

YOUNG VOICES 2019



ANTHOLOGY
OF STUDENT
WORK



NEW YORK STATE
SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE

NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE 2019 PARTICIPANTS

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Sarah Frampton	Syosset, NY
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Eva Sturm	Juneau, AK
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NEW YORK STATE SUMMER YOUNG WRITERS INSTITUTE

Letter from the Director

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

— William Patrick

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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.

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 2019 Workshop, and it’s your pleasure to discover them here.

William Patrick
Director
New York State Summer Young Writers Institute





SUMMER 2019 FACULTY



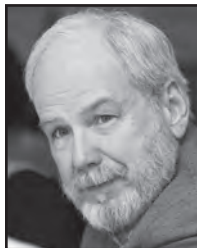
KATHLEEN AGUERO's latest book is *After That* (Tiger Bark Books). Her other poetry collections include *Investigations: The Mystery of the Girl Sleuth* (Cervena Barva Press), *Daughter Of* (Cedar Hill Books), *The Real Weather* (Hanging Loose), and *Thirsty Day* (Alice James Books). She has also co-edited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



LIZA FRENETTE is an assistant editor at the monthly magazine, *NYSUT United*, where she writes features, human interest stories, articles about workers' rights, environmental education, and breaking news. She has won the Mary Heaton Vorse award three times, the highest writing award from the Metro Labor Communications Council of New York City, for feature writing. Vorse was an activist and writer, often covering workers' rights. 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*. In 2014 she was the recipient of the first place international award for blog writing from the International Labor Communications Association for a piece about civil rights activist Andrew Goodman.



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



WILLIAM B. PATRICK is the founder and director of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. His 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.



SOMNIUM DEFLUXIT

By London Anderson

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This has been an important social and learning experience for me. The friendships I've made here are some of the closest and most trusting ones I have ever made. They have shown me support and compassion and understanding that I have never really felt before. It has been very useful to be surrounded by so many like-minded people with whom I could collaborate and felt sure enough to share my work with. I learned a lot about myself and about others during these two weeks that I don't think I would have otherwise. The relationships I have made here will be lasting and I'm very grateful for this.

— Sabrina Mizrahi

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You thought I was the sugar-tart dream
that chokes on real life, though I prefer to think of myself
as the rubbish drawer of treasures. Ticket stubs, stamps,
an old coffee-stained letter.

My mother said I was the third story windows
peering out over the drunken street. My father,
on the other hand, called me the nails and hair and
stardust collected like debris on the kitchen floor.

I am really the crumpled pages strewn over
the bedroom. I am usually
the emerald, sand-speckled vase from your
kleptomaniac grandmother. And I am certainly the whisper

of words over wailing sirens.

He said I was the ice-kissed night, caressing his face,
bringing him in and out of sleep,
though I am much more likely the clack of a

dying pen, and perhaps the cabinets quite questionably
built by my grandfather.

And I am definitely,
most definitely,

the pages crumpled on the bedroom floor,
sometimes including
the one or two that you
pluck from the shag carpeting and unravel.



ANYTHING FOR YOU

By Ameerat Bisiolu

“

Being a part of this program has proven to be very helpful for my writing work. The classes and professors were very specific and detailed as to what makes a good story. The most amazing thing about this place was the food – just kidding! But that was really good too. I ended up making more friends than I expected. And all the free time was excellent – it allowed me to get so much work done. This program was only two weeks long but I could have stayed here for a month.

— Sanjit Chidambaran

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My opportunity came with the slam of locker doors outside. Violence in my school wasn't uncommon, but I was gifted with the most easily distracted teacher in the world. She turned commonplace into a spectacle by rushing to the door. Her heels clicked in the otherwise quiet room. Only when she was halfway out did she remember that a class sat behind her.

“Stay in your seats and continue to work quietly!” The door clicked shut.

Naturally, the class, now animated and curious, rushed outside to see the faces behind the growing angry voices and locker-slamming.

I was left behind in the quiet room. Book bags, purses, and desks were left forgotten. Even the teacher left her desk unlocked. My fingers twitched at all the opportunities which lay before me. Needless to say, it was time to go shopping.

My first stop was a desk in the far corner of the room. A girl sat there, but I never cared to learn her name. She was as average as they come in terms of physical appearance, yet her clothes said otherwise. There was surely a goldmine hiding in her pink puffer jacket. I searched both pockets, a jolting chill running up my spine for each second I ran my fingers over her belongings. Both her pockets came up empty. Her sparkly silver purse, however, yielded a twenty-dollar bill and a piece of gum. I shoved the twenty in my front pocket, first checking it wasn't the one with the hole, then ate the gum: watermelon. Not my favorite, but something.

Other bags were less interesting. For kids that dressing like a million bucks, none of them carried anything close to that. A quarter here, a five there. I was pleased with a toy shark I'd found in a boy's hat. I pocketed it, knowing exactly who to give it to.

The noise outside seemed to be dying out, so I knew my spree was coming to an end. The last thing I took was a crisp fifty from the teacher's wallet; her fault for not giving me an extension on our project last week. I slipped my haul into a slit I'd made in my tattered bag. Seems like safety pins weren't doing the job anymore; the bag was basically falling apart.

I slipped into my seat just as the class reentered the room. As the teacher reprimanded us for disobeying her, I pressed my nails into my thigh.



Later, I shook my head at the pathetic haul. Twenty-four kids and one teacher. Together, they yielded \$287.15. Barely enough for a week, definitely not enough for a month. If I sold some of the jewelry, watches, or other items, I might have enough, but barely.

I rubbed my hands on my pants and instead focused on the little heartbeat in the corner. He was wrapped in three blankets, including mine, yet he still shivered. I knee walked over to him and delicately placed the shark beside his nose. A small surprise for the morning. At least one of us would be happy. ■



LYDIA IS DEAD

(inspired by *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng)

By Maeve Brennan

“

Beyond the vast amount I learned about writing, the connections and friendships that have been made here will be etched into my memory forever. My friends and I have already been talking about coming back next summer.

— Peter Charkalis

”

Lydia is dead, but they don't know this yet. The husband is standing in the middle of the street, a baseball glove in one hand, his jeans splattered with white paint (he told Lydia that he was going to get started on repainting the bathroom while she was away). The son is a little ways down the road, right beside that London Pine. He's a good kid, Lydia told me— scrawny-like, sometimes too angry, but a good kid all the same. He's a pitcher on his CYO team. Throws fastballs like no one else, his mother said.

The two girls are playing Skully on the side of the road, throwing wax-filled bottle caps into a chalk-drawn square. Lydia told me their names (Kathleen and Mary), though now I can't tell which is which. One of the girl's hair is tied back into a sloppy braid— I suppose her mother does them for her when she's home. I can imagine Lydia walking down the street, wearing that pink floral dress I found her in, and that sun hat with the blue ribbon, swinging her suitcase in her hand, dropping it to the sidewalk when she sees that little girl running towards her. Shoe-laces slapping the pavement, her arms out, her braid coming undone, yelling, “Mommy! Mommy! I did my own hair this morning! See?”

Only Lydia is dead. They won't know this, though, until the mail arrives. Maybe it will come in a telegram, slotted through their front door. I wonder what it will say.

LYDIA THURMAN IS DEAD, STOP, perhaps. Or maybe: THE NY-BOUND 3:22 TRAIN FROM WASHINGTON DC CRASHED, STOP. YOUR WIFE WAS A CASUALTY, STOP.

I wouldn't know. I've never written a telegram.

Lydia's husband throws a pop-up. It skims through the trees. The boy takes two steps back, eyes aimed up, his glove open, and then catches it. Throws it over the ear, above the head, like his father taught him. I see the husband check his watch.

I wonder if this was around the time Lydia was supposed to be getting home. Maybe it is. The

sun is starting to set, at least. Nothing grand. Pink by the edges and nothing more. A darkening sky.

The kids play on. It's not nighttime, yet. And after all, they have a mother to wait for. I wonder how long it will be until the streetlights come on and they go inside. How much longer after that it'll be until they'll start to get worried, and the children will have to watch from the stairs, knees pressed against the guard rails, as their father paces the living room floor.

Maybe he'll be listening to the evening news. Maybe that's how he'll find out. Maybe he won't have to wait for a telegram. Maybe, in a few hours, when it's time for the girls to go to bed, he'll grab the radio and turn around to all the channels. Maybe he's looking for a show he and the boy can listen to, or some music to fill the almost-empty house, and he'll pause at the evening news just for a moment, only to find out tomorrow's weather, and that's when he'll hear it: “22 were killed in a tragic train crash earlier today.” And maybe he'll get scared for a moment, wondering *what if* before he shakes his head and tells himself he's just being paranoid. But he keeps listening anyway, just in case, and that's when the newscaster will describe all the terrible things the workers saw, and then he'll say (his voice mournful and slow, so that you can almost pretend he's not reading this off a slip of paper) that in the rubble the corner of one woman's pink floral dress stuck out, wavering slightly in the wind. And then the newscaster will describe Lydia just the way I found her, when I pried her crumpled soul from the ground and let her whisper her goodbyes to me, let her tell me about how her son pitched a shutout last Friday and the peonies she was starting to grow in the flower boxes on her stoop until her eyes drifted and she wasted away— only then would her husband start to cry.

But for now, they are playing on the street, flicking bottle caps under cars. Unaware that I am watching them. Still waiting for their mother to come home. ■



THESEUS

By Peter Charkalis



Being part of this Summer Young Writer's Institute has been really amazing for me, both as a writer and as a person. I have never been with so many people who have such similar interests yet are so different that I can learn a lot from them. For the past two weeks or so, I have been treated as a writer, as someone who has something meaningful and important to say, and that has been an awesome experience that has cured a lot of my doubts about this craft of writing. The people are awesome, the teachers are amazing, and I am very happy that I got to come here.

— Liam Giszter



Where you'd reached the labyrinth's end,
Your mind unspooled like tattered thread
Memory and dream began to blend.

The spider that became your friend,
Spun a web to warn of what's ahead
Where you'd reached the labyrinth's end.

The grains of sand from where you'd led,
Became stuck, and rattled in her head
Memory and dream began to blend.

She'd gone where braver ones had fled
The snake that crept from 'neath your bed
Where you'd reached the labyrinth's end.

None before had dared to tread
Seven and seven, you'd gone in their stead
Memory and dream began to blend.

When all was dire, and most was dread
The spider's string that she fed
'Till you reached the labyrinth's end
Memory and dream began to blend.



REACHING THE FIGHT

By Sanjit Chidambaran

It's not my fault that I was daydreaming. This is a normal day. So I daydream, naturally. I'm in school, what am I supposed to do? Show interest in anything?

"What is the problem, Mr. Curtis?" asks Mr. Kove. Sheesh, I'm just a student. Why can't he just call me Ethan? That's a generic first name, to be honest. I would have preferred something classy. Like Zeus, or even Sergei. Oh well, I gotta take the good with the bad.

"Nothing, Mr. Kove. I'm just taking in what you've said so far." I say, nonchalantly. And he actually believes it! Wow, teachers are not that bright. But I can't say this out loud, can I? As if we don't have enough rules already. Damian Knight's militia has been around since last year, and I have HAD IT! He and his second in command, Athena Marshall, totally toppled the office and the principal last year, and the new principal is clueless. I mean, the teachers generally ignore bullying every day, until the victim fights back. So Damian took it upon himself to handle bullying, and his student council supported him like he was a GOD. But still, making all sorts of restrictive rules and giving the militia the authority to brutalize other students when necessary? Damn, that lacks any kind of humanity. Also, I didn't mention that Damian and Athena are together, did I? By the way, the Council of Salvation is kind of a cool name for them, even if they have a habit of acting like parasites, as Richard Kanan, my friend, would say. The bell finally rings, and I'm pretty sure we all run out before Mr. Kove can give us homework.

And then I noticed the commotion. "Hey, what's going on?" I ask another boy. What's his name? I can't get it right, don't ask me why.

"Athena Marshall came storming down the hall, flanked by some militia people. She seemed to be looking at that mark on her right hand every now and then," he says.

Oh... hell... no. That mark was caused by Shanaya Caspian, a totally badass friend of mine and also Richard's girlfriend. Also, she's a member of the Talon's Edge like me, which is basically a rebellion against the Council of Salvation, and I was the first recruit! Richard founded it, by the way. But back to the point. This could be bad. Shanaya and Athena kind of got into a scuffle at the mall over the weekend. It wasn't TOO violent, per se, but Athena did get a cut on her hand after falling into a bunch of ornamental stuff. So it's pretty clear what's going down. Athena's gonna try to take revenge, by creating some excuse to beat up Shanaya, or just go at her without a reason. Either way, it's bad, and not just because of that. Richard and Damian are both on a White House field trip today because being on the Gold Honor Roll four times in a row makes you special or whatever the hell it is. So no faction leaders being present probably means Athena is the Commander of the Council of Salvation today, which also means nobody can stop her. Unless someone tries to save Shanaya and spits in Athena's face.

"That somebody should be me and the rest of the Talons." I say, out loud as I plan things. Shanaya may be a contender for badass of the century, but the other militia members could jump her, along with Athena. But where should I go? Oh right. Richard once told me that Shanaya's third period class was in A12, as part of a job to give her back a pen he had borrowed from her. I start running towards A12.

What is it with all these extra hallways? I know some students need shortcuts so they won't be late to class, but when you NEED to be somewhere, like someone's life depends on it, the hallways become a maze.. Forget the no running rule. Forget bumping into things. If something is in front of me, and is not a person, there's a good chance I knock it over. I see the auditorium.

The auditorium is a great place. No, not because of the atmosphere, the room

smells like Home Depot. Not because of the plays, some people just weren't born to act. If you were on one side of the school and needed to be on the other for class, then by getting through the auditorium, you'd be on the other side before you know it. So I take it, naturally. Because I have to try to get to Shanaya before Athena. A new couple making out is one of the few things I actually get a clear view of as I run out of the auditorium.

"Congratulations!" I shout, as I zoom past them. I think I got a few weird looks for that one. Oops. In any case, I'm confident enough to say that the A hall is only a staircase or two away, which means Shanaya is too. She has a double period, so she didn't come out when the third period bell rang. I can literally see the scene right now, in my mind. I'm serious. Shanaya's probably TRYING to pay attention to the teacher, and outside the room, Athena and the militia are circling that room, Like the room is hiding a school of fish, and the militia are the great white sharks.

NO! A group of students materializes in front of me. Why now? When I actually want to be near a classroom? Isn't that where the school wants me to be? Anyways, now I gotta wait for this group to move. Time's gonna pass slowly. I could probably down a jumbo milkshake while I'm stuck here.

Finally, the group moves out of the way. And the run is on again.

Unfortunately, everything has fallen apart. By the time I get there, it's chaos. I don't know what happened, but something did. Maybe Shanaya provoked Athena, maybe Athena struck first. The point is, those two are fighting now. And I can see some of the militia getting ready to move in.

