

New York State Summer Young Writers Institute 2011



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.



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

These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing. That common interest creates almost instantaneous bonding when they meet each other, but it also encourages them to revel in the writing atmosphere of our intensive, week-long workshop. More than one hundred applicants 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 during our Summer 2011 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director
New York State Summer
Young Writers Institute

Summer 2011 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 *NYSUT United*, 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 Fairfield University MFA Program and serves as acquisitions editor at Excelsior College Press.

Murmur on by Christy Agrawal

A playful breeze
Gnaws at your shirt,
Extending its bone-chilling fingers
Up your back,

Whispering right through you.

Sunlight melts,
Delectably down your neck.
It dribbles,
Off your shoulders—

Spreading
A paralyzing warmth,
Into
The depths of yourself.

Infectious.

Undulating mirror,
The fragile surface
Dances
Beneath a (dense) halo of light.

Thick rays,
Pour through the leaves,
Exposing (true) green,
Gentle skeletal fingers.

Green,
Slithering mass,
Trees ruffling their flowy green manes
Hazy shades,
Blended together as if God himself
Had whisked his gossamer fingers
Across the landscape.

Sweep up,
To meet seamless skies,
Listen,
Hear the clouds

As they lumber on, floating on heavy blue
molasses.

The subtle breath of
Dew,
Fragile crystal,
Careening towards the ground,
Making a sound as sweet
As if a small speck of sky
Were to tumble to the earth,
And shatter.

The humid air,
Dense-thick-slow,
As if you could punch it,
Collapse into it,

Surrounded.

A hint of salt,
Ignites against your tongue.
The muffled smell of salt water
Engulfs you.

Murmur on.



“Stormy Heart” by Lily Cao

IT IS SUMMER WHEN THEY MEET. THEY are in their fifth year, and the sun basks openly, its rays beating ruthlessly against sweaty citizens who traverse the streets of a fallen apart village. There is a girl, her silky black hair gathered up in twin braids, her dress the color of bright, bright red. She stands tall, her back straight in a manner that others perceive as haughty, fitting for her background. In actuality, her stomach is twisting from anxiety, and she feels awkward in the little town, the others throwing looks of disdain, for her family is not like them. After all, she is the daughter of a wealthy family, a type of class unable to sympathize, to understand their woes. Only one

a country that is moments away from exploding. Outside of their little town, there are horror tales of Japanese troops ravaging the country, running rampant like beasts hungry for blood. But such monsters are far away from their little home up north, and they are safe from the endless appetite of hungry invaders. This is a matter for adults to concern themselves with, and there are new things to learn, places to discover.

When he isn't in the fields with his parents, Xin Xin teaches him the art of language, watching as his clumsy fingers finger dust-worn textbook pages, stumbling over the simplest of characters. It takes him days to remember the word da

(“big”), but eventually he commits the brushstrokes of the character to his mind. Still, the character that comes easily is yī—a single horizontal stroke that represents the number one. Nevertheless, she is patient with him, never growing frustrated when he mixes up his characters.

One day, she teaches him his name, Lei Tian-Say (“Thunder”), her brushstrokes neat and delicate against the

white parchment. Next she teaches her name, Xin. It means heart, but when said in repetition like Xin Xin, it sounds more like star, flickering in a night sky.

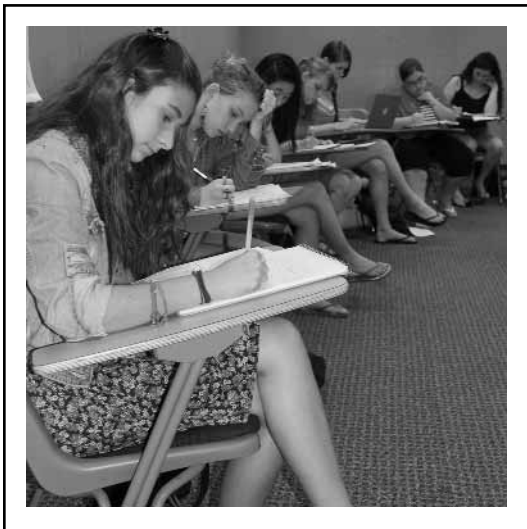
In the summer, they put their pens and books away, and it is Lei's turn to lead. He drags Xin Xin by the hand, and she walks into the town she hates, the town where she feels like an outsider. “This is Xin Xin,” he says matter-of-factly and he glares at

anyone who opens their mouth to retaliate against her presence. They go to the town sprinklers, where cool water emits from rusty, unstable pipes. The water spews out from everywhere and the children dash about, relishing the feeling of smooth water coating their hot, feverish skin. Xin Xin is shy at first, but Lei grabs her arm with a firm hand and pulls her in. It is only when Xin Xin is laughing and shrieking in childish delight because of a mirthful game does she know that she can never go back to a life where she doesn't know Lei. The two friends push and pull each other into the water, ignoring disapproving glances and curious looks. They are happy in their little world, even if in the real one they are not.

They are ten years old when one war ends and another resumes. There are celebrations as the Japanese flee their proud nation, but her parents remain wary as a civil war interrupted resumes. According to Xin Xin's parents, one side of the war is misguided. Her father throws around words like “swaying of the uneducated class” and her mother nods in agreement over a cup of jasmine tea. Nevertheless, she is convinced that nothing will change. She is sure that these new enemies will disappear just as the Japanese had, monsters that had never even shown their faces to her in the first place. They'd struggle and fight and spit liquid hatred in some other part of the country, but Xin and her family would be safe. So as the world worries, Xin's life goes on.

That summer, she and Lei do not visit the fountains. Instead, they meet by an abandoned shed near Lei's home. She always knocks first, like it is a real house and he is the real owner, and for moments, the shed really does seem like home.

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boy, with a dirt-smeared face and wide brown eyes dares to speak to her, his mouth fixed in a friendly smile. “Hi,” he says. “I'm Tian Lei. But everyone calls me Xiao Lei.”

The girl summons up all of her courage to offer him back a smile. “Hi,” she says. “I'm Hua Xin. But everyone calls me Xin Xin.”

And so it begins.

In the next years, they are content, oblivious to shifting changes in

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One day, in their little makeshift home, they talk of the future. “Xin,” he says one day. “Let’s marry when we grow up.”

Xin Xin laughs, and even though Lei knows that the joke is at his expense, he doesn’t mind because the sound is beautiful and joyous and something to be treasured. Then, she ceases her laughter and studies him with her dark brown, almost black eyes.

“Oh, Xiao Lei,” she says finally, a wistful gleam in her eyes, “If I could I would.”

Those words are enough for Lei to hope, enough for him to dream a future where he will have a better weapon than a dented shovel, a better future than a field where the only things that grow go anywhere but his stomach.

“Xie Xie, Xin Xin,” he says, thanking her. There is something earnest in his eyes. Xin doesn’t know what it means, but he sounds honest to her, and for Xin, that’s enough.

“You’re welcome,” she says pleasantly, and she means it.

When she is twelve years old, Xin Xin begins to understand that the enemies are not a distant threat. She realizes that this time, her hatred is not shared by all her peers, that this threat is actually called the communists, and that each day, they are drawing closer to her beloved home. Most importantly, it is not a hate that Lei shares. Instead, he talks of them with a shining look in his eyes. He tells her of how his parents have told him about the future they can have with a man named Mao. He tells her about a future he never once dared to dream. It is a future, he says, where they could marry, and for the most part, Xin Xin remains silent, because she doesn’t understand and she doesn’t want to talk about it. If they never talk about it, maybe it will never happen, and she clings to this belief desperately.

“Never speak of them, Lei,” she said softly. “They hate me. Please, don’t speak of them.” There is an awkward pause in their conversation, like a rough patch in a smooth road.

“Sorry, Xin,” he says, because he has made some inscrutable sadness appear in her eyes, and that is enough for him to regret daring to dream of such things, if they are the type of dreams that will make her sad. She smiles weakly, and stiffly changes the topic.

Xin is thirteen when she learns the bitterness of betrayal. It is his fourteenth birthday, and she is sure that he will be in their little shed, waiting for a gentle hug or a soft kiss to the cheek. But when she raps her fists against a decaying door, there is no answer, and the only reply is the emptiness of silence.

“Lei?” Still, there is no answer. Suddenly a glimpse of white catches her eye, tucked between pieces of firewood piled up high next to the shed. It is a letter, written clumsily by Lei’s shaky hands, and even though the Chinese is barely legible, each word rings out painfully clear in Xin’s mind: Sorry, Xin. I had to.

She is shaking then, hands trembling in an uncomfortable and unfamiliar emotion. Later, she learns from a prideful mother that he has gone to “fight for their country,” but as far as Xin is concerned, it is for the wrong side, for the side that wants to eradicate people like her father and steal away her family’s riches. The betrayal still stings, and that night she dreams of him in a green uniform, thirsting, thirsting for blood.

They do not see each other for decades more, when the hint of wrinkles have started to appear on their faces and their bodies have started to weaken under the weight of age. He is returning home, ready to greet aging parents who he has not seen for years. All of a sudden, he sees her, her long hair shining underneath the sun’s rays, her brows furrowed in concentration. Gently, she scatters the seeds over the field, and then covers her work with handfuls of dirt. The wind seems to be calling her name—Xin Xin, it sings, and it is a melodious, familiar sound. “Xin Xin!” he exclaims, echoing the ever-present wind. She jumps at the noise, and when she glances



behind her to see his face, her eyes widen in shock. And then, as the surprise slowly melts away, she cautiously takes two wavering steps back, wiping her dirty hands on what might have once been a pristine white apron.

Her face is older, but still has the same gentle grace. She is leaner than before, muscles gained from days on the field, and her skin has been

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bronzed by the afternoon sun. “Xin Xin,” he repeats, and this time she grabs her watering can off the dirt floor, straightens her back, and starts to walk away from him.

He pushes his legs forward to catch up to her. “Xin, it’s me—Tian Lei, I we, you—” His hand lands on her shoulder and her whole body stops and stiffens.

“Officer,” she finally manages, her back still facing towards him. She comes off strained, forced, a vestige of a voice that once ran free when she was a child.

“Please, Xin, call me Xiao Lei. We are old friends, remember?”

She turns around slowly, and shakes her head. “Officer, I have business to attend to. So if you please, pray tell me how I may be of assistance and I shall be on my way.” Her voice is carefully controlled, but he sees how her hands tremble and clutch at her apron in an iron grip. He grabs her hand, pulls them away from the dirtied cloth, and peels her fingers out of the fist. Her palms are calloused, unlike the smooth hands he had known in their childhood.

“Why are you here, Xin?” he asks, tracing the rough scarring on her little hand. She pulls away her hand quickly,

trying to push away his words, but they nevertheless make her think of what has happened since he had left her, how they had taken all the money, the house, and the furniture within it. She remembers the broken look on her father’s face as he toiled under the sun for the first time, punishment for his honest words against a government that didn’t want to listen. She remembers her mother’s look of red-faced shame, and the way her delicate body faltered underneath the hot sun.

“My father,” she finally says, in a quiet and resigned manner. “We were sent away for his telling of the truth.” There is an awkward silence, the sound of wind splicing through the air in the background. The thought of Xin doing work once meant for him makes Lei feel suddenly guilty, and he once again stares at Xin’s hands.

“Your hands are rough, Xin. I promise you—I won’t let them get rougher. You won’t have to work any...”

“And what authority do you have to do that?” she asks. She studies him with a contemplative look. “Doesn’t that go against your ‘equality?’”

“I just want to help...”

“Tian Lei,” she says. It is the first time she has said his name since he left, and his heart beats angrily against

“I feel like I have grown by leaps and bounds over the course of this week and I’m so incredibly glad that I pushed myself to apply. This was such a unique and wonderful experience as well as a helpful precursor to a college I’m interested in. If I wasn’t a senior, I would come back in a heartbeat.”

— CHRISTY AGRAWAL

his chest. “I thought for a while of what I wanted from you.” And indeed, there had been so much she had still wanted from him—an actual goodbye, an acceptance of a fourteenth birthday gift, a completion of a childhood. But such things were in the past, and Xin knows that it is futile to look back at something that is gone completely. They are things that Lei can no longer offer her, but still, he speaks.

“You can have anything, Xin. Marriage, freedom, money...”

“Equality?” she asks softly. There is a subtle mocking tone behind her words, and Lei opens his mouth to protest, but she motions for him to stop with her hands, flat up in the air. “Lei,” she says. “Du bu qi.” I cannot make it right.

And he wants to ask her why she is apologizing, why there is this strained look of sadness painted onto her sun-blackened face, but before he has the chance, she straightens her back so that she is standing as tall as she did when they first met and softly steps away from him. He is urging himself to move, but he finds his feet still, his voice gone, and so he watches as she grows smaller, dwindling into nothing. In the wind, the scent of wildflowers lingers. ■

The Sweeping of Star Skies

by Erin Carden

YOU NEVER THINK THAT THE YEARS YOU SPEND COVERED IN acne, the years that your bony knees become bonier and knobbier, contain some of the best nights of your life.

I forget how it started, but I think you were sweeping sunny golden eye shadow across my eyelids at 1:00 A.M on a fall morning, the moon illuminating the starless city sky. While she watched, amused by us, I think I accidentally spilled this sunny golden eye shadow on your carpeted floor, and you—in revenge—splashed me with its kisses, by throwing it playfully in my face. It became a game. Next you grabbed lipstick for protection. I grabbed at makeup on the nearby counter, trying to find something, anything. My boney fingers grazed mascara. We were fighting battles; our thirteen-year-old bare feet pitter-pattered across your floors. We laughed. You swiped my face with lipstick and I pathetically tried to attack you with my feeble mascara brush. The sunny golden eye shadow's dust drifted down from my locks and trickled into my almond eyes, blinding my vision with glorious, glittery specks. I couldn't see. She ran a bath because well, I was a mess, and you were a mess.

And she laughed along with us, too. You weren't as comic looking as I was. No longer could you see my dirty blond hair. Instead I was disguised as a sun child. A child, born from the gods of the skies. A child with a sun golden halo of angel dust, wrapped around my scalp. And there was lipstick. Bright ruby red lipstick painted in zigzags and lines across my face. And I was drunk with laughter. As you two picked me up under the armpits, and stripped me of my p.j. pants to place me in the lukewarm bath water, I laughed. I laughed as I watched the flakes of sun dust slip off my body, and swirl around the water, caressing my toes at the bottom. I laughed as the bath water turned red from the ruby red lipstick and the light above pierced my eyes, blurred with tears from my laughter. And we laughed. We laughed because we were young, naive and ridiculous. Our laughter reached the ceiling and shook the walls. We laughed because we were endless. Our laughter, our minds, and the glitter that was woven between us, was endless. And we were beautiful. ■

"This past week I have learned to open up to others about my writing despite whether I was confident about my piece or not. I have allowed myself to become vulnerable which helped me grow and open as a writer. Before I came, coming up with stories was always the hardest part for me. Now I'm excited to return home and begin the numerous ideas I have for new work. It's truly amazing how passionate we all are about writing and it's clear how tightly woven by this passion we are."

— ERIN CARDEN



Bats in the Belfry

by Kathryn Corah

I'm not going to lie
But now I see bats in the sky
Floating homicidally through the air
I could have *sworn* I saw one there!

And in the woods the foxes call home
Rabies-infested and prone to roam
About the campus, late at night
They stare from bushes with sickly sight

And at night killers stalk
All who dare to take a walk
Or maybe they'll just rob you blind
Most likely they won't be so kind

Of course there are fires everywhere
Sending students into open air
And down eleven flights of stairs
To be cataloged by RAs with care

The bats are on fire but aren't working alone
They're in with the foxes who give sickly moans
They attack the poor campus by air and by land
While the killers and robbers stalk and demand

I sit awake in my dorm room bed
Visions of rabid foxes in my head
A bat that I swear is attempting to kill me
Hangs from the pole in my closet, lonely

I could've sworn I was crazy
I looked at the bat, mind hazy
Slowly I got to my feet to chase it out
I got near it and let out a shout

And then the bat took off in flight
Out the window and into the night
I got back in bed, facing the right
Thinking, *now how will I get to sleep tonight?*

Monochrome Utopia

by Dana Crispi

As the tide rolls gently, the soft green ribbons sway and flirt, entangled upon the splintered bottom of the slick white raft. A raft which on countless occasions had been a pirate ship, a diving board, a safe haven. A place to stop. Just to stop. To lie and think, bound by the rays of the sun and cooled by the ease of water on skin. Where the horseshoe crabs can be seen in the water's cool depths, peeking out from the shadows of the sand. The light plays and flits on their perfect backs to the rhythm of the waves. Night approaches. The stars slowly encroach into the sky, until the sun has faded away, and touch each end of the earth, the water glistening in response. The sky is sable, the sand is silver and everything is black and white. It doesn't need to be anything more.



"Every year I was lucky enough to attend the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, it gave me something different. Whether it was the ability to critique others' work including my own with honesty, or the social experience of meeting dozens of others who were just like me in my thinking and passions for writing, or even just the challenge of true revisions and having to "re-see" your work once again, all helped me to understand how writing, as well as fitting into the place you most belong, is a process. It is a rarity to find a program like this that so fondly radiates that buzzing intellectual hubbub of words and writings with such passion as this one does. It is a world, that if you're like me, you are excited to get into. This program supplies you with a remarkable invitation into that world, where you feel already in the door."

— LILY LOPATE

Picket Fence & Canis Lupus

by Riley Dixon

There is a burning in my heart,
and wolves at my door and the beasts
are enough to drive me deeper
into the gaping maw of the stairway,
just so I can flee from the snapping,
cracking, dripping jaws.

"This is not my home," I say,
but you don't believe me because
I've been here before and I've
played with the beasts.

They remember me. They have my scent.
They want me back.

"I cannot live here," I say,
and you laugh because I've lived here all along.
Mired in defeat, too tired to move, sleep, or eat,
"I am dying," I say,
and you smile because you've been dead
for years and all you've ever wanted
was some company in this haunted house.

"We can sit here together, alone. We can spend
hours
in separate rooms, never speaking, never
believing the other one is there and
when we see each other we will
talk like strangers," you say, though
we've known each other for sixteen years.

"I don't know who you are any more,
and I am sorry I grew up so fast."

"Get me out of here," you whisper like you're
afraid someone will catch wind, will finally realize
you're not happy;
that you never were.

That you haven't been happy
since before we came to complicate your life,
since we drove him to the bottle and you to the
desk
and pinned you there, shackled. We thought it
would be a life sentence.

