young voices

Anthology of Student Work New York State Summer Young Writers Institute 2015

# A Poem about Nobody by Alexandra Willcox

She is the breeze by the ocean, tangling hair and catching lungs She is the ocean, pulling litter to her depths but remaining blue

She is the jumping edge of a flame lighting up the midnight She is pink bleeding across the horizon at the break of dawn

> She is the colors that explode when your fists scrub at your eyes She is the siren of a police car, purposeful and loud

> > She is the tug of her high ponytail against her scalp She is the narrowing of her eyes when she laughs

She is circling laughter, yelping like a docile hyena She is heavy boots, kicked off so they lie spread-eagled on the ground

> She is the glow of a computer screen at 2am She is surreptitious glances and lingering smiles

# The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

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 eighteenth 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 lateafternoon craft sessions or at packed evening readings, and then try out their own worksin-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 2015 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director

New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

# Summer 2015 Faculty



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 M.F.A. program at Pine Manor College.



LIZA FRENETTE is an assistant editor at the monthly magazine, NYSUT United, where she writes features, human interest stories, articles about workers' rights, and environmental education. She has won the Mary Heaton Vorse award three times, the highest writing award from the Metro Labor Communications Council of New York City. 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.



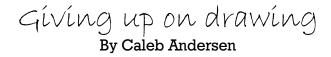
RICHARD HOFFMAN is author of Half the House: A Memoir, and the poetry collections, Without Paradise, Gold Star Road, winner of the 2006 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize and the 2008 Sheila Motton Award from the New England Poetry Club, and his latest, Emblem. A fiction writer as well, his Interference & Other Stories was published in 2009. His work has appeared in Harvard Review, Hudson Review, Literary Review, Poetry, Witness and other magazines. His most recent book is the memoir, Love & Fury. 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, Esquire, and others. 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, Empire State College, 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 acquisitions editor for Hudson Whitman/ Excelsior College Press.



Have you ever wanted to draw a picture, but when you scratch it down, it comes out as stick figures, faceless, talentless, lifeless?

I wish I could draw. I wish I could breathe life into a page. I wish I could create worlds on paper; but I can't. At least not with pictures.

But I am a writer, I use a pen instead of a brush, words instead of colors.When I write, I draw, I create; I compose symphonies.I make more than pictures with words; I run through the landscape of paper,Throwing balloons filled with color, covering the mountains with soul.There is nothing quite like it, no way to describe it.But describing it is my passion.

I forge words, tempering them in a pit of imagination Heating them hot before putting them out. They are my design, my framework of metal, bigger than a galaxy Then I fill it in.

I cannot draw, so I write.

If I can picture a painting in my head, I have given up on drawing it. Instead I depict it, leaving it to the reader to make it better than what I imagine. Thus, when I write I metamorphosize, go through apotheosis, and become God. Constructing a universe that could never fit on a canvas, Stars that could never fit in a frame. That is why I no longer draw; I create.

# LOSÍNG By Katherine Apt

Losing is	With a girl who sports
A car ride home with statues	Blood red nail polish
Who possess fiery	
Eyes	Losing is
	The realization
Losing is	That crickets begin chirping
A lecture	At exactly 3:30 A.M.
By a professor	
You do not like	Losing is
	A text message
Losing is	That reads
A confrontation	It was a good match but
With the gamblers	
Who bet on the wrong horse	Losing will be
	An acceptance
Losing is	Of yesterday's
A game of monopoly	Shortcomings
You wish you	
Never started	Losing will be
	An understanding
Losing is	That the best is yet
A rhetorical question	To come
You want	
The answer to	Losing will be
	The death
Losing is	Of the past
A treasure hunt	Embracing of the future
With pirates	
And plastic pearls	Losing will be
	Having the courage
Losing is	To never
A handshake	Give up

# Awkward Ferrís wheel

#### By Olive Bernath

SETTING: It's nighttime and there's a county fair with a Ferris wheel, a couple roller coasters and some other attractions. There are a lot of people around and there are also stands with food and carnival games. Focus in on the line for the Ferris wheel, a gaggle of girls stand chatting and gossiping with each other.

AT RISE: Ariana, Kelly, and Margot are standing in line to get on the Ferris wheel at their county fair. Ariana is pale with dark black hair, she has on eyeliner and lipstick, wearing a tight white tank top with a black bra on underneath. She has on a black washed mini skirt and black high top sneakers. Kelly has a fair complexion and light-brown hair. She is wearing lightwash skinny jeans and ballet flats. She is wearing a sweatshirt. Margot looks tan because she's just come from a vacation. She has very light blonde hair and is wearing a floral sundress and sandals.

#### ARIANA

And then he just whipped out his dick! (All start laughing)

#### MARGOT

(Laughing) Ariana! What the hell? Didn't you meet this guy like last week?

#### ARIANA

(Laughs) That's what I said! He caught me off guard, one second we're watching Friends and the next it's like hello!

#### KELLY

(Shakes her head) Margot help me please.

#### MARGOT

(Sighs and cranes her head around the person in front of her to see the front of the line) Guys, I don't know about this line. It's really long. And we have to go meet James and the rest of the guys in like a half hour.

#### ARIANA

(Snaps her gum) It's fine. I haven't rode a Ferris wheel since like the sixth grade. They used to be my favorite.

MARGOT I don't know...

KELLY Aw come on Mars, it's only a little bit longer. It's not like you have anyone to see anyways.

#### MARGOT

(To Kelly) Just because me and Marcus broke up doesn't mean I don't want to see him or James or Daniel. (Visibly hurt)

#### KELLY

That's not what I meant. It's just that, you and Marcus are broken up. You shouldn't be in a rush to go see him.

(Margot shoots Kelly a look)

I'm just saying! You know I'm here for you girl, I was here for all of it. (Gesturing to Ariana) We both were. (Ariana nods her head in agreement) We just don't want to see you get hurt again.

#### MARGOT

(Puts her hands out in front of her) Guys, guys. Calm down! Nobody's getting back with Marcus! Even I'm not that crazy. I just didn't want to wait in this stupid line that's all. Sheesh.

#### (Pregnant pause)

#### ARIANA

His dick was small anyways. (She shoots Margot a look, obviously trying to make her laugh)

(Silence and then Kelly and Margot's faces contort in laughter)

What?! It was!

#### (Laughing)

#### KELLY

Looks like the line's moving pretty fast. Look. (Gestures ahead of them to the shrunk line)

(The girls walk and follow the line, they get to the front in the next minute)

#### TICKET GUY Okay girls, two per carriage. Two per carriage. That'll be nine dollars by the way.

(Girls look at each other, confused on who should go in which carriage)

MARGOT It's fine; I'll go in the next one.

#### ARIANA Are you sure, I can go.

#### KELLY

Or I can go? I'll go; it's fine.

#### MARGOT

No guys, it's seriously fine. You were the ones who wanted to go in the first place. I'm fine (they hesitate before getting in) seriously! I'm fine!

#### KELLY

(Hesitantly) Okay.

#### ARIANA

We'll see you in a second. Bye. (Ariana and Kelly get into the carriage and the next one moves forward. Margot gets in)

#### TICKECT GUY

Hold up a minute, we've got another single here. (Ticket guy shoves a teenage boy into the carriage and closes the door. Margot looks up and appears speechless)

#### MARGOT

Anthony? (Anthony looks up at her. He looks surprised and hesitant)

ANTHONY Margot Jacobson? (Margot nods her head yes) You're Stephan's younger sister right?

MARGOT Yeah. You were his best friend all high school.

ANTHONY You look...different.

#### MARGOT

(Blushing) Yeah well, two years does change things.

ANTHONY I'll say.

MARGOT So what are you up to? Last I heard you were at the University of...

ANTHONY Arizona, yeah.

MARGOT What? Do you not like it?

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#### *(continued from page 5)*

#### ANTHONY

I don't think I'll really like any college. (The carriage lurches forward as the Ferris wheel starts to go)

#### MARGOT

(Clearly taken aback) What do you mean not like college?

#### ANTHONY

See that look you have right now? It's a look of judgment (Margot tries to defend herself) Ah, ah, ah, don't try to deny it; it's okay. Everyone gets that look because we are engineered to think. It goes high school, college, career, kids. Or if you're a girl, high school, college, kids.

#### MARGOT

Well, I want to go to college.

ANTHONY Of course you do.

MARGOT What does that mean?

ANTHONY Nothing it's just that you're that girl.

MARGOT What girl?

ANTHONY The perfect miss popular, 4.0 GPA girl. It's okay, accept it.

#### MARGOT

(Offended) Excuse me? You haven't even seen me in two years. Even then, we barely spoke. You don't know me.

#### ANTHONY

Well your brother was top of his class, quarterback so it's safe to say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

(Margot is obviously offended, long pause follows)

#### ANTHONY

Also, don't say I barely knew you. I knew you pretty well.

#### MARGOT

What? What do you mean? You were my brother's best friend, we spoke on occasion but we definitely weren't friends.

#### ANTHONY

(Chuckles) Do you not remember?

MARGOT (Snaps at him) Remember what? ANTHONY Charlie Hampton's party during my senior year and your sophomore? (Margot still looks dumb founded.

Anthony elaborates) We were both very drunk and we ran into each other. . . (Margot still looks confused) We ran into each other in Charlie's parents' bedroom? (Margot gaps in embarrassment and shock)

#### MARGOT

You're the guy I hooked up with at Charlie Hampton's party? (Anthony nods) I thought that was Marcus Scott.

#### ANTHONY

Marcus Scott? Isn't he the dumb jock who like fucked a teacher or something? You should be happy you didn't hook up with him.

#### MARGOT

(Looks away because she's lying) Yeah, really dodged a bullet there, hah.

#### (Long pause)

#### ANTHONY

I didn't mean what I said before about you being "that girl." You were right, I don't even know you that well.

#### MARGOT

It's really okay. I can be that girl sometimes. I don't try to, I guess it's me or my family or some combination of the two.

#### ANTHONY

So you really don't remember that night at the party?



#### MARGOT

(Laughs) No I really don't! That was the first time I had gotten black out drunk and I can't for the life of me remember it. I only thought it was Marcus because I talked to him earlier that day and on the next Monday he told me we had hooked up.

#### ANTHONY

Oh, well. I always thought you just wanted it to have stayed in the past or you regretted it so I never brought it up.

(Pause)

MARGOT If I had known it was you. ..

ANTHONY Yeah.

(The Ferris wheel gets to the bottom again. Ariana and Kelly are waiting for Margot)

Well, I guess I'll see you Margot.

MARGOT See you.

(Anthony walks away and Margot walks to Ariana and Kelly)

ARIANA Who was that?

MARGOT Nobody, just some guy.

(The girls exit stage right)

# Untitled Fiction By Brandon Christoffel

# Sunday, June 28th, 2176 enter the home of Jason Edge age: 8, gender: male.

It was a bright day and I was filled with innocent joy and happiness. It was one of those days that makes you feel as though the world would never end and you would live with eternal happiness.

There was no way I could've known that in approximately nine years this day would be my death date. I lived with such happiness in the beginning of my life, as though the whole world took a break from violence to watch and smile. Everyone I met, everyone that saw me smiled at the sight of my joy. But it was not to last. Two years on my birth

day, the 17th of January, my father died while trying to suppress a riot on city hall. And the worst part about it is we were never given a body. There was no funeral and no compensation. Until that point I had been a straight A student and was adored among my teachers, but when my dad died my mother fell into a stage of unrecoverable grief and died two years later. I was sent from my bright sunny town off the coast of California on one of the manmade settlement islands known as the Ions. These islands were supposed to be retreats from the horrible situation in the U.S. I was

transferred to Epstein, New Edinburgh, a state brought about after the collapse of Canada from the 2100 ice hurricanes that ravaged the country forcing the people out and leaving the country abandoned. At this time the U.S. signed a deal with the Canadian government granting them the unscathed settlements along the border that had not or had barely been touched by the disaster.

Epstein was not a nice town and hardly compared educationally to my old town. The children often skipped, drugs ran through the system and petty crime and gang wars ravaged the urban area. Most unfortunately I was transferred to the Dents district, one of the worst most gang-filled part of the city. I had been sent to a boarding school for those orphaned from the Ion riots. Even more so unfortunate is that those from Ion where despised for it was the cause of the loss of 2.2 million American jobs. And I had been sent to the heart of hatred where most families had lost families, jobs, fathers, sons, daughters and mothers. People starved and water ran as freely as the dunes of a desert. It was ridiculous. Didn't they know sending me there would likely have killed me! I was furious and there was no one I knew or could go to that didn't hate my very birth for having lived there. But I did survived and I adapted to hate Ion continents. I had grown up believing that Ion was good and that it helped people, but I later found it only helped those that could afford it. I stared out the window at an old homeless man who had no left hand and was wearing a torn blue T-shirt. The bus came to a stop.

"Ok get off, this is where you live now, don't like I don't care," said the bus driver in a raspy tobacco-bitten voice.

#### "Fine."

I got off the bus and gasped for air at the muck-filled air of the city and I started coughing for about ten minutes. Then the

as much if not more than any other man, women or child. I had let myself fall into manipulation and hateful minds, there was no escape, no turning from the path; but, there is always a chance for slight deviation. I just didn't realize this until it was too late for me.

# Saturday, September 8th, 2180. Enter Devin's school for the orphaned

As I drove through the city in the state bus to the school I saw horror on the streets and in the sky, which was dark always from the pollution released from the many factories used to supply Ion. I had never realized before in my life what Ion had actually done to the people living on the bus driver chuckled and drove off leaving me alone in front of what looked like a building from a horror film. I walked to the front steps and realized most of them were broken and rotted so I had to climb a small section still semi held up. The front doors creaked and let out a cloud of dust which made me reel back and fall to the ground. I got to my feet and walked into the school, the inside of which was even worse than its front and I contemplated how any of this was up to code. But then I also realized there probably wasn't a code and I would likely die in this mess.

"Hel-(cough)-lo. Who are y-(cough)ou?" a hoarse raspy voice called from behind a counter in the back left corner of the front room.

"Yes, excuse me Miss I'm Jason Edge. I was transferred from my old town when my parents died."

"Yeah where's your old town?"

"Um." I looked nervously at a broken floor beam. "Ion settlement 22567, Miss."

"Oh," she said leaning back in her chair with a look of disappointment. "Good luck," she said handing me a pair of keys that had the number 489 scratched on a tin plate.

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#### (continued from page 7)

My story begins on the 28th of August 2182. When I was 14 years old I had been sucked into the thorns a gang on the northeast side of the city. I hadn't actually joined any gang but I accidently started a one man war against them. I had been walking silently down East Ave when I stumbled across a nasty fight between five Thorns members and a single child around the age of twelve. Apparently the child had stolen medicine from a drug store owned by a lead boy's uncle to heal his dying grandmother. I went to break up the fight being I did not see the members wore any gang symbols. It was a known fact in Epstein that there's no heroism in standing up to a gang. But

as I could not see any visible symbols in the dark I decided to be the hero I never should have been. It was made pretty apparent in the beginning that the boy was never meant to leave that alley and I never saw the gun on the head of the team.

I managed to catch two of the five off guard on my first two vicious strikes to their backs sending them to the ground wailing, but as soon as they fell I had already set forth a straight jab to a third one's face breaking his jaw in impact, but also my middle knuckle on my right hand. By this time the

other two were ready with metal weapons in hand. The fourth boy came at me with a wrench to my face. I was able to duck but not before the leader hit my lower left leg with a titanium baseball bat. Luckily I sustained very minor injuries from that blow and recovered quickly with a jab to his face. I missed my target and hit his shoulder instead. This made him reel back and gave me recovery time. By then the fourth boy had come in for a downward chop at my arm. I quickly disarmed the boy sending him in a forwards direction to the ground. I then proceeded with a crush kick to the back of his head knocking him out completely. The leader had wrangled up the first two boys but they had on their faces

fear of me and I used this to my advantage by trapping, circling, emptying and then striking where I had initially hit them. This routine caused the boys to break their guard formation of the leader to defend themselves and I immediately lunged with a crushing knuckle punch to the nose of the leader. Fortunately the leader had seen the punch and fell for my plan. He released the boy he had grabbed after bringing up the first two boys and I yelled for him to run. However the leader did not fall for my diversion and caught my punch throwing me to the ground. I rolled on my side and swept out his legs causing him to fall to the ground where his pistol and gang flag fell

"These two weeks here were the best time of my life - the other winner being my time at the Institute last year. My writing has improved and I have made so many fantastic friends. This community has become a home for me. If I were to click my heels and say, There's no place like home..., this is where I'd be transported to. I am deeply saddened that I cannot return again next year. I can honestly say that the Young Writers Institute is truly unique."

-Lillian Johnson

the last 11 shots into his stomach making him collapse and turning the heated intensity of the other two to absolute fear. They turned tail and fled down two separate streets but I didn't chase them. I ran to the young boy to drag him to the nearest establishment with any sort of medical supplies but I wasn't speedy enough. He grabbed my arm to give me the medicine and location of his grandmother's house so I could save her for him, he then died in my arms. I didn't rest that night. I took his body to a hill outside the city and gave him a king's burial. I hadn't ever known his name or who he was but I buried him as though

ripping the pistol from his hands and firing

he were divine. I stayed at his grave for two days before going to his grandmother's house to give her the news and the medication.

#### Enter apartment 225 on West Winchester drive

I knocked on the door of her apartment with a heavy heart and a ghostly expression upon my face.

"Hello," she called from the room adjacent the door.

I called back saying I had a message from her grandson. To this she opened the door.

"Do you know where Jacob has gone?" she asked.

And without the heart to tell her the truth I told her, "He has gone away. You likely won't see him again but he wanted me to say good-bye and give this medication to you." I paused, swallowing. "He said this will save your life and he wanted me to give you this money to move you out of this place and send you to a better area."

I then followed by giving her all the money I had accumulated since I arrived in Epstein as I saw no use for it to me and I had figured she needed it more. I had been surviving on my own at the school.

"Good-bye. And may God bless you," she said, then gently closed the door.

