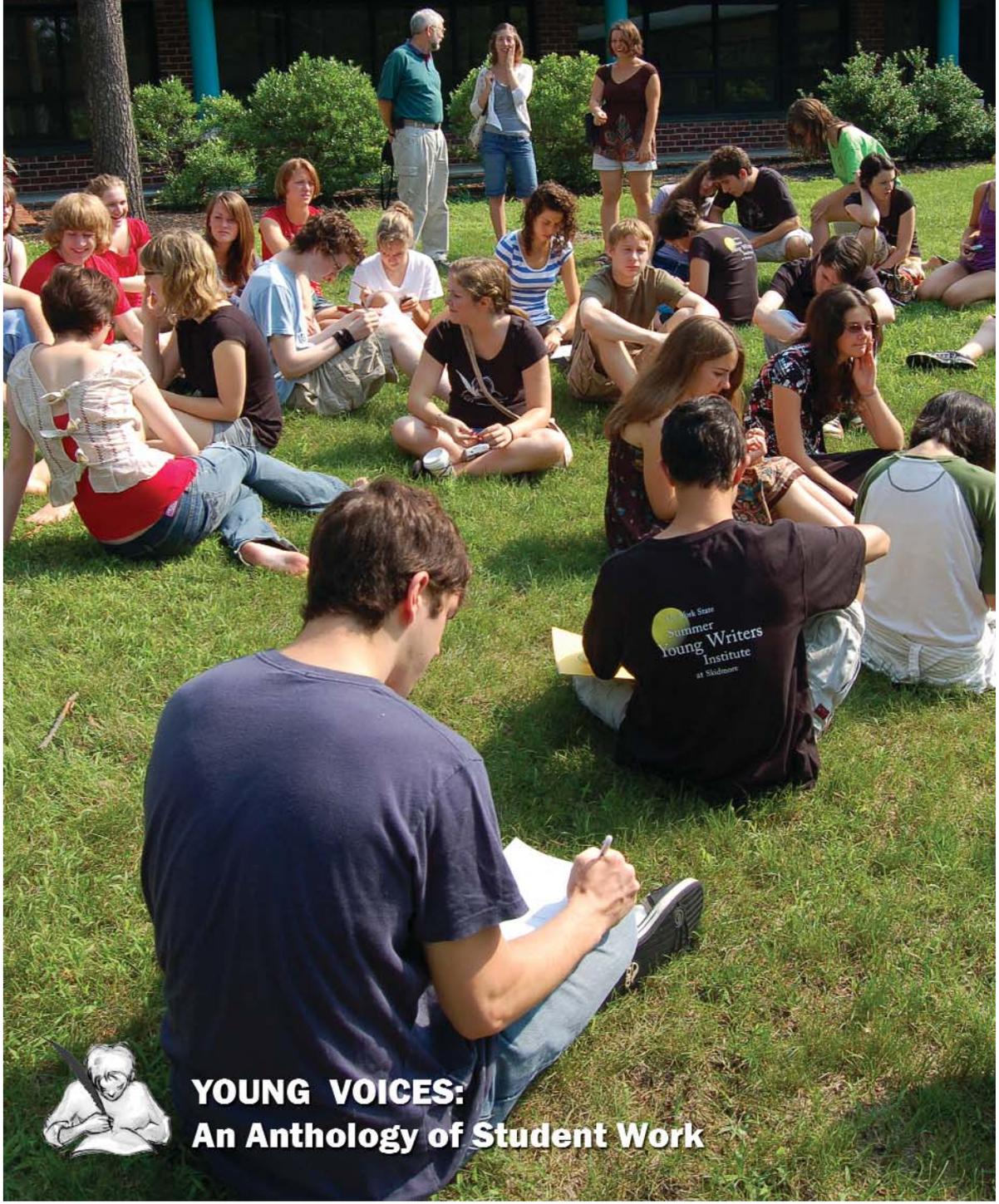




New York State Summer Young Writers Institute 2008



**YOUNG VOICES:  
An Anthology of Student Work**

# 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 one crazily inventive week last July, interspersed with photos and student comments that help to chronicle the sights and emotions of our annual writing residency.

For its tenth year, we moved the Young Writers Institute from Silver Bay on Lake George to Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, so that our students could take advantage of the New York State Summer Writers Institute, directed by Robert Boyers, which convenes on the Skidmore campus for the entire month. Having the opportunity to work on their own writing in three classes each day, hear accomplished

writers in late-afternoon craft sessions or at packed evening readings, and then try out their own works-in-progress during late-night reading sessions in the residence hall meant that our high school writers were thoroughly immersed in the writing life for every waking hour. And here's what we have learned to expect: they loved 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, week-long workshop. More than one hundred applicants from all regions of New York State send original writing samples each April, and we

choose the thirty-six 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 for a week but also the dramatic, funny, moving, troubling, and remarkable creative pieces in this anthology. It was our pleasure to watch as these pieces unfolded, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director  
New York State Summer  
Young Writers Institute

SKIDMORE  
C O L L E G E

NEW YORK STATE *Writers* INSTITUTE  
State University of New York



## Summer 2008 Faculty



**Kathleen Aguero's** most recent book of poetry, *Daughter Of*, is published by Cedar Hill Books. The author of two previous books of poetry and editor of three anthologies of multicultural literature from the University of Georgia Press, she is a Professor of English at Pine Manor College in Chestnut Hill, MA, teaching in their low-residency MFA and undergraduate programs.



**Liza Frenette** is an assistant editor at *New York Teacher*, the official membership newspaper published by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). Author of three novels for children, including *Soft Shoulders*, Ms. Frenette has published articles in *Reader's Digest* and *Adirondack Life*, among other publications, and has won first place feature and news writing awards from UPI and Associated Press.



**Elaine Handley** is a poet and fiction writer, as well as an Associate Professor of Writing and Literature at Empire State College. Her poetry chapbooks, *Notes from the Fire Tower* and *Glacial Erratica* won the Adirondack Center for Writing Award in Poetry in 2006 and 2007 respectively. She is currently completing *Deep River*, a historical novel about the Underground Railroad.



**Richard Hoffman's** memoir, *Half the House*, first published in 1995 by Harcourt Brace, was recently reissued in a new and expanded edition. He is also author of the poetry collections *Without Paradise* and *Gold Star Road*, winner of the 2007 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize. Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College, he also teaches in the Stonecoast MFA Program.



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



**William B. Patrick** is the founder and director of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. His latest book, *Saving Troy*, is a creative nonfiction chronicle of a year spent living and riding with professional firefighters and paramedics. He has also published a memoir, an award-winning novel, and two books of poetry with BOA Editions. Mr. Patrick teaches writing for the College of St. Rose and for the Stonecoast MFA Program.

## Untitled

by Conrad Baker

THE MOON WAS SETTING SWIFTLY AS Baldor made his last patrol atop the wall. He was eager and impatient for a much needed sleep in the chambers below, for he had leered tirelessly over the city and into the vastness beyond for many long hours. The day had been hot, and the frigid sting of night was welcome, even relished, in deserts such as these. An endless expanse of sand and rock yawned in every direction, humbling the vain and dwarfing the powerful, intimidating the most seasoned travelers. Within the borders of this parched and empty land there sat a fortress, low and broad and crafted from desert rock. Though only thrice the height of a man, the walls were thick and stretched like wings from afar, their ends lost in the blazing heat as they brushed one's limits of sight.

Enemies were few of late, and such great armies as were once mustered there were no longer needed or maintained. The fortress and small settlements within it were defended only by a small, well armed garrison of perhaps eighty men, sparsely stationed along the length of the wall. And so Baldor crossed the final stretch of moonlit stone, the day's weight making him limp and lean heavily on the spear he carried.

His shift of watch ended, Baldor could finally return to the armory, surrender his arms to the guard, and report his observations of the surrounding territory. He had seen nothing, as expected, and looked only to rid himself of his wet, sticky armor. The night was peaceful, if deadly cold, and Baldor was gladdened to see the moon adrift upon the dunes. Still, he sighed, long and mournfully. He felt exposed and unsafe atop the sandy walls, knowing that their easy accessibility placed him in great peril. For months he had avoided the shady stairways leading from town over the walls

and ran past them when his duties required it. The lamps and torches illuminating the walkway were greatly spaced, giving too many opportunities, he thought, for city dwellers to approach him at night. His insecurity kept him marching along, studying stairways with care.

A shadow flitted at Baldor's back. He took quick note of it but did not turn or slow in his hobbling rhythm, the steady, painful plodding that keeps an enemy confident. He knew the shadow, and he knew who it belonged to. Unfortunately, he did not know her intentions. The nimble figure, a grown child's, perhaps, wove itself into the fabrics of twilight, making it ripple slightly when approaching a lamp or torch. For some time it followed Baldor, keeping skillfully from lamplight and making not a sound. Baldor paused at last; he knew how to play her games. The figure was trapped beside a lamp post, locked in its halo of light. Baldor turned and faced her, poised like a serpent with his long, steady spear. "Show yourself to me," he whispered, "or I shall stab you like a rat."

"Already you have done that," a woman said, "already you have wounded my frail, soft heart. I have come to do you the same." The shadow rose, Baldor's past wife, clutching a dagger and hissing at him. Baldor was ready.

"Halt! Stay back! I've never wounded you!" But forward she lunged, and Baldor struck. The figure wailed and twisted

free, then leapt back into the darkness whence it came. Baldor solemnly removed his helmet and watched over the wall as it leaked into the seams of stone blocks below. He limped on again, this time with reports from his wife and his hardly untimely resignation. ■

**"I can't rave enough about this program. I loved the people — teachers and fellow students alike. They were knowledgeable, helpful, friendly, and talented. My writing was stimulated more here than it has been in months. I loved every minute of it."**

— Sarah Karpovich



## Watermelon

by Beverly Bartkowski

EVERY DAY IS HARD. I STILL SEARCH FOR you around every corner, half expecting you to reappear and open your arms to me again. Each memory of you brings its own sting. When I open the windows to the backyard, I wait to hear your laughter, but I am only shattered by silence. I stare into the once manicured and vividly green lot, all for you, but now left untouched. He says we should tidy, “We could host a BBQ, and invite some of the ol’ friends. How about Sherri? You two got along real well once.” He doesn’t know how I despise Sherri with her plump, third-trimester belly. I, too, had found it cute and endearing when she bumped into tables. But now it registers to me as annoying and flauty.

He emerges from the bedroom, collared pale-blue polo, black tie, and nice slacks. I sip my morning coffee, observing him bustle about, collecting files of clients from his computer desk.

“Don’t worry so much,” he

whispers into my ear, then kisses my forehead, which I realize I’ve held tense. I toss him a fake smile, and know he will leave me alone. It’s been this way for the past few months. I cannot stop blaming myself for it. I let you slip through my fingers. If I had the chance, I would have told you to stay inside while Mommy answered the phone. I shouldn’t have told you that you could run ahead into the front yard, that I would be right there. In those few minutes, I left you vulnerable to the world. Whoever stole you from me, I hope they watch you carefully, with loving hands. This is the only way to imagine it.

I pack my cart full of the week’s groceries – chicken, avocados, milk. I hear high-pitched laughter. Smiling, I look over, preparing to tell you that as soon as we get home you can eat the cookies, but only if you act like a good girl. I see you bending over a box of watermelons, your tiny arms stretching into the depths, hoping to touch one of the greenish orbs. Your

face, looking down, is mostly hidden to me, but your plumped cheeks reveal you are smiling. Leaving my cart to the side, I slide over to you and place my arm on your shoulder. I whisper into your ear about the cookies, hoping for you to turn to me, eyes aglow. Instead, you panic. This child is, of course, not you. A mother rushes over with frightened eyes, staring at me. She snatches her child away, as if afraid I might first. The mother scoops her child in her arms and whispers something about stranger danger. I crack open. The girl is too fragile, too innocent, too different, yet everything like you. As I bolt for the overcrowded checkout lines, a lump swells in my throat. On the drive home everything blurs; road signs, trees, other cars. I run inside, throwing myself on the amber-colored couch. The sun sets, colors melting and mixing. I wish I could show you, to set blaze to your imagination and heart, the way you did mine.

He gets home, hours after sunset. He finds me strewn across the couch, heart pieces in a million

different places. Being carried to the bedroom, I lay my head against his chest and inhale. He smells like musky cologne, sweat from another stressful office day, and maybe a touch of city traffic. But most of all, he smells like safety. I breathe him in, hoping to become drunk enough to fall quickly back into sleep.

He lays me into bed, tucks me in, and tells me it will get better, someday. I nod sleepily, ignoring my heart crying.

Every day is hard. ■

**“This week has built a community founded on the beauty of words — words that made me fall off my chair laughing, gave me chills and nightmares, and inspired me. Thank you.”**

— Adah Hetko



## Donations: Right Here Please

by Emily Beatty

YOU COULD HAVE BEEN ANYTHING YOU wanted, and you constantly torture yourself with this fact. You were a good student, a good enough person, and you suppose you could have had a pretty good future in some field like English or guidance counseling. But you craved more than the pen and paper; you craved performance, applause, audiences. You always thrived on attention, and now you have it. If they ignored you before, they go out of their way to hate you now. Congratulations.

It's extremely cold out, and you are proportionately miserable. You stand awkwardly next to your box o' things, tapping a beat on your leg and looking around in vain. No one's even out tonight, probably because it is really freaking cold. You might as well give up and skedaddle. You pick up your Donations: RIGHT HERE PLEASE hat and take a peek inside. Oh no. That is NOT going to fly. You're going to need a bit more than that before you can safely call it quits. Actually, a lot more would be a slightly more accurate statement, but you're not going to be picky about the details.

The sudden sound of guffawing laughter shatters the sleepy city silence like glass, and you spin on the spot to get a look, almost slipping on a patch of ice beneath your feet. There's a bunch of boys traipsing down the street in your general direction. You pause, the instinct to bolt building in the corners of your brain, but you squash it down. You're too desperate for money to not try and entertain these people and who knows, you might get lucky. Maybe they won't decide to pulverize your head on the empty, icy sidewalk.

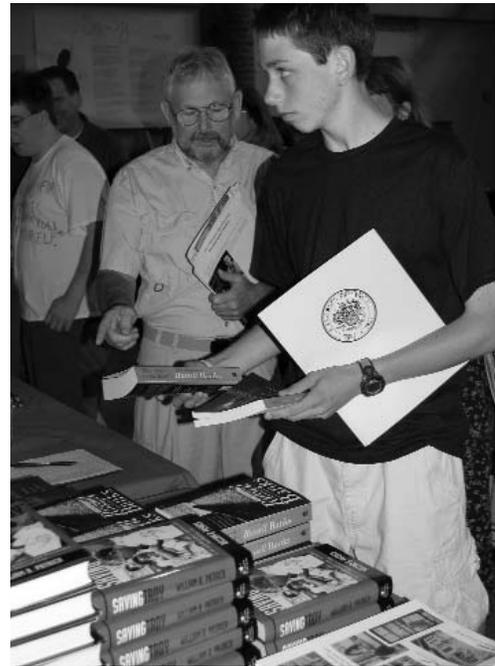
By the time they spot you, you've been hard at work making them a balloon weasel, which you offer forward as one would offer a very hungry bear a piece of meat. They stare at you. You pull another

balloon out, blow it up, and twist it into a passable cat's head. And they better appreciate it, cats were damn hard to make. It took you ages to learn how to do it.