"I can't do this anymore, and I want to go
home,"
but neither of us knows where home is anymore
and the word home
is circling in my head until it becomes house and
white picket fence and dog and

I hate you because you made me give away my
dog
and I will hold this grudge forever like a splinter
underneath my skin until it festers
and grows into something much more sinister.
I can't believe you left that desk, we put you
there, we needed you there,
and you, being the main protagonist, decided to
make the first bad decision in this rising action
and
the resolution is nowhere in sight and I am hiking
up this
metaphorical plotline without a goddamn dog to
keep me company

and, I don't know if you've realized yet,
but it's been years and I still haven't forgotten
about

all the choices you've made and the sour
decisions you've forced us to live through
and you are a stranger to me.

"Get me out of here,"
You mumble, as if you had never
even
heard
me
Talk.

Disappointed

by Maggie Doran

THE ENTIRE NIGHT SHE STOOD NEXT to me. Well to be honest, she had always been close to me so I wonder how it is that I didn't see things get so out of hand so quickly. She was a sophomore at the time, and though she was far from ignorant she didn't quite seem as conscious of herself or the world around her as she once was.

That night I watched her brown hair (the same shade as mine) whip back and forth as she laughed and talked with people she didn't really know anyway; I saw her hazel eyes turn hazed and red; and I witnessed her lose control, render herself senseless, and become someone she once swore she'd never be.

From the second she arrived she had seemed eager to begin the night's experimentation with how far she could push herself. Ten minutes in she snuck away to the bathroom to take long swigs from her secret stash with her two girlfriends. More and more people were arriving, all murmuring about when things would get started. I could tell she was disappointed in the lack of energy, which she practically craved. Soon the doors at the top of the basement's steps slammed open and in walked two upperclassmen carrying the treasures for the night. They were jocks, walking victoriously like the gods themselves carrying ambrosia. In reality, they were far from godlike, and the treasures they carried were certainly not the nectar of the gods, but cheap beer from the nearby Bottle King. The room cheered. She smiled and threw one arm in the air, obviously raring to go. She scooted around her fellow partyers: the scantily dressed girls, the bragging boys, and the wallflowers, to reach her destination. With a pull and click the dewy can in her hand was open and without hesitation she brought it to her pink lips, the silver and blue can looking even darker against her pale skin. She left it there, her cheeks swelling and

deflating like a fish desperately gulping water, until it was empty and she tossed it in the trash with her left hand, while grabbing another can with her right.

Turning towards the main table, where the cliché game of beer pong was starting, she sipped her second drink while chatting about ridiculously insignificant things with ridiculously insignificant people. I watched as her shoulders relaxed, the liquid courage starting to set in. She began to talk a little louder, to think a little less,

"I will remember Skidmore as a help in growing my writing. The community, camaraderie and wise teachers willing to listen meant a lot to me."

— KAREN YUAN

and to become a bit bolder. This feeling of liberation was exactly what she loved so much and I could see her eyes flash with pleasure. The basement, at the bottom of tonight's popular wannabe's house, was packed far past capacity. The lights were turned low and empty bottles, cans, and cigarette butts already covered the floor. The air was smoky and littered with shrill voices and yells, all growing louder as the night continued.

After cheering and booing the game with the others, she decided to play a round herself, finding the nearest partyer to be her partner. She, of course, let her competitive nature get the best of her, yelling at her partner when he made a mistake and giving little victory dances for every made shot. They won, of course. After all she was on top of the world, could she have lost anything?

Afterwards, she shimmied her way over to a speckled counter on the other side of the packed-like-a-sardine-can basement, where a tiny redhead held a large bottle high in the air. The group around the redhead held out their miniature glasses, each decorated differently—"Dirty Jersey" read one, "Just One More," another. She grabbed one for herself: a neon green striped one. Holding up her tiny glass she smiled and waited for the others to join her in her ritualistic toast, "To Fridays," she beamed before downing the clear liquid. I watched her face, waiting for the scrunching and the shaking that usually took place due to the biting, burning taste of her personal poison, Triple Distilled Smirnoff. But there was none this time. She had become so accustomed to it that it no longer bothered her.

And so she downed another shot, and another, noticeably trying to keep up with the hardcore group around her. They took a break and I was relieved. I wasn't so sure she could handle anymore. She walked on, stumbling and slurring, blatantly past her limit. I could barely watch the rest of the night, so I am only a reliable witness for sporadic moments, each separated by a dizzying darkness. So here is what I can somewhat piece together:

She guzzled at least another shot, maybe even two more, and another can of cheap beer.

She fell so many times that when she woke up the next morning she would be covered in mysteriously black and blue reminders of the evening's events.

She sat on a couch with guys she hardly knew or didn't know at all as she sputtered incoherent words and they laughed at her.

She dropped and broke the beaded bracelet her sister had let her wear, the one she promised to be careful with if she could just borrow it one time, and she barely noticed—let alone seemed

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to care—as it scattered in pieces across the sticky floor.

That’s all I can tell you about the end of the night. As I said, I could hardly watch. But that doesn’t matter too much because that’s not where her real problem happened anyway.

Her biggest problem came after she made a drunken fool out of herself, when her father came to pick up her and her friends in his midnight blue Corvette, like any other night. Her friends were piled in the back but she barely paid them any mind. I listened to her talk. She was practically screaming, it sounded so loud. And she was babbling on and on about her plans for tomorrow. Would she just quiet down and try to act normal? I didn’t want to see her get in trouble. The more she talked, the more I took note of her drunken breath. It was as if her pours were seeping the Smirnoff that she practically worshiped. I wondered why her father hadn’t noticed yet, why he hadn’t questioned her yet.

We—her, her father, her friends, and I—had almost returned home when she clasped her hand to her mouth and made a faint swallowing

noise. She did this once more and I found myself staring, wondering what on earth she was doing. Finally, she leaned forward swiftly, her now frizzy hair covering her shoulders as she spewed the contents of her stomach onto the floor of the car. She was done, she knew her father’s strict no alcohol rules as well as I did and surely she would pay for this.

But he didn’t yell yet, he just turned to her slowly as they reached the driveway and whispered, “Go to your room and sleep if off. We’ll discuss this in the morning.” She almost looked relieved but I knew better. This was only the calm before the storm. And of course she seemed to have forgotten that soon her progress report would be arriving as well, with a notice that she was currently failing advanced algebra. Yeah, I’m sure her dad would be real pleased with that news, too. Her grades were dropping faster than the cops act going to bust a party and now she had thrown up in her dad’s car after yet another night of binge drinking.

She walked to her bedroom as I stared at her. I couldn’t believe what

she had become, how stupid she could be. I was disgusted. I mean I’m all for letting loose every once in a while, but she had taken it to the next level, indulging almost every night of every weekend. She had once cared so much about school, she had once tried so hard to please her dad, and she had once been a perfect role model for her sister, but now look at her.

I was more than disappointed in her; I didn’t even have a word for what I felt. I looked right at her and she looked back at me, her eyes rimmed red. I bit my lip deciding what I could finally say to her, and she mimicked me. As I started to part my lips to speak she did the same and I held out a hand to silence her for a second longer. Surprisingly, as I did this she did as well. I slowly lifted my hand closer and closer to hers until we touched. But what I felt upon contact was not flesh. It was cold, hard glass. I pressed harder and found my hand against a mirror. I gasped, was this me? Had I become this monster? It appeared so. ■



“This week at the New York State Young Writers Institute was unexpected in that I didn’t know it would be so amazing. The teachers gave me such valuable advice and the friends I made will stay in my memory forever.”

— ELIZABETH LEE

The Learner and The Educated

by Andreas Esposito

IT'S A SLIGHTLY COOL TEMPERATURE outside, almost so that you wouldn't notice a change if you took off your sweatshirt, but still not quite warm. An eighteen-year-old boy walks to a bus stop and sees a scruffy, unshaven seventeen-year-old boy sitting on the bench. Reluctant to sit down next to him, the first boy leans against a pole instead of sitting on the dark brown, wooden bench.

Scruffy Kid: What are you afraid of?



Preppy Kid: N-nothing, I just don't feel like sitting.

Scruffy Kid: So what are you doing today?

Preppy Kid: Nothing, just going to pick up some books.

Scruffy Kid: Oh really? What are you getting? I'm still reading *The Principles of Psychology* by William James. It's like, fourteen-hundred pages and dry as hell. (Chuckling)

Preppy Kid: Then why are you read-

ing it? Is it for school or something?

Scruffy Kid: Naw, I don't milk that goat anymore, I'm just reading for fun.

Preppy Kid: Milk that goat? That's not what school is for; you go to school so that you can get an education and one day get into a good college so that you can get a high-paying job.

Scruffy Kid: The way I thought of school when I was going there was that you learn the things you want and ignore the things you don't need or wanna know. So essentially I just took the milk and threw away the crap.

Preppy Kid: Oh please, you're just giving yourself excuses. I mean, look at you! That bench is probably the closest thing you have to a bed, all because you didn't maintain your grades.

Scruffy Kid: Ya' know, grades aren't everything, they're just a bunch of numbers.

Preppy Kid: What are you talking about? Your grades in school have a direct correlation with the rest of your life. You can't do anything without high marks.

Scruffy Kid: Ha, that is where you are right. But I just couldn't ever connect the two. I always preferred to just listen so that I wouldn't start hating the material by associating it with endless worksheets and papers.

Preppy Kid: Oh come on, you're a lazy bum and you know it.

Scruffy Kid: I'm not lazy. I just believe that school should be an institution of learning.

Preppy Kid: That's what it is.

Scruffy Kid: No... I'm sorry to say that it is not...

Preppy Kid: Wha-what do you mean? What is it then?

Scruffy Kid: It's a beaker, a test tube, a ruler, something to measure us by. When is the last time you ever got a bad grade, and your parents told you that you need to learn the material so that you'll just know it? Never. All they see are your grades, and hammer you to get your grades up. All they notice are the As and the Ds and everything in between. Think of it this way: if you hand in your homework late, you get half credit. Does that make sense?

Preppy Kid: No, it doesn't, late work should be a zero because you didn't get it in on time.

Scruffy Kid: Right there, that is the social conformity right there. If school was really based on learning, then as long as you knew the material and understood it, then you should get an A.

Preppy Kid: What would that do? You'd just end up doing that later in life and lose your job.

Scruffy Kid: Yes, and why is that?

Preppy Kid: Because you would learn that you don't have to do things on time.

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Scruffy Kid: And that is because we do not learn discrimination. We are not taught discrimination. Most of the stuff we learn in school is repetitive and not useful to us—it's just a means of comparing us to other students so that colleges can nitpick who gets in and who doesn't. The saddest truth is that I wanted to learn. I desperately wanted to learn, but not so that I could get a job, but just so that I could advance myself. I was intrinsically motivated to gain knowledge, but it wasn't happening back in those four walls. I want to be challenged, not by multiple-choice

nineties on tests, and I knew that they weren't really proud of THEIR achievements. They just wanted praise and thought that they were fulfilling their own ambition to do well, but they weren't.

Preppy Kid: That is because they did achieve something: it's good to get a high grade on a test.

Scruffy Kid: Have you ever felt smart? And I don't mean in terms of school. I mean, have you ever been surprised by your own intellect and perception? This one time, I got to go on a writing retreat. Going there, I thought there would be a ton of brainiacs and I would be ignored. Instead, everyone was nice, and thoughtful, and real. And the best part was that I could compete with anyone there. Even the most gifted, artistic writers there were on par with me. I didn't know that I could do that before I went there. And do you know what our reward was?

Preppy Kid: What? Did it look good for college or something?

Scruffy Kid: My reward was just being able to read everyone else's work, and have mine read as well. No grades or credits. Yet that was the moment in my life where I truly felt smart.

Preppy Kid: But if you're so smart, then why drop out of school? Why not just do well so that you can do what you want later in life?

Scruffy Kid: Because I'm too smart for this time period. I wish I wasn't... I wish I could conform... I wish I didn't have to know all this... I wish I was just an asshole who thinks he's the king of the world without giving anything else consideration. Even though I'm here preaching my philosophy to some guy on the street and probably look like I think my way is the only way, it really isn't, and I know it. I can never go back because every fiber of my being tells me that this system is wrong and that I have to escape it and create my own new world of logic.

Preppy Kid: No, you can't just say that, you need to stop complaining! Listen, I know that it's a flawed system, but it's what we have. If you can't follow it, then just abuse it so that you can advance yourself into society and be better than everybody else. I can't stand seeing someone who's probably smarter than me just die off like this. I'm sorry that you have to be the one to see all of this, but it can't drag you down into the abyss. You've got a gifted mind, use it to inspire other people! I'll tell you one thing before this bus drives up and I never see you again, it's that everybody else in the world is an idiot, so don't let those dumbasses beat you in anything. Make that your new ambition, but keep your ideas and your way of thinking, because you only need one sun to illuminate an entire planet.

The bus arrives and the first boy gets on. The second boy gets off of the bench and follows him. ■



questions, but by deep, developed thinking. I wasn't a scholar, but a person who was genuinely interested by what my mind could achieve.

Preppy Kid: Then why, if you were so driven, did you just quit? Why not just do the work? You'll still get the same information.

Scruffy Kid: Because I couldn't stand the whole system. I felt so pressured to excel in things that I couldn't make any emotional connection to at all. I remember seeing the fake, deceived smiles of all the kids getting

In Observation by Andrew Fedorov

HE KNEW THE BOOK WAS TUCKED UNDER his shoulder but did not dare to take it out and flip to the pages with the crinkled post-it note wedged between them. He did not decide to reach for the book and hold it in front of him and curl his back and lean forward to explore the fictitious jolly world while his thick-lensed glasses slid down his large pointed nose. He didn't feel comfortable reading in public because he knew all these terrifying eyes that were the product of millions of years of evolution would come to that moment to provide a constant vigil. They were staring at the little man in the green jacket on the bus. Staring at him.

What went on in their minds? Why couldn't he understand? What did they do? Did they have friends? Did they relax with those friends and enjoy themselves? That guy there across the aisle. The one with the gray coat with the matching beaten-up fedora hanging over his empty-headed eyes. The one wearing the loose-hanging business suit and the heavy brown leather shoes. Did he go home to a family? Did he enjoy their presence or did he despise those damned drains that swirled away his life? Did he sit there on the floor, building structures out of Legos with them? Did he flip burgers on the grill on the small porch behind the house covering the majority of his small lawn? What did he do?

What about that girl over there with the hoodie with a demonic noir-haired Norse god frying a monkey (and enjoying the melodies of the sizzling hair) drawn on it. What did she think about as she stared out the window at that helpless hobo lumbering by with his cardboard sign as the bus slowed down and the doors hissed? Why did she press her pierced nose to that dirty window? He thought about her friends and the colony of eccentrics making up a whole. Was it possible that he was the real freak? The lonely little man in the seat, not staring out the window but with his

head firmly planted and sprouting roots on the seat in front of him. He was not a blooming eccentricity. He was not exhibiting his eccentricities for all to see. He just didn't get humanity. He just didn't get the social instinct.

In all likelihood they probably were still staring at him with their ignorant criticizing eyes. They had not grown up with books, they were not used to the idea that paper held ideas. Did their heads hold ideas? Were they just doers? Were they just human?

He thought of his future at the company as he slipped his mass market paperback into the solid briefcase. He put away what would not help him and focused. This was to be his first day.

What a cloudy, depressing first day it was to be. The sky was an unwavering gray and a fierce wind charged at him. Not a pleasant breeze but a wind that despised him, a wind that could not stand the sight of his meek form.

He pressed on, briefcase waving behind him. It had rained that morning. He schlepped past puddles, not noticing the wet dog walking with him, and not noticing that repugnant smell. The sidewalk was full of cracks, splintering apart with the freezing of the flow.

As he walked he mumbled to himself although he didn't realize it because he thought he was mumbling to the people passing him by. But they couldn't give less of a shit. They just went on with what he thought might be thoughts.

It wasn't practical matters he was mumbling about. It was just what he was doing. Life was a practical sport to him, not a jolly little game. But practicality has its limits and sooner or later he subconsciously broke off from it, trying to destroy the horrible chains that clinked as he dragged his feet, ruining the sneakers. And once in a while he splashed the wet ground so as to wet his carefully rolled pants and his thin but soft black socks, which were already a little wet because they

made him sweat like a tap.

He finally reached the dreaded number on the door, 90. He stood there. He had done this sort of cowardly thing all his life. Instead of choosing the way to go he would impale himself on the fork in the road. People went in and out, but he just stood there, staring at how the gray sky reflected off the numbers that were probably a glittering gold when receiving the sun's sacred rays. He moved closer and saw a large-nosed shmoe approaching the 90. This guy spread over the whole thing as he approached, like a liquid dribbling away into a mold. The door finally swung open and with false bravado he went into the large building past the second pair of large glass, brass-rimmed doors, forgetting to wipe his dripping shoes on the fuzzy carpet.

He walked on towards the old elevator, noticing the echo of his feet on the marble floor. The half-circle above the elevator door sat there with a slowly moving arrow and the grind of unnecessary gears behind it. He stepped in alone, careful to get ahead of the much older, hectic, jumpy but tired-out man with a prickly gray beginning-of-a-beard and a suit sized too big. He was quick to press the button and the doors pulled themselves together in front of the older man who had an expression of pure anguish upon his face.

He lay back against the elevator wall watching the arrow shift from number to number, performing its mandatory duty. He wasn't thinking of anything in particular when his head jerked up. He had always been spastic. In school the cruel children would call him "spaz."

The doors shifted open and he was on the floor of the company that now owned him for what he hoped would be the rest of his working life. In this place there would be no sky above him and no earth below. It would all fall away. ■

Hunted

by Luke Foley

JEREMY'S BREATHS WERE HEAVY AND frantic; he could hear every beat of his heart as if a tribal ritual was taking place in his chest. He had long since shed his burdensome backpack: lost textbooks were not worth the risk of being caught by the owner of the looming shadow he could see on the white hot pavement beside him. The slap of his rigid leather dress shoes on the concrete added a hi-hat to the all-consuming drums that he himself was orchestrating. Jeremy's intended destination was the school's playing field where it was possible his surprisingly relentless pursuer would give up chase.

"The Young Writers Institute has shaped me so much, not only as a writer but as a person. For the past three years, it has become my absolute favorite part of the summer. I will miss everything about this program from the faculty, to the students, to the author Q and As to Bob Miner's prison analogies. It has been one of the best experiences ever and I am so lucky that I have been able to participate in it."

