



Young Voices

An ANTHOLOGY of STUDENT WORK

New York State Summer Young Writers Institute 2012



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 fifteenth 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 2012 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick

Director
New York State Summer
Young Writers Institute

NEW YORK STATE  **Writers** INSTITUTE
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Summer 2012 Faculty



KATHLEEN AGUERO is the author of four books of poetry including, most recently, *Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth* and *Daughter Of*. She is also the editor of three anthologies of multicultural literature. A recipient of grants from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and a former fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, 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. She is an Associate Professor of Writing and Literature at Empire State College, SUNY, and received the Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2011. 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 is the author of the poetry collections *Emblem, Without Paradise* and *Gold Star Road*, winner of the 2007 Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize, and the short story collection *Interference & Other Stories*. His memoir, *Half the House*, first published in 1995, was recently reissued in a new and expanded edition. Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College, he also serves as Chair of PEN/New England.



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.

Train to London

By ADAM ALBAARI

“It’s like a dream sometimes...” Isabella trailed off as she realized the man she was talking to, the man across from her on the train, hadn’t been listening.

Jean-Claude looked away from the window and redirected his attention to Isabella. He loosened his black tie and leaned forward. “I’m sorry, I got distracted. Please, continue.”

“I said it’s like a dream sometimes—all of this. When I was a girl I would have never imagined that this would be my life.” She ran her fingers through her thick brunette hair as she spoke. Her hazel eyes were unfocused, as if she were looking at something far away or something extremely close.

“How did you imagine your life when you were younger?” Jean-Claude settled back into the conversation. He took his off-brown blazer off of his lap and placed it on the empty seat beside him.

“I imagined I would get married to the puppeteer that always came to our village to perform shows for the children.” She leaned against the glass window of the train. Tiny spots of water from the outside slid down the glass so close to her that it gave the illusion of tears sliding down her flawless, almost-golden skin. “My goodness, I was so in love with that man. But I forgot his name.” She sighed and sat back in her seat.

“Would you say the puppeteer has any impact on your life now?” Jean-Claude asked.

“He made me who I am,” Isabella answered without skipping a beat. Jean-Claude raised a dark eyebrow, a signal of his confusion. She took this cue to explain herself further. “I mean, myself when I was human.”

“You are human.” Jean-Claude smiled slightly, giving off just a glimmer of his perfect teeth.

“Hardly. I don’t even need to sleep anymore. If I can’t sleep then I can’t dream.” Isabella sat up and looked at the rain whipping the cold window. “If I can’t dream then everything just starts to become one big memory. There’s no analysis or interpretation anymore, just countless experiences laced with pointless thoughts.” As she continued to stroke her hair, the collection of gold and diamond bangles on her left arm struck each other like wind chimes.

“It’s like a film that never ends.” Jean-Claude quoted an earlier statement Isabella had made prior to them boarding their train to London.

Isabella nodded gently and then smiled. “Sometimes I feel like all I ever was is what I am

now. I feel like there was no one before. I feel like I have no past.”

“That’s the price we pay for immortality. Gold and immortality. That’s all humans ever really want. They want it more than food or water. Or love.” He smiled again, his cold blue eyes twinkling. “And the irony of the universe is that once people like us actually get it, we lose what it means to be human,” Jean-Claude pointed out.

She nodded her head slowly and then closed her eyes for a moment. “Sometimes I feel like there’s no point. Riches and fame mean nothing if you can’t enjoy what it means to feel alive. That’s why...”

“Why what?” Jean-Claude’s look of confusion came over him once again.

“That’s why I feel like it’s all a dream sometimes.” Isabella opened her eyes as the train came to a slow stop. ■



“The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute gave me a chance to listen – to writers, people, words. It felt right to always be listening.”

– Anna Jacquinot

Don't Be Bashful

By ANGELA ARZU

“Change your clothes. Why you being bashful? Don't be bashful; I'm your grandmother.” These simple words rang out clear. It was true, she was my grandmother, but yet I felt like a complete stranger standing there in that room with her. I don't know what it was about my grandparents' house that I disliked so much. Maybe it was the lack of television and computer that made the idea of spending time at that house so unbearable, or something else superficial like that. It wasn't that I didn't love my grandma; I just didn't know her. My grandparents lived in a small house on Long Island; the house my father grew up in. I often passed the time I spent there trying to imagine what it would've been like back then. My dad and his brother might've wrestled in the very living room I was sitting in, my grandmother slaving away in the kitchen. My late aunt might've listened to music in her bedroom, the same room I stayed in the one time I spent the night. I remember my grandmother sitting in the room with me that night, as I got ready for bed. I was hesitant to change into my pajamas in front of her. She sensed that and said,



“Change your clothes. Why you being bashful? Don't be bashful; I'm your grandmother.”

My grandmother's death came unexpectedly. It took me years to truly understand that she was gone. She had been in the hospital for a couple of weeks prior to her death and even though I wasn't really sure what was wrong with her, I never dreamed that it would be the cause of her death. Maybe my parents or other relatives saw it coming, maybe they had known the intensity of the illness. But if they had, they certainly didn't tell me. I knew in my mind that this day would come eventually; I just didn't want to accept it. My grandmother would say to me over and over, “Come spend the night sometime,” and I'd beg my dad not to make me go. He'd tell me, “Your grandparents aren't going to be around forever, you know,” and I'd brush it off like a mosquito buzzing on my arm. Now I realize exactly what my father meant.

It was unreal lying on the floor of my living room curled up in a ball by the fireplace after I heard the news. It was February, I was cold, and I didn't know what else to do. Watching my father completely lose control, tears streaming rapidly down his cheeks, was the strangest part of all. I had never seen my father cry before, and I found myself crying now merely because he was crying. It was unreal sitting in that hospital room, hours

after her death, asking my parents if I could go with them to the morgue and having them say no. It was unreal sitting in my Aunt and Uncle's living room writing the obituary together, calling up relatives to fill in the blanks of her life that none of us knew. It was unreal staring at my grandmother's familiar face in the open casket at the funeral, trying to convince myself that I knew her. I didn't know her.

Maybe if I hadn't been so opposed to spending time with my grandmother, I would've known her. At the funeral, I heard countless relatives and family friends relive times of hardship that my grandmother helped them through. To many, my grandmother had been a confidant, someone they ran to when things got tough. They would call her up and pour out their hearts. Maybe my grandmother and I could've had a relationship like that. But I never called my grandmother nor did I confide in her. She would ask me how things were—school, friends, etc.—and I'd always reply with an unenthusiastic, “Good.” I didn't understand why I acted this way. I was bashful, and I didn't know why. That was what I regretted the most.

It was the time lost that I missed the most. I mourned the grandmother I never knew. I pondered where the time had gone, only I knew full well that I had pushed her away on purpose, I had wasted the time we had together like it didn't matter at all. Remorse and regret wear heavy on my frame as my grandmother slept. “Don't be bashful, Angela, I'm your grandmother,” I hear her say. Maybe if I had listened, things wouldn't be this way. ■

Broken Glass

By SARAH BAILEY

She was warned
The warning fell on deaf ears
Regrets over ignorance
You handed her lies
Such fragile lies
Spider webs
Strong but not strong enough
She turned a blind eye
But knew all along
Your lies became weaker
Brittle
Broken glass
Today she leaves
Tomorrow she will forget



“The town, the road, the campus, the lobby, the IDs, the dorms, the dorm mates, the food, the late nights, the classes, the teachers, the writing, the readings, the books, the Q and As, the fireworks, the friendship, the fun, the passion – Skidmore and the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute provided all of this and more. Living with people who shared your interests and appreciated your talents was an amazing experience. I’ll never forget my time here.”

– Nicole Sanchez

Two Rooms

By ERIN BESSE

Mom moved out and I went too.
Every weekend that I go back
is a reminder of what's been left and lost.
Everything I've left behind, something precious...
My room at Dad's is pale sky blue.
A brother – I don't know which – was the one to choose.
The hardwood floor is scuffed and scratched.
There are tennis balls on the wooden chairs,
(but the table shakes and rocks too much).
The old black desk that I once graffiti-ed
has gaping mouths for drawers. I've forgotten
all inside: except the two towers made from straws. grief?
On the shelves are shells from Florida,
(sand dollars, cats' paws, conches too) and
aluminum foil sculptures, trophies, old books.
All my least favorite stuffed animals
are jammed in a box, tumbled together,
and hidden beneath the blue-green, too large, queen bed.
There's three hundred thirty-nine paper cranes
hanging from the evil, lady-bug killing lamp.
A thousand cranes was long ago a goal... not now
(not anymore). The electric typewriter rules the table,
but it really never worked at all.
Not grief. Remembrance: because there's beauty in the old, forgotten things.

My mom moved out and I went too.
Thing was, I originally didn't have a room.
So we made do with this and that...
We tore off wallpaper and painted it tan,
Darker tan sponge paint was splashed all around.
Mom did the painting, but the handprint on the ceiling is mine.
The striped comforter and shaggy carpet we bought
specifically for the almost doll size room.
A twin bed. A beanbag chair. An attic door.
A heater for winter. A fan for summer.
A mahogany lamp. Everything matches.
Forty-three books on the two little shelves (I know them all by touch).
A collection of keys, twenty-eight pens,
a bucket of colored pencil shavings,
three rolls of duct tape, even more books,
and an array of figurine hedgehogs all perch

Two Rooms (continued)

amongst the clutter of things I need for school;
it's not a mess, but rather a limited version of things I like best.

There's a picture, some letters from friends,
a chain of Möbius strips stuck up on the wall.
A poster says "chocolate is all the food groups."
It's a small room (a closet at first) kept clean.
Clean and boring and dull but all mine.
Remembrance? No. The future, I think. There's a beauty in things
new and unused.

Mom moved out and I went too (it hurt).
I hated her for a good long while.
Perhaps I've grown out of that (but it hurt a lot)
I've got two bedrooms: two beds and two lives.
One is cluttered and dirty and nearly forgotten.
Two is neat and ordered and not what I love.
Yet between the lives and the rooms and the beds each night
(always different)
there's a lot in common...
It ties both of my lives together.
Both rooms have slanted ceilings...
and no curtain ties
(there's a story to tell there, but not at this time).
I'm always a writer...
and I'll always have lies.

"This week at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute inspired me to write more on my own. I learned so many new techniques and I was exposed to writing styles and genres that I found really interesting."

– Clementine Morse



Quail Sailing

By MICHAELA BRAWN

Somewhere downstairs a door screamed open and then slammed shut again, pulling me from my sleep. I rubbed my eyes and shimmied from beneath the covers and out of bed. A window shattered.

I heard my mom draw in a sharp breath from her bedroom, “What was that?”

I ran down the stairs and looked around frantically. The window beside the front door had a small, odd-shaped hole in it, and I could already feel the cold air creeping in. My mother joined me on the staircase looking dazed and still half-asleep. We peered out the frosted window at my father who was standing on the small stone path leading toward the driveway. His long pajama pants were tucked into his snow boots, and his hands were jammed into the pockets of his flannel-lined jean jacket. My dad was craning his neck around, trying to see which window had broken, before glancing up at the small, old tree that stood in our front yard. As he headed back towards the house, I noticed it.

Lying delicately on the check-

ered kitchen floor was a quail, its stunning, royal blue feathers all puffed out as if it were preening. My mother gasped and ran toward the bird. She reached her hands out, but then pulled them back and up to her face.

“Oh no,” she whispered, shaking her head, her salt and pepper hair falling into her face, seeing the mangled body more closely.

My father came back in, stomping his boots, then stopped short.

“Is it hurt?”

“Broken neck,” she said quietly, tucking her hair back behind her ears.

I walked over and stood beside my mother, fiddling with my pajamas, unsure of what to do. I stared at the bird intently searching for signs of life. Its small body swelled and receded slowly, and then again with even more difficulty. As it heaved out small and strenuous breaths, I could see that its belly was covered with black and white feathers as well. The small plume atop its head bowed pathetically. The poor bird’s frame, once so regal and proud, lay quivering and vulnerable. We all watched in awe,

wanting to help, but knowing there was nothing we could do. I glanced up at both of my

parents, and their expressions were identical: resigned and taut with wide eyes.

Once the bird had shuddered its last breath, my father gently slid his fingers beneath each of its sides and carefully lifted it. He carried it to the front porch and softly set the bird down once more.

“Joyce, can you hand me that shoebox?”

“Sure,” my mother answered reaching for the box.

She returned the shoes to the rack as my father tenderly placed the fragile bird in the box. “Do you want to feel how soft the feathers are, Mickey?”

I nodded and reached out, just barely touching my fingers to the silky, almost velvety wing of the quail. I thought about the time our bird laid eggs and had chicks just a few years ago when I was five or six. The quail’s cobalt feathers were like satin compared to the sticky down of the babies.

“We should say a few words,” I said.

I knew people did that at funerals, though I had never really been to one. I had some vague memory of sitting alone on my grandmother’s carpeted staircase, watching a caravan of older people make their way through the house, all dressed in black with their eyes respectfully directed at their feet.