Five minutes later, I rise up again, resisting the pain in my leg, and get back into combat with the militia members that attack me, again. ■



WHEN WE READ, WE ARE NOT ALONE

By Ainsley Chisman

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This was such a wonderful and unique experience. I'm so grateful for this opportunity, and I can't remember the last time that I was this happy. I met so many amazing people and had so much fun.

— Sarah Frampton

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It was sometime in May, or maybe it was June, now I can't quite remember. I do remember however it was cold and windy in Seattle. Although outside your house on Camano the water stood still, the raging ocean finally at peace, like you at peace.

It had been a while since you had picked up the newspaper to read; so very unlike you to not have the Sunday Herald in your delicate hand. I would always look forward to Sundays with you, watching you sip your coffee and complain to Grandma that it was too hot the way she made it. As you read the paper, there was always something in those pages you thought worth complaining about.

One cup of coffee and two glasses of orange juice later, the harshness in your morning eyes began to fade, revealing the person I loved. It was always you and me, no matter who else was in the room, it was you and me. I would watch you all morning, examining you until the lines of your face began to blend with the corners of the paper. I knew you always watched me staring at you, because when I got older, every single Sunday I would find the comic section from the paper placed over my plate, and you would look at me and smile.

How I long now to see your smile.

Your smile was something of a paradox: it was soft yet hard, cold yet warm, yet it was something everyone who knew you adored. When I was six you told me a story - you always loved a good story - the story of how your father gave you your first yoyo and how that taught you to be a man. I never quite understood that. We sat there, and you would bounce me on your knee. I would watch the yoyo leave your hand and like a boomerang come right back. It would spin, mesmerizing me. I could have sat there and watched this for hours, had my nap time not been an issue.

Your winter house in Palm Springs is a place I can only describe as excessively large. It was pristine white with black rod iron gates with swirly patterns, similar to the shells of the snails I would find eating Grandma's lettuce in the yard. We had many of Grandma's Thanksgiving turkeys and Easter hams in that house. Far away from our house in Seattle, we found home in Palm Springs. Christmas and Easter were two of my favorite holidays to spend in that house, although I was always confused why you seemed not to care about the idea of those holidays. Until I found out you were Jewish.

You helped me learn to swim in the pool behind your house; you watched me kick and even when I splashed you in the face you didn't complain, you would just smile and say "one day you will get the hang of it." You were always patient with me and I never thanked you enough for it. You never raised your voice when I was acting like a brat, and most importantly never, not once, refused to read to me when I asked. Of all the things about you, your love for books was by far your best quality. You could read for hours about any topic, you didn't discriminate, from JFK memoirs, to vampires vs werewolves, you just loved a good book. You were the reason I found my passion: you were the reason books became my best friends; you were the reason words would fly from my mouth; you were the reason the trees were describable by words other than green. I don't think you knew this; I wasn't always good at expressing "feelings."

When you read to me, I could see the pages coming to life; elephants would prance around the room and sunsets bled from the walls. Your voice was a drug to me, no matter what you said I couldn't get enough of it. You found a piece of me that I didn't know that I existed, a thirst that was unquenched by anything else I had ever experienced. I devoured books after that, word by word,

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sentence by sentence, chapter by chapter. *Where the Red Fern Grows* and the *BFG* were among my favorites. You did that for me, you found me my place, a place where the world around me couldn't get to me, a place where my fears couldn't reach me. I'd travel from place to place and world to world.

It was on Camano Island that I discovered myself, surrounded by novels of varying colors and names, curled upon the soft yellow couch with the blown glass sculpture adorning the mantle. Grandmother watched old western movies, a massive glass of lemon water in her hand and the remote in the other, gripping them so tight, I always thought she was afraid of them running away. My father would sit next to her, bald head shining in the sunlight that had crept through the window. The part I remember most about that room though was you, with your metal framed glasses and multicolored polo shirts. You always wore your white Nike socks and the same dirty navy-blue pair of New Balance shoes. You always had a book in your hand, often times the book was breaking away from its binding and pages would fall into your lap and you would scramble to put them back in order before I became impatient. I, unlike you, was always impatient.

When you and I would run out of books to read, we would write our own: pirates fighting sailors, princesses turned evil, knights in shining armor saving the fair maiden. I can only imagine how much of an adventure these tales were after a lifetime selling insurance. The plots evolved as I got older; they became more in-depth and more interesting. You still never stopped reading to me, though the books got longer, and life sometimes got in the way.

It took me a long time to realize that the older I got, the older you got. Around 12 or 13 years old, I noticed that when you read to me, you sometimes re-read the same word 8 times, or you would look at the

same sentence for 5 minutes until you asked me to read it for you. I knew you couldn't see the pages anymore, and I knew that you sometimes forgot where we were. You sometimes forgot I was there, and that was the hardest part.

I was starting to see you slip away, and there was nothing I could do about it. I just had to sit there and watch you, sit there and watch you becoming less like you. Even when you stopped having coffee in the morning, even when the Sunday paper piling up on the counter, you still kept books on your nightstand. I read those books on that nightstand to you, and you would just listen. You became the child, full of wonder for books, even the ones you had read hundreds of times. You longed to hear the sweetness in the words of love stories and the darkness in the lines of horror stories. I was able to give the gift to you that you gave to me; although sometimes you would get tired and you would fall asleep, I never got angry when you did, not once, not ever at all. The truth is, you were so peaceful sleeping and not in pain, so I never woke you. It was in that limbo between sleep and wake where I lost you to a story in which I could not follow.

It is weird to think that this will be the first year I will not get a book from at Christmas or a hug at Thanksgiving. Now I know that I should have held you tighter, closer, and longer when I had the chance. Most of all, I miss that when everyone else was yelling at me to walk, you would let me crawl until you could help me onto my feet. ■

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The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has been an interesting experience. Over the course of the past two weeks, I've met some great people and friends, some of whom I wish to be friends with long after this program is over.

— Aja Samuel

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THE HONEST DOLLHOUSE

By Roxy Dias

“The earthquake was extremely minor, whatever damage it caused can easily be replaced,” Mrs. Frendy said, smiling at her students. Some of them didn’t even care, they just sat there laughing and chatting as though this was an ordinary day. This caused the fire burning in Rachel’s mind to grow. They don’t understand, but she would never show them anyway.

The image of her dollhouse stood strong in her mind as she sat away from the rest of the children, waiting anxiously to be dismissed. The dollhouse, broken into tiny pieces on her floor, was the ghost that kept creeping back into her mind since she was scared. The earthquake may have demolished it. And if it did, it would never be the same. She would never be the same. She worked hard to picture the sight of it before the earthquake, where it sat by the windowsill. The details of this dollhouse showcased her real home. She knew that no other dollhouse could ever do it like hers did, not even if someone tried to model her house specifically. The dollhouse reflected parts that were difficult to see.

“Everything will be fine.” Mrs. Frendy repeated. “Anything and everything that gets damaged will be replaced. There’s no need to worry.”

But it can’t be replaced. It will never be replaced. I’m as weak as that dollhouse.

Her eyes closed with tears as she imagined her dollhouse being replaced with a new, shiny dollhouse. She didn’t care how big it would be, or how beautiful it would be, or whether it would have intricate wooden designs and tiny marble floors. The thought of that new dollhouse stealing its spot on the windowsill made her have to fight back vomit that rose in her throat. She didn’t want any other dollhouse to lie on her windowsill. She hated liars.

Mrs. Frendy finally sat next to her, noticing that she was the only child sitting in an empty corner, and her eyes were fixed on the wall ahead of her as though her mind spun with thoughts that a girl

so young didn’t deserve to think. She said one more time, “Rachel, relax, dear, whatever you lost will be replaced.”

Rachel looked up at her and then looked down toward her pretty, red shoes. She hated these shoes. They may have been pretty, but her mother bought her a size far too small. She fought against the aching in her throat, swallowed her tears, and said, “Okay.” Disappointed, Rachel looked up and noticed Mrs. Frendy continued to sit there. Rachel continued, “I’m just a little attached to what I have.”

“That’s why you shouldn’t get attached to material things, Rachel.” Mrs. Frendy said, at this brutal comment, Rachel’s eyes, in a shade of light red, finally met hers. “Especially not when you live in a place where earthquakes are so common.”

“Yeah... you’re right,” Rachel nodded. *I live in a place with so many earthquakes. I should have gotten used to them by now.* “Thank you.” Mrs. Frendy smiled at her as she got up, and began to happily start conversations with other students.

Their giggling rang in the room, but Rachel was deaf to it. Her mind flashed back to the night she got that dollhouse three years ago. It was a birthday gift she got herself when she was nine years old, and she hid it from the world ever since. From the moment she brought it home, she knew no one would see her beloved dollhouse. She didn’t understand why she was so drawn to this dollhouse at first. She had never even put a doll inside it. There was no room, she decided, it was the home of her soul. Her parents would never know about the dollhouse.

She shook her head, in an attempt to hide the physical display of her pain. Clenching her teeth and swallowing back more of her tears, Rachel fought to keep her mind silent to the world

around her. The happy, unbothered world around her. The thought occurred to her that they might have their own unique dollhouses, hiding in their rooms.

Finally, the teachers began dismissing them. Leaving the crowd easily, Rachel bolted out of the school as fast as she could. The wind pushed past against her, her light brown hair flew back, and the weight of her backpack didn’t slow her down as she grew closer to her gigantic house at the end of the street.

“Mom, I’m home,” Rachel called out quickly as she entered the house. There was no reply. She was disappointed in herself for expecting one.

Rachel ran across the polished marble floors, up the long, beautifully designed wooden staircase to her bedroom, and pushed her bedroom door open. She stopped in her tracks with her hand still on the door knob as the bright, late afternoon sun glowed down upon her truest, most prized possession that stared back at her from the windowsill she left it on in the morning.

Its windows were shattered, the paint of the house was peeling off, there were scratches on the floor, and it was difficult to miss the huge crack that marred the side of the house. The tiny doors showcased the once beautiful staircases missing a few stairs, dirty kitchens with red stains on the walls, and beds that looked broken and clearly not in an intended place for a bedroom. Parts of it were barely holding together.

Her eyes studied the house carefully, and she smiled meekly. She was relieved to meet the identical image of her dollhouse that she found laying on the curb on her ninth birthday, exactly the way she left it in the morning. Every little detail.

“It’s still honest,” she whispered softly. Then, she heard it from downstairs. Another earthquake boomed in the house, but a different kind, one that doesn’t make the morning news, but still causes significant damage.

But at least she learned that her honest dollhouse could survive earthquakes.

So would she. ■



TECH SUPPORT

By Yotam Dinour

CHARACTERS:

JERRY, 27

PAUL, 32

MIKE, 64, and aging southern man.

TIME: The present, evening.

PLACE:

The stage is split in two. On one side is JERRY's cubicle, lit by dim fluorescent lights. It is grey, sterile, and reeks of impersonality. The cubicle is messy, cluttered with loose papers. A computer sits on JERRY's desk, as well as a telephone.

On the other side of the stage is MIKE's bedroom. It is also messy, with loose clothes strewn on the bed and on the floor. On one wall is a computer atop a desk, with a mess of wires underneath it.

(The lights come up in the office. JERRY sleeps soundly with his head resting against the desk. PAUL knocks on the door of Jerry's cubicle and raps playfully on the door. JERRY jerks awake.)

JERRY: *(dazed)* What?

PAUL: I had a feeling you were asleep again, Jerry. I just wanted to let you know that it's nine and we've gotta let the night-shifters take over soon. You getting up?

JERRY: Yeah, yeah, don't worry. I just need to get ready.

PAUL: Hurry up then. Don't want to keep your daughter up all night, do you? You can leave that to the night-shifters, ha! *(he walks offstage, amused with himself)*

JERRY: Oh you have no idea how much I wanna be home right now, prick. *(He begins putting his office supplies into his suitcase. He does this for a few moments, but is interrupted by the phone ringing.)*

JERRY: Are you kidding me, now??

(JERRY peeks his head out of his cubicle, hoping desperately to find anyone else who can take the call for him. When he sees that no-one is around, he sits back down on his chair and sighs.)

JERRY: Fucking hell. *(He picks up the phone.)*

JERRY: Good evening, you've reached Wallace Electronics Technical Support, how may I help you?

(The lights come on in MIKE's room. He is standing, awkwardly in front of a computer monitor with his outdated cell phone clenched tightly to his ear.)

MIKE: *(Loudly, almost screaming.)* Hello, this is Mike Yellowsmith. Can you hear what I'm saying?

(JERRY reacts to MIKE's loud voice, moving the phone away from his ear.)

JERRY: Yes sir, loud and... clear. In fact, it might be helpful if you could speak a little bit softer, Mike.

MIKE: *(Softly)* Oh, yah mean like this?

JERRY: *(He puts his hand on his face)* Yeah, yeah, that's great. So what were you calling about, Mike?

MIKE: Well, I think my computer's broken.

JERRY: Could you be more specific please? What is it exactly that's wrong?

MIKE: *(Throws his hands into the air)* I dunno what's wrong, aren't you supposed to know? You're the guy they told me to call if my shit ain't working.

JERRY: *(He moves the phone away from his mouth and sighs quietly.)* Of course, I'll do everything I can to address your problem. But in order to fix your issue, I need to know what the issue is. Could you maybe talk me through how you arrived at the problem?

MIKE: Well okay then. I was tryin' to turn on the computer, but the fuckin' thing ain't working! It's just- it's just black!

JERRY: Okay, okay, I see. Ummmm... can you tell me what model you own?

(There is a pause.)

MIKE: I don't think I know how to do that.

JERRY: There's a sticker on the ba- you

know what? It's fine. *(Quietly)* They're all the same fucking thing anyway.

MIKE: *(Loudly)* Huh? What was that?

JERRY: Nothing, nothing at all! Look, I need you to tell me how you tried to turn on the computer. Did you press the "ON" button?

MIKE: Of course I've tried pressin' the fuckin' on button! What, you think I'm some kinda idiot? That was the first fuckin' thing I did!

JERRY: *(Rubbing his palm against his face)* No, no, of course you did. Okay. Okay. Ummm... can you check for me if the computer's plugged in?

MIKE: How would I do that?

JERRY: There should be a large green wire connected to the computer. It should be connected to an outlet or a power source.

MIKE: Okay.

(MIKE crouches down and rifles through the mass of wires underneath his desk. JERRY nearly dozes off.)

MIKE: *(Loudly)* Yes, it looks connected to me!

(JERRY jerks awake.)

JERRY: Wha? What? Sorry. You say the computer's connected?

MIKE: Yup.

JERRY: All right then. In that case, there's a couple possibilities. It might be that there's something off with your power switcher, or perhaps with your cooling fan. *(MIKE begins to inspect his computer)* In either of these cases you'll need to contact our technicians and schedule an appointment. The number you want to call is 748-556-344-

MIKE: Hey, about the ON button.

JERRY: Yes?

MIKE: What did you say it looked like again?

JERRY: It's the big green one in the middle with the word ON printed on it. *(MIKE pauses.)*

(continued on page 12)

(continued from page 11)

MIKE: I see.

JERRY: You see? What do you mean you see?

