emma Hua	New York, NY
Claire Hyde	Salt Lake City, UT
Ben Kimmel	Florence, MA
Sofia M. Lauzurique	San Juan, PR
Nicole Lee	Roslyn Heights, NY
Mitchell Leung	Flushing, NY
Mairead Levitt	Bethesda, MD
Liam Mackey	Huntington, NY
Isabelle Mercado-Leon	New York, NY
Rorie Newman	Rensselaer Falls, NY
Phineas O'Brien	Saratoga Springs, NY
Joaquin Orozco	New York, NY
Anushri Radhakrishnan	Franklin, MI
Lulu Rasor	Yarmouth, ME
Hannah Stelben	Guilford, CT
Emma Suzuki	Fair Lawn, NJ
Andrew Tachman	Staten Island, NY
Angela Tanzer	Brooklyn, NY
Katie Taylor	Baldwin Place, NY
Zach Terrillion	Westport, CT
Anna Tjeltveit	Allentown, PA
Taylor Tompkins	Washington, DC
Amelia Urquhart	Saratoga Springs, NY
Isabelle Weiss	Hewlett, NY
Claire Wylie	Dayton, OH



UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY State University of New York

Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the New York State Writers Institute has become one of the premier sites in the country for presenting the literary arts. Over the course of four decades the Institute has sponsored readings, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and film events which have featured appearances by more than 2,000 artists—including nine Nobel Prize winners, and nearly 200 Pulitzer Prize winners—and has screened more than 750 films, from rare early prints to sneak previews of current releases. The Institute is a major contributor to the educational resources and cultural life at the University at Albany, where it is located, as well as the surrounding community. It is also identified by the writing and publishing communities as a place dedicated to promoting serious literature, where writers and their work are held in high esteem, where being an invited guest is considered an honor, and where talking about books is celebrated as the best conversation in the world.

Further information about Writers Institute programs may be obtained from its website at: www.nyswritersinstitute.org.

SKIDMORE
C O L L E G E

Skidmore is an independent, four-year liberal arts college located about one mile from historic downtown Saratoga Springs, NY. Skidmore extends its academic year emphasis on experimentation and creativity across disciplines into the summer months, through its numerous institutes in the creative and performing arts; the college's Summer Term; programs in the liberal and studio arts for pre-college students; and by promoting a wide array of campus events including concerts, film screenings, lectures, readings, and art exhibits.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

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Director, New York State Summer Young Writers Institute



NEW YORK STATE WRITERS INSTITUTE

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SKIDMORE COLLEGE

AUDEN THOMAS

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