(continued on page 9)



“It was a great experience to be among other writers who were eager to share their work and listen to my pieces. The feedback and the pointers I got from other kids this week were just as helpful as the ones from the teachers.”

– Julia Randall

Quail Sailing (continued)

When I had asked my mother about it a few years later, she explained to me that it had been her father's funeral and because of Irish tradition, it had been held in the house. She said no more than that though. When my other grandfather died, I was only months old, and as a baby who never stopped crying, I was left with a sitter.

I understood that the death of a quail was not nearly as devastating as the passing of a person, but at the same time, it wasn't all that different. A life was still ending. Something was still being lost. We spend our whole lives trying to do something, and then we just stop. Sometimes, like this one, a life ends unexpectedly and without reason. I wondered what happened then. Did everything just go dark and fade to black? It

couldn't just be over, right? Otherwise, what's the point?

My chest tightened up, and I wanted to jump out of my skin. My mother put her hand on my shoulder, sensing something was wrong. She always knew, and she always had a solution. With her reassuring touch, the knots began untangling within my rib cage. Her warm, gentle hand swept across my shoulders, smoothing out my shirt, a reminder of her ever-present love.

"I'm so sorry that I startled you at such an early hour this morning. We didn't know you lived in our tree," my father said.

We bowed our heads for a moment, and then my father picked up the box.

"The ground is too frozen to bury the bird, but there is still flowing water in the stream," he

said as my mother opened the front door for him.

She stepped into her snow boots still clad only in her nightgown. I did the same, and we paraded down the front steps toward the stream, like a trail of black cars following a hearse to the cemetery. My father eased his way down the snowy bank and placed the box on the water. The mild current gradually carried the motionless bird off, swaying the box to and fro, but never allowing it to bump the rocks that decorated the stream's edge. The barren branches of trees stretched out over the water, subdued, paying their respect to the creature. I shivered watching as the box floated down the stream. With the naivety of a nine year old, I hoped I would never have to attend a funeral. ■



"Honestly, what could be bad about being with a bunch of people exactly like you, in a college dorm, with amazing food, informative and chill classes, famous authors - and staying up late. Oh yeah: NOTHING! I learned a lot from this writing camp. It REALLY inspired me to write, and it taught me to do it better."

- Emily Honen

The Morgue

By MEENAKSHI (MEENA) CHAKRABORTY

A collection of freezers for the deceased—that’s what the hospital’s morgue is, really, cold cabinets to which people are confined after their hearts stop beating. My grandfather flatlined at 8:55 a.m., April 20th, 2010, in a white-washed hospital in Delhi, India. His body was placed in a long, frozen file cabinet, stored away like an item in a drawer.

My paternal grandmother had tragically and suddenly passed away only a few months before I was born. Heartbroken and in shock, my grandfather moved to the States to live with my parents. It started as a six-months-a-year arrangement, but as the years passed, it grew to seven and then eight months. He visited India only once a year, for a three or four-month period, to get away from the winter cold, especially after we moved to Massachusetts. Ironically, pneumonia was his eventual killer.

As a result, my grandfather became like a third parent to me. My father was “Daddy” and my grandfather was “Dada,” an infant name that stuck. He was someone I could go to when I couldn’t go to anyone else. When I was mad at my parents, for any reason at all, I would appear in his bedroom, crying. Somehow, he would always manage to comfort me. He played so many roles in my life—the sibling I never had, someone to fight with, a shoulder to cry on.

When he died, nobody wanted me to go to the morgue—besides myself, of course. My father wanted to go—but by himself; he stressed, not with me. Everyone was set against this trip: my parents, my aunts, my uncles, my cousins.

I was the only child of the family even willing to go. At twelve, I was apparently too innocent, too young to bear the pain of seeing my grandfather lying still, lifeless,

caked with the ice of his slot. It would be a trying experience, and I accepted that. But I would do it, for his sake and for my sake—I was trying to prove to myself that I had some level of emotional strength.

I felt numb during the drive to the hospital and descending the stairs to the morgue. But seeing the bright lettering – M O R G U E – painted on a white sign evoked a physical response. I felt a queasiness settle in the pit of my stomach.

The doctor—or nurse, whoever it was, I don’t even remember—handed the death certificate to my father and pulled out a tiny silver key. The key to my grandfather’s body—the words felt strange as they pulsed through my head. A stranger had the key, and I could only unlock the door with her permission.

We entered an icy room with a gray door, and immediately, I shivered with cold. My father saw the unsettled expression on my face and automatically assumed I was uncomfortable with what I was going to see. “Don’t worry,” he assured me, “if you don’t want to see this, you don’t have to.”

But I did, I did! It was my duty, my responsibility, to prove I was strong: to my family, to myself, and to my grandfather.

I saw stacks and rows of what appeared to be silver drawers, each with a number. In the front of the room, there were six drawers. Each drawer contained somebody’s loved one, lying unmoving and expressionless in wintry captivity. The lady approached #6 with her key. It made a high-pitched screeching noise as it twisted in the lock.

I trembled as she slowly pulled out the body of my grandfather. First, I saw the gray hairs of his head, then the rough tan of his face.

He was covered in a sheet, the hospital kind, fresh and white to make up for the disease and death that were its hallmarks.

I didn’t even cry. I just stood there, motionless, staring at the man who had promised, just a few weeks ago, that he would take me to the best sweets shop in India. The sports enthusiast who, in summer 2008, had spent his nights watching the Olympics with me, staying up until midnight or 1 a.m. even when yawns stretched across his face.

Five seconds and it was time to go. The nurse saw the expression on my face, and quickly closed up the cabinet. As she led us out of the room, her voice was soothing. “He can see you from above,” she said, “and he will always be proud of you. He will always love you.”

I did not respond. The words went in one ear and out the other. Perhaps I was not holding up as well as I had thought. My numbness had started to fade. No tears welled in my eyes—yet—but my heartbeat quickened. The room looked fuzzy. I felt sick.

I am not strong. The thought flicked through my brain. I feel like a disappointment.

“Are you ok?” My father whispered in my ear as we walked towards our car, which was parked in the crowded hospital lot. “You did a good job. I’m proud of you for holding up like that.”

Dead. Dead. Dead. He’s gone.

These words circulated in my mind, over and over and over, a frenzy of phrases that I didn’t want to acknowledge.

He said he’s proud. And I’m strong. I’m strong.

I pushed the conflicting voices out of my head and managed a little smile. “I’m fine,” I replied. “Let’s go home.” ■

Untitled

By TARA CICIC

I am here because my great-grandfather tied his shoelace. It was World War I and he was in France, fighting for the Americans even though he was from Montenegro. He had arrived in the United States at the age of eighteen and, when his brother died in a mining accident, joined the army. In a grisly battle, as they all were, he bent down to tie his shoelace. The soldiers running beside him left him behind and while he tightened the knots they were blown to pieces. He survived unscathed.

Years later, when he was already married to my great-grandmother and had his own children, he was dragged away from home by communist guerrillas. They broke into their mountainside home and searched for documents to burn while my great-grandmother urged him to put on his new shoes. He didn't. Nobody knows where he is buried, or what happened to him. We pretend that motifs only exist in love poems, sonatas, and novels, but they are in fact what make up our lives. It's a collection of moving parts that we don't see. For him it was a simple shoe.

He never kept his documents

at home because he was afraid that, should the communists come for him, they would take them and destroy them. My great-grandmother, Baba Zlatana, left with a brood of children in the countryside, did not have much opportunity to make money. Years after his kidnapping, she dreamed of her husband. He pointed out to her a collection of rocks behind their home, which is still there, shattered by an earthquake, goats grazing in its overgrown grasses. In the morning she found the documents that allowed her to get the American pension that she needed to make ends meet. Decades later, his son, at 73 learned he was an American citizen. I was already here before that but citizenship, there's a permanence to that.

I have always said that I am not a part of them, that I was not born from the soil that they tilled and that I do not know the sweet taste of nationalism burning hot and red on my tongue. My roots trail solemnly behind me and they do not know the comfort of being firmly plant-

ed in the ground. I am not lonely and I am not alone, but I do not belong to them and they are certainly not mine.

Serbia and Montenegro are tragic countries and although they are the birthplaces of my father and mother, they are not our home. We are a nuclear family. Yes, there are long branches of cousins, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, but we do not attend their weddings or funerals.

"You'll marry a man from Montenegro," my grandfather often jests. This joking prophecy produces in me a quiver of frustration that I understand is not called for. But why? Why do I laugh at the hot blooded Balkans, poke spiteful fun at their love for lounging about cafes and speaking of philosophy? Is it really so silly the way that they drink their coffee so bitter that Americans cannot stand it and then turn their tiny cups on saucers and wait for the remains to tell them their fortune?

But those shoes. ■

"I loved being here at Skidmore. The ability to be surrounded by peers and teachers who live and breathe writing was sweet. I learned a lot about myself as a writer and made exceptional friends who stayed up with me into the wee hours of the night, writing and laughing. It was an amazing opportunity to be able to work with published writers and hear them critique my work. This truly has been a life-changing experience."

— Angela Arzu



Henry's Daughter

By SAMANTHA CLARK

Henry Mathews is a flickering shadow in my memory, a blurry figure of a man joking happily with his children and building fire pits under the smattering of stars so easily visible from the long swaths of beach along the elbow of Cape Cod where our families spent our summers. His ghost follows me through worn photo albums collecting dust in an armoire in my living room and rests beside me as History Channel documentaries depict passenger jets demolishing skyscrapers and with them thousands of lives.

Henry's wife had grown up with my mother, a result of their own mothers' strong friendship that lasts still to this day. Due to this companionship I was destined from birth to develop a similar relationship with Henry's eldest daughter, Julia, a tiny blonde girl only three months older than I with whom I tottered across large green lawns and watched Scooby-Doo.

The year that I entered kindergarten their family was living in a beautiful Connecticut town. Julia and her sister had just started

school and Henry was commuting daily to New York City where he worked for Euro Brokers, Inc. He was attending a meeting on the 84th floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. That was the day that Henry Mathews died.

I'm not sure quite how long after September 11th the funeral was held, but the events surrounding it remain clear to me despite the more than a decade of time that has passed since they occurred.

We arrived at the home of the Mathews family in the evening to find it filled with people. Children and dogs wove between the legs of adults laughing hollowly at stories of safer and more comfortable times over glasses of wine and cans of Budweiser.

On the long drive from our home in Rhode Island to Connecticut along a highway thick with trees, my mother carefully explained to me how I should speak to Julia regarding her father's death. I recall a sharp irritation at my mother's assumption that I couldn't handle communication with my friend. I insisted that I understood, able to grasp even in kindergarten that tact would indeed have to be utilized when broaching the subject of her father. I assured my mother that I would talk to Julia exactly as she had suggested.

Upon arrival I hurried straight to Julia's room, uninterested in cheese plates and adults with sorrowful eyes who patted me on the shoul-

der in an attempt to comfort me for grief that I wasn't feeling, unable at the moment to truly grasp what it meant that my friend's daddy was dead.

Julia's room was crowded and messy, filled with the types of things that little girls love. Julia stood by her bed, her head cocked to the side as if observing me for the first time.

"We can talk about your dad if you want, but if you don't want to, that's okay too," I said earnestly, attempting a reassuring smile as I recited precisely what my mother had told me to.

Julia rolled her eyes at me and scowled.

"Oh my gosh, just stop talking. Just stop," she said coldly, her dark eyes hard.

I stared at her, my lips parted slightly, feeling a bit like I had been punched.

That was the start.

Over the following years our relationship deteriorated, as did Julia's ability to communicate peaceably with people.

She refused to discuss her father with anyone and people quickly learned to stop asking. Few could imagine the terrible trauma she had experienced at such a young age, and the event's unrelenting presence in all facets of our society in the following years must have served as a constant reminder of the life she had lost. Barely able to get through the chapter on 9/11 in my sixth grade history textbook without breaking down into tears myself, I couldn't even begin to fathom how she was able to handle it.

We continued to spend our summers together, surrounded by the other members of our third generation friendships. The fol-



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Henry's Daughter (continued)

lowing summer the transition was made from building sand castles and climbing dunes together to irritated glances and icy silences.

By age ten Julia had grown into a near spitting image, albeit highly feminized, of her father, and I had become used to the idea of being told to shut up every time that I opened my mouth.

"Nobody cares. Nobody likes you. Just leave."

I learned to stay quiet and not to protest or else everyone would join in with her. I remained in silent confusion as to what I ever could have done to warrant such thick hatred.

By age twelve I had developed a strong group of friends at my school.

Julia had none.

But summertime, my favorite time, had become her kingdom. Games of pretend turned violent, leaving bruises both physical and emotional that lasted weeks if not more. I stayed silent at the beach, at the movies, walking into town. I was reluctant to make a joke for fear of verbal assault. She had a talent for making me feel small and unimportant, fearful to express myself in my favorite place in the world with people whom I had known since birth.

My mother felt unable to do anything about it, acknowledging the fact that the "little bitch" had suffered more in thirteen years than most adults did in a lifetime. She suggested that the root of her relentless attacks was jealousy brought on by my closeness to my cousin, Maddie, who was also in our age group. The bond of blood was stronger than any that could

be forged even through childhood friendship, placing a permanent wedge between Julia and her best friend. That wedge was me.