— MADDIE ROJAS LYNCH

It was lunch time at Wellington Boy's College on the most revered, yet savage day of the year: the Third Form Hunt, also known as the first Friday of the school year. In the college's 126 years of existence, it is said that only two things have never changed: the name, and the Third Form Hunt. Hazing at British all boys schools is a widespread phenomenon that old men in their rocking chairs like to boast about to their grandchildren. However, never had there been a hazing tradition as brutal, organized, or consistent as the one practiced at Wellington Boy's College. It is more likely that the

world would simply forget to celebrate Christmas than for this ancient tradition not to be upheld. Even teachers turned a blind eye to the ruthless abuse of first year students for this one lunch time every year. There had been cases of boys being Saran-wrapped upside down to trees for an hour, having their pants set on fire, and being used as cricket wickets to the immense pleasure of the seventh formers. For some reason, these eighteen-year-olds found it necessary to establish a chain of supremacy on children a third of their size. No one ever escaped without suffering at least two or three

"dead legs". Older students would guard the exits to the school grounds and patrol the halls and classrooms to ensure that no newcomer was attempting to dodge the initiation "ceremony."

Jeremy knew all about the tradition; all the older boys in his neighborhood had told him

about their respective experiences. None of these stories seemed to deter any of the parents from sending their sons to the most prestigious school in the district. It was where you went.

Now, sounding like a drum kit on wheels, Jeremy was quickly approaching a flight of stairs that would lead him to the parking lot adjacent to the huge playing field and a slightly safer environment. As the sun continued to berate his skin, beads of sweat created canals down his forehead that lead to his eyebrows, limiting visibility. His belt buckle was apparently attempting to

permanently lodge itself in Jeremy's fleshy gut, the result of too many shepherd's pies.

"Get back here you runt," boomed a voice from behind.

Jeremy ran a little faster. The sound of the voice compelled him to mistakenly turn his head and to his dismay Jeremy saw that he was being pursued by an ogre—an ogre that had managed to don the navy shirt and dull grey shorts of the school uniform. Perhaps frozen with shock, Jeremy stared a little too long at the beady eyes and evil grin and ran head first into the first car in the parking lot.

"Gotcha."

As Jeremy was being dragged away he began imagining what tragic or fatal treatment he was about to be subjected to. It soon became clear that the ogre's destination was a nearby trash can. Soon kids were circling around to watch yet another humiliation. Jeremy spied his neighbor, Scott Fletcher, at the edge of the crowd. Their eyes locked and Jeremy's gaze pleaded with Scott to help him. The Fletchers were close family friends and Scott was a good friend of Jeremy's. Was he really going to stand there and watch this happen? As the fumes of hotdogs and unwanted fruit invaded his sinuses, Jeremy realized that Scott didn't care enough to help.

Forty minutes later, smelling like, well, a trash can, Jeremy stomped into class. There was no hint of surprise on his teacher's face and he took a seat at the back of the class without any questions. As Jeremy was walking home he was obviously angered and felt the pain of injustice; however, he could not help feeling like he was now part of something, he had joined a club. He was almost looking forward to next year when he would be able to say, "Yeah, that was me once, you'll live." ■

Sweet Revenge

by Cynthia Gerber

SOMETIMES THE BODIES FLOATING downriver looked like trees. The bodies were the trunk of the tree, with the heads being the branches that fly out in all different directions, clutching green healthy leaves—the hair—hoping they wouldn't fall when the wind began to pick up. You could barely see the bodies and their tree-like qualities, though: it was nearing midnight and pitch black, and the river was so quiet that it didn't appear to exist. It was a spooky scene, where I half-expected to see the ghost of my grandmother—a knitter who died just over three years ago—pop out and shriek, “Why haven't you called me, Lainey? What kind of granddaughter are you?”

The bodies looked so real, with blood gushing out of various body parts, polluting the clean river water. I could only imagine how they died: some maybe by murder, others by suicide. But, of course, those bodies weren't real. They were plastic, dressed in cheap, loose-fitting clothes like oversized plaid shirts and giant pairs of pants that no one could fit in. A face was painted on each body—the lips extra red, the eyes bloodshot—with random blood painted to look like it was dripping from noses, split lips or foreheads. Some had stitches, making them look like Frankenstein. They ranged in size, but it was obvious that all of the bodies were made by the same person. The plastic, floating dummies looked like a unified group of friends, lazily swimming down the river.

It was Halloween night, and my small town of Lilly Wood always made the town's park a haunted little village with the help of dedicated volunteers. It was the first time I had participated in something the town sponsored since moving away. Now that I was back, I had to be a proud citizen again, a model citizen, a suck-

up that always went to community events. Lilly Wood was too tight-knit of a community to not go to these events; rumors would go flying. Why wasn't the Black family here at the fall picnic? Oh, I heard they're having money troubles.

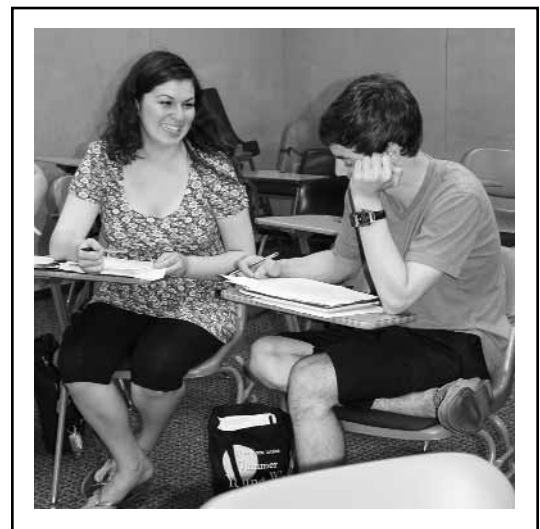
A loudspeaker suddenly cracked on and played the hoots of an owl and squawks of a crow, making me jump, trip and fall into Ben's chest. He caught me before I crashed into the river and made my own journey downstream, squeezing me close to him. I reached up to kiss his cheek, mumbling, “My hero.” I doubt that he caught that, and I sighed, intertwining my hand into his. I knew he wanted to be treated like a normal boyfriend, forced to go to my singing gigs with my backup band and dragged to events like this, but Ben couldn't honestly be enjoying this. He couldn't be feeling the same high I got after a concert or show. He just...he wasn't a normal boyfriend. Ben was something special, someone different.

Ben was deaf, his father was dead, and his childhood home was completely destroyed all due to a house explosion two years ago, right after I left for New York City. A pipeline had boiled over in his basement, and while the family heard some strange hissing noises, none expected the entire house to go up in flames. His mother wasn't home at the time, but his dad was in the heart of the home, the kitchen, when the house became engulfed in flames and shook as if an earthquake had hit. He was killed almost instantly; a refrigerator had toppled on him with such force that all of his ribs as well as major arm and leg

bones were broken into bits and pieces.

Ben had been lucky, hit only with the aftermath, the aftershocks. Playing basketball right outside in the backyard, the noise, flames and power of the explosion ruptured and burst his eardrums, causing his deafness. With deafness comes muteness; Ben hadn't said a word since learning he was deaf, too self-conscious about his voice now that he couldn't hear it. He had burns on a good part of his body, most on his chest, which was now mangled with scars and rough patches.

It almost seemed automatic for



me to pay Ben a visit once I got back to Lilly Wood, something I obviously had to do now that we were going to be shopping at the same mall and convenience store again. He was a friend of mine before the move to the city, but we lost touch quickly as he recovered from his accident. I knew I didn't have to befriend Ben again, especially since he went to a deaf high school instead of the town's public school, but I felt obligated to; it wasn't right to drop him

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as a friend simply because he was hard of hearing. He was still the same guy that loved soccer, hated the Speedo he had to wear for swimming and couldn't stand any type of math.

Of course, being Ben's friend wasn't the easiest thing. Just to communicate we had to come up with a silent language of gestures and motions until I became fluent enough in sign language. He carried a pad and pen everywhere he went, just in case I couldn't get what he was signing. Jotting things down became second nature in our new friendship. I had to learn to speak slower, to assist Ben in reading my lips, and his mom became our translator whenever necessary. It



took a lot of effort and dedication, but seeing Ben happy, seeing me happy with his arms wrapped tightly around my waist, made it worthwhile.

"Lainey, still babysitting the cripple?"

I turned around and saw the outline of a guy that appeared to be slightly shorter than Ben and about the same age as us. I couldn't make out his face, but I could smell alcohol, faint but prominent, probably the

scent of cheap beer that was sitting out for a while. The figure continued to walk toward me, revealing his hair, his face, his body, his posture: he was my ex-boyfriend, and he was most definitely wasted. "Troy, go away," I said and pulled on Ben's sweatshirt, itching to get away from smelly Troy. Only bad things happened when someone was that drunk.

Troy grabbed my wrist and dragged me closer to him, forcing me to hug his chest. His body odor was unbearable, and I tried to push myself out of his grip. Ben jumped in, unable to say much, and pushed me away from Troy. Little snippets of my memories with Troy flashed in my mind:

the way he drank too much, held me too tightly, gave up on Ben just because he was disabled; the way he pushed me down, down onto his bed that one night and tried to force me to. . . I stopped, feeling myself get nauseous.

The attempted rape. Oh, God, the attempted rape.

I breathed through my mouth, the salty, bitter taste of Troy's perspiration shocking my taste buds. "Go

away," I repeated, feeling slimy and dirty as I clung to Ben's red sweatshirt. We needed to get out of there fast. I began to pick up the pace with Ben following behind me, but Troy was faster, stumbling his way over to me, planting a wet kiss on my cheek. I felt vomit come up my throat.

"Come on baby," he slurred. "You know you want me more."

Something snapped. Ben punched Troy, causing his to fall and roll

around on the grass back toward the river. "I didn't know deaf people could fight," Troy mumbled and stood up, tottering a little, and threw his fist at Ben's face. He missed, his aim way off due to a powerful side effect of beer, and Ben punched him again. A fight was starting quickly enough, and I could feel the crowd form. There was no need to show the socialites of Lilly Wood a lowlife fight caused by jealousy and beer.

"Ben, Troy, stop it right now!" I shouted, tugging on Ben's jacket.

That didn't stop them, and off they went tumbling down toward the river, Ben winning the fight easily as Troy kept falling and falling and falling. It was hard for him to get up, probably hard for him to really see straight, and I could imagine Troy's head spinning with a huge ache in the back of his skull. "Guys, stop! Ben, let's go. Troy just leave," I begged, feeling more and more eyes on the scene, some cheering the fight on, and pulled on Ben's jacket hard. "Let's go," I demanded, forcing him back toward my car.

Ben held up a finger. One minute please.

He walked down the slight hill, eyes falling on a huffing and puffing Troy, trying to catch his breath while puking at the same time, and simply pushed him into the cold river water with the rest of the fake dead bodies, where he belonged. Troy easily fell down ass first in the water and continued vomiting, contaminating the water, the crystal clear water. "I'll fucking get you back for this," he promised in between coughs, and I heard Ben snicker, jogging back toward me, wrapping his arm around my shoulder. In his eyes was a flicker of something I never saw before, sparkling and dazzling in the low light.

Troy had got what he truly deserved, and Ben became the change he needed to be. ■

The Longest Elevator Ride

by Shivani Sanwal Gonzalez

GET ME OUT OF HERE. THIS WASN'T THE stereotypical teenage sarcastic line. I was stuck—in an elevator, with three other, not so charming people. One had a long mangy beard. The second one had a weird unknown band T-shirt and smelled as if he hadn't showered in a decade. The third was the worst of all. He was wearing tight pants and a tight T-shirt. On top of that he had an obvious spray tan. His hair stuck straight up and I could practically see the oil drip off as we stood there. His mouth was formed into a huge smile, showing off his bleached teeth. His music was blaring; even I could hear it. That's when I lost it.

"What the hell are you smiling about? We are stuck in an effing elevator!" I scream. Obviously fake tan guy didn't hear me over his loud music. Beard guy just stroked his beard while B.O. guy just hit the open door button repeatedly. What a genius. It had been a perfectly normal lazy summer Sunday. My mom had asked me to do returns for her at H&M and now I was stuck in this effing elevator with these idiots. God, I was so not in the mood for this.

"Um guys," I say, trying to act better. They all just glance around.

"Should we like, try calling someone or something?" I say, trying again. B.O. guy looked around.

"Yeah sure," he says, like he is high or something. He probably is. Fake tan guy takes out his headphones and says to no one in particular, "Damn, this is a long elevator ride."

I look at him. Beard guy and B.O. guy just glance around the elevator. I guess that I have to handle this.

"Um, the elevator's stuck, but yeah."

"What?" he says.

"The elevator's stuck" I say, trying not to lose my temper.

"Holy cow!" he yells. "We're stuck in this elevator, I'm going to die, I'm

going to die." He goes over to the elevator door and starts pounding on it. He is sobbing now. Beard guy just sits on the ground with his beard touching the floor. I see that fake tan guy is still pounding on the door, his fist leaving little dents in the metal. I suppress a giggle. This is not happening. B.O. guy lifts his arm and I wince from the smell.

"How about we call for help" I say, trying to get myself out of this situation. Fake tan guy starts screaming at the top of his lungs. I cover my ears.

"Shut up!" the bearded guy says.

It's the first time he's talked this whole time and his voice is higher

"I never expected to become so close, so quickly with the friends I made here. Between the time we spent giving each other feedback and the time we spent hanging out in the dorm, we got to know each other well. This added another layer to the already rich experience provided by our classes. It was the faculty and the other young writers that made the week special."

— MICHELLE WATERS

than any voice I have ever heard. I push B.O. guy out of the way and press the call phone button.

"Hello" a voice says.

"Hi, we are stuck in this elevator."

Fake tan guy starts screaming again.

"Shut up!" the bearded guy says again, his voice definitely higher than the first time. He could say that his mother died but I would still laugh because of his high voice. Fake tan guy is now sitting on the floor crying and apparently he's wearing mascara because black streaks his face, along with his tears. I realize that the guy on the other end of the call phone has hung up. Jerk. It wasn't my fault I had to babysit all of these guys who are

older than me. I pull out my iPhone so I can look up the number and call the mall. B.O. guy comes towards me.

"Is that an iPhone?" he asks.

"Um yeah," I say.

"Do you have the 'Rate My Kiss' app?" he asks, his eyes filled with wonder.

"No" I say sharply.

I sit down next to the fake tan guy. I dial the number of the mall.

"Hi. We are stuck in an elevator in the mall"

"I know doll face. We are getting there. It might be up to three hours" the lady says with an annoying drawl.

Three effing

hours. In this elevator. With fake tan, weirdo with a beardo and B.O. This was going to be a long three hours. I told them what the lady said. Of course, no one responded. All four of us sat on the floor. B.O. played chopsticks with himself, Beardo made clucking noises with his tongue, fake tan sat in a fetal position,

rocking himself and I just stared at these crazy people. I must have fallen asleep because I woke up and my head was on fake tan's shoulder. My phone was ringing.

"Is this the girl who is stuck in the elevator?" a voice asked.

"Yeah that's me," I responded, rising to my feet.

"We are getting ready to get you down"

"Thank god. Thank you," I said and then hung up. The elevator started moving. The other guys stood up. After a minute the elevator doors opened. I stepped out quickly and disappeared into the crowd. I didn't even look back. I kind of wish I had. ■

Breaking News

by Chloe Hamer

“SO, WHAT ARE YOU, A FUCKIN’ WEREWOLF or some shit?”

Chris flicked a clump of dirt on the rotting wooden porch rail toward the werewolf boy and the werewolf boy’s ugly girlfriend. The girl narrowed her eyes and tensed up like she had a real great comeback on the tip of her tongue, but Beast Boy, after wincing slightly, beat her to it.

“Guess you don’t get the news much around here,” he laughed, gesturing to the empty dirt road and the dull, sad houses that rotted among the weeds along the side of the road. But his voice came off sounding more nervous than he’d probably wanted it to.

Chris didn’t reply immediately. He watched the kid squirm in the silence and the girl scowl at him as he lit his cigarette, taking his time. He took a drag and blew a ring of smoke towards the girl’s face. She didn’t flinch or even wave her hand, just kept staring at him like she was trying to burn a hole through his head.

Finally, Chris got around to answering, in between puffs of smoke swirling lazily around the front porch.

“We get it,” he said, squinting up into the late morning sun. “Just don’t figure those crackpot journalists know what in hell they’re talkin’ about.” He looked down at the werewolf boy again, a hint of amusement playing on his face. “That’s why I’m asking you.”

The boy dug his hands into the pockets of his jeans, inspecting the floor of dirt and rocks beneath Chris’s porch like it was the most fascinating thing he’d ever laid eyes on.

“He’s not a werewolf, asshole,” said the girl, hissing the word werewolf like it was some piece of road kill she had to carry at arm’s length. “Do you really thi—”

“I was asking him,” said Chris, “not you.” He raised an eyebrow at the girl.

The boy laughed lowly. “No,” he muttered, “I’m not a werewolf.”

“Your mom screw an animal, then?”

At this, the boy’s ears perked up. His pupils got about three times bigger, and his chapped lips slid back to reveal a large, pointed set of canine teeth. The girl put a hand on his shoulder, as if it would actually calm him down.

“Look, if you’re not going to help us...” she sighed, giving Chris a weary look.

Chris laughed quickly and put a hand out like a peace offering. “Hold on. It was a joke, kid; I’m just playing with you. I’ve read all about this mess, like you said. Bet you wanna kill those dumbass scientists, huh?”

The kid looked at the ground again, his dark eyes back to normal.

“That’s the idea.”

Chris rested his elbows on the railing, leaning over the edge of the porch and fixing his gaze on the boy. He was maybe seventeen, with coarse black hair that fell dejectedly over his forehead and stuck out at random angles around his ears, which were covered in thin, short reddish fur, as was the rest of his body.

Chris remembered something he’d read that morning, scanning the front page of the newspaper as Frank or Steve—or whatever his mom’s boyfriend’s name was—read the Sports section or something, the open paper hiding his face.

“I heard your parents were pissed.” Chris chewed his lip and tilted his head to the side, softening his voice. “At you.” Suddenly, he laughed. “Ha, ha!—before the, uh, incident, I mean.”

The kid didn’t laugh. He looked at the girl, and the girl touched his arm and opened her mouth like she was going to say something, then closed it again. She shrugged apologetically, and the boy nodded slightly, then turned back to Chris. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse, like after you cry for a long time.

“If I was your kid, you’d be pissed at me, too.”

“Cause of the fur,” said Chris. It wasn’t a question. It was just to be sure they were on the same page.

The kid looked away from Chris, staring at the ground below the porch again with a sort of pleading look in his eyes. Human eyes.

Chris took another drag of his cigarette and nodded slowly, then exhaled and watched the smoke fade into the thick air.

“Fair enough.”

Somewhere, a dog was barking, mean and persistent. A police cruiser came lumbering down the road, a cloud of dust following it like an angry ghost. The car stopped in front of Chris’s porch, the engine still humming.

“Hey, kid.”

Chris looked up.

“Sir.”

“You seen a boy with fur wandering around? Orange fur, brown eyes? With a human girl?”

“What’s he wanted for?”

The cop rolled his eyes. “We have reason to believe he may be dangerous,” he drawled, and when Chris didn’t say anything, the cop’s eyes almost bulged out of his head and he added incredulously, “He attacked his parents, kid. Ain’t you heard?”