#### from his pants.

My eyes widened at their sight and an intense fear filled my whole body temporarily paralyzing me for enough time that I had not noticed the leader recover and start to kick at my ribs. I could not counter and absorbed the pain saving for a blow when the first boy tossed him his pistol. He pointed it at my face and started to pull his fingers back when the young boy smashed his head with a tin pipe and allowed me to recover, but not in enough time to save the boy. The leader shot him down right in front of my eyes. That possibly could have been the absolute worst mistake of his life as he had forgotten me and I lunged at him

### Agredulce By Cassandra Clifford

I saw fireflies light up the otherwise dark abysmal night; candles illuminate windows during the holiday season; a dim little light i mørken;

Blomstre i foråret; the orange-red sun dipping down; beautiful, divine creatures simply being; The American dream decays before my eyes; the follies of technology and a modern world; The loss of innocence; Holden Caulfield and Lolita Haze; the adults who were kids under their

responsibilities;

Kids who never grew up because of dreams; kids who never grew up because of traumas; kids; Hedonistic people; people who smoked and drank to get through the day; people who did not get through the day;

The golden lie Hollywood sells us; the beautiful sadness of words and song and film; ineffable sorrow; Anger which can consume; bitter fruit and sour apples; people with the inability to forgive; The silver-blue shine of a full moon; waterfalls cascading like the tears of a newborn child; tears;

Blue skies and silver waters; grey harbors met by faverige cities; drops of blood on unclean concrete; it Wasn't really there, but I could still see;

- Nights colored by ultraviolence; nights that were filled with only silence and a sleepy haze; sleepiness like the satisfaction after Thanksgiving dinner;
- Tiredness in the eyes of those who kept fighting; tiredness in those who kept walking; achiness in the bodies of those who worked endlessly;
- Laboring and slaving and carrying on; suffering and hurting and enduring; prospering and accomplishing and crying tears of utter joy;
- Drops of dew on soft green northern grass; dots of life on the window pane after a temperate summer rainfall; white butterflies flitting along;
- Glamorous, raw, breathtaking, astounding beauty; hauntingly red and grotesque roses; sun as it peeks, over trees, over snow, over buildings, over water;
- Rainbows as they appear after a monsoon; faith in humanity as it appears after the hurricane; the scraggly old car that always appears after a storm;

Hope; the morning sun rising softly and warmly; and bottomless, endless hope.

# Sílver, a monologue

#### By Ilana Cohen

Look, I don't know what the hell you want out of me but if you let me go, I'm ready to talk.

Call my parents? Wait, no! Please, don't...I'll explain, okay? (Pause) Okay. (Frustrated)

Yeah, I know you saw the lipsticks, nail polishes, candies, make-up, hair ties and the lighter, yeah, the lighter, fell out of my pockets. Look, officer... (Sees name tag) Officer Lambert, it's quite simple, really. (Clears throat) My lips were chapped, my nails haven't been painted in months, I needed some candy to boost my energy, I always need make-up--the insecurities society brings on, you know, and hair ties are a girl's best friend. . . (Tone becomes softer)

And the lighter. . .

Look, I took the goddamn lighter because I liked it. No, I wasn't planning to go smoke cigarettes and turn my lungs into ash before I can even learn to use them properly, or do drugs in some dark alleyway with a gang of red-eyed burnouts. I just--I wanted it, you know? (Slow, distant) You know that feeling where your fingers itch, your palms sweat, and your heart beats? Your eyes are frozen, stuck on that one thing you just have to have? (Pauses)

It was only a little lighter, anyway, doesn't mean anything to you. (Annoyed) I mean, it was like what-two dollars? Give or take thirty cents? It was worthless to the store so why the hell does it matter if I took it? (Pause) You need to know more? What more can I tell you? You won't understand, anyway. (Pause) Okay, okay. I'll try...

(Serious, stoic) It was almost... metaphysical. Maybe even, spiritual. When I walked down that crappy, milklit aisle, I felt something draw me towards the lighter. That two-dollar lighter was the shiniest silver I've ever seen. Shinier than the twinkling stars and the silver spoons that my three year-old sister Suzie drops all over the floor at home. And on the bottom of the lighter, on that rough, metal bottom, were these lacey, black letters in curly cue font. That's Suzie's favorite kind of writing, when each letter is a swirl of ink blotched onto the page, capitals scripted into a kaleidoscope of dark petals. And that two-dollar piece-of-shit lighter had curly cue written words saying "hope, dream, fly." I wanted to feel that lettering on the cracks of my palm, turn it over between my fingers, and give it a little jolt as I'd let the lighter fly from hand to hand.

Can't you imagine that? I wanted to see my face reflected in a pool of silver light and rub my thumb along the rough grinder to shoot up a little flame. When I felt that lighter thump against my thigh from the inside of my jacket, it was the most satisfying feeling I've ever felt. A cool wave washed over my body and I knew that the shiny silver lighter would follow me anywhere, tucked away in my pocket like a hidden treasure.

So yeah, fine, I took it. I shoved the lighter and all the other shit into my pockets. I was almost out the damn door when all of a sudden, the stupid detector started beeping and a security guard grabbed my arm. She searched through my bag and didn't find anything. But then she dropped the damn bag, and when I leaned down to get it, all the shit spilled out of my pockets: lipsticks, nail polishes, candies, make-up, hair ties, and the lighter tumbled onto the floor along with them. And you know, the really funny thing is I don't even need any of that shit...I don't need any of it...Fucking Rite Aid.

(Reminiscent, proud) You know, I've been taking things since I was six years old. I stole my first lollypop from the countertop of a run-down deli. It was twenty-five cents, that's all it was. But I didn't feel like asking my mom for money or to buy it for me, so I took matters into my own hands. The crinkly wrapper invited my fingers in closer and I just had to grab it, peel off the paper, and shove the sweet, grape lollypop into my mouth.

(Interrupted) Don't tell me to 'cut the crap.' I can't help stealing...It's all I'm good at...I know you don't understand. I mean, have you ever stolen something?

(Wide-eyed and spacy) Have you ever experienced that thrill, officer? That thrill of taking something that doesn't belong to you? Have you ever just needed to hold something, feel it in resting in the palms of your hands and own it?

That's what it was like with the lighter. Once I saw it, I felt like I was stealing that lollypop all over again. A flame trapped behind a shiny silver case, a sweet treat stuck inside a crinkly paper. It was the same rush back then that it is now. When I took that lighter, my head began to pound so hard I thought everyone could hear it. But that coolness, that cold that came after putting the lighter in my pocket, it was worth the trouble. I wanted to watch the flames of that silver lighter flicker under my eyelashes, singeing them ever so slightly, just the tips burning into charcoal.

(Looking down, cracking her knuckles, voice cracking) Look, I told you the whole story. Can I just...can I keep the lighter? I'll return all the other shit, okay? I promise.

"Getting the opportunity to write, grow, and learn among people who care and are passionate about writing was more than I could have hoped for this summer! I felt free. to experiment with my creativity in new ways without the feeling of being judged. Overall, being a part of the Young Writers Summer Institute was an extremely positive and fulfilling experience. Thank you!"

-Kate Swisher

# The Líttle Prophet Boy By Daniel Curry

The boy with the bag stuffed over his head didn't know where he was, nor did he care. The sky was arid, the ground rigid, and the light choked out. That was all he knew. He couldn't see anything but the suffocating darkness and the tear of the heretics' muscular arms, one on either side, as they dragged him along the ground, sending random jolts of pain and dry tears into his eyes.

The torrid air fell away suddenly, humidity taking its place; and resounding echoes rang out around them, mirroring their footsteps. It seemed, thought the boy-and he was far more intelligent than all the other boys-that they had entered a warehouse. They staggered down a staircase, his toes skidding along the edge of each step. They threw open a door, jolted to the right, and now there was a great, white blinding light above them, and the little boy felt a surge of pity for these two men because they were demons who hated the light, and he was the one with the blindfold. He smirked underneath his thick, cloth mask.

Now they entered a dark, quiet room, and there wasn't the light anymore but rather a vapid bronze hue emanating from the center of his field of vision. He was forced carelessly into a chair by the men's rugged arms, his hands still bound in duct tape and his legs left to dangle in midair. He yelped suddenly when his head was torn back, tears in his eyes again and the chair cutting like a razor against his scalp. But the men didn't respond. They preferred the silence.

A second later, and the blindness fell away as his mask was ripped from his face. Oxygen, crisp, pure oxygen entered through his nose, and he was elated. The men, on the contrary, stared down cold and stern at him, eyes like pockets of ice. They were pale and dead inside, with wide, muscular frames and faces drawn down.

"Look at this, Cal, this is the scum right here... the scum of the Earth... This is what I was telling you about," muttered the first man to his counterpart on the right. His voice was vile and serpentine, like a rusted knife cutting sharply into blissful innocence. But then the second man spoke, and his was slow and gravelly and soothing:

"Don't get carried away, MacLeod. . . Let's just do our job, yes?"

"Ha! Do your job, he says...like I give a damn about my job, huh, MacLeod?" He slithered around the table, eyes cast down like fire on the little boy. "I do my job..." He spat, and his voice reverberated around the room. "To take out scum like you!! Ya here that, kid?! Scum like you!!" And his foot came swinging down into the chair, kicking the leg out and sending the boy crashing to the ground. A hot, sticky red liquid oozed out from under the boy's cheek, and glimmered in the dim light.

"Cal!" the second man shouted, but the boy only smiled.

He couldn't see them now, with his eyes resting hard and low on the granite floor, but the voice of the first man trickled down in an odd haze, saying, "I bet you dunno what this kid did, do ya? That's the problem with men like you, Cal... Always following orders, never... never thinking." He paused. "You and this vermin have a lot in common, actually."

He let these last few words settle around

them for a moment, then continued. "This... kid... and I don't wanna call 'im that, Cal, it breaks my heart... this is the kid responsible for that string of murders two months back. Remember them? Six dead and nine missing, including my little girl. Boy genius, they say. Cultist, they say, following some psycho's orders. Thought you could get away with your little cult friends, huh, well WE CAUGHT YOU."

Here, his voice cracked, and his demeanor spiraled downward into a sort of repressed rage, before he halted abruptly. His voice lingered in the air for several long moments after that.

"...how is that possible?" trailed the second man, at a sudden loss for words. "This is just a boy."

"Yeah, yeah, and funny how just a boy can outrun the army for a month and a half, huh?" The second man just stood there, silent, and the boy lay there gazing off blankly into space, as the first man paced wildly around the room. He muttered, "Funny...funny how our best, and our brightest, and our maddest, are the first to believe God has any sense of justice beyond our own savage instinct."



# Thick, Straight Lines By Emory DeYoung

A side from the pungent stench of carpet cleaner and the unmistakable sounds of at least three people hacking out vital organs, this place isn't half bad. The hospital couches are patterned like a typical coach bus seat and are quite plush and comfortable, although I make a mental note to keep my leg at least three inches away from a meat-colored blotch in the corner of my chair. The carpeted floor is gruesomely stained in most places, but I suppose that's expected in the ER.

My optics scan the faded 'get well' posters that clutter the walls, reading every overused slogan with bored and drooping eyelids. I skim over the ones with stupid cartoon characters looking all too happy in their hospital garb. Naturally, hanging like a prized moose head above the central couch, I find a poster for safe sex, complete with information about condom use, herpes, and a timeless acrostic poem that I will remember until the day I am old and withered with bags as deep as a mother's purse under my eyes: 'STD' written out vertically and the unforgettable lines Stop, Take a second, Don't are spelled out next to each letter. Classic. There are at least ten of those "inspiring" posters that are guaranteed to be in any doctor's office hanging on the far wall. I turn a quarter of the way around to read some of the cliché quotes about mental and physical health printed on "encouraging" pictures of people standing atop mountains, arms in the air, proclaiming that you too can be as happy with your health as they are! But actually you can't, 'cause you're in the ER and that means that you're fucked up in one way or another.

That's actually why I'm here, but right now I'm less interested in the pain in my arm and more interested in the fat white kid having a meltdown in the corner. He's clearly wealthy, judging by his expensive looking Polo shirt. The kid's crying and sweating like a woman in labor in an airplane bathroom, having an absolute tantrum while his equally plump mother huddles over where he's sprawled on the floor, trying to calm him down. He screams and bangs his fists against a mustardcolored smudge.

#### "It burns! Mommy, it burns!"

"Oh, shut up would ya?" I mutter under my breath.

I've already got a headache from the ambulances wailing outside, now I've got to listen to this thing whining? I would get up and scream at the kid until my lungs burn, but aside from the pounding in my temples, this isn't half bad of a show. It's better than staring at the STD poster all night long. Seeing a wealthy white kid roll over onto his back and begin to kick his legs against the ground makes one very tempted to pull out a phone and take a picture.

I'm chuckling to myself when my vision starts to go fuzzy. This would be perfectly normal if my glasses weren't already in place, perched on my nose right where they should be. It feels like a swarm of yellow jackets is attacking the flesh of my arm every microsecond. My hand reaches up to clutch at the throbbing spot, but a hiss slips through my teeth when a searing pain shoots through every nerve in my frail human body. Loosening my grip, I force myself to take several deep breathes. My focus moves from the fat kid to the smudge in the corner of my chair, trying desperately to gain control over any part of my body. It takes a moment for my jackhammer of a heart to relax back to a normal pace and for my eyesight to clear.

#### "Hello."

I blink, my eyes flickering upward to see a nurse standing over me. Her dark hair cascades over one shoulder, olive skin catching the light perfectly. The nurse's almond shaped red-brown eyes stare down at me with a warmth and kindness all their own. She could be a reincarnation of Cleopatra, the cunning and stunning Queen of the Nile come back to life and standing above me. That, or the loss of blood is making me hallucinate.

She smiles at me, and I smile back.

"Hi," I reply, suppressing a wince when pain flares through me again.

The nurse kneels in front of my legs. "I'm Jodie. I've come to check out the new arrivals, see who's hurt the worst." She nods to where my hand conceals the bloody stain on my sweatshirt. "Can I see?"

I freeze, momentarily freaking out. Come on, Janice. I reassure myself with a



sigh. You knew this was gonna happen. You need help. Show her.

I breathe, avert Jodie's captivating chestnut eyes, and unzip my jacket. I pull my arm out as carefully as I can and hold it so she can see. Sharp gasps escape both our lips.

There are seven fresh cuts, stick straight and travelling horizontally across the delicate skin of the underside of my

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forearm. They sit among dozens of other scars, some of which are more raised up than others. They've clearly been cut open several times. Most of the fresh seven ones are already scabbed over, all expect three. These wounds are bleeding in steady trickles, one practically gushing thick red liquid to the point where my pale skin has been stained everywhere. My flesh can be seen through the openings, the deepest one exposing the buttery white fat covering my bones. The blood flows down my arm in streams, already catching in my cupped hand. I do not remember it being this bad when I left.

Jodie looks up at me once she's registered the deep slits in my arm, and I'm startled by the fire in her eyes. There's pure terror burning behind pitch black pupils, like she's just discovered the remains of a loved one buried in their burnt-down home. In that instant, I realize what that look means, and I want to take everything back. Jodie knows.

"Ah, ah, ah," the nurse catches my other wrist in her hand before I can conceal the wounds again. "You'll get germs in them and that will only make it worse."

Jodie takes the loose sleeve of my sweatshirt and wraps it around the flesh just below my elbow, looping it and tying it tight in a makeshift tourniquet. After a second, the blood slows from a gush to a trickle and from a trickle to a leak, and the nurse covers up the cuts with a strip of gauze that seems to appear from nowhere. Once Jodie is satisfied, she helps me onto my All Star -clad feet and, with her hand on the small of my back like the guiding hand of God, leads me to the ER's front desk.

"Found our next specimen," Jodie says to the receptionist.

The man behind the desk looks up at her from his typing, chuckling at her words like he's heard them a million times. "That one's getting a bit old, Jodes." His accent is British and rich, making me long for Cadbury chocolate.

"I'm too fond of it to stop," Jodie winks at him, bringing forth another round of chuckles.

"Alright, you arse," the man turns to me. "What's your name, love?"

"Janice Holston," I answer.

"Age?"

"Seventeen."

"Address?"

I continue to give responses to his questions, until one makes my breath catch.

"Reason for visit?"

My throat closes up and it is physically impossible for me to respond. The world around has folded and caved in on itself, leaving my stone body cold.

I'm about to open my mouth to stutter anything when Jodie answers for me. "Several serious lacerations to the forearm."

She looks over at me, and I give her a grateful smile. My heart does not slow as I follow Jodie down a side hallway, going deeper into the hospital. The nurse pauses every once in a while to glance through the small windows in the doors that line the walls, looking for an empty one we can occupy. She has to look through three hallways worth of rooms, but eventually stumbles upon an empty one and we file inside.

"Sit," Jodie gestures to the bed occupying the center of the floor space while she steps over to a counter lining one of the walls with cabinets hanging above it.

I comply, cross my ankles neatly, point my toes toward the floor, and rest my hands in my lap. My arm still feels like someone's poured lemon juice all over the gaping flesh, but at least the bleeding has gone down. The room is lit by warm ceiling lights, very much unlike the fluorescent ones you'd expect in a hospital. The walls are painted a soft, relaxing green and are devoid of posters. I'm tempted to raise my arms in praise for that, but keep them lowered in case

I tear my flesh open even more.

"Alright," Jodie mutters mostly to herself, but I look up at her anyway.

The nurse carries a tray over and sets it down on the bed next to me. I take in the sight of needles, thread and lots of bottles of oddly colored liquid as she pulls up a stool.

"I hope that brown one isn't a diarrhea sample," I mutter.

"It's just antiseptic," the nurse assures me.

Jodie undoes the makeshift sweatshirt tourniquet, quickly covering the fresh blood that spills forth with a fresh wad of gauze. She walks me through the process of stitches as the loss of vital red fluid is beginning to make me nauseous. I only catch half of her words, nodding every once in a while.

My fuzzy vision tracks Jodie's movements as she wets a wad of gauze with the poopcolored antiseptic. There's no warning before the damp cotton in pressed to my open flesh.