By age fourteen I was done making excuses for her. When she tried to insult me, I laughed it off. If she excluded me, I shrugged and went and did something else. Slowly but steadily, her viciousness towards me began to ebb.

The summer before my freshman year in high school, Julia Mathews apologized.

We were sitting on a friend's dock, gazing up at the spatter of stars plastered across the velvet sky, the sound of crickets and small waves lapping at the shore breaking the nighttime silence.

"I know I was awful to you, and I'm really sorry. I wouldn't blame you if you never wanted to talk to any of us again, but honestly, the summer just wouldn't be the same without you."

A few days after that, I heard her discuss her father for the first time.

The events of September 11, 2001 reverberate through time.

Widows still sit in their bedrooms at night alone and crying when they think nobody can hear them. They cradle urns in their hands where the ashen remnants of a collarbone or ring finger are all that remain of a thousand moments and memories and smashed hopes and broken dreams.

Stone plaques still

sit in gardens, fighting to ensure that the names of the stolen are never forgotten, surrounded by small stones in the shapes of hearts.

Little girls with barely a memory of their fathers struggle to find a place in a world that forced them to understand the cruelty and unfairness of its reality far too young. They find themselves lashing out in unexpected places and at unassuming people.

Some things can never be fully understood.

It is sometimes nearly impossible to say for certain what moment, if any individually, triggers deep-seeded aggression or anger in another one of the complex creatures known to us as human beings.

I do believe that sometimes you can guess at it. Perhaps it begins in a cluttered bedroom filled with the things that little girls love, or maybe on the 84th floor of Tower Two of the World Trade Center on a bright autumn morning, where by evil the seeds of a thousand things infinitely more important than an irrational childhood feud are sown in heart-break and loss. ■

"I adored meeting funny, smart people who are just as passionate about writing as I am."

— Alison McDonald



Never Die

By TJ DAIGLER

Every day brings a new challenge, a new obstacle, a new opportunity to express ourselves as individuals. Sometimes the challenges turn out great, like when a job interview turns into a job, but other times, things don't work out as well. On November 25th, 2011, just one day after Thanksgiving, my Uncle Doug, the strongest, funniest, and sweetest person I know was diagnosed with throat cancer. It was a vast change from the day before. On Thanksgiving my family and my Uncle's family got together, sitting around the table, covered in Turkey, stuffing, bread rolls, cranberry sauce, squash, mashed potatoes, pies, and cookies, and had an unforgettable dinner. We ate, talked, and laughed, loving every moment, never thinking that such a deafening blow was just around the corner.

That night as my family drove home, we talked about how it seemed that Uncle Doug's voice had changed. It was weird, we thought, but didn't think too far into it. The next day after coming home from school I found my dad sitting outside, head in hands, tears streaming down his face.

Obviously I knew something was drastically wrong. I'd never seen my dad like this, teary eyed, unable to talk without choking up, in a state of complete shock. He sat there, grabbing his hair, hunched over, elbows on knees, crying. It was a hard thing to see, my dad in such a state of shock, in so much pain. Later I found out he had just gotten off the phone with his brother, my Uncle Doug, and had been told about the cancerous cells growing around Doug's throat. Those cells are what had altered his voice.

As the months have passed, Uncle Doug has had several successful chemotherapy operations, but the cancer always returns. My family and I head down to Boston to see him every once in a while, something we all enjoy and appreciate. It is amazing what an outstanding attitude he has retained, despite all the setbacks. That is the thing I have found most amazing about him. His optimistic attitude is a wonder to us all. It has taught me how precious life is, how unpredictable it is.

Recently we received some really terrible news. A doctor at Massachusetts General Hospital told Doug that he would have between six and twelve months left to live. They decided to put him on an experimental medicine, something fresh and new out of the lab. All that I heard, however, was that within the next

year the world would lose one of its best people. I took this hard. Even though I only see him once every month or two, I still feel really close to him. I love his outgoing ways, his optimistic attitude, his ability to make everybody laugh and smile, his appreciation for the simple things in life, and, above all, his way of loving everyone. Even though he is sick, he still wears his "fashionable" clothes. By fashionable I mean neon green hats, crazy colored flannels, and jackets in every color under the sun.

Just a couple weekends ago, Doug's company held a dance to benefit Doug. Hundreds of people, from across the country turned out to support this amazing man. The dance alone raised approximately \$10,000, which just goes to show the magnitude of the impact this man has had on so many people. The money was raised in several ways, from a live auction, to a silent auction, to donations, to raffles, and everything in between. One auction in particular was a Dance with Doug. One lady bid up to \$325, just for one last dance with Doug.

Doug is an amazing man. He stares death straight in the face day in and day out, yet always remains happy, joyful, goofy, strong, and optimistic that a miracle will happen. In the words of Doug, "I'm shooting for at least five to ten years." We love this attitude, this never die mentality. So even though the cancer may be killing his body, it will never kill his soul. ■



"I appreciated being surrounded by other young writers who shared the same love of writing that I do."

— Louisa Oreskes

The News

By CHRISTOPHER DELARA

She turned on the TV, saw the news, and packed her bags. She frantically threw her clothes in a floral-patterned suitcase and pulled a steel grey briefcase out from under her bed. After closing all the blinds and shutting off the lights, she briskly walked out the door and locked it behind her. The frigid December weather made the leather seats of her car cold to the touch, and she began to shiver in her cargo pants and brown leather jacket. She sped down the highway, and she began to rummage through her handbag. About a dozen passports fell from her bag, all from different countries, and she picked one from the pile and gripped it hard in her hand. It was an American passport stating she was from Hoboken, New Jersey. Her black sedan slowed to a stop at the end of a dirt road under a large steel bridge. She walked into a field of foxtails that were blowing in the wind, and came out with a large brown drape. She covered the car with the brown blanket, allowing her car to blend in with the landscape. The trunk popped open, she grabbed her suitcase as well as the steel briefcase, and began to walk toward the highway, following the signs to the airport. ■



“It was amazing how I could meet someone in the elevator and strike up a conversation immediately. It was surreal to be surrounded by people who were exactly like me. We were asked to produce three pieces by a deadline, but it didn’t feel like work. Between the fun social interactions and the good atmosphere, it was a great experience overall. Sitting on the windowsill in my dorm room, writing, was a relaxing way to unwind and end the night.”

– Meenakshi Chakraborty

Oliver

By MARIE ISABELLE DOYLE

No one knows where the small sad pieces come from. They drift like lazy clouds inside ourselves, assembling a puzzle of sorrow and enjoying the warm curls of an adolescent heart.

Have you ever woken up and felt as if the whole world had turned gray and old overnight? That was how my brother felt the morning after Oliver died six years ago. It scared the living hell out of him, because he felt gray as well.

My brother used to say that when he grew up he'd live in a big sunny city and every morning he'd go outside for an hour saying hello to everyone he met. It was a pretty idea. Now all he does is weep.

Oliver. He moved in down the street from us last May. Came trotting down the narrow road to our house, denim pockets jangling with what we'd later learn were painted bottle caps. He was wearing bowling shoes, I remember, and a bright red T-shirt.

Red was my brother's favorite color. Red, my brother said, was the color of alive. That was Oliver. Deep-sea lips and an open look in his eyes, skin like the earth after it rains. He came into our front yard where my brother was reading a book with his back against the apple tree and I was playing with toy trucks on the driveway.

Oliver, sweet perfect Oliver, sauntered up to me and plucked my nine-year-old hand as if it were a flower. Never taking his eyes off of mine, he kissed it and gave me an extravagant bow. Then he turned to my brother and stuck out his slender, graceful hand to shake. "Oliver," he said with his sunrise smile, and my brother smiled too.

"Just moved in yesterday down at #17, and all this unpacking has made me hun-ga-ry!" I remember his deep creamy voice. It felt like honey was being poured

into my ears.

"There's a shop two neighborhoods over," my brother told him. My brother's eyes were sticking to Oliver like crazy glue.

"Cool beans!" Oliver said. "Why don't y'all join me? My treat."

"Yes!" I yelled, tossing my truck to the side and leaping up. I watched my brother close his thick, old book. I remember that was the moment I knew for sure how special Oliver was—Oliver was somebody my brother would close his books for.

Over enormous bowls of soft-serve chocolate, my brother and Oliver emptied out their heads to each other, laughing loudly at all the same moments. I'd never seen my brother open up so quickly—but maybe that was Oliver. Oliver with his deep, wonderful laugh; Oliver with his alive eyes.

My brother fell in love with Oliver that summer, in every kind of way. And Oliver felt the same. I remember they'd go on bike rides together to the tops of mountains and hold hands and whisper to each other. My brother told me Oliver was a lavender envelope filled with bright, magnificent secrets, and I believed him.

Sometimes my brother and Oliver would take me along with them. One day we went for a hike and Oliver made me a crown of wildflowers, rumpling up my hair with his gossamer hands and calling me a princess. I loved Oliver. I loved his soft, easy grin and the noisy, starry way he loved my brother.

I remember that I ached that summer. I saw the sweet green thing my brother and Oliver held between their together hands and I craved it. To fit another human being with such perfect grace; I could not imagine what simple joy it would be.

Oliver died in the fall, the autumn time, along with the birds and flowers and the apple tree where we first met him. I could tell you he fell down the library steps and cracked his head. I could tell you all about the bleeding in his brain and the coma he was in for three hours and twenty-seven minutes before his end. But it doesn't matter, none of it matters. What matters is that Oliver was the most beautiful boy I'd ever met, and my brother loved him, and he loved my brother. What matters is that Oliver was the truth.

I think about how my brother would tell me all the little things about Oliver that made up his love. How my brother would look at pictures of Oliver before he went to sleep; how my brother's thin, pale hands looked like cream against Oliver's deep brown fingers. How when Oliver and my brother met it was like the lights went out and all they saw were each other's souls. I remember when they'd leave to go on one of their adventures, to try to find butterflies in the city or volumes of poetry in second-hand bookstores, leaving me at home with my toy trucks and sidewalk chalk. Sometimes it made me feel alone. I was happy, you know, for my brother, though he faded as a character in my life that summer. But now I find myself coveting that love. I even find myself begrudging my brother's happiness, though Oliver is over.

Oliver isn't the small sad piece in my heart. It is the aching when I saw him with my brother. It is the loss of my brother, and now that I am fifteen it is the longing for that Oliver kind of love. The yearning is the small sad piece.

Have you ever felt stranded on the shore of other people's love?

Tell the truth. ■

Heart on my Sleeve

By NICOLE DUSANEK

The pads of my fingers slowly pull at the edge of my left wrist. They pause as they come across the risen skin right below the length of my thumb. My index finger begins to trace the small scar-like fixture permanently etched on the canvas of my body. This miniscule mark has impacted my life as if a boulder had fallen from a peak and landed directly in my path of choices, leaving only a single trail left for me to travel. It left me stranded on a dead end.

I've had it forever. My parents love to tell me the story of when I was born, how the doctor held me in his arms and my parents saw his eyes widen at the sound of my cry. They said that they had never heard a baby cry like I did, that my tears were musical and filled with actual emotion—emotions that they didn't know a baby could comprehend. I would laugh at that part in their narrative; how could they tell so much from the sound of crying? But they would insist that they did. I guess the doctor did too, because after I had paused in my wails to take a breath, his eyes glanced toward my wrist.

"You're going to have to be careful with this one, she is going to be fragile," the doctor said to my mother as he handed me to her. They never told me, but I am sure the doctor's eyes filled with relief at the fact that I was not his

and he no longer had responsibility for me. My mother then looked toward my wrist before looking toward my father. I always wondered what they thought after they saw my deformity.

My earliest memory would be when I was in my crib. My father stood above me with two of his friends at both of his sides. One of them said to him, "She'll be sensitive," and the other said, "You'll have to watch every word." My dad just stood there silently, and shook his head only letting a small sigh escape his lips. One of his buddies patted him on the shoulder.

My dad doesn't know I remember this. I don't want him to feel bad. Maybe he wouldn't, people just don't feel like I do.

I have never had any friends. It's too difficult to make friends when you cry at the sunset because it is the death of day, and when you can't go to the beach because, when you watch the waves claim each footprint left in the sand, you can't help but sob for the loss. I had to be home schooled. I didn't act like the other kids or react to certain moments like the other kids did.

My parents tried to put me in pre-school. It took me two hours to calm down after my mother left. Then at recess, I had a breakdown because one of

the bubbles I blew popped. I never went to school after that.

So now as I am looking at this small shape on my skin, only slightly larger than a freckle, I can't help but think life would be better without it. It would only take a second. What is a second of pain compared to a lifetime of it?

I am twiddling a sleek knife between my pointer-finger and thumb. I guess now is the time I should be grateful that I am right handed. One, two, three; quickly so that I do not have the opportunity to back out, I slice the fixture away from my wrist.