Chris dropped his cigarette stub onto the wooden boards of the porch floor and stamped on it with the toe of his sneaker. It made a quiet squeaking sound.

“If I see anything strange, officer, you’ll be the first to know.”

The policeman nodded curtly, and drove away. Chris watched the dust settle on the empty road, then turned and went inside, his lip curling up in a smirk to reveal a set of canine teeth that were still only a little bigger and a little sharper than they should have been. ■

Cheshire Cats

by Carson Jarrell-Rourke

I HAVE A SCAR SHAPED LIKE THE Cheshire cat's grin under my right eye. At least, I like to think so. Others just tend to call it "that" and then gesture to the bags under their own eyes. The question I normally get when people notice it is "What is that?" They know what it is. It's a scar. The question they're really asking is "How did you get that?"

When I was three and my family lived in a little white house in Camden, Maine, we owned an old white German shepherd, aptly named "White Dog." He had belonged to my great-grandfather. I don't remember how he became ours. White Dog had hip dysplasia, a canine ailment that fucks with a dog's hips once they reach a certain age; it's very prevalent in German shepherds. The incorrect construction of their hip joints is there genetically, but the pain it causes doesn't arrive until later life.

Now, at that time, I wanted to be just like my father. I still kind of do, except when he Tweets incessantly and laughs like a foghorn in public places. I would watch my father with White Dog, and when White Dog refused to sit, he would gently put a hand on White Dog's rear and coax him into a seated position. Once, when I was playing with White Dog, I didn't take such a delicate approach. Understandably, when I tottered over to White Dog, demanded he sit down, and then slammed my weight onto his hips, he was indignant as fuck. I remember him whipping around, a very lupine snarl carved into his otherwise sweet face. He bit me. My mom likes to exaggerate and say he "mauled" me, but that's not the case. It was more on par with a K-9 police dog taking down someone smuggling cocaine, only instead of going for their arm, White Dog got my face. I was pretty short, so I don't blame him.

I don't remember anything after

that, but I do know that I am not upset with White Dog for making me asymmetrical. Apparently, I was upset with my parents when they sold White Dog to an old woman who fed him hamburger meat until he became obese and died. But the thing is, I have no memory of the pain it caused, just like two boys I know who both have had heart surgery and are blessed with long, even scars down their chests; they don't remember their operations. Physical pain can be recalled, but not summoned up again like some pale specter that thirsts for your every happiness and longs to steal it from you. And that's where emotional scars come in.

In October I slid into a "depressive episode", which, along with ruining my GPA, exacerbated my social anxiety. I spent the school year in a numb, discouraged state. I had always had the capacity to be depressed, but the change in my hormones brought it on like The Great Flood. Information I received in class refused to click. Everyone around me was a fucking fucker and could go fuck themselves until they were fucking fuckless. Crying was also a frequent pastime of mine, and I began to entertain thoughts of suicide, but the kind of suicide that is often classified as a "cry for help." The details aren't important. What mattered was the ache in my gut that still likes to return often and with great ease.

Sometimes I wonder, in a fit of Angsty Teenager Syndrome, what depression would look like as a scar. Would it wrap around someone's entire body, encasing them in smooth pink skin, or would it look like brutal

slashes, as if they had been flogged? Furthermore, what would any kind of emotional turmoil look like physically? When one's skin has been fucked with, you can tell. But can you tell when their very being has been thrashed to the point of no return? No. If that were the case, babies would be shoved out of their mothers' wombs looking as smooth as fresh cream, and in their old age would die in a mass of unrecognizable scar tissue.

But even if emotional trauma could be seen, no one would know how it had gotten there. People would still ask, "What is that?" and inspect the scars with judgmental eyes,



searching for some explanation. That kind of grief would be more difficult to explain, and way more personal than telling the story of having a nail punched through your hand.

So I guess it's better that they do remain hidden. After all, no one wants to go around explaining something that they can't even explain to themselves to new acquaintances at dinner parties. It would put everyone off of their meals. ■

Passion

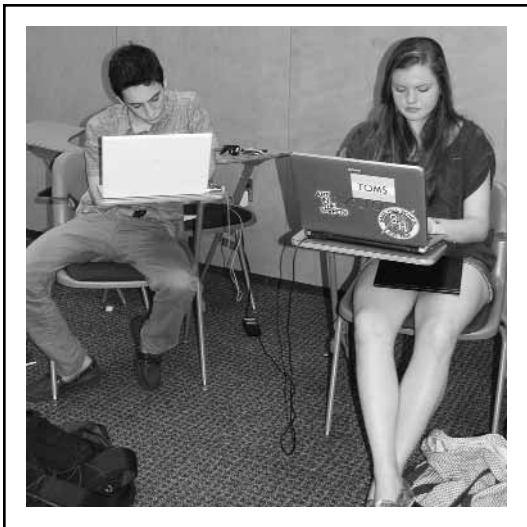
by Andrew Kim

Twelve years of beaming sunshine were followed
By a teenage life that seemed to be hollowed.
No matter how he tried to fill his heart with
Fire, true passion seemed a dead myth.

Hands unoccupied wander freely.

With all the focus teenage eyes could center
With all the force teenage legs could gather
With all the passion the teenage heart could muster
The boy ran, faster and faster
Adrenaline pumping mind blanking, heart racing
Clerk's gun behind, clicking and cocking and chasing.

Time rushes like rapids until finally
Still running he glances backwards to see
That deadly gunshot that pushed him to flee
Gave birth
To a passion – Gave birth
To a runner.



“The people at the Institute really made this experience one I will always remember. I felt comfortable reading in front of all the attendees and looked forward to hearing their insight. Without the welcoming atmosphere here at Skidmore, I would not have grown as a writer. All I can say is, thank you all!”

— KERRY MULLEN

Catholicism

by Madeline Klein

MY GRANDPARENTS ON MY MOTHER'S side lived in a house in Palos Heights, just outside Chicago, in a ranch my grandfather designed himself. It reminds me of one of the old Byzantine churches I studied in art history, because it was plain, even ugly on the outside, but inside, it was one of the most beautiful houses I've ever seen. It also had a crucifix in every room, or at least in all the bedrooms. They were always the Catholic or Eastern Orthodox style of cross, the kind that include a miniature Jesus hanging on them. This never bothered me as a small child; I think I assumed he was either sleeping or stretching, with his arms above his head. It helped that his eyes were closed.

My grandmother had several religious figurines, but my favorites were her Virgin Marys. She had three, all about the height of a Barbie doll, made of fine porcelain. They all showed Mary in the same robe-gown thing with a veil-cloak draped over her shoulders, long hair falling free down her back, eyes closed in an expression of serenity, palms pressed together in the prayer position. Two of the Marys, in my parents' room and in my grandparents' room, were white. The one that stood on our dresser had been painted—her robes were blue, her hair was blond, and her halo and hem were painted gold. Once I knocked her over accidentally, and she broke into three pieces; grandpa took her down to his workbench in the basement and glued her back together.

Every other Christmas, we stayed at their house, and this meant Mass. We never went on Christmas morning because my sister and I liked to open presents in our pajamas. We went on Christmas Eve, after dinner. I was forced into itchy tights, dress shoes with buckles, and the kind of

dress that has five miles of crinoline under the skirt to poof it out. The church was not gothic; alas, it was a one-story, octagonal building with a high, circular central room and a roof with a point in the center. Now, it reminds me of a Viking hall, with its bare walls and naked beams. It did have stained glass windows, which were my favorite kind of window and still are today.

The other thing Christmas meant was the Nativity Scene under the Christmas tree. My grandparents' living room was, to my young mind, the height of elegance at all times, with its white and gold wallpaper, upholstery, and curtains; its marble-topped cocktail table; its bouquets of fake flowers; and its gigantic table lamps with brocade shades, from which dangled crystal prisms. At Christmas, a statuesque artificial evergreen was added, and this was hung with glittery-white snowflakes and doves, bulbs, and ornaments that held photographs of our family. Under the tree was a sparkly, sequined and beaded tree skirt. On top of this cloth sat the nativity scene. It was mismatched, with two of the three wise men, Mary, baby Jesus, two shepherds, a person who might be Joseph (or another shepherd), two mismatched female angels, and a lot of animals, mostly sheep. Together, these were meant to be arranged to reenact the birth of Jesus; I played with them as if they were action figures, and when my sister got old enough, she demanded to play, too. We had a nativity scene at our home, but ours was newer, matching, and, with a clearly designated Joseph: much less fun.

When we stayed with my grandparents, or when they stayed with us (back when they could travel), my grandfather would do two things

every night before we went to bed. First, he would give us wet, spitty kisses on the forehead, and we did not enjoy this. Then, he would trace a cross on our foreheads with his finger, saying, "God bless this child." Some nights, grandma would put us to bed. She told us stories about her class back in Catholic grammar school, in particular stories about a boy named Tommy. In one story, Tommy dipped into his desk's inkwell the braid of the girl who sat in front of him. In another, Tommy pulled a loose thread on a boy's sweater until he had unraveled a giant hole in the back. Afterwards,

"Coming to the Writers Institute helped me learn how to spend time evaluating my work and how to enrich it myself and edit it over time and reflect about myself via my own work."

— MAGGIE DORAN

she would sing us two songs. The first was called "My Sweet Little Alice-Blue Gown," and the second was a church hymn about crowning Mary with blossoms. I forgot the words to the first song around the same time that she did, but I still remember the lyrics to the second, though I don't know its name. It stays with me, like the memory of her lying next to me in bed, her shaky voice straining to carry the high notes, the gentle smell of her old-woman perfume in the air, in the warm orange glow of the nightlight. ■

Life on a Scale

by Elizabeth Lee

The digital numbers blink 74.4
Mocking me
Tears swell, and I am red—
74.4
74.4
74.4
74.4
74.4
I will wait for 72.2,
But by that time I'll be orange
And then I will crave 68.8.
68.8 is a wash of green, satisfied
For only an instant
Until I cannot breathe without—
64.4
62.8
54.6
49.0
38.2
29.6
23.4
20.2
16.0
14.2
8.6
4.8
2.8
2.6
2.2
One. I am blue.

Zero.

I am weightless.
I am flying.

I am black.

The Art of Climbing the Social Ladder

by Lily Lopate

“HOW CAN I GET TO THE HAMPTONS?” I asked. As soon as the words came out I realized I sounded like one of those mythical characters on the desperate quest to get to their ultimate destination. I was talking to my young math tutor who lifted her head from her neat notebook and she looked at me with a perplexed face:

“Wait, I’m sorry, what’s your question again?”

“I must get to the Hamptons, how can I get there? Like as soon as possible.” Because yes, it was just that urgent. It had never crossed my mind to go until everyone I knew was suddenly talking about going to the Hamptons like they used to talk about going for an ice cream, as if it were that simple. The concept of envy and the desire for conformity consumed me when I was sure I was missing out on the party. My tutor responded, calmly closing our math books, “Well, I think it’s more simple than you’re making it. Getting to the Hamptons just sort of happens”

“How does it happen?”

“It’s very matter-of-fact, everyone knows someone in the Hamptons, and you just make the time and you go! It’s a wonderful place.” She seemed flighty all of a sudden, caught in a distant, post-college memory resembling a beach scene from *Gidget* or *Where The Boys Are*, a fantasy in which I was not in the mood to indulge her. In mere seconds, my once admiration for her sparkly earrings, perfectly curly hair and slender figure turned into scowling judgment, jealous of how her young twenty-something connections surpassed my own. I bit my lip and shook my head in disagreement: you didn’t get to the Hamptons knowing just anyone, and you certainly didn’t hitch a ride knowing no one. Getting to the Hamptons meant you had to know certain people, people who were “somebodies.”

After our lesson, I closed the front door in haste behind her. I rushed back to the kitchen. I pounced on my scraped-up frosted pink blackberry to scroll through my contacts, “Who did I know who could get me to the Hamptons?” “Which one of my ‘friends’ weren’t just anyone, they were exciting, well-connected and enviable?” I eliminated people as though they were fruit flies; I was ruthless. “Oh no, not her, God she’s such a tree hugger!” “No no, not her, she’s such a Marxist, she thinks social hierarchy is madness.” Or “No, no, they wouldn’t work either, they’re such oddballs!” It wasn’t the technicalities of the car, or the money that was stopping me from getting to the Hamptons, it was the vision I was so desperately eager to fulfill. I was stubborn and particular about the specific type I wanted to vacation with, which is why I wouldn’t settle for just a drive by look with my parents or my zany neighbor; I wanted the whole Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Abercrombie & Fitch Hamptons package.

Frustrated, I tallied up a short list, mostly people who were seniors in high school or freshmen in college. These were friends of mine who went to school in Manhattan but whom I only saw a few times a year. As much as I’d like to brag about how close we were, the reality was we rarely saw each other and it would be an extreme exaggeration to expect them to drag little miss me to elite or happening social engagements. And so began my tangled quest to get to the Hamptons, the place where fabulous people of purpose and money congregated in

the lap of luxury, and where exclusivity is the most prized VIP ticket: the place I was convinced would make my summer more complete.

Within the next few days in my errands around Brooklyn, I soon realized that everyone, even schlubs from the meat market, seemed to be making it to the Hamptons. I thought of migrations in history, like the Great Migration where mass numbers of black southern workers moved to the North for work opportunities and the hope of freedom. The concept of a migration felt so much more important than just an outing or a planned trip, just by the very fact that hundreds of others



were doing it, too.

While at my orthodontist’s office in Manhattan, I found myself uncontrollably glaring at people who chatted in the waiting room. A twitter of casual smooth phrases: “Oh yes, Ralph and I are going to the Hamptons, next week. Yes, well, we just cannot stand to stay in the city. We just have to get away.” Their hands would clasp the gold buckles

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on their Louis Vuitton purses as they said it with such a tone of relaxed social confidence. They had such a high-nosed demeanor, a heightened self-entitlement, for a moment I could see them back in time as those “popular” girls in high school who would declare with tremendous authority which harshly-lit lunch table was considered elite.

For the next week, the word “Hamptons” was highlighted in my brain, like a dog’s ears that would lift at the sound of a car. It seemed that

“The NYSSYWI is awesome! Everyone, the teachers and the students, are so supportive of each other and their feedback is invaluable. It’s an incredibly fun, productive week”

— CHLOE HAMER

just by walking around Smith Street in Brooklyn during particular times of the day you inevitably ran into nearly everyone you knew, whether you wanted to or not.

“Where are you all going for the summer?”

“Oh, well, we’re all dropping by the Hamptons actually, you know we own a house there. Yup, go there every year, fire up the grill. God those kids love the beach!”

“God, that sounds swell!” I say, my feet already walking in the opposite direction. Then there were the old time school buddies I met on the street:

“Yeah, well I’m going to the Hamptons, I mean cause everybody does.”

“Right, totally of course—everyone” I say defensively while simultaneously crushed.

“Well see you later! I’ll catch ya there.”

“Where?” I say—immediately remembering the tone of this conversation was so not the kind where you ask follow up questions in search of deeper clarity.

“Huh? The Hamptons. I’ll see you there.”

“Sure will,” I say, slapping some genuine onto my face, but thinking “fat chance.”

On one of the hottest days in mid-June my mother had sent me out on a grocery run to various stores around the neighborhood. I was waiting in line to pay for my mother’s Bok Choy at a Korean market when I heard two tan, fit thirty-something’s talking:

“I finally did it Meg!”

Oh no, I thought, another inspirational but slightly sleeper story about how they finally got married and the missing threads of their lives came together!

“I was sure I would never appear select enough to go, but I guess I was. Marjorie knows Liz who knows Claire who knows Annabelle who knows me, and apparently, remember those bratty blonde kids that I *au paired* for like three years ago?” Her friend nodded calmly while checking out some of the peachy summer colors on the Burt’s Bees lip smackers line by the checkout.

“Well...” she grinned in suspense like a little kid about to burp, “Annabelle knows the mother I worked for, Elizabeth, who called me the other day and asked me to work again this summer!” By this point the woman was looking like a blithering idiot grinning so hard it looked like she was auditioning for some Jim Carrey routine, and both her bland friend and I were failing to connect the dots.

“And...” she paused waiting for the big crescendo, “they’re summering in the Hamptons and they need

me to *au pair* all month!” Without another cue, her Burt’s Bees-inclined friend squealed:

“Oh my god! Get outta here?! Meg this is amazing!”

“I know. This’ll be it, Kat, I’ll finally get the summer I’ve always dreamed of. I’m going to the Hamptons!!! I can’t believe it!”

I wanted to butt in and say congratulations or something, as her over eager enthusiasm clearly matched my own but I figured the interaction wouldn’t go as planned. As envious as I was that she had attained what I had begun to think was the unattainable and had discovered the loophole for getting to the Hamptons, I felt genuinely happy for her. I grinned to myself with amusement as we shuffled closer to the checkout line.

“Oh, I have to find something sophisticated to wear, something expensive. I have to try to fit in okay?” Her eyes pleading as she threw her change into the “TIP” jar. The scraggly blonde guy at the checkout counter eyed her, but she missed it.

“Promise me Kat? I want to splurge and buy that dress I told you about.”

“But Meg—” the Burt’s Bees friend interjected, her strawberry chamomile lips now frowning. “That’s more than half your salary. You’ll never make it through the month with rent and all.”

“I’ll manage. I may be a working girl, but sometimes a girl’s got to spring for the glam when she’s headed for the Hamptons!”

As the women exited the store, they both were glowing, the 5:30 P.M. sun hitting their necks and forearms at the right angle, and as I exited the store, I thought: well it may take me ’till I’m thirty but at least I’m not the only one out there pining for a keyhole glimpse into a world just a few rungs above me on the social ladder. ■

Graham Who Loves His Jeanie

by Erika Lynn-Green

WHEN GRAHAM AND I ORIGINALLY thought of coming to Malibu, I pushed for ritzy glam-glam, the kind of place where we could have a star sighting. Graham played the money card, the “I’m only a poor dentist with one vacation which I want to enjoy” card. My friend recommended The Cabanas and so here we are, with the beach coming right up under the little thatched huts, blowing up through the sanded floors. Actually I do see Matt Damon as we’re checking in, but I don’t tell Graham because he doesn’t know who the hell Matt Damon is. I study Matt as he walks outside. He’s shorter in real life.

Graham slides around my shoulders and I slide away.

“I’m good, thanks,” but I smile at him blandly because Graham’s paid vacation is providing for my Matt Damon sighting.

In our cabana that night, Graham discovers the pocket-sized bottles of rum and downs three of them. “Only had three,” he tells me, irritated, after I remind him that not only is he in remission and should not have alcohol, but that I will not be sharing any kind of bed with his vomit. I step outside, my back to the door, as he lurches for the toilet.