MIKE: I ummm... I pressed the other one.

(JERRY moves the phone away from his mouth and screams in frustration. He takes a second to calm down before returning to the call.)

JERRY: Okay, that's fine, that's fine. We all make mistakes.

MIKE: What button do I gotta press again?

JERRY: *(bubbling with repressed rage)* The big one that says ON. Got it? The one with ON on it. The big button in the middle. That one.

MIKE: *(Passive-aggressively)* Well all right then. *(MIKE presses the on button. Nothing happens.)*

MIKE: It didn't work.

JERRY: What?

MIKE: The on button didn't work.

JERRY: Are you sure? Are you absolutely sure you pressed the right button?

MIKE: Yeah.

JERRY: Fuck...

MIKE: What did ya say?

JERRY: Nothing. Nothing. NOTHING, Mike. Look. Are you absolutely, superduper, one-hundred percent sure that everything I've been telling you about has checked out? You pressed the right button? The power's on? The computer's plugged in? It's all okay?

MIKE: Yeah. *(He looks down at the mess of wires beneath his desk.)*

JERRY: Well then I guess you'll just have to call our mechanics department. As I was saying, their number is-

MIKE: Wait a minute.

JERRY: *(Incredibly frustrated.)* What?

MIKE: You said it was the green wire?

JERRY: Yeah...

MIKE: Oh... that one wasn't plugged in.

(JERRY sits in silence for a moment before exploding in anger.)

JERRY: REALLY? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? ARE YOU *FUCKING* KIDDING ME?

MIKE: Hold on the-

JERRY: YOU CALL AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT OF THE DAY, THE VERY LAST *FUCKING* SECOND BEFORE I GET TO GO HOME, JUST FOR YOUR COMPUTER TO HAVE BEEN UNPLUGGED THIS ENTIRE TIME?

MIKE: Son you are stepping out of line-

JERRY: *(He abruptly stands up.)* No! *FUCK YOU! FUCK THIS JOB!* I'm sick of having to listen to old people hurling abuse at me every day! Ohhh, my email isn't letting me log in, what do I dooooo? *Ohhh, my computer isn't turning on, help me, little corporate slave. What do I do? But also fuck you for not solving my problems instantly, like some fucking hacker wizard.* God this makes me want to throw up. People like me are just living for our paycheck, just living for our daughters and our wives and our-

MIKE: YOU BETTER SHUT YOUR *FUCKIN'* MOUTH UP RIGHT NOW OR I AM GETTING YOU FIRED RIGHT NOW!

JERRY: Yeah, do that! Call my manager, do it! It can't get any worse than this shi-

MIKE: Oh it CAN kid! It absolutely can. You think you've had it rough? You think that just because you have to listen to rude assholes for 8 hours a day that you've lived through the fuckin' peak of human misery? You're a kid. You can't even imagine what some of us have gone through. You don't know what it's like to lose someone. You don't know what it's like to be at your wife's bedside as she slowly fades away, as she turns into someone you don't even recognize. You don't know what it's like to be locked away from all her photos and stories and memories just because SHE was the one who always knew how to use the goddamn computer, and you couldn't even log onto facebook without overheating the damn thing. You don't know any of that, do you? *(MIKE begins to sob.)*

(The two men sit sulkily for a few good seconds.)

JERRY: I- I was just-

MIKE: Exhausted? Miserable? Sick of bein' separated from the one thing in your life that matters? I know how that feels.

JERRY: *(JERRY looks down shamefully.)* Yeah. Yeah, no, you're right. I'm sorry, I didn't know. I shouldn't have lashed out.

MIKE: No, it's all right. I understand what you're goin' through. I've been there before.

JERRY: So, did you turn it on?

MIKE: Yeah. But it's telling me I need a password.

JERRY: You need help accessing it? There's a little button there in the corner that you can click on-

MIKE: Na, I know what her password is. She was never that original.

(MIKE begins typing on the keyboard.)

M-I-K-E-1-2-3. There we go.

(The computer unlocks.)

JERRY: Sounds like the first thing a hacker would guess, doesn't it?

MIKE: Ha! Do I sound like the kind of guy who cares about that sort of thing?

JERRY: No, I guess not. Listen, you need any help accessing anything on there, just call me up, okay?

MIKE: I'll be fine, mister. You can go on home to your wife and your kids. Appreciate what you have. Trust me when I say that it gets better.

JERRY: Thanks.

(Mike hangs up the phone. The lights dim in his room. JERRY begins packing the rest of his things into his suitcase. In the suitcase, he finds a drawing done by his daughter. He smiles, and hangs it up on his cubicle wall. The lights dim in his cubicle.)

BLACKOUT



O IS

By Sarah Frampton

“

I've definitely seen a shift in myself during these past two weeks. The first few days, I spent classes staring at the clock, waiting to get out. I got to my room and finished homework as quickly as I could, not really paying attention to the words I was writing or the stories I was creating. But after about a week, I started spending classes laughing and telling my friends at home about funny stories I had heard. I spent lunches wanting to hear from my new friends. I woke up and, even though I strongly dislike mornings, I loved waking up in my room with a sense of independence. I only wrote two poems during the first week, but I've written five new poems just in the past few days. My sudden increase in writing is because of how inspired and surrounded with writing I am. I've definitely felt homesick at times, but I've also definitely spent way more time almost crying from laughter, speed-writing poems, and brainstorming stories.

— Shikha Mehta

”

- is the position the puppy was in when the boyfriend first saw him
 - is the shape of the puppy's twinkling light blue eyes
 - is the form of the few light brown patches on the puppy's otherwise white fur
 - is the design of the teal collar the boyfriend puts around the puppy's neck
 - is the pattern of the turquoise polka dots on the chew toy the puppy liked
 - is the shape of the steering wheel as the boyfriend drove home with the puppy and a smile
- is like the clock that ticks slower than usual as the boyfriend waits for his girlfriend to get home
- is the form of the warm cookies the girlfriend is bring back to her house
 - is like the doorknob the girlfriend turns
- is what her mouth looks like when she sees her boyfriend's family and her family stand behind her boyfriend as he hands her a small puppy wearing a collar with the words "Will you marry me?"
- is the shape of the glittering diamond in the ring the boyfriend takes out of his pocket
 - is like the cookies they share
- is the letter that appears twice in the puppy's name after they agree to name him Cookie



CROSSROADS

By Liam Giszter

On the night that my brother told me he had raped someone, I packed about a week's worth of food into a little sack and took it on a train to nowhere. The train stopped for the night at a rural station, and I got off, slept by the tracks, and kept running as soon as I saw the morning light. Plains and farmlands turned into streams and crags, and then into mountains and rivers, which then flattened into massive forests, and then into jungles, deserts, abandoned cities which I didn't know existed, and into canopies of ivy so thick that I could walk on them as if they were ground. After a quick break of crackers and water, I came to a blank field that stretched on for what seemed like forever, with a dirt path in the middle of it.

I followed the path until the sun was starting to set, and by dusk, I had found a crossroads of two paths.

An old man sat at the crossroads behind a fire, facing me. He was naked, and on his back was a massive wooden box. The box went up past his head, on the top of which was a hole covered by something like a bottle cap. The fire was raging and beautiful, and it flickered in his eyes as I looked at him.

"The ivy, the deserts, all of it. It isn't real, is it?" I asked him.

He looked at me with grey eyes, wrinkles of exhaustion outlining his face in the red firelight.

"If you touch it you'll feel it. You can see it. If you jumped off one of the cliffs you would die. So that's up to you," he said.

I sat down next to him, feeling my body crumble to the ground in exhaustion like sand.

"I don't think it's real," I said, "I think I'm crazy. I think I'm just batshit, I guess."

"You aren't any crazier than the rest of us," he said.

"I don't think most of us see naked old men in the middle of nowhere."

"You'd be surprised. You'd really be surprised."

I looked at the setting sun. It was a bloody red and huge, and I could feel its fading heat in my eyes. It looked impossibly big, impossibly close, and I wanted to touch it.

"What's in your box?" I asked.

"Wine," he said, "the best wine."

He grabbed a small cup from behind him and handed it to me. He stood up and removed the cap from his box, and bent over towards me as the wine streamed out, red as the sun, into my cup. I took a sip.

Before my brother had told me the truth, I had drunk wine like this, and I had laughed and smiled and loved him. It was truly the best wine. It tasted like innocence.

"Why am I here?" I asked him.

"Because you can't deal with your life and you need my help."

He raped somebody. I loved him, he was my brother, and he had raped somebody. It was wrong. How could I still love him?

"How can you help?" I asked, and I heard my voice quiver and shake like a small child asking if he's in trouble.

"I can grant you a wish."

I looked down at the cup of wine. I didn't know what to wish for.

"Why are you helping me?" I asked.

"Some people don't deserve to suffer through the struggle of waking life. It's too hard, too much. But if we could just sleep forever, we could dream forever. If we could just sleep forever..."

His face scrunched up as he said this, like he was about to cry.

"You're not human, are you?"

"No," he said.

"Are you some kind of faerie invading my dreams?" I asked.

He nodded.

"Thank you," I said.

He nodded once more.

We sat in silence for a long time.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Peterick Dowlan," he said.

"Peterick. Peterick, Peterick, *Peterick*. I'll remember that."

He looked out into the sun.

"It doesn't look like that when you're awake. It just looks like a ball of fire. Here it looks like, like something else. It can look like whatever you want when you're asleep. When you're awake it's just a sun."

"It's beautiful," I said.

"You ever seen an eclipse?" he asked.

I shook my head no.

In about a minute, a shadow had taken over the setting sun, and it looked like an eye. The dark side of the moon was its pupil, and the blue light around it was the iris. It was beautiful, and I wanted to cry.

"I wish I could fly," I said, "I wish I could fly into the sun."

In the sun, he never raped her.

In one moment, I was human. In the next, I had angel wings, and I felt lighter than I had ever been. Yet at the same time, I felt somewhat like a galleon with the wind on my sails.

I looked at Peterick, and he smiled at me, the eclipsed light from the sun shining blue on his wrinkles and eyes, making them look bright and alive.

"How do I get there?" I asked Peterick.

"You fly," he said, "and you don't wake up."

I kicked off the ground, and I never came back down. ■



A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

by Chloe Gold

I

hiding in the pink folds of raw lung,
i learn to breathe quietly in time with dripping snot of broken faucets
shedding my sorrow for paradoxes in stained vinyl floors
and shining apple cheeks of newborn porcelain.
i match my heartbeat with the walls' respiration
in a plaster box with just enough space to inhale
and hardly enough to stir the thick stew of my mind.
with doll languor, i sit numbly on the edge of the toilet
and imagine the sink on the ceiling
perpetually broken, flooding the room with tap-water rain
spitting sewage-fed fish down to swim between toes and wadded paper towel reefs
and forcing my thoughts to drown, lost forever down the drain.

II

the basil will not grow, the tomatoes will not grow
they play dead in the dirt.
i have fed you from a stranger's mouth, planted your dormant bodies
hoping i could outsmart the curse and illness of my own fingers.
but green has sprung forth in the unexpected –
the rot on wicker chairs, mold on terracotta, a fly's mischievous hands,
other hues in the dirt creased in cracked palms, the museum insects make of my body,
lilac's slender form dipping for a kiss of grass.
the seeds chuckle below the surface, amused at their own game:
there is life here you cannot control,
there is chaos in the undergrown.

III

a twin bed, a shared womb fruiting box spring and mattress.
where we wove indigo tapestries into the midnight hour
words whispered like prayers, stories told from prophets' lips.
stumbling like the drunkard, you flew to roost at daylight
nocturnal slumber twisted in sweaty sheets.
i switch off the lamp, you leave me behind in a blue fishbowl
of empty beds i dare not touch – a bed filled with the weight of your skin cells, your red curls
each forming a question mark on the duvet –
i wonder if we will ever speak the same language of spilled memories again
or if you have given away your voice in exchange for a new life
or you have let me go to lighten the load, swollen with the weight of stars.



“

My two weeks at the Summer Young Writer’s Institute will always be held firmly in my mind. Although I underwent a period of low creativity while attending, I met lovely people and had experiences I will always cherish. I met a friend I have a soul connection with and I must thank Skidmore for making that possible. From late nights with friends to long hours spent outside, writing under the shade of the trees, I’ve experienced a wide range of fruitful encounters! Thank you for having me as a part of this program.

— Chloe Gold

”

SHELL-SHOCK

By Natalia Green

We are shell-shocked.
Overload,
Stuck in a deadlock

Fired shots.
In our throes,
We are shell-shocked.

No drop shot.
Veto.
No escape from the deadlock.

The boat is rocked.
We're due what we owe.
We are shell-shocked.

Our prayers are stocked.
Death’s whistles blow,
Amidst the deadlock.

Non-stop,
No reload.
We are shell-shocked
In a deadlock.



LIAM

By Sophie Grenke

(We open on LIAM and DR. STERN seated facing each other. LIAM on the couch and DR. STERN seated in a chair)

It's been like two weeks since he died but I still always imagine him there at night. I mean honestly, mom hasn't stopped crying yet either. She thinks she's quiet about it in the middle of the night, but I don't think she knows I can't sleep either. Honestly, it's kind of selfish, I think. How she cries and all. Like I don't think about him all the time, dead, in the ground. She's such a bitch sometimes. And yes, she is my mom, but I don't have to respect her all the time, do I? At least only to her face. And yes, I know all that bullshit about how he came from her stupid womb, so she gets to cry more because he "was a part of her" but he was a part of me too. Before he died, I had never gone anywhere by myself, I didn't do anything alone. He was, well, he was like safeness, if that's a word. He was like a personal body guard. Not that he was bigger than me or anything because he really wasn't, but it just felt nice always having someone with you to talk to. And he was a great listener too, don't get me wrong. But he was violent a lot, not like really, really violent but like teenage-boy violent, you know? Well, all teenage boys are, so it wasn't really out of the ordinary. But yeah, he was my built-in best friend. And I know people think I'm the one that killed him and that's why I'm here because the day before he died, we got in that huge fight. But ask anyone, we fought like that all the time. I mean we're brothers, or, we were. It was sometimes a little much being together all the time but not really. Like we kind of pretended it was just because we loved each other so much. At least I'm assuming that's how he felt too. It's definitely how I felt. But I know I'm here because of our big fight. I know because I know mom heard our fight and then in between crying over his dead body she looked at me like I was the devil. She's afraid of me, always has been. I think it's something about my dad, how he was a bad guy and really violent and she sees some of him in me. She never saw any of him in Luke, Luke was always the favorite. So of course, she blames me for the fight because Luke was her little angel and I'm her little devil. Actually, there was one year when we were 6 that she got us matching angel and devil costumes for Halloween, and I was the devil and

Luke was the angel. I shit you not. Whenever I would tell Luke about it, he would just laugh it off and say, "mom doesn't have favorites, she loves us equally" but that was so not true. Honestly ask anyone. Ask our teachers. Hard to believe it but Luke actually used to get worse grades than me and would never pay attention. I always payed attention though and I was the nicest little boy you've ever met. And then I got in one fight. I got in one fight and he doesn't listen to jack shit in school and suddenly I'm the bad child. And don't ask me about that fight because it'll get me really mad and I might need to punch something. But yeah, I was always the bad child. He always got special treatment and everything. He was so fake though and I was the only one that ever saw it. That's actually what we were fighting about the day before he died. I got mad that he was being rude to me and I told him that. He called me a little bitch, so I screamed at him in front of the grocery store. But he deserved it, so it doesn't count. But no matter what, everyone always loved him more. He had more friends, always got more money for holidays and birthdays and mom treated him like a little baby. Like he might get shot at any time, no pun intended. And because I said that doesn't mean I'm the one that shot him because I'm not so don't start assuming stuff. And even if I wanted to, where would I get a gun anyway? Not like there's a gun store around the corner. Honestly, I think mom overestimates me. Like I am not smart enough to find a gun and find the money for it and then hide it somewhere until I decide to whip it out and shoot my twin brother in the back on the sidewalk in broad daylight. And the police said they figured it was a drive by anyway, they were probably aiming for someone else. Around here it really happens a lot. The police did say that. Drive by gang shootings are really common, it's Harlem for god sakes, I don't know what people expect. But yeah, I miss him, that's all I really wanted to say. And now you're supposed to like do something and make me feel better right? That's what you people do right? I lie on your couch and you listen to my problems and tell me it's gonna be okay and maybe give me a prescription, so I feel better and you send me on my way. I really don't think my mom can afford a ton of these sessions anyway. So do your therapy shit and send me home. ■



THE NIGHT LISTENS

By Prisha Gupta

I woke up in a cold sweat, gasping for air. I patted my shoulders, then my face. Okay. I was fine. I propped myself up with my hands, and I could feel the firm bed beneath them. Okay. I was still here. As I looked around the darkness, I took in slow breaths. One, two, three...