I feel a sharp pain and then nothing. By nothing, I honestly mean nothing. My emotions evaporate as if they had never existed. I think I am empty. I wonder how I feel about that? Taking the thin piece of skin with my heart on it, I place it in a box. It's gone. I should feel relief, but I don't.

I pull my sleeve down to cover my wrist. I'm not bleeding.

"Mom, Dad?" I call from my room.

They come upstairs, and I ask

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"My two summers here have been so important to me as a person, and as a writer. I've made amazing friends who I know will always support my creative work."

— Michelle Waters



Heart on my Sleeve (continued)

them if I can go to school. Mom worries at first, “Oh honey, are you sure? You don’t have to.”

Dad is excited. He hides it though, and tries to act like a caring father. “Why the change of heart?”

I convince them I can work through my emotions. They believe me. I’m starting school on Monday.

From there on, things are pretty good. People seem to like someone who doesn’t have any emotions. I wonder why? I think it’s because nothing is there to tie me down. I don’t worry about getting embarrassed, nothing makes me sad, I am carefree. This means I make a lot of friends. My parents never ask me why I wear long sleeves in the summer. I think they know, and if they don’t ask, then they don’t have to admit anything to themselves.

I forgot where the box with my heart in it is. Oh well.

It’s Friday, and I don’t want to be at school. Everyone overthinks things at school, and I don’t want to think. I decide to go to the

beach. The ghost of an emotion is tied to my memories of the beach. I think it is called “calm,” but what do I know?

I find a shady spot just below a pier. I lean against a post, and look out toward the waves. I watch the footprints wash away with the tide. This time, I don’t have an urge to sob.

But I hear a sob. Startled, I look around, and my eyes land on a boy my age just a few feet away from me. There are tears on his cheek as he watches the waves whisk away the sand. I can’t help but stare, and before I realize what is happening his eyes meet mine.

I am frozen in place. His eyes on mine plant a seed that sprouts and roots grow through my feet and anchor me to the sand. He stands up and begins to walk toward me. As he nears my side I can’t help but glance at his wrist.

And there it is, a heart on his sleeve.

He tells me hello, and I say hi back. And days go on, and we con-

tinue to meet in the same place on the beach. When I’m with him, I feel what I haven’t felt in years. He is kind, and I am cold. But he begins to melt the ice crystals around my skin.

Finally, we meet again on the beach, and when I look at his wrist I notice familiar scars that I carry with me. I look up in horror, for I have finally understood how empty I have become, and do not wish the same fate onto him.

“Relax,” he whispered, putting his scarred hand onto mine.

Then he hands me a box that holds his heart, and tells me that he wants me to have it. I feel a sadness that I haven’t felt in years, for as I search my thoughts I cannot possibly remember where the box with my heart in it is. I have nothing to give to him in return.

I looked up into his eyes, and said, “But I don’t know where my heart is, I have nothing to give you.”

To which he responds with a smile and says, “Don’t worry, I’ve had it all along.” ■



“I came here for the writing, but as the week went on I learned so much more. The people I met I will never forget. On the very first day, everyone was welcoming. The faculty was very outgoing and got to know us all almost immediately. The RAs were down to earth and allowed us the freedom we deserved. They even brought us to see fireworks. It is an experience I will never forget.”

– Nicole Dusanek

Phase Shift

By ANDREW FEDOROV

Moscow was gray—its sky, perpetually sooty; its buildings, the gray homogenous depression blocks of the Soviet era with a few sharp glass structures of the modern era. This was a world where the ruthless lust for the grand cash riches of life, denied by the Soviet government for so long, ruled the minds of the “liberated” populace. From the minds of the largest new oligarchs to those of the smallest shop owners attempting to get rid of competitors, a single money grubbing need festered. In this world journalists were killed for the simple maintenance of power, a large percentage of people in jail had been put there by their business competitors, and my father was selling medical equipment for that invasive species, the American company. They thought only of material riches and applied to life a perverted, extremist form of capitalism.

Yet in this cut-throat post-Soviet Russia my life was bright, in contrast to the dim post-Soviet grays and crimsons. It was the short lived sepia of childhood, broken only by the occasional rays of light escaping past the iron clouds and piercing my smiling eyes. I went to *sadiik*, or a sort of pre-kindergarten program where my main memory is the routine break in schooling for lunch. We would have borscht and tea on red flowery table cloths creating a quaint old Russian feel.

Despite what seemed like stability in my daily routine, the world around me was morphing beyond what it had ever been. This seemingly idyllic period was snipped and transposed when I was five. My parents had been traveling abroad at the time and I was lost in curtains of confusion

at my grandparents’ apartment whenever they were gone.

It turned out, as I know now, that my parents were finding a house in a city, which means nothing but a blip on the news to New Yorkers and news junkies and nothing at all to most people. And so we moved from the dirt-dusted downtown to the American suburbia.

I was all right with it as far as language went. I’d been bilingual since I’d been able to speak because my mother spoke English to me and my father and nanny spoke to me in Russian. But no child wants to move. Milan Kundera says somewhere that by instinct humans find happiness in routine and habit and children are clearly the humans most influenced by instinct because of their lack of cultural conditioning. Senile people react similarly because of their loss of cultural conditioning. So for a child to have such a drastic change in routine is disconcerting to say the least.

My last day at the *sadiik* the other children presented me with a flower made of paper. It was a sort of origami but innately Russian in construction and the rough texture of paper. The children, though I was friendly with many of them, presented it without true sentiment and only as a matter of course, as children do.

We celebrated my last birthday in Russia at our apartment before we left. I was turning five. I accepted the wishes of my family while sitting on the life-size stuffed tiger while hearing but not really listening.

We boarded the plane and flew over Europe and the deep blue Atlantic. Upon landing at JFK the first memory I have of this country was seeing my grandfather,

who along with my grandmother, uncle and mother had been released by the Soviets in the 70s, though my mom went back in the 90s. He was leaning against his white minivan with the gruff impatient look that usually inhabits his face.

We took the long journey along the quiet highways. Slumping against the window, I watched the light tape on the poles by the highway blend into a simple mellifluous stream of light as the headlights hit them. We traveled on to Albany and the suburb where the house lay—Guilderland.

I took my first stroll about the yard, not seeing anything in the night’s total dark. I believed it was a land of infinite stretches of emptiness.

I gave up the search for substance in this land of naught and succumbed to the exhaustion that rose from out the flight and ride. I crawled up the stairs with a lead from my parents and into my new room which remained dark. I collapsed on the bed in my new bedroom with the same soft bedclothes that I had in the old Moscow apartment.

When I awoke I was in a room that I had never seen before, with furniture that was new. I put on new clothes and walked outside. The new world arose around me with the sun and all was illuminated. The material was of a different sort, but I knew the world was at least material. As the sun dusted my new home I gazed out on the plethora of new things that inhabited the place and decided it certainly wasn’t nothing. It was a world ripe for exploration, a world fit to savor, a brave new world. ■

One Job

By EMILY HONEN

Nikki, we're all going to die." "Ian. A.J. Meena. Guys. Pull yourselves together." Nikki clicks off the speaker and hangs up the telephone, their harbinger of doom, and locks the door. She wipes her hands on her skirt, then begins scanning the room with an eerie calmness.

"Nikki, we're all going to fucking die!" Ian repeats it, his head falling into his hands, gripping his hair. "Oh my God, my God my God! This isn't real! Security is tracking a serial killer in our dorm?!"

"Shut up, Ian. I have a plan."

"What plan?" A.J. shrieks through her tears.

"A plan to stop this asshole, and you guys need to pull together and help me. Please." She puts her hands on A.J.'s quivering shoulders and Nikki can feel herself change from smooth and eerily calm to pleading and comforting. "You need to help us not die."

"How?" Meena squeaks from her hiding place in the closet.

"Everyone gets a job. One job. If you all do your job and do it right, I promise you, we are going to live."

Nikki stands at the uselessly locked door of the dorm room and looks around with quick, darting motions for potential weapons. She spots things that most people would find mundane—a towel, some pencils, zip ties. But to her, they are like guns, flamethrowers, and chloroform.

She knows she has to do this quick, quick, quick, quick, before her or any of her hyperventilating friends begin to hear the heavy footsteps of the killer making his way up to their locked-down room on the top floor. Then it will be too late to reason, and she will not be able to plan. As long as she doesn't hear him, she can convince herself that everything is okay, and she will be able to plan.

"Okay. Ian, you take this towel. You go first. When I give the signal, jump down from the top bunk and wrap it around his eyes. That's all. Meena, Sarah, you guys take these pencils. All you have to do is jam them into his legs. Like, repeatedly. Annoy him."

"How—" Sarah raises her hands, mouth widening quickly.

"No questions. It's to distract him, like, so he won't just be hitting

one or two of us. Trust me, Sarah, it's gonna work. I watched it on a T.V. show once," Nikki lies easily, false words floating off of her tongue. Going into the pre-law-school program was a good choice for her.

"A.J., I know you're scared, so you can have these." As if giving

her some candy, Nikki hands A.J. a pair of scissors. "You don't have to use them. All you have to do is hold the guy's other arm while I grab his gun. Comprendes?"

"Uh, yeah... I guess."

She can hear the footsteps.

"Remember. One job and we're going to live."

They're getting closer. Nikki fiddles with her hair, twists her fingers like she is tying a knot. Jitters jitters jitters.

"Everybody hide. Ian, top bunk. Sarah, bookshelf. Meena, closet. A.J., behind the door with me. Okay. Okay, okay, okay."

She can't bring herself to check the keyhole, the footsteps are too close.

Ian scrambles up, clutching his towel as though it alone can save his life. Meena scuttles over to the closet while Sarah cowers behind the bookshelf.

Oh, closer. Closer, closer, he is definitely on their floor, running from the police, needing to kill, desperate to kill.

Nikki grasps the zip ties, her makeshift handcuffs, tightly. The room holds its breath.

There are many things that can go wrong. Anyone could freeze, fuck-up their one job. He may be carrying a chainsaw or a knife instead of a gun. He will almost certainly overpower a bunch of young teenagers armed with pencils and a towel.

But Nikki knows that there are two eventual outcomes.

Either they live, or they die.

She doesn't know which one.

And judging by the heavy breathing she can hear just outside the door, Nikki knows that she is about to find out. ■



Anxiety is a Corruption of the Mind: A Villanelle Poem

By MADISON HUGHES

Anxiety is a corruption of the sincere mind
A parasite invasion
Purging thoughts that are kind

Anxiety is here to blind
Prisoners from reality
Anxiety is a corruption of the sincere mind

Fears of people, pain, and pressure unwind
They rampage on this restless night
Purging thoughts that are kind

I struggle for a remedy to find
To leech out the intruder
Anxiety is a corruption of the sincere mind

Serenity is the savior for which we have pined
Interfering are the infinite insecurities
Purging thoughts that are kind

We labor over our thoughts uncouth
Rather than confront the trident of our troubled truth
Anxiety is a corruption of the sincere mind
Purging thoughts that are kind.

“Everything I learned and did this week has been absolutely amazing. This week forced me to write and forced me outside my comfort zone when it comes to writing. The whole week was beneficial and, if I weren’t a senior, I’d come back in a heartbeat.”

– Erin Besse



Baghdad, Iraq, 2002

By ANNA JACQUINOT

His worn leather boots are filling with sand.
Through the abandoned soles and fraying strings
Clamor gruesome tales of a distant land
Of spears and knives cut through delicate wings.
As the angels fall and the devil reigns,
The torches set fire to their last glowing light.
Only a silk strung last message remains
For a mourning girl who watches the night.
His cold lips are pursed, and grey eyes are closed.
He sinks deeper into bottomless dunes.
His opened buttons leave his wounds exposed
As Arabic sands veil corpses and ruins.
The soldier's last letter was never read.
They take only his shoes and leave the dead.



Untitled

By LAUREN JOLY

I love a cloud when it gets lonely
and meshes with the others
Though I hate sudden rain
as it excites younger brothers

I hate when one can't hold a conversation
I love to be the one with that power
Yet sometimes I hate caring so much
like I'm tending to a wilting flower

I love the way they smile
and I hate the way they smile
because I want that as my own

But just like with the clouds, the rain, the talk
I love and hate alone



Death From the Afar

By MAX KLEINER

When my parents hadn't come home, one day in my freshman year of high school, I knew something was up. They generally came home by 6:30, and if they were going to be later than 9:00, they told me. But today was different; I hadn't heard from either of them all day, and by 9:05, I'll admit I was getting nervous. The phone rang.

"Hey Max, it's Steph, your Dad asked me to tell you that he and Katie are dealing with some stuff in Jersey, and will be coming home late."

"Thanks Steph."

I hung up the phone quietly. Late night 'stuff to do' in New Jersey on a weeknight? 'Stuff to do' that they couldn't tell me about themselves? I don't know how I knew my uncle was dead, maybe it was just a lucky guess.

When my parents came home, I waited downstairs for them, pretending that I was simply preparing a snack as they walked in the door. It was my mom's day to set up the coffee machine for the following morning, so I stayed downstairs with her while my father went upstairs to take off his socks and lie down.

"Did Randy die?" I asked.