I force my body not to jerk away from the lightning that's conjured in my skin, clenching my hand into a fist in an attempt to bear through the pain. Jodie's free hand holds my wrist lightly, her thumb rubbing back and forth. I focus on that movement, holding on to the repetitive tingle of her skin on mine. I settle into its rhythm, following the tide of Jodie's thumb as the waves of calm sweep right and left. The movement clears my mind and lulls me into a sleepy state. I hear Jodie say something about how next she'll be applying an anesthetic to numb the area. Another wet cotton ball is pressed to my flesh.

One she finishes, Jodie threads a needle and starts to sow my flesh back together. I watch her fingers move the small metal object back and forth through my skin, connecting the numb, separated muscle again. Jodie works with precise movements, and I find myself wondering who taught her to reconnect flesh with such ease.

I make a mental note to stop thinking about things at three in the morning, things

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like how I got here in the first place.

Jodie cuts the last bit of thread, bandages up my arm, and puts her utensils away. Without a word, she leaves the room.

I'm left to sit alone in my silence for three minutes, wondering what the fuck I should do, when the door reopens and there's Jodie carrying a large tote bag and several pamphlets.

"Here," she hands me the glossy strips of paper which I take with raised eyebrows.

I read several of the tittles out loud. "101 Things to Do Other Than Cut, 'The Horror of Mental Illness', 'Oh My God, My Child's A Cutter.' Am I gonna find one on STDs in here as well? 'Oh No, My Dick is an Eggplant!"

Jodie looks over at me with unamused eyes and pouted lips. She grabs the tote bag and pulls out, of all things, a pair of knitting needles and a ball of deep purple yarn. The beginnings of a project already resides on one of the long wooden spears of death.

The nurse grabs a chair that was resting in a corner of the room, sits, leans back, and begins to knit. "Talk, I'm listening."

I stare at her, eyes squinting into strips. "Are you serious?"

"It's four a.m.," Jodie finishes another stich. "I'm on my break. I've got nothing better to do, so—" she shrugs. "I'm here to listen."

I just keep staring.

She looks up at me after a minute. "Are you gonna talk or do I have to ask questions?"

I don't say anything. My eyes turn down towards the bandage, following the pattern of the fabric. The fingers on my uninjured arm trace down my thigh through jeans. I can already feel the clouds of ink in my chest. Talking will only make it worse.

"Alright," Jodie thinks for a second, still knitting. "Why did you hurt yourself?"

The ache.

No words. Don't speak.

How can I explain the poisoned cloud that is shot into my heart by a single sentence, a simple action regardless of who it's from? My twisted mind latches onto that poison like a leech, sucking down the emotion for my brain to blow out of proportion. I can come up with a million different fucking deeper meanings for the insignificant thing that the other person was never even thinking. At the end of it all, I'm left feeling worthless and alone, the poison moving deeper in to my body with every beat of my heart until the ache is everywhere and there's only one thought on my mind. Cut.

"Lots of reasons," my voice is low, but hard and defensive behind the words.

"Does someone influence you?" Jodie asks, tailing a ribbon of purple yarn through her fingers. I can't see her face, but I can imagine she's got an over-sympathetic look on.

My eyes close, memories flashing in the darkness: my sisters screaming at each other, my mother arguing with my brother, the laughter of my father as I try to reason with him. Words thrown at me, half thought out, reminding me that I'm not worth the three seconds it takes to evaluate what one says. Words. It's always the words. Why couldn't it have been punches? Punches I could handle, but this? No way.

I nod. "Yeah, my family mostly."

"What do they do?"

My eyes drift up, giving Jodie's scrubsclad and knitting form a look. She understands the message immediately and asks something else. "Is anxiety a factor?""

Oh, honey, you have no idea.

A storm constantly churns in my gut, demons leaping up into my throat the second the opportunity arises. They hold me in a choke hold whenever I encounter anything new or am put on the spotlight. My eyes are always fixated on the ground when I'm in public, hands constantly fixing my clothes. I hate talking to people, and regret everything that comes out of my mouth for weeks. I've lost track of how many camps I've had to be picked up from early, and I'm still afraid to ask to go to the bathroom in class.

"Yeah," another nod.

"Body image?"

Stretch marks on waist and in the place where there should be a thigh gap, swishing hips that feel slutty with every step, biceps that droop fat, a neck supporting baby cheeks and several chins, dull eyes and unruly hair...yeah, I'd say that I have a body image problem.

"I guess," I say aloud.

"That sounds rough."

I look up at Jodie sitting across the room, her hands still moving in the repetitive motions of knitting. The stitching seems so simple, and my mind follows along with the movements. I find my heart steadying and muscles unclenching, just like they always do when a razor slices open my flesh, although knitting seems like a nicer pastime. Less bloody.

I jerk my chin at her project. "Can you show me how to do that?"

Jodie glances down at her knitting before getting up and carrying it over to where I sit on the bed. She places the needles in my hands and walks me through the steps of creating a stitch. After a minute, I've worked my way through one row and am quickly moving on to the next, even with my one arm so stiff. The wooden needles are smooth under my hands and it feels good to be doing something with my fingers other than gripping a blade and holding it to flesh.

"There's also a loneliness thing," I mumble to my hands.

"Hmm?" Jodie inquires.

"I don't have any friends at school, so I'm alone in a crowd all the time," I cast a glance up at her glorious Cleopatra eyes. "Also, I might be bisexual."

Jodie nods. "Okay."

She helps me pick up a dropped stich, and I continue knitting.

# Fall, a monologue By Eva Erickson

<sup>𝕶</sup>∧ lright Winston. I know it feels like Ayou're plunging to your death, but I promise it'll be fun! Exhilarating! Thrilling! Don't look at me like that, okay? I've done this before, believe it or not. Yeah, it was years ago, and I was sitting on a rock, kind of like this one. Sam was sitting next to me (Remember him? He was the third boyfriend with a barbed wire tattoo around his bicep) on the slippery, mosscovered boulder, our feet dangling in the openness between the water and the sky. He was petrified, Winston, like you are now. You wouldn't expect a biker that used to run a gang in the streets of New York to be scared of jumping off a little rock, but there we were. Maybe it was the fear of the unknown; that what his life would be like when it flashed before his eyes during the fall would be unsatisfactory.

You should have seen him, my boy. I threw myself off that rock time and time

again, assuring him that he would, indeed, survive the fall, but to no avail.

Why do I like cliff jumping, you ask? That's a good question actually. I think it began with my mother's suicide. When I was 14 she took a straight dive off the bridge near our house. Left me all alone in the world with nothing but a note that read "You have to live, and if you need to die to feel alive, so be it." I took her advice. I started jumping a few months after that. It first began with climbing to the top of my fence. I used to balance at the top, closing my eyes with her face burned into my mind. Then I'd jump. In that moment, I understood my mother. The exhilaration overwhelmed my senses, and I wanted more. When I was 17, I used to bring whatever boy I was hooking up with to the waterfall. I'd grab his hand and pull him down the falls with me, our bodies crashing together at the bottom of the pool. I didn't need sex; this was more intimate and passionate than anything I could conceive.

See Winston? Your old mom was a bit of an adventurer; I even jumped while I was carrying you; it just meant I could introduce you to the good life early. Where was I going with this? Oh yeah, Winston. It's in your blood, jumping, all the way back to your grandmother. Don't be such a pussy, kid. You have to do it to feel it; the smooth dive headfirst through the satin air, the calmness that ensues during the fall, the way everything else disappears. Your own mother wouldn't lie to you, would she? I know the last fall you took off that building a couple years ago was bad, I didn't see you for years after, but I'm glad you're back now. When I saw your mangled body being loaded into that body bag, I was scared you wouldn't be back. But hey, you're here now. Take the plunge again. Do it."

"The Institute was amazing, and really helped me write a lot in a very short period of time. I hadn't had much time during the school year to write creatively (outside of an assignment) so this was really nice for me. The people are awesome, and we have enough in common that we get along, but enough variation that we still have interesting conversations. The teachers/instructors were also wonderful, and I found their insights and instruction invaluable."

-Elizabeth Winkler



# I AM the SUN By Isabel Filippone

Let's pretend that every story is a dream That was forgotten when awake, Like lightning that only strikes once.

Or like a name that returns to an owner That is not its own. Could this explain Why when I hear you call for her I swear That you're asking for me? In my sleep

Raindrops are sucking on my window Begging for proper attention. I cannot Wipe them off from the other side of the glass. I am like the raindrops and also like the window.

Did you know that eye contact is a form Of communication all on its own? Yet no one seems to get my messages Because I am always put on Hold. The mountains are dipped in poison And the sun is shrieking out.

"Save me from this painful life, Where all I do is burn and shout." I can relate to the raindrops and I can Relate to the window, but I am the sun. "Save me, save me, I hope I am as worthy of rescue."

# The Problem With Windows By Kate Fishman

 $\mathbf{Y}^{\mathrm{ou}}$  can't see the bruises anymore, but you know they're there.

Even though the scars healed through nights spent running from the very idea of sleep, the memories are still night terrors that never fade, never lose their color. You still wake up sometimes at ungodly hours, at your best friends' parties where everyone has too much to drink, and see her standing at the window. Unblinking, she gazes into the street. You've never seen her cry, not once in the past two years. Instead she stands, hand pressed to the windowpane, as people laugh and dance and fall madly into one-night love around her. You used to try and walk to her and stand beside her, asking how she was, but the answer never changed, and so one day you stopped asking.

But you still watch for the signs of him on her. You know what he looks like: a smile too wide, sunglasses balanced over the tired shadows of cheekbones, hands that flutter a beat too fast and snatches of purple she tries to cover until she can't anymore. Truth she is forever trying to deny. But she didn't always need to.

The day they met, he asked her to marry him. She told him they were far too old for Romeo and Juliet, but you knew when she got really drunk and danced around the kitchen in her underwear yelling his name like a favorite song that she loved it. She was so damn happy the first few weeks, like maybe something was finally coming together. And who wouldn't be, when he cared about her the kind of way that makes you fall asleep smiling? He left flowers at her door, wrote her poems, made her feel as though no one else could ever mean a thing. They liked all the same bands, made breakfast with each other and spent the days walking in the park, lived like the movies. You felt so jealous you could hardly stand to look at her sometimes, asking yourself over and over why some people had all the luck in this world. Jesus, you were stupid.

You, better than anyone else, should have known that love goes hand in hand with heartbreak, that there is no joy without a following deluge of tears.

So all you can think is that you should have prepared her, should have warned her, should have asked why she no longer spent the nights with anyone but him. Instead you watched her smile as she walked away, promising she would call later. You barely thought of it when the phone didn't ring, figuring she was just busy. You forgot that she used to be the kind of person who would never let a boy make her too busy for her friends. Not even that boy. You forgot how much she used to adore romantic comedies and cheesy love songs, that those things never used to make her flinch and ask you to put on something louder. You didn't think to question her desire to bury the memories in music, her newfound need to run from melody that was beautiful, that would dare to make her feel.

You saw the bruise just beneath her collarbone that first week and the way she shifted so quickly to cover it, smiling like pain was a secret. You saw how she seemed to find it almost glamorous, in a twisted way, and you did too, back when you were both so sure it would be the only time. And so she didn't cry in front of you, even though you knew you would have. Maybe if you hadn't known her so well, you wouldn't have known not to ask about the marks mottling her skin. But you did know her. And so you didn't say a word.

Not even the night when she laughed so long and hard she started to sob, exaggerated joy turning to sudden sadness that cut you to the core. You simply held her, trying to pretend this was normal. You did everything you could to make her feel like it was all okay, telling her to sleep on it and take deep breaths and even to not think about it at all. How the fuck could you have said that, making it out as though there was nothing wrong? What were you thinking? Were you thinking?

No.

It was over a year before she got away from him. And maybe you can't see the bruises anymore, and maybe you haven't for a long time, but you know they're there.

You know them by the way they appeared, slowly like paint spreading, each one a thicker layer than the last. It seemed like he always waited for the previous coat to dry, leading her on like maybe this time would be different. He's really going to stop, she'd promise. I know he'll change. But she was wrong, and you knew it. She was hurting, and you knew it. The deeper she went the harder it would be to come back, and you knew it, and still you let her believe in the light at the end of the tunnel. It was the light they always say not to walk towards, not to chase further into the alleyway, but you pretended you didn't know the rules. You could have helped her, held her, given her something real to run to. But you pretended. Because you actually thought it would make her fucking happier. And now, she can't even be sad like she was then.

The lights are on, but nobody's home. Some nights, you wonder if she was better off stuck with him than left to drown in his aftermath. So you wake up at 4 a.m. and look toward the window. She is not standing there, not for the first time in years. You know you should be worried, but your sleepy brain convinces you not to look for her. You remember that every time you ask, you get the same answer.

You know it feels wrong, but still you don't look.

What are you thinking? Are you thinking?

### The Blue Above A poem compiled by Liza Frenette, Skidmore Summer Faculty\*

You are the curator of your own collage the blue above, the painted and the real in this landscape of paper. Please consider that at some point your hands must've held mine even when my skin is hot and there's a bonfire that burned in her heart even in her damaged slumber. I make an atheist's sweet oath to God and beaver Jesus to seek comfort in the shadows of mountains dipped in poison. Stop. Take a second. Don't. You were the m and m's behind the glass crying like a woman in labor in the airport bathroom where all the princesses look like a spray tan gone wrong. When we saw the elephant in the canyon Carol was sure Betsy at the A&P would understand with her cold saliva and wheelchair Billy's mother using bullfrog profanity with campfire lungs and time-consuming habits; slapping around Ben Affleck before being cuffed for grand-theft beaver.

\*Each line is directly from a piece read out loud by students at the 2015 New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. (One half of the students from day one of the readings).

# The Tipping Point By Ellie Garland

Harper scooted her chair away from the table and leaned back. The tips of her big toes, enclosed in a scuffed pair of black flats, were all that tied her to the ground. For seconds at a time, she would let her feet leave the floor. When she slipped too far, she exhaled sharply, brought her toes back to the carpet, and let her pulse slow before leaving the ground again, only to swing back farther than the time before.

Neck craned and eyes on the ceiling, she admired the fresco of a partly clouded sky. She wondered if it was wallpaper or if a man had hand-painted the stratus and the cumulus atop the blue. For Harper, this sky conjured up a strange desire. She back down to the floor and a hand swooping in to take her plate.

"You're done, sweetie?"

Harper nodded, eyeing the half-eaten salad below her, a far too fishy Caesar.

The waitress' other hand refilled the water, dousing the ice Harper had gnawed and spit back into the glass earlier that evening.

"Sir," said the waitress, turning to face the man across from Harper, "anything else for you? Off the drink menu?"

His hands were clasped on the table. Gray hairs nibbled at the sides of his ears



wanted to lean too far, to not feel the need to catch her breath or to steady herself with her toes. She wouldn't think about the hard floor beneath the carpet that would shatter her chair or the iceberg lettuce on her fork that would get caught in her throat. She wouldn't worry about her skirt flying up or her bones breaking. She would just escape, launch herself into the blue above, the painted and the real.

Before she could flee, there was a figure behind her, a strong hip pushing the chair

and the nape of his neck. His eyes scanned the room. They took in the dentil molding, a small chandelier, the red bow ties of the waiters, and the perfectly arched back of a woman. They wandered, absorbing the Coq Au Vin and the Confit de Canard, the dark spots on the red velvet carpet, the knives on white tablecloths, and the ticking of a slow grandfather clock.

"Sir? A drink?"

"No, no, ma'am. Water is fine."

She poured for him, the ice hitting the glass with a clink. He took a sip and swallowed.

"Harper, honey, would you please just look at me? For a moment?"

He leaned towards her, across the bread and butter, his sleeve almost in a candle.

Harper still had her head in the clouds, but she stopped staring to listen to his plea, more out of curiosity than compassion. It was almost evil, her incentive to hear him out, because she knew how he would struggle and squirm.

"I'm listening, Dad."

"Honey, I've missed you. It wasn't my choice, well, it wasn't my plan to go away. A minute didn't go by when I wasn't thinking of you and your mother. I was sick. It's a disease. It might not deserve your sympathy, but it does need treatment. Oh, Harper, you'll get it one day. I'm better now, and I'll be better, too, a better Dad to you, a better husband to Mom. Can you understand that?"

Harper was listening intently. She noticed his sweating hands, burrowed tightly in his napkin. She wanted to believe him, but she'd heard this too many times.

He continued. "You won't need to worry anymore. It will be different this time. Everything will be normal."

With that, Harper broke eye contact. Worry? She would always have to worry. Normal? Nothing would ever be normal. She gazed back up at the fresco. She wanted to be sure the clouds hadn't shifted while she was looking at her father. She tried to see animals and shapes, to make sense of the sky. There was one cloud tucked away in the far right corner. It looked like a glass, a wine glass. Then another, on the far left became a bottle, and in the middle there was an opener, then a shot glass, some gin, and lastly her father, his profile unmistakable. They were swirling now, these clouds, and Harper felt as though she were moving, back and back and up and up. She picked up her toes and let go.

# l remember By Daniel Goldberg

I remember when the world was smaller, and the years were longer. I remember when I could feel the magic course through my hands and spark from my fingertips, When I could lift skyscrapers if only I thought hard enough. I remember the beds that were clouds to float upon and the houses that were castles to rule, The shutters that flapped in the wind like battle flags. I remember the tyranny of bedtimes, The nightmares that were only bad dreams that ended when I woke up. I remember flipping off my teacher when the middle finger was simply the third one and nothing else, And hiding behind my mother afterwards. I remember the feeling of flight as I launched from the swing set, Suspended in the air as time stopped around me, And I remember the soft harmony of the trees, the mountains, the grass, and the daylight, Singing songs of joy and serenity every time I ventured outside. I remember walking on an alien world, and discovering every animal all over again. I remember when I was invincible, And I remember when there was no pain greater than skinned knees and hurt pride. I remember the warm, impenetrable shield of a parent's embrace, where no evil could catch me, And I remember when evil existed only in the pages of fairy tales and comic books. I remember the tears that I cannot show anymore. I remember when every color was brighter, And all the wonderful quixotic possibilities that came with the sunrise. I remember when the world was what I made it.