They slide towards you, smooth and silent. Oh god, you think. But you aren't going to give up that easy. You go into your standard routine. You are trapped in a box, and you are confused, tapping the air with your hands with your head cocked to the side in bewilderment. The boys have reached you by now, and are watching. You are now walking an invisible dog in place on an invisible leash. You over-exaggerate beaming and waving at the solid mass of hulking shapes. They start laughing a soft, nudging laughter, the kind you usually hear in places like doctor's offices and while watching home videos of natural disasters. That laughter scares the crap out of you, and you give up the routine as the boys move slowly to circle you. You back-pedal as fast as you can while pointing frantically upwards and saying a silent prayer at the same time. You praise whatever god is watching out for you when the boys look up, at the lens pointing at them. They pause; momentarily confused at this unexpected difficulty, then some grumble and murmur the standard curses. They begin to lumber off, and you sigh in relief. You are very happy you decided to buy that security camera a month ago.

"Hey! HEY YOU!"

You turn quizzically and a snowball hits you hard in the face. You fall silently, repeating the



constant mantra don't talk don't talk don't talk you aren't supposed to talk. The raucous cackle of the boys finally begins to fade down the street. You sit up and wipe at your sopping eyes, and when you take your hands away you realize you took most of your white paint with it. You groan soundlessly and glance back at your Donations: RIGHT HERE PLEASE hat, get up, and go to kick your box open. You rifle through the contents, mostly balloons, and finally reach your tubes and cans of white paint. You squirt some on your palm, stare at it for a second, and with a grumble smooch it all over your cheeks, nose and forehead. No need to be careful with the stuff this time at night.

You aren't mad. You're too used to that kind of action to be pissed off about it. You look up and around, glance at your watch, and yawn. Another half hour. Then you'll give up.

You shouldn't be mad anyway; you're in showbiz, you're a performer. Just like you always wanted. ■

## Untitled

by Sarah Borodzik

I am the death of an autumn leaf  
Cracked and bruised with yellows and reds  
And falling from sickness  
Like petals after a frost

This crisp air could tear me in two  
But the force behind an afternoon's breath—  
Only blows me back into bed

I am left spiraling on the doorstep of your Grandmother's porch  
Where rain saturates me—  
And glues me to the wood

Pressed between pages of ancient text  
And scattered among the backyard path  
Where your mother died alone—  
As I plagued the grass in a beautiful death

**“This week was fantastic. Not only did I improve my writing, I spent time with young poets, novelists, and memoirists — people who I’m sure will make a big impact on the literary world. I loved every second of it and would recommend it to anyone who even remotely considers themselves a writer.”**

— Liz Janetschek



# The Mind's Jailer

by Zak Breckenridge

LONG AGO, YOU BECAME FRUSTRATED with your fellow humans. It had started off as a nagging almost-thought in the back of your overworked brain. It grew. It became a regular thought, a constant thought, an obsession. You would lay awake at nights, listing undefined things that you hated about mankind. Your job ceased to apply. You became unemployed, hungry and impoverished. You never noticed. Too many people were suffering. There was too much wrong with the world for you to notice your own problems.

Death was not far off. You became a mess of bones contained by taut, colorless, rubbery skin, nearly robbed of life by your own brain.

One day it all stopped. The fog cleared. The self-induced cataracts melted away. You were not happy. You knew you could never be happy again, but you felt that there was too much pain in the world for you to simply sit at home and feel sorry for yourself and others. You elected to find the source of all evil and destroy it. With no more evil in the world, no one could ever suffer, and no one could be as completely overwhelmed as you had been.

You traveled for weeks, months, years. You lost track of time quickly. In all of your travels and conversations, you never once found anything that could help you achieve your goal. There were dead and dying people of all ages littering the streets, deserts, and tundra. You felt pity, but you knew that to help one, or two, a thousand, would not be doing justice to the rest of them. So you passed them by, in search of the thing that could help all of them... and help you.

One day, in the far north, at the very center of a blizzard, you found a cave in a snow-covered hillside, with a man patrolling in front of it. As you approached, you saw that the man was larger than average. He was

perhaps three meters tall, with a big fur lined greatcoat, a big furry cap, steel-toed boots and an appropriately sized rifle slung over his shoulder. As you approached, he leveled the gun at you. He said nothing. And now you stand in front of him, listening to the harsh wind and trying to shrug off the sharp snowflakes.

"Why are you here?" he asks, gun still on you. His voice cuts through the whipping wind and resonates through your entire body.

"I wish to cure the world of evil," you shout, barely able to hear yourself. He lowers his gun and steps aside, and gestures for you to enter the cave. You start shouting questions at him.

"Who are you? What is this? Where is this. . .?"

He shows no intention to respond. You hesitate for a moment before entering the dark of the cave.

The world falls away around you. Light seems to be devoured away as soon as you enter, like an animal being skeletonized by carnivorous fish. All that is left is calm, clear, silent darkness. Despite the complete lack of anything tangible, you seem to have remained standing on solid ground. You take a careful step forward in the abyss, and another. The solid ground remains. As you continue, the floor begins to slant down. The slant increases as you go until it seems almost vertical.

Eventually you begin to feel the floor level out. You think that you must be very far underground. As you go farther, a ghostly green light sculpts a square corridor out of the gloom. You cast no shadow.

Vaguely rhythmic clacking, echoes down the grey-green corridor. It gets louder. The sound of decaying percussion, played by a senile drummer, underlain by the drone of a quivering shaker. You shiver under your skin. You take an unconscious step back. The light gets brighter. A

hunched, grey creature comes around the corner. It wears a torn shirt, pants, cap and the remnants of shoes. With every step, the knees clack together, sending echoing percussive sounds towards you, always a little bit off the beat. It gets closer, yellowed eyes bulging.

"Leave," it croaks. "Go back."

You can't move. You are paralyzed with fear. It limps past, into the shadows behind you. You want to leave, but you know that this could be your break-through. You press on down the tunnel.

Around a corner, down another corridor, around more corners and down more corridors. The light gets brighter. Eventually you round a corner and see a door at the end, guarded by a man very much like the one outside of the cave, but significantly closer to your size. He may even be shorter. No sooner has he spotted you than he aims his gun at you and orders you to stop. You instinctively obey. He tells you to walk up to him slowly, with your hands on your head. Again, you obey.

"What do you seek?" he barks in a high, nasal voice.

"I wish to cure the world of evil," you reply, shaking with nerves. He laughs a cold, high, heartless laugh, stepping aside and opening the door.

"Go nuts!" he says through body-racking guffaws.

Slightly unnerved, you continue through and onto the ledge. The door slams behind you.

Below you is an elaborate prison complex, or something like that. On the same level as you, but across the prison, you see a large palace, vividly colorful in contrast with everything you have seen so far. Something in your mind clicks at the sight of that extravagant structure. Something you've been looking for. It's a thing that can't be described, only known.

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You must get there. That you know. With no other options in sight, you descend a stone staircase into the prison. One side of your path is lined by cells containing more of that same grayed, hunched being you had seen. They simply wander in circles and lines around their claustrophobic cages. On the other side is row upon row of cages imprisoning small, translucent humanoids with large heads and lab coats. They hold chalk and doodle and write on their floors. You stop outside of a cell containing one of the latter.

"Excuse me, sir. What is this place?"

It looks up from its sketches.

"Evolution is fact, not a hypothesis!" It screams. "Wake up! Wake up! We need to all wake up and see just how ignorant all of our actions are!" It leaps to its feet, small pale arms flailing above its head. "Religion is dissolving our society from the inside out! Humans have rights! Rights, I say! These rights deserve observation by the tyrannical leaders we select by process of elimination for idiotic reasons!"

"Life!"

"Liberty!"

"Happiness!"

"We deserve these things, what they entail should not be dictated by the religious and political fanatics that run our lives!"

You step back as it begins running around in circles, arms flailing even more violently. The words get higher and faster, until completely unintelligible. You mutter a quiet "Nevermind," before sidling off, towards the palace. The being was quite obviously insane. Was it the product or the reason of his imprisonment? You wonder to yourself. Perhaps both?

You get to the opposite end. A gated spiral staircase leads up a stone pillar that disappears into mist

above. You notice that the staircase goes farther up than the palace, but there is a bridge that seems to connect the two. You hesitate for a moment at the gate, before reaching through the bars and lifting the basic lock. You have come too far to be stopped by a simple, unguarded gate.

The ascension is slightly dizzying, but not difficult, and you eventually get to the palace. You wonder what is above the line of mist and if the pillar has a top at all. Your perceptions have been severely thrown off by this day. You simply cannot imagine what could be up there.

However, you feel that this blindingly colorful palace contains something you have been seeking, so you walk up to the crimson door and knock. In time, a tall, grey bearded man in a plaid bathrobe opens the door and wordlessly welcomes you inside. He motions for you to follow him into a cozy, colorful sitting room. You both sit. He snaps his fingers and a bald young man in a suit appears.

"Tea," the bearded man says to the bald. His voice is deep and resonating. The bald man bows and exits. The bearded man turns to you.

"Who are you?" he asks.

"I wish to cure the world of evil," you reply.

"I see..."

"Who are you, and what is this place?"

"I am God."

"Really?"

"Most certainly."

"Then this must be Heaven."

"You would think so, but no, it's not."

"Then what is this place?"

"This is the collective human consciousness. The self-created world of the human psyche."

The tea appears. God pours a cup for the both of you. He sips his contemplatively. You ignore yours, allowing it to calmly steam in silence.

"Why are you here and not in Heaven?"

"I've always existed here. I can't go anywhere else. This is my job, and I've done it for thousands of years."

"If you're not in Heaven, what exactly is your job?"

"I'm the jailer of the human psyche. Come with me." God rises, still holding his tea, and walks outside with you in tow. He walks to the edge of the cliff that overlooks his prison. Cells stretch out forever right and left.

"You see this? My job is to imprison these inhabitants of their minds."

"What have they done?"

"You see the sad, mostly-dead, colorless creatures? They want to be here. They are my followers and always will be. They have forgotten why they chose to step into the cells, but they have chosen to do so, and they will never leave."

God sips his tea.

"The others: they are the convicted inmates under my care. They are the reasonable parts of so very many minds. All that I have tried and judged have been found guilty. I am working towards trying every single one."

You are surprised by his brutal honesty, but as you think it over, it makes sense. It makes sense that this would be God's job. You grimace.

On God's belt is a large wrought iron key loop, with a single iron key hanging from it. You snatch it. God looks at you calmly. The surprise only registers when you embrace him and leap off of the cliff. The only sound is the whistling wind in your ears for a few moments before an abrupt, painful, and loud stop. Your last thought is that you have cured the world of evil. The last sound you hear is the tinkling of breaking china beside you. ■

# Rage on the Pitch: The Art of the Soccer Referee

by Daniel Claridge

WHEN I BECAME A NINTH GRADER, I WAS charged with the task of finding a job. I failed, but managed to land a volunteer spot as a soccer referee with the town. It had taken a few phone calls, a couple forms, a training session dominated by a saliva-spewing idiot, but by the end, whether I liked it or not, I had joined the professional work force of America.

For reasons stated, I remember the training session.

“Soccer refereeing is an art form,” my boss had screamed.

I had my misgivings—it seemed pretty straight forward. Kick. Pass. Kick. Pass. Tackle? You blow your whistle, smack the kid a little—just make him cry, no permanent marks—and resume play. Where’s the room for artistic liberties?

My cousin’s a professional soccer player. No he’s not. He’s a wine salesman. But if he were, he’d dispute the fact. In a game which relies on acting, pussy-footing, and exotic pain dances, refereeing is more guessing-game than empirical science. As I would painfully come to learn, it’s not about getting the call right—it’s about making it look damn good.

The kid to my right looked bored to death; heck... I was bored to death. I offered a greeting and my hand. We got to talking between sessions, and I learned of his refereeing history. The kid—I can’t quite call him a man—had been drunk while refing a six-year-old soccer duel. Players had complained the ref couldn’t see straight, but the coach had dismissed the claim as angry banter. When the ref—my new found friend—collapsed in the goal during halftime, it took almost fifteen minutes and a pair of wire cutters to untangle him. He didn’t go unpunished, and was sentenced to community service by a righteous judge. At the time, the only available volunteer work was soccer refereeing.

“I’m warning you, this job really

sucks,” my friend complained.

I could tell he was biased.

Training graduation was less of a celebration than a nauseating reaction to fruit punch. I shook a couple hands, looking like an idiot, and received my certificate. I didn’t feel that special. My mother showed up for the event and sat, at my request, on the opposite side of the room (my brother was watching TV, and couldn’t make the ceremony). They read the names, and a few people clapped. Clap, clap, clap. Great. I was ready to ref... or so I thought.

I remembered a time when I had played recreational soccer. My team had scored, and we were rolling on top of each other, making out, like a couple of logs, when the referee called the play offside.

“No goal,” he had screamed, with a flamboyant thrust of the arms.

Parents started yelling. One threw a frozen juice-box from the team cooler. I was determined not to relive that situation.

I wasn’t told what to wear, so I spent about a half-hour looking for shin guards in my attic—knees sore, shins covered in mice scat, coughing up dust—and it turns out I didn’t need them. They also told me to bring a whistle, so I washed my thumb and middle finger before I hitched a ride to the fields. I showed up with a red shirt, my recovered shin guards, sweat pants, and a cell phone in my pocket. In the lot, moms ushered their kids out of minivans, while others groomed their children by licking their fingers and fixing their hair. I imagined betraying my refing powers. Might I trip a kid? Mace a kid? I’d always

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**“This experience has changed my thoughts about writing as a career. I was finally able to speak with**

**people who knew how writers develop from small, aspiring youths.”**

—Conrad Baker



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thought it'd be funny if one of the kindergartners, in the midst of chasing a ball, spontaneously blew up. Not a land mine or anything—just too much apple juice at dinner.

“Where the hell’s your whistle?” my boss questioned.

It was rhetorical, but I didn’t realize, showing him my thumb and middle finger.

“Take mine,” he ordered, a disgusted look from a disgusting face.

Should I have thanked him for the used whistle? Maybe.

“And here’s your uniform,” he added, “I hope you can take an extra large.”

The white t-shirt read: “Parks and Recreation: Town of \_\_\_\_\_.”

I leave my town name blank, with the hopes that you, my reader, may fill in your personal residence. Then, however vicariously, you might answer my question: How was I to be taken seriously? Town parks and recreation! The label evoked the image of a counselor who made his campers toss a rubber chicken and scream their name. I was far from such a man—I was a professional, a soccer referee, prepared to enter a battle of parental complaints and prickly children.