I sighed. Breathing never helps; my heart was still moving a little too quickly. I threw my head back and licked my lips. Dang, how did my mouth get so dry? I reached over to my bedside, my arm shaking from the particularly cruel football practice we had yesterday. My hand felt nothing. I patted the table a few times again just to make sure. Well, shit. I groaned and dragged myself out of bed.

I used the handrails for support as I made my way downstairs; apparently my legs weren't working either. Once I got to the bottom, I tried to make my footsteps as quiet as possible, carefully feeling the cool tile with each step.

I saw a faint glow from the kitchen, and I thought someone had just forgotten to turn the lights off, but then I saw- "Dad?" I whispered. He was bent over the counter and was sitting on one of the high stools. The light was on him just like a spotlight, but it highlighted all his worst features.

He almost looked asleep with his head resting in his hand, but then he looked up at me and squinted as if he was trying to make sure I was actually there. "Evander? What are you doing here?" he whispered back. He was the only one who called me by my full name. Mom told me it's because he chose it, but I never liked it. It was just a weirder way of saying 'Evan.'

"Oh, uh, I was just going to grab some water." I opened the fridge and let the light and cool air hit my face. I grabbed a bottle of water, and my hand brushed against some cans of beer, making me get a queasy feeling in my stomach.

"Come here, come here! Sit with your ol' pa!" My grip tightened on the fridge handle. What? I closed the fridge door and turned around to see him. He was waving his hand around and the other hand clutched a beer can. I got that queasy feeling again.

I'd never seen him like this. I mean, sure, I'd seen him drink, and he looks happy on the outside, but at the same time he seems so...alone right now. Alone in the way that no one's ever listened to his problems - not because he chose not to speak but because no one was there to hear. Is that why's he up and drinking? But still, I don't know if I want to stay. I had my own problems to deal with. "I, uh..."

"Pleeeeeeeeeaaaaassee?"

But if I didn't stay, he'd never be quiet. I sighed and took a seat next to him.

"Ahh, there you go." He clapped me on the back, sending me forward a bit. "So. Why are you up, my boy?"

"Why are you up?" I whispered. Mom was still asleep.

"I'm older. You answer first." Wow. He still had some 'dad' left in him, so he's not completely drunk yet.

"I already told you. I was thirsty." I uncapped my water bottle and took a sip. Ahh. My mouth felt so much better.

"But why are you *really* up?" His face got closer to mine and I could feel the beer on his breath. I pushed him away, but he kept coming back over and over again. "Just tell me, and I'll stoopp!"

With a final shove, I said, "Fine! I had a bad dream, okay? Are you happy?"

He looked down at his beer that he was clutching with both hands. For once now, he was silent. He took a swig of his beer, and then he spoke, "Me too... What was yours about?"

"What was yours about?"

His voice was soft. "I'm older. You answer first." I swallowed some water and met his dazed eyes. Could I tell him? He'd be the first one I ever told.

He rose his can to his lips, drained it, then crushed it up and tossed it aside.

Fuck it, he wouldn't remember anyway.

"It-it was about..." My hand was trembling, and I held it to make it stop. "We were at a party, smoking, doing all sorts of drugs. I did some I've never even heard of. There was alcohol there." I glanced at Dad's crumpled

can; it rested by the small fake succulent in the corner of the counter. That queasy feeling came back again.

"I had some too. I...I dared one of my friends to take this one combination of drugs. Completely random, I had no idea what it'd do." I took in a shaky breath and stared ahead, clutching my water bottle even tighter.

"So he took it. Downed it with whisky. He was just that kind of person, willing to do anything. It was admirable, in some ways. But...I don't know. He seemed fine. But we were drunk and high, everything seemed great. We let him drive home, for some dumb reason. Outside, we heard the engine revving up, and we heard him take off. And just seconds after we heard a huge crash, and I could feel the world shake. But there was no scream. We stumbled outside to check out what happened, but the whole neighborhood already beat us to it. He'd run into a street lamp and completely bent it over. I remember pushing through the crowd and seeing his mangled body-" I choked. I wiped my face and my hand was wet. I took in another shaky breath and let my head fall into my hands.

"I don't even know what I was thinking. I don't know why. Why did it happen? Why did he have to - die?" The word lingered in the air, finally coming out of me, but it still clung to me like humidity clings to your skin. I know I said it was a bad dream, but it wasn't. I mean, it felt like a bad dream when it happened, but it was definitely real. I wish it hadn't happened, though, because then I wouldn't still be having nightmares about it and Reeve would still be here.

I finally looked at Dad, but he already had gotten another beer can and was playing with that bright green succulent. He was talking to it, too. I sighed. He didn't hear any of it.

I took a sip of my water, and he took another swig of his beer.

I wonder if anyone did. ■



MR. MILLER

By Julian Iwasko

“

This program is a healthy and constructive way to nurture your love for writing. It's great that each form of writing gets its exclusive time each day. The teachers and students here are all very accepting, and they critique so well. There is time for work and there is time for fun with your dorm-mates. It is an experience that you can benefit from professionally and socially. This program can be – or feel – a bit intense at times, but that just means it's a good challenge. Also, living in dorms with other writers is a fun experience.

— Natalia Green

”

The bright fluorescent lights in the ceiling stung my eyes. I planted my elbows into my thighs and leaned my neck downwards so I could cover my face with my hands to prevent another light-induced migraine. My toes were on the floor, and as my nerves began to swell, my ankles subconsciously moved up and down, bouncing my numb legs. Sadie noticed and stood up from her chair to perch herself in front of me.

“Daddy?” she asked.

“Yes, sweetie?” I looked up from my hands and she eyed my twitchy legs.

“Can I sit in your lap?” she requested with the tenderest expression dancing across her face.

I sighed, but quickly gave in at the sight of her puppy dog eyes. “Sure, sweet girl!”

I lifted her gently into my lap and wrapped one of my arms around her small frame. She turned around and peered up at me. “Daddy, you look tired,” she declared.

I glanced at Beatrice for confirmation of our daughter's statement. She reached a hand out and placed it on the side of my face, using her thumb to brush the dark circles underneath my eyes. She nodded her head, verifying Sadie's remark, but kept her hand on my cheek. I closed my eyes for a minute and leaned into her touch, placing my hand over hers. She gave me a small smile and I returned it; a short moment of bliss as my nerves settled.

Loud cries reached my ears from down the hallway. I looked up to see a middle-aged woman sobbing as a younger girl attempted to comfort her as they walked. The woman's eyes were red and puffy and her nose was runny. She made eye contact with me and looked away quickly, crying louder than before as she rushed out the door, young girl in trail.

I pulled away from Beatrice and Sadie, nerves setting in again as my legs began to bounce. Sadie slid off my lap and skipped away to the kids' corner to read a book. I stared straight ahead mindlessly picking at the skin around my nails. I knew that tearing and pulling at my skin should have hurt, but I could not feel the pain. Within a few minutes, my thumb began to bleed. Beatrice looked down at my hands in my lap and noticed what I did. She silently reached over and slipped her hand into mine, preventing me from picking at my skin again by intertwining our fingers together.

A tall doctor emerged from the waiting room door, holding a clipboard. He approached Beatrice and I, squatting down in front of our chairs to speak with us. Beatrice's grip on my hand grew tighter, attempting to reassure as the doctor walked towards us with a solemn look on his face.

“I'm sorry to inform you, Mr. Miller, but it seems your father won't make it.” ■



THAT ESCALATED QUICKLY

By Hope Jorgensen

“

I have had a really fun time. Not only did I learn a lot about writing, but I was also able to meet people who have many of the same interests that I do. I learned a lot of tool that I'll be able to use to help make my writing the best that it can be. This was a very supportive environment, and no one felt too afraid to share their writing.

— Emma Weitzman

”

CHARACTERS:

Carol, 42
Alan, 36
Barbara, 14

TIME: 1950s, afternoon

PLACE: Carol's sun-soaked backyard. The grass is freshly mowed and in the center of the backyard lies a checkered picnic blanket. On the picnic blanket lies an assortment of food on plates, along with a few forks and a steak knife.

(As the lights come on, CAROL sits on the blanket alongside ALAN. ALAN gazes at her like she is the only person in the entire universe. CAROL is clearly deep in thought and picks at her food.)

CAROL: I want to kill my kid. I know this picnic is for us to finally unwind and relax, but I had to say that. It sounds terrible, doesn't it?

ALAN: Nothing you say could sound terrible, my love. I know exactly how you feel.

CAROL: But how could you? You have no kids so you can't understand this feeling I get whenever I look at that innocent face of hers. This feeling that I am a monster for doing what I do. It would be so much simpler if Barbara was just... gone.

(CAROL gives an awkward laugh as she turns to look at ALAN, her food forgotten. A small smile forms on ALAN's face as he gazes at CAROL, as if he is remembering a fond memory.)

ALAN: I had a family once. A deadbeat father and an older brother with hurting hands. I even had a girlfriend, though your beauty far outshines hers, my love.

CAROL: What happened to them? I've never heard you mention them before.

(ALAN shrugs, as if it doesn't matter.)

ALAN: I cut them out of my life. They're dead to me now.

(ALAN laughs. As he laughs, the distant noise of a door opening and closing can be heard. CAROL becomes visibly anxious while ALAN stays calm)

CAROL: Wait, did you hear that?

ALAN: Hear what? All I can hear is the sound of your beautiful voice.

CAROL: I love you for saying that, but if that's Jim, I am dead.

ALAN: He's your husband, not your father.

CAROL: Yes, but if that is him I will be divorced and living with my parents faster than you can say "I'm sorry".

(Something changes in ALAN as he loses the calm visage. Anger twists his features as CAROL shifts away from him, having never seen this much anger from him before.)

ALAN: You want to kill your kid? How about you kill that deadbeat, lazy, son of a bitch first? He has never done anything for you! All he has done is treat you like a pretty bird that belongs in a golden cage! Cut him out of your life and start a new one with me!

CAROL: I hope you're joking, Alan. I don't love Jim but that doesn't mean I want him dead. Why do you always say such morbid things? And I didn't really mean that about Barbara. I feel awful saying this, but it would just be so much easier if she was out of the picture. But, she's my daughter and I-

(BARBARA enters the stage, looking confused and it is clear she has never seen ALAN before.)

BARBARA: Mom?

(CAROL and ALAN are visibly shocked. CAROL hastily gets up and walks towards BARBARA, regret on her face. ALAN recovers quickly and stands up slowly.)

(continued on page 21)

(continued from page 20)

CAROL: Sweetie, I thought you had girl scouts until 6 o'clock. Dad was supposed to pick you up after his shift.

BARBARA: The scout leader was sick so Joy's mom drove me home early. Mom, who is this?

ALAN: I'm Alan, your mother's lover.

CAROL: Alan, how could you say that? Barbara, sweetie, it's not what you think.

BARBARA: Lover? Wait, you're cheating on dad? I thought you loved dad!

CAROL: Barbara, just calm down okay? Let's talk this through.

BARBARA: So you don't deny it?

(CAROL says nothing. BARBARA looks betrayed and starts backing up towards the house. CAROL is devastated while ALAN is smiling.)

BARBARA: I'm going to call dad, I can't believe you did this.

ALAN: You have no choice, Carol.

(CAROL turns towards ALAN, who is now seen holding the steak knife. BARBARA's eyes widen when she sees the knife and she freezes, not sure what is going on.)

CAROL: What do you mean, Alan? Why are you holding that knife?

ALAN: You told me yourself, "I want to kill my kid". So do it, my love. I've done it before, it's not hard. I can show you how to cover your tracks, we can do it together and then we can run away. Ditch this old town and find a new life of love and adventure.

CAROL: I was kidding before, Alan! And don't joke about those things, you sound like you've actually murdered someone before. I know you are not being serious, right?

ALAN: I've never been more serious in my entire life.

BARBARA: Mom, what's going on? I'm scared.

(For a moment, CAROL and BARBARA stand still, both of them staring at ALAN who now seems calm and composed, still holding the knife. For a heartbeat nothing happens. Suddenly, ALAN bursts into action and rushes forward, grabbing BARBARA by the neck. BARBARA kicks out but can't break free as his grip tightens. In the same motion, ALAN holds out the knife to CAROL. After standing for a moment in shock, CAROL starts towards where ALAN holds BARBARA with her hands raised in front of her, as if approaching a dangerous animal.)

ALAN: Take the knife, Carol!

BARBARA: Mom, help me!

CAROL: Alan, please put down the knife and let go of my daughter before the neighbors hear and call the police. Please, this is just a big misunderstanding. I don't want to hurt her, I don't want her out of my life.

ALAN: I know you better than you do. This isn't the first time you've complained about your family. You are only a bored housewife, but you can be so much more with me. Cut off the ties that trap to this suburban nightmare and you'll be free.

BARBARA: Mom, this is ridiculous!

(In the distance, the neighbor's concerned voices can be heard. CAROL seems to hesitate and reaches for the knife. She glances between ALAN's hopeful face and BARBARA'S terrified expression. She takes the knife.)

CAROL: I loved you before I even met you. And I fell even deeper in love when I first heard your laugh and saw your beautiful smile. Please forgive me.