And when I was not what the world made.

# Accidents Happen By Luke Haas

"And she told me that I was a pig. So I smacked her, flat out."

"You hit your wife? The fuck is wrong with you?"

Dodson looked taken aback by this remark. That was the first thing Julian had said for the entire conversation, as he simply couldn't hold back his words anymore. He couldn't escape his southern partner. They were alone, working the rails together. So instead, Julian faced him.

"Well, what the hell was I gonna do, let her say that? To my face?" Dodson said.

"Yeah," Julian said, "Just let her say that. You were the fuckin' pervert in the first place."

For the first time in about three hours, Dodson was silent, much to Julian's preference. Each man nailed down rails in the sand as if the other was not present at all, but this only served to further accentuate the awkward elephant in the room. Or, in this case, the elephant in the canyon.

They'd been working tirelessly for an hour when finally Dodson spoke up, "I think you just don't know how to handle it."

"The sledgehammer?" Julian asked. "No problem, I think I'm handling it just fine."

"Not the hammer," Dodson said, putting down his tool and stretching, "Women."

"Is that so?" Julian asked, crouching down and inspecting his work for error.

"Sure is," Dodson snarled. "You couldn't handle a woman if you tried."

"I didn't realize that hitting your wife resulted in a handled woman, as you put it," Julian said, wiping dirty sweat from his brow. "Doesn't keep her from cheating on you, does it?"

After another half hour of working, the two had covered the entire canyon with rail, and had reached the exciting part. Consequently, yet predictably, the exciting part was also the dangerous part. In the middle of the canyon, there was a massive boulder that blocked the way. In the ongoing war between boulders, people, and dynamite, there always seemed to be two losers, and the dynamite was never one of those two. "You set the stuff," Dodson grumbled, pointing to the wheelbarrow of dynamite that the two had been dragging along throughout the canyon.

There were no unresolved words left between the two; the silence had transformed itself from an awkward one into a malevolent one. Julian and Dodson shared no eye contact, just disdain. Dodson was offended and Julian was exhausted. Those two emotions never mixed.

"I'm sett'n' it up, watch the fuse," Julian said as he unraveled the fibered rope gently in front of

Dodson. He handled the explosives with such care that his hands began to shake, not out of fear, but concentration. Julian was always one to get the job done without losing an arm. He wasn't going to start now, he hoped.

As Julian unwrapped the bundle and began inserting the sticks of dynamite into the boulder's weak points, he heard a weak fizzle below him. Looking down, Julian was dumbfounded to see that the fuse had been lit and had run out, but failed to light the dynamite beneath him. He stared, jaw gaping at the bum explosives by his feet for what seemed like an eternity, when he realized who was responsible.

Snapping his head toward Dodson, Julian was even more astounded, but somehow not surprised at the same time, to see Dodson holding a lighter with the same, jaw-gaping look on his face.

Without hesitation, Julian gripped a loose stone by his side and hurled it at Dodson, who was standing a good thirty feet back. The stone missed, and the shocked Dodson instinctively picked up his sledgehammer, approaching his colleague as fast as possible.

"What the fuck?!" Julian shrieked, continuing to hurl stones inaccurately toward his aggressor.

"You could be a statistic, Jules," Dodson said, dodging Julian's projectiles clumsily. "Rail workers die all the time, accidents happen with dynamite!"

"So what, you're just gonna fucking kill me? Is that it? Over some disagreement?!" Julian hollered, blindly picking up stones and throwing them.

"I'm a man who likes his dignity!" Dodson screamed, now running with his large hammer. "And you're a man who—" Dodson was cut off by a three-pound rock colliding with his skull.

Julian took his time walking over to the felled man, catching his breath and picking up another rock along the way, just in case. Julian stood over Dodson, examining his distant eyes and bleeding cranium. Dodson was about to lose consciousness.

"Why?" Julian asked, hunched over a defeated Dodson, sincerely searching for an answer.

"It wasn't this... this complicated... in my... head," Dodson mumbled, his dizzy brain moving far slower than his words.

"What do you mean? You were just gonna blow me up; no questions asked? Why?" Julian inquired, almost in tears.

"I... I just thought... it wouldn't... matter..." Dodson said, beginning to daze off. "I was... pissed... pissed at you... and no one... no one... no one had to... to..." Dodson's throbbing head lulled him into a damaged slumber.

"And no one had to know..." Julian murmured, completing Dodson's sentence.

After staring at the sleeping Dodson for as long as he needed, Julian bent down closer to Dodson. He picked up the man's lifeless arm, removed the work glove, and stared at the gleaming, dishonest wedding ring that coiled Dodson's finger.

"Your wife won't miss you much," Julian whispered. Dodson hummed gently, perhaps in subconscious response to Julian, or perhaps to a strange dream that his head couldn't comprehend.

Suddenly, Julian had an idea. He brought over a stick of dynamite haphazardly placed in a crevice of the boulder. He again crouched over the man, this time grabbing his face, tilting it upright and letting his jaw fall, leaving his mouth open.

"You could be a statistic, Dodson," Julian seethed, sticking the dynamite in his partner's maw.

"Accidents happen with dynamite."

# Untítled, Dramatíc Monologue By Naomi Harrison-Clay

T met up with an old friend a few days ago; Rachel is her name. We went to college together. We were never too close, but we were both on the soccer team, so we were around each other all the time. Most of our practices were in the mornings, 5, 5:30, something crazy early like that, right at the fucking break of dawn, we'd go out to the field and do our stretches in a circle in the pitch dark. It always made me feel like we were a cult or something, counting like drones in unison in the middle of this vast empty field. By the time we were done, the sun would have risen and we would start our practice, and then you could see Rachel's face in the light, and I remember it

it almost looked like she had a disease.

We were the only ones who got to see her like that, cause after practice she'd go back to the dorm and drench herself in foundation, and then she'd look pretty normal, except you could sometimes see the lining of her makeup around the edges of her face where she didn't rub it in good enough. She was pale except for the places where she was blotchy red, and her hair was stringy dirty blonde and greasy too, and then she was short and very fit and sort of muscular, with these amazing calves that made us the best goals throughout the season. I remember the way she used to dress, too, always with



so vividly because she had the most awful skin you've ever seen. Her face was coated in grease, it was worse when we got going and she started sweating, and she had these massive pimples formed in clumps around the side ofher mouth and across her forehead and on her cheeks, sometimes dripping in puss. Like, they had minds of their own, sprouting out, dragging themselves up out of her skin and then fucking each other hard and sprinkling baby zits all around themselves. I don't mean to be crude, but I couldn't help but stare at them sometimes, these patterned men's shirts, and she'd button them up to the collar and wear them with jeans that gave her a cameltoe, and sneakers, and she'd shuffle around campus like that.

So anyway, she emailed me a few days ago, and she told me she was in town doing a reading of a book she published, and that we should meet up. We had stayed in touch for a bit after college, meeting up with the rest of the team, but up until the other day, I hadn't heard from her in years. I guess I agreed to see her because I was curious about her, curious mostly about how her acne is holding up. And anyway, Bob is away on a business trip and my daughter was sleeping at a friend's house for the night, so I had nothing really better to do. I guess I don't know why things ever fuckin unfold the way they do. So she came to my house. I usually get nervous about having to hold up a conversation alone with someone I don't know well, but I knew that she would be more awkward than me, so I was confident. It was weird seeing her though, she had her foundation caked on and her hair in a buzz cut which I thought was funny when I first saw her standing at my doorstep, she looked so out of place.

> At first, we did the small talk thing, where I told her about Bob and Lily and doing services at the church, and she told me about publishing her book and travelling in South America with her sister, and we realized that neither of us have kicked a soccer ball since college, but that besides that we don't have much in common. And then, Reverend, we were sitting on the living room couch right up next to each other and she laughed at something I said and as she laughed she put her hand on my bare leg and it sent a tingling all the way from her fingers to my queasy stomach, you know, the kind of tingling that I get from Bob. And then we looked up at each other, her with an army of blackheads I could see dancing across her forehead 'cause I was so close to her face, I could feel her breath all hot against me, and then the whole room was hot against me as she slid her hand up beneath my skirt

and started rubbing my crotch all slow with her fingers. And she was looking me right in the eyes, until my whole goddamn torso was pulsing and she slipped her hand right down beneath my underwear and I put my own hand against her cheek and it was hot and I could feel all that oil against my skin. Reverend, I pressed my mouth against hers. I think I was delusional, because I've never felt so good in my life, I'm telling you? I don't know if I could have held myself back if I'd tried. Oh, forgive me, father, for I have sinned.

# Costume Change By Aria Herbst

SETTING: A single trailer in a park with lots of trees and open sky. CHET and ROGER, two estranged identical twin brothers, have met up after CHET has made some life choices that have alarmed ROGER, in a trailer park. ROGER, fearing for his brother's derailed life, is attempting to make an intervention, to no foreseen avail.

AT RISE: CHET is smoking a cigarette and has a beer gut. ROGER is in a suit, looking very pretentious. CHET has a strong Southern accent, laid back and slow. ROGER sounds Southern, but less so.

CHET: Right (Takes a drag from cigarette, holding it in for a second, then blowing the smoke accidentally onto ROGER.) So I'm just sitting there, minding my own business, when the kid comes up to me and asks for cigarettes. And naturally, I give them to him because hey, if he wants to fuck up that young, by all means, go ahead, right? I mean, I started smoking when I was six and the little dude was at least seven—and look how I turned out. My life's great, Roger. I mean it's fucking peachy, man.

ROGER: (Runs his hands through his hair

in frustration.) You live in a trailer, Chet.

CHET: (Pointing at ROGER with lit cigarette.) You say potato I say fuck them veggies, man. I mean, look, I'm free right? Isn't that the American dream? I mean, you—you got a wife and two rug rats pulling your hair out of your head and money out of your pockets but me—nah man, I'm as free as a bird. I'm a fucking bird and I can fly wherever I want. I ain't got no cage.

ROGER: Chet, you're wanted in at least 35 of the 50 states in this "free country."

CHET: Man, why you gotta be so glass half empty all the time? My glass is always filled to the brim with some sort of booze. Now that's success; finding a point in life when your glass is always full. Man, that's what life's about, you know? Finding your niche. (Takes another drag.)

ROGER: My niche? (Scratches his head)

CHET: I mean, sure, being a lawyer is fine and all—I'm sure you're having the time of your life with that, but me, I prefer the finer things.

ROGER: Finer things? (Rubs his temples.) Chet, you don't even own silverware.

CHET: But who needs silverware? Have you ever tried Ethiopian cuisine? Fucking A,

Roger—that's real finesse. And you eat it all with your hands. I've never felt so connected with the earth, man.

ROGER: That's great but... (Gets interrupted by CHET.)

CHET: And you know what else? The richest souls are those that have nothing, Roger. Money don't buy happiness. I've spent some days with people that live in shitholes and never stop smiling. I mean, most of the time they're completely fucked up on smack, but hey, deep down, they're happy, you know? They're living their life the way they want to. Isn't that beautiful Roger?

(continued on page 24)

"I was blown away by the talent and enthusiasm at this camp. I was thrilled to be surrounded by people who share the passion I have for writing. I had so many riveting conversations in the classroom and at the dining hall, so many word games and card games and late night editing sessions. I loved being on this campus, and all week, I felt inspired by the people here - faculty and students. I am proud of what I produced [here], and will cherish the friendships I've made and the advice/wisdom I received. Thank you for a wonderful week!"

-Ellie Garland



#### (continued from page 23)

ROGER: No. No, that's not beautiful at all. Drugs are not some grand paradise, Chet. Pull yourself together man.

CHET: Don't be a pretentious fuck, Roger.

ROGER: Look at what you've become, Chet. You used to be so, so

#### CHET: So what?

ROGER: So brilliant. And now you're just spewing this-this bullshit. What happened to you, Chet? What happened to my Mensabound brother?

CHET: Are you calling me stupid? Roger, what the hell, man? Don't come into my house and fucking insult the host.

ROGER: This is a public park, Chet. You're being delusional. How long has it been since you stopped taking your meds?

CHET: It's mind control; I'm telling you the government is trying to control us by numbing our brains, man! I've been fortunate enough to have seen the truth so many brothers have been taken. I don't want to go to sleep one night, all fine and dandy, and the next morning wake up a sleeper agent, newly activated. It's scary stuff, man!

ROGER: Chet, you need help, buddy. Let's go, you and me. We can take a train to the nearest hospital and get you the treatment you need. At this rate, you're going to be the most wanted man in America! My little brother—a criminal. CHET: I'm only three minutes younger than you, ya fuck. You know I'm not gonna get caught. I didn't commit any major crimes, just petty ones.

ROGER: Arson is not a petty crime, Chet. I mean, what the hell? That kid died in the one you set in Minnesota. (Voice raises and looks like he's about to explode. CHET stares at the floor, dropping his cigarette and stomping it out. His shoulders are shaking and when he looks up, he's crying.)

CHET: You think I don't regret that one? Fuck Roger, I didn't even set that one and yet I can't let myself be seen in public because every face I see is his; that little boy who wanted a cigarette. It's not my fault he didn't know how to handle a pack of matches. I just-I just handed a lit match to him and he freaked out, dropping it onto the floor. The flames caught onto his pant leg and the next thing I knew, he went up in flames. The smell of burning fleshthat's something you never can run from. Sometimes in the mornings I wake up with that smell fresh on my tongue. I can taste it, Roger. I can fucking taste it. Every time I smoke, I can taste it. I'm so lonely, Roger. Maybe I should go straight.

ROGER: (Pats CHET's shoulder gingerly. It's awkward to watch.)

You need to let go. Come on. Let's get you out of here. You do"t belong in the woods you need a life, Chet. CHET: You have such a great life, you know? (Something changes in the way he's looking at ROGER; not in a good way.) You got Molly and the kids. Molly's real pretty, isn't she? I need something like that; some stability.

ROGER: Thanks, man. You can have a great life too if we can just get you out of this rut!

CHET: We look so alike, Roger. It's funny, you know—how much we look alike.

ROGER: Of course we do. We're twins.

CHET: Right. We are.

(CHET produces a gun out of his pocket. ROGER grows pale with fright.)

ROGER: What are you doing, Chet? (His voice shakes.)

CHET: What are you doing, Chet? (Mimics almost perfectly.)

ROGER: (Eyes open wide in realization.) Don't you dare. Don't you...

(4 gunshot sounds and ROGER slumps backward, a hole in his cranium. CHET removes the suit jacket from ROGER and tries it on, his posture straightening, a smile on his lips.)

Morning, Molly. Hello kids! (He speaks, reveling in his ability to mimic ROGER.)

CURTAIN CLOSES

"The Young Writers Institute was an incredible experience. I not only learned so much and vastly improved my writing, but I met amazing people and made friends I will remember. I came expecting it to be kind of crappy maybe but I was surprised at how welcoming everyone was and how quickly people became close. I hope to return next year and learn even more and meet even more people. The faculty was so helpful and informative, not to mention highly experienced and talented. Yes, I will miss the people here a lot but, I think this experience has changed me for the good so I'm happy I came"

-Olive Bernath

### Pressure By London Hu

With people under the kotatsu, Pretending we were alright for awhile, alright while the wind was always rushing, with the snow against the 'pane.

We were alright, Over stories of home and fairytales over Dreams like cloudbursts.

And then we weren't alright between The lines and the gray hairs in 16-year-old black

Eye sore Eyes sore

and voice dry From laughing about the good times with myself, alone, perhaps but always it seemed with what I loved.

# Curíosíty Killed the Cat By Lillian Johnson

Why does the watch have hands? What does it watch if it doesn't have eyes? Why aren't those eye crusts we wake up with wet like morning dew? Does Mr. Sandman hate the human race?

Are shoes just minivans for our feet? Shouldn't handcuffs be called high-security bracelets? Why does the brain die if it has protective armor? Why are girls easy if men are the simpler sex?

Which is better: Irish or Jewish corned beef? How is corned beef both such an Irish and Jewish dish? Is it because in their cultural differences they find so many similarities? Am I just a raging racist? Or can I claim my curiosity knows no bounds, no limitations, no fears?

Why did curiosity kill the cat? Did the cat refuse to answer curiosity's questions? How did curiosity kill the cat? With a gun? With poison? Was there a trial? Did curiosity ever really kill the cat?

### CO<del>ff</del>ee By Ginevra Lee

A t first Index thought that every suburb and small town she saw was a carbon copy of every other suburb and small town ever to spring out of the dusty soil, an endless string of beads on a necklace, tightly fastened on the land. But before too long she realized that few things could be further from the truth. Every town was different, ever so slightly different. She first noticed it in the coffee.

Index had never been a coffee drinker before, but through necessity she became one. At first she would drown her coffee in milk and sugar, not caring about the taste. If it was sweet and caffeinated, she would drink it. But as time went on, she began to taste the difference between a good cup of coffee and a bad one.

Good and bad are being used as relative not absolute—terms here, because she still purchased the cheapest coffee she could find. But even then she was able to notice a gradient. There was the satisfactory coffee, the mediocre coffee, and the coffee that she had to pinch her nose and swish down her throat to drink.

This discovery opened her eyes, as they say. She was soon predicting the quality of coffee on a place's appearance—it had to be a small place, but not too small, and it had to be clean—when a week ago she was blind to the differences. She began to notice that different types of coffee shops were found in different types of places. Out of the way rural places that use tourist traps as their sole means of generating revenue had run down coffee shops, filled with taxidermy jack-a-lopes. Farming towns were near empty ghost towns, and if there wasn't a good bar or general store, the coffee shop was the unofficial town meeting place. However, usually they didn't have a coffee shop and she had to ask for a coffee when she checked into a motel for the night. Suburbs had the best coffee, but their coffee was also the most expensive.