I had taken a ball to my assigned field, and had prodded the teams to get in position. All was ready to go—I even had my fingers in my mouth—when my style-wary boss called out:

“You can’t wear a red shirt under your uniform!”

Say it ain’t so. I stood, amidst parents, coaches, and young children, forced by awkward confrontation to strip half-naked. That’s bad enough for the self esteem of a 14-year-old, but when you’re embarrassed about what your brother calls “caved in nipples,” the prospect of doing so seems doubly harsh.

Kids stared at my naked form, unsure of an emotional response.

Standing there, bare chested, as if I’d conjured up an audience to watch me change, I couldn’t help but crack a grin and shake my head. I looked like dimple-boy.

I blew the whistle to start the game. Swarms of dirty little children, with dirty little fingernails, chased after the ball. The scene reminded me of the time my older brother had gotten stoned with three of his friends, who then chased me around the house for a piece of pizza.

In my nostalgia, I lost track of the game. Damn Marijuana. My senses came about as two kids— a cute girl, and an overgrown boy—collapsed in front of me. I blew my boss’s whistle, unaware I’d even put it in my mouth.

I spat. Play came slowly to a halt. One child, obviously confused, started rolling in the grass.

Crap. I hadn’t seen the play. What had they told me to do? Make an educated guess? I pointed at the boy, and accused him of assaulting the little girl.

The coach exploded—I must have guessed incorrectly.

The man stomped onto the field. Ten feet away, his moustache began twitching violently. He towered above me, spitting saliva, rocking forward in a disgusting rage. I couldn’t keep my eyes off his moustache. It was perfectly groomed—the sign of masked belligerence—and it mimicked every syllable that exited his mouth. Sweat and spit droplets hit my forehead, and his breath—a combination of meatloaf and maple syrup—flowed into my mouth. When it hit the back of my throat, and began to burn the nostrils, I lost it. I don’t think I’ve ever found it since.

Blowing my whistle to his ear’s dismay, he shut up and cringed. With a thrust of my middle finger, and a few choice words, I ordered the coach off the field. Slowly tilting his head, he stared puzzled, chewing his gum, as if surprised by my violent

outburst, but refused to budge.

“Thomas, come back,” his wife pleaded.

He was pissed. I was pissed.

He ignored her, staring, while she repeated.

For reasons unknown even to myself, I demanded she leave the premises.

It was a chain reaction of sorts. Kids started complaining we were wasting time. I kicked a child out of the game for tossing a lump of grass in the air. By this time, my boss had realized the commotion, and was yelling at me.

“Get over here now!” he demanded.

“Shut up you grizzly prick,” I responded.

I was a professional, entrusted with responsibility, and I was attempting to control the situation. By undermining me, my boss was undermining all soccer referees. It’d make a great case for their labor union.

A parent threatened to call the police, so I left the game. When law enforcement gets involved, I tend to draw the line: those guys are real professionals.

It’s funny that I’d volunteered for this. I was working without pay—a benevolent citizen with good intentions that had turned rotten. Jacked up on a mix of hormones and adrenaline, I walked off the field while smacking my butt and bending forward.

“Screw all of you,” I yelled up at the sky.

“Mushy nipples!” shouted one of the first graders.

I can now understand where my friend was coming from, the day he had told of his embarrassing exploit on the soccer field. Refing soccer was not a job, nor a profession: it was an art. And given the day’s events, I had come to realize that I was not an artist. ■

# **The Mosquito**

by Laura Colaneri

I know, the second the sound  
evades capture by my  
Venus flytrap ears,  
I am lost.

We were looking for a defining moment:  
this is it!  
A day, concrete,  
when adulthood will have snatched me away  
completely.

Suddenly, the annoying, impossibly high-pitched  
frequency  
has almost become clear to me.

Unsympathetic scream, worthy of a horror film,  
you are one more secret  
adulthood is itching to deprive me of.

Imagine:  
a sound only kids can hear! Like  
the ringing of the silver sleigh bells of  
Santa Claus.

Imagine:  
A thousand tiny fragment frequencies floating through the air that  
escape us  
and keep traveling, carrying their mysterious messages  
to some forsaken childhood ear.

# Ode To A Used Condom

by Julia Conrad

Brave warrior

What difficult journey has brought you to this sidewalk slate?

Triumphant, and happily exhausted

Your job

Done nobly at last

After unknown time waiting

Seemingly endless time

Deep inside pockets,

Boxes,

Wallets

Was the wait worth it, condom?

The calm satisfaction of a job well done

The knowledge of having saved at least two

From the woes of a dreaded STD

Why do people blanch

At your worn and tired body?

You are a proud veteran,

Exhausted like a bumblebee after a sting

Never to be used again, but glorious in memory

Even the sound of your name

Condom

Causes such shifts in seats

With eyebrows raised.

Happy latex slave

Who left you in this oblivion?

Naked, crumpled, cold

Your pride apparent

Little Trojan

For certainly

If others could introduce

Such care and attention

To duty

Love and labor

Would become one.

## A Memoir

by Jordan Ferrin

“PUSH! PUSH! PUSH LISA PUSH!” Howard, my father, chanted. My mother lay on the white hospital bed, surrounded by the sterile, gleaming white tiles, the smell of disinfectant heavy in the air. My father stood at her side, urging her on like a crazed cheerleader at the Superbowl. She had been in labor for hours, but had been unsuccessful.

“Puuuuuuuuush!”

“It looks like we are experiencing some difficulty,” the hawkish doctor commented. “Try to keep your contractions rhythmic.”

And so it went on for what seemed forever to me, waiting, just waiting, for the birth to finally happen. My mother panted like a

winded sprinter,

“He... won’t... fit... too. .. damn... big!” Her head collapsed back down on the pillow.

“Hmmm. Yes,” the doctor began nonchalantly, rubbing his beaklike nose with the shoulder of his white coat. “It appears that his head is too large to fit. I don’t think we will be able to have a natural birth. I’ll have to deliver the baby by Caesarean section.”

“Just... get it out!”

The doctor soon returned with the surgeon, who was armed with a gleaming scalpel. The razor sharp blade reflected the fluorescent lights from above, causing a circle of light to dance around the wall. The group of assistants prepared the spot of the

incision, and the surgeon moved in with his blade. I couldn’t watch.

After the ruler straight incision had been made, a line of red across the mountainous belly, the doctor walked in to extract the baby. He was quick about it, lifting it from its fleshy cocoon, still covered in muck. The umbilical cord was quickly clipped, and the nurses cleaned the baby from head to toe. My mother watched as the stitches in her stomach were tied off. She and my father waited for the baby with baited breath.

The nurses handed the baby to her, and I smiled as I looked upon my mother for the first time. ■



**“The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has been an awesome opportunity, not only to meet new people and become fast friends, but also to work on our personal writing skills while getting great feedback on anything you’ve written. I’m so glad I’ve had the chance to be part of the program this year, and I fully intend to come back next year as well.”**

— Isaac Handley-Miner

## The Chamber that Entrapped its Keeper

by Meghan Flynn

KURT NONCHALANTLY STROLLED through Buchenwald, feeling a winter chill surge through him. It was a Thursday afternoon, and he was back on duty. Passing the gates of the vast camp, he glanced at the words engraved in the steel barrier—“Jedem das Seine—Everyone gets what he deserves.” He silently agreed for perhaps the thousandth time, and continued the short walk to his post. The distinct sound of infants sobbing, followed by coos from their mothers chirped persistently. Kurt spit, partly as a public display of disgust, but more so because the morning’s breakfast was God-awful and the taste wouldn’t leave his mouth. He contemplated why the Jews complained so fervently about starving—the food could make one abstain from eating anyway.

He was following the simple

routine he repeated nearly four times a day, every day directing the bulk from the cattle car towards the crematorium. Six months at Auschwitz had both trained and hardened him, now his job actually felt enjoyable, especially since he worked at the same camp as his father. Though they didn’t work together—Mr. Veigzar was a respected lieutenant and Kurt, only nineteen, merely a guard—occasionally his watchful father gave him a nod displaying his approval. Each time this occurred Kurt nearly burst with pride. Since his mother had passed and his brother estranged, they were really all each other had.

The doors cracked open and a tidal wave of people poured onto the platform. An uproar of sobs and cries commenced, and Kurt bellowed

with a heavy tone of authority “Stop your crying and head to the right.” Few obliged, so Kurt snatched the leash that held four canines from Arnold, a fellow guard who manned the entrance. If Arnold wasn’t going to enforce discipline himself, Kurt decided he’d have to take the initiative. The vicious shepherds mercilessly gnawed the skin of a thin, middle-aged man, and the crowd collectively gasped in horror. They will get used to it, he thought . . . if they live that long.

Each head was tilted downward as the mass of people stumbled towards the crematorium. The first group was already headed inside, leaving three other groups anxiously sitting, paralyzed by fear. One woman sat apart from the tight-knit cluster of people, and on her lap sat

*continued on page 15*

**“The instruction was great . . . and unique. Advice was individualized, and we were treated as writers, not students. The atmosphere was really encouraging, and the accommodations were great. I really believe this program fostered the growth of my hidden writing talents.”**

— Julia Conrad



*continued from page 14*

a young boy. She rocked him as he glanced frantically at the still-new surroundings. The woman was somewhat pretty, though heavily worn-down and showing signs of emaciation. She looked familiar, and Kurt racked his brain, trying to recall where he recognized this woman from.

The next group rose shakily when called. Smoke poured from the top of the crematorium, and Kurt gave a small cough, something he tended to do when he accidentally inhaled it. At least the smell no longer bothered him. All the while he continued to ponder why that girl seemed so very familiar. It was most curious; he had, after all, been separated from Jews all his life. Rarely had he had any interaction with them, at least if he could avoid it.

The mysterious woman, he thought to himself, looked almost reminiscent of a girl Margot—whom his brother had fallen for a few years back. Their father, though, had made it clear that to associate with Jews was a sin. Ehren had stubbornly disagreed, and the words he had spoken the night he left had forever stuck with Kurt. “What is religion, father, between lovers? Between family? We are all people. Shouldn’t that be enough to let us live harmoniously?” he had foolishly questioned. Though Kurt could see how much Margot had meant to Ehren, Kurt couldn’t possibly imagine abandoning their father; to abandon him for a Jew was simply unfathomable. His father had repeatedly insisted that they were better off without Ehren, but, even still, Kurt wondered what had become of his beloved only brother.

Again, the smoke seeped into the sky, and the second to last group crept forward. They entered the chamber, some praying in their native tongue, others silent and emotionless. One younger man,

**“This week has been wonderful, both as an aid to all our creative endeavors and as a means by which to meet kindred spirits.”**

— *Ada O’Higgins*

panicked and hysterical, struggled to escape, pushing furiously through the forlorn crowd. Kurt promptly gave him a sharp, forceful kick to his abdomen. He tumbled onto the ground, and lay still for a few moments. Then, after regaining consciousness, he began to pray furiously. Kurt responded by taunting “Our father, who art in heaven. . . .” The Jew began to cry. Kurt hoisted him up and shoved him through the entrance, reuniting him with his fellow group members. He patted the door as he locked it. Several yards away, Kurt’s father nodded in his direction, as if by cue.

Kurt glanced at the final group, huddled together several feet away. Even the woman had joined them now, protectively gripping the boy on her lap. Kurt now had a clear view of him, and he studied the boy as he had studied the mother. He, too, looked startlingly familiar and once again Kurt was baffled. With hair the color of a newborn chick’s, and eyes a crystal blue, he certainly looked out of place. The child also possessed a curiosity about him that kind of reminded Kurt of how he himself had been as a boy.

Like they had three times before, the chamber doors swung open, welcoming the final group inside. The small, remaining mob stood and



began to file in, calmer than any group previous. When the woman, holding her small son’s hand, passed Kurt, something struck him. As their pleading eyes met his, memories rushed through his mind. Days of exploring the woods with a young Ehren jolted him, along with the vision of his intense blue eyes, always alert and mischievous. His knees weakened as he replayed the first time he met Margot in his head, when he had been unaware of her religion but enthralled by her affectionate nature. Recollections arose of countless nights when he had covered for Ehren as he snuck out to meet his forbidden love. All at once the strong connection surfaced; his face paled as the realization hit him, and he nearly collapsed with horror. Kurt vaguely heard a door slam behind him, and suddenly the all-too familiar roar of a fire sounded as he caught his father nodding at him in the distance. ■

# Nicky's Pizzeria

by Willa Granger

I.  
Quarter past ten  
and it is safe  
for the cooks at Nicky's  
to smile  
in their greased  
whites  
no slam-crank register  
to muffle them now  
as they braid their arms  
atop their bellies  
and smile  
sagaciously  
smile  
at the kids in skin woven dense.

II.  
I am drunk  
outside of  
Nicky's again  
but I'm told  
I've got  
Reserve  
and this is why  
I do not  
take to laps  
in those  
frothy pangs  
in those  
bitter drams  
but I want to so badly  
and I feel so tall  
and I feel so sinewy  
in the pocked light.

III.  
Here,  
here is where  
you look like  
the slow motion tumble  
of glass  
in the faulted physics  
of my eye—  
so thick  
in the feet  
and your head  
drizzling out.

IV.  
We spit  
on the granite but  
we  
do not care  
we  
do this because  
we do not know  
the staccato and  
we  
do not know  
of ventures  
but  
stems  
spit  
ownerless grease  
and Nicky himself  
mops it up.

## To My Fellow Scientists by Maggie Guzman

To my fellow scientists:

I have not abandoned my experiments. Although I do admit that the experiments that we collaborate on do consume a large amount of our time, I must say that this is a burden and a pleasure that we scientists share. In the hopes of renewing your fervor for experimentation I have decided to share with you some of what I have learned about the amusing creatures with whom I co-exist.

Like most small minded creatures humans stand on only two legs. It is clear to us large brained mammals that this is not the most logical of standing positions as it does not appropriately distribute weight nor does it contribute to superior balance. Besides any matter of physical inadequacy the position also gives them the look of stretched out featherless pigeons. Humans have other weaknesses as well. For example they must encase themselves in a second skin in order to gain further protection from the elements. Even in places and times in which protection is not needed

the people do not shed the second skin while in the presence of others.

A human's mental capacity does seem to be large enough to understand and react to the basic signs of affection and anger. Using Lassie's *A Study of the Human Psyche* for reference, I have conducted various experiments on my people. When I snarl or snap at them they seem to understand that these are signals that I am about to attack. Likewise they respond to my licking or nuzzling them in a positive way. Therefore it can be concluded that they have the ability to perceive my actions to be affectionate.

The modern person seems to be enslaved to glowing box shaped creatures. I believe that these "boxes" are an invading species perhaps from another planet who enslaved the weakest species they found here on earth. I have extensively studied the works of historians such as Fido and Rex and have concluded from these histories that the invasion of these boxes began sometime in the 1920s. They took over slowly and now it seems they have taken nearly every

person into slavery. The largest of these boxes in my people's house is in the space known as the "living room." The box is placed high most likely for worshipping. Most of the time when my people enter the room they are obliged to hear the box speak and show them pictures. The words themselves are unintelligible. It is my theory that the boxes have created a language that combines visual and verbal images that are simple enough for the inadequate mind of a person.