She turned her back to me as she poured coffee beans into a funnel, but I knew it was so. I couldn't see her face as she let out a weak "yes."

My stomach dropped. I wasn't upset because I knew my uncle was dead, or even that my mom was crying over the coffee maker. I was upset that the only thing I felt was the satisfaction that came with accurately predicting what happened to Randy.

My mom had no blood relation to Randy; he was my father's brother, and they never seemed to

be particularly close. I couldn't understand why she was more upset than I was.

The funeral didn't make me feel better. My grandfather couldn't be in the same room as Randy's body; my grandmother cried as she placed some of Randy's favorite things, concert ticket stubs, a blue New York Knicks blanket, and pictures of his children, into his coffin. I just looked at the man with unblinking eyes. I was interested in his cheeks; they were sagging down because there was no more life in them to fight gravity.

The only other people at the funeral who didn't seem upset were Randy's children. At the time they were young; I believe David was eight and Emily was six. My dad said it was better this way, easier. They were too young to fully understand the implications of their father's death. Too young to know that the man who was supposed to teach David to be a man was never coming back. That the man who was supposed to carry Emily on his shoulders while she ate an ice cream was gone. I understood what was happening, I even expected it to happen, but I couldn't feel it happen.

A couple of days before the funeral, I had told my history teacher that I was going to be absent and needed an extension on my term paper because of all of the family obligations that were coming up over the next week. "I'm sorry to hear that Max, it's been a tough year for you." This was the third day of school that I was going to miss this year because of funerals. I wanted to say, "Don't worry about it, I don't even really care," but I didn't. I thanked him for his condolences.

The first two funerals I went to that year I only attended to give moral support. My best friend's grandparents had both died that year, first his grandmother, then, a few months later, his grandfather. I stayed by my best friend's side the entire time at both events, silently accepting condolences from guests with him. I felt honored when he and his family invited me to ride with them in the procession to the graveyard out in Long Island. The Rabbi began saying prayers. The coffin went deeper and deeper into the ground. I noticed a tear trickle down my friend's face. I hadn't seen him cry in years.

I never felt bad about being unaffected by my friend's grandparents' death. Those days had nothing to do with me. I was there to be by my friend's side while we were stuck in traffic, starving, on the way back from Long Island to sit Shiva at his house. But now, when my friend was there to support me, I didn't need it. I didn't even cry.

I would have felt better if I hadn't known Randy, but I did. I remember the time he explained the New World Order and Stone Mason conspiracies to me, and when he gave me a T-shirt from a Snoop Dogg and Fifty-Cent concert. We were never close, but the fact that we were family should have meant something.

He was my father's brother, and, standing over his open casket, I couldn't help but think about how little he looked like a man who had been hit by a train. I stared into his closed eyelids. Maybe, I thought, if I stare long enough, something will change. ■

Strong Materials

By JULIANNA LEIGHTMAN

The plastic rib sits hard beneath my own
and rubs to raw the heavy flesh above
this slab of cartilage and weakened bone.

The math is done,
the work was clearly shown,
the x-rays laying plain each crooked cove.
The plastic rib sits hard beneath my own.

They will not look at all the seeds they've sown
and tell me sourly that I should love
this slab of cartilage and ugly bone.

But look at me! See how my body groans
below the weight of theories I can't prove!
The plastic rib sits hard beneath my own

uncertainty, a smooth but heavy stone
so gently placed atop the molding grave
that holds this slab of cartilage and bone.

And see, my heart pumps slowly to postpone
the foul collapse it knows is on the way.
This plastic rib sits hard beneath my own
unlovely slab of cartilage and bone.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime, life-changing experience for me. I have never learned more or met better people than I have here."

– Hannah Levin



Not Sad

By HANNAH LEVIN

I wasn't sad. I should have been sad. I should have been shocked, or sobbing, or at least scared. But I felt absolutely nothing.

My mom, my sister and I were in the bagel store when the news came. My mom hadn't been in a good mood that day even before this had happened. I forget why. The ringing of her cell phone didn't help the situation. She felt around in her black hole of a purse until she found it, and then a look of dread crossed her face as she read the caller ID.

"Your grandpa's calling. I should take this." We knew what was coming as soon as she said those words.

She took the call, leaving my sister and me standing alone. In that moment my mother was not across the bagel store, but instead in another dimension, far away from us. After she hung up it took her a minute to take the journey back. She looked mournful as she returned to us.

"Uncle Irv is dead."

Uncle Irv. Dead. He'd been sick for a while, and I hadn't been close to him. He was always present at family gatherings, but he

didn't speak to me or my sister or our cousins. Instead he talked to the adults and ate the sugar-free cake I always hated buying. We got it for him. He was diabetic. That was the sum total of my knowledge of him.

We weren't close. I knew that. I had from the moment he'd gotten sick. But I hadn't expected to have the reaction to his death that I did: namely, none. I should have felt something driving to his funeral. I should have felt something watching my family mourn. I should have felt something throwing the shovelful of dirt onto his coffin. I should have felt something when the realization set in that he was truly gone from this world forever. But I didn't. Only guilt.

I listened to all the speeches about him. How smart he was, how he'd spend hours at the library, how quickly he did puzzles, how he adored movies, how he could complete the Sunday crossword in half an hour. Things I hadn't known. I wondered what it would have been like if I knew him. If I'd done puzzles with him or talked to him

about school. If I'd known him for anything other than being the reason I was forced to eat bad cake. Would I have been his friend? Would he have lent me books? Would he have recommended movies?

Would I have visited at the hospital when he was sick? Would I be mourning now rather than simply feeling guilt?

My mother brought us to our grandparents' house after that. Being surrounded by mourners was not helpful to my emotional turmoil. I remember that I kept trying to muster some sadness, or trying to cry. Maybe if I could appear sad, that would make things better somehow. And I did. I cried. I cried because my uncle was a person and he was dead, and that was sad, but beyond that I still felt nothing, and I couldn't stand it. I couldn't take watching my grandparents, mother, and aunt so upset, and not having a clue how to sympathize.

I am a horrible person. That thought kept running through my head. My uncle is dead and I do not care. My family is crying. I should be crying. Why am I not crying? Because I am a horrible person.

It echoed through my head driving home, and the next few days I could not get it out of my mind. Everything I did, a voice nagged in the back of my head: Your uncle is dead, it hissed. He is dead and you are completely unaffected. You are a soulless, heartless, horrible person.

It's only looking back that I realize that maybe I'm not a horrible person. Maybe some things simply don't affect certain people. Maybe you're not supposed to mourn someone you didn't ever know.

Maybe I'm just human. ■

"This is a very unique experience, and everyone is extremely friendly. From the first day I came here, I felt welcomed."

- Lynn Wang



love poem

By ANJIE LIU

how to write a love poem
having never kissed your eyelids, my lower lip bitten
by your eyelashes colorless to me at this present moment,
having never tasted the salts of your neck
or heard the crinkles of your lips unwrap,
smooth as you smile to me,
having never heard the groans
of your turning ankles, your sighing hips,
although I have already done all that years ahead;

I can only recount the outlines of your face, your torso,
the weight of your name on my tongue, your lettered thoughts
or at least the ones you share with me (half of which
I will keep for myself), all plucked from the hands of yesterday
and the moment we just left

where between our quick past and unspoken future,
I meet your soul, or whatever you have to love me,
above the tangible messes of cities and oceans between us
so that one day (I'm sure) when we fall down,
my fingers in yours,
we'll have everything

so until then, I wait, satisfyingly impatient, for the day
I see the world through the tilt of your chest,
rising and falling
at the mathematically perfect angle,
the Golden Ratio of my universe.

“The week here has shown me that there are other teenagers like myself who genuinely love to write. It was shocking to me to be around other kids who really liked sharing what they wrote and getting feedback. I have never before stayed up until 1 a.m. doing an impromptu poetry reading.”

– Marie Isabelle Doyle



Lavender Mountain

By IAN MCCLURE

Tyler Grayson had been followed for years, haunted and hunted by someone or something that refused to give up. He didn't know what it wanted, or even what it really looked like. Most people now treated Tyler like some estranged elder relative who was broken and delusional but still held some place in their hearts. They didn't understand that he hadn't made this choice for himself, or that he didn't want to seem like some crazy bastard who couldn't trust anyone. Staying around his friends and family who gave him looks of helpless condolence whenever he described his lurking omen was too much to handle. So Tyler left.

Now, thousands of miles away from his old life in Arizona, the wind was berating his helmet and tearing at his clothes as he began to descend down a steep and snaking mountain slope on an old European motorcycle. The deep blue waters of the Dalmatian Coast looked calm and soothing, almost like an invitation to see just how far this thing would go to follow him. He didn't even know how to speak to the Croatian locals around him. At this point there had been too many countries, languages, and cultures that were all failed attempts to blend in and escape. No matter where Tyler went, he was followed.

In China, he had heard scuttling feet in his hotel room and proceeded to search for it for hours to no avail. The outdoor market in Bangladesh was where something had kept incessantly pulling at his clothes and then disappearing the moment he turned around. It had been like this in every new country. Tyler would constantly catch glimpses of his pursuer darting around corners, or maybe he just felt it. But there

was something, a shadow or blur of movement, when he would turn around quickly to catch it. The most recent encounter with his unwanted acolyte had been in an Italian taxicab. The driver was taking his client, the very jumpy Mr. Grayson, to a new hotel outside of Rome so that he could get away from the crowded city.

Tyler, as always, was looking out the windows and checking the rear view mirror for any chance to see it. Cities were exhausting due to the fact that there were almost an infinite number of places that it could hide and retreat to whenever he noticed its presence. At this point, he could almost feel it when it was close by. Or maybe he smelled it, or tasted it in the air. This ceaseless stalker had infiltrated all of his senses and conquered his consciousness. In the cab, he could feel every part of his body covered in a cold, static sweat. And for a brief flash, it was there. Although the cab driver denied it, Tyler swore he could see its eyes. Maybe it was for a split second. He never saw a body, or even a face. Just a pair of deep green eyes staring back at him in the rear view mirror for a split second.

As the trees and strange rock formations flashed by on his way down the mountain, Tyler wondered over and over again if he had really seen those eyes. He could smell the lavender still, coming from the plantation on the top of the mountain that was run by an old lady who had spoken no English. While on top of the hill, he told her everything about the thing that was following him. She sat there the whole time listening while her son packed his bike full of lavender soaps and incense and all sorts of useless things. At the end of his story, she smiled warmly and said, "Ako

vjerujete da vjerujem." Unfortunately, Tyler never had a chance to find out what she said to him.

He tore around the corner down the perilous slopes, and before he knew what to do with himself, it was there. Right before the next turn, not even twenty feet away, he could see it. It wasn't more than four feet tall, and its skin was a sickly shade of pinkish yellow. It didn't look real, and Tyler wasn't even sure if it was. He just saw the thin arms and legs, protruding rib cage, sharp teeth, and intensely green eyes. He barely had time to take in its gaunt and horrifying features before he was upon it. Instead of hitting the breaks, he just kept going. He drove straight through it—all the way through and right off the side of the lavender mountain.

Tyler saw the majestic blue water of the Adriatic below him. It looked calm and soothing, almost like an invitation to see just how far this thing would go to follow him. Moments before he hit the waves and headed to the last place he would ever go to escape, he thought to himself, "I was right."

The other drivers that saw Tyler Grayson's incident were interviewed and questioned. None of them said anything about a short, sickly creature with green eyes. They just remember seeing a foreign man riding without a helmet and a grin on his face as he went over the edge. Some reporters drove all the way to the top of the mountain, where they found an old woman who smelled like lavender. She told them about her visitor and what she said to him right before he left. "Ako vjerujete da vjerujem." "If you believe, I believe." ■

The Beautiful People

By ALISON MCDONALD

These girls are everywhere,
like field mice in weather-beaten bungalows.
They live in shiny bubbles,
smelling like fake vanilla deodorant and hard candy.
They live their lip-glossy lives with their best friends
sticking knives in their sides,
piercing ears and hearts.
No one else exists beyond their vacuum-sealed airtight airhead galaxy
where the sky is dotted with movie stars.

They will grow up someday
and become their bottle-blond minivan mothers
washed out from too much laundry.
Maybe a few will be those cool moms
who let them do anything,
get punch drunk on the spiked punch.

Seventy, eighty years from now,
they will lie dying beneath musty floral bedspreads,
as their lives flash before their eyes.

“This week has helped me discover what it is about my personal life that I can write about. I’ve never considered myself somebody who is good at or enjoys writing nonfiction but this week has helped me realize how much I truly love it. I’ve discovered a new passion and love for writing that I didn’t feel so strongly before. I now know not only that I want to write, but I know what I want to write.”