So she was learning as she went, learning the differences between towns based on the smallest of details, the most insignificant of minutiae—what brands of crackers they stocked, whether they drank flat water or carbonated water, whether their roads were well maintained or not. In a way, that was the best way to learn about a town. It lacked an overt bias, and it was practical. You weren't finding out how the town thought of itself or what it was like hundreds of years ago. You asked whether or not they had good coffee, and how cheap their motels were.

Index never stayed more than a few days in any one place. But she was learning a lot. Nothing important or useful, but she was learning all the same. She was experiencing life. Through the months she was on the road, her map became increasingly covered in notes—so covered, in fact, that at the next town she passed she was forced to admit defeat and buy a new map. When she checked into a motel later that evening, she stayed up copying the notes, carefully, into the back of a book she found lost beneath her car cushions. The notes marked which towns had the best coffee and the dirtiest rooms, the friendliest civilians and the best cherry pie. She had written down the weather on the day she visited and what she did to try to find Confidence.

There was still no luck with the search. Index kept it up, but she could tell that her heart wasn't in it. It became a habit, and habits are hard to break. But she knew she couldn't keep it up forever. She knew that one day she would drive into a town and want to stay there forever, or want to leave it immediately, or want to go straight to bed and head out the next morning before the sun rose, and she won't bother asking around if anyone saw a barefoot girl who answers to Confidence and thinks herself to be a cat. She was terrified of that day. She knew that her journey wasn't really about Confidence anymore, but she still didn't know who it was for. It wasn't for her, she knew that much.

While waiting for the answer to reveal itself, she drove on.

"Every class was so engaging and informative and all the teachers were very interesting to listen to. Also, everyone (all the kids) was so nice, nonjudgmental, and eager to write. I loved not only becoming friends with super cool people but making friends with people who love to write and read other people's writing. There was such an open, comfortable environment where anyone could read their work and get feedback or just have fun hanging out. I loved the program!"

-Ilana Cohen

# Wicked Awesome Friend For Like Ever

### Dedicated to Erin Van Flandern By Nick Martin

You were the cotton snow trapped between crevices of pavement. You were the M&M's behind the glass received by the tender hands of a young girl.

You never understood, I wasn't a broken alarm clock that rested on the bureau, displaying inconvenient time.

I was a liar.

Now, I wish we could have finished Men In Black 3, with my sweaty hand interlocked with yours. I wish we could have gone to semi together and danced with our feet following studied patterns.

But you had an undetected illness, lurking beneath the surface. It revealed itself in a lonely cottage in New Hampshire. I heard the sirens echo from a state away, as the beauty escaped from your purple lips.

I was an abandoned love letter.

But, for one night we were the same. We were waffles, woken up to before Sunday morning church.

As syrup and warm butter filled our pores, we entered a state of final bliss. Then you disappeared.



These shards, rearranged and put back together, recount the relationship between a shy poem-loving boy and the fantastical creative writer who destroyed him.

#### **BORROWED LIVES**

After her, everything falls apart.

In reality, life as he knew it shattered the moment he locked eyes with her. He'd felt the cracks shudder, warning shots, but he'd shrugged his backpack a little further onto his shoulder and weaved his way through the sea of students anyway, like a lone salmon struggling upriver. It was instinctual.

It's funny how being alone aches so much more now that they're over. Not much changed on the physical planein fact, life simply reverted back to the way it'd been before. He walks by the lockers instead of meeting her there for stolen kisses. He eats lunch by the sapling in the corner of the courtyard again, alone. His social life lapses back into its old comatose state.

Some afternoons he'll be curled up somewhere, reading,

when the 4:00 p.m. sunshine instantly floods him with memories. "Golden hour" she'd called it, sunlight glancing off her hair, turning every strand that warm shade of yellow. He'd feel tempted to reach out and stroke her hair then, so he would, and she'd rest her head on his chest until the sun dipped below the horizon and the air turned chilly.

When he finally snaps out of his reverie, he'll discover thirty minutes have slipped by. Also, he's lost his place. He'll busy himself with burying his nose back in the novel, convincing himself the flashbacks don't bother him anymore.

### Golden Hour By Yuki Morgan

These days he scrapes by on borrowed lives. He absorbs energy from the strained short-lived conversation offered by the few friends he still has, sealing it away deep inside so he can carefully ration it out.

And still, every stray glimpse of her takes his breath away.

#### VIBRATE

Art doesn't look at his phone as much as he used to, but notifications still make his breath catch and his hands fumble. Each shrill sound is torturous. An email, post, text, or tweet, yes, but from whom?

"This program showed me what it meant to create something beautiful with words, as well as make me think practically about how to live a life while writing. The people I met here are amazing and passionate, and made me want to create and work hard alongside them. This is an experience that I will never forget, and is something that I am eternally grateful for. Living in a sort of bubble, I came here excited to meet people who loved what I loved, and I was not at all [disappointed]. The teachers are phenomenal, and there is endless learning and fun and love for writing, as well as pushing people to be better."

-Marianna Nayman-Franks

She's what he vainly hopes is behind every buzz, every beep—and never is.

It's a pendulum's swing—the high of swiping the lockscreen, the low of seeing any name but hers. There is no net gain; the thrill, the rush, takes more energy than it gives. He is a battery, drained. Or perhaps he's the charge cable, snapped. All he knows is he's been yanked out of his outlet, his power source.

He can't bring himself to swap the sound for silence, though—he needs the melody of hope behind the beat of his metronome heart—so he compromises. When people ask why his phone's always on vibrate, Art just shrugs.

#### LIKE THE POEMS

Being in love is just like what the poems say, Art thinks. More. Slanted sunlight paints his room gold as they lie sprawled across his sheets. Her dress is crumpled, his hat slumps over his eyes. She's wonderfully warm, like candlelight. He listens to her chest rise and fall and feels her plodding pulse in the palm against his cheek.

Art remembers reading poems in grade school. Poppies and wheelbarrows and

pastures, yet so much more, the teacher says. Look at the line breaks and tangy adjectives. See the symbolism? It's like they nicked a branch Art assumed was dead to reveal supple green fibers. Poems are like secrets. They torment He stumbles him. through the next few weeks wondering how many other hidden doors in his life he'd walked right by.

It takes the rest of that year and the better part of the summer but, slowly, poetry grows on him. He spends hours in his parents' walkin closet turned home

library, leafing through the petal-thin pages of leather-bound volumes titled "The Best Loved Poems" and "The Bond of Poetry." The words ripple on his tongue, echo inside his mind. They're alive, he realizes, biting and breathing and vibrant. Then, just like that, the old frustration falls away. He doesn't feel the desperate need to understand them anymore, because really, he can't.

Poems aren't secrets. They're experiences.

When fourth grade begins Art hits the ground running. He goes from the

#### (continued from page 29)

quiet boy with the beanie to the quiet boy with the notebook and beanie. Sentence fragments flow through his veins and out his fingertips. He feels like he's been rebooted, upgraded, the same only better. Not long after, he meets her.

Art presses a shy kiss to his sleeping girlfriend's wrist.

#### COLOR OF LONELY

The lady barely looks up from wiping the counter as the bell chirps and he steps inside. Art shakes his umbrella before pulling the door closed.

"Th' usual?" she smiles, the crow's feet around her eyes softening. He nods. Apron crinkling, she scoots around the counter and shuffles into the back, returning with a brown paper bag. Now comes the scrutinizing. She drops the bag with a hushed thud and she props her elbows up beside it, frowning at him. Art places a ten on the counter and sweats.

Most days she takes the ten, once in a while she'll narrow her eyes until he's added a few quarters. What he dreads are the days she hands him back a one, a five, sometimes less, sometimes more.

Immediately she shakes her head and

pushes it towards him. An outright refusal. When he begins to protest, she only waggles a finger at him.

"My shop, my rules. Enjoy th' bread." She picks up the rag again and Art knows the discussion is over. He sighs, fishes a single out of his wallet, and pokes it into the narrow neck of the tip jug; this, at least, she allows. Scooping up the bag and pocketing the ten, he unfurls his umbrella and ambles back out into the rain.

"Why 'Cause you, my boy, got eyes th' color o' lonely, and I ain't makin' you pay up to me what's already been pummeled out o' you by fate."

#### CAPILLARIES

There are many things Art likes. Vanilla, the beach, smiling at nothing, fingertips ghosting over the back of his neck. Simple things.

He pulls the guitar case onto the bed and opens it carefully, revealing the glossy instrument. His fingers brush against the strings gingerly, hungrily.

Then there's her. She's the odd one out, he thinks wryly, because she isn't simple at all.

Tuning before all else is second nature to

him now. It fixes the guitar's heartbeat, gone off key after months of being suffocated by boxes and stiff-collared shirts in drycleaner's bags. Art fiddles with the slackened strings, schooling the jumbled sounds into a clean pattern: E-A-D-G-B-E. He hums along out of habit, giving the guitar another wistful strum.

Art pulls a few crumpled sheets out of the case's front pocket. Picking up a simple rhythm, he begins pairing words to each cluster of sound. Writing is where he's more technical—the music curls up inside and ripples through him. Poetry lingers in his veins, melodies course through his arteries. The trick is getting the two flows to meet.

Guitar strings make great capillaries.

He spends the better part of the next hour toying with various tunes and scribbling notes in the margins. Then, he zips the guitar up again and stows it back in the closet. The song's not done, not by a long shot, but it's done for today. He needs to think on it some more before coming back to it.

Art gazes out the window. Maybe that's what she's doing. Maybe he's her song, still unfinished.



"The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute opened me up to my own abilities and a love of writing that I actually didn't realize I had. It provided a safe space where I felt encouraged to continue writing & appreciate my own style as well as others'."

-Naomi Harrison-Clay

### Listen

#### By Marianna Najman-Franks

Normally he heard music in everything, melodies in each crevice and crack, but today the music was faded. The music that was constantly filling his eardrums blared as usual, but the normal potential that he heard was missing. There was no invisible bass line, no tangible violin solo towards the end. It sounded muffled, like someone singing with a cloth over their mouth, making their words blur and the pitch plummet. Malcolm licked his lips and scratched his ear hard with his index finger, attempting to make himself feel enough pain to hear the noise again. But for some reason all the sounds blended together, and he lost the poetry of the melody.

The music boomed loud into his headphones, and suddenly as the cymbals clanged and the trumpet resounded, it all sounded too familiar. He remembered the exact second that it changed, from passionate to mundane. The notes went from girls jump roping happily in a culde-sac of sound, to soldiers marching in a solemn line, quick to conform and fall into place with all the others. He was scared; scared of the way his ears stopped detecting the passion.

He took his headphones off, breathing forcefully for a moment to collect himself.

No matter what the song, no matter where he was, he couldn't feel the passion of the hands on the keys or the pick tugging the strings. Why couldn't he understand what the melody was saying anymore? He couldn't hear the power of the music, echoing in his mind like tiny thoughts as it always had. Tapping his foot hard on the floor, he hummed a slow, steady beat. He couldn't hear the crescendo rise, or the chords alternating like two ends of a breathtaking seesaw.

Maybe he lost it because he wasn't listening to the right music. His older brother James, with mop-like hair, slurred words, and cheddar-colored teeth, a bassist for a local punk rock band, had once told him something that stuck with him. "The music that you choose to put to your ears is what dictates what you compose. Remember that while you listen. Play punk, and you will be angry. Play indie, and you will be dreamy. Play classical, and you will be calm."

But Malcolm had never really listened to James, had he? He'd listened in the sense that he remembered, but never really heard it, never took it into account. After all, James wasn't the most reliable person. He never came home at night, and Malcolm would see him on Fifth with a sign reading "help me I'm homeless, anything helps," begging naive strangers for some cash with which he could buy weed. But James did have his moments—rare, but moments nonetheless.

Malcolm regretted not listening to him, especially since he'd left last week. The smack of the suction of the sliding doors as he'd run away echoed in his ears in place of melody. Even when James was hung over, or clearly under the influence of a powder, drink, or plant, he always had melody in his eyes, his pupils darting back and forth, occasionally gazing on something he found eccentric. Whenever Malcolm was listening to music, James would walk over and just stare at him.

I'm watching you feel the music, Malc. You gotta get your whole body into it, you know? Without that, your ears are just organs, not vessels." When James said this, his eyes were striped with pink, and his mouth had a little drool hanging off the side like a man on the edge of a cliff, about to jump. But it made Malcolm feel something special, making the hair on his forearms stand up like soldiers at attention, his stomach bubbling with something warm. That's always what happened when James talked, no matter what he said, always making Malcolm feel like he had a purpose; like nothing he did was ever meaningless.

Malcolm remembered when James had gotten him on the list to a club in town, where his band, Sautéed McKensey, had a gig. The smoke made him cough, and he remembered his chest thumping with the loud bass. He remembered the way James' eyes shut and the way his fingertips stealthily fluttered from string to string during his solo. It was as if nobody was in the room besides him and that bass, nobody listening expect himself, fine-tuning all of his movement to mesh with the music. It made Malcolm feel the vast array of emotions that James felt when he played. Malcolm was anger, he was in love, he was a cheater, he was selfish; he was everything the notes told him to be.

When Malcolm arrived home after the concert, he immediately slid his headphones over his ears, and suddenly felt something new when the music played. He imagined every bass line being played by James, the passion and love for every individual note emanating from his iPhone.

But now that James was gone, things were different, and Malcolm couldn't fee it anymore. When nobody was watching him feel the music, he couldn't feel it at all. And that was how he lost it; his inspiration. Even when he listened to his favorite song, the one he had listened to a million times, he didn't feel anything. He missed the cheddarcolored teeth and their awful morning what-the-fuck-happened-last-night breath, and the darting pupils moving quickly from left to right.

He missed late night yelling between his furious mother and his fenced off brother, filled with slams and broken glass and regrets and guilt rips. He longed for the reassurance that James was home and safe, although perhaps not from his mother's sharp tongue, hit Malcolm like a wrecking ball, demolishing every ounce of worry left in him. He remembered the last fight, the one with the secret stash inside the pillow and the one with the threats. It's what made the music leave him, flee from the cul-desac of sound and travel far away, too distant to be heard properly.

Malcolm was scared. Not just of the way he couldn't feel the music anymore, but of the way his ears were turning back into organs. He listened for the suction of the sliding door to sound throughout the house again.



Were the stars in the inky night sky? Did the blinding city lights outshine them and cancel them out? Did blaring horns or singing birds wake me? When I danced into the kitchen were my feet and spirit light? When I walked out into the still of day did I breathe in the blue air? Was the road solid beneath my feet, or, was it me that was shaking? How many steps did I take to get to you? Were you even there? Did the honey sun reflect the gold of your hair? Was I smiling when I grabbed you and whispered fiercely that I loved you? Did I even say anything at all?



"I was definitely nervous when I first came, but at the end of these two weeks, I can say I am thrilled with this experience. I have met such great people who have been such fun friends and who have helped me a lot with my writing. Everyone, including the amazing faculty, was so encouraging and supportive. I am really proud of the work I have produced here, and I know I will carry the skills I have learned here with me throughout my whole life."

-Claudia Teti

# A Clown and a Priest Walk into a Nail Salon

ike my dear mother used to say, there's ⊿nothing like a good manicure, eh Father Ralph? I tell you, as much as I love the boys in our troupe, it's a little frustrating that I'm the only one who seems to appreciate the finer things, like the gentle caress of a brush of clear paint across the nailbed, or an invigorating massage between the toes. I can't remember the last time I did something just for me. The salon is the first place I look to when I need some alone time. See?

All the nice ladies in here know me from over the years. They understand I have nothing to be ashamed of. A clown's gotta have a break here and there, just like anybody else.

You know, I don't think many people realize this, but we clowns in the comedy business are essentially slaves to the world's enjoyment. I mean, when you walk into a birthday party, who's making everybody laugh? Me or one of my boys-Snarky Puppy, Happy Pete, Silly Billy ... It takes a lot of soul to do what we do. Every morning

### By Annie Nields

I get up and look in the mirror and ask myself: Alright Steve, do ya have it in you today? 'Cause you'd better give it all you got. A very special little boy or girl is counting on you. You create the mood. You set the tone. Then I put on that mask and slip on my big shoes and I can't leave the role. Do you see what I mean? My job is to make people laugh, create good memories. If I don't, I've really screwed everything up for the family. I've wasted their time. They can never get that memory back.

Sometimes late at night, if I've had a really bad day, I consider quitting the boys and, you know, getting a simpler job, one with less emotional commitment. I suppose I could've become a pancake flipper at my brother's diner, or even worked at a nail salon like this (Please don't take that the wrong way, Wanda, you know I think you work wonders with those hands). Right after I got my diploma from clown school, my brother Nicky asked me if I wanted to be the grill master at his roadside diner. Boy, can I remember that moment as if it were yesterday. Never thought you'd hear a clown talking about feeling dignified, eh? So I look at him, square in the eyes, and I says: No Nicky, I got a job to do. I got a service to provide. Call me in a couple of years, and you'll see I'll be a changed man. Then I turned on the balls of my feet and went into the crowd of my true comrades. I never looked back.

Ah, goddamnit, what a sap I am! I think I actually made myself tear up. Oh, I'm sorry, your Grace. I would never truly mean to put the Lord's name in vain. I'm a very pious man. I'm convinced that making another person so much as giggle is one of the few ways to keep the spirit of the Lord alive. Some people pray, sing, say grace ... Me, I think comedy is pure generosity.

Well, I should probably get moseying along. Snarky's bringing the car around in a couple minutes, and we have an elementary school party to prep for. You enjoy your day, Father Ralph. It was a pleasure to meet you. God bless you.

"The Young Writers Institute has had a great impact on my writing and life. I have met amazing people and formed even better friends. My confidence as a writer has grown immensely and my work has been improved greatly with the help of the teachers, students, and workshops. This has been an experience I wish didn't have to end!"

-Elizabeth Nelligan



### Just Friends Don't Share a Bed By Maya Domini Paolasso-Martinez

She was supposed to stay in the living room, because that's where friends slept. They didn't share a bed. Just friends weren't in proximity of each other when they slept. Then again, just friends didn't look at each other the way she would look at him.

