

changed my life!

Lasting
Freindships

Explore!

creative Freedom

Poetry

Plays

YOUNG

Inspirational

VOICES

Talented people

Fiction

imagination

Home away
From home

Monologues

essays

welcoming

passionate
writers

Thank you
skidmore!

ANTHOLOGY OF STUDENT WORK

New York State

Summer Young Writers Institute

2017

NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE 2017 PARTICIPANTS

STUDENT	CITY & STATE
Caleb Andersen	Ballston Spa, NY
Elaina Bealieu	Barrington, RI
Ronin Berzins	New York, NY
Alyssa Bonaro	Clifton Park, NY
Padraig Bond	Clifton Park, NY
Angela Calcagno	Rensselaer, NY
Kaitlyn Coffey	Delmar, NY
Molly Cutler	Ardmore, PA
Sneha Dey	Scarsdale, NY
Rachel (Emory) DeYoung	New York, NY
Kaela Ellis	Schuylerville, NY
Jessica Haas	Bronx, NY
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Meridian Hinton-Cooley	Glen Ridge, NJ
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Lily Sandidge	Colts Neck, NJ
Sydney Schulman	Syracuse, NY
Samantha Vatalaro	Latham, NY
Isabelle Verdino	Port Washington, NY
Linda Zhang	Chappaqua, NY



NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE

Letter from the Director

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

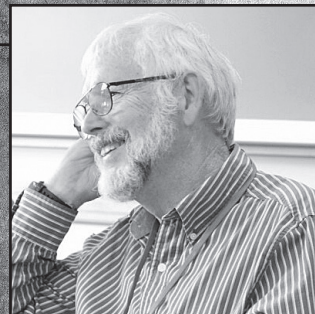
In its twentieth year, the Young Writers Institute is held at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY, so that our students can take advantage of the New York State Summer Writers Institute, directed by Robert Boyers, which convenes on the Skidmore campus for the entire month. Having the opportunity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

These young writers are unique in any number of disparate ways, but they all share a devotion to writing. That common interest creates almost instantaneous bonding when they meet each other, but it also encourages them to revel in the writing atmosphere of our intensive workshop. More than one hundred applicants send original writing samples each April, and we choose the forty best writers to attend the Young Writers Institute. That ability to be selective pays off for us. Year after year, we offer these students respect and recognition for what they have already achieved, and in return we receive not only a committed, attentive group of students but also the dramatic, funny, moving, troubling, and remarkable creative pieces in this anthology. It was our pleasure to watch as these pieces unfolded during our Summer 2017 Workshop, and it's your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick
Director
New York State Summer Young Writers Institute

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

—William Patrick





SUMMER 2017 FACULTY



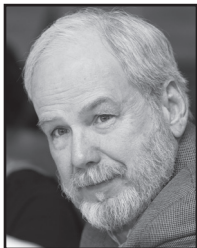
KATHLEEN AGÜERO'S latest book is *After That* (Tiger Bark Books). Her other poetry collections include *Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth* (Cervena Barva Press), *Daughter Of* (Cedar Hill Books), *The Real Weather* (Hanging Loose), and *Thirsty Day* (Alice James Books). She has also co-edited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



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



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



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



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



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



FREEZER MEAT

A Play by Caleb Andersen
Ballston Spa High School, NY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

TOM SOUTHERLAND: *An elderly man who still works at a meatpacking plant. He feels as though he's being replaced by a younger worker.*

KYLE NORTHROP: *A college kid, who just got a job at the same meatpacking plant. He just wants to do what's right and get through school.*

SCENE: *A meat locker with the lights off, modern era, sometime in the afternoon.*

TIME: *The present.*

AUTHORS NOTE: *The actors playing Kyle and Tom should be of the same race, regardless of what race it may be.*

AT RISE: *(A light originating stage right briefly illuminates the stage, silhouetting piles of boxes scattered around stage and KYLE, standing stage left.)*

KYLE: Sir? Do you need some help with that? *(He takes a step forward. A creaking sound is heard and a door is heard latching as the light dims and disappears, engulfing the stage in darkness.)*

TOM: *(Faintly, from a distance)*
Oh hell no.

KYLE: Shit. Shit.
(Fast footsteps grow increasingly close.)

TOM: I swear to THE LORD if that's what I think it was

KYLE: What do you think it was?

TOM: *(Finally sounding like he's in the same room)* Jesus Christ.

KYLE: Come on man let's just –
(He tries the door, and exhales softly.)

KYLE (cont.): Shit.

TOM: *(Irritated)* The door opens from the outside. As of right now, we're locked in.

KYLE: So how are we gonna get out? Holy shit, I'm so sorry. We're trapped in here now – it could be days before anyone finds us, this is all my –

TOM: Son! You need to relax. It's just a beginner's mistake. I'll call Paul and he'll get us out. You got your phone?

(A phone screen lights up, illuminating the path from Tom's pocket to his face. This is the first time we see Tom.)

KYLE: No, I left it up in my locker. Company policy is no phones on you, right?

TOM: I keep it on me at all times. Never know when my wife might call.

KYLE: Oh. All right. Uh, where are the lights?

TOM: The switch is outside. I didn't really expect to get locked in here.
(Shivering) Should've brought my coat.

KYLE: *(Murmured in agreement)*
It's cold. *(Typing, Tom shoots him a "You-caused-this" look, his face lit up by the phone. He starts dialing.)*

TOM: Come on, Paul.
(A faint voicemail message is heard.)

TOM (cont.): Shit. There's no service in this freakin' cage.

KYLE: Oh my god. I locked us in here. We're gonna die.

TOM: Boy, in my last few decades of working here, I have been locked in this freezer a whole of six times. Not with the lights off, to be fair, but it's happened before. They'll have to come down here eventually.

KYLE: Eventually?!?! It's fuckin' cold, man.

TOM: I'm gonna get some aprons so we can curl up in them. *(Tom starts to walk around. He accidentally kicks a pile of boxes and they tumble to the ground.)*

TOM: *(cont'd):* Shit! Agh, my foot! Get the phone, turn the flashlight on.

(The bright phone screen is lifted from the ground and illuminates the face of Kyle. He turns the flashlight on and shines it over Tom, who's on the ground holding his foot, cursing quietly.)

KYLE: Oh my god. I am, shit, ahh, here let me help you.

TOM: *(Waving him off)* I'm fine, I'm fine, just a stubbed toe. I've been through worse. *(Noticing Kyle's worried expression)*

TOM (cont'd): I said, I am fine. Just 'cause I'm an "old man" doesn't mean I can't do work just as well as you. I guess some higher-ups don't necessarily agree with me on that, though. Help me put these back, will ya?

(Kyle places the phone flashlight down on the boxes and a spotlight turns on, encompassing the two men in the light. Kyle starts picking up boxes close to him, which are smaller, while Tom shifts larger boxes back into place. He gasps in pain very quietly as he bends down.)

KYLE: Oh! Here I can get those for you. *(Kyle steps in and easily picks up the largest box. As he sets it back into place, Tom turns to confront him.)*

TOM: Look kid, let's just pick these boxes up and wait this out, okay. All I want to do is get through this, I don't need your help, and I definitely won't accept it, considering it's your stupid ass that helped us into this box with no way out. This is why we can't have kids

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like you working the job because you're irresponsible and going to get us killed. OK?

KYLE: What? Man, I barely even want to work here. I just got this job as a filler, alright? So I don't know what your problem with me is but I'm just trying to get through college. I'm sorry about the freezer-

TOM: IT'S NOT ABOUT THE FREEZER! *(Taking a second to breathe)* It's not about the freezer. It's just... you're only here, at this job because there's a "new position". Let me tell you, I've been at this job for 50 years, and there have been two new hires. One is when Carl Newman had a heart attack, and one is when Jonathan Reiter retired. I'm the oldest one here, I don't plan on retiring, and as far as I can tell, no one is going to have a heart attack. So if they're teaching a new, young guy...

KYLE: Oooh shit. You mean...

TOM: They're looking to lay me off. And replace me with you. I shouldn't be surprised, really, but... this, *(Gesture between them)* showing you the ropes? I don't want that. I don't want to have to teach you. I don't even want to talk to you.

KYLE: Look man, I - I don't know what to tell you. This job isn't a long time investment, I'm not going to stay here for life.

TOM: Ha. That's what I said. 50 fuckin' years. I had just gotten out of high school and I needed the money. And I get stuck here. And now I get laid off and hell, who knows? With my wife's pension and what I have saved up we'll make it a lil' while. Not long enough though.

KYLE: Look man I'm -

TOM: I swear if you're going to say you're sorry again. *(He chuckles, though it's not really funny, and sits down on the boxes.)*

TOM (cont'd): I should really be apologizing to you though. It's not your fault.

(Kyle looks down at one of the smaller boxes in his hands.)

KYLE: I can't stay here.

TOM: Heh, tell corporate that. *(Kyle smiles, but sadly.)*

KYLE: *(Trying to connect)* So, any kids?

TOM: One, yeah, but it's the grandkids we're thinking about now. Three of 'em, all going to college. You're in college right, what do ya study?

(Kyle sits down, slightly awkward and wary.)

KYLE: Physical education, actually, figure teaching a gym class can't be too bad.

TOM: Ah, yes. Spending 60,000 dollars on college tuition to learn how to throw a ball. Your parents must be happy, eh?

KYLE: Well, um, my dad, he - he actually passed, uh, pretty recently. Five months ago.

(Tom recoils slightly, regret clouding his features.)

TOM: Oh, I had no idea, I mean, I'm -

KYLE: I swear to god if you're going to say you're sorry - *(He looks up at the man and smiles softly, and Tom shares the sad smile.)*

KYLE (cont'd): No, he, well he had a lot of heart problems and, well, he... he had a heart attack. It wasn't his first, actually his third, but it was unexpected. I guess he was supposed to be recovering.

TOM: Were you two close?

KYLE: Yeah, I mean we were alright, he'd still text me these goofy things from Facebook and shit, but I was here. He was home and I was here when it

happened, and *(explosively, standing up)* Fuck! I didn't even make it back for the funeral, in time. Bought a plane ticket, my mom made all the arrangements and I get stuck in the fucking Denver airport cause of a snowstorm. And my dad gets buried without me there.

(Kyle is pacing now, walking back and forth at the edge of the spotlight. In a fit of rage, he kicks a box and hunches over, breathing hard.)

TOM: I bet that hurt.

(Kyle hobbles back to a box and falls heavily on it, holding a frozen package to his foot.)

KYLE: Yep. That hurt a lot.

(Looking at the label on the package he's holding)

KYLE (cont'd): Huh. Look at that.

TOM: What is it?

KYLE: A flank steak. *(Gestures with box)* Not the best cut, but it was my dad's favorite. He said that tenderness has it's time, but the marinated, ground stuff is the best.

TOM & KYLE: Makes ya tougher. *(Kyle nods.)*

KYLE: And here I am, hauling it. And spending 60,000 dollars on dodgeball lessons.

TOM: You know, I really didn't mean it like that.

KYLE: No, I know you didn't, but it's true. My dad, he always thought I had potential, ya know. When I was like ten, I loved. *(Laughing)* I loved to cook. Which was dumb because I couldn't even get my head above the kitchen counter, but I mean dad, dad believed in me. He made me a little cooking station and gave me knives that he had dulled down so I could make stuff. He bought me

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cookbooks when I was still struggling to get through Magic Tree House, 'cause man I was a dumb kid.

(Tom smiles and nods, seeing his relationship with his own son played out.)

KYLE (cont'd): But everything I did he coached me through because he believed in me. It's like I lost that kick, you know? I'm still a dumb kid and now look at me. Working for minimum wage and locked in a fucking freezer. Jesus man, what am I doing here? I don't think I'm making him proud.

TOM: *(Hesitantly, choosing his words carefully)* You know, when my son went to college, it was the proudest day of my life. He had made it, persisted despite every obstacle that I had caused by mistake. I didn't even care what he was studying. It was structural engineering. Wanted to be an architect. That's what he is, sorta, designing houses for construction in developments. But it wasn't that easy. When he got out of college, he hit the fucking dirt.

(Kyle snorts.)

TOM (cont'd): No, believe me, it was awful. He was just some kid who had kicked ass throughout high school and college to get him to where he was. And he was a hard worker, but he thought that because he had struggled he would make it. And that just wasn't the reality. No one would hire him, no one would consider his ideas or plans or situation. So the only job he could get that had anything to do with his degree was building the houses he had hoped to design. It was exactly the kind of work I never wanted for him. And he knew it and he was ashamed. Ashamed that all his work had been reduced to a blue collar job, but worse, ashamed that all my work to get him through school and college was used to get him a ground level job. But you know what?

(On this, Tom turns to look straight at Kyle.)

TOM (cont'd): I was never ashamed of him. I was so proud, so fucking proud that he stuck with it, that he did chase his dream, and that he was willing to do anything to get there. And son, I don't know what your dream is, but if you stay true, and if a degree in PE gets you there, you get that degree. And your father could not ask for a better man as a son.

(Kyle purses his lips and clenches his jaw, clearly holding back tears. Tom nods, satisfied that the boy got the point. It's silent.)

KYLE: *(Swallows and clears his throat)* So, what happened after that?

TOM: *(Deadpan)* Oh, the physical labor became too much, he quit his job and started working in a McDonalds, and I told him I've never been more disappointed. We're estranged.

(Kyle's jaw drops in horror. Seeing this, Tom laughs – a real laugh for the first time.)

TOM (cont'd): Hah, your face. Nah, he kept at it. Rose up, started doing what he dreamed of, and he's got a pretty good paying job now. And you know what? I'm proud as hell.

(Kyle smiles at this. He takes a second to compose himself.)

KYLE: Ah... thank you. A lot. For that. *(They both sit silent, content at the agreement they've reached.)*

KYLE (cont'd): Must be a super good paying job, with three kids heading to college.

(Tom grits his teeth and massages the back of his neck while shaking his head.)

TOM: Not good enough, it seems. That's a lot of tuition, and he can afford to send maybe two. I'd love to help out, I need to help out but if my theory about you is correct (sidelong glance) then times might get a little tight up ahead. Not that it's your fault...

(He trails off and Kyle nods, acknowledging that Tom doesn't mean it in a rude way.)

TOM (cont'd): But my wife is retiring soon. I can't ask her to keep working in that bank until judgement day. She needs a break, I need a job, and we all need money.

(Kyle stands up, brushes off his jeans, and starts to undo his apron. While untying it...)

KYLE: Until my orientation is over, you're technically my senior officer. And because of that, sir, I'm afraid I have to announce my resignation. *(He hands Tom the folded-up apron. Tom, gracious, accepts the offering.)*

TOM: And what about you? Any jobs for Mr. Northrop?

(Kyle nods carefully, thinking hard.)

KYLE: I think – I think I saw a NOW HIRING sign at a restaurant down the road a bit.

TOM: *(Concerned)* You mean you're just taking any old job at a restaurant? That doesn't at all guarantee you a job in the kitchen.

KYLE: *(Grinning sheepishly)* Well, I guess that's a good thing. I haven't actually cooked anything in, like, ten years. And I'm going to stay in college, stick to my degree. Who knows. But I need to do something else, other than physical labor. Or, whatever, the job doesn't really matter. But I'm going to do what I want. And getting you fired is not what I –

(The spotlight goes out abruptly, leaving the stage in complete darkness again.)

KYLE (cont'd): Wait, what the –

TOM: Ah, shit. My phone's dead.



BREATHE

By Elaina Bealieu
Barrington High School, RI

At twelve, in denial,
I was new to the world
My biggest sin so simply just
Being the quiet girl
It was endless
I was friendless
Preteen addict of the web
My only source of happiness
Was what a blue name said

But by thirteen
I'd seen some things
That make my skin crawl
'Til it bleeds
"Post some pictures,"
"Love, for me."
The man was thirty fucking three

And then I was fourteen

It's her birthday
She's engaged
And then a vein
Bursts in her brain

Alone, I found her on the floor
With foam instead of breath
And so with CPR I swallowed
Back the taste of death

But she was gone
And so was home

So what do you do when your home disappears?
What happens next when the new is all that's here?

When your brother cries
And your mother dies
And you can hardly remember
Your father's blue eyes?