– Tara Cicic



The Men Who Sold the World

By CLEMENTINE MORSE

In their bald heads anxiety curled
He licks the sweat off his face
They are the men who sold the world

They accuse themselves of lies unfurled
The salty bead of sugar they taste
In their bald heads anxiety curled

The swill and soot in a timetable swirled
By each other they are chased
They are the men who sold the world

Their teacup dancers mourned and twirled
Away with arms wide to a worse place
And in their bald heads anxiety curled

A glass football is repeatedly hurled
At their suits, slick with mace
They are the men who sold the world

Born to rags already gnarled
The lock is betrayed by its case
In their balding heads anxiety curled
They are the men who sold the world



“The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has been an absolutely amazing opportunity. I met awesome people with similar interests. We all became friends instantly. My writing skills and areas of interest have expanded greatly during my time here. This was a valuable experience that I will carry with me for a very long time.”

– Samantha Clark

State of Confusion

By BRIGID NEUMANN

My head felt like it was under enormous pressure. If the pressure became any higher, it would explode. My palms were frigid, but sweat swam out of them. I could feel my heart pounding in even my pinky toe. My legs and arms shook as I tried to force out the words I'd held back for so long.

I couldn't find my tongue, no matter how hard I searched for it. And my mouth was dry, as if I'd eaten a spoonful of cinnamon. Thankfully, my desk chair kept me from collapsing.

Haru was sitting on my bed with an impatient stare, as I tried to get the words out. But how could I tell him, and would our friendship ever be the same?

"Spit it out," he says, flustered. This woke me from my trance-like state.

"Haru, I think, I might possibly be just a little somewhat, slightly, a teeny-weeny bit," I paused, "partly gay."

I felt my bloodless face gain some color in embarrassment, hoping to God he's ok with it. I expected everything from horror, surprise, disgust, emptiness, anger, disbelief, maybe even happiness. But he did the one thing I never even dreamed of. Never even considered a possibility.

He kissed me.

I can't say it was pleasant, because I was still freaking out with the shakes. He kissed me and I'd expected him to ditch and run.

I watched him pull back. The closet gay, the guy with the culturally correct girlfriend. The leader of debate club. Captain of the tennis team. My best friend was gay, or at least questioning, or bi.

I could not understand what was happening. I knew I was gay, I could feel it in my core, but to tell people that? There's no chance to go back. Once words are said, you

cannot change them, no matter how hard you try.

"Don't tell anyone!" he said angrily, and I didn't know if it was with me or himself.

"Don't worry, I won't. But I am going to tell other people that I'm... gay..." His eyebrows pulled together and his cheeks turned down.

"Do you think they'll suspect anything?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so," I said casually, but it hit me like a train. What if Haru was too ashamed to be my friend now? Sure, I have other friends to fall back on, but they're not Haru. I remember endless lonely days when Haru was the only one around. We told each other all our secrets; I guess it's only fit we know this secret.

Haru stepped away from me and my eyes followed his footsteps toward the door.

"If you value our friendship you won't tell anyone about what happened," he said, leaving me sitting alone in my bedroom.

The next day, I walked down the hallway. How was I going to tell people? Actually, did I even have anyone to tell?

My eyes traveled upward to see Haru and his girlfriend, Emily, walking down the hallway. Haru diverted his brown eyes, but Emily had no such aversions.

"Hey Rian!" she called to me from across the hall.

I cringed, "Hey Em."

"So, me and Haru are going on a date Saturday, and you should definitely get a girl and come with us."

"Um...yeah..." I trailed. Emily and I were never really close. Haru only dated her because his father wants him with a respectable Asian girl. I personally think she doesn't have much personality.

"What, no one you're interested in?" she raised an eyebrow in an

attempt to look sly.

"Yeah, no girls. Listen... I've got to get to class, catch you later." My footsteps dragged behind me as I trudged away. Haru hadn't even so much as look at me. What had I expected? Him to run into my arms and proclaim to the world he was gay? I haven't even come out yet and I can't see him out before me.

When lunch rolled around, I avoided the crowded cafeteria. I just sat in the library, reading a book and starving. Eating wasn't allowed, but I just couldn't face Haru in the cafeteria.

Maybe it'd be better to talk about what happened. I could imagine it.

"Hey, you realize you kissed me right?" I'd say.

"Of course, I was there! Do you realize I kissed you?" he'd respond. He'd try to play it cool, but I'd know he didn't want to talk about it. He would try to avoid the subject forever if he could.

After school I walked back home dejectedly. I'd planned on coming out today, but who was there to tell? Who but Haru? And Haru was too stubborn.

"Rian! Rian!"

I turned at the sound of my name being called, only to see Haru stumbling over his feet and struggling to catch up with me.

"I need to tell you that I had no idea what I was doing yesterday. I'm sorry, I just have no idea what's happening to me."

"It's ok, Haru. You can always count on me to help you figure things out."

Once again, he kissed me, and this time I kissed back. We weren't afraid of someone seeing us, although we should have been. We almost didn't think of the fact that we were both boys, that Haru's dad wanted him with an Asian girl. We almost even didn't think of Emily. Almost. ■

Ben

By LOUISA ORESKES

I remember the day my older brother came home crying in the days leading up to his high school graduation. It's funny to me, the idea of him vulnerable, and my big brother. The one who took care of me for half of my life. The one who taught me how to throw a baseball and who I always looked up to. I could hear through the thick wall the sounds of him crying.

My room was so neat, which is rare if you know me at all. I sat on my tightly made bed with my feet paved to my hardwood floor. My posture was at a ninety-degree angle opposed to my naturally slouched stature.

"Buddy, I'm right here next to you, every morning, every night, and playing Xbox is the alternate to us talking." I said these words in my head as if I were speaking right to Ben. As if there was no wall separation between my room and my parent's room, where he was most likely in my mom's arms, letting it all go. He can only do this when he feels absolutely hopeless and those moments are always scary to me. I knew why he was crying though. I wish I hadn't. I wish sometimes my parents had shielded me from the realities of the world I was growing up in. I knew from the get-go that when we moved back from Paris, after living there for three and a half years, me as a sixth grader, Ben an incoming sophomore in high school, his adjustment was going to be far from easy.

I had been exposed to art, culture, and kids from all around the world. Both Ben and I had a maturity that came with the package deal of being at an international school, having journalist parents, and living in one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

When we came back we both went

to the same private school in Manhattan where Ben would inevitably finish out high school and I would end up finishing middle school, but moving on to a bigger, specialized public high school.

Living there forced the two of us, Ben and me, along with my mom, to form a unit. We were all each other had, and we became best friends. However, when we re-entered the culture of the New York City world, he had to push me away. After all, he was a teenager, and I wasn't. The friends he made were far from the smart and worldly kids we had met at the American School of Paris. They were mean, rich, and self-centered.

The reason Ben was crying that day was not beyond me. It was very clearly due to the environment in which Ben had to fight for survival and acceptance in a group of kids who had known each other since birth in this small, private school world. Ben became mean. He was cruel to me and our relationship went down a dark path followed by his grudges against my father for making us move and my mom for not solving the instability in our lives that created collisions in his happiness. Since I was the youngest, I went from being thought of as a capable young human being worthy of talking with to having to just accept the issues my brother now faced.

My mom told me later that Ben had been sitting at a Super Bowl party with a group of his so-called "friends". My least favorite of his friends, let's call him John, had made a snide comment to Ben saying something like, "Pshh, Ben you don't belong here, we've all known each other forever, you're just the new kid!" All of his other "friends" had laughed at this, presumably nodding and agreeing. Yet what killed my mom

and me the most is that the parents around at the time had made comments agreeing with the immature teenagers who at this point were simply torturing Ben because now all he was, and all he ever felt he would be, was an outsider.

My mom walked out of the bedroom. The crying had stopped and I could hear the creak of her doorframe followed by the sounds of her footsteps getting louder. She appeared at my door. Her eyes were puffy but intensely focused, like she hadn't slept in days. Later I would learn she had cried due to the unbearable thought of other parents being mean to her son, her baby. She had always treated our friends with the utmost love, as if they were her children too.

"Your room, it's so clean, good, very good. I didn't want to have to make you clean, but you did it yourself," she said.

"Mom..." She interrupted me.

"No honey, not yet, give it time and get your shoes on honey, we're going out to dinner," she said to me.

I was the little sister who was incapable of helping my brother. The brother I loved so dearly. The brother with whom I had shared everything during our years in Paris. We had laughed in the Champ de Mars playing soccer beneath the Eiffel Tower with the other French boys, we had scootered to the bus every morning panting to catch our breath while simultaneously laughing. He was beyond my reach now because he couldn't see me as his equal. Because that would deny all the things that I tried to make him feel normal. I had to let him be miserable and reach states of sadness that scared me but were necessary. ■

Boom

By JULIA RANDALL

Fingers tapped and heads bobbed to the rolling gait of the rickety subway car on the tracks. The car was quiet except for the thumping beat from a boy's earphones and the occasional rustle of a newspaper. Suddenly, there was a loud boom and the three passengers in the car were sent flying.

The passengers awoke to the chilling sound of the emergency alarm. The car was wrecked, turned on its side with a deep dent down the middle nearly slicing it in half. The passengers groaned, and looked around slowly.

"Is everyone all right?" said a man dressed in a ruffled though well-tailored business suit. He stood up and brushed the dust off his pants. "Is anyone hurt?"

"My head fucking hurts like hell," grunted the teenage boy with his earphones still jammed in his ears. "Guess I'm alright though."

"What the hell was that?" frantically asked a woman in her early forties. She climbed out from under her seat and looked down to where she stood on a window. "What turned the car over?"

"How the fuck would I know?" the boy said irritably, narrowing his eyes. "It was so fast, I don't know what the fuck happened."

"Well what do we do? Isn't someone going to help us get out of here?" The woman's voice rose

to a tone of panic. She began wringing her hands.

The man sighed. "For now let's just stay calm. At least none of us was seriously hurt. We might be able to walk along the tracks until we get to a station."

"Are you crazy? We could be hit by a train! What if there are terrorists? Besides, the tracks are too narrow!"

"Hey, lady, if you've got a better idea, I'm all ears," spouted the boy, getting to his feet. "I just want to get out of here... alive." He looked away.

"Then we should stay in here and wait for help! And don't you call me 'lady,' my name is Clare."

"Anthony."

"I'm Steve," said the businessman. "Before we start panicking, I think we should at least take a look outside, see if people in the other cars are all right."

He pushed open the emergency window and hopped out before Clare could protest. He crouched on top of the overturned car, coughing in the dense cloud of smoke. The fluorescent squares lining the tunnel provided minimal light, but he could see that the other cars had been reduced to twisted hunks of metal and that portions of the ceiling had fallen in.

The dent in the middle of the sole surviving car was created by a column which had presumably fallen over in the commotion, and, Steve noticed, was the only thing keeping the ceiling from caving in on them.

"Guys, you should really take a look at this." The other two climbed out and crouched alongside him, following his gaze.

Clare gasped and looked around at the wreckage on either side of them. "A-Are we the only ones?"

"Who cares, we've gotta get out now before that ceiling caves!" Anthony said, fear in his voice.

"There's a railing on the other side, we can follow it out of here."

"No, we'd be safer inside the car! I mean, the ceiling wouldn't damage the car, would it?"

"See for yourself," said Anthony gravely. Clare reluctantly glanced down at the other crushed cars and her face contorted into a pained expression.

"We might as well go."

They each slid down the side of the car onto the tiny walkway. The fluorescent lights blinked ominously.

(continued on page 34)

"This week was great for meeting people who like writing just as I do. The one-on-one meetings were really helpful and I'll continue to remember the advice I've been given."

- Sarah Bailey



Boom (continued)

“Which way do we go?” asked Anthony. Both directions looked equally unfavorable.

“Left,” Steve grabbed the metal railing and led them down the narrow path into the cloud of smoke and fumes. They walked past the wreckage, trying not to think about all of the people who had perished.

“Is anyone out there?” yelled Steve. “Anyone?” There was only silence.

After a few minutes of walking, Steve squinted and sucked in his breath sharply. He stopped dead and reached out in front of him. He was met with a solid wall of rubble.

“Maybe we’ll have more luck in the other direction.” They turned around and headed the other way, Anthony leading them. As they approached the car they were in originally, Anthony paused.

“Is it just me, or is that column

lower than it was before?” Clare and Steve exchanged worried looks.

“We have to hurry!” Clare shrieked. The blood had drained from her face. They continued down the path, quicker this time. Within thirty seconds, Anthony groaned in frustration.

“This side is blocked off too.” Clare leaned around him for a better look. She sank down with her back to the wall and dissolved into tears. Steve put his hand on her shoulder.

“Help will come,” he said. “You’ll see.”

“What if they don’t get to us in time? What if the ceiling caves? We’re going to die!” Clare threw up her hands hysterically, crying even harder now.

“Come on, let’s stay rational, we’re not going to die,” Steve said, trying to comfort her.

“There’s no use in crying, anyway,” Anthony said hollowly.

There was dread in his voice. Clare continued sobbing convulsively, transitioning into a full-on mental breakdown.

“I didn’t get to say goodbye to my kids, m-my parents!” She exhaled deeply and was silent for a long time. “So that’s it then. It’s just... over.”

“Over,” Anthony repeated softly.

The car creaked under the weight of the pillar, and the three of them looked up at the crumbling ceiling. Steve began running his fingers through his greying hair. “No... No. It’s not supposed to be like this. No.” Anthony put his earphones back in and closed his eyes, head swaying to the music.