She was invading his privacy, more or less, yet she found herself unable to stay away from his bedroom. She hadn't been able to sleep that night anyway, and his couch wasn't much help, with the squeaky sound of the leather against her bare legs every time she tried to shift into a comfortable position. She found herself giving up after multiple attempts, and resorting to walking around his living room at 2 a.m., admiring his wall-mounted guitar collection, running her fingers over the strings, barely audible hums vibrating at the loss of her fingertips when she heard a whimper once, twice, and finally, a third time, coming from the direction of his room.

The frown on his face deepened as she crossed the line from hallway to bedroom, the moonlight peeking in from the curtains just enough to illuminate the pained expression on his beautiful face. But he was still completely asleep; trapped in his nightmare, letting out another few pained whines, shifting heavily. She bit her lip, tensing at the sight, holding her breath as she tried to figure out what to do. His breathing changed, his head rocking back and forth against the pillow. "No," he murmured.

She looked down at him. She knew that she should wake him and save him from whatever horrifying thing he was dreaming, but she also knew it was only a dream, and even scared sleep was still sleep.

"Don't," he abruptly breathed and lurched lightly. "No." He repeated, kicking the covers and grasping at the comforter.

She couldn't stand it any longer. She had

to do something. She let out a timid sigh, forcing herself to push aside any doubts in her mind whether to wake him up or help him sleep.

She took slow strides, crawling into the bed, sliding under the comforter easily. She moved until she was close enough to feel his body heat. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and pretended to sleep, taking his hand in hers slowly, interlocking their fingers. She squinted her eyes just enough to realize that his frown had lessened. She smiled, and closed her eyes again, almost drifting away when she was pulled back yet once again by the sound of his agitated moaning. Her eyes shot open and she shifted her body to fully face him, his face was twisted up in fear. "Don't," he gasped again, throwing his head to the side.

"Shhhh," she whispered quietly, turning on her side, shifting even closer to him, placing her free hand on his chest, drawing circles above his heart. He breathed in heavily, but seemed to calm again with her touch. She watched him for another few minutes, tracing his heart with her fingertips and counting the beats, watching as his chest expanded and collapsed easily now, all signs of the nightmare no longer there.

She let out a sigh of relief knowing he was at peace, but still she frowned, kissing his cheek as lightly as she could manage. She slowly shifted away from his body, pulling her hand away from his chest, sliding towards the side of the bed. She hesitated for a second, turning to watch him one more time, asking herself, would it really be immoral for her to stay with him? But she fought herself, remembering that they were no more than friends. And just friends don't share a bed.

Sighing again, she worked up her resolve before pulling her hand away from his, and moving the covers off her body slowly, the heat slipping away as the now-cold air bit at the skin of her bare legs.

As she lifted herself off the bed, his hand unexpectedly lashed out, catching her wrist. In shock, she looked back to see him sitting up, resting on one elbow, now fully awake. They laid there for a moment, eyes locked, one of her legs off the bed, the other knee pressing into the mattress as his hand held her wrist tight. The moonlight was still shining just enough to bring out the color of his eyes in the midst of the dark, his dusky blonde hair a mess that fell over his forehead. She felt breathless, the surprise overwhelming as he pulled her wrist a little closer to him, looking at her with veneration in his eyes before he whispered, "Don't go."

She froze, his hand still holding her tightly. "You want me to stay?" her voice was hardly a whisper.

"I wouldn't have asked you to if I didn't want that." He shifted closer to her, running a hand across her cheek. His eyes studied her face, as his hand slid slowly down before she used her free hand to stop him.

"Easton." She swallowed hard, pulling his hand away from her face. "You have a girlfriend."

He blinked for a moment, bringing his eyes back to her level. She felt her heart beat intensify as silence draped over the room. Her body shivered at the longing to accept his offer. She knew it was wrong for him to ask for her to stay, and she didn't understand his sudden change in heart to ask her that. They were just friends, he was in a relationship, and it wasn't supposed to be this way, was it? Questions flooded her mind as he leaned forward, taking her face in his hands, pressing his forehead to hers, his breathing now erratic, falling on her lips as he whispered.

"She's not here."

# Castor Canedensís

#### By Priscilla Rapp

"What?" Alex rubs his eyes. He doesn't know what time it is, but his room is pitch black. He pushes himself up further in bed, trying not to drop his phone, patting the night table for his glasses. Oliver's voice on the other end of the line is slurred, and Alex can hear crackling laughter in the background.

"Alex, Alex, Alex, listen. Listen." As far as Alex knew, Oliver was still in Canada— Ottawa, to be specific. He hadn't told him why he'd gone in the first place, but he figured he could safely assume it had something to do with the Molson beer and the fully nude strip clubs. "Listen."

"Shit, I am, what is it?" Oliver laughs and Alex can almost see the stupid halfconscious smile plastered across his face.

"You're not even gonna—it's gonna change your life. You're gonna shit yourself. Go...go get on the john. So you don't shit yourself. You'll at least pee a little, if you don't shit the bed. Where are you? I swear to god, there will be something coming out of every hole in your body."

"Dude, c'mon. It's like 3 in the morning." Even as he says this, he knows he'll have to listen and likely participate—in the rest of their conversation. Nothing he does now will stop the train wreck he's about to be a part of.

"A beaver. We stole a beaver."

"Wait - what? A live one? Ho-"

"Shh, shh, shh, listen, it was like...ya know when you go to the museum and they have those birds and stuff that are real birds but dead but not rotten ones? It's a...shit. Marc! Marc, what's that thing?" There are a few seconds of white noise before Oliver continues. "Marc doesn't know shit, he says taxi cab, but that's not right, right?"

#### "Taxidermy."

"Alex. Alex. Be a good listener to my story and shut your face's mouth hole. Taxidontist. Like

Steve Irving."

"I don't have the time right now to explain

how inaccurate that statement was."

"Alex. I am trying to tell you a story. So not an alive one. A dead one. Anyway, we were driving and I see the fucking queen of all taxi-cabbed beavers on top of this place. Lumber yard place. It had the wood in its mouth—not in a gay way, like it chopped all the wood. Ya know, it couldn't...it couldn't chop all that. Beavers can't even build their own house. Maybe this beaver was smart though. But you know I had to have that beaver. It would look so good in the kitchen. It would. On top of the fridge. So we got it, in the car. The beaver. Climbed the fence. Snatched that beaver. He was on the roof. But we got him." He stops, as if to make sure Alex is still listening.

"Yes. The beaver."

"Right. Beaver, Jesus. It was so hardcore. Like imagine...imagine meeting like Ben Affleck or someone, it was like...this beaver was the Nick Cage of beavers. With his teeth and everything, and the...the claws. Crazy respect for that beaver. He knows what the fuck is up. We got beaver Jesus ridin' in the backgat and up get to the

backseat and we get to the...the Mounties. Canada cops, right? With the hats and horses and stuff. And we're like 'hey' and they're like, 'you got any beavers?' and of course we're like 'yeah' and apparently it was an illegal beaver. Couldn" take it home. No fur across the border, the guy said. Tragic. So I offer this guy a beer—" Alex almost chokes.

"What? You can't bribe a—What the fuck—are you in Canadian jail right now?" There are a few seconds of silence before Oliver answers.

"Maybe. Don't ruin the story, you shit. So we have a beer with 'em and we're getting hammered and they decide it would fuckin hysterical to dress up the beaver like a cop, like with a hat and stuff. A Canada cop hat. With the... the maple leaf and stuff. Only better thing would be like...maple syrup. Then they got him a knife stick—no...night stick, to chew on. Fuckin great; it was great. That beaver...damn. I swear, it's the fucking reincarnation of Winston Churchill. Smokin' a cigar and shit. But they're getting these calls, from other Mounties about the break-in at the lumber place. All these cop cars and stuff are goin' by, and...shit; they don't even know. They don't even know. They're taki" pictures with it. Grand theft fuckin beaver, man."

"Shit, just—"

"It's almost over! It's almost over I promise! So we drive away, they still got the beaver, right. All dressed up still. And I'm... I'm drunk as a fuckin skunk, so Marc... Marc's drivin'. Like five minutes later, we get stopped by this other guy." Alex sighs and interrupts.

"How much is bail?"

"Shit...I don't even know."



# A Story About You By Olivia Romano

You walk down the dark streets of a new city, having snapped yourself through space like a rubber band, only now your edges are worn you are worn down, and you need to rest, to get inside away from the piercing chill that is your past, creeping up on you like a cold pat around the neck that transports you back to the time you were four, and you fell face-first into the snow for the first time and you ran, yelping red-faced with frost kissed cheeks into the arms of your mother who held you as you cried-but she is not here now. You are, and you are alone as you walk into the seedy bar that has grown up on your right. It suffers from a bad name and a bad smell, but you slide into a seat at the bar with such practiced movement you fit into the grooves of the chair like it was made for you. Next to you, a girl with red lipstick smiles, and you're put off by the lines of her cheeks you find too much familiarity in how they crease, or maybe not enough-but you talk to her anyways. "Let's get out of here," you say, but what you mean is 'me! I want to get out of here,' and she feels this, parts from you under the streetlight, but not before pressing a slip of paper with her number into your hand, flashes that one red-stained tooth at you as she smiles goodbye. You watch her walk away, silhouetted by the street lamp, and the weight of everything you could've been hangs in the air, shatters as you turn your back, crumple the piece of paper in your hand, shove it deep into the front of your pocket and you keep walking.

# Sunday Morning By Chloe Schwartz

SETTING: A kitchen in a city apartment on the seventh floor or thereabouts, Philadelphia. Early morning on a Sunday.

AT RISE: Leia is sitting at the kitchen table, orange juice, pancakes, and syrup in front of her. The pan she used to make breakfast is still on the stove (empty), and she hasn't eaten any of it yet, stabbing her food with a fork repeatedly and reading the newspaper. The sunrise streams through the window along with the faint sound of birds chirping, but the doorway leading into the kitchen is dark. The first thing heard is a light clicking on, and the sound of feet padding down the wooden hallway toward the kitchen.

CARRIE: [off] Leia? You awake?

LEIA: Mhmm.

CARRIE: [entering through the now lit doorway] Damn, that smells good. You make pancakes?

LEIA: Mmm.

CARRIE: Not any left for me I s'pose? [Goes over and looks into the empty pan] Oh.

LEIA: Mmm.

CARRIE: Um. Okay. I guess I'll just make some for myself then. [Turns and walks over to the refrigerator, opening it]

LEIA: There're no eggs.

CARRIE: Hmm?

LEIA: No more eggs left. I used the last of them.

CARRIE: The carton's right here.

LEIA: Yeah.

CARRIE: [picking up the carton and opening it] It's empty.

LEIA: [turning the page of her newspaper] Hmm.

CARRIE: You put the empty carton back in the fridge? [Pause, waiting for an answer] Leia, you know how much that bothers me.

LEIA: What bothers you?

CARRIE: Putting empty things away instead of throwing them out!

LEIA: Really? I hadn't noticed.

CARRIE: I've only told you about a thousand times.

LEIA: Must have slipped my mind.

CARRIE: But you've never forgotten before-[pause] Oh.

LEIA: We're out of milk too.

CARRIE: So that's what this is?

LEIA: [staring at the obituary section in her newspaper] And butter.

CARRIE: Seriously?

LEIA: Oh look, Ms. Agatha died last week. Pity. I quite liked her. Used to tell me the oddest bits of poetry.

CARRIE: Leia.

LEIA: And she made wonderful cookies too. You know, if she was still alive we could've borrowed some milk from her.

CARRIE: Leia, stop it.

LEIA: [as though Carrie said nothing] But you never bothered to talk to her anyway. Not surprising really, seeing as you never take the initiative.

CARRIE: Seriously, cut it out.

LEIA: I suppose I could've introduced you, but right now I"m not sure you're worth it.

[Pause]

CARRIE: Excuse me?

LEIA: I said you're not worth the effort.

CARRIE: I-What?

LEIA: You need me to say it a third time?

CARRIE: Leia, what did I do?

LEIA: Mr. Hanson died too. They're giving away his cat, aww...

CARRIE: Leia, please.

LEIA: I should see if I can adopt it; it looks adorable...

CARRIE: Okay, fuck the obituaries and fuck the cat!

LEIA: I'm not sure fucking obituaries or cats would be particularly enjoyable but to

each their own kink I suppose.

CARRIE: What is this about Leia?

[Pause]

LEIA: Well, I rather thought it was about the eggs.

CARRIE: No, it's not about the eggs, it never was about the eggs, or the obituaries, or that damn cat that we are not adopting. Ever. Now will you please tell me what the fuck I did so we can both get over this and move on with our lives?

LEIA: Oh dear. You know, I really did think it was about the eggs. [setting down the newspaper and looking at Carrie for the first time] I mean, it couldn't've been about the milk, or Ms. Agatha, or the fact that you've been cheating on me for the past three months. No, that would just be absurd.

CARRIE: I've been—What?

LEIA: You know, for using it so often in your vocabulary, you have an oddly vague sense of what fucking means.

CARRIE: I-I understood what you said, but...

LEIA: Oh good, I'm glad to hear it. Now, either give me an explanation, and it better be damn good, or get the hell out of my house.

CARRIE: I-Leia, I don't

LEIA: Wow, thank you, I completely understand now, thank you so much.

CARRIE: [nearly shouting] I didn't cheat on you!

[Pause]

CARRIE: [quietly] I didn't. I swear.

LEIA: I don't believe you.

CARRIE: [sitting down in the opposite chair] Who'd you hear it from?

LEIA: I don't think that's any of your business.

CARRIE: Of course it's my business, I'm the one that's being accused!

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LEIA: Fine. Mia told me.

CARRIE: Mia?

LEIA: Yeah.

CARRIE: But she ... told me ...

LEIA: What?

CARRIE: She's the one that told me you got fired.

LEIA: Fired?

CARRIE: Yeah. A week ago?

LEIA: What?

CARRIE: And that's why I've been out so much, why I've been so pissed at you.

LEIA: Carrie...

CARRIE: If you'd just told me, I'd have...

LEIA: Carrie, I didn't get fired.

CARRIE: ... been - What?

LEIA: I-I didn't get fired.

CARRIE: But—I talked to your boss and,,,

LEIA: Of course my boss told you I got fired. She hates my ass.

CARRIE: I thought your boss loved you?

LEIA: Yeah, right up till I went and got a better job than her at the place across the street.

CARRIE: You...

LEIA: Mhmm.

CARRIE: [standing, moving towards her] Of course you did. Fuckin' brilliant, you are.

LEIA: Hell yeah I am.

CARRIE: But wait. Why would Mia say...

LEIA: [standing] See, that's what I'm wondering.

CARRIE: Because you know...

LEIA: She did sort of tell the truth.

CARRIE: Just not...

LEIA: Quite...

[Pause]

LEIA: The whole truth... Carrie, I...

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CARRIE: Hey, hey, it's all right. It's like you said, you weren't told the whole truth. Right?

LEIA: Okay. Okay, but what the hell is going on?

CARRIE: I've been going over to Mark's house a lot lately. Maybe it...

LEIA: [incredulously] Why the hell have you been at Mark's?

CARRIE: Mark's a perfectly nice guy.

LEIA: He's boring as hell!

CARRIE: He is not.

LEIA: He is and you know it.

[Pause]

CARRIE: Okay, honest to god, I don't know how anyone listens to him talk for more than five minutes without falling asleep.

LEIA: That kid's never gonna get a date, I swear.

CARRIE: If he ever does, I wish whoever it is the best of luck.

LEIA: Well right now, it looks like that date is you.

CARRIE: Fuck no, you think I'm a masochist?

LEIA: Of course not, you're a sadist. Obviously.

CARRIE: You know me so well.

LEIA: We've been dating for a year, it'd be hard not to.

#### [Pause]

LEIA: What were you doing with Mark?

CARRIE: Mark's a—a jeweler...

LEIA: Yeah?

CARRIE: I was—gonna have something made for you.

LEIA: That's sweet of you Carrie, but seriously...

#### CARRIE: A ring.

#### [Pause]

CARRIE: I was gonna get a ring made. And I couldn't go to just anyone.

LEIA: Oh my god.

CARRIE: Because, you know, it's you. And I just—I want this to be perfect, and—Are you crying? I'm so sorry.

LEIA: No, I mean it's okay, I'm just—the reason I switched jobs is because I wanted enough money to do the same thing.

CARRIE: You...

LEIA: [laughing a bit hysterically] Yeah!

CARRIE: Oh my god.

LEIA: Right?

CARRIE: We're both idiots.

LEIA: This is the best.

CARRIE: Fucking idiots.

[Carrie and Leia stand on stage, smiling at each other, as the lights fade to black]



## An Executioner's Lullaby, a monologue By Erin Shuster

I remember when I used to play with Legos. I had the best time creating different structures out of the plastic pieces that always scattered the basement. Do you remember that one time I built a tower that nearly reached the ceiling? In my mind, it was an enormous skyscraper six stories high and one foot wide. All right, so maybe I'm exaggerating when I say it reached the ceiling; it was probably only three feet tall. I can't help it. When you're that small, you view things larger than they really are.