I jumped off the diveboard

Into my despair
I almost stopped breathing
But fear kept me there

Yet nevertheless
I could not escape
The budding of blood
From the kiss of a blade

But these butterflies
Drawn onto my wrist?
They are not a sign
Of some great weakness
They're printed upon
Dull marks I don't hide
Yes, all that they say
Is that I won't die
Oh, no, not of this
I will walk this road
I will drop the knife
I have pressed to my throat
And yes, I may trip
And yes, I may fall
But no, I will never
Try throwing it all
Away

I'll never stop

And I'm not up here letting fly
The worst of what I've seen in life
Because I like to whine and gripe
It's so you have the will to fight
The strength is there
It's in your veins
So stay and wait
For your next day
I know it's tough
But don't you leave
'Cause all you have to do is

B r e a t h e



EXCERPT FROM THE EXTREMIST 1

By Ronin Berzins
Stuyvesant High School, NY

It was a cool night in Dorresville, Pennsylvania, as Damien's cigarette slowly sputtered out in the wake of a strong breeze. Damien cocked his head to the right. He could just make out the distant sounds of the rally going on a mile away, in old Stimson Stadium down Whitetree Lane. The street was dark, and the streetlamp he was leaning against hard and unwelcoming.

Every now and then, a car would pass, and Damien would gaze into its reflective windows.

On a whim, Damien decided he would walk through the adjacent park. His nightly excursions always included a quiet smoke and a long walk, ridding himself from his small, two room apartment. Another cold breeze rustled through the trees. Damien pulled up the collar of his jacket as he continued walking. Only a few people were still out, a tall vagrant sleeping on a park bench, and an older man leaning against a tree as his partner coughed into the ground and shook violently.

Damien made his way around the small fish pond, and across the bridge over Woodson Creek, settling at a bench on the cusp of a new road. He relit his cigarette and continued to smoke. Thirty feet away, two men were in deep conversation. Their faces were concealed by the dark, and their voices drowned out by the clip-clop of a woman's heels as she hastened home.

The distant sounds of the rally went away, and Damien checked his watch. It was 9:45, when the rally was scheduled to end.

What a week it had been, in all the excitement that Daniel White was coming

to speak to the town. Damien, who did his best to ignore all things political, could not help but see the signs and posters shooting up in lawns and on buildings proclaiming their support for him. And in that excitement, Damien had remained as secluded as ever, not taking part in the euphoria shared by many of the townsfolk.

Fifteen minutes passed in silence, only broken now and then by the sound of a car driving by or a branch snapping in the wind. Still the two men remained where they were, talking intently. Damien had noticed that both were Muslim, their faces illuminated by the passing car.

Another cool gust of air spread through the street, causing goosebumps to spring up on Damien's alabaster skin. Despite the cold, it was a nice, clear night, and Damien stayed out. It was the sound of laughter and approaching footsteps which broke his tranquil state. He saw five men strutting through the street, speaking loudly and boisterously, scratching themselves and making nasty gestures. Each was sporting a white baseball hat, with the words "Wake Up America!!!" inscribed in red on the top. They passed him without taking notice, and were halfway down the street when one stopped and pointed back, laughing as he did so, a sneer across his face, as another car drove by, lighting up the street.

Damien listened as they walked back the other direction, laughing.

"Well look what we have here," one laughed, approaching the two Muslim men.

"Two of 'em," said another loudly. The

two Muslim men had been walking slowly away, but now found themselves surrounded by the rowdy group of men.

One of the group stepped forward, pushing the taller of the two men. "It's Arabs like you who are ruining this country, you nasty little fuck," he said. Damien could not make out the man's response, though he was sure it was ill-advised since the group laughed.

"What good are two Muzzies like this," shouted the leader of the group. "White said it himself. All these fuckheads should be killed or banned cuz they're ruining our country." The group chanted its assent as Damien watched, transfixed. The taller of the two Muslim men tried to push through a gap in the group, but was shoved back, to more laughter. From behind him, one of the group's men thrust forward and punched the side of his head.

"You like that, fuckin' freak?" shouted the leader. The smaller of the two Muslim men lunged forward at his friend's assailer, but was grabbed by others in the gang. Dwarfed by them, he was no match. The taller Muslim straightened, and said something. Damien saw the leader's smile fade, and watched as he thrust his head forward weirdly at the man. Damien saw the Muslim man wipe his face, and realized the leader had just spit on him. Hands trembling, Damien took out his phone and began to dial 911. He watched as his phone rang, and saw the leader draw something from his pocket.

As if in slow motion, he saw the taller Muslim turn to run. The unmistakable sound of a gunshot boomed through the street, like the backfiring of an

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enormous truck. The taller Muslim fell, and the shorter Muslim shouted as the group members holding him laughed, cheering at the leader's shot. The group turned towards the shorter man.

Damien, his mouth glued to the phone, could not say a word as the operator asked what his emergency was. With several quick motions, he saw the group's leader punch the man in the face. The group members laughed, and dropped him. They strolled away, as if nothing had happened, and continued laughing and shouting as they had done earlier.

Damien talked into the phone, as he ran up to the shorter of the two Muslim men, his words coming out as if in a sprint. "Two men have been attacked, by the side street on Whitetree Lane, next to, to Woodson Creek. One was shot, there's a pool of blood beneath him. Bring help, please."

The operator said they would be there right away, and Damien hung up as reached the shorter man. His face had a bloody, beaten look, his nose crushed and his eyes unmoving.

"Sir, can you hear me?" yelled Damien, and held the man's head up, cradling it in his lap.

The man gave no response, and Damien looked once again into his vacant eyes and smashed-in nose. He lowered the head back down, and took a deep breath.

Kneeling, he closed the man's eyes, and stared out into the night. ■

"It was really enlightening in so many ways. Surrounded by intelligent teachers and deep, thoughtful students in many ways similar to yourself but with their own unique experiences, you're able to broaden your perspective."

—Ronin Berzins





THE ARTIST

By Alyssa Bonaro

Shenendehowa High School, NY

“Where are you? I’ve been calling and calling and you won’t pick up the phone. Please, call me back. I’m starting to get worried.”

The phone rests against a green fuzzy blanket on a mattress kept on the floor. He replays the message again, listening to the desperation of his friend, who has been trying to reach him for the past two hours. He doesn’t call back.

It’s raining outside, the water rapidly falling from dark clouds and pounding against the roof and windows of the tiny, abandoned house. There’s a small crack in the ceiling that lets the rain leak in, dripping in a rhythmic motion onto the wooden floor. There’s a puddle forming, with small specks of dust and dirt floating among it. The house is dark and cold for a springtime afternoon, but he doesn’t mind. He likes the dark and the shadows that he can hide in.

The phone rings again, buzzing and vibrating. Across the screen is his friend’s name, Flynn. Flynn leaves a message. He listens to it.

“Okay, okay. Did you forget the every-hour-on-the-hour check-in calls? Atticus, seriously, call back. I’m starting to think something’s happened to you.”

Atticus crosses the room, leaving the phone behind. No, Flynn. Nothing’s happened to me. Not yet.

In front of him is one of the walls of the house. Paintbrushes and buckets of colors are scattered across the floor on sheets of newspapers. Some are as much as twenty years old, others are from yesterday. The headlines glare up at him.

The oldest ones read World War III

Is Upon Us and U.S. Conquered. The newest says President Brings Peace and Prosperity.

Atticus scoffs. President is the wrong term, Dictator would be the right one. Prosperity is up for debate, but there is no peace. He steps over a newspaper where a drop of red paint blots out the President’s photo.

His fingers touch the wall, tracing over his painting of a city, the buildings structurally resembling the ones down the road. The sky is blue and the sun is bright, its light reaching everything. People walk in the streets, smiling and conversing with each other. A young couple sits on a bench, sharing a treat outside a bakery. In the background, a young man stands on a ladder, painting a magnificent mural on a wall.

He studies his painting, observing the carefully made brushstrokes that produced the lively scene. Atticus can almost feel it, feel the warm sun on his face, breathing in the scent of chocolate and bread wafting out of the bakery, listening to the sounds of chatter and laughter. He only wishes it was real.

Behind him, on the opposite wall, is a painting of reality. He doesn’t have to turn to know what he made in it. The dark city streets, people moving with their heads down, dressed in neutral colors that make them almost seem to fade away into the background. Government officials in the roads, patrolling with their large weapons. A man trying to hand out flyers that describe what our country used to be, and an official pulling him away. There is hardly any color, except for a small group of people in the back. Their clothes and hands are spotted with tiny bursts of orange,

yellow, blue, and green. They are the artists, and they are being rounded up and taken.

The government knows the power artists have. They know the messages they can spread with a flick of a brush. They see them as dissenters and get rid of them.

So, he takes refuge in this tiny abandoned house, his secret sanctuary, creating pictures of what the world is and what it could be across each of the walls. His parents were taken three years ago for being artists, but they managed to send their son away first. Now, he only knows Flynn, who is the same age as Atticus, twenty-one, and who gives him what he needs to survive. Flynn knows Atticus is an artist, yet he doesn’t know where he hides. If Atticus is away from him, he calls every hour so Flynn knows he’s okay. It’s worked for three years. But not today.

The phone rings again from behind him. Flynn. Atticus steps over his paints and brushes, picking it up and listening to the next message. Flynn’s voice is shaking.

“Atticus. Atticus, don’t do this. Call back. Where are you? Tell me where you are! You’re going to get yourself in trouble, please, Atticus, call me. Call me.” He sighs. “Oh, God. Oh, God. Atticus...did they...are you gone?”

He doesn’t call back. Atticus’ hands tremble at the sound of his friend’s voice. Flynn would talk him out of what Atticus wants to do. Though he doesn’t want to hurt Flynn, he’s tired of this, of this life of living hidden away, making creations that no one will ever see,

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dreaming of a world he cannot have. He's sick of it all, of the officials in the streets that control everyone's life like a puppet master.

I'm sorry, Flynn.

His eyes burn with tears that won't fall and his heart pounds, like someone beating a drum as hard as they can. Atticus' hands grab the paintbrushes and he shoves them in a canvas bag along with his cans of colors and a painting he had done on paper. He storms out of the little room with the bag in his hand, the cans clanking against each other. There's a gray building down the road that he stops in front of, kneeling on the sidewalk. Atticus lays his brushes and paints down around him, beginning to work on the rough canvas of the walkway. His hands move rapidly, creating a blue sky and a yellow sun. The rain works against him, and the colors run down the path, blending together. But, the colors are still there, and Atticus keeps putting them down as best as he can. He creates more and more large spots of yellow and blue and sections of

green where they mix. He hears shouts. Atticus ignores them, his paintbrush flying across the sidewalk and into the road, painting nothing but bursts of bright color. People crowd around him, watching in awe. Officials shove them aside. Atticus pulls the paper painting from his bag, a replica of the one on the wall. There are the happy people, the bakery, the artist painting freely. He lays it in the street, where it sits among the paints streaming out from the rain. And as the officials drag him away, his hands and clothes are soaked in bright bursts of color, the mark of an artist giving light to a dark world.

Flynn stands by the window of his apartment on the sixth floor of his building. He watches the chaos occurring in the street below, admiring the paint on the road being blended by the rainfall. He pounds several times on the glass, trying to catch his friend's attention, but Atticus doesn't notice. Flynn stares in a stunned silence as his friend is dragged away from his beautiful artwork. He's forced down onto his knees before a crowd being ushered back from

the scene. Flynn sees it all and hears the sound of a gunshot that echoes in his ears. Tears slide down Flynn's cheeks as he sees Atticus, his best friend, crumpled on the ground, and red running through blue, and yellow, and green, flooding through the street as it's all carried away by the pouring rain. He notices Atticus' hand lying limp, his fingers outstretched as if reaching for the paintbrushes several inches away, their tips still soaked in blue.

Flynn wipes his eyes and turns away from the window. He shoves open a closet, pushing aside clothing, blankets, and curtains, to reveal a mural on a wall. No one has seen it, not even Atticus. Buckets of paint and brushes are carefully stacked on the wooden floor. Flynn picks them up, lugging them all down six flights of stairs, and begins to paint outside. He does just as Atticus had done, a desperate attempt to support and avenge the friend he couldn't save, with tears painting his face like the pigments streaking across the streets. ■

"The Summer Young Writers Institute taught me how to write the truth. I became a more knowledgeable and open writer, and I met wonderful peers and faculty. I'm very grateful for the experience."

—Padraig Bond





JOE CAMPBELL'S SOUP

A Play by Pádraig Bond
Shenendehowa High School, NY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOE: Works at a soup shop. Very opinionated. Wants to understand the meaning of the universe. Sort of a man-splainer. Can break the fourth wall. Age: Older than Belle but not much. About 30.

BELLE: Customer at a soup shop. Just wants some soup, but is willing to listen to some philosophizing. Very quippy and down to earth.

SCENE: A small soup shop in New York City. Very minimal set design, but use of sound will convey city. Cabs and engines and shouting and whispers can be heard offstage.

TIME: The present.

AT RISE: (Joe is sitting behind a counter. It is a small table, center stage. There is one door placed near it, on stage right. In his hand is one bowl of soup. He is tapping his finger and looks bored.)

JOE: (To the audience)
I want to understand the meaning of the universe, you know? I've read hundreds of stories and myths from the farthest reaches of human history, and I've noticed they all seem to follow a similar pattern. Everyone claims that this... 'meaning' is something different, but they're all just saying the same thing.

(He thinks for a moment, like he's making it up as he goes along.)

A long time ago, someone said the son of god came to earth turning water into wine, that he came from a foreign land and created a new religion with his followers. His name was Dionysus. The Buddhists said the same thing, but with Gautama. The Christians came along with Jesus.

(Pause.)

It's all the same thing. Don't be a jerk, respect your family and the people around you, follow the rules, all very

elaborate ways of describing what I think is just...

(Door opens very loudly and throws Joe off. BELLE enters. Joe watches her.)

BELLE: Is this Joe Campbell's Soups? My friend recommended it to me. You're Joe, right? ...She said you guys had quite a conversation.

JOE: (Still talking to the audience)
Look at her, everyone. She was born with a purpose and a meaning and is still looking for it to this day. (Back to her) Tell me, what is your name, young lady?

BELLE: Belle. Tell me, Joe. Can I get a cup of soup? It's cold outside.

JOE: Can you tell me how we all came to be here?

BELLE: I came here for a cup of soup.

JOE: I said how, not why.

BELLE: Why are you so interested in this?

JOE: It's my real work. My passion. To get this cup of soup, you have to give me something to think about. No money needs to be involved.

BELLE: Okay. Lucky for you I'm short on cash... Let's give it a whirl.
(Pause. Belle thinks for a moment)
Last night. Last night I... I had a dream I was up on the roof of my house, re-shingling. I heard my father's voice on the ground, he was calling to me. Uh, as I turned to face him, the hammer fell to the ground and I heard a scream and a thud. I... um, I should add that I just left my husband at the time and my father has been insisting I go back to him. I was only 23 and already a divorcee.

JOE: The Father. That's part of it, I think. Part of the larger question.

BELLE: You'll have to be more specific if we're gonna get anywhere.

JOE: Our need to please the Father. Or our hatred of the Father. Isn't that part of our existence?

BELLE: You're half-assing it, pal. Can I have my soup now?

JOE: Let's keep going, I'm having fun. Are you uh, familiar with Greek Mythology?
(Belle does not respond)
"Sing, O muse, of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans."

BELLE: Is that the Iliad?

JOE: Sure is. One of the earliest recorded accounts of the Hero's Journey, the one path that all great stories follow.

BELLE: I know about the Hero's Journey...

JOE: We all follow the monomyth of Odysseus and Achilles, of course. I developed this theory from reading Sumerian, Buddhist, Hindu, Greek myths and etcetera. The great male heroes venture out from their safe homes to conquer a new world and become the master of both their homes and the new world.

BELLE: (Getting irritated)
Just men, huh?

JOE: Well, look at Odysseus and Achilles, Gilgamesh and King Arthur! The Hero's Journey, and most stories worth reading are centered on male -

BELLE: Okay, hold on a sec, hot-shot.

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JOE: Excuse me?

BELLE: I come here looking for a goddamn cup of soup and you're about to lecture me on male superiority? Well bullshit, mister Joe, I'm sorry but you've gotta take a serious look in the mirror, sitting around here trying to coax out my life story. Look at your own!

JOE: I'm taking my time so as not to rush my –

BELLE: Well MAYBE you could take a little more to read up on women, huh? Get off your Trojan high horse and read a little more on Scheherazade and Athena, huh?