(As the lights begin to dim, CAROL thrusts forward her knife. There is a scream and police sirens in the distance. When the lights turn on, ALAN lays alone on the floor, dead, in a puddle of blood. CAROL cries silently, with her arms wrapped around a shocked BARBARA as the police sirens grows louder.)

BARBARA: Well, that escalated quickly.

BLACKOUT



EXCERPT FROM A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

By Josephine Lauricella

“

While the beginning of my time here was not entirely as I had hoped, it got better over time for the most part. People were accepting of everyone's work, and in my time here I became more and more comfortable sharing my work. I found that I would sometimes even be excited to share my work in class because it was such a great environment in which to do so. I also met people who enjoyed writing as much as I do, and we would sometimes help each other with our work. Overall, there were many aspects of this program I enjoyed. It was fun.

— Sophie Grenke

”

Braelin thought about that fateful night when she'd poisoned any chance of redemption. The memory of it was vivid. She knew the best country to disappear to would be Ascinorev. Its numerous forests and small towns were perfect for hiding from her past. The first time she walked down the streets of Vikavra, she realized what kind of people lived in the Peric district. Before turning her first corner, she'd already seen a man pull a knife and two young girls pickpocket a noble who had dropped his books. Growing up, she'd heard the stories of Vikavra and tales of the violence that always ended with the saying,

It's the town you'll lose it all, and once you do you'll surely fall.

It was just a rhyme to scare children. But the sight made her knees shake. Houses lined the cobblestone streets that twisted and turned into smaller alleys and dead ends. *Dangerous. There were no escapes from shadowy corners.* She quickly shook her head. The town felt dirty, there were people drinking in the taverns and on the streets. They were loud and rough with each other, often getting in fights that resulted in a body being thrown across a bar. Braelin had come with nothing but a cloak, her knives, and some coppers hidden in her left boot. Head down, she kept a wary eye on the streets ahead.

It was getting late and unsafe to be out in the open. Braelin rounded a corner and suddenly found herself walking on a quiet, abandoned street. *Something wasn't right.* Other streets were full of rowdy gamblers and gangs talking loudly and waging bets. She quickened her step towards the corner ahead, careful to watch for muggers leaning against the dark buildings. Her boots clacked loudly against the stones and she felt her skin prickle with unease. A figure slipped from the shadows and walked towards her. For a moment it looked as though he would simply pass. Keeping her hood on, she looked up for a split second. She silently unsheathed her knives, keeping her pace steady. As he passed, she relaxed slightly. The next thing she felt was a wrench on her cloak as she was thrown into an alley that hadn't been there a second ago. The air was knocked out of her with a heavy blow. She coughed hard against the weight that had struck her stomach. Backing away from her attacker, she slashed at his arm with one of her small blades, but instead of cutting him, heard the clang of metal against metal. She tried for his face but he was quick. He cut her hand with his blade and she hissed as the cold steel split her skin. Taking a moment to recover, she then grabbed her other knife just as he reached for her head. With one swift motion, she held one knife to his throat, the other to his chest. Kicking aside his smaller blade, Braelin increased the pressure on her knives. It was then that she realized just how fast her heart was pounding.

That was the first time Braelin saw Rav. ■



BROKEN VIOLIN

By Tristan Lauricella

“

The people and the experiences I have had here are better than anything I have done in the past. My writing abilities have grown and my love for words is more apparent to me now than ever before. The teachers and the other students have really made this a memorable experience for me. Everyone here was so passionate about their writing! And they were all so willing to help out someone if they needed it. This has shown me how much writing actually means to me and how my words can truly touch someone. This has been an adventure I will never forget.

— Ainsley Chisman

”

You were born in pastel pink
and yet you grew into a sharp dark black.

You constructed your life with gothic white pillars
though the rough scaffolding became your ultimate definition.

You always smell of freshly-baked cookies
and the twilight sky knows the lost adventures of only us.

In the eyes of judgment, you stand
but crumble unto your own self-hate.

In a white room stand shelves of countless volumes
each a different piece of a jigsaw which fuels the enigma which you embody.

You're cold as the ocean spray to those who cross you
yet warm those you love with bleacher blankets and late-night campfires.

I wish only that you could let yourself live
as beautifully as you play your broken violin.



THE BATTLE OF RAIN DANCE

By Harrison LeBow

“

It really was awesome — unlike any other program I’ve been to. I made lots of friends who shared my passion and was basically given two weeks to write to my heart’s content. Seriously, before this, I had never tried screenwriting or playwriting and now I have, so that’s cool. I’ve written more stories and more poetry here, and I’ve gotten lots of ideas. I’d like to think that my writing has improved as well. Unfortunately, I am a senior, so this year is probably my first and my last time here, but I’ll carry these wonderful memories and experiences with me. Wow, that sounded really sappy, didn’t it?

— Marlee Seifer

”

As you all may know, we are a now a grieving nation. We have been licked. Our people... You! *The* people have been put into a position of major strife. We have lost countless lives. This war has drained our resources and drained our wills. The attack, now known as, “The Battle of Rain Dance”, has killed 40,000 soldiers and 10,000 civilians. Our borders were infiltrated and because of that, we suffered. They have commandeered our ports, shut down trade routes, closed businesses, and are committing murders on the streets. We are in a state of disarray, but nonetheless, we are here. We are not here today to settle this dispute, but to cope with it. To cope with the idea of our nation being held hostage. To cope with the idea that the rising sun and the waxing moon look over us and see our strife, but do nothing. We must not rely on them for support. We must rely on our brothers and sisters to look us in the eye and be able to sense our hand quivering, even if we do suppress it. To do this is to not only find strength in ourselves, but sympathize with others. Sympathize with the rising sun and the waxing moon. To think about their perspective. To realize the rising sun does not know the meaning of the phrase, “ignorance is bliss”, for this celestial being knows all of what goes on in this world. Heartbreak, war, murder. And the waxing moon, living in isolation, knowing nothing but darkness and stars. So I address this to you, my fellow citizens. Teach the moon friendship. Give the sun warmth and beauty. Let them both wane, rise, set and wax on our nation, for if these two forces work in tandem, a thriving nation will rise again. ■



PILOT

By Katherine Marriott

“

I think I learned a lot here about writing that I wouldn't have known otherwise. There was a lot of trying new things. For example, I had never written a screenplay, dramatic monologue, or a play, but I've always wanted to, and I got the chance to try them here and I'm glad I did. This program has given me confidence in my own writing and, at the same time, has shown me that I have a lot more to learn.

— Prisha Gupta

Help! Help! This is pilot Emery Crane requesting immediate assistance... I'm caught in a storm... about 43 miles out... I can't do an emergency landing! Hello? Hello? No don't cut out on me now! I need you to tell me how to land this giant metal tube!

Ok, ok, deep breaths, you know what to do. Martin said all I had to do was pretend it was just a normal, everyday runway. I can do this, after all it's either do it or die trying, right?

So, step one is to find a flat spot to land, in a forest, great. Fingers crossed I find a field or some sort of clearing big enough. Trees, trees, trees, oh maybe there! And... nope still trees. Where does this forest end?! Wait... that's a field! Thank goodness.

Step two, circle back and now I must check the airspeed indicator and then of course the altimeter and then the vertical speed indicator, don't want to run into the ground!

Step three I can't forget to line up the plane as well. A little to the left... too much! Right, more, more, tiny tap more... there. No wind, come on, the other way!

Step four, I need an altitude of around 1000ft, I have 635ft, get higher... come on rise! Don't get caught in the downdraft! 752ft? Guess I'll work with what I got.

Step five is to... to... what was it that Martin used to say? Something along "aim for the threshold of the runway" I think. Sure hope so!

Step six at about 20ft above the "runway" I need to tip the nose up so that the plane becomes level with the ground.

Step seven is to touch down, just like when landing on an actual runway. I can do this!

Whoa, a little bummmppy, nicce and straaaighhhh nowww, eassy, eassy, and parked!

Ha I did it! And nothing exploded! Take that storm! You don't scare me! Was that lightning? You know maybe I should get out of the giant, metal, can in the middle of the clearing. ■

”



REJECTED (AGAIN)

By Seviya Mast

“

What my time at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has meant to me – a fine question, I suppose. A better question might be, why is this guy’s handwriting so bad? But to answer your question, my time here has felt like a free trial for college life – the freedom, the lack of responsibility (not a bad thing!), the homesickness (quite bad!). Here, I felt at least a little alive, like I could do whatever I wanted. If your intention was to combine a lite-school system with a home-like environment, you didn’t fail.

At the same time, though, I did miss my family and my x-box – for the record, I am most definitely someone who doesn’t invest in material possessions, and it made me invest in my future – and to think that in three or four years, this is how I’ll be living. Makes a guy think. But enough of that. As I once said after eating a full tub of ice cream, “Man, I could really use a healthy diet.”

— Nick Sepci

”

“You’re cute.” He blinked once.
“What?” he asked.

“You’re cute,” I repeated. He took one drawn-out step away from me.

“Thanks,” he said. Then he shuffled backward just slowly enough for it to be awkward. He shot me finger guns, then spun himself back toward his group of soccer friends: Cole, Andrew, Lucas. He made eye contact with a girl by the lockers, Emma. She nodded at him, then began sashaying my way, adjusting her seashell choker as she came.

“Brian isn’t really looking for a girlfriend right now. Sorry.” Emma leaned in a little closer. “He does like hookups though. Teenage boys, am I right?” she giggled. She was pretending we were pals. We both know that we’re not pals. She then sashayed to a big group of girls, all in Birkenstocks. I glanced at Brian. Clearly he had been watching the whole event. His cheeks were bright red and his palm was pressed against the back of his neck like it usually is when he’s embarrassed.

I shrugged. It’s nothing personal. Getting rejected is typical when you’re the beautifully intimidating heir to the throne and you constantly have a squad of bodyguards behind you. ■



WEDDING MISHAPS

By Shikha Mehta



During my two weeks at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, I have made many new friends who are smart and interesting and very funny. They made writing easier, but they especially made my time here something that I'll never forget. To be honest, I didn't want to leave.

— Harrison LeBow



CHARACTERS:

ELISABELLE, 27

HALEY, 27

TIME: The present, 8 a.m.

PLACE: Haley's bedroom, with the bed in center stage. Light is focused on the bed. There is a closet door, and a wall to the left of the bed that is not illuminated. The bowl is in front of the wall.

(As the light comes up, HALEY sits up on her bed.)

HALEY: Ah help! Someone call 911! Logan! Belle!

(Belle sleepily strolls into Haley's bedroom.)

ELISABELLE: Haley, calm down. Your makeup hasn't been magically melted by evil demons, your wedding dress hasn't been torn apart in a shredder, and Logan doesn't want you to move to Canada.

HALEY: No, seriously, all of that happened.

ELISABELLE: What do you mean?

HALEY: Well, except for the Logan thing, see for yourself, everything's ruined!
(The closet door, the wall, and the bowl to the left of the bed are illuminated. Haley points to the dress on her closet door. The formerly gorgeous white dress has been destroyed by streaks from Crayola markers in red. All of Haley's makeup is in a bowl on the floor filled with maple syrup and Haley's jewelry is glued to a bunch of maple leaves taped to the wall next to her closet door. Elisabethe slowly turns to look at what Haley's pointing at and she almost falls back in shock.)

ELISABELLE: How? It was all fine yesterday.

HALEY: Don't look at me. When I went to sleep everything was okay. Who would have done this?

ELISABELLE: At this point, I don't think who did it matters, it's 8 am. 8 freaking am, Haley. You have to be at the wedding venue in 5 hours and it's your wedding.

(Elisabelle takes a breath and calms down a little when she sees that she's worrying Haley.)

ELISABELLE: We can fix this though. We'll get a new dress.

HALEY: But, Belle, that dress is The One--

ELISABELLE : *(cuts Haley off)* I can pick up new jewelry and you can use my makeup. It's not that bad. At least you still have the ring.

(Haley glances at her nightstand.)

HALEY: Belle, stop saying things. What you say keeps coming true!

ELISABELLE: What the hell? How is this happening?

HALEY: Belle, I can't get married without that wedding ring. Logan said he got it from his grandmother when she was on her hospital bed 10 years ago. I can't even *face* Logan knowing I lost his dead grandmother's ring.

(Elisabelle runs out of the bedroom.)

HALEY: Hey, I want to run away from all my problems too, but I don't just get to!

(Elisabelle re-enters the bedroom with a plastic golden ring in her hand.)

ELISABELLE: Here, a ring. We have to give something to the ring bearer by 9 am, so this will have to do. Maybe you can wait until after the wedding to tell Logan about his dead grandmother's ring.

HALEY: That doesn't solve the problem.

(Elisabelle sits down on Haley's bed.)

ELISABELLE: Yes, it does. This ring is fine for the ceremony. You have to get married tonight or else Logan will get deported; you know you don't have many options here.

HALEY: Okay. As annoying as Logan is sometimes, I love him, so the wedding has to happen. But did you seriously have no other ring options? I mean, this looks like you won it from a claw machine at Walmart.

(Elisabelle laughs and they exit the bedroom together.)

BLACKOUT



I'M FROM

By Sabrina Mizrahi

“

Honestly, at first, I didn't think spending two weeks upstate would dramatically impact my writing. How wrong I was! Now even the way I read pieces of writing has changed. I never would have been given the opportunity to write and write nearly all day long anywhere else. I have been surrounded by so many other people who love to write as well. I know I will never forget what I have learned here.

— Hope Jorgensen

”

I'm from slammed doors and shoes dropped from windows
I'm from toilet water pawprints streaking our wooden floor and
God forbid you don't use a coaster
I'm from 93rd and 96th street
7b and 11k
Lamachun and brisket
Latkes and glach
I'm from netflix and dvds
And the lion king "just one more time" before bed
I'm from unibrows and mustaches
And endless buckets of
Wax
I'm from "you should really do something about that"
I'm from "you will grow out of it" and "It's just a phase"
I'm from bioengineering coders
And frequent enthusiast stoners
I'm from elmo on repeat even though she is 19
I'm from I tried my best
And I'll never be the best
I'm from "Do you still need therapy"
And everlasting longing that shreds my soul on purpose
I'm from "combat the intrusive thoughts"
I'm from making an entire project about how I shouldn't compare
myself to other yet doing it every waking hour
of everyday
I'm from the sizzle of butter for 10am pancakes
I'm from "you will do better next time"
And "it will all be fine"



PERFECT

By Rorie Newman

“

My time here has been marked by powerful, cathartic experiences and an overwhelming sense of belonging. Being part of this program doesn't just mean that I am a talented writer; it means that I am a writer with the potential to grow and evolve. Through this program, I have learned that open-mindedness and commitment are the unforgettable keys to becoming a memorable and relatable author.

— Ameerat Bisiolu

”

(MIRANDA is sitting at a restaurant table facing a man about her age, and relatively handsome. They are both dressed semi-formally.)