There was a low rumble above them and pieces of the ceiling began to fall down around them. Clare shut her eyes and her hands clenched into fists. Anthony tilted back his head and his lips twisted into a wide smile. ■



Untitled

By AJ RIO-GLICK

Why are we still awake?
An iridescence burns in your eyes and
You have a physical effect.

Little moments survive,
flitting up and away
In this hour we wear no disguise so
Why are we still awake?

Creating endless body byways
Nothing we do can be unwise
You have a physical effect

The world turns from night to day
And we are as up as the sunrise
Why are we still awake?

Let our hearts dance for there's no debt to pay
It's all a musical reprise
You have a physical effect

I listen to the way we say
I will, I want, I wish, no lies.
Why are we still awake?
Because you have a physical effect.

"I've just filled a week of my summer with continuous interaction with people who can actively and knowledgeably discuss the highest and lowest aspects of the world around us. It's been wonderful."

– Andrew Fedorov



The Black Death

By NICOLE SANCHEZ

The death is coming;
from all sides, the black consumes.
Shrouded by the dark lit night

the doctor arrives in his herbed bird mask.
The man lies there, the bleeding resumes--
the death is coming--

The priest enters, holy water in his flask,
granting absolution, ridding demons with fumes.
Shrouded by the dark lit night,

the man listens to the hollow echoes and follows the tracks
of those who've crossed the path of unknown glooms.
The death is coming...

The gravedigger comes, completes his task.
The wife pales, the children wail, the future looms,
shrouded by the dark lit night.

The plague spreads, hysteria ensues unmasked.
Repent, repent, avoid your several dooms;
Death is coming,
shrouded by the dark lit night.



“This week, I was completely surrounded by writers, which is incredibly rare. There were people constantly available to bounce ideas off, to trade literary opinions with, and to read pieces out loud to. I felt at home with the other writers here, even when we weren’t in class.”

– Julianna Leichtman

The Jump

By MICHAEL SHELDON

“Man, how’d you do it?” Grant Pearson pushed open the double glass door, his hand trembling as he reached into his pocket for a cigarette. “What do you mean?”

“I mean how’d you talk him down?” The voice of Chris Jensen, his colleague, was rife with excitement. “He looked just about ready to jump.”

“Well, y’know. I just talked to him,” Grant replied dismissively.

“Oh, come on! You must have—”

Grant interrupted: “You wanna go get some coffee?”

Chris chattered on about how sad it was that someone could take their own life, how strange the human mind was, how nice it was that this story had ended happily. The proclamations and clichés blended into mush in Grant’s mind. He didn’t want to talk about these things. He just wanted his iced Americano, and then a nap.

Grant was on the office balcony again. Wind whipped around, rain flew sideways. The man was standing at the edge. Grant tried to move to him, but his legs were sluggish and felt melded to the concrete platform beneath him. He screamed, “Stop!” but the exclamation was swept away like a feather in a hurricane. Grant heard a fluttering behind him and turned his head, but there was nothing there. He looked back up, and in the man’s place stood his mother, pale and sickly in her hospital robe.

“You think you saved me? You

think you saved me?” Her voice grew from a whisper to a full-blown wowl. “You gave me torment. That’s all there is.” He knew what came next. He reached his arms out and screamed, but he knew he was too late. She jumped. As he watched her fall, his view of the street obscured by the rain, piercing beeps faded into his awareness, and he awoke to his alarm clock. “Shit,” he muttered. It took him about another twenty minutes to get up and out of bed.

Grant sat with his red pen in hand, puzzling over a resolution between two parties he wasn’t allowed to talk about. He grabbed his plain black mug and took a long sip of coffee, and when he put it down he saw Chris Jensen standing in the doorway to his office.

“Hey Pearson,” he said brightly. Grant inclined his head slightly in response. “I was wondering if you’d be willing to talk about Monday now.”

“Why? It happened. It’s over.”

“Well, I emailed some guys at the *Times*, and they loved the story. They’re asking for—”

Grant sprang to his feet, slamming down his documents. “DAMN IT, CHRIS!”

“I’m trying to help you, Grant! You could be a fucking hero!”

“Shut up, Chris! Just shut up!”

The secretary from across the hall came in through Grant’s door, which was still ajar. “Is everything okay in here?”

“Yeah, we’re fine,” said Chris in a measured tone. He left the room,

and after giving Grant a concerned look, the secretary followed.

Grant sighed, swirling his coffee as he willed his heartbeat to even out. Just as he re-gathered his documents and picked up his red pen, the phone rang. Grant shut it out and let it ring, drawing lines across faulty clauses and notating his corrections as he waited for the secretary to pick it up instead. About ten seconds after it stopped ringing, she came back into his office. “Grant, it’s the hospital. I told them you were busy, but they say it’s about your mother.” Grant’s stomach turned to stone. “Thanks,” he managed. When the secretary left, he lifted and then immediately hung up the receiver. He stepped out onto his office’s balcony, quivering as he drew out a cigarette. “Hey,” he heard. He turned around, and it was Chris.

“Look, Pearson. I wanted to apologize. I guess I just didn’t realize—”

“I said shut up, Chris.”

Grant heard a fluttering behind him. He turned and saw a sheet of paper falling from above. He traced its path, back up into the sky. He saw the man from Monday, standing a few stories higher. He looked back at the paper. He saw the word “torment,” emblazoned on it in red pen.

His cell phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out. “Mom,” read the caller ID. He looked back up at the Monday man on his balcony. He heard the wind pick up.

“Stop!” Chris shouted.

And they jumped. ■

“This week has really breathed new life into my writing. I feel as though the editing sessions, and the new work I have started here, have been immensely beneficial to my journey as a writer.”

— Adam Albaari

The Two Towers

By DOUGLAS SOLOMON

When I was five years old I loved building things with blocks. I had just started kindergarten, and building was our first project as a class. Before even learning the ABC's we began to build. We built all types of things, like large buildings, castles, roads, and basically anything else that came to the imagination of a five year old. A couple of friends and I started to build our final project, our last piece of art. We decided to build two large towers (based on our love for the "Lord of The Rings" movies). We quickly got to work one morning. There were about four of us working on the project. I was basically the head architect. I decided what blocks went where, and how the towers were to be designed.

After three long days of building, our masterpiece was com-

plete. In the back corner of our kindergarten class stood a magnificent five-foot structure. The two towers were sturdy and well designed with thick bases leading to somewhat narrow tips. The towers were taller than our teachers, and luckily, were wider than them too.

The next week, after the towers had been up for some time, I made an executive decision that they needed to come down. The boys agreed because they too wanted to work on other projects. In the morning, before we started class that day, I knocked the towers down. I put all my force into them, and they came crumbling down. After the blocks were scattered all over the floor I felt sad, like I had lost something special. It was my real first project as an elementary student.

After we cleaned the blocks, and put them back in their bins, something strange happened. Something that hadn't happened since last year, when I was in preschool. Parents came to pick their kids up from school while we were in class. As kids left one by one, I went on with my class day. I did some finger painting and coloring. Later that morning, my mom came to pick me up as well. When we got home, she turned on the news. I didn't know what was going on. She looked at me very concerned and told me that the World Trade Center was attacked. At the time I wasn't very intrigued by what she was saying. I didn't understand. While watching the coverage on the news, all I could picture were the two towers in my kindergarten class. ■



"The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute here was a great experience. There is something truly inspiring about being in a group of writers who are passionate about their work and can challenge you to become better yourself."

– Avantika Tankala

Untitled

By AVANTIKA TANKALA

The loud whistle of the train echoes loudly through the station over the hustle and bustle of the early morning work rush. I watch the people come and go. There is a woman standing in the corner, not boarding any trains at all. She looks up, and I see her face is lined with worry.

"How may I help you?" says the young woman behind the desk, leaning back lazily in her chair and obnoxiously chewing a wad of gum. The lady clears her throat softly. "I... well, I... I have this photograph of my son. He disappeared two months ago. I was just wondering if you'd seen him." Her eyes now dart uncomfortably between the desk, woman, and the floor.

The woman behind the desk sits up, interested suddenly. I could now make out her blonde hair, which is tied into a bun above a forest green visor. She had a matching green polo shirt, where I could see a nametag that read, "Abby." "Isn't that the kid on the news who went missing? Went to a friend's house and never came back?" Abby says eagerly, quickly grabbing the photo of the boy out of the woman's surprised hands.

Awkwardly, the mother stands there, as Abby stares fascinated by the boy in the photo. She only looks up when another train pulls loudly into the station. "Right, so... um...what do you want me to do about it?" she asks, still not meeting the other woman's gaze.

"Well, I was hoping that you

could put up posters, or just ask around to see if anyone has seen him, or..." She looks up at Abby, her eyes glistening. "Please."

Abby's eyes soften. "Okay," she says quietly. "We can put them in the trains and around the station." She hesitates for a second and then adds, "I hope you find your son." The woman smiles wearily, and heads toward the trains.

Suddenly, she stops, turns around and runs toward the crowd of people clogging up the stairs. "Hunter!" she calls. She looks frantically at someone in the crowd. "Hunter!" She elbows her way through the crowd, until she reaches a young boy, five or six years old, with the same mousy brown hair but with shining blue eyes. Grabbing his shoulder she turns him around, holding up her photo next to his face. The boy in the photo and the real one in the station look almost identical. Their brown hair is cut short and brushed back neatly. They have the same toothy white smile, and pudgy cheeks. They even seem to be wearing similar clothes. The only difference between the two is that the boy in the photo has bright green eyes, while this boy's are sky blue. But the worried mother doesn't seem to be thinking about that.

"Hunter, is that you?" she says breathlessly, staring at the boy in won-

der. The little boy looks around nervously and doesn't answer. "Hunter?" The boy stares down at his feet.

"Mommy says I'm not supposed to talk to strangers," he says quietly. The woman's face falls slightly. "I just wanted to know if your name was Hunter," she says so quietly it could barely be heard over the loud sounds of the station.

"I'm not Hunter," the boy replies eventually. "I'm Charlie."

"Oh" The woman trembles with disappointment and hugs her arms around her chest. She turns to leave when she hears someone call Charlie's name. She watches as Charlie's mother lifts him up into her arms and scolds him for running off. Charlie says something to her and the woman turns away again, when he points in her direction. Charlie and his mother talk that way in the middle of the station until he hops down and they both walk hand in hand to one of the platforms. The lone woman standing in the corner glances back at them one last time before turning away and walking out of the station without boarding any trains at all. ■

"This week has inspired me and encouraged me to explore future opportunities in writing. I feel that I now have a deeper understanding of being a writer."

— Anjie Liu



Love Poem to Someone

By CLAIRE TOBIN

You, graveyard
You, smooth things
You, pulse rising
You, full to bursting
You, killer
You, breather
You, holder
You, Mecca
You, throat clench
You, jazz song

Part of my brain where I throw my holy thoughts, beautiful things.

The skillet of you, burning and running, caramel in my teeth.

You always hold my fingertips, shallow and unforgiving, burying me beneath your feet.

I open my window for you and let your breezes blow in, lavender, sunshine,
patting my shoulders, and shaking my hair.

And I follow you, all the heartache of me.

“I loved being a part of The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. Being at Skidmore provided beautiful serenity, perfect for writing. The classes were helpful but never too much. As the teachers gave their advice and suggestions, they were always kind and helpful and never overbearing. I appreciated the activities we did during our

workshops because they provided us with guidelines but never with strict rules that would obstruct our creativity. I liked being given ways of coming up with ideas. It was great to be able to take classes in the morning because the instructors, using wonderful examples for inspiration, gave us activities that got our juices flowing. Since our classes ended pretty early, there was always plenty of time to work on our writing before the next day. I loved being able to share my work and hear the pieces written by my peers. Overall, I had a wonderful time here, and I feel as though my writing definitely improved.”

– Michaela Brawn



Wedding Crasher

By KRISTIN VON OHLSEN

Ido.” The two simple words were all that Natalie needed to change her life for the better. She had yearned to say them since she was a little girl, and although she imagined it differently, she knew that she needed to do it now. If only he hadn’t stuck his nose in it.

Before it happened, the wedding was moving along well and plans were carried out with precision. Natalie’s dress was stunning, a Vera Wang that looked strikingly similar to the style Kate Middleton had worn at the royal wedding the month before. It was not surprising her dress had a \$50,000 price tag, as her husband-to-be, John, would spare no expense for the woman of his wildest dreams. Her spray tan looked flawless, as if she had been living in Martha’s Vineyard for many months and her blond hair was falling perfectly on her small shoulders in large ringlets. The groom looked dashing in a crisp tuxedo, equally luxurious and expensive as the bride’s gown. Their families were all in attendance at the Oceanside altar in the vineyard where the two were scheduled to wed. The groomsmen and bridesmaids looked like perfect dominoes lined up next to the pair. The breeze blew just enough to ruffle everyone’s hair slightly and give them a beachy look. The thermometer read a perfect 74 degrees and the sun shined with glee. And, best of all, Natalie did not feel as greedy and

insincere as she imagined when she walked down the aisle, clutching her father’s arm, looking out at an expansive and beautiful ocean of endless possibilities.