The sun has decided that I, Emma Jean Porter—aka “Jeanie”, trophy wife, never-mother, that-girl seeing California with a baby’s eyes—should come outside and play. The sun falls in spectacular fashion, an Olympic diver. He is on the runway, dressed in his best.

I lie out on the beach, not yet wearing my new sarong because Graham got drunk too quickly to unpack. The beautiful people are inside; no doubt at parties like those ones in the *Vanity Fair* Graham has in his waiting room, where actors laugh on art nouveau couches with actresses leaning over them. Flipping onto my stomach and stretching, I yawn and lean my cheek against the shifting beach. It is less of a beach to me now,

more individual, tiny grains of sand, of every color, most of them dark, in fact. They stick to my hair and the oils in my skin soak them up.

Graham is asleep when I get back, travel-dirtied and old in the armchair. Hands on my hips, I wonder what my mother would have done. No doubt she would have tidied up. I throw off my shorts and climb in the sheets’ maw.

My husband and I look the picture of domestic tranquility at breakfast: combed hair, zipped pants, bright colors. He laughs at me laughing at

“I’ve met the coolest people who all get my references and who have such skill in writing. It’s been a great time staying up all night comparing words with them.”

— LEILA SELCHAIF

him—really it looks like good times. Our waiter, Ronnie, is a twenty-something who wears a little medal around his neck, which he explains is Saint Christopher, patron saint of surfers.

“No wonder you’re so fit!”

Graham exclaims, laughing to me as Ronnie and I smile at each other.

I wheedle Graham into coming to the beach after breakfast, so he sits and reads while I am forced to make acquaintances. The children are in the water while their parents and their parents’ circles are on the sand, barking. The people who are interesting are impossible, and the people who are accessible are boring. As I approach my husband in defeat, he reaches up for me, to kiss me. Sidling around, I reach for his book, of which the titles change but the contents stay largely the same: Republican superiority. As I release it Ronnie comes charg-

ing down the beach, no shirt, muscles tight, flying into the ocean. The water seems to part for him and then take him, one of its own. Graham is watching me watch him and I grab up my sunglasses to keep my feasting baby’s eyes private. We stay there, the three of us in a triangle, Graham back to reading, Ronnie doing whatever hot, surfy things, until a breeze comes down the beach, breaking Graham’s concentration, and a buzzer rings the time, breaking Ronnie’s, breaking mine.

Graham pulls me inside our cabana—he is laughing and dancing me around, happy, and I grin at him and exclaim, like it has just occurred to me: “We should go to dinner in the restaurant; it would be so much fun!” His face is indulgent, like my grandfather’s, and I press down my shudder, pushing it into the pit of my stomach.

The restaurant’s atmosphere has changed to spicy, sexy candlelit and I feel it cling to my skin as I come off the cool beach, a tingling layer of spark. I lead Graham to the same table, in Ronnie’s section, and I watch Graham order his shots. Ronnie glances at me—he is in formal wear now, a white tux that is delicious in the way Stacy London would use the word delicious—and when I smile at him in my sparkling new skin with my ingénue’s eyes he sets me a napkin, beautifully folded to hold a paper, subtly, while Graham is behind his menu.

Graham gets toasted pretty quickly and so I can read Ronnie’s note without suspicion.

“Darling,” I say, feeling my pretty skin flush. “Darling, I’m going to get some air.”

I don’t wait for Graham’s reply, to hear him order more shots or see him gaze after me hurrying away, the most soporific smile on his face. I don’t think anything of a drunk, stingy old dentist, Graham Porter who loves his Jeanie. ■

Untitled

by Sean Maloney

THEY LOOKED HAPPY. AS THEY TRUDGED by me in my rickety beach chair and thick paperback, I quietly observed how they glanced over at each other, smiling as they did it. The taller of the two, very pale with short silvery hair, obviously had not been to the beach in years. She walked with an uneasy, self-conscious waddle, knees together, trying the best she could to conceal her veiny chicken legs. It was no fault of hers: I put her in the ballpark of about sixty years old and most women of that age hardly have the self-image to show their faces on coastal vacation spots at all.

Her partner, who looked about ten years younger, smiled warmly and laid her slightly baggy arm across her shoulder, assuring her that she looked beautiful as always. I wasn't alarmed to see this type of relationship at the beach, although these ladies were a hair older than the average beach bums. I did, however, notice as they began to settle down in front of me, that this was an excellent opportunity for some "people watching." Keeping half an eye on my paperback, I began to discreetly eavesdrop. (An embarrassing side note for me is that I have become quite good at this sort of thing; I don't think of it as "creepy" so much as it is me exploring my interest in my fellow humans.)

Anyway, as they were settling in I noticed that the older of the women spread out a large blue towel which in bold white letters read: Darla's Dentistry D.D.S. Under this was a jolly cartoon tooth whose wide grin revealed another set of teeth: tooth teeth, if you will. At the appearance of this towel, her partner rolled her eyes.

"You brought that thing!?"

"Indeed I did."

"I have never heard of any other dentist's office which gets personalized towels made."

"Well in that case I run a unique office."

Interesting. Darla, perhaps growing tired of the monotony of prying open the mouths of shrieking grade schoolers, decided to pack up her girlfriend and her personalized dentistry towel and enjoy a long overdue weekend of fun in the sun. I put on my sunglasses so that no one would notice me staring a bit more obviously.

The sun moved further and further across the sky as the two ladies both spent time sizing up the other beachgoers and reading their respec-



tive paperbacks. Darla, fancying herself not only a unique dentist but also a literary critic scolded, "Harriet! You're reading that trashy romance again!?" Harriet simply shrugged her shoulders and smiled cheekily, "I have to find romance somewhere, don't I?" They both shared a hearty laugh.

After some time, Darla put her book down, sat up, and relaxed while looking out toward the blue horizon and other families enjoying themselves. Harriet now lay on her stomach with her eyes closed. Each time a young child happened across their path, Darla would smile and wave at her or him, shaking Harriet awake to

marvel at the youngsters with her.

At first, with each awakening Harriet simply smiled and rolled back over. But with each successive shake, she became increasingly unpleasant, rolling her eyes and grumbling so that her steadily increasing blood pressure was very apparent. Eventually, stern and unblinking, she said, "Okay Darla. I get it with the whole 'kids' thing, but I think I've made it quite clear where I stand on that and I am sick and tired of having this conversation."

"But we could do a better job with them than half of these parents!"

"Okay, you've officially lost it. We are as suited to be mothers as we are suited to carry a child." With this she gestured with an outstretched hand to Darla's presumably baron pelvic region.

"Oh bull! Look at him," she gestured to a little boy of about three. He wore a red bathing suit and smiled contently as he mounded the sand in his surrounding area into a little pile. "Look at his teeth," she exclaimed, "They're mossy! His parents obviously don't care about hygiene. If he had a dentist for a mother

those abominations would be pearly white."

I looked back at the boy and was shocked to find she was right. I guess a dentist develops an eye for this sort of thing. This child's toothy grin revealed a revolting, almost moldy set of chompers. They could have been oozing pus. Honestly, it was revolting. The absent-minded parents snoozed in the sun while their gremlin-toothed toddler played in the sand.

"Oh sure," said Harriet, "That's the dentist talking. You'd get bored in a week, I promise."

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The argument escalated and other people on the beach started to stare and whisper behind cupped hands. I felt for them. Having this type of argument is never easy, especially under the scrutiny of strangers who are quick to judge. Finally, Harriet, with a teary yet bitter expression, got up and left Darla alone in the sand. They wouldn't be speaking any time soon.

Abandoned, Darla curled up into a ball, placing her forehead on her arthritic knees which made an unpleasant popping sound as she did so. She sat there for a long time, still and quiet. I had begun to think that that was the end of it, and was just turning my attention back to my book, when Darla's head reared upwards and into the sunshine, eyeing the kid in the red bathing suit.

Discreetly, Darla packed up her things. Leaving them in the sand she walked over to the kid and crouched

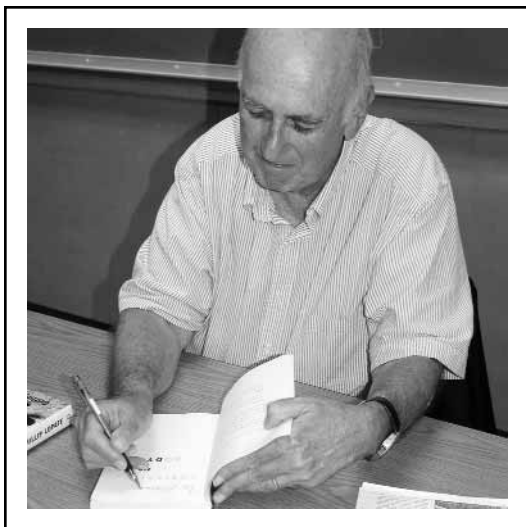
down next to him. She smiled at him, tussled his hair, even helped him in making his little pile of sand. I couldn't hear what they were saying but she was being very friendly, always looking him in the eyes when she said things. Mostly the kid just laughed and nodded.

Looking over the kid's shoulder at the still sleeping parents, Darla quickly directed her attention back to the kid. She got all serious and pointed with her thumb over her shoulder at her packed up things. The kid's face seemed to light up and he quickly stood up in his lopsided three year-old way, brushed the sand from his red trunks, and trailed behind Darla back to her spot, grasping with all his might to two of her fingers.

I stiffened, not quite sure if I should believe what I was seeing. The parents, still snoozing away, had no concern as to where their child went, or with whom. I scanned the beach to

see if anyone else had their attention on Darla and her little friend, but everyone's attention had been diverted from the scene she had made as easily as it had caught their attention.

As Darla and the boy collected her things and headed off the beach together, Darla now walked with a confident stride that told the world that she didn't care what you thought of her veiny chicken legs. I started to leap out of my chair to perform some vigilante justice, but just as I was doing so I caught another glimpse of the kid's grimy, putrid, wouldn't-wish-it-on-your-worst-enemies teeth. Simultaneously I took a gander at the towel rolled up under Darla's arm, the partially obscured smiling tooth staring out at me, and decided that the boy in the red trucks might be better off after all. ■



"This was the first time away from my parents, so I was kind of nervous, and I wasn't sure I was going to make friends, but I did, despite being somewhat socially awkward. From all different parts of the country, everyone was friendly, talented and unique."

— CYNTHIA GERBER

What You Deserve

by Olivia McElwain

How dare you treat people like scum
When you can barely hold your own.
You ask for approval
From the people you hate,
And people did like you.
They weren't ready to say good-bye,
But you lied.
You changed.
You will never be the same.
You're cold.
You're alone.
No feeling, just flesh
And bone.
I'm tired of thinking about you
Since you said good-bye a long time ago.
I'm holding on.
I'm filled with hate,
But I love
You,
But you don't deserve my love or anything more.
You don't deserve these words.
You deserve nothing.
Not a thought or
A second glance.
Not even this poem.



Green Eyes, Blue Lips

by Matteo Mobilio

"IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL OUT HERE," ERIC said to her on a cool spring night. The small fire they'd made on the beach crackled loudly. The embers whizzed up into the dark sky, making a break for freedom. It was mid-April and the tourists hadn't started to arrive yet. This night, they were alone on the beach. For a moment, Sophia slipped out of Eric's consciousness, replaced by the sound of the waves breaking on their cushion of sand. "It's so much more of a distinctive sound when you hear it at night," he thought, "During the daytime, the people and seagulls and boats and



planes all detract from a solo piece." He listened to the rhythm for a while and, for a minute, neither said anything. They waited. For a moment, even the air lingered, as if it was waiting to see what would be said next. The crackling of the fire came to a halt but the waves continued, their pattern remaining unchanged.

Sophia fingered the small, golden cross at her neck, twirling it in her fingers. Her hair was a faint brown; thin, but vibrant and full. Freckles covered her pink cheeks. She stared into the fire forlornly, her green eyes, small and bright, flickering.

"We need to consider our options," Eric had said. "There's school in the fall."

"We don't have any options, Eric," she told him defiantly.

"Sophia..." He slid his hand across the sand towards hers.

"I need to tell my parents," she said, unwilling to make eye contact with him.

"Before we make a decision?" he asked her.

"I've already made mine."

The words sent a shiver down Eric's legs.

He forced a smile. He thought

back to the letter he received just a week ago, informing him of his acceptance to the University of Pennsylvania; about how hard he worked to get into his first choice; and about how upset his parents would be to learn he wouldn't be attending in the fall. He thought of their disbelief that their son could be so stupid. Another case of a bright, young teen wasting away his youth, he reflected.

"Let's go for a swim," he suggested, swallowing his panic. Reluctantly, she agreed. They stripped down to their underwear and dove into the ocean. The water was cold, but it soothed Eric's tense muscles.

"You've really made your mind up?" he whispered to her as the waves bobbed them up and down.

"This is part of me now. There's no turning back."

Again, he tried to force a smile but this time his lips refused to curve properly. Instead, they twitched rapidly and he had to bite them to subdue their trembling.

They swam back towards the beach, the water weighing down Eric's briefs as he rose from the waves. He looked back, expecting to see her beside him, but she wasn't. He examined the shore, searching for her. Finally, she surfaced in the waves, a little ways off in the water.

"Eric!" she shouted shrilly, her voice full of dread, "My leg! It's cramping. I can't...I can't..." but she disappeared under the waves before she could finish her sentence.

"You're going to fucking joke at a time like this?" he yelled back. Her hand resurfaced a moment later, pawing the water. Then, it slipped under again. A breeze blew by and suddenly the wind got colder, prompting him to shudder. She came up again, repeating his name, crying out as she said it. Then, something clicked inside him and he felt his whole body stiffen. He walked to the edge of the water and stood there, looking out at her attempt to swim to shore. She was still moving towards the beach but she wasn't going to make it by herself. She's drowning, he realized. He ran a few steps into the waves and then stopped. She's drowning, he thought again. A thought popped into his head, a police report scrolled across his brain. He took a step back, the water receding, sucking his feet down into the wet sand; the beach held him in place.

For a moment longer he stared out, watching her flail. Another click and his mind jumped back to reality. He plunged into the water and started swimming furiously towards her. When he reached her, she was lying stomach down in the water, her hair spread out in the water in clumps like the pedals of a flower. He turned her over and wrapped his right arm around her torso, pulling her towards the beach. He dragged her onto the

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sand and knelt beside her. Her lips were tinted a faint blue. He pressed hard on her chest with both hands and she began to cough up water. She inhaled and her eyes jerked open with a renewed vitality. Falling onto his back, fatigued, Eric put his hands on his head, running his fingers through his wet hair, taking in what had just occurred.

When he glanced over in her direction, she was sitting up, glaring at him. His chest contracted sharply and his heart seemed to knot up. He heard the cogs turning inside her head, processing. Her mouth barely hung open, salt water still drooling out as she examined him. He had looked away, trying to regain his breath. Eric felt the chill of her stare on the back his neck.

“Close call,” he said, panting. His assertion received no response. Eric got up, gathered his clothes, and started towards the car.

The drive home was a quiet one. When he had dropped her off, she gazed at him one last time, quizzically, her impeccable green eyes glossed

over. He hadn’t noticed it before, but she’d been crying, a soft, silent cry. She closed the car door behind her with a distinct frailty. For a moment, he watched her walk slowly across her lawn and then he sped off, eager to get away from her. He considered heading home, but the thought of seeing his parents stopped him. He headed back to the beach, this time to the pier, where his grandfather’s fishing boat was docked.

The engine came to life slowly, the rumbling starting as a vibration under his feet. It built up, the boat shaking as it idled. No one else had been out in the harbor that night. The waters were calm, the waves barely lapped against the hull.

When he decided he was far out enough, when the buoys were way off in the distance behind him, he stopped the boat. He made his way to an old fishing chair in the stern and scanned the sea. The seat was old and the bolts that kept it attached to the boat were rusted through so that the

chair faltered to one side. He sat there, letting nothingness surround him. “It’s nice out here,” he had said to himself, unperturbed, “away from everybody.”

He peered over the edge; the water was dark and murky. The wind picked up and caused the boat to rock ever so slightly. He felt the panic returning to his fingertips; images of her face frozen in terror projected themselves onto the calm waters in front of him. He closed his eyes and sucked in the muted atmosphere, holding it in his lungs. He let his mind relax and his body unclench. The wind had died down and the boat sat still. He opened his eyes to the boat’s dirty stern. Spots of rust dotted it like the freckles on Sophia’s face, but when he thought of her, all he could remember were her blue lips and radiant green eyes. He got up slowly, the cheap padding on the chair’s armrests breaking away under him. He returned to the helm, surveying the nautical equipment. Eric looked out onto the expanse of water and gunned the engine. ■



The NYSSYWI provides the groundwork to aid the transition for writing students becoming writers. The instructors here, instead of pushing a set curriculum, help to build upon the students’ creations, turning ideas into works of art.”

— MATTEO MOBILIO

Checkmate

by Kerry Mullen

SUNSCREEN BURNED INTO MY EYES, A riptide warning forbade any refuge in the foamy sea, and the neighbor's screechy one-year-old teethed on the edge of my blue striped towel. This beach day, spewed from Hades itself, mocked my inadequate professor's paycheck and anger stewed deep within at the injustice of it all. I came here to swim and deserved the sanctuary of the tumultuous waves if only to replace the torturous memories of blank stares as I poured the knowledge of a learned man, an educated man—Columbia Masters, Harvard Ph.D.—into empty heads. The tedium of the swirling waves and the excruciating sun was not the rejuvenating escape from indolent students I sought. On an overcrowded, family-infested shoreline, only one other beachgoer seemed alone, and she headed straight towards me, a chessboard balanced in her juvenile hands. The rumpled chess tournament champion shirt I'd donned this morning must have attracted her narrowed gaze and impelled this girl to open her small mouth.

"Chess?" a single word blurted from her freckled lips. Her question would have taken me off guard if not for the stupor of boredom that encased my old soul. Why not? I decided, thankful for this chance to unglue my eyes from the seagulls circling the clouds.

"Delighted."

"Winner takes thirty," a command escaped the silence and I complied with only minor reservations, not wanting to rob this adolescent of her monthly allowance. The opportunity to break the monotony of all this sitting and staring was irresistible. I edged the black rook into the chess arena to begin the game.

The chess match was a blur. This girl moved the pieces intimately, targeting holes in my strategy that I had believed flawless after fifty-eight

years of meticulous sculpting. Three moves and this mysterious, nameless girl broke through my extensive barrier of knights and bishops with one measly pawn. My king—history's shortest reigning royalty—submitted to the underdog.

"Inconceivable." The word seeped through my pursed lips and I was all too aware that I was quoting that red-faced pompous bastard who dies laughing.

"Pay up, mister," I heard her utter through the heavy, dark mass of her tangled curls.