Miranda: I think the best date I have ever been on, bear with me it's super cliché, but it was a walk on the beach at sunset. We had been wandering up and down the pier together, just you know, talking. And everything was coming super easy and natural. Oh, and you know the, like, umm what am I thinking of? Oh airbrush that's the word. You know the airbrush tee-shirt guys, we got matching his and hers shirts- this was like our eighth date together- and they had little crowns on them. They were so cute. So we walked up and down the pier for hours, and then we got ice cream. I got maple walnut, and he got vanilla, and we walked along the beach. It was the evening, so we watched as the sky turned from that brilliant blue, to orange, and to red, and to pink. It was beautiful. We laid in the sand together just watching the sky and the waves until the moon's reflection was clear in the water. I thought I was in love.

No that's not right. I was in love. He was perfect. His name was Fletcher. Fletcher was perfect. He was handsome. He had dark brown hair, and rich chocolate eyes. And his muscles. Oh my god they were incredible. I think I have a picture somewhere.

(MIRANDA pulls out her phone and after a little searching she shows the picture to the man.)

Isn't he a dream? Ughh, perfection at its finest. And he was so nice. But not like pushover nice. He stands up for what he believes in, but like he also drinks a big glass of manna in the morning with his protein shake. He worked for a bank or something like that, so he was always wearing suits. And boy did he look good in a suit.

We were going to move in together, you know. He had an apartment and he asked me to move in with him. But the week before we were supposed to move in together he dumped me. I already had half my things in boxes. I told everyone that I was finally moving out of my parents' basement. Everyone. I thought we were going to get married and he dumped me. I was heartbroken. Heart-broken. But, oh my god, I'm sorry. I totally forgot this was supposed to be a date. I want to get to know you, too. So like what type of music are you into? ■



THE SOLITARY BEAST OF ANGUSVILLE

By Lukas Ostler

Angusville was a painfully normal town.

Nothing interesting ever happened. Crime was basically non-existent except for the occasional teenage caught shoplifting. The high school was full of kids with painfully average grades and painfully bland plans for the future. Each day was like a mirror of the last. An endless loop full of mundaneness.

But one day, the adults of the town awoke to a strange phenomenon.

It seemed as though every child in the town had gathered at the great clock buried in the heart of the town. The clock had been silent for years, never up-kept and full of nests and webs of every sort.

But now this rotting shell had become an intense point of interest for every child in the town. But perhaps it was not the clock itself, but rather the creature that resided upon it. The immense black creature that hunched over itself. It was more bird than anything, but from some angles it looked almost like a crouching man wrapped in a black cloak of feathers. It sat, a gloomy and striking addition to the decrepit clock. It's hulking form drew the children in. They stood in almost uniform rows, all of their heads tilted to the right at varying angles as they gazed with glassy eyes up at what seemed to be their new god of sorts. They were silent, unlike large groups of children usually are. They seemed almost to carry a heavy blanket of silence on their small backs. If you walked into the crowd you could feel it settle on you as well. Parents, although mildly surprised and confused at their children's sudden fascination with this odd beast, didn't do anything about it. The kids weren't hurting anyone or themselves, so why stop them?

They were left alone for the day when lunch time came, the calls of parents echoed out, coaxing their offspring back to the nest. Not a child heeded. Not even turning their heads in response. After the adults realized their little ones weren't coming for their meal, they abandoned

the cause till later. Hours passed, the sun sunk slowly in the sky, people went about their mundane days, and the children stood.

Dinner time came, and the parents became more insistent this time. A timid mother approached her child, murmuring gentle words, beaconing them home. The kid didn't respond in the slightest, not even a glance. Their big eyes stayed intensely focused on the Bird. Her tone became increasingly commanding, till she was shouting at her child, her voice a screeching mix of panic and anger. The panic mounted ever higher in her hitching cries until she broke down into loud sobs. She threw her arms around her child's neck in desperation and tugged. This elicited the first reaction from any of the children since that morning. The kid, without moving their gaze from its point on the Bird, let out a low, guttural growl. The sound was unsettling, a sound that would form knots in even the bravest person's stomach. The sound grew to a low whine and slowly but surely, the children around began to pick up the call till the chorus of synchronized groans filled the air. The mother released her child in fear and the noise slowly died out. She let out a despondent wail and fell to her knees as her husband rushed out to gather her. A few others came along presently and were also scared off by the low whining groan of the crowd. The sun set in a fury and yet the kids still stood.

Suddenly, the great bird opened its wings and stood to its full hulking height. The children's heads snapped up straight at this. The Bird opened its great beak and let out an incredibly loud squawk that rang out over the entire town. The children raised their voices to answer in a unanimous scream. The Bird flapped its immense wings once and the children scream in response. With great, wind filled sweeps of its wings, the beast took to the sky, followed by an army of children screaming all together. They ran off into the surrounding woods until their cries faded into the distance as they followed

their new god. A murmur of unease rose in the town. Parents began crying out for their children who'd already fled into the fast arriving night. No answer. The fear mounted in each town's person, and they began to gather in the town square about the broken old clock. The crowd was filled with bubbling and potent unease as they feared for their kids.

The buzzing adults stayed vigil all night, calling names every now and then. As the pink edge of the sun peaked it's one bright eye over the lip of the mountains, the first child traipsed their way back to town. Their family cried in happiness and swept them into their arms.

Then they noticed the blood covering their child's hands. The mother let out a scream and the father grabbed his kid's wrists, yelling questions about whose blood and if they were hurt. The kid simply pointed to the clock before asking to be put to bed. This continued for hours as the children began to trickle back into town slowly. Each was run ragged and tired, some collapsing to the ground in exhaustion. Each with blood covered hands.

They all had the same answer for where it had come from.

A point to the clock tower.

All the children made it home safe and uninjured. None of them spoke of what had happened and wouldn't answer any of the prying questions the adults would ask about that day. A few weeks later the body of the beast was discovered half buried in a hole in the woods. It was violently maimed and torn almost to bits. The town was shocked and many parents looked at their little ones with side long glances for months after. Even so the reason for any of it was never revealed and presently it was almost entirely forgotten. Since the children wouldn't share details, the story lost traction and died from peoples' lips. Angusville went back to its mundane ways and it was soon only remembered as an eerie fever dream. ■



“

This program is amazing! The professors are all so kind and encouraging. You get experience in all different styles and forms of literature. However, I think the best part of the program is the students. Everyone wants to be here, they really try their best, and give each class their all.

It's a very supportive environment, the type of place where you get the opportunity to share in a community of writers.

The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute is truly a one-of-a-kind experience.

—Katherine Marriott

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LIMBS

By Sadie Radka

limbs don't regrow,
but i cut them off for you.
i don't expect you to know.

there were other things you wanted me to throw
away, but that was okay, i knew.

limbs don't regrow.

do you see the stitches i've had to sew,
something i never deserved to do?

i don't expect you to know.

you never understood when i said no.
god, the pain you've put me through.

limbs don't regrow.

too many times i begged you to let me go,
til it turned my body blue.

i don't expect you to know.

your venom was methodical and slow,
and stupid me, i stayed true.

limbs don't regrow.

i don't expect you to know.



PERFECTLY INFERIOR

By Emma Saarnio

“

My time at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute has not only taught me how to further enhance my skills as a writer, but it has also taught me how to give and to receive feedback. I have learned from many other young writers in this program, and my writing has improved over the past two weeks by listening to other writers' work and by experimenting with many different forms of writing. My time here has been transformative, and the skills I have learned are ones I am going to keep with me forever.

— Julian Iwasko

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TALIA: Hey, welcome to—oh, sit down, please. I'll be with you in a second. Mom, I got it, I can get that chair down for you, yes, yes, yes, I know, it's my shop, I'll get it. One moment, I'll be with you guys in one moment.

Ok, Dad, do you want anything? Do you still like the fruit tea with a little bit of honey? Here, I'll grab it for you. I know this is silly that you guys are seeing it for the first time, but part of me wanted for you guys to see it when it was finished. I guess it'll never be finished, but it's at a pretty good place right now, so I'm proud for you to come see my little coffee shop.

You know, when we were first setting up the place, I was so certain that it would fail. Me, with a bigger rent bill than my plans for the place, and the three high college students that had agreed to work for me, probably out of pity or something. But it survived, so much longer than I thought it ever would, and I was actually making some money. I know you guys don't probably care, but this place makes me so happy. It's weird to think that people are actually interested in the quote unquote innovative drinks that we serve, and that I've helped real people find real jobs, even if it isn't much over minimum wage. But I guess we all do what we can to get by.

I'm doing fine, Mom. On that note, I... I didn't invite you over to see the place. I should have done that a while ago. Yes, I know, you've told me, hindsight, it's great to look back, but now, I have something that I need to ask of you. I invited you so I could ask, to ask if I could borrow some money. I know,

I know, it's not some small favor that I can pull out my back pocket when things are going slightly haywire. But me, the staff, and this place that I've built needs it. I wouldn't be asking this, truly, if I really didn't need it.

You'll have to think about it?

That's fine, Dad. I understand. Everyone is always pressed for money, as you always said. For some bizarre reason, I thought that you would have the slightest bit of pride in what I've done. I am doing something of my own, owning this tiny corner of the world and running it on my own. Without either of you holding my hand, running my own finances and making my own decisions. All by myself.

Don't you say that all of this place is about Alice. It was never about Alice. It's never been about Alice, with her perfect degree, perfect boyfriend, perfect job at her absolutely perfect startup, actually doing what she loves, and not a hobby of a job... I bet if it were Alice, you would help her out. But no, it's me who's actually going to go into debt, just because I wasn't the best, most perfect angel that you truly wanted.

But my sister has nothing to do with what I've created. You don't need to bring her up so that you can make one of your infamous exits again, with the only person who gets hurt at the end of is me. Maybe your precious, favorite older daughter needs some more attention right now. The one you actually care about, yeah.

Stop. Stop. You know what? I don't need your money. Please leave. Leave. ■



GREEN HAVEN

By Olivia Salvage

“

My first week at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute was, to put it bluntly, rough. I hadn't made many friends and I felt like my writing was terrible compared to my peers. But with time, I made a small group of friends and slowly began to feel more confident in my writing abilities. We explored new genres that I had never written in and I discovered that I really like playwriting. I'm glad I was a part of the NYSSYWI and I hope I can keep the connections I made while I was here.

— Josephine Lauricella

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I stepped off the train station steps and into the concrete streets and sidewalks. Greasy fast food smells whirled through my nose as I walked down Nereid Ave, eyes down and earbuds in. My black shorts, still soaked from the splashes of sea water that snuck into the boat at crew practice, clung to my thighs. My eyes stayed glued to Google Maps.

In the early days, this was my daily routine. Walk fast, look down, get there quickly. Scramble for the keys, push them into the purple lock first, then the black, and then shut the metal door behind. Once I was inside the green haven, the coast was clear. The tidy rows of tomatoes and collard greens greeted me as I picked up the cold hose and began sprinkling the flowers. The sound of the bees buzzing around my ears accompanied the whoosh of the 1 train platform just 10 feet above the rows of vegetables in front of me. I just had to remember to heed to my boss Stephen Ritz's advice: Ignore the strangers if they try to ask too much, give me anything, or come in. Be respectful, but remember that you don't have to answer to anyone. And if they say they work there, remember it's not true.

Though Stephen's words were meant to serve as reassuring advice, when I heard this on the first day working at the Food for Others garden, I felt my stomach drop. Less than a week before my first day on the job, there had been a shooting right by the school where I would be working at, and when my parents and I drove by the neighborhood to take a look, we immediately noticed bodega and shop windows boarded up at every corner. Between my commute to and from the garden at Nereid Ave and the school building at St. Paul's Place, I was navigating these unfamiliar Bronx

neighborhoods alone everyday, and although my parents were just a phone call away, I was on my own. When my ponytail swung as I walked down the sidewalk I felt eyes watching me, a constant reminder that I was the only white person on the street. Teenage boys stared at me as they smoked from nearby rocks at a dead-end street. Sometimes they went up to the garden gate and asked me why I was there. I told them I was a volunteer, feeling like an annoying do-gooder as they raised their eyebrows and walked away. Even the older man working at a nearby lot seemed resentful of me, turning his back as I walked by. I couldn't help feeling like an outsider, and questioning if this was right for me. In this Food for Others garden, I began to wonder who the "other" really was.

Although my initial week was bumpy, I decided to brush off my wary thoughts and keep going back. When I saw the excited faces of the elementary school kids as they learned how to make their own strawberry-banana smoothies with berries from the garden and how grateful organizers at the local homeless shelter were when we dropped off bags of kale and lettuce, I was reminded of why I chose to do this. When I opened the metal door everyday, I felt determined to get the job done as efficiently as possible. I began opening the locks more quickly, and figured out how to turn the hose on properly without spraying myself in the face. I listened to music as I lifted the almost-ripe tomatoes up against the stake with the palm of my hand, making sure they didn't droop. I remembered to cover every inch of my body in mosquito spray and I learned that if I timed it right, I could take the express train and get home within 40 minutes instead of the usual 55.

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(continued from page 33)

I didn't choose to spend my days in this garden to fulfill any green thumb quest. In fact, I never even tried gardening before finding my internship with Green Bronx Machine. I decided to try this because I wanted to know more about the community where I was going to school and rowing every single day. Although I loved my high school, I felt a disconnect from my

surroundings ever since the first week of freshman year. The second the last class of our school day ended, my classmates and I would leave our beautiful campus, hop on the school buses and zoom right back to Manhattan on the West Side Highway, our minds set on finishing up our essays and studying for tests. If I had crew practice at City Island, I'd be completely soaked from rowing, and my teammates and I would run to the nearby Dunkin Donuts, grab a hot chocolate and call an uber home. Even though I was spending so much time in these neighborhoods, I felt like every day I was in and out, focused on other things. I never stopped to notice where I was spending most of my time.

By the end of my internship I had fallen into a rhythm and knew what to do. My actions became automatic, and I was satisfied with getting my work done in solitude. As I walked up to the garden gate after practice on one of my last mornings, taking my earbuds out, I saw my boss Stephen waiting by the door.

"Hey," he said. "Let's take a walk. I have someone I forgot to introduce you to."

I followed him and we walked a few yards up the woodchip filled path.

When I saw the face of the older man who had been working at the nearby lot, my steps began to slow. I had

worked next to this man for several weeks now, and based on his glares and back that was always turned, it seemed clear that he wasn't interested in any interactions with me at all.

"This is Chuck," Stephen said. "He's going to give us a tour of what he's got."

Chuck's serious expression was shifted as he gave a small smile, and I followed him, slightly confused as to where we were headed. When he twisted the silver knob on the door and opened the gate to the lot, my eyes quickly widened. It was as if the Food for Others garden had found its long lost cousin. A rainbow of strawberries, tomatoes, collard greens and kale awaited us as we walked in, closing the door behind us. Patches of flowers were scattered about the rows of parsley and oregano. The strong sweet smell of mint stained my fingers as we bent down and pinched the dark green leaves. The rays of sun beat down on our heads as we heard the familiar whoosh of the 1 train platform again.