Natalie was expecting to feel guilty in the deep corners of her heart. She didn’t love her fiancée, and that was that. Her last boyfriend was Charles, whom she dated for several years. He had broken up with her a week before she went on her first date with John, her rebound. As soon as their first date, she knew he was not right for her, and that she should chase after Charles. But she continued to court John because she was lured in by the perks of dating a millionaire. The surprise trips to Rome, the penthouse apartment he agreed to pay for. Flying first class and sipping expensive champagne at elite gatherings. The extravagant yacht cruises and, over all these things, the shopping she was able to do with the credit card he paid for. After being born and raised in a suburban upper middle-class neighborhood, Natalie was used to being comfortable, but never this level of comfortable.

There was nothing wrong with John, no, not at all. He was handsome enough and good to her. But there were no sparks, and they got along too well. No problems ever

came up, signaling something too stable. Their relationship was not the real love you expect to have when you get married. Although Natalie was not crazy about John, he was head-over-heels for her and would do anything to make her his wife. For Natalie, it came down to the money. So when he proposed while they were vacationing in Florence to celebrate their six-month anniversary, Natalie’s fashion-sense and lifestyle told her to scream yes, even though her gut said no.

Natalie told her parents and the rest of her family the lie that she was in love with John and wanted to be with him forever, and they believed her. Everyone but Natalie’s twin sister Kim was on board with the wedding.

Inquisitively, Kim saw right through the faulty plan and knew Natalie’s true intentions. She was not pleased with the greedy and wrong decision Natalie was planning to make. And after a rather intense argument a week prior, Natalie had revoked Kim’s privilege as maid of honor and substituted her with her snobby friend Mandi from college. They had not

(continued on page 42)

“Interesting you want? Yoda grammar you get. But in all seriousness, this reminded me how much I like to write. At home, you forget sometimes, but being around other supportive writers makes you remember.”

– Max Kleiner



Wedding Crasher (continued)

spoken the week leading up to the wedding, but strangely, Kim still made the decision to attend.

Fully expecting to go through with the marriage, Natalie walked down the aisle with confidence. She went through the motions and said her fake vows with convincing emotion.

Suffice it to say, she was dumbfounded when her five-year old nephew Jamie did what he did. When the priest addressed the people in the audience asking if anyone had any objections and told them to speak now or forever hold their peace, Jamie mounted his white folding chair and cleared his throat, preparing for an announcement.

He made a cup with hands, surrounded his mouth with them and declared, "I don't want Auntie Natalie to get married to John!" with ferocity. He stomped his foot on the chair and tried to keep his pudgy baby-like face solid and businesslike.

Nervous laughs and horrified glances echoed throughout the air as Kim, who was sitting beside her outgoing son, looked on as if she suddenly needed to focus on the

ocean. Her indifference annoyed Natalie who screamed from the altar, "KIM! Get him to sit down! Now!" John looked stunned as his face went white, and Natalie exceedingly anxious.

"She won't love him forever!" Jamie continued to bellow. "She should be with Charles, from high school! She should have stayed with him! But John has more money! Honest everyone, I heard my mommy say it to her last week on the phone and my mommy is always, always, always right!" he addressed the bewildered guests. Most of the guests looked confused and horrified. "Also, he is stinky... he wears too much cologne!"

Although Kim now appeared to be attempting to contain the boy, she burst out laughing. At this point, the crowd was chattering loudly in an uproar.

Natalie gave John a sorrowful look mixed with a small laugh that failed at lightening the mood. He avoided her gaze and started to leave the beach. As he about-faced, he whimpered to the crowd of his family and friends, "I'll be right back everyone." He took short, choppy steps towards the parking lot. Kim's heart ached for him, and Natalie's heart sank as she saw her

fortune walk out of the picture.

Natalie stormed up to her sister and screamed "How could you let him say that?! I thought you wouldn't tell anyone that stuff!" She was clearly enraged.

She bent herself at her waist to get down to Jamie's level and wagged her finger in his face. "And you, mister... that was very very very inappropriate... that is not what polite little boys do," she told him with a sneer. She turned away from her family in embarrassment and put her head in her hands. Mandi tried to console her, but Natalie just shoved her away with a surprising amount of force.

Natalie began to weep a pitiful weep, but Kim did not comfort her. Instead she tried her hardest not to laugh at the bizarre nature of the situation as her face held a strange half-smile. Kim wasn't happy her sister was in distress, she just could not help herself. She looked down at Jamie and winked.

"Nice work, sweetie," she whispered and gave him a high-five.

"You'll thank me one day," Kim told Natalie as she walked away from the crazy scene, a smiling Jamie in her arms. He was satisfied that he had carried out his mission, just as he was instructed. ■



"I am so thankful I had the opportunity to attend The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute this year. I learned a lot, and I met some great people. The skills I acquired can help me throughout the rest of my writing career, and I am very excited about this."

— Kristin Von Ohlsen

David

By LYNN WANG

“You’re stupid,” I yelled across the hall. “Well you’re ugly,” my brother yelled back.

I honestly can’t recall a day when my brother and I weren’t fighting. On the day I was born, the house lost all peace. Don’t get me wrong, I’m perfectly fine with not getting along. I mean, who would want to be friends with an idiotic, immature, condescending brat like him? What’s worse, our childhood logic really wasn’t logical at all and he won all his arguments with a simple, “I’m older.” Soon I discovered my own bratty way to get back at him: crying and yelling hysterically, and then telling my mom it was all his fault. I would immediately get sympathy from my mom while my brother would be glaring at me, mumbling about his revenge plot. One of our most common arguments was about TV time.

“Give it back, it’s my turn!” I yelled, lunging at the remote.

“Your show is on commercial. Just let me watch,” he protested. He held the remote up high in the air knowing it would be impossible for me to reach.

“Fine, I’m telling.” I knew I was a complete tattletale but that was what he deserved. I ran downstairs to my mother who was doing the laundry. “Mom, he won’t let me watch TV, even though it’s my turn,” I whined, stomping my foot and crossing my arms.

“Lynn,” my mom sighed. “I’m busy. Just tell him I said he has to let you watch.” She had heard this argument several times before and didn’t even bother to get involved anymore.

“She says you have to stop watching,” I yelled, running up the stairs. But of course, it was never that easy. We would fuss for another half an hour or so, throwing insults left and right. My family would ignore us, as

usual, leaving us to figure it out ourselves. By the time we calmed down and resolved the issue, both of our shows would be over.

One November day, my brother and I went to my mom’s office. Bored out of our minds, we decided to run around the office, disturbing everyone by saying hello. We weaved around the cubicles and lost track of where we were. We were definitely lost but my stubborn brother insisted that he knew exactly which way to go. In my eyes, the place was huge and we seemed light years away from my mom’s office (which, in reality, was really just a few cubicles down). We wandered around the office when, all of a sudden, a large ringing sound filled my ears.

“What is that?” I quickly covered my ears and began yelling to match the sound of the bell. I ran off to find shelter from the deafening sound. When I found an empty cubicle, I immediately crawled under the table, still with my hands over my ears. I looked around and realized that I had lost my brother and was completely alone. Still, I wasn’t scared—more startled—because I had no idea what the sound of the bell was. My brother came running not long after, panting and fuming.

“There you are. Are you stupid? That’s a fire alarm, get up!” my brother said, sounding frantic. It was a fire alarm? There was a fire in the building? Was I going to die in here, with my stupid brother? I had seen these tragedies on TV before, where the firemen couldn’t find everyone. We could be left in the building. Would I ever see my mom again? My pulse quickened and my breathing got heavier. I started to shake in fear, worrying for my life. My brother got irritated and pulled me up. We ran out of the cubicle and met the tons of other people shuffling towards the stairs. That’s when my

mother came running.

I quickly latched onto my mother and let her lead me out of the building, following a crowd of other people. Outside, the autumn chill greeted us. I saw the people that we had said hello to not long before, chatting together calmly. After I shivered for 20 minutes, the firemen told us it was okay to go back up. Later I found out that there was never any real danger. There was no fire, just smoke that set off the deafening alarm. I asked my mom what had happened, to which she replied, “Burnt popcorn.”

Sometimes I wonder how my brother found me so quickly. How did he even know I wasn’t already out of the building? I could’ve already been outside, safe and sound, while he would be running around looking for me. After that incident, I knew that he cared for me and he would actually go out of his way to help me. I admire my brother a lot more now, knowing he has a good side to him. It’s reassuring to know that I can count on him (although I’d never tell him that). But don’t worry, I’m not going to tell you some sappy ending about how we became best friends, or that we stopped arguing with each other. We still don’t get along. We still never get each other gifts for Christmas or our birthdays. We still pretend we don’t know each other when we are with our friends, or when we see each other in the halls. And we are most certainly still arguing.

One thing did change between then and now, though. Our arguments are even worse. We spend hours debating who’s uglier, or who’s stupider, or who needs to go on a diet (all of which are him). So that’s all I have to tell you about my immature, senseless brother. Oh, his name? Well I call him lazy, ugly, stinky, and pain in the ass, but you can call him David. ■

The Farmhouse

By MICHELLE WATERS

It's a fitting way for someone named Bridget to die: jumping off of a bridge. Today I walked down to the Golden Gate because I couldn't think of a reason not to anymore.

I've seen thirty-two years of soggy, foggy mornings in San Fran, and this was another. I stood on the bridge and looked not out, as I usually did, but down—down at the water that would be my means of escape. I'm sure it's not this way for everyone, but it's like my half-memory of being rushed to the hospital with appendicitis when I was seven years old: lying in the back of the ambulance, I feverishly chanted, "No pain, no pain. No more." And so I killed myself.

Not long after I took the leap that ended my life, I became aware of myself again. Something was different about that self, though. It was as if someone had taken my soul and cleaved away the pain. I hadn't felt this light since college. I wiggled my toes.

Before me stood a shaggy creature. It was chewing grass in a slow and sardonic way that made me feel judged.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Peru," said the creature, its mouth full. I hate it when people talk with food in their mouths.

"Peru?"

"Yes," it said.

I looked around. We appeared to be on a hill at the foot of a larger hill, or maybe a small mountain. The shaggy thing—a llama, maybe, I thought—was standing on the other side of a fence in a pasture filled with sparse brown grass.

"I'm an alpaca," the alpaca added.

"What is this place?" I asked. The alpaca appeared to ignore me. He walked over to another patch of grass and began to eat it.

I felt, suddenly, a strange, sick sensation in my stomach. "I want to go home," I said without meaning it, but then I started to.

"This is your home now," said the alpaca. "Peru is your heaven."

"But why Peru?" I said. I had never been to Peru, nor harbored any wish to go there. I have no Peruvian loved ones (oh God, my loved ones—Tara, Mary, Jonathan—what have I done?). It had always upset me when people were angry at those who killed themselves. Who were they to say that the suicidal were selfish? But now I understood: they would never see me again.

"You may not ever have been to Peru, but it has always been inside of you," the alpaca said. "In my experience, once you've thought about it a little more, you'll figure it out. Peru could've been in your eye, or in your arm. I really don't know."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Your death has always been with you," said the alpaca. "You humans don't see the big picture. You think that death is something external that, someday, is just going to happen. But you're wrong: it's internal, a part of you that will surface when your time comes. Of course, in your case, you made the choice to die. That's a little different from most."

I sat down on the ground, still feeling weightless, and thought for a while about what he had said. I tried to locate my death. Had it been in my arm the first time I threw a softball? And the time I sat on my glasses—had it been in my cornea then? I considered my most important childhood memories.

"You should also consider the least important ones," the alpaca called from across the pasture.

I thought back to a perfectly ordinary day. It was a few months

after my appendix was removed in the middle of the night. I recalled waking up, getting dressed, going to school. And then I had it: Peru had been in the sole of my foot. I had been stepping on my death every day without knowing it, and every step had brought me closer to the day I was to die, which was not determined by anyone else—as the alpaca had said, dying had been my choice. That's the thing about suicide: you die.

"That's interesting. The sole of your foot," that alpaca said, "I've never heard that one before."

"You know, that's getting annoying."

"What, me reading your mind? Sorry. Can't help it. It's in an alpaca's nature."

"Whatever," I sighed.

The alpaca took another lap around the pasture. I noticed that he had a bell tied around his neck with a red ribbon. It tinkled softly with each step and movement.

"But why Peru?" I asked.

"You've always known that it existed," said the alpaca, "but you never understood it. Just like your death."

I got up from my spot on the ground and surveyed the area further. On the other side of the pasture was the small, densely wooded mountain. Turning around, I saw a farmhouse at the bottom of the hill that appeared to be seconds away from collapse. Beyond that was a dirt road.

"That's the farmer's house," said the alpaca.

"The farmer?"

"Otherwise known as God."

So I began to walk toward the farmhouse and the road and God, full of wonder. I am opening the door. ■

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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

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

Administrative Staff

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Director, New York State Summer Young Writers Institute



New York State Writers Institute

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