JOE: *(Curses under breath. Get creative.)* Yes, I suppose you have a point.

BELLE: Look man, I'm starving. I can see this isn't going anywhere and I think there's another restaurant another block down. Good-bye.

JOE: Wait! Uh, please... don't go. I'm sorry. I just don't get to uh, talk to people like you a lot. *(She's waiting for him to continue.)* You're right. You... I need help, here. If I'm going to start learning about the heroism of women... do you think I could start with you?

BELLE: You... want to know about me?

JOE: Well, yes! Screw Athena and screw Odysseus. Maybe I should focus more on the average Joe... or the average Belle. *(Belle scowls at him)* Sorry, I worded that uh, very wrong. Please?

BELLE: ..I started my heroine's journey in White Plains, New York. Just above the city. I had a quiet, easy life but chose to venture to the netherworld below after the divorce. It wasn't a long trip but I needed to be somewhere larger, I needed bigger ideas than I was seeing every day. I needed a real conversation. That's why I'm here in Manhattan, and more specifically why I'm just trying to buy a cup of soup. I'm hungry and tired. It's cold outside.

JOE: Well, I'm very glad you stopped by here to have a conversation with me, Belle. *(Both are silent.)* Can I ask you some more questions? Is desire the root of all suffering? Are you flirting with me?

BELLE: Is that the question you wanted to ask? If I'm flirting with you?

JOE: No.

(He is struggling with what he will say next. He has never opened up to anyone before.)

JOE (cont'd): I dreamt I was walking in a forest alone at night. The moon shone through the pine trees and a soft breeze brushed against my cheek. The breeze grew stronger, and stronger, and I could feel myself lifted off the ground. I kept going higher and higher up, out of control. I could see the whole world – but I was so terrified I woke up in a cold sweat. What do you think that means?

BELLE: I'm not exactly an expert, but it seems to me like you're spiraling out of control. Your head's so full of ideas and

up in the clouds... like you uh, need someone to keep you tethered to the ground.

JOE: I think you might be smarter than I first gave you credit for.

BELLE: *(Takes a sip.)* I think your soup might be worse than my friend gave you credit for. *(Both laugh.)*

JOE: The soup is just a gig to keep money flowing while I get my ideas in order.

BELLE: Master of the two worlds. Soup and comparative mythology. You know, I could use a job while I'm living here and figuring stuff out. Maybe we can help each other.

JOE: I would like that. I have no money to pay you, though...

(Belle does not listen. She goes offstage and grabs a cup of soup. Hers is finished and she has placed it offstage. She brings on a chair and the soup and sits next to Joe.)

BELLE: I want to understand the meaning of the universe, y'know?

JOE: Yes. Yes, I know. *(He chuckles and gazes at her fondly)*

(BLACKOUT)



VERTIGO

By Angela Calcagno
Doane Stuart School, NY

It was a place
It was a time unfamiliar
A pub
Musty, grimy,
Angela Calcagno - Poetry
The floor caked with spilt drinks and spilt intentions
You were tipsy at best
Sloppy shirted
Sloppy handed
Sloppy hearted
That one familiar curl brushed your forehead
You know the one
You were drinking tap
And I was drinking bourbon
No,
Scotch
Smelling the smoke seep in from the city streets
Hearing the rain curling off the rooftop
While you sat at the bar
While you were sitting at the bar
Eclipsed by your own indictment
And you looked over

Wait
We were at the ocean
By the ocean
It was spontaneous
You read the notes

You remembered
And wielded yourself mighty
Dressed in that blue shirt
Bright blue joy that cut through my morning angst
Crisp blue every morning
And brown shoes
Leather
You wanted to polish them
But you forgot
So you stared at your toes
The truth was knocking on your door
And you weren't done cleaning

No
We were at the train station
Platform B 19
Or it could've been C24
Standing on the platform
Putting faith in a cable car
Carrying a promise
Carrying a continuation
Of callus contradictions
And questioning curations
when is forever too long?
But my heels hit the platform
As your heart hit the floor
And you saw me,
And you stopped

"The Summer Young Writers Institute was like my Hogwarts. Although I have never been here before, it felt like home."

—Kaitlyn Coffey





TRUCK CAST EPISODE #14

By Kaitlyn Coffey

Bethlehem Central High School, NY

Let me tell you a story. You know how I truck? Well I started to get bored of the commute. All that time on the open road...fantasizing about the sexy lady tattooed on my bicep got old after a while. So, my fancy, city-slicker of a brother told me about podcasts.

My city-slicker brother voted for that whore Hillary, so obviously I didn't trust his judgment. But after he said he would buy me a six-pack if I sat through an episode, I complied. Surprisingly, I quite enjoyed *Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me*, despite the fact that all the funny people on the show were unpatriotic commie fuckers who hated Donald Trump and, by extension, the American dream.

So I downloaded a couple more episodes because I had a delivery in Albuquerque and that's a long, long drive. You ever seen the girls in Albuquerque? Damn, and I thought my wife was a dog.

Anyway, I really did like the show, I really did. All these smart people were sittin' 'round, exchanging jabs...it reminded me of me and the boys down at the bar, 'cept me and my boys aren't cuckold.

So when I got to Albuquerque, I called my brother. He said, "I told you so, climate change is real..." y'know, that kinda liberal bullshit, but then he suggested I listened to *This American Life*. Since I'm such a goddamn patriot, I nearly got hard from just hearing that name.

Turns out that podcast was less about America and more about Americans, which was a disappointment initially, but I learned to love *This American Life*.

I laughed, I gasped, I cried...I felt like my pussy of a brother.

Ever since then, I've been downing podcasts like Moonshine, and you know how much I love Moonshine. I must've spent hours upon hours just listening.

This American Life changed my American life. My worldview was changed...I began to wonder: What if women were meant to do more than have sex and cook? What if gay people weren't freaks of nature? Maybe Donald Trump wasn't the messiah...

So I started to research up on some of these topics, and I was shocked...the liberals had been right! The middle class was disappearing, the ice caps were melting and it turned out that not all Muslims were terrorists...

I was shaken. This couldn't be true! Oh, how many hours I had wasted arguing online with millennials, calling them gay when I ran out of arguments.

Fox News had been deceiving me that whole time, using hot pieces of ass like Tomi Lahren, Megyn Kelly, Sean Hannity, to distract me from the truth.

My life was a lie.

But then, at my lowest moment, when I found myself actually having a hell of a time at a farmer's market in Seattle, God intervened.

I was looking for a new podcast- I was an addict now, I was like one of those bums who live off welfare - when I stumbled across something called *The Alex Jones Show*.

And, oh boy, did I love it. ■



SHOES

A Play by Molly Cutler
Lower Merion High School, PA

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NADAV: *A creature of habit and routine, concerned with doing the right thing, strong ties to his sense of family. A Hungarian Jewish man in his early forties who is a tenant in RÓZSI's building.*

RÓZSI: *Strict, but enjoys being on good terms with all her tenants. More concerned with maintaining her own life than paying attention to the controversies of the outside world. A Hungarian Christian woman in her mid-thirties.*

SCENE: *A modest apartment building in Budapest, Hungary. The building, which is no more than four or five stories, has a ground level façade in a smooth, up-to-date style, but its upper stories are in what is probably their original stone from the 1920s.*

TIME: *Takes place in the late 1990s.*

PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES:
“Zs” can be pronounced as “sh”
“Sz” is the same as “s” (as in Szekely, which is SEH-kuhl-ee)
Otherwise, names are generally phonetic.

AT RISE: *(Inside NADAV's apartment. It's decently well furnished – he takes care of himself. He sits at a table in the kitchen with his elbows propped up on top of it, eating a sandwich. RÓZSI perches on a barstool and sips a glass of water. It feels a little bit uncomfortable, but both of them plow ahead regardless.)*

NADAV: And how's Emilia?

RÓZSI: She's, you know, she's three. She's however three-year-olds are. Lots of questions and complaints. Another tenant, almost.
(An awkward laugh)

NADAV: That's... well, you're really lucky. It must be a blessing.

RÓZSI: Oh, I suppose, I suppose. If children aren't blessings, then nothing is, right? But I don't know. Sometimes it's just life. Not special. Just the way it goes.

NADAV: *(Looking around his otherwise empty apartment)*
You're very, very, very lucky, Rózsi.

RÓZSI: Yes... *(pause)* Nadav, you are a good man. I can't talk to all of my tenants so easily. You're a decent, responsible guy. Really.

NADAV: *(With a laugh, but he's nervous)* So what favor do you need...?

RÓZSI: Oh, please.

NADAV: It's the rent, right? I know, I know. I'm... I'm going to get it. Really. Have I ever before missed the deadline? It's just this... the new job, and –

RÓZSI: No. Nadav. Listen. The rent's not due for another six days. You've got time there. I just needed to ask you something else. Ah... The Fodors all the way upstairs, they found a pair of old leather shoes on their windowsill. Not theirs. And on the front step into the building, two pairs of women's riding boots. Janis Varga said there was an empty, unlocked suitcase, like, the old style, in the courtyard. A single tiny slipper in the middle of the Kovacs's foyer. Again, not theirs.
(Nadav puts down his sandwich and leans back in his chair. They look at each other, silently.)

RÓZSI: So?

NADAV: *(Looking down)*
I don't know anything about that.

RÓZSI: You don't?

NADAV: No.

RÓZSI: It's just, you know, it's a little upsetting for people to find, like, weird relics in the middle of their living space for no reason. You understand that, right?

NADAV: Why are you asking me?

RÓZSI: Nadav, I'm not accusing you or anything. I just thought maybe you might know something about this because...

NADAV: *(He thinks he knows what's coming.)* Because?

RÓZSI: Because.... Never mind.
(He waits for her)

Because, I don't know, Nadav, because you're who you are and –

NADAV: Because I'm Jewish, you mean.

RÓZSI: *(Clearly uncomfortable, as if he's said a bad word)*

Well... Just... you're the only one in the building who... you know... is different in that way and... I thought maybe, maybe it was something you people do, and you didn't realize that here, we –

NADAV: I've lived in Hungary my entire life.

RÓZSI: Of course, of course, I don't... I... *(pause)* I hope this strange business stops soon, that's all I mean. Just... stop.
(another awkward pause)

Oh, forgot to mention, Emilia had her first ballet class today, that was very exciting. I just... thought... maybe you'd like to hear that.

NADAV: I'll see you later, Rózsi.

RÓZSI: Right, yes, of course. And... Oh, and Merry Christmas, really. Hope it's great.
(She leaves.)

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NADAV: (to himself, while rubbing his temples) Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. I... does she not... what?!

(The lights change as he stands. It's darker. He moves into the adjacent living room. He strokes a picture frame in a bookshelf, then, standing on tiptoes, removes a large cardboard box from a shelf. He brings it back to the kitchen table and opens it, taking out several items. A pair of wire-rim glasses. A wallet. A deck of cards. Books. A violin. A watch. Several necklaces. A prayer shawl. Candlesticks. Other religious items, etc. And finally, several pairs of shoes.)

I'm not stopping.
(He takes a notebook off the kitchen counter.)

Margit. Margit Szekely. Age... 23. The violin. This necklace. And that's now... number 403. Just inside the doorway.
(He retrieves a lock-picking kit from under the sink)
Cause of death....
(He reads it, heaves a deep sigh, then, with the lock-picking kit, violin, and necklace, he exits. Lights dim.)

(Lights back up on Rózsi in the hallway of the building, several days later. She is carrying a pair of glasses, a Hebrew prayer book, and another pair of shoes, and not gently. She politely knocks on a door, which opens, letting her inside. We hear indignant muttering from within. Soon after, she emerges balancing yet another pair of shoes and a necklace with the other items. She is clearly not happy. Finally, she reaches the end of the hallway and bangs with a fist on the last door. Nadav opens.)

RÓZSI: Nadav.

NADAV: Good morning, Rózsi. It's a little early, ha.

RÓZSI: May I come in?
(She does so without waiting for an answer, but proceeds no farther than just within the doorway.)

Look. I'm not dealing with this anymore.

NADAV: I'm sorry?

RÓZSI: I hope you are. You have been trespassing, breaking and entering, and disturbing property. I'm giving you a day for this to stop and if it doesn't you're out.

NADAV: (His lie is clearly useless at this point but he clings to it, afraid of trouble.) I... Why me?

RÓZSI: WHY?
(Waving the prayer book)
Nadav, this is your damn Jew book, is it not? Who the hell else would have this, this possessed... thing? Who the hell else would be trying to, I don't know, indoctrinate innocent people with this? What are you up to?!

NADAV: (quietly) It's not mine.

RÓZSI: What?

NADAV: It – (clears throat)
IT IS NOT MINE. It belonged to József Szekely. My grandfather. That is the point.

RÓZSI: If you don't explain yourself immediately I'm going to get the police involved. I am considering you a threat right now, Nadav. You are breaking all kinds of rules, you have been for days, you haven't listened to anything I've told you, and you are not going to be welcome here much longer.

NADAV: (increasingly angry and hurt)
I kind of thought you were nice. I kind of thought, Rózsi is maybe nice, maybe righteous, at least willing to be friends with me. I thought, Rózsi is not even a conscious anti-Semite like so many people I've known. But my "damn Jew book"? Do you know what you're saying? You talk of it like that? You see me differently. I can tell that now. I guess I might as well throw this in, while we're on the subject: we don't have horns and we're not part of some international conspiracy led by Soros and you can't see the devil when you look into our eyes. So now you don't even have to ask.

RÓZSI: I... I never thought you had horns.

NADAV: But you thought I was trying to indoctrinate people.

RÓZSI: Then what are you doing?!
(He steps back into his apartment for a few seconds, returns with the cardboard box from earlier.)

NADAV: Listen to me. You see this box? You see all the stuff in it? This all belonged to members of my family. This building used to be part of the Central Pesht Ghetto. Uh, during the Holocaust, the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Nazis forced the whole Jewish community of Budapest into this tiny, guarded neighborhood. No food, no jobs, no freedoms, not a real life. And, and two or three families would be crammed into one tiny room, and it was hell, Rózsi, it was hell instituted by very unspeakably terrible humans.
(A pause. He watches her.)

My mother kept a journal while she lived here, if you can even call it living. While she was imprisoned here. She wrote down everything that happened to her and her family, all the atrocities

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(continued from page 16)

they faced. She bore witness. She documented it.

(He runs a hand through his hair and fiddles with the doorknob, then stops, serious.)

Her cousin, Zvi, dared to look out the window on the fourth floor and as soon as his face showed between the curtains he was shot dead. Her father, József, died of hunger in his bed. Her uncle was dragged out into the courtyard and shot. They came to take her sister Margit and her sister dared to resist and took a rifle butt to the skull. Natália, her mother, and her grandmother, and

dozens of others were shot down by a firing squad outside the front door. And there was more. And... I don't know how she did it, because after everything that happened to her here and elsewhere, she never was capable of talking about it much out loud, but my mother survived all this. And you know what she told me to do before she died? To remember. To memorialize. So you know what I'm doing, Rózsi? I'm using the journal, and I'm putting the belongings of the people who were murdered in the locations of their deaths. I'm creating a monument, a real monument that lives among us.

So arrest me, evict me, I don't care. I've done my duty. I am remembering the genocide of my people in this way. And I'm helping everyone else remember too. They lived here. That should never be forgotten.

(They are silent for a very, very, long time, looking at each other. Rózsi presses a fist to her mouth. Then she dumps the armful of things she's holding into Nadav's box and walks away without a word. Lights fade on Nadav in his doorway.)

(BLACKOUT)

"The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute changed my life because I was exposed to new, amazing learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom. I believe that the connections I have made here and the things I've learned will stay with me for the rest of my life."