Hustled by an eleven-year-old. What karmic mistake led me to this moment: discarding money into foreign hands on a distant Long Island shore?

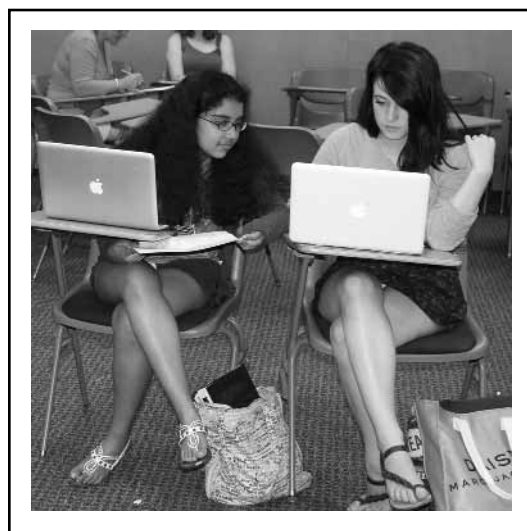
Her nails were bitten beyond recognition, gnawed until they resembled the discarded core of corn on the cob. I met her cold, calculating eyes that had dominated the chess board moments before. They flicked between the outstretched cash and her worn chessboard. Disconnected from the black and white squares and lost without the need to outsmart her latest victim, the simple exchange of bills seemed a task far too complex for her to comprehend. She had wandered out of her element— or so I gathered from the mismatched mumbles that barely escaped her chapped lips, nearly engulfed by the ravenous ocean roar.

"Keep it," her barely audible voice somehow found its way to my aging ears.

And then she was gone, grabbing only her chessboard and scooping the pieces into a cloth drawstring

pouch before tearing down the sandy obstacle course. Tufts of sand flew as her bare feet slapped against the ancient beach and she tore towards that sea.

A tourist, jogging to lose a few extra pounds that padded his waist like an inflatable tube that keeps swimmers afloat, collided with this girl, my opponent. She crumbled into an inhospitable mixture of rock-sand-salt water while the tourist stood apologizing before he fled the



scene. The girl's chessboard, knights, rooks, bishops, queen, king, and the favored pawns were lodged in the sand, forlorn by her motionless feet. Shock. It had to be shock that kept this poor girl rooted in the rock-sand-salt water. It had to be shock that forced her to stand and pound her own footprints into the sand. She never glanced back at the chessboard and the game that no longer belonged to her, covered in soggy sand and salt water. Only then did I look at my own hands, still with money outstretched, and with nails bitten beyond recognition just like hers. ■

Portrait of the Grandfather Who Never Was

by Connor Murphy

IF I TRY AND REMEMBER THE TWO MOST distinct words I had ever heard my grandfather speak, it would have to be feck (fuck) and arse (ass). Since his passing ten years ago, the closest I can get to that bittersweet memory is either my father's impression of him or mine, the latter not being pleasing to the ear on account that it is only my voice. I also recall to this day various adults saying with their smartass humor, "Ah the poor little bollocks looks like Old Tom Murphy!" I may have some resemblance to the old Paddy, but nothing will ever come close to the original, my Grandpa and true Irishman, Thomas Joseph Murphy.

Mr. Murphy was a short and stocky man, with the ugly Irish guy's face, and the ten red hairs that lay on his head in what he called a "comb over." He wore wool sweaters and dress pants nearly every day, with a pair of cheap tan loafers, as if he were still a kid in County Mayo. The one article of clothing that he would never skimp on though was that wool hat imported straight from Dublin. I knew he didn't go cheap on the hat, because of the Irish festivals I would go to in hopes of buying a pure replica of it. I found at these festivals it cost some low amount in Euros that translated into forty dollars American. As for me buying one...I mean, I like the hats, but forty dollars? I'm kind of a cheapskate just so you know, so that doesn't work out.

He walked to his bars down the street with his polished, wooden cane, which was most likely just a symbol of him being as aged as he was. And if I had to make an educated guess, it would be that he had the Irish curse, as all his kin most likely do. If you're not aware of this curse, just imagine Grandpa Tom saying something in that broken accent of his a little like, "T'ain't t'size tat matters boy-o. It's

how ya use it!" At this point, I'd like to mention that I'm not trying to be crude and obnoxious, or even walk over a dead man's grave with any disrespect. I am simply trying to put this completely how we Irish like to converse. But as my people have said in an expression you might get by inferring from the context, I'll try not to keep this one on the long finger.

So I'd known the rowdy old man for seven years, minus about two or three when I was a baby who knew jack shit, as we Irish say everyone does in that early stage of life. You'd proba-

"The Young Writers Institute has been such a great experience for me. The program really pushes you to explore other genres and the faculty is awesome. You meet really cool people here, all passionate about the same thing you are."

— LYDIA YOUNGMAN

bly think that ranging from years zero to seven, I didn't take in much from this grandfather of mine, but you'd be wrong. When I became conscious of myself around a toddler's age, I was genuinely scared of the crazy old Mick. He used to growl at me for God only knows what reason. It was classic teasing of course, but still scared me as a little kid, who didn't know a lot at the time. This I know is something that our family's old men enjoy doing to children, as I have seen my old man do it every once in a while to get a mean-hearted, but meaningless laugh out of life. It sounds kind of fucked up, but then again we Irish tend to be kind of fucked up.

I was roughly around four or five when all the bullshit entertainment my Grandpa and I got out of each other was over, and we truly connected with one another for the first time.

Now let me note that if he was in front of me at this moment, he would likely beat my ass for describing one of our descendants as having a heart that is filled with some emotion: that generally isn't allowed in our culture. (The reasoning for this remains unknown to me, but it's possible that because of our ancestor's drinking and fighting habits, our emotional side of the brain has been left underdeveloped). So he would overpower me easily, for although he was on the small side, he was built with what I liked to call "farm strength." After giving me a fine ass whopping, he would laugh a hearty laugh and ask me, "Do I have emotions now, boy-o?"

How he and I connected (considering the small brain levels we both had at the time, his pickling back and mine still growing) was under the simplest of circumstances. One day I was standing in front of him lying cozily on a bed, watching a game show of some sort. He had his pillow up against the wall, and he didn't look at me for one second. I held his cane and hat—he had called me for them a few moments ago—as the cars buzzed by in front of his and my Grandmother's house. I can recall hearing the host of this TV show have some corny and pretending-to-be-excited voice at giving away a bunch of worthless shit. It was something my Grandpa liked to watch, for what reason I don't have a clue. Realizing that I was in front of him finally, he turned to me and asked for his property in that voice that could be made fun of with that damn annoying phrase "top o' the morning t'ya!" I handed them over, eyeing that oddly-patterned wool hat with some attraction. It took him a few tries to get up, being the old man he was, but

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he eventually landed on his feet with the support of that oak cane. Towering over me, he looked at my face with that joking smile of his for some time. At this point, I thought he'd say something witty as I always expected. Instead I saw this joking face change into a genuine smile, where his eyes narrowed, the kind of smile that you would use to look at your grandchildren with love. He slowly took off his hat and studied the texture, as if something were wrong with it, all the while with that same grin upon his face. After a few seconds of this, he dropped the hat on my head, completely covering the childish mushroom cut I had. A huge (and similar to his smile) smile appeared on my face, with no words having to be said. He began to walk away, and although it may sound terribly dramatic, he also began to walk away and out of my life.

Yes, this is where the sad part of the story begins. You see at this time, my Grandpa had been in his fifties, yet you would guess from his appearance that he was at least seventy. He looked older and more wrinkled than men of his age. Why you ask? Well, it's complicated in some ways for someone who doesn't have experience with this kind of stuff. But for others who do, it's not. I told you my Grandpa was an Irishman, a true Irishman. This duty doesn't just come with the brute-like looks or the wisecracking humor, but it also unfortunately comes with some pretty terrible habits. When the Irish culture comes into discussion, the topic of alcohol usually follows merrily along. I'm not trying to be cliché or stereotypical about my heritage, because it isn't too far off-base from my past experiences. So what I'm really trying to spit out is that my Grandfather had a little drinking problem. Well actually, 'little' might be a little understatement, as he was a raging alcoholic, known to go on binges for days at a time. Being only a wee little

lad while he was still alive, I was quarantined from that kind of behavior. Yet I had somehow known in the back of my mind that there was something wrong with this man who tended to act like an ape sometimes, while holding a bottle of beer in his shaky hand. Now I'm assuming that you know that drinking can seem like it's the fun thing to do at first, but the backlash of being an alcoholic is devastating not only to the alcoholic, but to his or her family. And there was no exception with my Grandpa. To be brutally honest, I'm not sure why my Grandma stuck around with him, but she did and here I am now because of it.

But it wasn't just the drinking that he was prone to. These bad habits usually tend to come in pairs and in the case of Tom Murphy, it was smoking. Not pipes, not pot, not cigars, but plain old cigarettes. He would lie on his bed for hours at times, doing nothing but taking the smoke into every inch of his body, for the hell of it. It made as much sense back then as it does now to me; why would anyone continue with this as a hobby? Being the big hypocrite he was, he would say to me from time to time, as my dad also has said to me, "Don'tcha ever smoke, okay? Ya Promise?" I hadn't comprehended why he said it like this, but I came to learn in time. And I don't mean to sound like some anti-drug freak, but my Grandpa's choices came to shape me in a colossal way. I know also by this point, I have become less jokey and more somber-toned. But knowing my grandfather, he would've found the whole thing hilarious in some zany old bastard sort of way.

I distinctly remember when he faced the consequences for his habits, in the form of a cancerous growth in the lungs. He lay on his bed with something similar to that old grin, yet not quite there because of the illness. My Grandpa looked shittier than usual, as well as deathly tired. He snuck a drag inconspicuously every

once in a while, sometimes even in front of me. I was an ignorant child and he a reckless old man in so many ways. I wonder if he knew what he had done to me the day he died. He stripped me of a grandfather and all the lessons never taught in the sarcastic tone he would've delivered them in. I loved him with every goddamn inch of my heart and soul and he passed on me. Yes, I know I'm a selfish fuck, so no need to remind me as he would've undoubtedly.

That Irish bastard, I sometimes think nowadays. He's probably off in Hell, laughing his ass off and waiting for me to get there. I bet the devil and he would be buddies by the time I arrive. And perhaps if I was lucky enough, he'd introduce me. Oh wait, you didn't get the memo? Yes, I'm most likely going to Hell for undisclosed reasons, but who gives a damn? Half of my family and half of the important people from the history of the world are down there, so how bad can it really be?

For now, I live my life sometimes quietly thinking of him. The wool hat sits in my closet, slowly aging from the time and the dust it's lived through. I have refused to wear it at all. But as Oscar Wilde once said, "I can resist anything but temptation." Perhaps he would've wanted me to wear it, but who knows? Once in a while I swing by where he resides presently, St. Patrick's Cemetery in Catskill, New York, to be exact. It's as nice as a cemetery can get I guess, patches of grass some places and dirt in others, indicating the newest members of the club. I think his pitch black gravestone with the overgrown bushes surrounding it has something like, "Thomas Murphy, Husband and Father" carved exquisitely on the side of it. They forgot about me I can see. Or maybe I'm wrong and it's something different inscribed on it. I'll find out next time I drop by, Grandpa. ■

The Fountain

by Maddie Rojas Lynch

I inhale the smell of fried dough,
freshly mowed grass,
I hear the sharp sound of children's laughter.

I pluck a penny
from my back pocket.
Its texture is smooth,
its color faded from many fingers.

I test the weight of the coin,
contemplating its fate.

It seems silly now,
to wish for things.
Wishing is for laughing children
who gobble down fried dough.

The vision of my former self
parades down a path before me.
Her hands are melded with her mother's.
But her eyes
are glued to the sky
leaving it only once, to find the fountain.

She whispers to her mother, who has no time
for marble fountains.

I look down, and cast the coin
into the mist of the moonlit water.
I cast it for her, and I cast it for me.
We are both too young to stop wishing.



Gone

by Carolyn Schultz

Disappointed.
I've only truly been that way
once in my life.
It was on a slow
summer morning that my world
ended.

I've always wished
that the sky had been full
of lightning,
scorching the earth
with forked tongues of light,
or fist-sized chunks of hail,
leaving spider webbing patterns
on windshields.
Some small hint from nature,
some ominous sign.

Instead, I got a sunny day
and a comfy family couch—
my father scratching his stubble,
while trying to explain
why he couldn't stay.
My mother staring out
the window and
not saying a single thing.

I wanted screaming
and tears.
Some sort of epic battle
to defend what I held
most dear.

But there was nothing.

There were only
footsteps,
the sound of the front door closing
and a car engine starting.

There was no explosion,
gravity didn't disappear.
No black hole
ripped open to swallow up
my old life.

Nothing happened.

It was just gone.

These Are My Scars

by Leila Selchaif

DO YOU SEE THESE SCARS? DO YOU SEE THEM COVERING MY legs, my elbows, the backs of my knees? No? Look closer. Closer! Don't tell me you can't see unless your nose has pushed against my skin. They aren't hard to see; you just don't notice. Let me help you.

The scars at my ankles are from the constant nipping of the small dogs of the media, telling me to buy this gum, this razor, this diet plan. Cut and dye your hair just like Rihanna's. Don't ever cut your hair like Rihanna's: you're not black, you're not allowed.

The scars on my heels are from the stilettos I refuse to buckle into. As I ran without them on strong, flat-footed feet, the shoes flipped upwards and their spikes dragged into me, the stabs an attempt to hobble me. I walk barefoot now, savoring the pain they have caused.

Do you see my ribs? The scars there form a tic-tac-toe board. They were drawn by the pink, glossy edges of *Elle* magazine, *Cosmogirl*, and *Teen Vogue*. You must fit size zero, you can only wear extra-small.

Here: let me peel the soft skin of my thighs back, and show you the marks dotting them. They are puckering burns, from the cigarettes lolling on the older girls' lips, from the tokes rolled by all the beautiful boys who flirt with me in class.

And don't even get me started on the needle marks along my inner arms. They're almost too small to see, but they itch like hell until my fingernails have formed long red marks along the skin.

Take your hands—I won't hurt you—and drag them along my cheeks. The ridges are beautiful, are they not? They come from the makeup that beckons in the drugstore, all manner of matte and berry, desire and self-worth. They are scalding to my skin and caused these ridges to rise up. They accentuate my cheekbones, right? They make me look like Keira Knightley, right?

And here—these ones are still raw, these one hurt like nothing else. These scars curve along my breasts, trace the wires of my bras cutting me ragged as they lift and plump and round. They suffocate me behind bars of a curved prison.

The scars behind my ears are from the tears. As I lie upon my bed and let them slip from my eyes and migrate back there, they cruelly left their marks, turned to acid from my want of things I couldn't have, shouldn't have, would never have or even voice my desire for.

Instead, I'll open my mouth and show you the scars there, and while you're at it, imagine the ones scrawled across my eardrums. Those have grown from exposure to the constant droning of the mosquitoes of terror, and the scars along my lymph nodes come from my screams in terror. I'm deafened by the terror of being different; I scream in terror that I'm not.

You can lean back now. Get away. You can see them now, can't you? Now look down. I know. They're on your fingers too, they lace your skin as much as mine. Don't just stand there, that won't stop them! Get up! Get to your feet! Our scars can't stay invisible any longer. ■



"The NYSSYWI is a valuable experience for me to grow as a writer and as a person. Surrounded by such a diverse and talented group of people, it's easy to get caught up in the passion and energy."

— ANDREW KIM

Untitled

by Kaveri Sengupta

WHY DID MEGAN ALWAYS THINK IT WAS someone else's fault? The truth was that it was her fault. Of course, Camilla could never pluck up the courage to let Megan know because she had always idolized her. This undermined her most prominent and bothersome flaw: ever since they were little, Megan was an expert at blaming 'it'—whatever 'it' was—on someone else. Usually it was someone close to Megan, someone who was uninvolved in the undisclosed 'it,' someone like Camilla. Megan was clever and savvy, but never creative. Camilla had forgiven Megan for innumerable faults in the past, during their childhood and adolescence, because Camilla couldn't seem to find the initiative in her to tell her that she didn't like what she was doing. Camilla had to let out some of her own pent up frustration—to shove at least some of the blame onto Megan. It was only eighteen years overdue.

But all the worries—What should I say? How should I frame things? Will she hate me?—would have to be pushed aside for later contemplation. First, she would simply meet Megan for lunch—a harmless, unassuming act. They would go to that sushi bar Camilla knew Megan loved but she personally couldn't stand. She would complement Megan on some new outfit of hers, warm her up with some chit chat and then...she would finally say what should have been said two years ago, the event that marked the last straw for Camilla.

The air was chilly on that October night two years ago, and the leaves—illuminated mysteriously due to the streetlights—had transformed into the auburns and burnt oranges that were inevitable. Camilla identified with this time of year because it was a transitional period. As her father had passed away two months ago, she found herself caught up in her own process of

transformation. She was unsure if she should remain continuously aware of her father's passing, or find the strength to move on. If she rose above it, she would have a guilty conscience after realizing she hadn't thought of her father for a significant amount of time. These were the thoughts that plagued her mind as she walked to her closest friend Megan's house.

As she knocked on the door, loud music reverberated off the walls before Megan could even answer the knock. Camilla raised her eyebrows and sighed. Megan, of course, would be the one to have a party when her parents were out of town. It was so like this "new" popular Megan. The old, innocent girl who accidentally fell in a pile of mud at the age of four, laughing hysterically at its gloppy texture, was gone. In its place was a stranger who Camilla barely knew.

"Hey Camilla," Megan said, "come on in."

Camilla was reluctant to enter. She knew this party would contain a variety of things she was uneager to associate herself with, namely drugs, drinking, and hooking up. But parties were the "new" Megan's hobby. Camilla knew full well that she would be unable to say no, as Megan would interpret this act of refusal as a huge insult to their friendship.

Megan stood there, tapping her foot and waiting for Camilla to answer. No doubt she was dying to get back to the new guy she had set her sights on. Camilla walked past her and into the house, her feet dragging.

Sure enough, the potheads were in one corner smoking weed. One of

them, bleary-eyed, looked up at the sound of the door slamming shut and raised his eyebrows suggestively at Camilla. She rolled her eyes and continued inside, taking care to dodge the empty beer cans littering the floor. The shiny green Heineken cans cast an eerie glow on the wall, causing Camilla to shiver. She sat down on a couch, the only one remotely vacant (a couple was



canoodling on the other side) and stared at her watch, trying to will time to speed up.