One time you got so mad at me for not cleaning up the pieces because you stepped on one without wearing shoes and you cursed so much and stomped up and down in so much pain that I saw the whole room quake. Your face was so red; I thought you were going to explode. I didn't mind the outburst though. I never really minded your anger over nonsensical things. It was a nice distraction from dad. I hated that I could never invite anyone over to play. He always acted like such an idiot; he was an embarrassment. One night, he stumbled into the kitchen when I was getting a glass of orange juice. I couldn't sleep. I still wasn't able to sleep after he called you a filthy whore that deserved to be hit. You weren't there to comfort me. You were probably staying the night at the apartment of your new boy toy. Don't act surprised mom, I knew from the start. You weren't very good at hiding your various men. I'm sorry mom, please don't cry. I didn't mean to upset you. Really, I mean it. I'm just so used to people upsetting me. The world is just making me cold. All I am now is numb and bitter. You know what was bitter? The stale beer he offered me that night. He told me it was my first step to becoming a man. I could smell the fermented stench on his hot breath. I thought he was talking about trying the drink but before I could taste it, his calloused hands were pawing at my shirt. Fuck, I didn't know what to do mom, I had to stop him; I was scared shitless. So I grabbed the bottle off the counter and smashed it over his skull and beat him until he was bloody. Goddammit mom, stop crying you selfish bitch! You never loved him! That sonofabitch deserved everything he got...God, please stop sobbing-we're in public. Mom! You're not a bitch, I'm just a rotten asshole. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry I treat you like shit. I'm sorry I'm so cruel. I'm really trying to work on it, I really am. I'm sorry I've always been so distant. If I'm being honest, I blamed you for his advances. You were with Rick Daniels, the egotistical bastard that drove a used Porsche. Where were you when I needed you? For Christ's sake, my own goddamn father was trying to have sex with me and you were at Rickfucking-Daniels' shitty condo! I admired you so much. I needed you more than anything. You're here now though, and I guess that counts for something. You want to know something I've never told anyone? Whenever a man is sent to the chair, I think of dad. I fasten in whoever the scummy low-life of the hour, day, or week is and I stand behind the glass anticipating flipping the switch. I stare into their dull eyes with extreme rage. I think of dad and his reckless, sloppy, uninhibited manner that caused me to loathe him ever since I was born and I can't help watch with joy as the maximum voltage turns dead humanity into a corpse. And I'm not sorry about it. About any of it. I'm really not. They deserved it. He deserved it. I just can't help it.



## UNTÍTLED By Stella Simic

**SETTING:** Present day. The interior of a subway car on the 6 line in Manhattan, late morning right after rush hour. The commuters are mostly young professionals with late-starting jobs. There are few enough passengers that seats are empty.

**AT RISE:** A middle-aged man in cheap clothing with a coarse appearance enters the car through the side doors. He stops in front of the doors and looks around, assessing the crowd. He sits down with a sigh, rubbing his face with his hands. After a moment, he gets up and walks heavily over to the other side of the car, where he picks up a discarded gossip magazine and tucks it into the plastic deli bag full of trash that he's carrying. The spot he picked it up from is uncomfortably close to a seated passenger.

#### PREACHER

(Projecting voice to address entire subway car)

Good morning everyone! Yes, I'm addressing each and every one of you. I'm

going to ask you to give me your undivided attention, if you would be so kind. You're not going to want to stop whatever you're doing, but what I'm going to tell you is very important. Keep in mind that I'm not just a voice but a pair of eyes too, so I can see if you're paying attention.

(He lowers himself to the seated passenger's level, who has earbuds in and is ignoring him.

*Continues at same volume in front of her face)* 

And I can do more with these eyes than any of you can. I can see inside you, to the grimy mind being corroded by influence. Every time, listen to me, every time you allow some kind of popular music to enter your head you are losing your power. Thoughts are put into your head that are not yours. You lose something you can never get back. That is your willpower.

(The passenger has closed her eyes to ignore him. He stands up and moves to the center of

the car, turning around to address and look at everyone)

You want to ask me how I obtained a power like this. How I can see the filth piled up inside every single one of you. The answer is, there is no superpower that has been given to me. There is no secret you can get out of me. You all, your kind is always hunting for quick solutions, a miracle weight loss pill or the new drug to take away your worries. So how did I become special? I'll tell you what I've done. I've looked inside myself, seen the dirtying influence, and wiped it all clean. I don't listen to music! I don't read books!

(He leans over to address a made-up woman)

I don't put on a fake face! I live a pure life, and that's what gives me the power to come up with my own truth!

(After a dramatic stomp, he continues into the next subway car)

"I can honestly say that these past two weeks were some of the best of my life. I met amazing people who will be a part of my life forever, and my confidence in my writing doubled. If you're thinking of applying I would really recommend doing it. I've never met so many people with the same interests as me, and you'll stay up all night talking and writing together. Everyone is so kind and helpful critique is never scary or crushing. Also, the food is great..

-Alexandra Willcox



# The Cardínal's Slumber

#### By Olivia Simonds

In winter, there were cardinals. Damp wings when landed and close to my feet, On the frozen shore.

And the door had been built. Lined with thin paint, Secured with bolts and nails and a muddy fingerprint, Massaged with great detail. Rooted. Even in the rust and through the rain, I heard their calls overhead.

And she slept in her mom's bed when she was young, Fell asleep on her dad's shoulders. So I wonder, what darkness can hold such room for the ever-present breaths of distant birds? And what pillows can carry the heavy heads of the weak?

I wonder how time can be found in the trees and the branches, Enclosed under dewy leaves and unfurnished roots, Only to reveal its layers, long past expiration.

Like bark peeling over time, I heard the mother speak and the father never respond. Like damp branches, I saw the baby touch the mother's face, Eyes closed, mouth curved.

I wonder how time can make us say I am here, and breathing, and alive, And other times say I am wilting Floating, Yet somehow still feeling the earth and the heartbeat below my knee.

As the ice melts from the tree branches, I am reminded of spring. Yellows and greens and oranges all melted together. I remember when sleep meant wisps of colors and sounds, When eyes meant unconditional love, When the cardinal's overhead wished for unfrozen water And nightfall whispered,

You, my darling, can see.

# Upon Reflection By Kate Swisher

They were cold... like reptile scales. Sometimes, they glared at me with so much cruelty that they turned pitch black. I always imagined it was the smoke from the bonfire burning in her heart, rising up through her lungs and trachea, and eventually flooding her irises. Those eyes were deadly.

She was a girl who cackled when she laughed, screamed when she sang, and grinned wickedly when she smiled. She was a cruel girl, especially when she pretended to be kind. She had difficulty holding back the insults she wanted so badly to spit in my face, and as a result, white foam would dribble out of the creases of her crimson lips. She was so ugly when she tried to act kind, and yet, I yearned for her acceptance.

I wouldn't say we were close, but we were certainly connected. She was dangerous and the fear and hatred I felt towards her was even more so. But, she lured me in. She beckoned me with an ice cold index finger. I saw her from the corner of my eye every



morning and just had to approach her. I was like a fat, greedy child at the sight of moist, chocolate cake. I would cry out for it, but when I got my sickeningly sweet taste, I realized how bad it was for me. Even so, I kept eating the cake and would slowly expand from eating too much of it, rolls of fat folding over and over again.

There was a city wide black-out last night. My lights flickered off around 8:00 o'clock, then my candle burned out around midnight. I was sitting at my marred desk, fiercely carving pictures of faces much prettier than mine into its wood, when all the light was swallowed by the blackness of the night. I pushed back from the desk, then fell to my knees hard and frantically scrabbled around in the dark for my matches. I thought I had dropped them under the desk chair but all I felt under there was dust, dead flies, and carelessly discarded candy wrappers. I screamed in frustration and terror, because I knew she was standing by my closet door. She frightened me so much. I trembled and then shook as I started to crawl around

on my floor, searching, and searching for the matches. I felt my knees being scraped raw, and tears welled in my eyes. I knew she was more dangerous at night than in the morning but I couldn't rest yet. I needed light. I rose slowly from my aching knees, and took careful steps toward my closet door... the flashlight on my shelf. I needed the flashlight. One, two, three, four...I felt her in the shadows now. Hot tears rolled down my face. They were wet and sticky and burned my cheeks. Carefully, I reached up for the flashlight but stumbled after I stepped on the plastic bristles of my hairbrush that I had thoughtlessly thrown on the floor yesterday morning. I was so close now that I could reach out and touch her, and if I turned on the flashlight, I would be able to see her clearly.

She began to mock me. A shiver rode up my spine as I felt myself being drawn in by her shadow. I swallowed hard. My hands wrapped around the cold black metal of my heavy flashlight. I clenched it with both hands and squeezed it angrily. I found its plastic button and clicked it on. The batteries were nearly dead so the light was very dim, but I could see her there, in front of me. She looked even more hideous than I imagined. Her eyes were as dark and as cold as I had ever seen them. I couldn't handle the sight, so I swung my flashlight and broke the mirror... I shattered her. Then, I took a shard that reflected her empty soul and cut the finest line across her neck... Blood dripped down my nightgown and she was gone. I would never have to gaze into her black eyes again.

"I've loved my time here beyond words. I made lifelong friends, and my experience writing here was unlike any other. To live in a community of writers is truly invigorating."

-Priscilla Rapp



If I believed in God I would believe there was an eighth day of creation just for us

when he created the stretch of Goshen Road that leads us to one another

when he blew his breath into the atmosphere hoping our lungs would share his exhalations

when he hand-sewed your schoolboy heart threading each stitch with fray-proof string

when he planted the roots of the towering trees joining the earth and the sky together like us

when he shaped the sun to give light to our unclouded eyes

when he gave voices to the canaries and nightingales and the whistling thrushes so they could sing only to us every morning

when he carved the moon to give life to our drowsy minds

when he created cotton that mimicked clouds so we would be wrapped in heaven every time we dreamed beside each other

And I would believe on our eighth day of creation he saw that it was good if I believed in God

## Monkeys, a monologue By Jordan Thaler

No. No. No. Listen to me. Please listen to me. I'm telling the truth. I'm not crazy. I don't know what I would do if you didn't believe me. I can't go away. I like it here. I've got a life here! You can't take me! You have to believe me. You have to, you have to! No don't touch me. I said don't touch me. Do not touch me. Get off of me. Get off. Now. Oh you're grabbing me? Don't grab me. You're hurting me. Your nails are hurting me. You should cut your nails. I know this place down the street called Eda's nails. You should go there, it's really great. They have beautiful colors there. Plenty to choose from. I usually go for blue. I feel like you would be more of a red color. And they cut and trim your nails for you! It's so nice. I love getting my nails done.

Once my mother took me there because I got an A on a project. I had never gotten an A before. Want to hear what it was about? No? So it was all about Monkeys. I had to research all about Monkey's and their habitats and what they eat. I learned so, so much about monkeys. Did you know Apes are not monkeys? I definitely did not know that. Also did you know that different monkey species eat a variety of foods, such as fruit, insects, flowers, leaves, and reptiles? Reptiles? Ew, right? And insects? Why would anyone ever eat a bug? If I was a monkey I would eat fruit. I love fruit. Apples and oranges are my favorites.

What's your favorite fruit? I really wanted a pet monkey but nope, I couldn't have one. I got so mad and that was the first time I—oh wait I shouldn't tell you that. Because I'm not crazy, I promise. I promise! Ow you are really hurting me. Now you're dragging me? I'm not crazy you can't take me away. You can't, you can't! I have rights. Rights! I said get off me! I'm getting away, ah hah, try to catch me now. Fine you got me. No, I will not just cooperate. Straight jacket? No. No. No. Fine I'll cooperate!

I'm sorry. I'm calm. See? Calm. Not doing anything. Nothing at all. I'm sitting down in your car. I'm putting my seatbelt on see? I don't want to go anywhere because I'm not crazy but here I am sitting down just for you. I am totally calm. Bye house. See you later maybe tomorrow because I'm not spending one night in that place. Because I am not crazy. I know I keep repeating that. But sometimes you just have to repeat something over and over for it to stick you know? Am I distracting you as you drive? Oh well I love to talk. I love to talk about Monkeys. Want to hear more? I can't remember anymore facts sorry. If we just go back I could get my project. Can we go back now? I don't like this. No. No. No.



# Wasted Love

#### By Megan White

She is the pop of peppermint gum between Lips painted pink and the flutter Of a short white skirt in an ocean breeze. She is the streaks of blonde Dyed into chocolate brown hair, And the blister Rubbed into a pedicured toe by expensive sandals that were More comfortable in the store. She is a seductive smile around the Straw of a Starbucks Frappuccino And a French manicure with glitter on the fourth nail. She is ankles crossed instead of legs And the red lines engrained in her skin from jeans A size too small. She is the frizz humidity pulls out of her sprayed-in curls And the creases of her eyes where eyeshadow clumps together. She is a carefully calculated calorie count, A push-up bra that's uncomfortable but cute as hell, A plastic credit card with the magnetic strip half worn away, And the sting of the infinity tattoo on her ribcage. She is the spray tan that came out Four shades too orange, And the cruel arch of sculpted eyebrows, She is the stinking feeling in your stomach when you realize that she loves The diamond necklace you gave her more than she will ever love You.

## Dandelíon Yellow By Sam Whitman

The walls of the pediatric ward waiting room are the color of a dandelion crushed into the dirt under the heel of a boot. Theylook like they've needed a repaint since the nineties, and the paint job is thick in some places and paper thin in others, cracked and globbed and peeling. Disney princesses smile down from the walls where they've been immortalized in godawful murals, like an amusement park attraction abandoned for thirty years. Cinderella has two black holes for eyes where someone assaulted her with a Sharpie, and the words "FUCK YOU" have been scratched into the folds of her dress. I can still smell the fresh

ink, pungent and sweet. It must have been done this morning. I wonder what kind of sick jerk would graffiti a children's hospital.

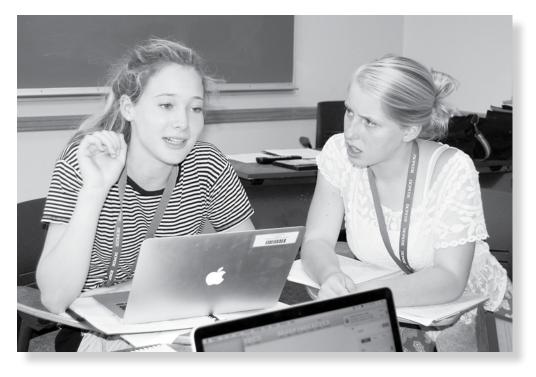
But of all things, even in spite of the decor straight out of a horror movie and the overbearing scent of antiseptic, the most depressing part of the waiting room is the people who occupy it. In the corner is a little bald girl no older than five, playing with that weird toy with the beads on wires that only shows up in doctors' offices. She pushes the bulbous wooden beads back and forth with the intensity of a surgeon, an art form she is intent on perfecting. Her father sits on the floor next to her, his eyes bagged with blueish exhaustion. One hand grasping her shoulder, he cannot bear to let go, terrified of the moment he'll lose her.

Brooding at the other end of the room is a wheelchair-bound thirteen-yearold, staring daggers at an empty point on the opposite wall just to show the rest of the world he's pissed. He thinks he's too old for this place, with its princess walls and the TV playing Finding Nemo on the back wall. They only ever play Finding Nemo. I cannot remember a single other movie they've ever shown. If I so much as hear the name of that stupid fish, I get sick to my stomach.

One of the ladies at the front desk comes over and puts a hand on my shoulder. She smells like cheap perfume and stale coffee breath. "Miss, could you please stop pacing? You're making the other patients anxious," she says. The only person who seems to notice or care about my pacing is Wheelchair Boy's mom, and she's not even an actual patient. I collapse into the nearest chair anyway, making a sound somewhere between a hum and a grunt. The lady purses her lips, like she's not quite sure whether to be annoyed with me or feel sorry for me. As she turns away to return to her desk, she notices the vandalized Cinderella. "Oh dear!" she says. She scurries to the nearest closet to grab a spray bottle and some paper towels, and begins scrubbing away the work out?" he says. His mom tousles his hair and leaves, her high heels clicking against the linoleum.

Wheelchair Boy (or Billy, as I should probably start calling him) looks me up and down from a few seats over. I must look like a mess, in my sweatpants and running sneakers, my hair tied up in a bedraggled wreck with strands falling out around my ears and sticking to the back of my neck. I didn't shower this morning, or yesterday morning.

"What are you in for?" Billy asks dryly, trying his hardest to seem like he doesn't



of the Sharpie artist. The swirling vortexes of Cinderella's eyes smear and drip, like tears of liquid night. "FUCK YOU" becomes "F K YO," but no matter how hard the woman tries, the ink won't scrub away completely.

"I'll have to call the cleaning crew," she mutters, hurrying back to her desk and picking up the phone.

"Billy, I'm going to the restroom. Will you be okay alone for a minute?" Wheelchair Boy's mom says.

"What am I gonna do, get up and walk

actually care.

"Not me. My little sister. She's getting more scans done. They're still not sure what's wrong with her, and they never are. She's in her appointment now. You?" I say.

"A shitload of stuff," he says. He doesn't elaborate, so I don't push him.

"I think this is the part where I'm supposed to tell you to watch your language," I say.

#### (continued from page 46)

"And this is the part where I tell you that you're not my mother and I don't have to listen to you," he says. It's not like I can argue. He goes back to staring across the room and drums his fingers against the arm of his wheelchair, so I assume we're done chatting. I kick back and scour my fingernails. They're bitten to the nailbed and sprinkled with the remnants of blue polish I've had on since school got out a month ago. I try to chip away the rest of it for a minute, then sit up on the edge of my seat again. I tap my foot, speeding up until my ankle starts to hurt. The front desk lady shoots me a dirty look, and I almost keep going out of spite. But I don't. Still, I feel like a shaken-up bottle of soda, fizzing to the top and ready to explode.

"Jesus, will you chill out?" Billy says, his eyes on me again.

"Sorry," I say, clenching and unclenching my fists a couple of times to let out my last bit of momentum, like a conductor slowing a train to a stop. The energy's still there though, like I haven't turned off the engine just yet.

"What have you even got to be worried about?" he says.

"My sister? She's sick, I told you that. It's been three years," I say.

"So what if she's sick? We're all gonna die eventually," he says.

I recoil. "You say that like I don't have nightmares about it every night. Like it would hurt any less just because it's inevitable."

I'm just being honest," he says, "because nobody around here is. They talk sunshine and rainbows. They dodge the death word, but it's always there. I mean, look at this shithole. No amount of smiling doctors and Finding-fucking-Nemo is going to change the fact that I'm literally dying by the second. I'm probably not even gonna make it to my sixteenth birthday. Do you know how bad that sucks?" Tears of anger well up in his eyes. He wipes them away with a violent swipe of his wrist.

"I'm sorry," I whisper. I want to say something more, but there isn't anything else to say. There aren't any words that can make him stop dying.