—Sam Jacovitz





I AM SORRY; I NEVER TOLD YOU IT'S OKAY TO TAKE UP SPACE

By Sneha Dey
Scarsdale High School, NY

acid runs in her intestines
an apple is lunch
eat more, i told her, but i did not push
she laughs, thinks of how hills will go from bones

pomegranate juice like rivers on the kitchen counter
she shuckles for dinner
will the compact crimson seeds let her feel ribs?

she loads her pockets with rolls of change for her trip to the doctor
leaves crumbs on the plate so no one thinks to check the garbage
big breakfast means not at all
means you'll see, my thighs won't touch soon

he doesn't like "fat girl,"
but "drunk girl," he just might
he brings the beer to her lips
she opens-

now there's vodka on her bedside table
the burn in her stomach dulls
when her throat burns too

did i give you that acid?

we'd talk through the night
speak, you couldn't tell me then
you didn't talk in class because all you could think
if your fat rolls showed

between hospitals and rehab
all you see are white ceiling walls

how could i have not thought anorexia
how could i let you think you were
fat girl



SAPPHIC LAMENTS

By Rachel (Emory) DeYoung
Bard High School Early College, NY

She is black and I am green. Her goddess is Pluto and
mine is Minerva.

She is a bat and I am a butterfly. She sings to the stars
in the cool night while I flutter on gossamer wings.

She is the depths and I am the reefs. Strange
creatures light her calming darkness while turtles float
gently on my waves.

She is velvet and I am silk. She evokes power, grace,
and elegance while I am sleek and smooth.

She is dreams and I am reality. She blankets and
protects in the deep calm of night while I punish and
demand in the bright prison of the day.

She is Hades and I am Persephone. She is the judge
of a world of the dead, seducing my naiveté with her
charm and mystery.

She is lies and I am truth. She is kind and softens my
cruel, tormenting honesty.

She is darkness and I am light. She cannot exist
without me, nor I without her.

We unite and universes are born from the touch of
our lips and her hands on my breasts.

She is the moon and I am the sun. My light never
leaves her silver surface, my hands always hold hers.
Our marriage decorates the heavens and no one shall
ever call into question the love Everything has for
Nothing.

She is death and I am life. She and I meet in an
instant, able to touch and kiss before death takes
life's gift into its embrace and we are separated across
galaxies once more.



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

A Play by Kaela Ellis
Schuylerville High School, NY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ISAAC: *Janitor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Disappointed with his life.*

VINCENT (VINNY): *Janitor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Easily frustrated.*

SCENE: *Outside of Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in the back where the janitors put the trash out at 5pm.*

TIME: *The present.*

AT RISE: *(ISAAC is sitting on the steps outside the museum, depressed. VINCENT walks up to Isaac, mop in hand.)*

VINCENT: Isaac, I'm done cleaning up your slack.

ISAAC: *(depressed)* What slack?

VINCENT: It's been months, watching you pout around. I can't stand it anymore. I get it your dad died, but come on man, mid-life crisis or whatever, get to work. I've even been making excuses for you, telling the boss all sorts of lies.

ISAAC: *(mumbling)* I never asked you to do that.

VINCENT: I've been doing your work – dusting those fancy metropolitan statues, shoving your plunger down those grimy toilets caked with the filth coming out of those rich touristy museum visitors, and doing the sinks as well.

ISAAC: I never asked you to do that.

VINCENT: I KNOW YOU DIDN'T ASK ME, but you've never heard of the universal law of being nice to people who have had a recent death in the family. I know what it's like and I

thought I could help you. But you don't appreciate anyone's help and you don't do any work.

ISAAC: *(mumbling)* I'm going through stuff.

VINCENT: DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE ALL GOING THROUGH STUFF? I have my stuff just like you, but you still see me at work everyday, not making excuses. GET TO WORK.

(Angry, Vincent tosses his mop to Isaac. Isaac catches it easily.)

ISAAC: It's time for you to wake up, Vinny. Look around, is this where you imagined you were going to be 10, 20 years ago? I can tell you this isn't where I wanted to be. Hell I want to be working on Wall Street. I want to pick my kid up from school and not be working these god damn shifts. I want to go home to my penthouse, not some dingy apartment with rent not paid and where I have to dodge crime scenes to arrive.

VINCENT: We all want the dream life Isaac.

ISAAC: But I hate this life Vinny. Don't you? You don't have it any better than me, I know about your addict sister who you've got to care for and you live in a neighborhood no better than mine. Do you ever stop and think? Come on I know you must. We could have such a better life for ourselves.

VINCENT: Of course I want my life different, but what can I do about it. I dug a hole for myself, goofing off in high school and so never went to college, but that was normal, I was lucky to even graduate from high school.

ISAAC: It doesn't matter what you did. What do you want to do? What type of

life would you like to have?

VINCENT: Well, between my janitorial job, McDonald's counter one, and helping my sister, I never got to do what I want. As a kid, you know when everyone had those far out crazy dreams, I always dreamed of being a judge. I wanted to be the man making the decisions. I thought a job as a judge would give me control, control in a world where I got none. But my dreams mean nothing, there is no way of achieving them.

(Isaac rubs the concrete stairs as a nervous reaction and takes a deep breath.)

ISAAC: I – I've been going to night school you know. I'm learning to be a math teacher. It's at terrible hours of the night and every time I go I almost fall asleep, but it's an opportunity for a better life.

VINCENT: A better life. I can see myself sitting there in one of those little school desks learning about all the judge stuff and one year later who knows, hell I can be a judge, making real money and sending my sister to rehab and cleaning up myself.

(Vincent sits down next to Isaac and looks off into the distance, thinking.)

ISAAC: *(Chuckling)* Dream big, you never know where it can take you.

VINCENT: Yeah, I guess so.

ISAAC: *(sighing)* Good Talk.

(Isaac pats Vincent's knee and walks into the museum, mop in hand, whistling. Vincent sits on the steps, taking Isaac's place.)

(BLACKOUT)



BLUE

By Jessica Haas
Preston High School, NY

Two years. As of today, it's been two years. Two years since I lost her. Two years since my wife, Kori, ended her life. It still haunts me, finding her the way I did. I had gotten off work early that day, but not early enough. It was around 1:00 p.m. She wasn't supposed to be home at that time. I remember walking up the stairs to our bedroom, to change into something more comfortable than my suit. I just wanted to relax and wait for my wife to come home. Little did I know, she already was. When I reached our bedroom, I opened the door and noticed her lying in our bed. Huh, I had thought, why is she home so early? I walked over to her quietly, thinking she was asleep. I went over to make sure she was all right; the blankets were covering her from head to toe. She only did that when she was sick. I pulled the blankets back and felt an overwhelming sensation of nausea. Kori's eyes were open in a blank stare, and her skin held a blue tint to it. There was a sealed plastic bag covering her head. I ripped the plastic bag off her body, but I knew I was too late. My wife was gone. She was dead.

"Here you go sir, blue roses just as you asked," the cashier at the florist shop interrupts my thoughts. I hand him some money, take the flowers, and leave the shop. Blue was her favorite color. I walk absentmindedly to my destination, staring at the bouquet of flowers in my hand. I do not have to look ahead to see where I am going. I always end up in the same place: the cemetery. When I arrive, I follow the path to my wife's grave. Tears threaten to spill from my eyes. I stop in front of the grave that reads, "Here Lies Korina Grayson. Beloved Daughter, Sister and Wife. 1987-2015." The tears start to fall freely then. I begin to think of all the memories I had with my love. How infectious her laugh was, how sweet her voice sounded calling my name, how beautiful she was.

Thinking of Kori makes me feel uncontrollable sadness and guilt, but also anger. How could she leave me? I think. She meant the world to me. She was my everything, and she left me. Just like that, Kori made the decision to leave me behind. Was I not important to her? Did she become sick of me? My anger started to grow and my tears stop. I feel like screaming. Checking to see if anyone is in sight, I look down at Kori's grave, and scream at it. I let all my anger out on her. "How could you? How could you be so selfish and take your own life?! Didn't you think about how that would affect me? You were so stupid! It was a test and you failed. I knew if you were given the chance, you would leave me. And you did!" I pace angrily back and forth, trying to calm myself down. I suck in a deep breath, and look back at my wife's grave. "I'm sorry," I began, "that was rude of me. What I should be telling you is how much I miss and love you," I calm myself down completely and continue, "and how sorry I am for leaving that note. As well as the supplies." I chuckle ironically, and think back to the morning of Kori's death. I left the plastic bag and a sedative out on her nightstand, with a note, saying, 'If you're really worried about not being loved by me one day, you might as well just kill yourself now. Save yourself the heartbreak.'

My chuckling continues for a few moments, looking down at Kori's grave one last time, "It was only a test. I didn't really want you to do it; I didn't think you would. I love you, but I wanted to know if you would leave me. I guess I got my answer." Raising my head up to the sky, I let out one last hearty laugh, and walk out of the cemetery, where my wife would remain, buried six feet under. ■



FIVE LETTER “I LOVE YOU”

By Alexandria Henderson
Colts Neck High School, NJ

I don't know how you like to spend your Saturday afternoons, but I like to spend mine torturing myself. You see, I haven't talked to him in over a month but he might as well be years away at this point. And so, I'm sitting here, on my bed, smoothing over the same crease in the bedspread as if the determination in my palm could also smooth over the month of animosity between us, but every time I lift my hand a mountain of fabric rises once more. My eyes have glazed over from staring at my phone for too long, reading over the same words for the hundredth time. I would just delete the message – that is if I could. Instead I'm anxiously hovering over the send button, because the wrath of my mother, you know how she is, is enough to keep me trapped in this personal hell. I could just press the blue button and end it, it's really not that difficult of a task, but all I can think about as my thumb prepares to fall is a month filled with what has to be complete and utter hatred. All I can see are the cold looks, the eye-rolls, the times where I'd hear his infectious laugh and then hear it die as soon as he saw me. All the times that he'd talk about me but never to me. All the times when he would pretend that I didn't exist.

I know deep down that somehow I must've hurt him. I'm no saint. But he's hurt me too – in ways he can't even imagine. But even after all that, even after he's put me through hell and back, my mind keeps going back to the look in his glassy, red eyes. And the way his shoulders had slumped downward like he was Atlas carrying the weight of the world. And how that Thursday morning all I wanted to do was hug him again and feel the way his head rested atop mine and tell him that I was sorry.

That I was sorry we didn't work out. That I was sorry I didn't tell him how I felt sooner. That I was sorry we'll never get to find out what could have been. That I was sorry hearts were broken. That I was sorry that I had hurt him to the point where he felt like he had to shut me out. And that I was so, so fucking sorry that on Wednesday night, his friend put a bullet through his skull.

But I didn't. I didn't even come close. When he'd finally looked my way, I couldn't even meet his eyes, my gaze stopping at his downturned lips. Instead of speaking, I just turned away and shrunk into my jacket, like a butterfly crawling back into her cocoon. All throughout that morning, I felt a ball of emotion begin to grow in my throat, rapidly, like a snowball being pushed down a steep hill. Guilt piled up on top of anger on top of embarrassment on top of fear, layers of emotion piling up on top of each other until it was hard to tell where one stopped and the other began. And all the way at the core of this snow ball, no, snow boulder was an overwhelming, unadulterated, cluster-fuck of love for a stupid, clueless boy. Do you know what it's like to love someone more than you love air itself? Because I did. I think I still do.

I'm filled with love. Love for the boy who single-handedly ruined my reputation with the entire school with just one angry post. Love for a boy who earned me dirty looks in the locker room and whispers in the hallway. Love for the boy who sparked a deluge of creative notes in my locker. Slut. Whore. Skank. All words designed to pigeonhole a girl into a tiny little box with barely any room for her to breathe. Love for the boy who bulldozed over my confidence and most of my heart.

And here I am. I sat down at 2:37 and the clock now dutifully reads 3:14. The crease in my bedspread remains persistent as ever and the guilt weighing on my conscience is a few pounds heavier. My phone screen has dimmed but the paragraph is still neatly pasted into the text box, riddled with apologies and unspoken hesitations. The clock now says 3:15 and my finger crashes down on the send button like a guillotine being dropped. And with that one push of a button, my condolences and another small piece of my heart are soaring through cyberspace. ■



BELOW THE SURFACE

By Meridian Hinton-Cooley
Glen Ridge High School, NJ

I used to think of myself as
tiny but mighty
when I was blind to the horrors of this place
or just chose not to look closely.

The ocean can't be avoided forever,
not when it's so easy to get swept up,
tangled in chains of black seaweed
or pushed down deeper,
into places no one sees
and everyone is afraid of.

I had to open my eyes at some point,
peer out of this shell
that I've long overgrown,
yet the thought of stepping onto the sand
turns me to stone.

No armor is enough to protect me
from the way they stare and whisper,
the way they recoil
from my black eyes
— devoid —
and my sharp claws
— wasted —
empty space fills the place of friendship,
yet another place I've never known.

I know I could try harder,
but I tell myself
I was not made to exist
in such a cruel realm,
where home and prison
are indiscernible.

Maybe this is the life I'm supposed to live.

I should be somewhere far from here,
past the sparkling, sun-kissed ceiling
that ripples tauntingly, far above my head.
I shouldn't live below the surface,
where my only role is to fade.

Yet I stay, day after day,
in this place where the light never reaches,
where my only name is insignificant,
and sinking is inevitable.



WHEN HE WAS MOST ALIVE

By Lucy Hodgman
The Beacon School, NY

There were white roses at the wedding, and gardenias, and lilies that Emily had put in blue vases. She was wearing pearls. After the ceremony, Richard had seen her looking at him. Her face was gold; she had just finished crying, light catching in the tears and making her cheeks shine. When the sun went down she had gone to her mother.

Richard had been drinking too much that night, until his wedding became a scintillating delusion of light and music. Until he started to wonder if the light was what had gotten him drunk, or the apple blossoms, which never used to bloom but had started to bud the week before the wedding.

From across the lawn, Emily was looking at him again. She was beautiful, in this light, with the wind from the mountains lifting the hem of her dress. He liked her, even, he had wanted to marry her. He had wanted to marry her. And they would be married, when in the night she would take hold of his hand and they would leave her parents' house. He wondered if they would stay married, if they would have children, if he would see her die. Or perhaps, she would be the one to see him die, to watch while he faded and to be the one to bury him. This was the night when he was supposed to be most alive, this night when he married her. Maybe it was, he thought, watching Emily receive guests and looking around for a waiter to fill his glass again. Maybe he would never be more alive than this. Low wind blew apple blossom petals into his hands.

He remembered when they were young, they were still young. Emily's brother had put an old song on when Richard reached for her hand. Her fingers were cold and the sun was gone altogether by then, the sky purple smoke above the hills.

He looked at her, while they danced, and they still did not speak, and she had started to cry again. Her eyes had always been level to his. She looked back at him. Her face was fiery with bright desperation and they danced faster, spinning and holding on in the falling light. ■



"This program was a huge inspiration to me. Hearing everyone's words and work inspired me to be a better writer. Thank you so much for this experience."

—Alanna Moore



IGNORANCE, TRASH TALK, AND FRIENDS

By Emma Hua
Roslyn High School, NY

There was once a girl, a pretty girl. She was very pretty, kind, and smart. No one knew the ugliness underneath the mask she wore. No one did until she started ignoring people and people started ignoring her back. She got infuriated that people were ignoring her, and she started talking about them behind their backs, negatively. People realized that it was her who was talking negatively about them and they started talking negatively about her.

She figured out it was them, the people who she considered she was close with. She blamed everything on them and on one specific person, she lashed out at that person. The person who had given their friendship one hundred percent effort while she just set her feet on a table and relaxed.

Before their friendship dissipated, they had a big fight. The pretty girl constantly pestered the other girl about her trash talking about the pretty girl. She blatantly accused her of things that the pretty girl would start, such as hanging out with the hard-working girl's other friends more than hanging out with the pretty girl when she needed help in school. The other girl cried, the girl who gave so much effort into their friendship. She became intimidated by the pretty girl and apologized for giving their friendship all her effort while the pretty girl didn't put in any effort in their friendship. The pretty girl, however, wouldn't accept the hard-working girl's apology. Instead, she decided to target her and insult her even more until another friend came along. This friend was the hard-working girl's friend, the silent friend. The silent friend called the pretty girl a hypocrite

as the pretty girl accused the hard-working girl of dragging all of their friends into this fight when the pretty girl had started the fight in a group chat that involved their friend group. Immediately after the silent friend's defense, the pretty girl puts on her sweet mask.

The day after, the hard-working girl ignores the pretty girl. The pretty girl tackles her in the morning, however the hard-working girl only gets even more infuriated with the pretty girl. Before long, another friend stepped in: the lean friend. The lean friend was the neutral friend, and decided to help mend the friendship between the pretty girl and the hard-working girl. It went smoothly with tears and secrets being told, however the hard-working girl was still intimidated by the pretty girl. She didn't tell the pretty friend her darkest secret or any secret at all.