She barely noticed when a raucous game of Truth or Dare began, which mutated into an equally boisterous spell of Spin the Bottle. Just as she was about to leave, blaring police sirens sounded, causing the partyers to scatter and attempt to hide the remnants of their escape from reality. Caught up in the sudden action, Camilla was thrown off balance by a guy sporting a plaid shirt. She landed on her stomach on the couch, looking just as high/drunk/whatever else those kids were as the others.

The doorbell rang: an ominous,

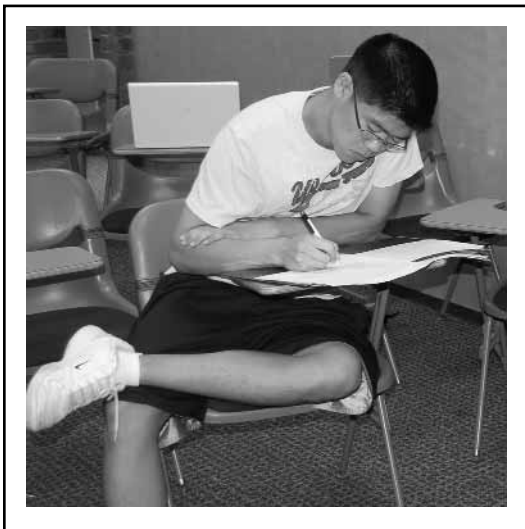
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foreboding sound. "Hide everything!" Megan whispered harshly, as if everyone hadn't been doing so already. Making her way to the door cautiously and slowly, struggling to steady her steps after the beer she had drunk, she answered the door.

"What can I do for you, officer?" she innocently asked the man, whose silhouette was outlined in the moonlight, his face hidden in the shadows. It was impossible to mistake the stench of alcohol and marijuana that lingered like fumes rising from a busy factory.

"Officer?" the man responded.



He stepped forward, and the figure of Megan's father was defined. Megan's eyes opened wide, and she whipped around hastily. Her gaze fell to Camilla, who was still trying to untangle herself from the couch.

"Daddy, Camilla really wanted to have this party. She decided to invite everyone over, without even asking me! I told her you and Mommy would be out of town, and she took advantage of me. I got home late from school and I was so surprised when I saw this! I really tried to make everyone leave, I did, but I just

couldn't..." Her voice was broken, soft tears falling down her face. She was the incarnation of a pitiful, helpless baby, so naive, so inexperienced.

"Camilla, could you come over here for a second, please?" Camilla heard Megan's dad's grating voice and knew that was it. He had never taken kindly to Camilla, deeming her from the start of the girls' friendship 'a bad influence.' If he had his way, Megan would never be allowed to see Camilla after the former accused the latter of stealing her paint set.

After taking the liberty to yell at Camilla for a little while, Megan's dad assured her he would let her mother know about this "incident," as he called it. Camilla didn't stand up for herself. She couldn't. The entire time, Megan was peering around her father's back, shooting Camilla looks of deep apology. Camilla closed her eyes and pretended she was escaping far, far away from the depths of the hell she was trapped in. She was with her own father, in a better place, and they were

playing the games they used to play during her childhood.

Megan's father kicking everyone out jolted her back to reality, and Camilla stumbled back to her house. A day later, she endured a harsh rebuke from her mother, and swore to give Megan a piece of her mind.

But it never happened. Life went on just as it had before.

That would change today, Camilla resolved, as she opened the door to the sushi bar. A strange-looking wind chime was suspended over the door that sounded as

Camilla entered the room. She half expected it to fall on her.

"Hey?" Camilla turned around. Megan was standing a few feet away, wearing a tan jacket and jeans splattered in paint from the time they had painted her bedroom orange. After it had dried they repainted it green because the orange looked ugly. She looked so familiar it killed Camilla. She didn't want to distance herself from Megan; they'd been friends for so long. She knew that bringing up this old story would alienate Megan. Megan was one to hold grudges.

"I like your jeans," Camilla said, trying to make some conversation.

"Thanks," she smiled.

The truth of the matter, though, was that those jeans fazed Camilla. They took her back to a time when life was hanging out at one of their houses on Friday afternoons after school. Megan was there for Camilla at a time when no one else was: just after her father died. She was the shoulder Camilla cried on, the person she called when she woke up tearful in the middle of the night.

They made small talk for a while, Camilla skirting around the object of the lunch and Megan a little confused as to why Camilla seemed so skittish.

Two hours passed in that café with the two of them talking. Camilla did not tell her a thing. Megan had a power over her; one that she hated acknowledging but one that always existed. That power left her with no determination to utter what needed to be said. After three wholly awkward hours in the cafe, they hugged and parted. Camilla departed with a huge cloud of regret for things not said churning in her stomach. A tear trickled down her cheek as she made her way down the busy, bustling city street. ■

The Scarecrow

by Griffin Shoglow-Rubenstein

The waves broke slowly, not hurrying,
Relishing the endless
Back-and-forth motion as I did, too,
As they touched my hands,
Spread out on either side
Like tiny wings.
Sand grains beneath my back and body entire
Became wet as the water
Washed over it and banished dryness.
I saw only blackness, saw nothing also
Save the absences of things, but I felt
Everything, and so, I saw everything, too.
Cars on the freeway
Rushed by dimly, and their wild quickness
Slowed me,
As did the gentle ocean breeze, and then—
And then it was ruined, ruined by the absence of an absence, and this new presence slid
inside my nose, and I sniffed
The smell of cigarette smoke.
And at once that inner gravity, which had held me fast and slow against the sand,
Was burned away by a scent.
And I? I lay on the jetty, either hand immersed in continual waves,
Which never came quite far enough
For me.
I, the scarecrow, lay on a bed of sand,
Caught between an ocean I did not know
And a scent I knew too well.



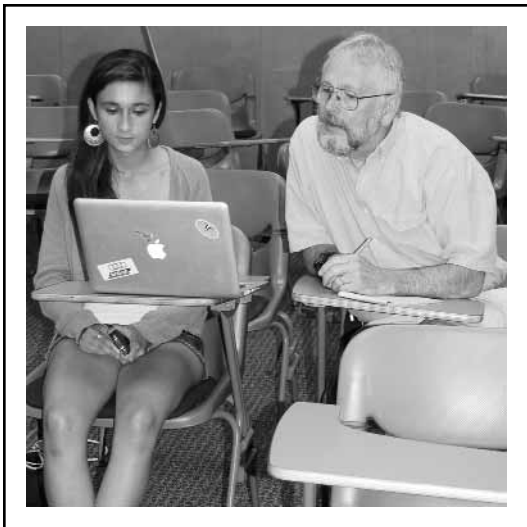
“The program was extremely helpful and the talent in the room was astonishing. We were able to learn so much from each other. The faculty was light-hearted but their critique was expert.”

— DANA CRISPI

Things I Didn't Do

by Grace Terdoslavich

I didn't finish speaking.
I didn't do the homework.
I didn't forget to do it.
I didn't forgive him.
I didn't say goodbye.
I swear to God, I did not see your hairdryer!
I didn't phrase that quite right.
I didn't learn the language.
I didn't try. I didn't not try.
I didn't kill anyone. Yet.
No, I didn't know where it was, either.
I didn't break a bone.
I didn't climb a tree.
I didn't pick that lock, either.
I didn't die.
I didn't flunk science.
I didn't try to hurt anyone.
Of course I didn't ask anyone else, it's your hairdryer.
I didn't cry.
I didn't shrink and cower in a corner.
I didn't run away.
I didn't hide.
And I didn't lose.
And I didn't know who could have taken it, maybe the squirrels or something.



"This week was honestly unlike anything I've ever experienced before. It was amazing to have an opportunity to hone my writing skills, something I'd never been asked to do and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The teachers and students were really inspiring."

— KAVERI SENGUPTA

Saturdays at the Beach

by Cara Tomaso

“FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME, Christopher, Mommy is tired. Collect shells, swim . . . hell, build a sandcastle for all I care. Mommy needs her rest.” His mother’s eyes were glazed and watery, and her threadbare swimsuit—a real steal off the Wal*Mart clearance rack—was two sizes too small. She situated herself on her towel, tucked her wiry hair beneath a wide-brimmed straw hat, and sighed. Christopher knew what that meant. He had just been officially dismissed. Mom would smoke two Marlboros, sip a fruity wine cooler, and read what Daddy called trash novels, with titles like *Thou Shalt Sin*, *The Deflowering of Marie Osmond*, and *While the Body’s Still Warm*. She repeated the same ritual every time they visited the beach. Christopher used to get excited about their Saturday outings, but not anymore. He didn’t like to be alone.

Much like his mom, Christopher, too, developed a routine, sans the porn masquerading as serious literature. He packed a PB&J sandwich, two Capri Suns, and a beat-up Tupperware container into his backpack. Once she decided she wanted her alone time, he grabbed the plastic box and scoured the shoreline for shells and starfish. He had it down to a science. He’d go shell hunting for about an hour, take a break to eat his lunch, and then keep collecting until Mom decided she was ready to go home.

Plastic box in tow, he tiptoed through the sand in search of seaside treasures. He methodically dug through piles of damp grit, but after a short while, his fingers ached and he was bored. He considered taking an early lunch break, but a glance in Mom’s direction told him now was not the time to dig through his backpack. Christopher knew his mom well. She was on her second cigarette pretty quickly, which was never a

good sign, and besides, Christopher wasn’t that hungry.

He settled into the sand and studied the families on the beach longingly. He was used to being the wallflower, the doormat. His mother did all the talking, and his dad had better things to do than stay home for any length of time. He liked to watch the kids pick fights with each other, the teens mingle and flirt, and the adults sip beers and flip through wrinkled editions of *Us Weekly*.

Having grown bored with his shells and the other families on the beach, Christopher focused his attention on this guy sitting alone in the sand. He’d first noticed him earlier that day after experiencing an uncomfortable stinging sensation that was the universal indicator that someone was watching you. Now the man was cradling his head in his hands, and his forehead was creased in intense concentration. Without realizing what he was doing, Christopher slowly approached him. His gut wouldn’t take no for an answer.

It took the stranger a couple of minutes before he finally noticed the little boy standing there expectantly. Christopher got the feeling that this man wasn’t used to feeling anything that wasn’t sadness; the sudden shift in emotion from sorrow to surprise seemed painful for him, like he had just moved his arm too quickly after sleeping on it the wrong way.

“You’re sad,” Christopher said softly.

“Yeah,” he admitted, reluctantly, “I guess I am. How old are you, kid?”

“Ten.”

“Just ten?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Wow. You’re . . . small.”

Christopher was mildly insulted. “Yeah? Well, you’re big.”

The stranger laughed, but then stiffened, like it hurt to be happy.

“So what happened that made you so sad?”

“Listen, kid . . .”

“It’s Christopher.”



“Listen, Christopher, I’ve just got a lot on my mind, is all.”

“Like what?”

The stranger took a moment to mull this over. “You ever been in love?”

Christopher thought of a girl in his class named Gracie, who had tight blond curls and pretty blue eyes. She was cute enough. And then he thought of Mommy, who smoked Marlboros more times a day than Christopher could count. And then he thought of Daddy, who forgot his last birthday.

“No,” Christopher answered definitively.

“Consider yourself lucky.” The stranger bowed his head. “She was my everything, you know?”

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Christopher didn't know, but he nodded like he did, anyway.

"My cousin Amy has that sweat-shirt, I think," Christopher said.

The man looked down at his hoodie. It had a picture of a goofy red bear carrying pom-poms and the letters BSU stretched across the chest.

"Probably," the stranger agreed lamely. "I was supposed to graduate from Bridgewater State this year."

The two fell silent. Christopher wasn't sure what to do next. It looked like this poor stranger hadn't slept in days. Greasy clumps of jet-

"Writers are a different type of people and need to be surrounded by each other. If you're serious about writing and want to improve, the Institute is the place."

— JOHN VOLZA

black hair clung to his forehead and the nape of his neck. His eyes, weighted down by angry splotches of blue and purple, sagged deep into his skull. His clothes were sloppy and mismatched. And he reeked. The stench of stale smoke and cheap beer was painfully familiar to Christopher. His heart lurched when he realized that he was looking at a younger version of his dad.

"You can tell me," Christopher whispered.

But the stranger shook his head. "No. I really shouldn't."

Christopher couldn't stand it when adults clammed up like this. He was ten, for God's sake. He'd been taking the bus by himself since he was seven or eight, and he'd taught himself to use the stovetop to

make macaroni and cheese just a few months ago.

"Can you at least tell me her name?"

"Ava," the man sighed. "Her name is Ava."

The admission encouraged Christopher. "You can trust me, I promise. I'm really responsible! Mom says she's never met a little boy as dependable as I am!"

The man scrubbed his hand over his face, annoyed. "She loved to bake. Apple pie, pumpkin bread, cake."

Christopher rejoiced silently over the little victory. He was giving in.

"She made our wedding cake—red velvet with cream cheese frosting. Mom told me we were rushing things, but I didn't listen. I loved Ava. It felt like the right time."

"So what happened?" Christopher asked.

The man grimaced. "Turned out my mom was right. She decided she didn't want kids. But she never told me that, and by the time I found out, it was too late."

Suddenly the man was choking back quiet sobs, and Christopher shivered as understanding hit home. He'd once heard Mommy talking to his Aunt Tracy about . . . that. Tracy was forever getting herself into sticky situations with men Mommy called no good, rotten bastards.

"I couldn't look at her after that, you know? So I filed for divorce. But lawyers are expensive. And I'm still in school, but I've been such a wreck . . . and now I'm failing practically every class. I'm broke, and I might as well be homeless because of course the apartment was in her name, so I'm bunking with a buddy of mine, but I can't mooch off him forever. And I still have to call my mother . . ."

Christopher didn't know what to say to that. "I'm sorry," he offered.

He knew it was a lame response.

"Me, too, Christopher. Me too."

"So, now what?" Christopher ventured.

"I'll sit here on the beach, I guess."

"And when the beach closes?"

"I'll walk to Travis's apartment. Fall asleep watching reruns of *Roseanne* on *Nick at Nite*. Wake up at noon. Realize I've skipped class. Again. Think about calling my mom, my lawyer. But I won't. Maybe I'll walk to the beach again. Grab some Taco Bell. Fall back asleep on the couch. Wake up the next day and do it all over again."

Christopher wished there was something he could say, something he could do. He knew all about being lonely.

"Wanna check out my shells?"

Christopher asked. "Mommy drags me here every Saturday. She's the lady in the ugly pink swimsuit reading the book with the naked lady on the cover. I get bored, so I collect shells."

"Really? Let's see."

In mere minutes, the two were engaged in animated conversation about anything and everything—where Christopher found his favorite shell (wedged between an empty can of Pepsi and a crushed box of Sno Caps), how much school lunches sucked (the pizza was rubbery, and the milk was always expired), and what Christopher wanted to be when he grew up (an astronaut).

"Christopher! Time to go!"

Christopher sighed. "That's my mom."

"I figured."

Christopher crouched awkwardly above his shells. He wasn't ready to let this moment go. "So . . . same time next week?"

Much to Christopher's relief, the man smiled: "Same time next week."

And for once, Christopher felt alive. Hopeful. Maybe stale cigarette smoke and trashy romance novels weren't so bad after all. ■

Poetry

by John Volza

I'm drinking sangria
with rum
and I don't even like rum

Stirring the plantains
in the kitchen
taking sips when my arm gets tired

There is guacamole on
the deck and I walk out
to take a taste

My sister is smoking
a cigar with my cousin
the ash falling into their cups

My aunt is wearing
a miniature yellow sombrero
and asks where our dead dog is

Someone hands me a tortilla
chip and I try the salsa
instead

My fedora is on
backwards, but I'm too
drunk to notice

There is something I'm
supposed to be doing right now
but the air feels so good on my face

I breathe in and smell
the growing stench of
burnt plantains

I steal away, back into
the kitchen to cut up more fruit
for the sangria

Sister Of by Michelle Waters

“MOM,” I WHINED, “MOM, EVERYONE has them. I’m not even just saying that so you’ll buy me a pair.” The day my brother walked out of the car and into history, all I wanted was a pair of Ugg boots. You know Uggs: those ubiquitous glorified slippers that muffle footsteps and deaden souls.

Mom sighed, “Michelle, we’re focusing on Sam right now.”

“Tell me how that’s unusual,” I grumbled, playing the bootless martyr. Minutes passed in silence. Sam barked at Mom to turn off her favorite oldies station. She did, and he leaned his head back in an

December, January, February, or March, because in my family, that block of time means one thing: wrestling season.

“Don’t be nervous,” Mom told him, though he had not mentioned nerves. “Rick has prepared you well.” Rick was Sam’s tutor for the math section of the test; my parents had hired him based on a random mailing we received from the tutoring center where he worked, towns away from us. God, another stroke of dumb luck, hiring Rick was.

“Can we go to the shoe store,” I burst out.

“Michelle, shut the fuck up,” Sam said: a typical exchange. Mom said nothing, knowing as she did that he was just letting off steam before the test.

“I could wear them with so many types of pants,” I continued. “Jeans and sweatpants. Plus they come in neutral colors, so they would go with so much.”

“We’ll discuss this later,” said Mom. I could feel her annoyance with me hanging heavy in the air, as well

as Sam’s. In fact, I was annoying myself, but I could not help it. I ached for those boots the way a writer aches to be published. It was a desperate ache, a shallow, materialistic one.

“Sam, we’re here.”

My brother’s head jerked back. “What?” He looked around and noticed the school’s facade. “Okay, let’s do this,” he said, goading no one in particular.

I was much more subdued on the return trip to the school, exhausted from the skirmish I’d had with Mom about the Uggs upon our return home. Neither of us spoke as

we waited for Sam in front of the school. Her oldies music blared from the radio. I ran my fingernails over the grey velour seat. The motion created a nearly intolerable swishing sound that pleased me. “Can you stop,” Mom paused, searching for a word “generating that noise?”

“Sorry,” I drawled. I couldn’t think of a snappy comeback. You’re arguing with a woman in her forties, I thought. Save your energy for an age-appropriate opponent.

“You’re being a brat,” she told me, not for the last time. Sam emerged from the school, not for the last time either. He searched lethargically for

“I thought the Institute was great. It was cool to share a common ground in writing.”

—LUKE FOLEY

Mom’s silver minivan. She rolled down the window and shouted his name. He approached the car, motioning for me to get out of the front seat and move to the back. Mom offered a sincere smile. “How did it go?” she asked.

Despite his obvious drowsiness, a half-terrified grin was frozen on Sam’s face. “I think it went well,” he said. “There was this one question on the critical reading section—what does ‘bellicose’ mean?”

Mom paused, considering, turning the wheel with vigor. “To be honest, I don’t know,” she admitted.

“There was another one on the math section, but I’m sure you wouldn’t know that either,” Sam said.