My people are not free of their masters when they leave the living room. On the contrary it seems that they are never permitted to be without one. If they are not listening to orders they are at the very least providing transport for one or more of the smaller ones in their pockets. One particularly appalling one controls the person's thoughts by grabbing its ears with long thin tentacles and feeding information directly into his or her mind.

I believe that it is clear that due to the relatively recent enslavement of humans our experiments of false inferiority to humans have reached a new importance. We must study how an enslaved species reacts to enslaving and supposedly being dominant to our species.

Dear friends, fellow scientists, I urge you to continue your experiments and on a sentimental note always remember the words of the great philosopher Rover, "A treasure is worth nothing unless you bury it." So friends if you treasure this letter don't hesitate to bury it along with your bones and anything shiny you find.

Loyally yours,  
Max ■



## Altered

by Isaac Handley-Miner

A MAN IN A POLICE UNIFORM SURVEYED the house from a respectable distance. The family has only been gone for a few minutes, he thought to himself, I'll have more than enough time. But still something kept him in check. It was this little nagging in the back of his mind as if his subconsciousness was trying to tell him something. He just had to get over it and go in. Come on Brian, just do it, he told himself. What the hell was keeping him from doing so?

After a few more minutes of dawdling, he gathered up all his spare courage and padded up to the front door. Locked. Of course, it was the suburbs. He'd have to try the windows. At least this family didn't have a dog or an alarm system.

Damn! The windows were locked too. He'd have to smash one of them. Taking out his flashlight, he slammed the butt against the glass. CRASH! It shattered easily enough, but the noise reverberated through the whole neighborhood. He looked

around, making sure no one had heard the deafening crash, and without a second glance slipped through the open window.

He'd root through the bedrooms first, people always kept their valuables there. The steps squeaked and squawked as he took them three at a time. He twisted the doorknob of the nearest room and pulled open the door. He was taken aback by the bright pink wallpaper decorated with Barbies. There was a pile of disfigured Barbies right beneath a patch of off-color wall paper. Clearly he was in the wrong room. There would be nothing worth his time in there.

Suddenly, the policeman's head erupted in pain. It was as if he'd just had a knife driven through his skull. He stumbled into a wall, groping his forehead. Just as his vision was getting all fuzzy, the violent episode miraculously faded away. He got back to his feet shaken, but all right.

*continued on page 19*

**“This experience has been awesome. I really enjoyed it all. Somewhere between the classes, writing, and memory-making, I learned about myself.”**

— Beverly Bartkowski



*continued from page 18*

He'd been having headaches lately like that, but now they seemed to be getting worse. He'd also been having a lot of memory loss, waking up sometimes not knowing where he was or what he was doing. Each time was marked by these terrible headaches. Eventually he would end up passing out from the pain. He'd really have to hurry now. He'd need to find some valuables and get the hell out of there before he passed out.

He flung open the next door. This one looked like the parents' room. He burrowed as fast as he could through the drawers of the wardrobe on the right hand side of the room. Nothing. He upturned the next wardrobe, causing all the shelves to spill their contents, and quickly searched through the miscellaneous items. Still nothing of value. He threw a frantic glance around the room.

The mahogany nightstand caught his attention. It was his last chance. He slid open the only drawer and found a small oak box, decorated with an engraved acorn on the top. He popped open the lid. It was empty. But that couldn't be, it would be pointless not to put something in a box like this. And where was the woman's jewelry? In an upscale place like this the wife always had pearls or diamonds.

Just as he was about to give up in frantic rage, he noticed that the soft velvet lining wasn't actually attached to the edge of the box. He lifted it out, and there, etched into the oak, were three numbers: 20-12-31. It was a combination. But then, where was the safe? He'd have to find it quickly.

He swiftly crammed the little box into his pocket and began tearing down all the paintings and shoving all the pieces of furniture away from the wall. But there was still no sign of the safe.

Then it occurred to him. That

**“Through this program, I have met so many incredible people who have enriched my life in countless ways. I know that my writing has improved immensely, and I have become more confident about my work and about myself. I feel like I am ready now to put my writing out there and go for my dreams. My greatest hope now, after my final incredible week here, is that the Young Writers Institute will live on to inspire many, many other aspiring writers, the way it has inspired and changed me.”**

— *Emma Loy-Santelli*

one discolored patch of Barbie wallpaper. He sprinted to the little girl's room, found the off-color spot and ripped the Barbies off the wall. Just as he had expected, there was a large black safe secured in the wall. He then took out the little oak box, checked the combination and opened the safe. Inside was a small stack of cash, pearls and some gold jewelry. He needed something to hold it all.

He scanned the room and found a little handbag with pink unicorns on it. That would have to suffice.

As he opened the front door of the house, his head exploded into bright fireworks of agony. He staggered across the front lawn, barely able to see straight. He was feeling faint, his eyes were swimming. . . the pain was overwhelming. When he reached his police car he could barely open the door. He managed to put the handbag on the front seat and get halfway into the car before he passed out.

\*\*\*

He awoke to the sounds of a car pulling into the driveway. He jerked up, hitting his head on the roof of his car. He looked around to take in

his surroundings as bolts of pain flashed inside his skull. Where was he? This house didn't even look vaguely familiar.

Suddenly, shouts began emanating from the home. The policeman walked over to see what the problem was, clutching the back of his head. He knocked on the front door. A woman quickly opened it.

“I'm Officer John Smith, is there a problem here?” he asked. “I heard shouting.”

“I think someone's broken into our house!” she shrieked.

The woman said it looked pretty bad upstairs, so he headed there first. As he entered the first room he was taken aback by the bright pink of Barbies on the wall. They looked curiously familiar, must be *deja vu*. There was a black safe—the door hung lazily open, and it was empty. What kind of lowlife filth would steal from a family like this?

Shaking his head the policeman walked back to his cruiser to retrieve his radio. Lying on the driver's seat was a little girl's handbag with unicorns on it.

“What the hell is this?” he said out loud.

He unzipped the bag and inside was a small stack of bills, and a collection of gold jewelry. ■

## Mint Green Walls

by Adah Helko

I AM FROM MINT GREEN WALLS; MINT green on every wall inside of our dirty-white cape when we moved in. My first memories have green backgrounds, like the filled-in panels in a Peanuts cartoon. My big brother, Eli and I happily shared a minty green room. But, Mom hated it.

When I was in second grade, and Eli was in fourth, Dad built bedrooms in the attic. He magicked me a room and magicked Eli a room. Mom seized the opportunity to make more changes. “Carpe Diem!” she thought, and did away with the green of my babyhood. We painted all of the old rooms white.

White, like flat frosting.

All that latex paint gave me an allergic reaction. I had red bumps over my face during most of the rehearsals for Bought Hills Elementary’s “Punxsutawney Phil,” in which I starred as Phil, the groundhog. I’m sure it’s the only play ever written for Groundhog’s Day, and the only production featuring a singing, dancing rodent with a strange allergic rash.

Despite all this I was excited. Mom said Eli and I could choose which colors to paint our bedrooms. I said pink, and he said blue, turning us from siblings into a sister and

brother. Actually, we didn’t have a choice. Mom picked out the weakest possible pink and the palest possible blue. The walls looked white anyway.

I liked the way my room would look innocently white during the day, but in the afternoon would start to glow pink, like a secret under my tongue. Eli, on the other hand, gave up the powder blue when he was sixteen. Led Zeppelin being his ideal in everything, even, apparently, decorating, he chose Kashmir green. Green, green again. Not the sweet toothpaste green, but dark and foresty. But rich, and not white. ■

**“This was an excellent experience. I discovered new things about my writing, and I learned a lot of new writing techniques. The teachers were very helpful and funny. The campus is beautiful, and the whole atmosphere was totally inspirational and encouraging. I wish I wasn’t too old to come back here next year!”**

— Rose Silberman-Gorn



# I Am

by Liz Janetschek

From  
shepherds tending their flock in County Cork  
two strangers staring across a square in Vienna  
the somber drone of bagpipes  
the bustling streets of Berlin  
two Belgian wooden clogs, tangled like lovers  
Flat plains of the Midwest, wheat swaying like gilded raindrops  
crowded suburbs  
full of throngs with thick accents, knotted tongues.  
Towheads and raven-haired beauties  
with rail-thin bodies and second, third, fourth helping figures  
both with oaken eyes thick with a child's mischief  
that lasts long after  
the eyes are old.  
Ignorance, hatred, purity, intelligence  
and roses every Friday night.  
Smoky living rooms  
and immaculate kitchens.  
Naturalists with hands riddled with dirt and cracked by the  
Earth  
and agoraphobes darting out the front door in pink robes  
to get the paper  
hoping the neighbor's blinds stay shut.  
Shattered glass  
and swaddled newborns.  
Children who ducked through holes in fences and  
those who sat in carefully pressed skirts.  
Suicide  
and addictions  
the Navy  
heroin and pot  
curling through veins and air.  
Starved hearts, brains, lungs, souls, bodies  
all before I hit puberty.  
Racism  
a father who grows weaker every day  
and a mother anchored to him, but swimming desperately  
upstream  
cigarettes, smoked in a chain thick as titanium.  
The thick scent of death and pine-sol that rolls through  
hospital corridors late at night  
like sinister fog.  
Big soft dogs that everyone remembers  
right down to the bushy tails and clumsy paws.  
Colonels and dukes

farmhands and peasants  
tractors and cadillacs  
tomato gardens  
rolling fields of sod  
first-edition books  
drive-thru theaters  
amusement parks  
chain supermarkets  
the caress of the dunes  
the bustling city  
jammed freeways  
permanent marker  
apple farms  
log cabins  
microscopes  
sculpture  
fishermen's sweaters  
dissection  
ballet  
monkey bars  
pollywogs  
spilled cereal  
bee stings  
sweaty pencils  
lavender  
blow-dryers  
pearls  
Christmas bows  
canoes  
shopping malls  
tears.  
My present tries to embrace  
the bursting seams of my past  
but only succeeds  
in splitting threads.

## Untitled

by Sarah Karpovich

sunshowers make me think of  
you  
and how you always marvel  
at the paradox.  
something that doesn't quite  
make sense,  
but you accept it.

like that heady smell and stained glass  
that makes me think of  
you  
and how you always sing hymns  
with your eyes closed.  
something that doesn't quite make sense,  
yet you  
believe it.

and you're always seeking rainbows.

so the sun came out today  
amid the rain  
and I looked for you.

**“It has been an exceptional experience where I was able to bond with young writers like myself, and where I was able to fine-tune my writing skills. It was dope.”**

— Alec Marchuk



## Having Brothers by Danya Kaufman

“HEY DANYA!” THEY CALL, SNAPPING me out of my fantasies. “Where’s your doll?” My heart pounds. I look around my seat. Where is my doll? I squint at them as maliciously as I can, and then scan the area frantically with my eyes and little hands. She’s not on the seat. I bend down and lower my head, upside down and in-between my knees and search the dark world under the seat. I part an ocean of coloring books, magic markers, chewed apples and an empty apple juice container. A balagan, I would say. What a mess.

With brothers like mine, a chick’s got to be alert. Only now, protected by years of distance and recovery (and the knowledge that I can sue them if I want to), do I see the long-term benefits of their actions. They did teach me a lot about life. But once—before the carefree days of tests and army and jobs and college and break-ups and family—I had to deal with some pretty serious shit: Having slippery zucchini forced down my throat, not being able to breathe (having been dunked in the pool), and most frequently, having Dolly kidnapped.

Frustrated, I take a stance. “Give it!” I demand, in my whiny, six-year old voice. They can hurt me, but I will not let them hurt Dolly. And if they do, I’ll, I’ll—I’ll tell on them!

They scoff at my feeble attempt to administer justice. “Why would anyone take your doll? She’s an ugly monkey!” They emphasize monkey as if it’s a bad thing. A big grin spreads on both of their faces, as they become a two-headed monster guarding the gates behind which Dolly lies, suffering.

“Mom-my,” I call urgently to the faraway land of The Front of The Car. A muffled “One second Danya, I’m trying to read the map,” travels back. My eyes burn as I glare out the window.

“She’s crying!” one face of the wicked head reports to the other, delighted. Aaaargh! Rrrr. Humph. I keep this all to myself.

“Why are you crying?”

They have got to be kidding. Why? “Because you T-TOOK my DOLL-EEEE!” I howl, the tears gushing. The Front of The Car is unfazed. Am I alone in the world?

Unwilling to be their helpless victim any longer, I extend my small arm and pinch as hard as I possibly can, squeezing and twisting their skin violently.

To my bewilderment, they laugh. Laugh! “Are you tickling me?” he asks. And then one face to the other, “is she tickling me?”

And then, they tickle back.

They tickle me in all of the very tickly spots, and I’m a very tickly person, so it is going to be impossible for me not to laugh. But I won’t, I solemnly swear. I shall save the little dignity I have left, if it’s the last thing I do. Their monster fingers are under my knees, under my neck, under my armpits. I hold it in as

hard as I can.

I squeeze, looking like a tomato in labor. But my squeezing doesn’t work like I want it to. A giggly snort and a loud, rumbling fart, like a clap of thunder tears out of me at once. The horror. The shame. How could I have? Worse though than my mortification, is seeing The Brothers’ delight. Their faces light up electrically, the way they would have if a million marshmallows, baseball cards and bikini blondes had just fallen into their laps.

I cover my face with my hands, unsure if I should cry or laugh, and terrified of the dire consequences of doing the two at once, and wish I’d have been an only child.

Eventually, I guess, they matured. In their own way. The two-headed monster underwent a strange form of mitosis and today they consider themselves two separate entities.

They have learned to forgive themselves for the wickedness of their youth, and they truly believe that I have, too. Let them. My revenge is yet to come. ■

**“This week has meant a lot to me. The classes were intense — I’ve never spent so much time writing, discussing, and reading every day. Now I think of everything in terms of writing: keeping a list of short story ideas, writing down overhead snatches of conversation. I am so happy with what I have learned and so proud of the things I wrote while I was here. I feel like when I get home, writing will be a much bigger part of my life.”**

— Tessa Kuster

# Asian America

by Jiae Kim

## ASIAN

### I

The world's perception  
Of an Asian person:  
Yellow-skinned, short,  
and slant-eyed

### II

Mail-order brides  
Fill the newspaper ridden skies

### III

Eastern mysticism  
Or perhaps, Western egotism

### IV

Oriental people  
There is no such human  
But the oriental rug, china, or cup  
There is

### V

So naturally smart,  
No, we just work hard

### VI

Model minority, people crow  
It's just filial piety we show

## AMERICAN

### VII

America  
Prosperous  
Powerful  
America  
Luxurious,  
Lovable

### IIIX

English  
Such a pretty language  
The flow it shows  
Compared to my native one.