A few weeks later, the pretty girl starts to ignore the hard-working girl, the silent friend, and the other friend: the wise friend. The pretty girl starts to give looks of irritation and infuriation towards the three friends but the pretty girl is always joyous when another friend comes: the talented friend. The hard-working girl and the wise friend notice. Eventually, they stop all communication between them and the pretty girl. Christmas soon came along and the hard-working girl bought gifts for the talented friend, the pretty girl, the wise friend, and another friend: the kind friend. Before the break, the hard-working girl made custom cards and gave her gifts to those she bought them for. She had a gift for the pretty girl but the pretty girl only glared at her and didn't accept her expensive gift.

Then it comes around that the pretty girl was trash talking about the hard-working girl. The hard-working girl is dealing with her own situations with school and other friends. The pretty girl only adds to her pile of situations. The pretty girl then apologizes for her behavior after the hard-working girl had an emotional breakdown after school, however the hard-working girl couldn't face her so the hard working girl sends out a message on social media for the pretty girl to stop picking on her. The wise friend also gets irritated at the pretty girl after the pretty girl had done things that wouldn't be accepted by most normal people. Together, the hard-working girl and the wise friend ignore the pretty girl, breaking their ties with the pretty girl.

To this day, the pretty girl still thinks they are fighting and that the wise friend and the silent friend took sides with the hard-working girl. The lean friend is neutral between the two along with the talented friend.

The pretty girl claimed that she didn't need friends, however no one can be independent for all of their life. If she ever were to call for their help, the hard-working girl and the wise friend would not respond to her cry for the pretty girl was forever alone. She had pinpointed the blame on her friends and in return, they left. The ignorance and trash talk formed stronger bonds between the silent friend, the wise friend, and the hard-working girl. It formed friendships, everlasting ones.

The pretty girl would forever remain alone. ■



SUBURBAN

By Laura Hurley

Shenendehowa High School, NY

has anyone ever told you about the suburban gods?
the reckless, the immortal
swallowing ashes and fire without a second thought
filling the nights with life and noise, only to vanish when the morning comes.

they're easy enough to find, if you feel like looking—
go to the smallest town, find a street:
an empty, worn down, in need of repair but the town budget's too low street.
and then you wait
until you hear the surefire sound of old car engines,
smell the tang of cheap alcohol from the only convenience store in town.

they can be found elsewhere too, of course:
behind the school building,
the drive in every friday night,
the back booth of the diner on main street—
such stagnant places until they walk in, make them chaotic, make them alive
one harsh laugh and cigarette at a time.

that part where i called them immortals?
i lied.
they're more like fireworks—
getting their few lucky moments in glory,
everyone knowing full well the time will come when they burn out.

it always happens when they least expect.

there's never much left behind to remember them by:
jars of ashes, halfhearted cenotaphs.
despite this, they live on
in the hushed stories told in the midnight hours,
the truths that become legends,
intertwining their ways into history.

there are always more to take their place.
new blood, confident they will be the ones to change the fate
that befalls all the gods from the suburban myths
but here's the truth: they never do

and it doesn't look like they ever will.



SPLIT

By Hannah Jablons
Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

A cube
No, a square
No, a triangle
No, a symbol

A divided people
A melting pot
Unmelted
Hard as a rock
Just taken out of the freezer

A divided nation
Two sides optional
Yet some betray
With the third, fourth, or fifth

A divided world
Because when you
Put together two stones
They don't melt
They don't fuse
They just *clank*
Separated by watery breaks

Even the line
Dividing the divided
Is split
Some white
Some black
Some gray areas like usual
Blocking off their opposite sides
Down to the very last detail



BUTTERFLY EFFECT

By Samuel Jacovitz
Friends Seminary, NY

If you were to go back in time and pluck the wings off a flying butterfly would it make a difference?
If you were to have called her before she went out and had too much to drink would it have made a difference?

How significant is every single decision you make throughout the day?

And how insignificant?

At the end of every day

We all close our sleep-deprived eyes

We all started from the same place

Attached to the umbilical cord

But everyone ended up on different paths

How can one feel insignificant

When once their self-conscious forms

They are capable of doing whatever they please.

The self has infinitely more freedom than the society we all conform to.

Every decision

Action

Emotion

that you express goes on to alter the universe.

How can one feel significant when all other seven billion people are just

like

you?



"These two weeks were a nice reminder of the many different kinds of writing there are to explore, and that writing is really a constant battle to improve oneself. It was also nice to meet and hear other young writers. This program has been a great opportunity for me to just have time to write."

—Anna Niedzelski



THE LITERAL VAGINA MONOLOGUE

By Elizabeth Karpen

Baruch College Campus High School, NY

I sit in the circle, my head kept low as everyone states their sins. I can't say who any of them are—they all blend in together as all men in suits seem to—yet they know who I am. We looked like fools, sitting in children's chairs, overflowing from the sides. Eventually it is my turn. Most of the other miscreants squirm in their seats, but I am ready.

“Hi, my name is V and I am an addict. I ruin people's lives. I never mean to, but somehow it always seems to happen. You see, I come as a curse. I pick you, and suddenly you are less than what you were the moment before. I can even give you a number for that, 77% of what you were before— that's still passing right? Parents dread me so much that they do rituals far and wide to prevent their child from having me. I'm the not-contagious malady of their nightmares. It's not that I enjoy being a *bête noire*, but to have me is a kiss of death. Say goodbye to a future of endless possibility— now you're stuck with me (I think this is the part I'm supposed to insert an evil laugh). Your parents and their parents before them have gone so far as subjecting me to a life with neither glory nor prosperity, written out of history completely. Now I'm sounding quite judgmental and I shouldn't, we're all here for the same reason.” By this time everyone had already turned away. They know my wrongs, but will not admit to their involvement in the continuation of such vices.

I have many names, most synonymous with weak. This is strange because there is nothing dainty and feeble with all the gore, death, and life that come out of me— literally.

I guess the debilitated stereotype comes from those who have spent eternity blaspheming my name. The ones who subject my victims to the constant fear of being the one in five, an ever present knowledge that it can be you. You can play it like a game: will someone force their body upon yours today?

More people have been stricken by my plague than not, yet somehow they don't make up the majority. They are left in lugubrious silence; those who speak out are only pushed down farther down than they had started. The assertive— no bossy, they're always bossy, are subjected to monotonous nodding and smiling. Speech is not part of the package. That's just nature's role for you, sweetie. Now push back your hair, sit up straight and look pretty. Your decrepitude will be watched and scorned, so smile and put on some lipstick.

I can try to curb my pessimistic attitude, but when you get me, you are now a target. Vermillion branded to all of your form so everybody knows. You have a vagina. A living embodiment of irony: subjugated by the people that they made.

“Women since the dawn of time have been ruined just for having me, and I'd like to apologize to all of those whom I have hurt.” Truly at this point I am not looking for atonement, I know that it is far too late. In retrospect, the human race should be apologizing to me because they are the ones who have made my victims into victims. Women were not considered inferior until mankind decided that they were. I should not blame myself, but them; institutionalizing sexism was not my creation. I only made females... well females by definition. I only turned them into the original lycanthropes: turning them into completely other beings at every “full moon.” Fire crackers bursting in their uteruses. Sometimes I like to shake it up with rolling waves of cramps; I try to resemble the ocean, except this ocean is made of pain. I can't say that I'm not a fan of the classic sharp shooter cramps...but who isn't? But for all of that I am sorry.

“I am sorry that I turn white pants into costumes from the set of *Carrie*. I am sorry that childbirth is a bitch. I am sorry for centuries of oppression just for possessing me. I am sorry you become petrified cocaine to dogs. I am sorry for being shark bait. I'm sorry, but I am not to blame... you all are.” So I sit down, push my hair back and look pretty— it's not like anyone was listening anyway. ■



TEARFUL

By James Ko

Stuyvesant High School, NY

When I asked him how he'd found them, the policeman flinched.

"Well..." he trailed off. "Doc, have you heard about the protests going on today?"

"Course I have," I said. "It's been all over the news lately." I gestured towards the TV, where news headlines exclaimed "POLICE USE TEAR GAS ON PROTESTERS." Live footage displayed a riot that appeared to be escalating.

The policeman glanced at the TV, but quickly shifted his gaze back to me. "I was part of the response force for this riot," he told me. He paused for a moment to poll for a reaction from me, maybe expecting disgust. I had none.

"I was watching the couple for a while before the tear gas started," he continued. "They were real enthusiastic about the whole thing. One of the most rowdy bunch of protesters, I tell ya." He paused, recuperating himself a bit. "They were also pretty cheerful. They kept smiling at each other and giving each other googly eyes. If you'd seen them, you'd think they were on a date." Both of us snorted softly.

We turned our attention to bodies lying in two light-green beds next to us. They were covered in bruises and splotchy patches of red. The man was slowly opening and closing his hand because of a nervous system malfunction. In our silence, we heard both of them faintly wheezing.

The policeman sighed. "What a fucked up day to try to be romantic."

"When the tear gas started," he continued, "they were caught in the middle of it. They tried to run away, but there were other protesters left and right. They could barely budge without knocking into someone."

I made a grim face. "Is that how they got extended exposure? How did the people around them fare?" I inquired.

"It's a bit more involved than that," the policeman replied. "Most of the folks around them managed to escape after a minute or two. But this girl," he gestured to the woman lying on the bed next to him, "she was tripped by one of 'em and got stuck in the gas."

"I see. Did the guy trip too?" I asked.

The policeman's eyes started to cloud. "No. He was leaving like everyone else at first, but once he saw her he rushed over. He stood over her and yelled her name over and over while shaking her. Then both of them started losing control of their muscles and writhing," he said. "The young man crumpled to the ground, still calling the girl's name. They both passed out eventually."

"How long were they writhing?" I asked.

"For a few more than five minutes."

I winced. "You were there, and you let them inhale that for so much time?"

The policeman pressed his index fingers against each other. "My superiors had told me not to get close to them until the gas had dissipated. They could've ripped our masks off," he said. "But after watching them for a few minutes, I came to my senses. Every second they spent in that gas might be the second that kills them! So I finally waded into there even though the gas was still potent, and I helped put 'em on a stretcher and rode with 'em on the ambulance towards here."

I gave the policeman a pat on the back. "In that case, it's awesome that you defied orders to get them here safe and sound. Great job!"

"Well, I don't know about 'safe and sound,'" he said. "They're still in critical condition, aren't they?"

That was the moment fate chose to make the male patient's pulse drop; the monitor next to him started beeping rapidly. I scrambled over to his bed and shouted to the policeman that he needed to leave.

The policeman started having a breakdown. I couldn't deal with him at the moment, so I yelled for a nurse to escort him out of the room. The policeman tried to resist the nurse, but he wasn't forceful.

As he was dragged out, he exclaimed, "I'll confess, I hated austerity too! I sympathized with the protesters. I became a policeman because I wanted to serve my country, but now I feel closer to a criminal."

Although I only glimpsed him, I can remember that moment with startling vividness even today. That frantic, disillusioned expression etched into his face, the smell of salty tears mixed with a hint of tear gas, his droopy body and his uniform mopping up hospital grime from the floor as the nurse held his worn hands, this all comes back to me with unnerving precision at will although I've handled plenty of ER patients in my career.

That day, both the guy and the girl died. I never heard from the policeman again. When I searched for him years later, I found out he'd moved to the other side of the globe. Whenever I think about that case, I always remind myself that the couple died on the same day and with each other to cheer myself up. ■



THE LOUSE

A Play by Carmela Lara
Frank Sinatra School of the Arts, NY

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CAMERON: *A young recluse. Melodramatic, self-conscience, self-deprecating and very, very tempestuous. His hair is long and he wears wire-rimmed glasses. Fan of Morrissey, Floral Button ups and The Picture of Dorian Grey. In a long term relationship with a louse named Vee. Only Cameron can speak to and understand Vee.*

FOX: *Best Friend of Cameron, analytical and pensive. Bold and at times a bit brash. Sarcastic and skeptical, cool and down to earth. The exact opposite of Cameron. Not afraid to speak his mind. Tall and lanky he is ginger with short, unruly hair. Mistrusting of the louse, dislikes the effects it's been having on Cameron.*

SCENE: *An apartment.*

TIME: *The present.*

AT RISE: *(Lights fade in focusing on FOX who sits on the bathroom toilet. He is attempting to calm CAMERON (seen only in silhouette) who is crying in the bathtub. He sits behind the shower curtain with his knees to his chest, rocking back and forth.)*

CAMERON: *(yelling hysterically)*
YOU'RE SICK, MY GOD, FOX,
YOU'RE SICK! HAVE YOU NO
HEART?! NO CONSIDERATION
OF MY FRAGILE PSYCHE! YOUR
LACK OF COMPASSION KNOWS
NO BOUNDS! WHY, IF YOU AREN'T
THE MOST MISERABLE SON OF A
BITCH I EVER...

(He can't finish his sentence; for a few seconds he is silent. Then he continues blubbing, hurls a shampoo bottle at FOX's head and buries his face in his hands.)

CAMERON (cont'd): *(muffled)*
I invite you... a comrade...a trusted
colleague into my house...my humble

abode *(removes hands from face)* and
you do what?! shit all over me like
you're Nana Mildred's disease-ridden
Pomeranian! I already told you why I
can't go outside?! How do you expect
me to if I can't even stay inside without
being scrutinized? Well now do you
see what you've done, Fox?! What
you've made me resort to? I can't
believe that you of all people...a man I
once called my friend, would possibly
go as far as to encroach upon my
personal boundaries. WELL GUESS
WHAT? I FOUND IT! THE LAST
POSSIBLE PLACE YOU HAVEN'T
DESECRATED! MY ONLY SAFE
SPACE!

*(Fox rolls his eyes, unfazed by his friend's
temper tantrum.)*

FOX: *(irritated)* Cameron, your grimy
bathtub is not a safe space.

CAMERON: *(sarcastically)* Oh please
do continue! It's not as if I don't need
another metaphorical blow to the testes!

FOX: Cam, look at yourself! You're a
hermit crab!

CAMERON: *(self-pitying)* I can't help it.
I've been sleep-deprived. And I haven't
been consistent with my honey-ginseng
facials.

*(Cameron looks up and cocks his head to
the side, listening for an inaudible voice.)*

CAMERON (cont.): YES, I KNOW MY
FACE GETS PUFFY!

FOX: Seriously, Cam, how can someone
like you...you a face-mask-utilizing,
hair-volumizing, anise- cumin-
moisturizing Duckie Dale wannabe
have let himself fall so deep down the
rabbit hole?

CAMERON: I told you I was fine.

FOX: And yet look at where believing
you has gotten me!? Spending my
Saturday night on your toilet as the
torrents of time race faster and faster
towards our inevitable demise. Haven't
you ever tried living like the Romans
man? Eat, drink, and be merry, for
tomorrow we die! They just opened a
new '50s style dive bar down the street,
walking a block won't kill you.

CAMERON: Well, I s'pose...
*(He snaps his head up abruptly. Again
Cameron looks up, listening for the same
unheard voice.)*

CAMERON (cont'd): *(nervously)*
Considering it? No. No of course not!
You know I'm perfectly happy on the
liquid diet.

FOX: That's her, isn't it? The louse.

CAMERON: Would you at least make
an effort to call her Vee? You know she's
sensitive about that!

FOX: Look, man, you and I both know
I only want the best for you, and I really
don't wanna say what you and I both
know I wanna say but... I'm gonna say it
anyway; I really think the root of your
problems is that louse, man. I mean,
think about it, really consider it. Ever
since you got with her man, that louse
has been *(mimes the sound of a whip
cracking)* left and right. In fact, I think
the last time I saw you set foot outside
this chasm you call a home was when
you were still single.

*(Cameron gets out of the tub and walks
out of the bathroom. He makes his way
over to the dining room instead and sits
down at the table. He rests his head in
his hands.)*

CAMERON: *(calmly)* You know, I may
have been a tad melodramatic before,
Fox, but jabbing at my love life is a low
blow even for you.

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(continued from page 31)

FOX: Right now the prospects aren't looking so good man. You're not really into that whole John and Yoko dynamic.. are you?

CAMERON: *(angrily)* Well, I'm sorry that my happiness offends you.

FOX: *(firmly)* It isn't. But have you ever considered that your relationship might be a hindrance to your social life?