Mom’s nostrils flared slightly. I could see that her fingers were red from taking out her vexation with us, her know-it-all children, on the

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attempt to steal a few moments of sleep before the test kicked his ass. It was November of his junior year, and I was thirteen, an age at which I was aware of the SATs but not their significance. Lucky as usual, my brother took the test on a day in which it was being administered at his school: Millburn High School, the toast of the township, the pride of the people, their reason for moving here. That month was chosen as the first time he would take the SATs for logistical reasons that my parents rehashed, and continue to rehash, over and over; he couldn’t take it in

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steering wheel. As it turned out, Sam did know it all.

During that long winter—wrestling season—Sam was plagued by injuries. I used to claim that I didn't understand the hold that wrestling had on generations of men in my family. There's my grandfather, who was banned for life from a certain Long Island high school gymnasium because he protested a referee's call with too much fervor. There are my uncles, whose college wrestling feats were lauded in now-yellowing newspaper articles that my grandmother keeps in a photo album. To say that Sam was pressured into wrestling would be unfair to my father, for whom the values of individuality and athleticism are in a neck-in-neck race. He allowed my brother to choose to stick with the sport that, at eight, he had wanted to quit. As a result of his involvement in wrestling and soccer, Sam grew from a short, scrawny kid with buckteeth to an athlete, a true one, with the muscular arms and deviated septum that accompany that title.

It was expected that Sam would be recruited to wrestle in college. We didn't expect it the way desperate teenagers and families do, posting on college admissions forums about how to get in contact with Ivy League coaches. Sam simply had the grades and the talent to attend such a school. His future was simply a given because, as people say when the topic of my brother arises, "some people are just fuckin' blessed." The summer before Sam's junior year we had visited a few coaches, who told us of the hard life of a college athlete in a rigorous school. My dad, who'd wrestled for Yale—which, to his annoyance, had cut its wrestling program—spouted pithy aphorisms of his own fabrication throughout the process, including his longtime favorite: "Never give up." On what?

But my brother didn't; he obeyed Dad's platitudes. After all, I was the recalcitrant one.

Early that season, his shoulder was rotated awkwardly, but staying true to a maxim that Dad never used because he thought it crass, Sam "played through the pain." Weeks later, he was thrown clear across the mat by a wrestler from Newark with a pair-of-wings tattoo on his back, and this was years before the advent of Black Swan.

The January day on which Sam found out his SAT scores was colored gun metal gray by rain that would have been snow had it been ten degrees colder. I remember the three of them—Mom and Dad and Sam—squabbling over how to access the scores online. My parents stood behind him in the computer room, known somewhat inexplicably as the office in our home. "I did it," Sam said with a roll of his nut-brown eyes. "I'm in."

"What does it say?" Mom asked. She strained to see the all-important numbers on the computer screen.

Stunned silence from them all as I watched from the doorway, the belligerent younger sister almost always outside of the yellow room, waiting, excited.

"Is it possible?" Dad asked.

"Is it possible?" Mom repeated.

"I think there's been a mistake," Sam murmured.

"You can always retake," I volunteered. "This was only practice, right?" I didn't understand then, as I do now, the world of practice tests and scaled scores and wanting, desperately, to prove the world wrong—or, in Sam's case, right.

"If these scores are correct, he's never going to take this test again," Dad said. So it's a good surprise, I thought. I should have known.

"What does it say?" I stepped closer.

"Three eight-hundreds," Mom hollered as if she were announcing the gender of her newborn child. "A perfect score."

"Oh, wow," I said. Even then I did not understand. Mom bent down to hug Sam and Dad offered him a spread palm. "That's cool."

"I think maybe it's just saying, like, what you can get," Sam opined,



his voice calm.

"Let's call Rick," Mom said. She turned to my father. They were both calmer now. "Jeff, get his number."

Dad ran upstairs to his own home office, returning a few tense minutes later with an uncrumpled scrap of his paper held delicately in his hand as if it were made of most delicate crystal. "Here, I have it," he announced.

Mom dialed the number on the venerable white office phone, the same phone that, three years later, received a call from my math

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teacher, who wanted to tell Mom and Dad that she was proud of me for raising my grade to a B- from a D+. “Rick—yes—hi—it’s Nancy—Greene, Sam Waters’ mother?” Mom’s voice ticked up. “We just wanted to call because—yes—yes, we checked, and—yeah—we saw that Sam—well, he got a perfect score.” I heard Rick’s animated shouts on the other end of the line. “Do you think it’s possible?”

Sam scratched his chin. Dad bit his already-bloody cuticles. I fell upon the bed, bored. Mom began to laugh with glee at Rick’s words. “Okay, thank you so much,” she said, and hung up. “She said he definitely thinks it’s possible.”

That’s when my world exploded.

More changed over the next year than my shoe collection—for my fourteenth birthday, I got a pair of Uggs, which was anticlimactic given that my birthday is in August. I entered high school, where my epithet remains “Sam’s sister.” I see those months as a slideshow: here, an image of Sam calling the greedy College Board to confirm his score; there, our family huddled around the white telephone on the first day of July, the first day college coaches are officially permitted to contact recruits; Sam visiting once again, more seriously this time, the campuses of Princeton and

Stanford and Harvard and UPenn; and me, in the car with Mom asking if he could go to school wherever he wanted. She told me it wasn’t as simple as telling the schools about his perfect score. But, really, it was.

A sunny Tuesday morning in October: “Dad and I can’t pick you up from practice today,” Mom said as I hoisted my field hockey bag over my shoulder. “Something big might be going down.”

“What?” I asked, watching the bus leave my stop. I had missed it, but Mom could wait to hear that.

“I can’t give you details right now,” Mom responded. She shoved a bagged lunch into my hand.

“Mom, I’m already carrying three bags,” I whined.

At the same time, she said, “We’re not certain yet that it’s going to happen today, or even at all. And you will bring a lunch to school. Can you get a ride home?”

I did get a ride home—from my friend Elizabeth Shea, whose car carries the permanent stench of liquidated crayons and sour milk. “I think something big is going down today,” I declared.

“Oh, what?”

“I think,” I said, “that Sam is going to decide to commit to a

college.” It had come down to Stanford and Harvard, if my memory serves, and I knew enough by then to know that few people know in October where they will be going to college, least of all that they will be going to either of those schools. Though I knew what his choices were, the whole business seemed literally incredible.

“Oh my God, that’s so cool,” Elizabeth said. “You’re going to find out, like, now.” We had pulled into my driveway. I exited the malodorous Shea family van.

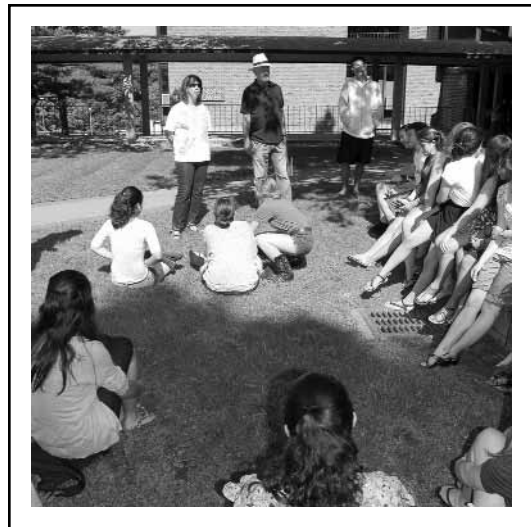
Sometimes I think I dreamt it all. Sam opened the front door—not the white door we usually used, but the glossy brown one with the fake stained-glass window. He was shirtless and smiling. “So?” I shouted.

“Harvard,” he shouted back, and there is no word or phrase that can capture that moment. It seemed that everything in our lives had led to this, had brought it about, not just chronologically but thematically, somehow. It seemed that we deserved it. I ran into his ridiculously muscular arms.

Mom appeared in the doorway as well. “Isn’t it amazing?” she asked. And it was amazing what assholes we were. ■

“It was a chance to be surrounded by writing on all sides, literally and metaphorically, so that I was pushed in ways I haven’t experienced before—and the results showed.”

— GRIFFIN SHOGLOW-RUBENSTEIN



My Other Family

by Lydia Youngman

BRITTANY TELLS ME THE STORY OF HOW we met every time I ask her. It starts with her coming home from school to Nana's house with a few of her friends. When they arrive, there's a strange crib stuck in the middle of the living room. Brittany and her friends kind of look at each other wondering what's going on before they kick off their shoes and approach the crib. They peer over the side and see a baby—me—blinking up at them. "Who is that?" Brittany asks. Nana comes up behind them and says in her Nana voice, "That's Lydia." There's a general chorus of "ohs" and the story's over.

Nana has been my babysitter since I was just a few months old. There were always kids at Nana's house; she'd watch five at a time, a lot of them her relatives. Since everyone in the Bobb family got married and had kids really young, they had a huge extended family. Family members were always dropping by, talking on the porch for a while before sticking their heads in the living room to check on the kids watching television. At Nana's house, I was part of something I wasn't when I was at home—I was part of a big family. In fact, I used to spend so much time at Nana's house that I would tell people they were my family.

Brittany lived with Nana. She had her own room right off the kitchen with a lock on the door because Brittany was picky with her stuff. Her room was purple—both our favorite colors—and had a Tweety Bird theme, which I loved.

Then there was Monasha, another one of Nana's great grandchildren. I always played with her when I went to Nana's house. She loved to do my hair because it was long and hers was short, but by the end it would always be in a horrible knotted mess. It was so bad one time that Brittany had to reach for a pair of scissors. I didn't want her to cut my hair, but I had absolute faith in what she was doing just because she was Brittany. It was a huge relief to see at the end that she'd only cut the tangled hair tie, and not any of my actual locks.

Monasha was the one who read the

poem she wrote at Nana's funeral. It was called "Yes You Are" and each line was addressed to Nana as a description of what she was like—how strong and eloquent and beautiful she was—followed by "yes you are." It was one of the best parts of the service.

I don't know who I would be without Nana's presence in my life, because I'd never not had her there. When I was just a few months old, my mom had been searching desperately for a daycare for me and had come up with two options: one was a brand new daycare center near her work and the other was Nana. When my mom visited the new center, she said the kids sat around U-shaped tables while teachers sat in the middle and monitored everyone's activities. My mom said she thought that I'd be in these controlled environments for the rest of my life. Nana's house, where I could get to be a part of a big family, was something that I couldn't get somewhere else. Nana wasn't running an institution: she was just opening her home. From the kitchen table I would watch "Judge Judy" while Nana made fried chicken. We taught Nana's great grandson Junior how to write his name while sitting around that kitchen table.

Nana always looked the same every time I saw her—every time but once. Lying in her casket she looked very thin and small and not at all like herself. She had been sick for a while and lost enough weight that her skin sat on top of her bones instead of melding to the shape of them. Her face looked like it had lost some hidden quality.

Lots of things Nana said and did stick with me. My favorite Nana memory happened during a sleepover birthday party of Monasha's. Monasha was serving drinks and asking me if I wanted soda. I was about to say sure, even though I didn't like it and never had, when Nana brought out a bottle of Hawaiian Punch. It was juice she'd bought just for me. "I know my Lydia," she said. When I had to make a decision about which high school I wanted to go

to, Nana knew what I'd decide before I did.

There were some things about me, though, that Nana didn't know. I have this one memory that always leaves me with a squirmy feeling. In middle school, I had stopped at Nana's to visit. I rang the doorbell and saw her brown eyes looking at me through the blinds before she opened the door. When she did open it, she looked distrustful. I could tell she didn't recognize me. I was a strange white girl on her porch. Of course, once she realized who I was all that evaporated. She smiled and ushered me inside before telling me to take my shoes off.

Race was one thing we didn't share. The Bobbs were black and I was white. Nana wasn't even sure how the babysitting would work at first because we weren't the same color. It quickly became clear, however, that skin color really didn't matter at all. My mother says that when I was little I was absolutely colorblind. She has a vivid memory of taking me to the ballet in Saratoga and asking me who my favorite dancer was. "I like the dancer in yellow," I said and described her without once mentioning the fact that she was the only black dancer on stage.

My dad says that, in the beginning, Monasha was colorblind, too. She used to come to all my birthday parties, even though she was the only black girl there. She even came to my swimming party, despite the fact that she couldn't swim. But after a while she stopped coming. She told me she was uncomfortable because she didn't know anyone...but part of it had to do with how different she felt from everyone else.

When I was inside Nana's house—not just standing on the porch—I never once felt out of place. When I was with Nana and her family, I was with my family. It wasn't until Nana's funeral when all of her grandchildren stood up to sing a song for her—and I wasn't up there—that I realized for the first time that I wasn't one of them. ■

Blazer Boy by Karen Yuan

EVERYONE CALLS HIM BLAZER BOY, AND THAT'S WHAT HE IS. NO one's seen him without the deep blue blazer with the double cuff stitches and gold insignia buttons that covers him like a great bird: not in the dining hall or class or on the path. So, obviously, people wonder if he takes it off outside of public eye, in the dorm. But the people who would know change the topic when they're asked.

He's not the pale and pimpled kid who's wearing daddy's best jacket though. No, he's "English but not," kisses the hands of the girls he meets, wears calf-high white socks and waves his hands as he talks. My first memory of him is seven o'clock in the morning before German class: he waltzes into the room and towards Herr Schieber's Macbook in the corner and turns on Tchaikovsky from iTunes. Then he just starts moving around and humming, hair stealing the morning sun. At first I'm thinking, what

the hell? But he just swings right out of the room, voice carrying down the hall.

Rumors fly. His parents take him to operas in NYC every weekend, they say. His mom bought an apartment by the school to live in just so he won't be lonely. And...his accent is fake...his accent is fake. Because one cold day in November blazer boy shows up without his blazer, without his dapperness and without the accent: just a rumpled shirt, bags under his eyes and a very American 'sup', charisma—or whatever it was—gone. He meets no one's eyes. When someone asks him what was up with all of that, he gestures at himself, tired and smaller somehow, and says, look at this, this isn't interesting— September was, October was, the blazer, the guy who swept through the halls in early morning belting classics and pulling chairs out for the ladies. That was interesting. No one knows what to say. ■



"This program is a great break from your daily chaos. It's nice to have a time and place where you can simply set aside your time and write."

— LILY CAO

Untitled

by Sinan Ziyalan

DISAPPOINTMENT? YEAH, I CAN THINK of a few people. Disappointments summed up in feelings are hard to put into words. I guess I'll take a crack at it.

Rose was someone who, while beautiful, wasn't ready for the kind of responsibilities that such beauty gave her. She's the kind of person who doesn't understand and thus fears the world of men. Light brown hair with

This week was pure awesomeness. All of the people here are the best. I honestly wish we could band together and form a covenant of writers.

— CAROLYN SCHULTZ

piercing blue eyes, she finds a way to make you remember her at the end of a long night with friends.

She was the crazy one; the fun one; the hurt one. Behind each laugh there was a fear of who she was laughing with, or at. An uneasy question — 'will you hurt me?' — hung in the air. They say that laughter has more to do with bonding than with humor; if that's the case, Rose seemed very tentative to bond with people.

Every man, I believe, has a side that makes them want to protect others. They may play it down, but everyone, from the burliest of jocks to the smallest of nerds, requires someone that they feel they can protect. Not someone to hold, or look after in the romantic sense of the word, but someone to whom they feel at least platonically responsible, someone who gives them a purpose in living. Rose was that purpose.

She had a way of seeming small and crushed by those who tried to take advantage of her good looks by

being invasive. When someone sees a pretty girl, they assume she's been approached a lot and that they can handle the pressure that being approached causes. Little did these hounds know that Rose couldn't handle it. No, I wasn't her knight in shining armor. No, I wasn't 'in love,' or the faux-teenage equivalent. In all seriousness, I had no ideas to get involved with her. After all, how would that help someone damaged the way she was? No. I was just someone who got caught up in taking care of her. Who got caught up in caring for someone else, because they were someone who needed care. I just wanted to protect this frail, fragile person.

I remember walking her home from the train station after a night out with friends. I remember how we decided to sit on her stoop and just talk. I remember walking away feeling different about people in general.

She had been through shit. A victim of two very pushy 'suitsors', one of which she took to court for sexual abuse. It made my blood boil that these people made her this way; the way she said it, it was as if she was embarrassed that it had happened to her. She even felt sorry for the guy, because of how he wrote things on his Facebook making himself out to be the victim.

It was horrible that they—two entitled, poor excuses for human beings—had come to define her male experience and turn her into the person she was. She was someone who had had a bad time, because of two isolated incidents of guys being pricks, not realizing the power they have to change people, treating this girl like she was their 'right'.

She said, quote: "I just feel bad for him. It wasn't that bad, after all

the crap he gave me on Facebook, I just thought that this wasn't worth it. He made me feel terrible. I wish I had just kept my mouth shut...if he had raped me or something, I don't think I would've said anything, because it's so embarrassing for people to know."

I care for people. I cared for her. Frankly, I was disappointed.

I was disappointed in what people turned out to be: lowlifes that have the capacity to treat each other like meat. I was disappointed in the entire fucking human condition for what we are capable of.

So yeah, Rose fucking disappointed me.

We don't talk much anymore. She's grown and moved on, but I know that the scar is still there. I guess this is what people are, a collection of mutilating scars that grow over and comprise the twisted, contradictory people they've become.

She's made me realize that we're all just reactive children, children who have had bad experiences and act differently to avoid repeating these experiences. Those guys who were invasive probably had experiences that were rewarded for this kind of entitled behavior. So they, in turn, gave her an experience that affected her. We're all just reacting to each other. In this long, drawn out dance of shifting personalities, we must be mindful of who we may 'bump' into and how this bump might alter their step.

I don't want anyone to think that I'm admonishing these particular boys. But know that I believe, in a way, we're all vulnerable. We're all just the sums of our experiences manifested in our actions. Don't ever think that that pretty girl or that big jock is invulnerable. No one is. We could all use some caring and protecting every now and then. ■

New York State Summer Young Writers Institute
Summer 2011 Participants

Christy Agrawal	Lily Cao
Erin Carden	Kathryn Corah
Dana Crispi	Riley Dixon
Maggie Doran	Andreas Esposito
Andrew Fedorov	Luke Foley
Cynthia Gerber	Shivani Sanwal Gonzalez
Chloe Hamer	Carson Jarrell-Rourke
Andrew Kim	Madeline Klein
Elizabeth Lee	Lily Lopate
Erika Lynn-Green	Sean Maloney
Olivia McElwain	Matteo Mobilio
Kerry Mullen	Connor Murphy
Maddie Rojas Lynch	Carolyn Schultz
Leila Selchaif	Kaveri Sengupta
Griffin Shoglow-Rubenstein	Grace Terdoslavich
Cara Tomaso	John Volza
Michelle Waters	Lydia Youngman
Karen Yuan	Sinan Ziyalan





Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the New York State Writers Institute has 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 more than 1,000 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.

SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

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

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