

THE WINNING WORK:

Zain Murdock (BTL '17, U.S.):

scar

how it feels,

this must be,

to roam inside

a memory

I hear again: the *crack!*

of leather

against skin

& wide-eyed boyish cry,

barbed--

& broken

hand on doorknob

chipped

but gold,

fingers cold

with forgotten I-told-you-so's

wrench & wring, but

it shall not open;

I guess I had forgotten--

this was not

my punishment...

& so fled I, too

back to blank-walled room

--never licked

the wretched wound--

but, family—

that is who we are--

we slouch away

from our disasters

&, like lightning,

let them scar

When black kids time travel, they don't—

I wanna press my palm against Claudette Colvin's stomach

And feel life shift behind her ribs,

Feel the movement quake

and rumble

and *begin*—

I wanna steady the shoulder of Rosa Parks

As the bus sways to a stop,

Adjust my knees so she can step off

First—the driver says,

Have a good day, miss

Waves the folding doors closed

As she walks on

And keeps on walking—

I wanna wind King's wire 'round my fingers,

Shut my eyes and let his sermons

Lull me all the way

To that dream he was going on about,

Erase the tapes,

Coretta loves you, Coretta loves you,

Coretta loves you—

I wanna carry Ruby Bridge's books down the hallway

Catch the stares with my right fist and

Let them fall, hard,

Onto the linoleum floor,

Whisper, "*They're only looking at you*

'cause you're so beautiful,"

So, so beautiful—

I wanna slide a quarter 'cross the counter for Emmett Till

Maybe for some Mary Janes or Tootsie Rolls

Or Bazooka Gum,

Maybe he'll beam, puff out his cheeks,

blow, and scrape the pink residue

From his lips with his teeth—

I wanna sip chocolate milkshakes with John Lewis,

Swing my legs from a silver stool,

Make small talk about the slushy Nashville snow,

He'll echo,

Are you cold?

And, with a charming flourish,

Maybe offer me his coat—

I wanna read Marx and Lenin with Angela Davis

Every few moments a page will flip too fast,

Liberation, she'll resound

And the sky will become a graveyard

For the lumpenproletariat

And my head will nod in understanding—

I wanna watch the wind roar as Ali throws

One, two, three punches—

Lunge, jump, leap, shut the door,

don't let the draft in—

I wanna lindy-hop in the Audubon with Malcolm X

See if his smile is more of the sun

Than the photographs say

Maybe he'll slip his horned browlines atop my nose

Grin, As-Salaam-Alaikum

And his warbling voice will carry

What silver bullets cannot—

I wanna lay in wet grass with Gordon Parks,

In overalls and white tennis shoes,

He'll turn to me and say,

Camera whirring, June bug stringing,

Yes, this is my shot—

I wanna offer my right earbud to James Baldwin,

Watch his lips curl as Stubbs croons,

I can't help myself,

And Baldwin's fingers will do a little tap-dance

And his pen will waltz across the paper

And—maybe he'll write

About me, yes—

Maybe he will write about me.

apologies don't need motherfucking metaphors

like papier-mâché:

you layer them on

until your fingers are wet and sticky

with the residue of excuses;

you stick

a sculpture on the uneven foundation

of guilt

and title it "I'm Sorry,"

wrap it up in newspaper,

noose it with gold ribbon, and pretend

it's a fucking gift—yes,

apologies are like papier-mâché,

malleable, crumbling, made to

fall apart,

to give way

to forgiveness,

to voluntary amnesia;

the sound of an apology

is the crinkly smoothing of

pulpy white sheets;

the sound of forgiveness

is nothing at all

(I love you like this): a duet in verse

“have I fallen out of love?”

empty em dash arms

—outstretched, waiting—

hinged limbs on

parenthetical;

(or do I only love

in silence?)

with his right ring finger

Pablo Neruda points,

a graceful gesture

of last autumn’s English,

a few decades ago,

in Spanish—

how long does a man spend dying?