CAMERON: *(conflicted)* No... that *(looks up)* you can't be?

(He trails off. Then firmly)

CAMERON *(cont'd)*: You're wrong.

FOX: Am I?

CAMERON: Yes. Vee has been nothing but good to me and you know it! *(pauses)* You just don't understand the symbiosis we've got going on. You know I've never been the type to have his shit together. Remember how it was before her? Yeah that's right; complete, unfiltered entropy!

FOX: Entropy?! Cameron, you're the biggest control freak I know! This has got to do with your insecurity and you know it. You're constantly picking on yourself and now you've found someone else to do the job. Face it, man! She's a creature comfort.

CAMERON: Vee gives my life the direction it's always been lacking.

FOX: Well I think she's been giving your life something entirely different man. In all the time you've been with her I've only ever seen you ... I don't know *(pauses)* dismal, blue, pessimistic? Significantly more than usual. I can think of about 20 instances of that being directly correlated to Vee. Shall I recount the highlights?

CAMERON: Highlights? What highlights?!

FOX: Family cook-out last summer? You didn't come because of what she told you about spontaneous human combustion. Stacy's 21st birthday party at Long Beach? You told me you couldn't go because Vee said you risked coming into contact with flesh-eating bacteria! You couldn't even go shopping for a swimsuit because she told you you were putting on a beer gut. Aren't you tired of the ceaseless criticisms? Face it *(pauses)* that louse is what's holding you back.

CAMERON: But how could I live without her? How could I rid myself of her when...when her ceaseless criticisms are the only things that reflect my true perception of myself?

(Fox ponders that. For a while he doesn't respond. He walks over to the window. Then he sees something and turns back toward the dining room.)

FOX: C'mere. *(Cameron holds his head in his hands. He looks up.)*

CAMERON: Why?

FOX: Would you just come? Come look at the window for a second.

(And so he does. Nothing particularly eventful is occurring outside. The pavement is wet. Across the street is a children's playground. A tree has fallen on it, just barely missing the swing set. The tree's branches inhibit any motion, however. And the swing set just sits idly by.)

FOX *(cont'd)*: Picture this. You're the swing and Vee *(pauses)* she's the tree. Now both you and that swing are free agents. You've got momentum man. You've got that potential energy just stored there. Just sitting stagnant *(pauses)* taking up space inside you. You could do anything with that energy man it's just waiting there fizzing up to the brim waiting for the day you'll free it. Which takes me to our next point of discussion: the tree. That tree is Vee, now do you see it? She's robbing you of it man, you're one shot of existence, Your momentum. Vee's all right *(pauses)* but what do you say we find Cam again?

(Cameron then feels Fox press something into his hand. It is cold but familiar. He now knows what must be done. Fox stands over him and does not speak. Cameron holds the shears in his hand, pensively, despondently, maybe even mournfully. Then he flicks the switch on. There is a fade to black as, offstage, we hear the shears buzzing.)



NOTES

By Adele Long
Spackenkill High School, NY

Mrs. Johnson? Yes, it's me, Vivian Wescott, but please don't kick me out just yet. I know, I know I'm not supposed to be here, but hey, I have to plead my case. See, I'm sure this isn't the greatest time, half an hour before closing on a Friday, but I said to myself, is it ever a good time to beg a librarian shamelessly to un-ban you from the library? No. Not really. And yes, I'm not allowed in, but it's really hard to find librarians outside of the library, and I figured that stalking you wouldn't help my case. Right, my case. Here's the thing, Mz. J, I mean Mrs. Johnson, I am not a bad kid. Many, many people would vouch for me; I follow rules. I'm an upstanding member of the community. Well, not exactly upstanding, so to speak, since my grandma is always yelling at me for having bad posture, but—you get what I mean. Do you? You don't. Okay. That... incident was a fluke. I wait at crosswalks, I give up my seat on the bus for elderly people, I put my gum in the trashcan like a decent human. I always do my homework, and that's why I need to not be banned from the library, this library. Yes, there's the one on 3rd, but it's creepy! They have a whole section of books on how to dissect cadavers, right in their opening display. Creepy. You have a lovely, nice display! I really like the Jane Austen. Okay, that's not really it. You guys are the only ones with air conditioning. No, that's also a lie. I realize this isn't making me look good, but hey, it's a little scary to tell the truth here. I... shit, the truth is so harder to tell than those lies. Oh, shit! Sorry for cursing. Sorry. Okay. I'm nervous. Sorry. Why won't my hands stop shaking? Sorry. Okay. This library ... the Littleton Public Library on Porter Street. I've grown up in this library ... No, that's not all! I promise. I've grown up in this library and my mom and I always used to take out books from here, like once a week. I still have the library card I first signed back when I was four. Did you know I learned how to write my name specifically so I could get a library card? I know that doesn't matter a whole lot but I think it's cute. I was a cute kid. Anyway, mom always used to leave me notes. In the books, I mean. She'd write me notes and stick them into random pages, and I'd find them as I read. They were always silly little things, written on the backs of grocery lists, and ads from the mail, and those receipts with the coupons at the end, y'know? With, like, funny puns, and pen drawings, and encouragements, and sappy messages about how she'd always be there for me. Those were my favorite. And it was corny, and we both knew it, but it motivated me, got me to read on so I'd find the note. It was our thing, y'know? Me and my mom. Our notes. Always in books, always from this library. I mean, we stopped sort of over time, but it was this shared piece of our history, this treasured piece of our history. So then ... so then she died a while back. And she, she didn't leave a note. Just blew her goddamn brains out, and left me without a note. And I know it's dumb, I know it's not gonna happen, but I feel like if I keep searching the books ... if I keep reading the stories, the words in this library, then maybe I'll find her note. Not, like, a post-it fluttering dramatically down from the spine of a huge dusty volume of Shakespeare, but ... If I keep looking, if I keep reading, I have to find her voice. She was trying to tell me something and I didn't listen and now I have to make up for that. So ... I've been going through the book cards, one by one, and checking out the books my mom took out. And reading them. And trying to find a note. Thank god you guys still used a card catalogue for the longest time. So ... yeah. I know it's against the rules to go behind the main desk, I know it's not strictly ethical to search your database for all the books my mom checked out after you went digital, but please don't ban me. I promise, I'll never, even look at the main desk ever again. I'll stick to the book cards. Just let me have this, this small piece of her. I know it won't bring her back, I'm not trying to bring her back, I'm trying to ... to get her note. And I need this library. Is that ... does that make sense? Sort of? Okay, well, I'll let you think about it. ■



THE MIRROR

By Ryan Ma
La Salle Institute, NY

He loved music—especially the sound of the piano—since he was little. Growing up in a small family, he always wanted to learn the piano, but never got such an opportunity until he went abroad and moved into a new host family. They had a beautiful house and a beautiful concert piano, which hadn't been touched for years. It rested in a big lonely room, waiting for someone to break the long silence, waiting for someone to gently wipe out the dust—well, at least that is what he was told.

He was wrong.

The day he moved in was a cold, rainy day, but the murmuring of the rain and the howling of the thunder was his fiery heart, his earnest excitement. He carried his luggage in and upstairs without breaking a sweat, then he gently put them on the floor and slammed himself onto the bed. But then he realized something—without unpacking, he gathered himself and headed downstairs to the piano room. And that's when he heard someone playing the piano—it was Chopin's Waltz in B minor, Op. 69, the second one; he instantly recognized it—it was one of his most favorite pieces.

The boy was shocked by how well the gentleman was playing. His eyes were filled with curiosity, excitement, and joy, you could tell. He sprinted out of his new room, jumped down the stairs with cat steps, trying not to make any noise to interrupt this beautiful, melancholy work. He knew that whoever it was that was inside really appreciates and understands what he was playing.

He waited patiently outside the room, he was hoping that the music could just keep going forever—he told himself that he would literally spend his entire life to wait for it, to appreciate it, and to love it. But the beautiful, melancholy sing of the angel stopped as it reached its conclusion. The boy walked in with a palpitating heart. And suddenly, he found himself sitting on the chair, before the concert grand, hands holding the final keys.

Shocked, he turned his eyes to the door—no one was there but himself. Looking into the ancient, round, Victorian mirror hanging on the wall close to the door, he saw a younger version of himself, staring right into his eyes, shocked and confused. ■



MONOLOGUE - QUINN

By Alana Moore

Liberal Arts & Science Academy, TX

I know you're wondering why I've gathered all of you here today. You must be wondering what all of you have in common to be invited to my humble home on this afternoon. You're all cut from such different cloth. Barry, that little baking company of yours is doing just fantastic and hey, Marta, how's that book on crystal healing coming along? Glad to hear it. Okay, I know I'm stalling for time here. I guess I'll just get to the point.

I sell drugs. I sell A LOT of drugs. Wow, it's a rush to finally say it! I sell drugs. I sell drugs. I sell drugs! I SELL DRUGS! Painkillers! Ecstasy! Meth! You name it, I've got it, I'll sell it to you for a price! Old Quinn's reliable as chewing gum and they've never been caught and they never will! That's what you've got in common. Me. I've been dealing to the four of you for years now. Oh, don't act so shocked, Barry, you knew it would come out sometime! Cocaine habits are messy and hard to hide! Angela, what's your poison again? Never mind, I remember. You're an LSD gal! Starlet on the streets, swallowing pills in the sheets. Marta—a little herb never hurt anyone! The opioids will get you into hot water, though. And Pierre—haughty little rich boy Pierre! Would be a shame if daddy found out you're using his cash to buy yourself some of that special K. Ketamine. I'm talking about ketamine, just to be clear. Okay, now that we've established you're all drug addicts (don't give me that look, Angela, I took my fair share of mushrooms back in my day), let's get down to business.

I'm getting on in years. I know, I still look pretty good for seventy-three but still. I'm getting up there. My... history certainly doesn't help with the aches and pains of aging. And I was thinking... well, I'd like to retire. Move away from the big city and somewhere old people go, like Florida or something. God knows I've got enough cash, amirite? So that means your supply has dried up. I'll be fine—I've been clean as a whistle for years, but the four of you? Wow, it's not looking so good. Marta, Barry, I'm really the only dealer in this city that sticks to your price ranges, and for the other two of you, well, I don't like the idea of you giving that cash to bastards who've been trying to creep in on my clientele for years. SO. Here's my plan. I'm here for ten more months and then I'm off to somewhere warm with a beach. During that time, I will sell you all the stuff your pretty little heart's desire but after that that's IT! I'm done! No more! And if you try to buy from another dealer I will know, and I will come for you. I know where all of you live. It would be as easy as a phone call to the city police. So my advice is this—start weaning yourselves off. Get clean. Use each other as a support network, your own little Addicts Anonymous. You all know about each other now so if any of you narc on the others you'll know you're next. And then, in ten months, I'm gone forever and you can all resume your normal lives, drug free. Come on, Pierre, don't look so glum! This is—this is me trying to be nice.

I've seen the four of you crush your own lives into pieces for your little habits, okay? How many of the four of you have cut people—really important people—out of your lives for this? I'm willing to bet all of you have, to different extents. And it's not like I've really...taken pleasure in my work, despite what I pretend. Especially these last few years. But for someone as old as me with no high school diploma, what else could I do? Gotta keep a roof over my head and at least three walls around me, right?

And you guys...you guys are the closest thing to friends this senior has, okay, I SAID IT. You think the four of you are my only clients? No! I just don't give enough of a shit about the others to give them a heads up! They can find a new dealer or go cold turkey, see if I give a shit. But the four of you... you're my clients, but you've been my friends, too.

All right, this is the only warning I'll give you. You have ten months! Quit on your own terms or in prison, see if I give a damn!

But. Seriously. Thank you. ■



INDIAN PALACE YELP REVIEW

By Ana Niedzielski

Amherst Regional High School, MA

To be fair, I'd already eaten a turkey burger before we got there, but I ended up eating Indian food with a fork—looking like a total idiot. I admit, I hadn't taken Asian History yet, but I already knew I was messing up culturally. She got curry—fine to eat with a fork—but I ordered something small, finger food—a couple of samosas. Trying not to be awkward, we talked about the music and about guys who get their balls cut off to sing high—you know, without trying to actually use the word “balls.” Next, I tried to find some aspect of my life to interest her, but of course none of it was as interesting as the absinthe poster in her dorm. It was a nice venue, though. The room sparkled under the green glass chandelier, it was almost turquoise in the light—walls draped in images of the East. Colorful. Vibrant. It made me feel bland, as bland as eating plain naan—or boiled broccoli. So overall, the food was good, but the bathrooms were cramped with a lavender Febreze can on the shelf and when I got back she still wouldn't shut up about Texas. Two-and-a-half stars. ■



"I only started creative writing this year. I'm more of a Math and Science-driven student. Skidmore and the Summer Young Writers Institute exposed me to 39 other amazing writers, almost all of who have been writing for many years. I was in awe of their talent. I learned a lot from them and I was driven to become a better writer. I made such amazing friends here that I know I will keep long after the program ends."

—Julia Pines



JOHNNY GO BOOM

By Cassidy Pawul
Westfield High School, MA

Thanks for talking with me, I guess. To be honest, I wouldn't've come unless the state made me go. Mom was never too keen on shrinks. Didn't think she needed one. Well, turns out she did, didn't she? Ha-ha. Anyway, it's not me I'm worried about—I can't afford to worry about myself. Not when my fucking three-year-old brother's gonna be carted off to some dingy orphanage where the nuns smack his knuckles with rulers 'cause I'm one year too young to take care of him! ...I'm sorry, Doc. It's just... I just want things to be normal again... Go back to the days when Dad was there and Mom smiled and Johnny was first learning to walk. He kinda waddled around the living room floor, you know? He'd, like, stagger between Mom and Dad on his stubby sausage legs, and sometimes he got so confused deciding who to walk to he'd fall flat on his butt! He'd never cry, either... He'd just laugh his chubby-cheeked head off. Then Mom would say, "Johnny go boom!" in that fake-deep, goofy voice adults use to talk to babies, and he'd laugh even harder. We all laughed, actually. Mom's voice impressions were pretty funny—that nasal stutter for Porky Pig, that deep, booming voice for Yogi Bear, that sultry Southern drawl for the woman Dad was cheating with. And just like that—once Mom found out—Johnny had one less person to walk to. Mom kinda shrank into herself after that. She started working longer hours at the office, even though we had enough money to support us without Dad's added income. I basically had to take care of Johnny by myself at that point. Instead of Mom, it was me waiting for Johnny at the bus stop, after secretly leaving school early so that I'd make it across town in time. Instead of Mom, it was me who knelt on the carpet for Johnny to walk to when I should have been doing my homework. I clothed him, fed him, dressed him, taught him to talk, taught him to walk. And she just sat there at the kitchen table, watching us with those empty eyes—like she was staring into nothing, you know? Sometimes I got so frustrated I'd just yell at her—scream at the top of my lungs, trying to make her angry, upset, anything but that blank stare. But she'd just turn her head and sigh. Johnny, thank God, barely noticed. He'd stumble across the rug, not a care in the world, repeating Mom's stupid catchphrase to himself and laughing his effin' head off. And then... Then Mom didn't come home from the office. I just assumed she was working a particularly long day, trying to avoid her motherly responsibilities for longer than usual. So I walked Johnny to the bus stop and walked myself to school, like I always do. And that's when I got the call. They said that my mother had jumped off Sycamore Bridge and her body had been found floating at the surface of the river. They came to the school with Tommy- they'd pulled him out of daycare- and let me explain to him what happened. What the hell was I supposed to say? What do I say to a three-year-old child whose mother is dead? So I just tell him that Mommy fell. And do you know what he does? He looks up at me, with those shiny wide, big blue eyes, and says: "Mommy go boom!" He doesn't understand that she's g-gone. I d-don't have the heart to t-tell him—I-I'm sorry, Doc—that Mom won't just sit back up and keep b-bumbling along like he does. Every day, he thinks she'll be back tomorrow when really the funeral arrangements are what will be completed for tomorrow. I'll have to handle them by myself, just like I've done for the past year now, and they'll take Johnny when it's done, and, and... I don't wanna talk anymore, Doc. Is that all right? Good. Thanks for talking with me, I guess. ■



ALL IN THE FAMILY

A play by Julia Pines
Staples High School, CT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MICHAEL: 13 years old. A wannabe businessman who would do anything for success. Needs approval from others (especially his parents) to feel good about himself. Younger brother of Joey.