### IX

The same childhood is shared  
By my blond friend and me

### X

Beds and couches  
I prefer, over  
The hardwood floor

### XI

Glorious land of liberty  
Glorious land of prosperity

### XII

From the metropolitan slums  
To fried, fat-filled chips  
I still seek a quiet refuge  
In my home, sweet home, of diversity

### XIII

Divided, I am  
But why shouldn't I care,  
If this indecision and uncertainty  
I must bear?

## Untitled

by Teresa Kline

“DOMENICA,” MY MOTHER WARNED ME, “*stai attento.*”

“*Si, mamma,*” I answered absently as I stepped out the door into the hallway that smelled like cleaning fluid. The Hispanic cleaning woman smiled at me as I passed her in the hallway. She was stout, motherly-looking. I smiled back and continued down to the elevator. Smiles were universal. I didn’t have to search through my Italian-English dictionary for the right words when I smiled.

I pressed the button for the elevator, and rode it down to the first floor. It had taken me several interesting elevator rides to acquaint myself with American elevators. In America, the first floor was actually called the second floor, and the ground floor was called the first floor.

Our hotel room was on the third floor and on the outskirts of the Upper West Side, which I’d been assured was very close to Central Park. I had dreamed of visiting New York City ever since I was a little girl. We were staying in New York City for three weeks, and I was excited to begin exploring the city. I had been to Italian cities before, but never for more than a couple of hours, and always under the watchful eye of my parents. Besides, I was sure *le citte italiani* couldn’t compare to New York City.

I walked down the street towards a falafel vendor I’d seen earlier. As I walked, I mused. If you looked around without glancing up at any of the glaring advertisements and closed your ears to the low roar of conversation that filled the air, the city could have almost been *Roma* or *Napoli* or *Bologna*. But it was *Nuova York Citta negli Stati Uniti*. New York City in the United States of America. The hard sounds of the words seemed to knock into each other, fighting for dominance. English lacked the beautiful, emotional flow

of Italian, but there was something captivating about it, something that promised to both reward and disappoint.

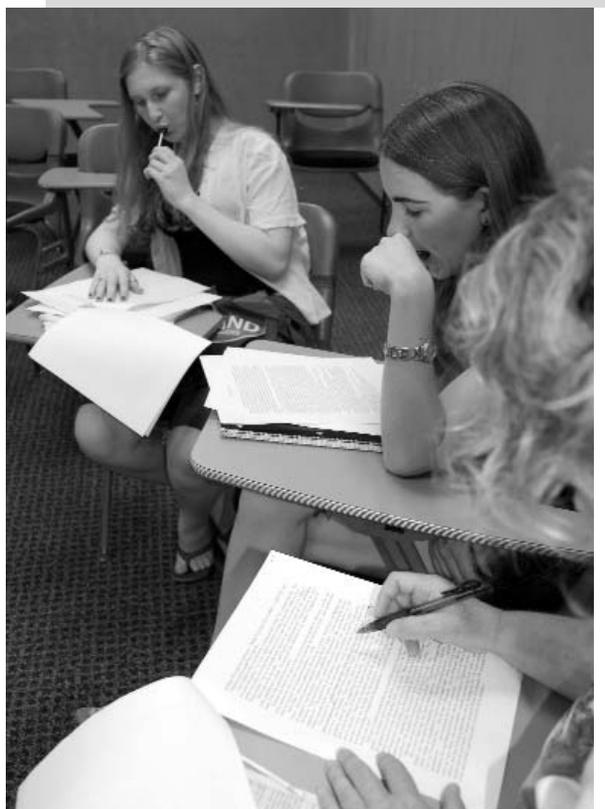
At the end of the street I pressed the button and waited for the little green man to replace the red hand. I turned left and then right, and abruptly stopped short in surprise and shock. The falafel cart wasn’t there anymore. My stomach rumbled in disappointment and my heart quickened with the unease of uncertainty. I didn’t even know what a falafel was, but I wanted one. With a sigh I turned around and started back towards the hotel.

I had gone two blocks when I realized I should have made a right turn somewhere. At least, I thought it was right. I tried to retrace my path in my head, but I wasn’t really sure where I was now. Forcing my

heart down from my throat, I turned around and walked a block. I looked both ways, but the streets all looked the same. Finally, I turned and started walking in what I thought was the right direction. By now, my heart was pounding. I didn’t even know the address of my building, and even if I did, I wasn’t sure I knew how to ask for directions in English.

Not knowing what else to do, I kept walking, heart pounding, palms sweaty. Suddenly New York City no longer seemed so exhilarating and new. Now it was cold and forbidding, impassible. All at once, the noise overwhelmed me. The people who hurried by on the streets never looked away from where they were headed, their feet a chorus of

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drums pounding incessantly. On the side of the street, vendors shouted out their wares in loud, callous voices, fighting to be the loudest, the most piercing, to better catch the attention of the people who rampaged by with single-minded determination. A cacophony of voices and honks of car horns weighed the air down with impatience and frustration.

I began walking faster. I didn't know if I was going in the right direction or not, but I had to keep moving. Moving meant I hadn't admitted defeat. Faster and faster I went, until I was flat out running, and the further I went, the fewer people in business suits I saw. When I finally stopped, I was panting and terrified. I had no idea where I was. *Dove sono?*

The street was narrow and dirty, and stank of sweaty bodies. Garbage littered the ground, and I saw no vendors selling food or purses or watches. A dozen or so people were sprawled in various positions in doorways and on stairs. A few were lying flat on the sidewalk. Most hid their faces against their arms, curled up around themselves, but one man, unblinking, unmoving, stared up at the sky. I shrank back from the people who passed me on the street, smelling of alcohol and something else I couldn't identify. Some of them swayed, some of them walked, some of them staggered. A woman lay curled beneath a shopping cart laden with clothes and empty plastic bottles, and a few yards away from her an old man sat in a doorway, wearing several layers of clothes, staring at nothing, his hands clasped loosely together. Beside a nailed-up storefront window three women in low-cut shirts and tiny skirts lounged and smoldered at the unsavory men who passed by. The narrowness of the alley and the tall,

dilapidated apartment buildings hid the sun, and turned the street into a dim vista full of shadows. A young man, surrounded by empty bottles, lay on the ground. He reached out with one hand and implored and begged the empty space in front of him. The stench of unwashed bodies, waste, and human refuse blended together to create a shocking aroma of poverty, hopeless and undeniable.

My legs were shaking, and my fingers were cold and clammy. My heart beat as though I was still running. I turned around and began hurrying in the opposite direction. My heart beat louder than a train, and I began to run. *La polizia*. I should find *la polizia*. I thought I knew the English word for that. I ran past a young man sitting next to almost a dozen empty bottles and mumbling something. I ran past a man holding a cardboard sign that said 'Help. AIDS.' I ran past more women in gaudy, revealing outfits, past an old woman relieving herself in the middle of the sidewalk, past a man with his hand in his pants, past a boarded-up store and the scorched remains of a building and a tied-up bulldog that barked and snarled at me, his eyes glinting red.

I ran until I saw a man in a uniform coming out of an apartment building. He was getting into a car that said 'Police' on the side. Frantic, I shouted, "Help!" using one of my few English words before he could shut the car door behind him. He turned around unhurriedly and raised his eyes, looking tired and resigned. He said something in English that I didn't understand. "*Non parlo inglese*," I sobbed, knowing full well he couldn't understand a word I was saying, but unable to stop. "*Mi sono perduta*." I repeated myself almost fanatically, and he sighed. He spoke again, slower this time, and louder, as though I was deaf.

Tears streaming down my face, I fought to find the right words. "*Mi sono perduta*. No look home," I managed, my tongue tripping over the foreign syllables. I wasn't sure if that was right or not. "Are you lost?" the policeman asked, very slowly, carefully enunciating each syllable. I didn't understand what the words meant. I realized I was rubbing my arms in a fenzied, hysterical way, and I was shaking all over. The scent of the street closed in on me and my vision blurred, going dark around the edges. My heart was hammering as fast as a hummingbird inside my chest. I felt the policeman take my arms and put me in the back of his car. He got into the driver's side, turned on the car, and began to drive, glancing at me in the mirror every once and a while. I cried silently in the backseat.

I realized he was talking, still slowly and loudly, as though he expected me to suddenly understand. "It's a rough neighborhood around here." I didn't know what that meant. "Not exactly the place for a girl to be wandering around." I didn't know what that meant either. "Don't worry, though. We'll get you home." Like before, these words meant nothing to me, but the reassuring glance he gave me in the mirror was all the translation I needed.

All I had wanted was to see the city I had dreamed of for years. I had wanted to taste the foreign food, watch the people, feel the pulse of the city's life. *Ho una esperienza*. I had had no idea the city was a place where desperate people lived without hope, hidden away in slums, out of the public eye, that the businessmen and women moving with single-minded determination were the glitter and feathers on an elaborate Carnivale mask that hid the city's true face. The Big Apple was dipped in candy on the outside to hide its rotten core. ■

# Ode to an Umbrella

by Tessa Kuster

I.

My father's favorite color  
Is the sun shining  
Through a black umbrella.

II.

An umbrella is a strange bird—  
Smooth feathers of cloth  
And far too many legs.

III.

Umbrella,  
Do I always need you?  
Sometimes I want to feel the rain  
Fall directly on my face.

IV.

We often look  
For an umbrella excuse:  
Something that can shield our sins  
From the rain of accusation.

V.

Mushrooms shaped like blooming  
umbrellas  
On feathery stalks of thin filament:  
What is sheltered underneath?

VI.

Warning: Do Not Open  
Umbrellas  
While Inside the Building  
You will be Held Accountable  
For Any Bad Luck that Follows

VII.

Shared umbrellas are an excuse  
For huddling together,  
Electrically touching  
When the rain stops,  
The umbrella closes, reluctantly.

VIII.

Panoply of umbrellas  
A sea of swimming color  
Bobbing gently  
With unexpected grace.

IX.

How I want to leap  
Into empty air,  
And let my umbrella unfurl:  
I would be a parachutist  
With no strings attached.

X.

We turn an umbrella over,  
Open and exposed.  
We climb into its shell  
It becomes our boat.

XI.

A broken umbrella  
Handle torn off,  
Tears in the fabric.  
The rain leaks through  
Like tears.

XII.

Girls walk together,  
Twirling umbrellas.  
Men let the rain fall.  
Pearls of water  
Collect in their hair.

XIII.

So many ways  
To carry an umbrella:  
Forward, facing wind;  
Or leaning on the shoulder,  
Like a lover's arm.

XIV.

My umbrella  
Is an extension of myself:  
How often I hide  
Behind its bright leaves.

# **I Saw The Minds Of My Generation Starving . . .**

by Malcolm Lasky

It pains me to see the impoverished wilt  
Of human flowers crumple to their knees  
Their greasy-haired heads bow to an  
Unforgiving world, and a bitchy Mother Nature.  
Shuffling along in caustically cold winds swaying numbly.  
They freeze to death at night and they're cleaned up in the morning  
So we don't have to look death in the face.

This is how it is in Chicago.  
Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and Berlin  
The cities with ugly underbellies can stomach  
The loss. Can the collective brain?  
Yes. It happens every winter.  
The homeless are gone with the wind,  
Out with a whimpering bang.  
The groans ring out, saturnine.

They're dying...the flowers  
Strong winds let them flow  
Back and forth hiding low  
Under the buildings. Oh  
Once beauty, I say  
Welcome to speculation.

No the winds are ripping  
The flowers' heads off with razor  
Winds that blind the human eye.  
...Or so they say.  
Welcome to apathy.



## Down the Manhole

by Emma Loy-Santelli

CHARON WAS NOT IN THE BEST OF moods. Truth be told, he had never been in the best of moods. A sunny disposition just didn't correspond with the ferryman's personality. He had met people with sunny dispositions, and had hated every one of them. In fact, considering that he had never left the Underworld, he had encountered a surprisingly large number of sunny dispositions. But that was people for you. In terms of moods, however, he had been in better ones than the one that gripped him now. He stared at the boy, sitting on a rock in the darkness and looking around him in interest. This show of interest annoyed Charon to no end, since he, Charon, the one who had to spend countless millennia there, found the Underworld about as interesting as dirt, which there happened to be a lot of.

"Can I go now?" asked the boy. Charon stared at him. He just didn't get it, did he?

"I ain't dead," the boy continued. "Huh?"

And now he had been temporarily relieved of his ferryman duties in order to interrogate some kid who had apparently managed to sneak past every single bit of Underworld security. By accident. Right, good story.

The boy started to hum tunelessly. The sound seemed to stick in the flat air. Charon glared at him.

"I could have you thrown into Tartarus for this," he snapped, hoping that this, at least, would get a reaction. The boy shrugged.

"Cool."

Cool? What did that mean? It wasn't even a sentence.

"There you would endure unbearable torture for the rest of eternity," Charon continued. He waited expectantly.

The boy looked around him, seeming to find some sort of

entertainment in observing the drab, greyish brown wastes that made up most of the final resting place of the soul. This particular area of the Underworld was pretty far out of the way, and mainly featured twisted black trees and jagged black rocks.

"So can I go home, or what?" the boy asked finally.

"Of course not!" Charon snarled. "Tell me what you came for, or...you'll regret it," he finished, cursing to himself. It had been a while since he had had to threaten anybody. The boy smirked.

"What's the magic word?"

Charon blinked at him.

"Now?" he guessed.

He got a grip on himself. "You let me do the talking, you little delinquent. What are you doing here? Rescuing your girlfriend?"

"No."

"Trying to talk to your father?"

"No."

"You have to complete a challenge, is that it?"

He shrugged. "I guess so."

Charon was thrilled. So that was it, was it? Well, he certainly knew how to deal with that.

"I got a dare," the boy continued. Charon deflated.

"A dare."

"Yeah. To go down a manhole." The kid grinned. "I was gonna get fifty bucks for it. Now I think I'm gonna ask for a hundred. Above and beyond, you know?"

Charon felt he had to ask, if only to try to understand the intricate complexities that were the human mind.

"Someone told you to go down a manhole... and you did?"

The boy shrugged. It seemed to be how he started most sentences, as if to prepare the observer for the proclamation to follow.

"Hey, fifty bucks is fifty bucks."

Charon couldn't argue with this bit of wisdom. He knew quite well

that fifty dollars was, indeed, fifty dollars, if not more.

The boy glanced at his watch, rather pointedly.

"You know," he said, "your security must be pretty lame. I mean, look at all the people who broke in here. Orpheus, Odysseus, Aeneas, Heracles, me..."

Charon blinked at this unexpected spouting of classical trivia.

"Not to mention the fact that Heracles actually stole Cerberus."

"He didn't steal Cerberus," Charon shot back. "He had permission . . ."

"Seems pretty dumb to me," said the boy.

"Not as dumb as going down a manhole," snapped Charon, rather defensively. In his opinion the kid was heading for a few thousand years as a weasel. Charon felt that he would enjoy watching that. Staring at the boy, he asked himself how having kids could possibly be so popular.

There was a moment of silence. The boy began tapping his hand against his knee. The sound was like a finger poking at Charon's soul.