As I listened to Chuck introduce us to the different plots of vegetables with a bounce in his step, explaining how often he had to water the flowers, how long it took for him to harvest the radishes, and his special tips for fighting off the pests, I was stunned. What I had assumed was just an empty lot a few feet away, was a world of its own that I didn't even know existed. As he explained that his work lasted for hours during the day, and that he was so invested he barely noticed when others walked by, I laughed at myself for thinking his body language had anything to do with me. We stood there chatting for an hour on that hot city day, and I realized that in these concrete neighborhoods, the gardens really were green havens. ■

“

This program has been such a blast from the very beginning! From reading at Cafe Lena to coming up with 14 (!!!) new pieces to dorking around in the dorms at 2 A.M. with all my friends, it was such a great time. The group became very close very quickly, and the two weeks zipped by so fast. Thank you to all the amazing teachers – Bill, Bob, Elaine, Kathy and Richard – and of course the RAs – Samara, Nick, and Camila.

— London Anderson

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COLLOSSIANS 3:18

By Aja Samuel

DAD: Now your mother and I have decided that this college you want...?

(Searches his brain and then looks to his wife)

MOM: St. Rose, honey.

DAD: Yes, St. Rose, we have decided that, that college is no good for you. We have both thought about it, and we have decided to send you to the Bible-approved college that Mr. Allerton has created.

(CAROL is shocked for a moment.)

CAROL: But that's ridiculous, the most that college can get me is a husband and a couple more verses.

DAD: I don't understand what more you need. The only things important in life is loving others and loving the Lord.

CAROL: Dad, we talked about this, I was going to be a nurse and I was going to bring in money for the family while I waited for my husband, this was our plan, how could you do this?

DAD: Carol, I do not want to talk about this anymore, this is my family I make the rules and the last thing I need is my family questioning my authority.

CAROL: Authority, huh? That's what this all comes down to, isn't it? Just authority. You want to let me and everybody else in this family know that you're the boss, you're in charge and we can't do anything about it. You know, Dad, when you guys decided to join this "church," five years ago, I was skeptical. I was skeptical about all of it. I was skeptical about your intentions, the intentions of the church, the teachings, and if it was right for my life. For years, I tried to convince myself that living this way was good. Was right. When I was 16-months-old, and you guys would blanket-train me, putting me on a blanket then luring me off with toys and spanking me when I would inevitably wander, I thought, *Wow, they must love me so much they don't want me to fall into the trap of the outside world.* Of

stepping outside of the safe "blanket" that was created for me.

Later, when I would laugh too loudly in church, you would beat me with a rod until I passed out, and I thought to myself, *This hurts, but at least they are protecting me from further making a fool of myself in church*, because that's what you said to me, right Dad? When you pulled me out of school, away from all my friends, to follow the church-approved curriculum, I thought, *The outside world must be really dangerous because, no matter what, my parents' main goal is to keep me out of harm's way.*

Year by year, I grew up and somehow was still tricked into thinking that hell, the hell you both have created, was normal. And to be honest, you guys had me. I was right where you wanted me to be. But you want to know what changed it? You want to know what really broke my will, more than any of your stupid spankings or punishments? When I was at a Bible study, alone with Reverend Tom. It was a Thursday afternoon and you both were having small group discussions. I don't know how it ended up just the two of us. Actually, wait a minute. I think... wasn't it you, Mom? Didn't you schedule some one-on-one time because you didn't like the stories I wrote in my journal? My dreams of being a world-renowned doctor? Because I know it just broke your heart to imagine that your daughter would not be getting married at the ripe age of 18 to a controlling Christian man who would control all aspects of my life like you two have done for as long as I can remember.

Anyways, I was with Reverend Tom and everything was great. We were opening up scripture and he was explaining to me the roles of men and women, and how I was created to be his help-meet and so on. Somehow... somehow, the conversation shifted to how I was supposed to please my husband in every

possible way. I got a little uncomfortable but I knew and trusted we would get back on topic. But we never did. He put down the Bible, grabbed my head and moved it south. I froze, I did not do anything. I just prayed over and over again to a God, who for those ten minutes just did not seem to listen. I came home broken and in shambles and I ran to both of you for comfort, only to hear that there was a *purpose* to this event, a mistake I made to garner this behavior.

(Carol starts crying)

One of my sinful behaviors must have provoked the Reverend to stumble. You left me behind. My whole life, you guys have been trying to break my will, break my spark, and it never worked. But that day, I knew I was never going to be the same girl again. The girl who changed diapers when you were too lazy to, the girl who stayed up all night memorizing verse after verse as her eyes turned bloodshot, the girl who listened and obeyed authority no matter how devastated it made her. I'm not going to let you two walk all over me. I have people in my corner, friends in my corner, a boyfriend! Yes, I said boyfriend in my corner, ready to catch me when I fall. But most importantly, I have the law in my corner, and last time I checked sexual assault is a federal crime and all it takes is a couple of phone calls and this entire establishment, the one you've spent years so carefully following, will be ruined. So this is what we're going to do. You are going to call the fake college you just enrolled me in and tell them a family problem came up and I will not be attending in the fall. I will be going to go to St. Rose. And you can tell St. Rose there has been a misunderstanding and that I am perfectly ready to attend in the fall. Then you two are going to take a trip down to the bank, take out some cash, and put a down payment on my enrollment. Any questions? ■



SILENCE

By Sage Sanderspree

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I was unsure of how much people would like or appreciate my writing before coming here. When I write, I am very vulnerable, and I often feel the need to compare my pieces and my writing style with others. However, since being part of the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, I have learned to push myself to share my writing even when I don't want to. Every time I read, I was nervous because I felt like everyone else's pieces were much better than mine, but people were always extremely supportive and gave me helpful feedback on my work. When I first arrived here, I wasn't sure how well I would fit into this group of people but now I realize that I've found some really great friends and writers in everyone. I'm going to miss the creative and vibrant energy in this place, and I know everyone will do great things.

— Emma Saarnio

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YOUNG GIRL: Listen, I-I don't know what happened, okay? I came in and she was just dead. I didn't know what to do, I'm a sixteen-year-old girl! You expect me to call the cops? It just happened, and then I went into my room a-and I washed off and it was fine. I didn't do anything wrong. I've been in this room for four hours and I want to go home. I don't know what you want from me. I am not a murderer. You hear me? I am not a murderer. Please, just let me go home.

(A pause. Tears run down her cheeks as she stares down at the desk.)

I don't know how it happened. I came home and she was there and then she was bleeding and there was so much screaming, I don't know where it was coming from but it wouldn't stop, just screaming and crying and I just wanted it to stop... I don't even know what she said. She was just there and it was so loud, so so loud. I hate the noise. I hate it so much. I just want everything to be quiet, you know? Just for once, no noise, no screaming, just nothing. She knows I hate it, but she just gets louder every time. And I try to cover my ears but she won't let me. She wanted me to hear it, every word she said. And I did listen, the first and the second and the third, but it never changed. It was always just the same loudness. I didn't hear it when I came home - I just heard noise. I just wanted the noise to stop. I don't hear it anymore.

(She puts her head in her hands, fingers pressing against her ears. A long pause goes by, and she speaks with a soft voice.)

It was over pretty quickly. It was there, and then it wasn't. I don't know what I did. I closed my eyes and I screamed and then it stopped. Silence. It felt so good. That's all I've ever wanted. I opened my eyes and she wasn't yelling at me anymore, just lying there. I had never been able to look down on her like that before - I still hadn't reached her height. But I was taller than her, and I was louder than her, and I was alive and she wasn't, and it was the first time I had breathed in my life. Do you know what it's like, to breathe for the first time? I do. I feel it every moment of every day, and it's the best feeling in the world. I couldn't breathe before, with her around. It would make her mad. But now I can do that. And anything else I want to do. ■



AN UNKNOWN ACQUISITION

By Odin Scorzelli

It was midnight, well almost midnight anyway, whatever the time was or was not only one thing mattered to Ruse at the moment... it was dark. She crept through the forest leaving nothing behind, no footprint nor broken branch stood in her silent wake. It was around five minutes before she saw it, closer than she expected. A small light in the distance, a campfire. She approached slowly. That was it, the wagon she and her friends had seen earlier. When they passed they had no time to ask any questions or see if they could buy any supplies. That's when she got the sense something was off. Luckily for her it had rained a day earlier and the roads were washed out for both her group and the carriage. It was her of course who had suggested they try to set up camp and look for another way to Alderswing in the morning. It was five hours later and all her friends were asleep because it was her guard shift. She knew they'd be alright.

"If anything attacked them they could handle themselves. Besides, Saarthal would kill me if she found out I left." she thought to herself while looking around, scouting the campsite before her.

The cart had plenty of supplies that were unpacked and lay strewn about, more than she had seen when they passed it on the road. Silently, she crept forward, being careful not to let the dancing fire give away her position. In front of her she saw a large bald, bearded man with leather armor and iron gauntlets and helmet at his side, not as big as Scale but nonetheless a person she would want to avoid provoking. At his side he held a mighty glaive, on the other side was a dog, a Mastiff, like the guards back in the cities. It was sleeping so hopefully she could go around the man and get into the carriage.

Slowly she ducked from tree to tree using the shadows to her advantage like

she had been taught, and in a minute, Ruse was able to reach the wagon undetected. Upon stepping up into the cart she was able to see more clearly. Clearly the large man outside was a hunter of sorts, each of the walls had the heads of animals hung on them. Some of the trophies she did recognize, a bear, a wolf, a deer.

But there were some she hadn't seen before such as a bird like animal with fang-like growths and a short but thick beak. Another looked like some kind of a stuffed aquatic creature, long humanoid arms and a round green scaly face with thin and long needle teeth protruding from the lower jaw. But Ruse did not care for the abomination, she only cared about one thing, the sense she felt when the carriage had passed her by. She stood up, knowing full well the thick green tarp covering the back of the cart will hide her from the sight of the man outside. She took another look around.

"Always look twice, never distract yourself from the relics."

The line repeated itself in her head, it had burned itself from memory into habit. It repeated itself over and over until... there it was, she had found what she was looking for. She reached out for the device, the cold metallic surface and ornate design was immediately recognizable. Ruse took the device and pocketed it. As she turned around to leave she felt a large hand clasp around her shoulder.

"What're you doing in my carriage thief?" a gravelly voice whispered from behind her.

Ruse knew it was the man from outside. She had a plan, she'd been in plenty of similar situations before, after all, no thief is perfect. Without hesitation she lifted her legs up and using the nearby desk as leverage she pushed backwards

into the man behind her. Both of them went tumbling down out the back of the carriage. Ruse reached for her dagger at the same time the man reached for his sword as his glaive was still by the fire.

As they got up off the ground Ruse could feel something sharp pierce the back of her leg, the dog, holding her in place. As the man swung down at Ruse, she managed to dodge out of the way, but just barely as she turned around and kicked the dog biting her other leg. Then spun around and using her momentum to run the dagger across the man's arm as he let out a cry of pain.

Trying to ignore the wound he tried to swing at her again. Ruse was ready now and with the man's arm injured his movements were rigid and sluggish. She took the opportunity and seized it, plunging the dagger deep into the man's leg as he swung with his sword, cutting into her shoulder.

Noting that he was aiming for her head, she lunged at him again, and as the man swung once more at her head, predictably, she fell to the ground, picking up some dirt and throwing it forward into his eyes, blinding him.

As he stepped back he started rubbing his eyes. She pondered her next move as the dog moved between her and the man. It didn't attack, it just stood there growling and baring its teeth at her, it was protecting him. She wouldn't kill him, but she didn't need to, she didn't want to.

She took off running while he couldn't react, and after the first five minutes at full sprint, but eventually she found herself on the right path back to camp. As her vision focused once again, she noted the success of this night, she looked at the device one more time as the as it disappeared into the depths of her burlap bag. ■



HERE LIES

By Marlee Seifer

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I've had an amazing last two weeks at the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute. I made some very close friends despite the short time we spent together, and I got to spend each day doing the thing I love the most – writing. And I learned new styles of writing, like screenwriting and villanelles, and I made new pieces in the process. I've emerged as both a better person, thanks to my friends, and a better writer, thanks to this program.

— Maeve Brennan

”

CHARACTERS:

Bennett Hartford, 23

Fanny Hakes, deceased

TIME:

Modern day, a Monday evening.

PLACE:

A cemetery in New York, centered on a specific grave of one Fanny Hakes. There are fresh flowers at the dirt by the stone, and rocks littering the top of the stone.

(BENNETT enters scene, holding a bouquet of flowers in his fist. He walks slowly over to Fanny's grave, and kneels in the dirt, placing his bouquet by the other one at the foot of the stone.)

BENNETT: Hey... hey, Fanny... It's me, Bennett, your boyfriend. I see your parents came by? That's... that's good. I know you guys had your issues, but... it's really good that they came. You're their daughter... no matter what happened, no matter what you or I thought, or what they thought... well, it doesn't really matter anymore, does it?

(BENNETT reaches out to touch Fanny's name on the stone gently before pulling his hand back.)

BENNETT: I'm in law school, now... like you always wanted. I wish you were here, to see me. I wish you were here, period.

(Choked up, BENNETT mutters to himself.)

BENNETT: This is... harder than I thought.

(Steeling himself, Bennett addresses the stone once again.)

BENNETT: I'm really mad at you, you know? I'm mad at you for making me love you so much... for leaving me... I didn't even get to say goodbye... I never wanted to say goodbye... and now I have to, and it is just... it is just really hard.

(BENNETT runs his hand through his hair, before holding his palm to his forehead.)

BENNETT: Do you remember when we met? It was in that criminology course, remember? We took it together sophomore year. I was a

punk twenty-year old, and you were out of my league... but we just started talking, you know? And we never really stopped. I always told you how I loved the aspect of criminal law where the families of the victims could get closure... could get justice. There is no justice here, though. There is no one to blame; it was an accident. And that fact almost kills me. Because I want someone to blame. I want to be angry with someone else, anyone else, but you. But it's you I'm mad at, because there is no one to blame, and it is you I love, and it is you that I... because now I am going to have to live my life without you in it. And, I just... I don't know how to do that. I don't want to. I really, really don't. I just... I don't know what to do. I don't know how to... to do whatever it is I need to do... and I don't know how to let you go. Just... tell me what to do. Please, just... tell me what to do.

(BENNETT starts to sob silently, tears streaking down his face. He makes no move to wipe them away; he just stares at the grave as if Fanny's voice will come through and answer him.)

BENNETT: I want... I want to ask you to come back to me... but I know that's not fair... I know... I know that you can't. Doesn't stop me from wishing. From hoping. Every day I just... I wake up, and I reach over, and you aren't there. I wake up, and I think that this was all just a bad dream... but then I remember. I really fucking hate it when I remember.

(BENNETT laughs bitterly to himself, tears running past his lips.)

BENNETT: I was never really... religious. You know that. You weren't, either. God, it kills me to think about you, to talk about you like this. I hate saying you 'were', I hate saying 'Fanny was'... I hate it so fucking much. It makes it real; you know? Anyway, I... I was never religious, and I never really believed in Heaven or Hell... or even God... but, I hope you're in Heaven. I hope you are there, and you're okay, and you're happy. I like to think that you're watching over me... the thought that you want me to be happy is the only

(continued on page 39)

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“

At the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute, I finally met my people: creative-minded, kind, funny, and interesting kids who I could spend all my time with. From sharing our pieces out loud to playing games after dinner, I loved hanging out with the other writers. I created some lifelong friendships. I don't think I've ever laughed harder in my life.