he cries; and now

I trace the letters

upon Allende’s pages,

muse,

how long does a woman spend loving?

what does it mean to say

for ever?

you love me

syn-tact-i-cally

& loving you is a language

i must shrink

to learn

James Baldwin

taught me a piercing lesson

about claustrophobia

(and a great many phobias

elsewhere), said,

the world is full of rooms;

how long did you think it took you?

to find the room you have?

i am the ever-changing caesura

the backspaced ellipses

the forgotten comma

the hesitant semi-colon

the enjambed i love you, but

but Warshan Shire warns,

you can't make homes out of human beings,

someone should have already told me

that; walls are just solid fences

keeping out tall gunmen

and your chambers will contract

every time you miss your shot—

and even the fastest bullet

could be conned by

the steel in your eyes

when you deadpan,

i am not a period.

I'm still shellshocked at needing anyone,

yes, Marilyn Hacker never titled need

for a reason,

(because

because—i know

i am not your

forever; i am not your

ever after

it looks too much like love)

because *paper and pen*

neither care nor profit

whether we write or not

breathes Audre Lorde

breathes the sun

breathes the windows,

breathes you, into me—

thank Yeats for

gyres or else

i'd snap my arms in two

like twigs, like

elbowed puppet bones,

to hold you, or—

or, maybe Neruda is right,

I love you like this

because I don't know any other way

to love

what it means to fall

in high tide,

what it means to drown

in white skies—besides

(I love you like this)

from the eager mouths

of poetry's yore—you're

what it means to say

(for ever)

International Winner:

Yazan Omari (BTL '14, Jordan):

-1-

"أحمر الشفتين"

أحمرُ الشفتين يصرخُ في أنوثتها
و يدعو كل ألوان الهوى لتسترعي انتباهي..
و يجلسُ مثل سلطانٍ على شفةٍ
حتى يقيسَ تحركاتي..
يناديني كشيطان نصف الليل بعد أقداحٍ كثيرةٍ
متربصاً بأصابعي و مشاعري
و بكل أحلامي و كل تخيلاتِي..

**

هلاً صببتَ الحب في فمها
و أرضيتَ ليلاً لم يعد كسابق عهده
تخاف الأمهات على قلوب بناتهنَّ عند قدومه
قد صار مسكيناً ينادي:
أفي الظلمات من ينسى خرافات الصبا
و يعيدُ قصة عاشقين تجمعا تحت النجوم
في ربوع تجلياتي..

**

شفتاك قد أعياهما الشعرُ
فضعُ كل ما جادت به النفس في قبلةٍ
حتى تصير ديانته العشاق واجبةً
ككتب الشعر أو كصمت المفردات..

**

أحمرُ الشفتين يحفرُ في قراراتي..
و يمنعي عطرها الأخاذ من ردّ الهدية
يحرّضني على احتلال الورد في فمها
و يأمرني أن أولفت لها لغة جديدة
أقول الشعر فيها بكل براءة
و أطبعه كجبار على ثغر الحبيبة

**

أكنت أكلم الشفتين أم رداًهما
فمن حدّته يعرف الإقناع
و يعرفني و يعرف أن لي طرقاً كثيرة

و حين أفقت من صمتي و من بحور تفكُّراتي ..
أدركت بنظرة منها كلَّ معالم اليوم

**

فما أجمل الحُبِّ الذي بدون سؤالٍ
قد أجاب جميع تساؤلاتي ..