"You will be sorry, if your sister turns out to be dying too. Just wait."

Just then, Billy's mom comes back from the restroom and sits down beside him. She looks at Billy, then me.

"How are you doing, sweetie?" she

sure he's out of hearing range, then turns to me.

"I don't know what you said to my son, but you've clearly upset him. He...he doesn't need...doesn't deserve that. Not right now," she says.

"Ma'am, I'm sorry for what's happening to your son, but I didn't say anything. He just asked me why I was here," I say.

"Well, clearly you said something that made him unhappy. You saw the way he was looking at you," Mrs. Baker says.

"With all due respect, there's a lot of things making him unhappy besides some

stranger at the hospital making small talk."

"You...you.

"It was absolutely fantastic to be in a group of people that were all so passionate about writing. Everyone really helped each other, and cared about everyone's work. There were no judgments, and seeing that there were people out there that wanted to do this, and weren't just obligated to because of school was heartening to say the least."

.," she sputters, distraught and shaking like a leaf in a hurricane. Then, out of nowhere, she slaps me. It's a hard hit, right across the cheek. I stumble back and cradle my cheek.

-Daniel Goldberg

says, kissing him on the forehead. He tries to squirm away, which isn't easy in a wheelchair.

He's still looking at me, like there's something else he's trying to say but can't because his mom's around.

"Billy?" his mother says, a bit worried now. Billy still doesn't respond.

A nurse steps halfway into the waiting room, hanging onto the doorframe. "William Baker?" he calls.

"Why don't you go in? I'll be there in a minute," Billy's mom says.

"Whatever," Billy says, finally breaking his gaze from my face and turning to his mother. The nurse takes hold of his wheelchair and pushes him down the hall.

Mrs. Baker watches him go until she's

"What the hell!" I shout, adrenaline coursing through my blood. I take a few heaving breaths, then say in a fervent whisper, "If you want to deal with your son's problems, maybe you should actually be with him instead of trying to pick a fight with a stranger."

I want to hit back. Were she anyone else, I would. It is only the hurt dripping from her eyes that stops me.

Security comes and makes me wait outside. They don't care that I wasn't the one who threw the slap so long as we're separated and the "conflict is resolved." I volunteer to be the one to leave so Billy doesn't have to brave his appointment alone. I take a seat on the bench where all the nurses go for cigarette breaks and text Mom to let her know I'll be outside when Lydia's appointment is over.

# UNTÍTLED By Alexandra Willcox

**SETTING:** A sketchy looking cafe. There are two grimy looking tables with red checkered tablecloths and an abandoned counter with dirty glasses on it. Kevin is a shaggy-haired early twenties-something with a decidedly unwashed appearance. He is dressed in a blue T-shirt and tan khakis.

**AT RISE:** *Kevin is sitting at the left-most table, playing with his phone. He sees a friend.* 

#### **KEVIN**

(Waving crazily in the direction of the audience)

Hey Joe! Joe! Hey! Over here, man. It's me, Kevin! Yeah, remember, from Videogame camp?

Man, what've you been up to? It must've been like five years!

(Kevin comes to the front of the stage and rocks back and forth on his feet)

How's life?

(*He nods emphatically as if listening to a reply, mouth slightly agape*)

Aw man me too, working is so hard I just hate it. They increased my shifts at the gas station and now I'm just fucking tired all the time but yeah...

(Kevin peers down at his calf and points to a large, purple bruise)

Oh, this bruise? Dude it's a crazy story, really. You want to hear it? Like dude you want to hear this.

(He takes a deep breath, and begins to rock on his feet again as he begins)

So like I'm sitting on my bed, listening to music and just chilling, y'know? But then, over my headphones, I hear this crazy echoey singing, and of course I'm like what the fuck is that, because I thought I was alone, but it's definitely there. So like I leave the apartment and I'm looking for this voice and I've taken my headphones out now so I can hear it better but it's not helping it's just emanating from some-um, what's the word? Uh, some...

(He falters, looking confused. He nods and points at the audience as if he has been spoken to) Unidentifiable? Yeah, thanks man. Ok so it's just emanating from some unidentifiable source and I'm starting to get a bit freaked, y'know? This old dude was coming the opposite way at one point and-I was like, 'Yo man do you hear that?' And he's like 'Hear what?' and gives me this look like I'm crazy but I'm not. The singing is clearly real, and I figure he's just deaf or something. (He waves a hand) So anyway I spend like an hour searching and I've checked every floor and the basement and I've asked two more people but they also can't hear it so now I'm wondering if I am a bit crazy to be honest, cause like I'm the only one who can hear this shit, and I'm just wandering the hallways and this shit isn't getting any louder or quieter it's just floating from the vents or something, and that's when I realize that I should try...

(He takes a big breath and a manic look comes into his eyes; the next two words are given a lot of force)

...the vents, so I do, I go to the big vent opening in the basement and like pull

(continued on page 49)



#### (continued from page 48)

myself up and so I'm wriggling through the vents looking for the voice which is finally getting a bit louder and finally I reach a sort of big connecting part of the vent and there's this beautiful girl just sitting there in this white floaty dress and singing.

#### (Kevin closes his eyes and moves his hands emphatically, as if drawing the scene he is describing)

And I'm just like fuck yes this is the best day of my life, I could get laid so I go hey what's up baby and she stops singing and gives me this sly smile and god my heart is racing so fast it's crazy and I start to step towards her because she definitely seems interested-I mean why wouldn't she be, right man? So I'm in the middle of this big metal cavern, and she still looks eager, but then the vent under me fucking collapses and I fall through the fucking ceiling. So now I'm just in this like sweaty dude's apartment and he's glaring and yelling at me but I don't care I just want to see what happened to the hot singing chick, and I figure if I can just find her she'll still be interested cause it wasn't like an embarrassing fall. I didn't do that girl scream I sometimes do so I was still good. But then the fucking sweaty dude shoves me out of his apartment so I have no idea where she's gone. I'm pretty pissed about it as well because no gross guy should be allowed to get in the way of me getting laid.

#### (Kevin sighs and collapses into a chair, shakes his head, and puts his finger and thumb on his chin thoughtfully. He jerks his hand away again as he is spoken to)

What happened next? Well I spent a couple of days thinking it all over, cause like it was so crazy, I mean it's not every day some hot girl beckons you to come and have sex with her am I right? Well, I mean it's not that I don't have a ton of hot girls asking to have sex with me, but this one man this one was something else I swear to God. So it's been a few days, when I hear it again. Can you believe my luck? I'm straight up the vents, because I figure that's where she'll be, and I'm right. Same image, man. Same smile, and I'm like fuck yes this time I'm definitely getting laid but then you won't fucking "Being a returning student to the institute, I was able to take advantage of all the incredible opportunities offered to me, such as the readings and the campus facilities. This program has opened my eyes and expanded-my perspective of the world of literature, and myself as a writer. I will carry the memories from Skidmore with me for the rest of my life. This is truly the place to be for any aspiring writer who craves a life changing experience."

-Maya Paolasso-Martinez

#### believe this it happens again!

#### (Kevin kicks at the floor, looking pissed off)

I'm back in the sweaty guy's room, and he's his usual pissy self because the mess I'd made had just been fixed or something and why was I creeping around his room. Except the weird thing is I swear nothing looked like it had ever been broken, man. Like it's not the kind of thing I'd notice except my Dad made me do that shitty construction job summer of 11th grade and I know what a patched up roof looks like. So now I'm moping around my room with a purpose.

# (*Kevin imitates pacing back and forth, rubbing fingers against his chin*)

And I'm thinking, man. I'm fucking thinking about how convenient all this shit is, and I figure, y'know that I should make an effort to work out who this sweaty dude is. So yeah I start stalking his apartment, except no one ever comes in or out. I'm like fucking hell, this dude is so lazy he doesn't move! Except to yell at me when I invade his space or whatever. I literally stood out there for two days straight once—the entire weekend, man. I missed a party for it at my friend Cal's house.

(Kevin's face momentarily crumples. He moves back towards the front of the stage, motioning emphatically) I'm wondering what the fuck is going on here! So eventually I go down to the front desk and I'm like hey so what's up with the slob in apartment 214 and he just gives me this look like I'm crazy. I go what. And he goes, all spooky-like, 'There is no man in apartment 214.' So now I'm like, fuck, what is happening? He must be a really talented squatter or some shit, and I'm like look I saw this dude he was 6 feet tall and he kicked me out of his apartment twice. Guy just looks at me like I'm crazy but I know my shit. I go down that night, right, with an axe I got from the Home Depot, and I hack that fucking door down.

(He pauses for dramatic effect)

#### It was empty.

(Lights go down, Kevin in the middle of the stage, brows furrowed, mouth agape. Lights come up again. Kevin gives a farewell wave to the audience)

Anyway, nice to see you man. Don't look at me all skeptical like that it really happened! You know fuck you man. I hacked down that fucking door and it was like no one had ever been there! They made me pay for it as well. Anyway, see you.

(Kevin moseys off the stage with a final disgruntled wave. Lights go down)

# Knees Like Stones

#### By Elizabeth Winkler

She stares at me, lips white from being compressed into a single, disapproving line. I wince; it must hurt to suppress all the criticism she's longing to throw at me. Averting my eyes, I glance around the restaurant. There's a man in the corner, a father of four, who sits with his family and gives his cell phone all his attention. My eyes rove on, taking in the lone waitress rushing from table to table, refilling water glasses, taking orders, and, with remarkable frequency, responding to the finger-clicking summons of a portly woman whose wine glass seems incapable of remaining full; the Finger-Snapping Woman,

#### I name her.

With the irresistible pull of imminent conflict, my attention returns to my sister. The struggle she's engaging in shows on her face, eyes narrowing, lips tightening, everything about her face becoming smaller and more tense. I think that if she keeps trying so hard to restrain herself, her face may disappear entirely. The slits of her eyes dart from my plate to my face, to my unmoving fork. I know she can't hold it in much longer. Then, as I predicted, the dam breaks.

"You realize how abnormal you are, right? How little you're eating? Normal people don't leave half their food on their plate when they're out to dinner," she says, a rush of hot breath escaping from between her tense lips, words tumbling out with it.

My throat aches with the need to throw my older sister's invocation of "normal people" back in her face. What right does she have to say what's normal? Is she still watching what I'm eating? I thought we had passed that stage. And here's the irony of the situation: she's convincing herself that she's eating more than I am; she's trying to make herself believe that I'm the one with the problem.

The waitress stops at our table, the Finger-Snapping Woman having gained control of her wine glass for the moment, and my sister's tirade pauses in an effort to keep our conversation private. I see her lips stretch in a false smile for the waitress's benefit; I mirror the look. After refilling our water glasses, the waitress moves on, and our mouths relax. My sister leans towards me in the late afternoon sun, her voice little more than a hiss when she speaks again.

"You have a really weird relationship with food, d'you know that? If she were here, Mom would agree with me that you need to eat more." My hair slips over my shoulder as I shake my head in exasperation at her words. We haven't seen each other in six months, and this is the conversation we're having? I'd hoped that enough time away from me, at college, would have helped her care less about what I eat. Opening my falsely smiling mouth to speak, I attempt, as she had, to appear to be having an amicable discussion over chicken, pasta, and a popover on the side.

"So if I call Mom right now and tell her what you're saying," I say, trying hard to disguise the angry shudder in the hand that pulls my phone from my brown leather bag, "you think she'll be fine with it?" She hesitates briefly.

"No, she won't," she responds, caught in her bluff, "but –

Shaking my head again, her claims continue flowing over me in a wave of self-righteousness. I stare fixedly at the pale yellow liquid in the Finger-Snapping Woman's glass, seeing it multiplying as double-vision sets in on my unfocused eyes.

How can my sister be so sure of herself? I know without a doubt that I do not have an eating disorder; I've always been at a healthy weight for my height. But her constant claims that I eat too little or that I have a problem with food make me feel guilty when I don't eat what she thinks is right for me. No wonder her presence makes it hard for me to swallow.

The stream of words emerging from my sister's mouth continues, making a

background of white noise as I breathe in and out, steadying my heartbeat and quieting the rushing in my ears.

How can she have such confidence that she's right? Unshakeable faith in the correctness of one's beliefs must be a trait of self-delusion. The flustered waitress, accustomed now to responding to the sound of snapping, rushes over to the woman, bringing the bottle of wine with her.

I sweep my elbow-length brown hair over my shoulder, feeling heat escape through the now-exposed nape of my neck, imagining the anger inside me being whisked away along with it. I have to sidestep my irritation or I'll get the inevitable Part Two of this conversation with my sister: "Everybody hates me, no one understands me." Sometimes—scratch that; all the time—I wish I could just scream at her how much her disorder affects me.

Instead, I force myself to look at her; really look. I stare at the hollows in her cheeks, at her jawline, sharp as the knife on the table; I shift in my seat and knock into her knee, the bone within much too close to the surface for comfort. It digs into my flesh like a jagged stone.

She stiffens noticeably, her slim back straightening.

The waitress drops the check on our table and hurries away to the woman who is again clicking her fingers imperiously for more wine; she's switched to red, I notice. My sister throws down cash and shoves back her chair. I think she's upset that I never responded to her monologue. Picking up my sweater and bag from beside me on the booth, I follow her through the door of the restaurant, the silence between us palpable.

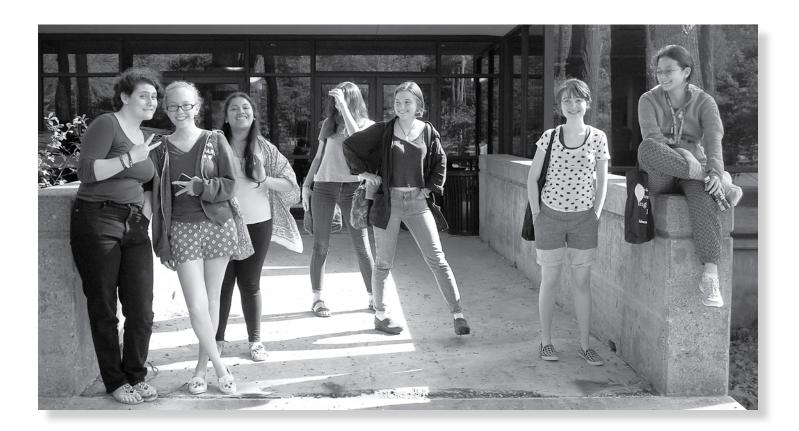
Outside, she takes the car keys out of her purse, fumbles with them, and they drop to the pavement with a metallic clink. She bends, silhouetted against the setting sun, and as she does so I can see every vertebra in her spine.

### Zombie Prom By Eliana Wiseblatt

 $\mathbf{Y}^{\mathrm{ou}\,\mathrm{can't}\,\mathrm{go}\,\mathrm{to}\,\mathrm{prom}\,\mathrm{if}\,\mathrm{you're}\,\mathrm{dead}.$  That might not be a problem, but just in case it is,

I'm nervous. I missed the morning announcements though, and now there's a gunman in the building. Came in through Ms. Graham's door to the lot. Honestly, I wouldn't mind missing if it was up to me, but Elsie wants to go so badly, and of course, I'll go for Elsie. She asked Mark to go with her in the fall, so everything should have been set, but now I think he's on the fence. I didn't want to go at first, but if Mark decides he doesn't want to, there's no way I won't do it for Elsie. I came into school late so I'm not sure where everyone is. Elsie usually is by the 400 wing water fountain with her friends, but I can't find anyone there, and I'm starting to get worried. I hope she's okay. Mark's first period class is chemistry, right down the hallway. As I get to the room, I realize it's locked. That's alright though, last month I snagged the janitor's keys, so I can get in easily. With a satisfying click, the door unlocks and I step in quickly, relieved to finally be out of the dangerous hallway. My eyes find Mark, who is huddled in the corner with the rest of the class, and his eyes meet mine.

I raise my weapon and take aim.



"This was one of the best writing experiences I've had. The classes were engaging and I saw a noticeable improvement in my writing the two weeks I was here. I got to try my hand at dramatic writing, something I've never gotten to do before. This program was a great way to broaden my horizons, especially with such helpful and accessible staff. And the editing session one-on-one was a new and useful tool in developing my writing. This was a great experience and I'd recommend it to all my friends."

-Olivia Romano

# New York State Summer Young Writers Institue 2015 Participants

#### Student City & State

Caleb Andersen Katherine Apt Olive Bernath Brandon Christoffel Cassandra Clifford Ilana Cohen Daniel Curry Emory DeYoung Eva Erickson Isabel Filippone Kate Fishman Eleanor Garland Daniel Goldberg Luke Haas Naomi Harrison-Clay Aria Herbst London Hu Lillian Johnson Ginevra Lee Nick Martin Yuki Morgan Marianna Najman-Franks Elizabeth Nelligan Anne Nields Maya Paolasso-Martinez Priscilla Rapp Olivia Romano Chloe Schwartz Erin Shuster Stella Simic Olivia Simond Katherine Swisher Claudia Teti Jordan Thaler Megan White Samantha Whitman Alexandra Willcox Elizabeth Winkler Eliana Wiseblatt

Ballston Spa, NY Far Hills, NJ New York, NY Rochester, NY Staten Island, NY Brooklyn, NY Valatie, NY Pelham, NY East Amherst, NY Delray Beach, FL New Paltz, NY Rye, NY Glenmont, NY Florence, MA New York, NY Houston, TX Seattle, WA Hohokus, NJ New York, NY Boston, MA Lexington, MA Stamford, CT Troy, NY Norwalk, CT Slingerlands, NY Niverville, NY New York, NY Shaker Heights, OH Center Moriches, NY Brooklyn, NY Brooklyn, NY Larkspur, CA West Chester, PA Scarsdale, NY Woodside, CA Burnt Hills, NY Greenwich, CT Greenwich, CT Greenlawn, NY



Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imag-ination 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 1,300 artists— including six Nobel Prize winners, and 100 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.albany.edu/writers-inst.

# SKIDMORE

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.

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Director, Nw York State Summer Young Writers Institute



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