"It's not like I even had to go through any of that, anyway. Cerberus, or anything. I mean, I got down the hole and Cerberus was, like, way back there."

He waved vaguely into the bleak distance. Charon studied the boy. He had to be lying. There was no way that an entrance like that could have gone unnoticed. No way at all.

Silence stretched out again, broken only occasionally by the faint screams that regularly emanated from Tartarus which was, in appearance, a high-security prison, but with a greater emphasis on thumb screws and eternal torment. Charon let the silence drag on. Maybe the screams would freak the kid out, which would be highly

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amusing to watch. He waited.

“Got any cards?”

Charon stared at him. “Cards?”

“Yeah. Anything. What do you do for fun down here?”

Charon stared at him some more.

The boy glanced at his watch again. “I should be home playing Call of Duty right now, you know.” He looked at Charon’s blank expression. “You know, the video game? Man, you are old.”

Charon was thinking, hard. Any time a member of the living was caught trespassing they were kicked right back out again. Not literally kicked, of course, though Charon would have liked to take a boot to a few of them. But he just couldn’t send the kid home yet. He was so god damn relaxed. Yes, he was going to put some fear of Charon into this kid before sending him on his way. It was the first goal he had had in the last...well, ever, probably. He cranked

up the force of his glare and aimed it at the kid. He had started humming again, tapping his foot absently. He glanced at Charon.

“So, what’s up with you?”

Charon stubbornly kept glaring.

“I’ve been thinking,” the boy continued. “Have you still got the same boat?”

The glare, unbidden, dimmed a bit.

“I mean, have you ever considered upgrading to, I dunno, a motorboat, or something? I drove one of those once. It was pretty sweet.”

I will not respond, Charon told himself. I am just going to keep glaring until he damn well notices.

“You know, you could paint your name on it, and stuff, and get a real jacked-up motor. You can go mad fast on one of those things.” He frowned at Charon.

“Something up with your eyes?”

The kid couldn’t get a hint if

it was hammered into his foot.

Charon gave up, all motivation and drive gone.

“Don’t you have a job you’re supposed to be doing?” the kid asked, glancing around.

“Yes,” said Charon through clenched teeth. He did. A job that had never before looked quite as appealing as it did now.

“How ’bout this?” said the boy. “You send me home, and forget you saw me. Say you taught me a lesson. Say I promised never to come back.”

“Do you?” Charon demanded quickly, hope blooming in his mind. This was all he really needed from the kid, right? A promise that he’d never come back? Sure. That would do it.

“Yeah, I won’t come back. Why would I? This place is lousy?”

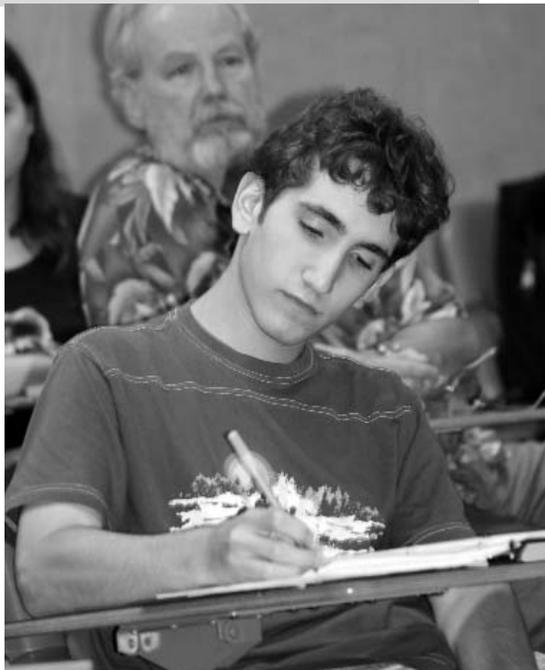
Charon agreed completely, but didn’t feel like saying so. However, he knew that, with the boy gone, things for him would suddenly be just a little bit less lousy. He had a job to do, so it was about time he got back to it. Right now. Kick the kid out, if not literally, then at least figuratively.

And who knew? He might even get himself a motorboat.

The boy found himself lying in the road. He slowly pushed himself to his feet and glanced around. To his left was the open manhole. Above, the sky was darkening. It was almost night time. Damn. He got to his feet. He hoped his parents wouldn’t give him too much hell for being gone so long. He glanced around, nodded to himself, smirked at the open manhole, and wandered off to collect his fifty bucks. ■

**“The best part about the program was being surrounded by people who loved writing as much as I do, and wanted to talk about it and work on it all day long.”**

— *Teresa Kline*



# CHIVA

by Alec Marchuk

EVERYONE HAS THEIR HOBBIES. SOME like camping. Others enjoy horseback riding. Many are entertained by theatre. Me, I shoot heroin.

Heroin and I have had a dazzling relationship. Unfortunately it's time for us to part ways. I made this decision this morning when I woke up after a night of heavy drug use in some random person's bed. I had awoken suddenly in a room that stunk of mold and rolled over only to find myself face to face with a man with a thick black handlebar moustache. On top of that I soon discovered that all he was wearing was a pair of assless chaps. It opened my eyes to the fact that heroin can take me places I really don't want to go.

Of course my separation from heroin wasn't going to be easy. This isn't because I've been dealing and shooting smack for five years. And it also isn't because I've experimented with everything from freebase, speedballs, hydromorphone, fentanyl, oxycodone, pethidine, and morphine, to name just a few.

I'm not even worried about the symptoms I will suffer from withdrawal, even though I probably should. No, I'm worried about two of my biggest clients: my parents.

"Going clean? You? Ha!" my mother cackled. My mother was quite peculiar looking, which is probably due to the fact that she has been a heroin addict for nearly thirty-five years. Her skin is quite smooth and wrinkle free, even though she is in her early sixties. This is due to the heroin, which often has this effect on people. As she likes to say, "Chiva is the best skin product out there bar none!" But her skin itself is scarred and covered in scabs and she has managed to acquire these massive jowls, which, when she is laughing like she is right now, seem to flap up and down like the pudgy wings of a bird.

"Have you been smoking the reefer?" my father cut in. "You should stay away from crap like that, it kills brain cells!" My father was also far from the norm when it came to his appearance. To be honest, he looks very similar to my mother; except he has his long gray hair tied into a ponytail and doesn't have any jiggling jowls.

"Now dad, really! You should know better than to think that!" I said exasperated, "I don't dabble in such trivial activities! And besides, you mainline heroin!"

"Arty, if you go clean, how are your father and I supposed to satisfy our heroin needs?"

"Oh well, let me think for a moment, hmmm, maybe you could think about getting clean yourselves," I offered in a serious tone.

"Don't be foolish!" my father grunted, "I've been shooting smack for over half my life, and I'm perfectly happy, so why should I quit now?"

"Well that's a dirty shame for you I guess. . ."

"Now Arthur!" my mom piped up again. "Think about this: if you quit dealing and we don't have a source of free chiva, how can we afford to buy any from anyone else when we still have to pay for the mortgage, insurance, and groceries among other things?" My mom was trying to play the guilt card that she had played so many times before.

"I'm not budging on my decision, I'm finished with drugs," I stated again.

"Listen you selfish son of a bitch," my father growled, "we put a roof over your head, put hot meals on the table, I mean Jesus Christ! Look at you, you're like what, twenty-seven, twenty-eight now, and you still live with us!"

All of my patience just evaporated. "This is absolutely ludicrous!" I yelled in a rage, "I'm going clean whether you like it or not!"

Personally, I don't give a shit what you think!" I stood up violently and knocked over the chair I was sitting in. Before I marched out of the room I sneered at my father, "Oh and by the way Dad, I'm only twenty-one!"

I made my way up the carpeted stairs to my bedroom and dived onto my bed. The sheets reeked of various odors due to the fact that they probably hadn't been washed in months. It didn't bother me though, and soon my eyelids twitched shut.

"Dinner!" my mom's piercing scream shot through the house. I lazily rolled off my bed and meandered to the dining hall. My parents were already seated and there was an enormous crock-pot sitting in the middle of the table. I walked over and removed the lid, ready to serve myself. I yanked the lid off and immediately stumbled backwards. The crock-pot was filled with syringes, all bobbing up and down in the boiling water. I then witnessed in horror as my parents each grabbed a syringe nonchalantly, as if it was some sort of pork roast. They each rolled up their sleeves revealing belts tightly wound around their upper arms. Gingerly picking up the syringes they methodically jabbed the needles into their bulging veins. . .

My eyes burst open and I shot upright and began breathing heavily and rubbing my eyes trying to forget the dream. I grabbed the phone laying on my nightstand and dialed up a man named Dupree. Dupree was an old friend from high school who also dealt heroin, but has what is called a chicken shit habit, since he's not really addicted and only likes to shoot up pineapple, which is heroin mixed with Ritalin. I figured I could sell him my remaining stash and use the money to invest in something legitimate, like a topless bar. He was all for the deal and I

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promised to meet him the next day.

I made a quick trip to the bathroom and while I was washing my hands, I took a long look at the reflection in the mirror. The face staring back at me was grotesque. It was past the point of being gaunt and was now more emaciated. My cheeks had an almost concave look, and the dark bags underneath my eyes seemed to be sagging farther and farther down. I couldn't stand the sight of myself and spiraled into a violent fit, repeatedly punching the mirror until it was smashed to bits of glass and my knuckles were bloodied. I stood there for a moment panting. In the beginning, heroin gave me a purpose, an identity, but now I realize that all this time it has actually been slowly giving me an identity I never wanted. It has turned me into nothing more than a lowlife junkie.

I washed the blood off my hands and slapped some water on my face and went to bed. That night I was tormented by recurring dreams and hallucinations involving syringes, my parents, and my own skeletal looks. At one point I hallucinated that Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison entered my room carrying whiskey and drugs, ready to let the good times roll.

Finally at seven o'clock in the morning I passed out due to sheer

exhaustion, and didn't come to until nearly two in the afternoon. I had to meet Dupree in twenty minutes, so I grabbed my jacket and my stash of smack and bolted out the door, avoiding contact with my parents.

I met Dupree at a playground adjacent to an elementary school. Dupree was very skinny and very white, but if you ever told him so he wouldn't believe you.

"Yo homes! What's cracking! So you really are serious about this. Shit man, I thought you wasn't gonna show!" Dupree said excitedly as he gave me a high five followed by a fist pound.

"No man, I'm serious," I replied as I pulled five Zs of smack out of my duffel bag and placed them in the trunk of Dupree's car. "Are you sure this is the best place to do this?"

"Of course man! Them little kids ain't gonna make a fuss about us. Oh shit! You wasn't kidding when you said you had a shitload of scag!" Dupree said as he weighed the heroin on a small scale he kept in the trunk of his rusted Chevrolet.

"Do you think you can make a good profit of it?" I asked curiously while I watched what I presumed to be third graders scamper about on a set of monkey bars.

"Hell yeah man! I can pimp this shit easy! Oh and look at that, five Zs exactly!"

"So how much can I get for it?" I asked.

"I can probably throw ten Gs your way," Dupree answered.

"Come on now Dupree, I'm not buying into that bullshit," I said in a cool voice.

"All right you caught me. Hey I'm just a business man, trying to make a living in these hard times..."

"All right, I get it. How about we settle for double," I said and Dupree reluctantly nodded in agreement and doled out twenty grand into a brown paper bag.

"One love my brother," Dupree replied. I did another fist pound with him and began my trek home. I was feeling high on life, for the moment.

During the walk home though, my condition transformed rapidly. It had been two days since I had stopped using, and already withdrawal was setting in intensely. I began to suffer from chucks, or hunger pains caused by the lack of heroin in my diet. I also began shivering uncontrollably and sweating profusely, even though it was November. I needed a hit. Just one more hit and then I could quit for good.

When I reached my parents' house, I was in bad shape, but still managed to sneak by my father, who was watching a TV set that I had stolen a few months earlier from an old folks' home. I made my way upstairs to my bedroom and grabbed a dime bag hidden in my drawer. I wanted to throw it in the fireplace, but my desperation for a hit overpowered me.

I collected all of my materials and began to prepare for my last injection of smack. As I was cooking the heroin, a gunshot ripped through the house. The dresser in front of me was now painted with blood. I collapsed to the floor and turned to face my assailant. The first thing my eyes focused on were a pair of jowls, those grotesque flapping jowls belonging to my mother. I shifted my focus to her entire face, which was void of emotion.

I tried to say something, but all that spurted out of my mouth was blood. My mom was still pointing the gun at me, her hand kept steady.

The last thing I saw before my vision faded and eyelids clasped shut, was my mother reaching for the half-mixed heroin, so she too, could get just one more hit. ■

**"Here at the Institute, I learned to stop writing words and start playing with them instead."**

— *Anonymous*

# I Am

by Hayden Miller

I am the ooze of the 20th century  
Bubbling in the heat – urban landscape  
The playground across the street from the high rise  
The river with more carcinogens than a pack of cigarettes  
I am from competition  
I threw elbows in basketball games when I was six  
I am from a dad who enjoyed his Jewish milk  
Until they sent him to rehab  
I am from a mom who carries the scale of justice  
Sometimes juggling me  
I've passed through the parks where kids got high  
I've attended the parties on the Upper East Side  
Too early for regret  
And simply bored of angst



**“I had a great time interacting with teachers and published authors. Everyone was accomplished and talented, but also easy to approach and very encouraging to young writers. I feel I improved because of the great faculty.”**  
— *Anonymous*

## Ode to the Teakettle

by Maggie Millner

**“This has been a challenging, adventure-filled week. Without a doubt my writing has been pushed and stretched, and I am leaving positive that I have grown not only as a writer but as an individual as well. I never knew what I was capable of, but I am closer to knowing now, as the staff encouraged me to tap into the unknown and dip into the bizarre. It has been a trying and exciting week that I will surely carry with me wherever writing may take me.”**

— Meghan Flynn

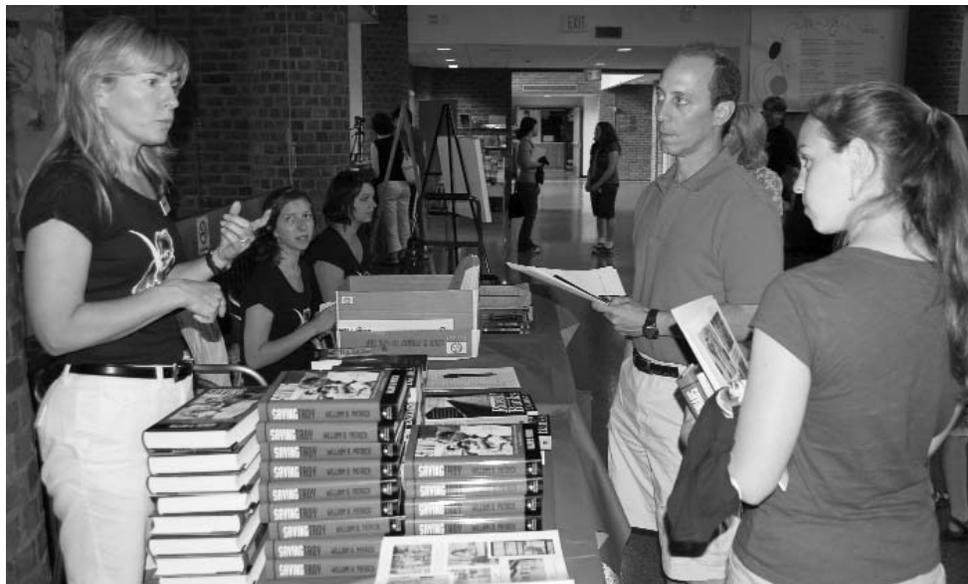
Mornings, we wake to your voice  
the way farmers wake to fowl  
crowing at the sun  
on the shoulders of a field.