-2-

"الثوب الازرق"

زُرقة العين تخفى عند ظلمتها... و زُرقة الثوب تبقى رغم عُذالٍ
أحاول السَّير في الفلوات مُتَرناً... فأفقد القلبَ بينَ الرِّاءِ و الدَّالِ
و الغينُ جائتْ كفصلِ الخطابِ بها... كلُّ الحلولِ و اصواتِ بها حالي
تُغالبُ الفكرَ في عَقلي إذا نظرتُ.. إليّ لكنَّها محضُ أقوالِ
في القلبِ تسري و هذا الحُبُّ ان ظَهَرَ... يشفي النُّفوسَ و يُزهي كلَّ أعمالِي
بلفظةِ العشقِ لا تلقي لها بالاً... تفاخرُ الخلقَ و الأكوانَ في المثلِ

-3-

"معارضة"

يأتي كضيفٍ لا يجوز فراقه.. أرقُّ على أرقٍ و ما أحلاه
ما أجمل اللَّيلِ الذي في طوله.. ذكُرُ الحبيبةِ لا يزول صداهُ
ذكُرُ اللَّيالي غلَّفتْ أصواتنا .. و تسابقتْ كلُّ النُّجومِ عساهُ
يُنسلُ بيتٌ من وعاءِ قصيدةٍ.. و يصيرُ فُرانُ النُّجومِ هواهُ
ذكُرُ التَّلَاقِي دونَ ميعادٍ مَضَى.. بينَ الشِّفاءِ و بينَ ما تهواهُ
أرقُّ على أرقٍ يلخِّصُ قصَّةً.. عن حبِّنا و اللَّيلِ لا ينسأهُ
حتَّى إذا صار الشُّروقُ مهيباً.. و انزاح ليلٌ دافئٌ عشناهُ
جمعُ التَّارِقِ ما له و تسلاً.. لينالَ نومُ العاشقينَ جزاءهُ

-4-

"21 و أفكار"

إذا ما جلستِ كنهري أمامي.. تقولين شيئا و لا أتذكرُ
و حزنك خلف ابتسامة ورد.. يطالُ الغمامِ بروحٍ و مظهرُ
فرحتِ أهلوسٍ علَّ الشعور.. ينامُ طويلاً لكي يتحجرُ
و رحنٌ أغطِّي دموعي ببطءٍ.. و صمتٌ كسيرٍ كطعنةٍ خنجرُ
فلا تحسبي أنَّ روعي سباتٌ.. و قلبي غيبٌ ولا يتذكرُ
فبالوقتِ يغدو لخوفي معنى.. و يصبح قربي و قربك أخطرُ
و بالحبِّ أخلقُ منك إلهاً.. يطالُ القلوبَ بصوتٍ و جوهراً
و حين يصير الصِّراخُ شديداً.. ينامُ الظلامُ و يصحو القمرُ

و أُلقي برأسي إلى كتفيك.. إلى أن أحس بشيءٍ تغيّر
أزيح برأسي إلى كتفي.. فعقلي بقربك ها قد تحير
أكنت تحبيني يوماً أم.. إنني كنت أهذي و أسكر

جميلُ الحياة الذي لا يعاش.. فنومي يفوز و صحوي سيخسر
ففي الحلم يغدو لصمتك صوتٌ.. و تصبح أبعادُ عينيك أكبر
و أُلقي بشعري إلى قبضتيك.. فشعري هناك يدوم كقصر
بحلمٍ قديمٍ رأى أن يجاب.. يقولون كن حبهَا و ازدهر
نعيش الدهورَ بلا ذكريات.. بيومٍ نصير قتلنا السّفور
و خضنا الشتاء و خضنا الربيع.. و عشنا الحياةَ بحلمٍ ظهّر
و في الصّحو أرى لشوقك قيدياً.. و أكبتُ صوتي و لا اتخير
فبالوقت يغدو لخوفي معنى.. و يصبحُ قربي و قربك أخطر
ركبتُ الصعابَ و لا خوفَ منها.. و طفئتُ الغمامَ ! كسرتُ الحجر
فكيف أخافك يا نور عيني.. أجازَ الزمانُ سطورَ القدر

-5-

"رسميّة هي الدنيا"