— Seviya Mast

”

way I can get through this. It is the only reason I get out of bed in the morning, knowing that's what you would want.

(BENNETT stops for a moment, just staring at the grave. He doesn't speak for that moment, breathing heavily, chest heaving with emotional exertion.)

BENNETT: You know, that day at the hospital... I thought it was just some sick joke. I thought... I don't know what I thought. But never in my wildest nightmares did I think this. It never even crossed my mind. My mom got the call from the doctor... and when she told me, I... man, I was just in shock. I mean, Thanksgiving dinner there on the table, my mom and I were waiting for you to get back from your shift so we could eat... and we got that call instead. You haven't seen your parents in years, after that fight... and you made Mom your emergency contact. You didn't even tell me that. I found out when the doctor told us. And, we had to call your parents. They didn't want to talk to me... not at first... but when I told them... when I told them that you were in a car accident, and it was bad... man, they just... they were really quiet. They didn't say anything. Then, your dad asked what hospital you were at. I told him, and he hung up. Next thing I know, they were there, in the waiting room. Their eyes are puffy, and they looked as shocked as I felt. I know you guys had your differences, but, uh... they really loved you. And I know you regretted not fixing things with them... but, I want you to know, because you deserve to know that. I wish I could have told you before. I wish they could have told you themselves.

(BENNETT wipes his eyes with the corner of his shirt sleeve. The tear tracks remain.)

BENNETT: We waited in the hospital room for a really long time. For, well, it seemed like an eternity. But then that doctor... Dr. Thweller, he came out, and there was this look on his face and I... I just knew. But, when he told us, when he said that he didn't save you, that he

couldn't... I was so angry. I was so, so angry. I just screamed at him, right there in that goddamn waiting room, in front of everyone. I demanded that he fix you, that he make you better. I told him he was a liar, that you weren't gone... that you couldn't be... It took a while to sink in. It took a while to even say your name. It was unbearable. It is still really painful, and I don't know when that will fade, if it ever does... but... look, I don't really know why I'm here. For closure, or some shit like that, I guess. But I just wanted to come... I want to pretend you can hear me, and I want to tell you that you were loved. That there are people who will carry you in our hearts forever. That we'll... the people who love you... we'll remember.

(BENNETT gets up from the ground. He gives the stone one last mournful look.)

BENNETT: Why am I even here? Dammit. I didn't plan to come here, you know? I was just... it's been almost a year. I haven't seen you since... since... look, Fanny... the truth is... I met someone. She, uh, she's a law student, like me. She's really, uh... she's made her feelings pretty clear. But I don't know if I can give her my heart. Not when half of it is in the ground with you. I keep trying not to compare you guys... because that isn't fair to her. It isn't fair to you. But, I do feel something. I could love her. I know that I could. But, I... you're here. I just need... clarity, I guess. And I don't know any other way to get it. There are places I can't go anymore, because your memory is too strong. But I've been walking around with half of my heart for so long... I'm alive. Part of me hates it, but I am. I have to live. And she... she's making me feel alive again. I won't forget you. I never could. But, I... I have to let you go. This is... this is goodbye.

(BENNETT turns away and walks passed the graves and out of the cemetery, gets into his car, and drives away.)

BLACKOUT



BILLY BONES

By Nick Sepci

A wise man once said “Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” Of course, by the time this book takes place he’s been quite dead for a while so there’s something to be said about that.

Billy stared into the flames, long and hard, of the dying past. He was told it was better this way, just like he was told it was better the way his pet newt had been punted like a football. It wasn’t.

There was an enormous fire, where books burned. The evil of the Old World, sinister tomes like, “The Little Train that Could” and “the Fart Dictionary.” Yes, the last one’s a real thing.

Atop a large pedestal, overlooking the flames, were four men. One was dressed in the robes of a pious priest. Not only were the robes heavy, but they could also overheat you and they weren’t too resistant to bullets last time I checked, thus making them pretty unwise to wear these days.

The other two men weren’t important. At least, they probably wouldn’t have been. Carlos and Jimmy. They have the typical role of being the mook: run into a fray against the hero and get absolutely murdered.

While I could go on and on and explain that these guys are humans, there’s also the fact that they’re screwed up in the head enough to go along with all of this, so maybe a swift death is their best hope.

The last guy was one of the Precursors. He wasn’t exactly wrinkly and white-haired like the rest of them, the database still revealed he was one of them. He was being held down by Carlos and Jimmy as the Priest listed off his crimes.

“Failure to answer the Call! Creating the world we live in now!” The priest bellowed. He was holding one of those

little whips, the ones you use to beat someone without killing them. The only thing the Precursor could do was look down in shame and take his beating.

Billy looked around. Surrounding him were dozens of people just like him. Hungry. Befracked, which is defined as someone being frackled. But still, he was different. A brick painted gray amongst concrete blocks. So close, yet so far away, wasn’t he?

“What is your defense to these crimes!?” The priest bellowed.

The man didn’t respond, to which he got a blow from the stick.

“Ignoring a Priest! That would be one month in the dungeon had you not been a Precursor scum!” the priest yelled. “But nay, you shalt be cast into the fires of your people’s arrogance! People, do you scream for blood!?”

They screamed for stuff, actually. Mostly milk, water, food, clothes. You know, things you might need to live. You can walk through the ancient cities of the Precursors, monuments to their power and wealth, and yet odds are you won’t find a pair of shoes that your feet can fit in well.

Before Billy could say anything, the Precursor was cast into the pit of fire. Burning and yelling, the priests said it would have been just like that one scene from *The Wizard of Oz*, but it wasn’t quite. The man didn’t shriek about what a world this was while turning into a puddle. Instead, he just cried out as the flames rent his skin.

Everyone watched on. This had happened so many times that by now they were completely numb to it, like when you’ve attached twenty hairbands to your finger and it becomes a whole new color.

Only me? Hm...alright.

Billy looked down, pulling his cloak of privilege down closer over his face. It’s not like people were new to sentient skeletons. No skin. Just bones, kept alive and kept with magic from the past even Precursors don’t understand. But as I said, he was literally wearing a cloak of privilege. He pulled it closer over his head, disappointed at what he’d become.

You could say he had gone commercial, except by commercial we mean he agreed to act as a walking argument on why the Old World should die. His only job was to stand around, listen to some religious guy yell his vocal cords to kingdom come before throwing some old woman or man into a flaming pit, fueled by trinkets from the older ages.

Now the first couple of times, Billy was able to get through it. Hell, he’d even been willing to look one of them in the eyes once. But it was when that same person looked back at him, with their aged and sad cataract eyes, that Billy had to rethink some things.

With every passing month, the executions became harder. Listening to the occasional grunt of pain or demand to try to get the high score on Donkey Kong one last time became harder to hear. It came to the point where he would lie awake at night, replaying everything he heard.

And he had finally decided what had to be done. Billy met friends. Lots of friends that agreed throwing the elderly into a makeshift hell was a big no-no. His friends had given him instructions, and even if things went rough there was still a good chance he’d make it out alive.

Billy felt the gun in his pocket. One of the Old World’s guns, actually. A small weapon forged by a man named “Kimber”. Fully loaded. As soon as the priest began making his way down that staircase, something bigger than him or my ego would begin... ■



FORGET ME NOT

By Eva Sturm

“

The New York State Summer Young Writers Institute was quite possibly two of the best weeks of my life. I learned so much from the professors, and discovered a love of poetry I didn't know I had. I was able to write and to engage in my work in a way that I could never do in school. But most importantly, this Institute gave me a family. We all came from different backgrounds, with different talents, but were able to come together through our love for writing. From game nights in the basement to running in the rain to the dorms, I've made memories here that I will never forget. I love the campus, the staff, and the people who made every day an adventure. Thank you.

— Sage Sanderspree

”

Dead fish in a too small tank,
neon pebbles in a too big lake,
Blue Forget me nots already in bloom,
Hoping, Praying, that your words are proof,
That you will forget me forget me forget me not,
Ants crawling over my feet in search of food,
Fireflies a fluttering in the gloom,
knowing that you'll forget me forget me forget me soon.



TITAN

By Britney Trachtenberg

“

These two weeks have been a lot of fun. It was awesome getting to know new people who I wouldn't have known otherwise. It was an amazing experience to learn from all the teachers here, and the classes were so interesting. I worked a lot on my writing, and I am so glad I had this opportunity. It's been so much fun.

— Eva Sturm

”

The sky is swirling with smokey blues and greys above me. I'm lying on my back, tail squished against the beige, rough ground, just staring up into what could easily be a whirlpool in the sky. This turns into a lazy gaze, my head lolling, my fur brushing up against the ground in a sort of weird massage. A distant part of me still notices that my tail is in agony being stabbed against the ground, but in this moment, I don't care. In my daze, I ask Luke in a series of *bow-wows* and *ruff-ruffs* if this is his idea of a perfect evening. No response.

“Luke?” I ask, turning this way and that. I roll back onto all fours and start roaming. I start *looking* for him, this damn old poodle.

“I *know* that these last few days I didn't give two shits about getting off this planet but now I do,” I say, looking behind craters and crawling inside inactive geysers. I can't find him. “You think I like bathing in pools of methane?”

“No,” he says, sighing. He climbs out from a rock, searching desperately for balance on his two legs, dragging his tail and waist behind him. I stare at this physical deformity absent-mindedly.

“It bugs me how you don't care, Crash,” Luke says.

“I *care*,” I say.

“Then you would bring me home. For treatment's sake,” Luke says.

I ignore this and instead start the walk to the broken spacecraft, which is still buzzing just as it did when we arrived four days ago. I hear Luke's dragging behind me, nearly panting from that. I let out a joyous bark, a laugh even, then I break into a run, something he can't do.

“You hector!” Luke screams, piercing the air.

I start to sprint, a speed my solo lung and I can't handle. A cramp is building in my ribs, but I don't stop. My lung lets me know that there's a hole slowly puncturing it. But I keep going. The spacecraft seems to get farther away, while Luke screams out words I've never heard before- bully, menace, cow. I want to tell him I'm no cow. I'm *the* dalmation, he's a disabled poodle, and neither of us go moo. I want to tell him he's not that disabled either; dragging is a form of transportation. I want to say that there's so many other, not special, unspectacular poodles who need treatment too. But my lung doesn't have the air, my brain can't make many words.

“You coward! Respond, already!” Luke barks hoarsely.

The hole is gaping wide in my lung now. I will lose air quickly if I don't stop now. I will shatter on the rough ground. Luke would then pass me, dragging his ass all the way to the space craft. And so I stop, sitting down slowly.

“Why'd you stop?” Luke calls out.

“Because if I don't, you'd make it there before me,” I said. ■



MISSING YOU

By Emma Weitzman

“

The energy in the New York State Summer Young Writers Institute classes was an experience like no other. I've learned to feel my emotions and experience words more deeply here. This is a nurturing environment where there is no competition – only support from your peers and the teachers. We are viewed more as young colleagues than as students by the teachers, and that gives us the freedom to think and write freely. Not to mention that it also makes you feel respected and important. The lifelong friends I've made, and the unforgettable advice I've received, have made this place more than worthwhile.

— Lara Yildirmaz

”

I lost my arm. I lost my left arm. I liked that arm. It was good for aiming, or rather, was useful for steadying my gun. I liked how I could add to it over the years; a chip here, an extra wire here. I thought it looked bad-ass. Getting captured and tortured by an enemy platoon was what made me lose my arm. They ripped it off and studied it, I guess to see how a piece of machinery could make one human so deadly. Not that I don't like my mechanical leg, or the machine that keeps my heart going, but I couldn't help but get offended when they thought that my arm was what made me so good at my job. At that point there was only one thing I could do; activate the self-destruct mechanism and see their plan, quite literally, blow up in their faces. Finally, after two days of sitting bound in a chair with charred corpses around me, a rescue squad eventually found me. That was exactly three hours, fourteen minutes, and forty-six seconds ago.

“You would think after I didn't reach my extraction point on time, you asshats would have at least started to think something was wrong.” I spit out to Dr. Phelt.

“I know you're frustrated right now but you need to stay calm.” She looks up from the mechanical arm she is tinkering with.

“How about you take your advice and shove it up your-”

“Shut up, Adrian!” she yells at me.

She is the only person I know that has the balls to speak to me like that.

“Do you want a new arm or not!” she slams a screwdriver down on the table.

“...yes.” I mumble.

I stare back at the ceiling of the operating table.

“Not such a mean assassin now, are you?” she taunts.

I just let out a sigh and close my eyes.

“I was worried,” she starts, “when you didn't show up. I suspected something but no one would listen.”

“Thanks.”

“Don't be sarcastic. That is the last thing I need from you right now.”

“No, really, thank you. For trying. Means a lot.” I open my eyes again, and squeeze her arm with my one good hand.

“Did something happen to you while you were captured? Adrian, the world's biggest asshole, is suddenly a nice guy?” she laughs.

“I can guarantee you, nothing has changed. Nothing.” I smile.

Dr. Phelt picks up the arm and moves to place it into my shoulder.

“Ready?” she asks.

“No.”

I feel a tingling sensation where my arm used to be, and then a short wave of pain.

“Can you try and flex your hand for me?” she pushes her glasses back up on her face.

I sit up and stare at the new arm. It is shinier, and definitely feels lighter than the last one. Dr. Phelt leads me through various exercises to get adjusted to the new machinery.

“Do you like it?”

I shrug and hop off the table.

“Liked the old one.” ■



SKIN

By Lara Yildirmaz

“

I came into this bitter, as per usual. I was homesick the moment my dad left me alone in the dorm and apprehensive about making friends who I figured would all be the same. I was defensive. Reserved. Over time, though, I realized I had so much in common with these kids. There was something so indescribably wonderful about meeting kids from all over the country who came here because they like to write. Such an intimate setting made for fast bonding. I have grown closer to people from Philly, from New Jersey, and from New York City in two weeks than I have where I live in Rhode Island. I have developed such a loving and accepting group of friends here that I look forward to spending time with every morning. I never had close friends like this at home, and it's a wonderful feeling that everybody deserves to experience. I have never felt more comfortable and more welcomed by other kids – young adults – and it has inspired me to work hard. This program, despite being just two weeks, has helped me grow as a writer and a person and has helped prepare me for college life. This is something I will be eternally grateful for.

— Sadie Radka

”

I do it for the thrill.

To see my skin split apart.

A fault line.

The ends never meet again.

I love to see white peach, hungry, I wait for blood.

A crevice in a cup it fills the cracks.

It drips off my skin like ruby droplets.

Luxury, I am proud to wear it.

My dermis, the skin protects you well.

The shell of a mussel, but my blade is the enemy



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 2,000 artists—including nine Nobel Prize winners, and 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

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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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