JOEY: 14 years old. Usually easy going but short tempered. Bit of a partier. Older brother of Michael.

SCENE: A juvenile detention visitation center. There is a table in the middle of the stage with two chairs on either end, and a glass protector in the middle. There are two phones, one on each side of the table.

TIME: The Present.

AT RISE: (MICHAEL enters the juvenile detention visitation center wearing a suit and tie, and gingerly sits on the edge of the seat on the left side of the glass. He looks nervous and bites his nails. JOEY enters wearing an orange prison suit and Michael quickly hides his fingers and tries to look more confident and nonchalant. Joey sits in the other chair. They both pick up the phones.)

JOEY: What the hell man?!

MICHAEL: Calm down, Joey.

JOEY: How could you do this to me?

MICHAEL: Joey, you can't keep blaming your problems on other people. You know you brought this on yourself. (sighs)

It's getting really hard to watch you throw your life away like this.

JOEY: Cut the crap, Michael.

MICHAEL: Now, now Joey. If you keep using language like that Mom and Dad will never take you back.

JOEY: And what are you wearing?

MICHAEL: (swankily)
What do you mean?

JOEY: That suit makes you look like a penguin.

MICHAEL: Hey! Mom bought me this suit. She says it makes me look handsome.

JOEY: Oh of course! Little Momma's boy gets a new suit after he ships his brother off to rot in a cell for eternity.

MICHAEL: Don't be so dramatic. It's only for two weeks.

JOEY: So you're not even going to deny it.

MICHAEL: (starts picking at his fingers)
Listen Joey...

JOEY: I know you searched my room and took my weed to Mom and Dad.

MICHAEL: (uncomfortable pause)
Yeah?! So what if I did? Mom and Dad have a right to know you're being irresponsible. (sarcastically)
We're all reeeeaally worried about you, big bro.

JOEY: (sarcastically)
Oh sure you are. You'd ship me off to jail for the rest of my life if you could. Too bad I don't turn eighteen for another four years.

MICHAEL: Two weeks is all I need. You know Dad's taking me to work tomorrow. Showing me the office, all the important files, everything I need to know to take over the business someday.

JOEY: Oh god is that really what this is about?! The business??

MICHAEL: (stands and raises voice)
Of course it's about the business! Do you think I'd ever get it handed down to

me if you were in the picture?? I'm the youngest! I'm the afterthought!

JOEY: (stays sitting and calm)
So what if you don't get the business? You can live comfortably up Mom and Dad's ass like you usually do.

MICHAEL: (yells)
Shut up! I'm going to be twice the man that you'll ever be.

JOEY: Dude I don't want the security guards coming over here. Just calm down.

MICHAEL: (still yelling)
You can't tell me what to do! You're the one in juvie! You're the one who's going to be the disappointment! You're going to see how it feels.

JOEY: When have you ever been the disappointment? You do whatever Mom and Dad say.

MICHAEL: You've always been better at school than me. And sports. And even with girls and I've just gotten so sick of being second best. (Michael sits back down slowly and speaks more calmly and apologetically than before.)

MICHAEL (cont'd): And this year, you started coming home smelling like the inside of a fraternity house and I heard Mom and Dad talk about intervening... and I saw the opportunity so I took it.

JOEY: Mike do you hear yourself? You're planning out your future when you're only thirteen. This is the time to have fun! Live a little! Find a hobby! Maybe take some weed for yourself instead of to the police station like a normal kid!

MICHAEL: (clutching his chest)
I'd rather die.

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JOEY: Be my guest.

MICHAEL: *(pointing viciously at Joey)*
So you do want the family business!
(Michael looks Joey up and down, noticing his orange prison suit.)

MICHAEL: This was your whole plan all along you malicious Orangutan.

JOEY: See your insults would be a lot better if you talked to anyone else but Mom and Dad.

MICHAEL: *(yells in frustration)*
You just want to convince me to have fun and get out there so that I'll be the irresponsible one and let my guard down and...wait a minute...
(Michael leans in close to the glass, his eyes narrowing and staring into Joey's. He speaks quietly and methodically, with a hint of mad scientist.)

MICHAEL: *(quietly)*
I'll bet you did all of this on purpose. This is part of some master plan of

yours. Did you plant someone else's weed in your room just so I would find it, turn you in, then have you convince me go to parties, then I'll be the one in juvie... *(raising voice)* And then you can swoop in and seal the deal!

JOEY: *(yells)* This doesn't make any sense! Why would anyone in their right mind do that!

MICHAEL: *(yells)* I don't know! But I intend to figure it out!

JOEY: Mike, I don't want any part of the business anyway! Why would I want to sit in a stuffy office all day in uncomfortable shoes, looking like I just waddled out from Antarctica?

MICHAEL: I'll have you know that penguins are adorable creatures that are perfectly happy with their wardrobe choices.

JOEY: And even if I did want it, we're brothers, man! Brothers don't do these

kinds of things to each other. We're supposed to have each other's backs!

MICHAEL: The real power in this world isn't friendship or brotherly love. It's money. Lots of it.

JOEY: There are tons of rich people in the world whose lives suck. Do you really want to become a series of memes making fun of your hair and tweets?

MICHAEL: Maybe I do. *(Short silence. A wave of guilt passes over Michael's face and he picks at his nails again. He takes a deep breath and speaks.)*

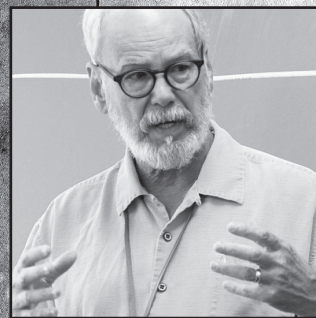
MICHAEL: Look...even though I don't agree with literally anything you say or do and I'm still planning on taking over the business...I'm...I'm sorry that I turned you in.

JOEY: Yeah well...it's only weed...at least you didn't find any of my cocaine.

(BLACKOUT)

"This program has enabled me to explore many facets of creative writing. Personally, it has been a great platform for me if I look forward to making my living as a writer."

—Nayan Raman





APHRODITE LEAVES HER KEYS ON THE TABLE

By Medina Purefoy-Craig
Choate Rosemary Hall, CT

When we were young we
Touched the sun
Made forts
Felt free

When we were older I
Touched your spine
Your legs
Your fine heart

Last year I had you in my arms
Against my chest
In my bed
Upon my sheets

This year I put my hands
Against your books
Against your towels
Against my aching heart
This year has grown
As cold and dark as my
Bed



"Having my own personal editing session really helped me understand some of the more complex aspects of writing and revision."

—Nichole Ramirez



NEVER LIKED HIM MUCH

By Sreya Pyles

New England Academy, MA

You gotta believe me when I say this, Officer ! really did believe that the Boss was a great guy. We met when J applied for the job ... as the lifeguard, of course ... about five years ago or so, and of course right away he was taken by me. It was back at the pool center when it was brand new. New, polished floors and all that. I remember, he led me back into one of the conference rooms, and, being the great man that he is, catches a piece of plywood that would've fallen on me from the ceiling, because naturally, the old building was falling apart. Anyway, about two weeks later, when I was 17, we thought we'd head back to Carmen's place after work, ten at night or so? I mean, we would've gone to one of our places, but I'm a broke middle-aged man with a rundown apartment and he lives with his parents. So, so we get to Carmen's, right, and no, she wasn't home so we got through a window ... it was open, I swear! And he'd had a lot to drink, but hey, he's overage officer ... and dead, so you can't charge him. So yeah, tipsy, very tipsy . . . he asks me for a drink and I tell him, "It's morning, boss! Almost noon!" but he didn't seem to believe me even though it was true. He can be real stubborn like that. So he tells me, "Get me a drink, son," and I do, 'cause I could get fired otherwise, and I live with my parents. I start to fill up the bathtub and add a little rum and margarita mix to it—wait, you haven't done tests yet? No, of course that wasn't blood, Officer, didn't you even taste any? What else do you do at a crime scene? Okay, okay I'll get back to it. So I tell him I made him a drink 'cause I was super proud of it, and I thought it was hella creative. So Boss tells me that if he's gonna wash up, he's gonna need me some privacy. And hey, I get it, not all guys can be into that! So I give him a little space, clean up a bit for Carmen . . . Don't look at me like that, you gotta respect privacy, Officer. Yeah, okay, so anyways, I knock on the bathroom door a few minutes later and he doesn't respond, so I'm guessing he fell asleep in the tub. Kind of rude of him, when there were guests over. He never cared much for manners. So I wait a few more minutes and return, knocking one more time. Now, I don't want to barge in, 'cause I'm a nice guy, so I sit for a while until I hear a creak in the floor. You should check out Carmen's second stair, by the way, I think it's broken. Anyways, I get a little freaked, obviously, so I go to join Boss in the bathroom. And you wouldn't believe it, but he was dead. I mean, I think he was. Man, was that guy clumsy. Never liked him much. ■



REFLECTION

By Nayan Raman
Peddie School, NJ

I knew that this was not me—this was not who I was. But it was inevitable to happen. It was roughly midnight as the tall, narrow headlights overlooked the barren parking lot. I could not help but shiver, as my blue Bayamon FC jersey and Adidas sweatpants did not suffice in the cold Seattle weather that encompassed me. I pulled a cigarette out of my pocket and applied my lighter. I inhaled, letting the smoke wither throughout my body, while I glanced at the starry sky marked by the illuminating moon. My eyes wandered back and forth from one boy to the other.

“You two tryna smoke a blunt?” Jordan and Mason nodded in agreement, a subtle smirk drawing on their faces—a smirk that immediately took away the inner children in them. I grabbed my backpack and unzipped it. I pulled out a plastic jar and opened the lid, laying it on the floor. I placed my hand out and motioned for the money. The two both handed me 20 dollar bills and I stuffed them in the pocket of my ripped sweats. I picked up the jar again and reached in for the marijuana. I squinted into their eyes, and a sudden sense of guilt swept me. My hand was shaking. This was not a first. This guilt was not a first. Take it back to 8th grade of middle school, which was the first time I interacted with a drug like that. From then on, I would be hooked, chained by the shackles of this drug so bad. This guilt had attached to me. And it affected my decisions from that point. So here I was, dealing drugs to two teenagers. Here I was, making the worst of two bright kids with a potential to do larger and better things than me. Here I was, turning these innocent kids into me. I handed them the drug and they nodded in approval.

“Thanks Quinn. You’re the man,” said the older of the two. I smiled at them for a second, but it was a smile with no substance or meaning. A kind of crooked smile. I looked down at the blacktop space for a quick second and looked back up again at the kids. I gave a slight nod of the head and left the area. As I crossed the road before the hospital, I looked both ways. I crossed, and slowly walked up the steps leading to the hospital. I checked in at the counter and headed to room 124, which was on my right. I walked in and stared at him. He was fast asleep, resting up for the long days to come. He was in recovery mode. At least that is how I thought of it. In reality, he was on this machine that was supposed to give him air and life, but he had not awakened for a few days now. But I knew he would wake up. I went back to the counter to check the remaining amount that had to be paid. Thirty-eight dollars. I lay the two twenties I had on the counter and walked back to his room. I knew he had to wake up. This machine was going to continue to give him air. I stared at him again, this time into his closed eyes. And suddenly, it hit me—that same wave of guilt. That same wave of guilt when I stared into Jordan’s and Mason’s eyes. And it hit me again and again. While their eyes were still open, open to the potential and opportunities of a successful and healthy life, I was one that had to change them—change them for the better. ■



LOVE IS DEAD

By Nichole Ramirez
Worcester Academy, MA

You often feel that the harvesting of a woman can be much more difficult than that of a man, but you are not sure why. Focus on the task at hand. As you finally see her beautiful face frozen in time you know that although bodies were a sort of commonplace for you, opening her up would not be business as usual. The way her eyes gaze into your own almost made you feel bad about what you were going to have to do. To be fair you do have your reasons for choosing this line of work.

Harvesting organs has never really been a legally or morally right thing for that matter, but you do it for Mason. He is the reason that you do this. So that he would not be just like you, having to do hopelessly disgusting and evil things just to get by. Ever since Mason's mom, Cynthia, left the two of you this has been the only real option to keep you both afloat. Your little boy will be eight next month. The other day he stood in front of you with his big, brown, hopeful eyes and asked for a bright red bike from the store down the block. This woman lying in front of you will be that bike, or at least her organs will allow you to get it.

You begin to mark all the curves of her body with a thick black marker as you plan the path your scalpel will take. Now that you have completed drawing the pattern of her body you pick up a 10 blade, and trace the dark lines that stand out against the vision of her pale skin. You make one long deep cut down the middle of her torso, but all you can really focus on is this woman's bright green eyes that are still so full of hope. Though you have no idea what she could possibly be hoping for.

You gently slip both of your gloved hands between the flaps of her now open stomach and evaluate her, she seemed to be very healthy at one point. And as you do this, the woman seems almost content with the process occurring. You snip, dice, and cut each organ from its original location and place them in their respective dishes, but you continue to look back at this woman's striking face. She starts to feel warmer to the touch but you cannot tell if it's her or if it is just your hands on her still soft skin.

You have not finished removing all her organs yet, but you cannot help but stop to spend a moment with her. You remove your formaldehyde-scented gloves, leaving her open torso exposed to the cool freezer air. Whoever brought her in this morning had left her hair pulled back into a bun, but you cannot stand to see her like that. You gingerly remove the tan-colored rubber bands holding together her glowing auburn locks. Once removed her hair falls around her in a cascade of flaming red and you are unable to resist the urge to stroke it. Though her skin still looks drained of color her lips seem to suddenly turn a bright inviting pink that you cannot ignore. You lean forward closing the increasingly small gap between the two of you and kiss for the first time. And what would become the first of many. ■



MONOLOGUE

By Samara Rosen

Glen Rock High School, NJ

I want to thank you, Principal Johnson, for calling me into your office to talk about my

Instagram account. I am so glad to have someone to talk with. I know that Ally feels I've been personally attacking her, but I haven't. If you read my posts carefully, you will see Ally's name is never mentioned. She just feels guilty about things she's done and is taking my posts personally because of her guilt. That is her problem, not mine. I swear to you, on my iPhone, I did not do anything to Ally personally. Ally and I were actually like super close.

Did you know that we've been friends since preschool? I can even tell you the exact day we met. It was the first day of Sarah's Preschool, a strict orthodox Jewish preschool. Ally's wispy blond hair was pulled back into two small pigtails, which sat askew on the sides of her head. Nerves knotted my stomach and black dots speckled my vision, making it almost impossible for me to walk into the center. I was clenching my mom's hands so hard that my nails left four small impressions in her palms. The first person I saw when I walked in was Ally. She was joyfully building a tower from colored foam blocks. My mom let go of my hand and I fell into a complete panic, the same negative thoughts circled my head in a never ending carousel of fear. Ally walked over to me. She reached out her small hand and smiled, a smile so warm and welcoming that it melted all my fears away faster than the sun melts a Popsicle on a summer day. That's how we met, I would have never guessed we would end up like this.

Let's assess the real issue here. Why is it that I am being accused of bullying in this situation and not Ally? Yes, I posted some comments online that offended Ally. But what is the crime here? Finstas are made for venting about things that bother you in life, so that is what I did. I simply outlined what happened to me

that day—about an unnamed person who said some bad things to me and treated me poorly. That was it. I was not specifically targeting Ally. I was merely stating my experience.

Principal Johnson, do you still believe that I am bullying? I mean let's look at the facts. First of all, why would I bully a person I have worshiped since preschool. Secondly, it's called freedom of speech. Come on, man, look it up. It's one of our inalienable rights, guaranteed to us in the Bill of Rights. America was founded on these very principles of freedom and liberty, ask my history teacher, Mr. Hillside. Thomas Jefferson and the other founding fathers would also really want you to let me go. Even the Supreme Court would agree that you have absolutely no right to call me the bully.

If my mom and dad were home from Africa, they would definitely be defending me too.