We wake to your homage  
to the burners beneath you,  
your tribute to daylight,  
its teabags and cream.

Of your love affair with teacups,  
of your single, slender arm,  
of your broad haunches  
like a featherless hen's, you sing.

Once, we forgot you and you boiled  
away all of our tea water, sat steaming  
in your nakedness  
like a woman empty-wombed.

We weren't sorry enough  
and I hear it some sun-ups  
when I rise, when I find you singing  
*Pie Jesu* to an empty kitchen,  
to a glowing stove,  
to the nights you spend alone  
waiting to be filled.



## What Mollies Do

by Mollie O'Brien

"MOLLIE ROSE! WHAT IN GOD'S NAME did you do to yourself?!" Even at age three, I was well accustomed to this reaction from my mother. I had this tendency to get myself into a bit of mischief from time to time, no matter where I was. At two, I had painted my babysitter's vanity mirror crimson with the lipstick I'd found in her room when I couldn't sleep at naptime. Most of my mischief involved not sleeping at naptime, or stealing candy during various holidays. But this was a little different.

I sat on the dark wooden floor of the spare bedroom in my house which was mostly used for arts n' crafts during the days of my youth. I can't recall what I was wearing that fateful day, but there's a pretty good chance I had on my tan, fringed Pocahontas dress, which I wore throughout a good portion of my childhood. Anyway, my mom was cooking dinner, and I was left on my own to create something with the rainbow-like array of brightly colored paper spread out around me.

However, I soon grew bored and decided that I needed something more exciting to busy myself with. I eyed my surroundings. A desk, a bed, paper littering the floor, glue sticks, my purple safety scissors that couldn't even cut through paper without difficulty, and, yes – my mom's "grownup" scissors sitting on the desk, shining like a beacon, calling out to me.

I looked around to make sure no one was coming, and snatched the long silver scissors from their resting place, a devilish grin surely spread across my chubby face. I climbed up onto the bed, scissors in hand, and pulled the sheets over my head, trying to keep my secret operation under wraps. There, in my little hairdressing den, I grabbed a clump of shiny brown hair and held it in front of my eyes. With my free hand, I began to snip. For several minutes I

proceeded like this, taking sections and snipping, until my mother's voice rang out summoning me for dinner. My work wasn't quite finished, but the damage was surely done.

I set the scissors down and felt the choppy pieces of hair that fell stiffly around my face. I smiled at my handiwork. Head held high, I sauntered into the kitchen. With one look of shock and confusion, my mom made it clear that she didn't share in my delight at the haircut I had just given myself.

The following day I was whisked off for an emergency visit to the hairdresser, who did her best to even things out, but who ultimately decided that we just had to wait it out for my hair to re-grow. My mother was horrified. I felt victorious.

"I can't believe you did this," she said sounding exasperated. "What on earth possessed you to cut your own hair?"

The answer I gave seemed quite obvious to me. I shrugged and replied, "That's just what Mollies do," matter-of-factly. ■

**"This was one of the most amazing weeks of my life. I met so many people that I hope to keep in contact with. It was amazing to learn from the experienced writing staff, and I feel that I have learned so much here.**

— Ariel Rehr



## The Pain of Perception

by Liam O'Connor

EVER SINCE SAM WAS A CHILD HE WAS unparalleled in the powers of observation. He knew which cats and dogs had fleas by the patterns in their fur and which animals were beginning to get sick by the state of their pupils. In his fourth-grade English class he astonished his teacher in an assignment about adjectives with a description of a blade of grass. Whereas most students wrote one or two words (green, pointy) Sam's efforts produced four pages. But observation can be dangerous; there are some things best left unnoticed, facets of the world that are better seen out of the corner of the eye.

It began with a simple enough thing—a thin slice to the flesh at the tip of the index finger, at a diagonal to the faint lines of the print. A paper cut. Sitting on his bed, Sam dropped the offending book on the

floor and began to call for aid before remembering no one was home. Instead, he turned back to the cut. Staring at it, his face gave no indication of the sharp pain that threatened to burst out of the tiny incision. It came in waves, pushing at the doors of flesh periodically, in time with his heartbeat. Sam noticed the ooze of blood, beginning at the edges and welling into the gap at the center, eventually overflowing and running down the side of his finger. It followed the contours of his fingerprint. Then something new caught his eye.

It was a dark shape, seen fleetingly at the edges of his vision,

but Sam turned his attention to it immediately. At first it seemed to try to elude him, fading away among the shadows on the wall. But Sam concentrated on it and began to notice things. With each detail, the object came into sharper focus.

First he noticed the faint wrinkles in the object, something of cloth. Sure enough, he saw it to be a dark cloak, hanging toward the ground. The material had a similar quality to leather, which created a burnt appearance and odor. Yet in some places hair could still be seen; thin, coarse hairs not unlike those of...a human.

The cloak was made of human skin.

Sam began to feel very afraid. The pain in his finger threw itself at the wound faster and faster in conjunction with the beating of his heart and as it did, the image became clearer. His attention was drawn upward, and suddenly everything was in perfect focus.

The cloak's hood was pulled back, revealing an utterly hairless head. Lashes, brows, all were missing. The face was pure white except for the blue veins crisscrossing in a chaotic fashion. Red lips sat above a sharp chin,

but they were cracked and blood seeped from them. Sam, despite his terror, noticed that the blood pumped in sync with the throbbing of his cut. And this was not all. Blood dripped at the same rate from the pits where ears, eyes, and a nose



**“Being here was extremely helpful. It helped my dream of becoming a better writer turn into a reality. All the people I’ve met here were so supportive of writing and now I have memories to draw from for my writing. Thank you!”**

— *Soniya Shah*

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*continued from page 36*

should have been.

The phantom's head had not been facing Sam. But as he stared at it, gaping in soundless horror, it began to turn, ever so slowly. Sam watched as its attention became firmly placed on him.

Shutting his eyes tightly, he screamed as loudly as he could, yelling until his throat grew coarse and raw from its effort. Sobbing quietly, Sam peeked through his fingers for the apparition.

It was gone.

He curled up on the mattress, back placed firmly against the wall, his tears slowing until they finally stopped. The halt in his tears had nothing to do with recovery from the incident; rather it was due to his reaching an understanding. Though still terrifying, everything was so much more manageable after figuring out the cause behind it. And Sam, with his miraculous observation skills, had reached a conclusion. The correspondence between the phantom's blood and his own pain suggested that it had appeared in response to the cut. Perhaps the pain itself.

The avoidance of pain is a large part of life. But for Sam, it became all that mattered. His obsessive caution and constant fear broke him. And barely a week after the incident he tripped and banged his knee despite all attempts to avoid injury.

"No!" he yelled frantically. His mother glared at him.

"Calm down, you're making a scene." She grabbed his wrist and helped him up.

But Sam was staring blankly past her, an expression of such terror on his face that she herself felt nervous.

The phantom was back, proving Sam's theory. But he noticed that as the pain faded away, so did the phantom. Rather than being a creature that responded to injuries, it

was a manifestation of his own pain. But for Sam, this simply meant he could never escape it no matter where he hid. He collapsed in fear and despair, shaking on the ground.

He became aware of his surroundings and found himself in his bedroom. He could hear that his mother was speaking in hushed tones with the doctor, but the content of their conversation was impossible to discern. It wasn't much of a stretch to assume it centered on him. Sam entered his anti-phantom position, back to wall.

Sam's terror only grew as time went on. His mother failed to console him and the doctor was unable to determine what was wrong. Neither of them could persuade him to leave the comfort of his room. As far as Sam was concerned, the likelihood of getting hurt while huddled in his room was fairly low, and he had no desire to test the fates. Though his room was the site of the first incident, it was the most comforting of the environments available to him.

Sam's fear consumed him. He grew stunted and pale, his eyes wide and dulled from both the dimness of his room and perpetual terror. Sam ate nothing but soft foods and never ventured outdoors; a sharp edge could gash his mouth and the sun would surely burn his skin.

It was because of this excessive caution that the phantom returned one last time.

During a wind storm the tree next to Sam's room was blown down. It was an old and rotten elm,



ant and termite tunnels accumulated by its many years of growth weakening it significantly. Blown down by the tempest it crashed through Sam's window, a stray branch skewering one leg.

Sam awoke instantly, the sensation of pain filling him. His mind went into shock from the agony and the fear that accompanied it. Sam twisted, agonized, desperate for awareness, desperate to know if the phantom would come.

There it was, standing motionlessly at the side of the bed. It stared down at Sam, its horrid face turned to him. Cold sweat poring down his face, Sam tried to call for help, but no sound came. As the phantom reached, its white hands grasping, Sam's voice finally came free, screaming for all he was worth.

Then all he knew was pain. ■

# A Lament to Savour: An Ode to Chewing Gum

by Ada O'Higgins

My father, exiled, somber and silky with  
old age

sits back and watches the sky turn pink above  
the sweet sexuality of his cigar.

Despite his tears longing to take him back, he  
chuckles:

"When I came to America, I found there is  
nothing as ugly as a beautiful woman chewing  
gum."

Peppering the rugged sparkling asphalt  
Like flattened globes you surrender to the  
elements,

To our depressed loafers, demeaning stilettos,  
dilapidated Converse

Thudding thundering stuttering tilting like a  
toddler's uneasy steps

Gotta make the meeting gotta make  
the reading

Gotta make a buck duck behind red lips and  
college degree.

damn you, clingy chewing gum, when you  
latch on to our pillars

Why can't you just let go? move on?  
Get a life?

Yeah, just grab it.

Discarded

In the trash, under the table, on the windowsill

You attack my slumbers

Slither into my ears, nostrils, sticking to

Film of my eyes

Impair my sense with your glue-like, malleable  
touch

Did you mask the bitter taste of a kiss Today

Swirling mouths, pools of thick saliva

Did you enjoy it?

I think of you, sticky serum of sadness Solitary,  
humming blues and purples in the caverns of  
my belly, We chew eternally.

Did you ruin that dirty dress

Today dragging her wearer's thighs through the  
concrete

Today did you replace a cigarette in those  
leaf-like lips

Today, that little boy sacrificed his last dollar for  
you

Gnawing, a solemn face, he chomps Hey  
watcha doin'?

Cheap flavour

Why do I desire you

Discard you once you are bland and dry like a  
too gnarled lover

Whoes mouth did you dwell in today?

Who gave you pleasure today with their expert  
tongue unknowingly?

Who left you helpless stuck to the ceiling of  
their palate

Spit you disdainfully?

Immortal wanderer, the earth will not retrieve  
you into its warm womb

You know you will outlast us all.

Ruminating cows in an abattoir, today

Behind a bench on the subway the rats scatter  
by you Just as We do.

# The Woman in the Bed

by Jackie Parker

THE FIRST THING THAT STRUCK HER when she opened her eyes was the blankness of the room. Where were her curtains? Where were the photographs her mother had taken? The bed felt off, uncomfortable. She tried to speak but her vocal cords were too dry to make sound. The smell of cheap cleaner and cramped air drifted under her nostrils. Where was she? The thought echoed, then vanished, and faded away into her foggy mind. She tried to bring it back, to even remember what she was trying to remember, but it was gone. She fell again into a hazy unconsciousness.

The sun came through the window and cast an unmoving shadow across the smooth floor. Everything was still and noiseless, until a group of interns led by a resident doctor walked briskly into the room. Each person's shoes made light tapping noises against the linoleum as they crowded around the woman. The resident's eyes flicked over the woman's face before he whipped around. "Can someone tell me her condition?" An intern in the back blinked, hesitating. Then he slowly raised his hand. "Yes?" the resident snapped. "It's hemiplegia," the intern responded. "She's paralyzed." The doctor turned back to the woman, and for a moment a glimmer of concern flashed across his usually callous face. He stood, captivated by the woman's tranquil glow that could only mean there was still life. She looked so young, so pure. She couldn't have been more than twenty. It made the doctor think of his daughter, away at college. She didn't call much, didn't email. They hadn't exactly left on good terms after his only child decided on art for her career path. What was she thinking? He had worked so hard, trying to provide her with a good home and a good upbringing. How hard can you work if you're an art

major? Drawing sketches and throwing paint around? He couldn't take his eyes off the woman. "What a waste art is," he thought to himself. "Especially when life is so short." But it was the second part that bothered him. He closed his eyes, pushing the thought away. He'd call her when he got home. An intern coughed and made him jump. The movement merged into his quick stride as he left the room.

On his way out he passed a nurse. He barked a sharp hello, but looked away quickly and continued on his way. The nurse nodded in acknowledgement, letting wisps of unkempt hair fall across her cheek. She entered the woman's room to refill the cupboards with supplies. Mindlessly she stacked linens and bedpans onto the plain, white shelves. She turned to leave, but stopped at the sight of the pale figure on the bed. Her seemingly lifeless body matched the rest of the room, but there was something about the faint smile resting on her face. She seemed calm, unafraid. The nurse tilted her head, and blinked her tired eyes thoughtfully. When she was that age, she had plans. She had ideas in mind for what would happen and when. Sometimes, when she fell into the rhythm of her work, she would think about her dreams again, but only in the nostalgic way that one remembers childhood. They were distant, unattainable. Still these thoughts made her eyes smile when they crossed her mind. The nurse wondered what the woman's dreams were. Which ones were now ruined because of the accident? The nurse sighed. Even after ten years in the hospital, certain stories still struck her. She turned to leave the room, but looked back once more at the woman, her hand resting lightly on the white frame of the door.

The second after the nurse stepped out, a panicked girl burst

into the room. She was not much younger than the woman in the bed. When she saw her, her weight shifted backwards and she clutched her heart. The girl had the same defined cheekbones as the woman, which soon became stained with tears of fear and uncertainty. She collapsed into a chair, and buried her mouth in her hand. The girl's soft crying and the steady beat of the heart monitor filled the room. Who was this person, lying there so calm and content? Where was the girl she grew up with? The one who, as a senior, began singing "Endless Love" to her younger sister in the middle of the cafeteria. She was loud, off-key, and got even worse when everyone turned to look. "I was welcoming you to the high school," she said later, defending herself. "You'd humiliate yourself as a freshman anyway, I was helping you get it out of the way!"