And don't give me that look, you know that look of sympathy, I do not want it. I know my parents have been gone for two years but that doesn't mean they don't love me, right? No, no, stop, Principal Johnson. My dad loves me to pieces. Just this weekend, he sent me a really special doll from Africa. I named her Neddie because she has a needle stuck right in the left eye. My nanny told me that pin dolls are all the rage now in Africa. So, see you're wrong again. My dad does love me. I mean, sometimes when he is really drunk or moody after a long day of work, he says otherwise, but that is just his exhaustion and frustration talking. Like this one day I came home from school and I found him on the couch, wearing only his boxers and a ratty old white tank top. There was a sea of crushed beer cans on the floor and a pool of yellow liquid at his feet. His breathing was labored and he angrily twitched in his sleep. I knew exactly what to do though because we had just spent a month

learning about the dangers of alcohol in health class. I tapped his sticky shoulder twice, then whispered softly in his ear, dad are you okay. He didn't respond for a while, just continued tossing and turning and moaning. Then all of a sudden he burst out of his sleep, his face fiery red with anger. He swung his hand at me, so fast and hard, it left a stinging red mark for days. I swear I saw literal plumes of smoke spraying from his ears and a set of devil horns sprouting from his head. I stuttered, searching for an answer to appease him when there was a knock at the door. I did not want anyone to see my dad, or to see me in that state. When I got to the front door, I saw Ally eyeing me from the window. That peeping Tom. I knew she saw it all. The yelling, the beer cans, the slap.

The next thing I knew, bags were packed and my parents were gone. They left me, all alone with my nanny and a huge welt on the side of my face the size of my dad's meaty hands.

So, okay I guess you are right, maybe my parents don't care about me and Ally got offended by some things I posted. But did you ever stop to think what happened to me? Did you ever even consider that Ally was asking for it? Since that evening, Ally has been teasing me nonstop. She just kept coming and coming with the threats and slurs. She'd tell me that I'm a disappointment, she'd tell me I'm unlovable and that's why my parents left me.

Well, one day I had enough. I decided to prove to her that I was not any of the things she said, to show her that my parents loved me and to shove everything right back in her face. I have been working my butt off to do exactly that. And I finally did it. And you know what, I have no regrets. So, Principal Johnson, explain to me why the victim gets screwed with a visit to your office and the bully gets a personal day. So there you have it, the full truth. Are you happy now? ■



WHO AM I

By Juliana Salamone
Greenwich High School, CT

I am from a woman whose name nobody can pronounce.
Seven letters that are articulated to sound close to a Brazilian flag or when the Portuguese
language is being spoken.

I am from a man whose attitude matches mine,
our personalities so connected like connect the dots.
We have a similar view of the world but we're both trying to connect our own,
to follow our own paths,
and to reach our own goals.

I am from a state that have people [connect]ing,
as [i] am simply trying to find my own interconnections.
Where people [cut] class,
[cut] hair,
and [cut] themselves.

I am from a town filled with green;
green lights,
green grass,
green eyes with white skin and blonde hair attached.

I am from a city that used to be called Bayport in 1883 but now is called Cos Cob and it's 2017.
The place where I could go get Froyo or coffee that I'm unapologetically addicted to.

I am from a street that is filled with laughter,
children playing,
nature,
and trees.
The smell of a nearby park comes to mind and the flashback of a young girl skipping.

I am from a number that's hinged onto the outer layer of my house,
a mustard yellow palette holding onto the 31 like a mother who's afraid of letting go of her child.

I am from a home that's surrounded by quiet but hidden inside there is sound,
there is noise,
there is life.



FALLING

A play by Lily Sandidge
Colts Neck High School, NJ

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ELIZA, 26: *An aspiring actress, also working as a waitress. She is MASON's fiancé. She is hardworking and optimistic, but also often tired due to her busy schedule. She volunteers and was in a service sorority in college. Always smells like apples and cinnamon.*

MASON, 28: *A talented photographer who travels frequently, doing everything from photo shoots to weddings to simply taking pictures of nature. He's friendly and enjoys traveling. Has been with ELIZA for six years. He is thoughtful and introspective.*

SCENE: *An amusement park by the beach in New Jersey.*

TIME: *The Present.*

AT RISE: *(ELIZA and MASON are seeing each other for the first time in months. They climb aboard the ski-lift ride at an amusement park.)*

ELIZA: So what have you been up to? You travel so much. I forget where you are sometimes.

MASON: Oh you know, here, there, everywhere. I did this awesome shoot in Ireland. I told you about it, remember?

ELIZA: *(awkwardly)* Oh yeah....

MASON: It was pretty. *(pause)* I thought about us having our wedding there.

ELIZA: *(wincing)* Yeah, I should start planning that.

MASON: You haven't started yet?

ELIZA: I've.... looked into things. Seen some places, and reviewed some catering companies.

MASON: Liz, we don't have long to

plan it. It's gotta get worked on a lot more.

ELIZA: Normally, a couple does that stuff, I don't know, together?

MASON: Liz, you know it's really hard for me when I'm traveling.

ELIZA: Well, I'm busy too Mason. I have my shifts at the restaurant, auditions, practice, and my acting group. It's not fair for you to put all the pressure on me.

MASON: It's my job, Liz!

ELIZA: *(angry)* Well, I have one too, and mine doesn't involve parading around with models!

MASON: Don't tell me that's what you really think I'm doing.

ELIZA: I've seen their Instagrams. I've seen what they post about you.

MASON: What about all those guys in your acting group. Don't you think it's difficult for me to think about you with them?

ELIZA: The big difference, Mason, is that I don't go out for drinks with them! *(Ski-lift lurches to a stop. Eliza and Mason are stuck.)*

MASON: Fuck, are you kidding me?

ELIZA: God, this is just perfect.

MASON: You always do this! You swore that you would trust me and you still don't!

ELIZA: It's not that simple! I'm at home, waiting for you, forever. I never thought that I would be that type of girl but I am! It's hard, Mason, it's damn hard. I want to do the fun things that we always did. I want to do all the things

we used to do together, like cook. I want to mess around and have fun but every time we see each other we fight. I want to be happy with you again.

MASON: *(with conviction)* If you'd just let me explain

ELIZA: OH PLEASE, CUT THE CRAP. I DON'T NEED, OR WANT, YOUR EXCUSES. I JUST WANTED TO HAVE A GOOD TIME BUT CLEARLY—

MASON: GODDAMNIT, ELIZA, I'M LEAVING!

ELIZA: *(A pause. Eliza is stunned. Voice breaking.)* I—what do you mean?

MASON: I didn't mean for it to come out like that but it's an amazing opportunity in Seattle. An apprenticeship. I don't think I'll ever get a chance like this again. I think we should break up. I mean, look at us. Look at where we are, what we're doing. We're not happy.

ELIZA: *(Visibly upset and watery-eyed)* I see what you mean, I just...

MASON: *(Quiet and somber)* I know what you mean. I feel like we've been together forever.

ELIZA: I don't know how I'm supposed to feel right now. I know, *(laughs dryly)* it's probably for the best.

MASON: Just—just tell me how you really feel.

ELIZA: This might make me a horrible person, but, I feel relieved. Like damn, I'm just so tired of fighting. I—I don't wanna do it anymore. I can't.

MASON: I understand. *(pause)* For months, now, we've been trying to

(continued on page 47)

(continued from page 46)

recapture this energy that we had early on, when we first said that we loved each other, ya know? I don't know what happened or where it went. It's just gone. *(Ski lift starts up again.)*

ELIZA: *(wiping eyes)* Can't say I'm excited to tell my family this. They're probably gonna be more upset than me.

MASON: *(smiling softly, remembering them)* Yeah, your family is a group of emotional, passionate people.

ELIZA: I'm sorry, by the way, if I did something wrong. I tried so hard, but it all just slipped through my fingers.

MASON: *(more relaxed)*
Nah, it's no one's fault. For what it's worth, I'm not sorry. I'm glad I met you and I'm...grateful for all the time that we spent together.

ELIZA: *(relieved)* Me too.
(The end of the ski lift nears.)

MASON: Well, this looks like the end.

ELIZA: Yes, it is.

MASON: Good luck, Eliza, I hope you find a guy who really loves you, 'cause there's someone out there for you. It's just not me.

ELIZA: *(laughs)* Thanks, Mason. I want you to be happy, and I know you'll do great in Seattle.

(They both get off the ski-lift. Waving goodbye, they walk in separate directions to restart their new lives without each other.)

(BLACKOUT)

"I have made so many amazing friends this summer. Everyone here has been so kind and smart. The best part of this camp has been getting to learn from such knowledgeable teachers and friends."

—Samara Rosen





THE END

By Sydney Schulman
Christian Brothers Academy, NY

“You just don’t get it, do you?” He spat, looking back at the jetway of the airplane he should’ve boarded five minutes ago for what felt like the hundredth time. In reality, it was likely only the third or fourth.

“No, actually, it’s quite clear to me,” I replied. I wanted so badly to throw my words right back, shocking him with impact, but I couldn’t. Even after all this time, all I could bear to do was pass my answer gently over.

“If it’s so crystal clear to you,” he countered, “then I assume you know I only did what I did because I still love you.”

“Grant...” I began to protest. I knew this proclamation wasn’t true. There hasn’t been a lick of truth to anything Grant has said to me lately. I wasn’t certain whether Grant was aware that falsities were trickling from his lips like dirty water from a gutter. He could very well be in the deep stage of lying that makes it impossible for the liar to decipher where the truth ended and stories began. Stories that never had a beginning, middle, or end.

“You know me,” he continued, ignoring my interruption. “I run from everything. For a while, the only form of motion I knew was fast and away. Those old habits are the reason I’m even at this airport right now. But you... looking at you makes me want to stop. To stand still and wait. I love you, and yeah, there’s still a hint of, ‘But now what?’ But for the first time in my life, I’m content with slowing down a little bit. Slowing down, and, um, letting there be time to figure it all out.”

I know there was once a point when

Grant meant every word he ever said to me. Okay, that’s not true, but he meant enough of them. Especially in comparison to now. Presently, every word is swollen with invalidity. Every plea and every praise is laced with manipulation. There came a time—and I can’t pinpoint exactly when—but there came a time when an obvious shift occurred. After it, Grant’s love for me was quite visibly replaced by his love for controlling me.

As a person, I am the self-destructive kind of empathic. The way I have always felt for others is a trait I consider my sharpest, double-edged sword. On one end, it has given me a rare patience and a roomy heart, spacious for love. On the other, and more often than not, the extent to which I stretch understanding others has gotten me hurt more times than I can count. More times than I want to remember. Understanding all elements of a person in efforts to make up for the pain they cause really is life’s most dangerous game. Frighteningly, it had become habitual for me; a ritual that made me the most loving and the most vulnerable kind of sympathetic. The way I am gradually made others’ pain my pain. Their feelings were my feelings. Their power, poison, pain, and joy pulsed through my veins as my own. For a while, I deceived myself into thinking such submission doubled as generosity. I thought the way I disregarded and deteriorated myself was noble. But then Grant started to hurt me. Really, really hurt me.

Initially, I justified the beatings and emotional outbursts. I recognized and felt the strength of his emotions, though negative, and accepted them as reasonable. For so long, I had just taken the bruises and appreciated the way the

light shone on them. But I couldn’t do it anymore. And I shouldn’t have done it at all.

“Grant,” I said slowly and sharply, like a kindergarten teacher reminding her kids not to eat the Legos, “if you love me so goddamn much, why’d I have to chase you to the airport?”

I didn’t wait for an answer. The question was the bitterest form of rhetorical. But I justified the unfamiliar twinge of salt on my tongue by understanding now more than ever that, while hate and love may be on-par in intensity, the two cannot exist harmoniously. They should never be so terrifyingly confused. I just wish my oblivion to the obvious had ended sooner. I wish the realization that I deserved a better love hadn’t arrived as a delayed flight.

“I don’t know,” Grant chuckled. “Why did you follow me here?”

I spun on my heel. After staring at him for more than a moment and shrugging my shoulders, I called out toward him in a voice I hoped would circle through his mind for the entirety of the flight (and miles beyond that). I let the words free from the cage under my tongue and said, “Because I couldn’t let you go without finishing everything.”

“Finishing it?”

“I deserve a love that takes the weight off, Grant. A love that offers more than it expects.”

A love that shows what it means. I deserve better, Grant, and that’s the end.” ■



CONSTELLATIONS

By Samantha Vatalaro
Shaker High School, NY

We were home beneath the stars at last.
— Dante, *Inferno*

It's days like this that last forever
in your teenage life-drunk brain
hopped up on hormones and cheap caffeine,
sprawled on melting lawns after lunch, or
huddled on quilts on sunset grass, or
asleep in honey-filled quiet.
To you, they make the world so small
and yet
so enormous at the same time like
a supernova, expanding,
and to you,
they glow far brighter.
They are the planets in your universe,
in sun-soaked empty space
stretching on forever.
It's days like this that last forever
in your teenage life-drunk brain
and you wish, just for a moment,
that the sugar-sweet technicolor
of this afternoon
could spin around you forever
like the moon around the earth
like the earth around the sun
like a planetarium,
preserved in orbit,
like constellations
leading you home.



4TH OF JULY

By Isabelle Verdino

Paul D. Schreiber High School, NY

I won't. Don't
give up—ankles crossed
polished and poised, sitting quiet—
I can't
because of: prowling sharks,
lips smothering pointed teeth,
stretched wide as
they tell us to smile.

Because of: credit card charges,
bills from falling bank balances,
figures ever dwindling as—
we're not supposed to
support ourselves.

Because of: blackmailing
ivory tower inhabitants indicting
doctrines that cage us,
suffocate us behind red tape in
our own bodies,
that we don't seem to own.

Because of: public shame,
twitter chains if
we step outside in less than a
straight jacket,
total coverage or
face news coverage.

Because of: neon picket signs and
chants to
“build bridges not walls”
that can't say it all, when we scream—
show up by the thousands yet
we're still too quiet.

Because
this country insults us
spits at our feet when
its president leaves me feeling
outcast and lonely but
he should be defending me.

Because entire races, religions,
sexual orientations,
pending victims of upcoming rape cases,
women of all shapes and colors
—more than just red, white, and blue—
who want the chance to choose are
really sick and tired of
facing this abuse, at least,
I am.

So I won't give up,
even if you want me to,
just because I'm a woman
doesn't mean I have to listen
especially not to you.



"The Summer Young Writers Institute was an intellectually-stimulating environment, and it was particularly helpful being surrounded by people who lived and breathed writing like I did. Everyone had such different strengths and styles as writers, and being able to observe that helped me develop my own writing style. Thank you, Skidmore!"

—Linda Zhang



AT SKIDMORE

By Linda Zhang
Horace Greeley High School, NY

It is summer.
There is the smell of sweat and rain and freshly-cut grass.
Flip-flops clack against
burning pavement, and the sun becomes
an egg yolk spilled across the horizon.

We are young.
Time's careless destruction cannot
reach us;
Here we are every age we have ever been.
We tell stories
within stories,
ones we did not know we needed to write,
about ourselves,
about everything other than ourselves,
all truth in
one form or another,
whether we are afraid of their words or not.

This is the age of not enough sunscreen and
laughter deep into the evening and
collective hatred of the Cult of Talented Youth.
It is the age of inside jokes and
eggs with legs and
Hoff-pocket and
Mike Pence wrote My Immortal

Here we are both
the person that we used to be and
the person that we want to be,
We are
beautiful
in our reckless youth,
Here we find the words to say and
they are gleaming and completely and utterly ours.



"It's hard to put an experience I'll remember forever into a small collection of words. When I think about trying to condense the memories and emotions, what I remember most of all is the light, happy feeling of being myself with people who loved those parts of me. The comfortable environment made it so easy to grow as a writer, and just as easy to create friendships that I'll value forever."

—Sydney Schulman



UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY State University of New York

Since its creation in 1984 by the state legislature to promote writing and the artistic imagination across the state, the New York State Writers Institute has become one of the premier sites in the country for presenting the literary arts. Over the course of four decades the Institute has sponsored readings, lectures, panel discussions, symposia, and film events which have featured appearances by more than 1,300 artists—including eight Nobel Prize winners, and nearly 200 Pulitzer Prize winners—and has screened more than 750 films, from rare early prints to sneak previews of current releases. The Institute is a major contributor to the educational resources and cultural life at the University at Albany, where it is located, as well as the surrounding community. It is also identified by the writing and publishing communities as a place dedicated to promoting serious literature, where writers and their work are held in high esteem, where being an invited guest is considered an honor, and where talking about books is celebrated as the best conversation in the world.

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

SKIDMORE

C O L L E G E

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

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