The girl waited in the hospital room, and searched for a quick glimpse of hope, the slightest sign that things would be okay. But nothing happened, nothing changed except the lengths of the faint shadows across the floor. The girl grew used to the beeping heart monitor until it was almost soothing. Hours passed, the room darkened. The girl, curled up in the chair, began to sleep.

Sometime in the early morning, the woman in the bed blinked heavily and dragged herself to consciousness. The room wavered, still blurry. The woman blinked again. Soon things were sharp and recognizable. She saw cupboards and drawers, white and neatly arranged along two walls. She noticed the slender-armed girl asleep in the chair. The girl's face was tight, and part of her long black hair clung to her neck, damp from sweat. "I knew she would come," the woman thought. She had trouble lifting the corners of her mouth, but she felt the smile nonetheless. ■

## Gypsy > Diva by Ariel Rehr

THE LOBBY IS BUZZING WITH PEOPLE.

With the same elegance and excitement that was formerly associated with going to the theatre, the prospective audience waits early outside the big wooden doors, so clean and waxed that they radiate the energy of the room.

Elegant women in pearls cling to their handsome male counterparts, holding their champagne glasses between manicured fingers.

The thrill of opening night is evident everywhere, except, this is not opening night. The show had been open for months, captivating audiences nearly every night. The Tony awards have been given out, naming three of its actors the best in their field.

I enter the lobby minutes before eight, hurrying down the red velvet stairs and heading straight for the commotion. The merchandise table is crowded with people, all wishing to pre-order their copy of the yet-to-be released cast recording, without even entering the theatre.

The ushers take tickets, scanning them with a beep that is becoming soothing and exciting to me, the smile across my face embarrassingly wide as I follow the usher who takes my mother and me on our own up to the box by stage right. We sit in the cushiony red velvet chairs, lined with gold trimmings, and the entire scene is magical.

An orchestra sits on stage, dozens of dapper men holding their polished instruments that reflect the bright spotlights of the stage.

The lights fade away as the orchestra begins to play, a medley of tunes both familiar and new to me. I squeeze my mother's hand; she raises an eyebrow but smiles at my childish excitement.

A thin screen covers the orchestra as they play their last notes of the overture, and new lighting reveals the set.

Once again surprising me, the show plays as though it is opening night. The cast seems at their brightest, their chemistry undeniable. Though an announcement before the show revealed that the lead had injured her foot and would be wearing special shoes throughout the performance, and though I notice another actress incorporating tissues into her act, the performance seems otherwise flawless.

Near the end of the second act, the lead, the woman with the protective slippers, sings a soliloquy. She imagines herself on a stage, in front of a huge and impressed audience. At the end of the number, much of the audience, including myself, rises to give her a standing ovation. Imagining that she is responding to her own audience, the woman is able to graciously thank us for the applause, bowing and blowing kisses to the rising patrons who stand for a solid minute praising her. She waves at me; I am sure of it because my mother and I are the only ones in the box. My heart skips a beat and I beam.

And with the beat of music, the show continues on and what seems to be the ending actually reveals another half an hour ahead of us. Which is too bad for the older couple in the nearby mezzanine who I see leave during the clapping.

At the actual ending of the show, the large cast comes on stage, running to the front for individual bows as they narrow down towards the stars. The three leads eventually walk off hand in hand, laughing and hugging each other, and visibly mouthing words of encouragement and praise. This family I see on stage in front of me makes me jealous and happy all at once.

We return down the same red velvet steps, into the main part of the theatre and then out the doors that

lead to the metal barricades which I quickly find a space behind. Rapidly, the space behind me fills up as more and more people crowd for spots where they can give their congratulations to the cast.

I hold my Sharpie marker and Playbill tightly, handing it off to actor after actor with a "Wow, that was incredible" or "Amazing performance!" They graciously thank me, leaving their signatures in black marker across the traditional booklet.

The diva, this former 'gypsy' now the Tony award-winning star herself, walks out the door. A black limo waits for her at the end of the short sidewalk but she surprisingly pauses to listen to her eager fans and sign for each and every one. She comes to me and I manage to stutter an "Oh my gosh, that was the most brilliant performance I have ever seen." She quietly thanks me, signing the photo of herself on the cover of the Playbill in silver marker, and she moves on to the next patient person. Soon, as quickly as she came out, she gets into the car and the crowd quickly fades away. ■

**"Meeting and hanging out with other young writers was a blast. Your age, gender, interests, disinterests — none of it mattered. Everyone got along and made everyone else feel comfortable."**

— Jordan Ferrin

## Ode to the Mud Puddle

by Adam Sax

The ground is puddled with rain  
Which is how the oceans  
Must have begun:  
A beautiful mess  
Of squishy craters  
Polka-dotted between trees

Wee beasties swim  
In these temporal tidal pools  
Growing and multiplying  
Making meiotic soup  
In the notches of the lawn  
Where frogs and feet can play

Splashes flood pieces  
Of the asphalt paths  
Making us dance  
Trying not to soak  
Our sandal clad feet  
In the wet dirt and grass

But it is wonderful,  
The dance between puddles  
Holding arms akimbo  
Spinning, missing  
Splash! and you're in  
Toes cringing, cold and brown



**“This week was so much fun. Everyone was awesome and there was no one I didn’t get along with. The feedback sessions were done really well; I feel like everyone was so good at commenting.”**

— Liam O’Connor

## Rain

by Alex Scanlon

Birds, specks  
Really, soaring, gliding

But small  
In a pool of blue

Tears that fall  
Let me fly free

In water so pure  
It pours down.

**“This week was a chance for me to feel like a true writer, I had everything I needed — inspiring classes, helpful tips, support, and wonderful friends. I loved it!”**

— Anonymous



## Gold

by Soniya Shah

Nothing gold is forever  
The time is passing, it has to go  
As it lies there, time passing, slowly tarnishing  
Ice comes, drastically cold  
The warmth fades replaced by bitter decoration of a new world  
Gold disappears, it doesn't last and neither does snow.  
The beauty is one belonging to the heavens  
For angels and saints to wear  
It doesn't belong in our nasty, cruel yet magnificent world  
And yet it still shines through, just bits at a time  
There it is, next to a patch of shade  
Seasons are changing, flowers are blooming  
Life is back here  
It shines as bright as eternity  
Promising to stay on  
Lighting up even the darkest places filling them up, up, up  
Fighting for a place to call its own  
Never ending, pushing to survive  
Sweeping through corners, brushing the past, studying the future  
Darkened by the terrible, lightened by the excellent  
Hope.

**“I really enjoyed being here because it has made me more comfortable writing poems and short stories. I have also made new friends. It is over and I feel like I am just really getting to know everyone. I will miss it here, and miss everyone I have met.”**

— *Liam O'Connor*



## Untitled

by Rose Silberman-Gorn

*I AM THE QUEEN OF CYNICISM, AND I have yet to be dethroned.* That's what I'm thinking when my mom looks at me in confusion over the top of her newspaper. I've just said something sarcastic, and she's eyeing me like she doesn't understand who I am. Go right ahead and stare at me, Mom. But don't you know that parents are responsible for how their child turns out? So, news flash, the way I am is your fault. Of course, I don't actually say this. If this were any other day, I would, but it isn't any other day. So instead, I just say, "What? Why are you looking at me like I'm a martian?" I try to sound neutral, but some bitter resentment slips out.

"Honey, I just don't understand why you're so angry all the time. Did something happen? Something you want to talk about?"

Now I'm the one to look at her strangely. "I'm not angry. I'm *cynical*. There's a difference, you know."

"All right," my mom says, smiling

so hesitantly it looks almost painful. "Finish getting ready for school. You don't want to be late."

"Actually, I really wouldn't mind," I say tonelessly. "Not at all. Not one bit." My mom gives up her attempt at a smile, and her face seems to collapse into itself with sadness. For a second, I feel guilty that I can't be the child she wants me to be. Then, as always, the moment passes.

After school, the event that I've been looking forward to—and mind you, it's pretty rare that I look forward to anything—comes. I walk to the diner quickly in anticipation. When I look in the third booth on the right, there she is, looking almost exactly the same as the last time I saw her, the day she moved away three years ago.

"Hey, what's been shitty today?" I say, sneaking up on her. It's something we used to say to each other back in junior high, when we ate lunch together every day. Her

eyes widen in surprise at the sound of my voice, and she turns around.

"Sammy!" she cries out. "I've missed you so much!"

We don't hug; we're not what anyone in their right mind would call affectionate. Still, I can tell she's happy to see me. We sit down across from each other in the sticky vinyl booth, and begin discussing old memories.

"Remember Miss Bell?" she asks.

"Yeah, I remember. She was the one who was always saying, 'There's no such thing as a stupid question.' I can't stand when people say that. Isn't it better to tell the brutal truth than to delude morons into thinking what they say is actually valid?"

Claudia ignores my little rant. "I just ran into her on my way here. Apparently, she got married last July; can you believe it?"

I snort. Am I supposed to be happy about this? Let out a cheer, a hip hip hooray? I don't think so. "You know how I feel about marriage."

"Yeah, I know. But this is our teacher. We know her. Can't you just give her the benefit of the doubt? Maybe it's a happy union."

I snort again. "No, I can't give her the benefit of the doubt. Can you?"

She looks down at the table. "Yes," she says quietly. "I can."

Our conversation is somewhat stilted after that awkward exchange, but it's just like old times when we get to the topic of our horrific classmates.

*continued on page 45*

**"The Young Writers Institute really helped me to improve my writing and to be more confident. Everyone here was incredibly nice and the teachers were very generous with their time."**

— Margaret Guzman



*continued from page 44*

“Brett Williams is playing football, varsity, and he’s an even bigger idiot than he used to be,” I update Claudia.

She deadpans, “We really shouldn’t be making fun of football players, you know. They help society. In their own way.”

“Yeah, I feel so sorry for them. They face so much opposition and prejudice. They are alienated from the world. It’s just a difficult life, the life of a football player.” When I finish, she cracks up, abandoning her faux-serious expression. It feels so good to reminisce and make fun of the people who used to make fun of us nonstop.

“Oh, whatever happened to Warner? You know, the shy guy in our history class? I always liked him,” she says.

I think for a second. “Ummm, I think he’s going out with some cheerleader,” I lie.

Claudia raises an eyebrow incredulously. “Really? He didn’t seem like the type to go over to the dark side.”

“He isn’t. I made that up. He’s in a bunch of A.P. classes, and he grew a beard. He looks like Paul Bunyan, and that’s on a good day.”

Claudia just looks at the table thoughtfully, doesn’t laugh, nothing. I know it’s not one of my best jokes, but in the past she would’ve at least giggled a bit. Or maybe she’s just offended that I insulted her former crush. I’d probably be if she did that to me.

We get on the topic of our families, a subject I’d really rather avoid.

“So, how’s your mom been doing since the divorce?” she says.

I positively hate the “D” word. I avoid it at all costs, and it practically makes me shudder to hear Claudia use it so casually. “Um, I don’t know. Okay, I guess,” I say.

“How’ve you been doing?” she says this more cautiously, as if the wrong word could make me leap across the table and attack her.

I shrug. “All right, I guess. As good as I possibly can be.”

Her gaze is serious and penetrating. “Are you sure? I know this really good psychologist. He’s a family friend. He can help you deal with your feelings of anger and grief?”

My jaw drops open. “Are you kidding me? Since when did you turn into Oprah?” I spit angrily. “And what would you know about my ‘anger and grief?’ In case you need reminding, your parents have been together for 32 years. You have no clue what I went through.”

Claudia looks sad, in an almost pitying way. “I know it was horrible, what you went through, and I wish I could’ve been there to help you. But you can’t just stay angry for the rest of your life. There comes a time when it’s like, get over it already.”

I shake my head slowly, completely in shock. “What did you do with Claudia?” I reach out and tap her skull with my pointer finger. “Is my cynical best friend from junior high in here at all?”

Claudia sighs slowly, the sound dragged out and wistful. “She grew up. I suggest you do the same.”

We sit there, just looking at each other, and for some reason I feel like crying, something I haven’t done in years.

After our emotionless goodbyes, I walk home slowly, my feet dragging, feeling like I’ve been beaten up. What I keep focusing on is the look she had on her face while she was lecturing me about therapy. It was pity, fear, and confusion, all at once. It was the exact look my mother had given me this morning. I don’t think I ever want to see it again.

I somehow arrive home and go up to my room. My bright, cheery

red walls seem morose in the mood I’m in. I plop down on my bed, too emotionally exhausted to even reach the remote to the television. When the conversation from the diner pops into my mind, my tiredness shifts to anger, and I begin pacing around my room. What was it she had said? Oh, yeah. “You can’t just stay angry for the rest of your life. There comes a time when it’s like get over it already.” Gosh, what helpful advice that is. *I’m soooo sad about my parents’ divorce. Whatever shall I do? I know! I’ll get over it! How simple.*

Suddenly, I stop everything, and stand still in the middle of my floor. My pacing has turned to furious stomping in my anger, my face is flushed, and I’m being bitter and sarcastic about someone who used to be my best friend. Why am I like this? It makes sense that I was cynical in junior high, when I was hormonal and nearly friendless, with a face full of zits. Cynicism made me feel like I had a morsel of control in such a scary time of my life, and helped me bond with Claudia. But it’s probably not healthy to channel all my emotions about the “D” word into sarcasm. The problem is, if I stop depending on my crown, where do I go from there?

Feeling the strain on my sore muscles, I plod over to my wooden cabinet, open it, and reach towards the back. I know it’s there, where I put it years ago. It has to be.

Finally, I find what I’m looking for, and pull it out. It’s a note Claudia wrote me when she was bored in math class, from 8th grade. It says: *Cynicism is what would be created if intelligence and rapier wit had a love child, after intelligence cheated on kindness. And really, who wouldn’t? I chuckle darkly. That Claudia, she’s quite a funny girl. I sit on my bed, staring at the note, allowing tears to well up in my eyes. ■*

## The Train

by Erika Wolf

In a lonely corner of this new country,  
I wait for the train to arrive,  
my chance to go somewhere new  
and welcoming.

I wait patiently, for I have been waiting a long time.  
I wish for someone to perhaps  
coax me out of my mind and  
Into the world.

I need some familiarity  
to maybe teach me what to say  
to the people who inhabit this  
strange new place.

**“This was a great  
experience, both  
socially and mentally.  
All the kids really  
pulled together to  
help each other out  
and to make sure  
that we had any  
support we needed.”**

— Emily Beatty



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Summer 2008**

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Grand Island

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Farmington

**Emily Beatty**  
Albany

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Essex

**Daniel Claridge**  
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**Laura Colaneri**  
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Crown Point



The New York State Writers Institute is celebrating its 25th Anniversary. Created in 1984 by the State Legislature to draw attention to writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the Institute has emerged as one of the premier sites in the country for presenting the literary arts. Over the course of three

decades the Institute has sponsored readings, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and film events which have featured appearances by over 900 artists—including six Nobel Prize winners, and 90 Pulitzer Prize winners—and has screened more than 600 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](http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst).



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

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