قالوا بأنّ الحبّ فيها سرمدٌ** و الناسُ تعرفُ ما تريد و تفعل
و أنّ لها ريحاً حين تشمّها**ترقى بنفسك للجنون فتعقل
و بأنّ شعباً لا يقلُّ عن السّما**فكراً و عقلاً في المجالس يصهلُ
و بأنّ عدلاً في جوانحها انبنى**يُعمي النجومَ كأنه متنزّلُ
و بأنّ دنيا مثل تلك جميلةٌ**و أمانةٌ و عزيزةٌ و لا تتعطلُ
لم أدر من قالَ الكلامَ بساعةٍ**تبدو كأنّ السكرَ فيها مُشعلُ
أو طفلةٌ كتبتُ على كراسةٍ**رأيتُ أنا في الحياةِ مُسهلُ
إن الحياة إذا أردت تعلّمًا**تعطيك لغزاً لا تزيد فتحفلُ
حتى إذا صارَ الجوابُ مهيناً**نثرتُ بوجهك ما علمت و تجهلُ
هذي هي الدنيا إذا أحببتها**و سهوت عنها أنّها تتبدلُ
راح المطافُ و راح كلُّ جمالها**فمن أمنَ الحياةَ أمانه متخلخلُ

-6-

"جوليا"

سنابلُ القمح التي فقدتُ مزارعها
صحراءُ العروبة التي لم تجد بعدُ فارسها
أشعة الشمس التي احتارت بين شرقٍ و غربٍ
كلّها تُشرق من شعر (جوليا)..

(جوليا) تمنع لحن أغنية
ظننت أنها النفس الأخير
فقد خرجت عن المؤلف عند ثقافة الروسي
فهنا لا تُعرف الحان (موسكو)
و لا يقف الجميع عند زجاجة (الفودكا)
و لا يحبُّ الثلجُ أقدامَ النساءِ ..
(جوليا) تصالح ليلةً صيفياً
لم تحتل أقمارها نور (جوليا)
و تبحث كل يومٍ عن معاهدةٍ
تضمُّ العرب و العجم ..
و تقسمُ أنها كانت بموطنها
وردةً بين آلاف الزهور ..
و أن جمالها الذهبي ليس محفوظاً
فكلّ رجال أمّتها لن يدركوا أسرارها
و في غابات عينيها
خسر التناز ..
و عند تلوج ساقبها
تناحر آلاف الجيوش
و راح نهر الذكريات الى السريز
و لم تجد بعد السلام ..

**

إنّ زماننا العربيّ يكاد يخلو من أمثال (جوليا)
يكاد يخلو من عذوبة صوتها
من رباطة جأشها
من مساحة خصرها
يكاد يخلو من ثبات ثيابها
في صيفها و شتائها
(جوليا) دائماً تكون جوليا
بشعرها الذهبي
و ثغرها المهووس بالقبل ..

**

(جوليا) تصافحني و تدعوني لأقبل دعوةً
فيها جميعُ قصائدي تُروى على لحن عيونها
و كلّ ثقافتني تُحكى على وقت العشاء
و أنا أطارذُ الشفة السريعة في الكلام
و لا أجد الإجابة ..
جوليا تناشدني لأترك برهةً أبت الذهاب
و تقنعي باحتلال جمالها

و أنا أسافرُ وجهها متفاجئاً
كطفلٍ جاء القرن الحادي و العشرين
مباشرةً من عصرِ الحجارةً ..
سحابةُ الصمتِ الطويلِ ثقيلةٌ
ستسمعين الردَّ
لا تتعجلي
أو ربّما ضاع صوتي في خضمِّ مشاعري
لغةُ العيون جميلةٌ أيضاً ..
و براءةُ الجسدِ الصبورِ شهيةٌ
أنا معك ..

حتى تصير عروبتني فيك
و أجتاز تهالك الأرقام عليك
و أعبّر ناجحاً غابات عينيك
أنا معك ..

**

(جوليا) تحركني بلطفٍ كاد أن يطغى على حجم القصيدة

و تحكي لي عن الحب
و تروي حكاياتٍ لا تناسب غيرها
تتقلني إلى جنة الخلد
و تحرص أن أساعدها على أبسط الأشياء
(جوليا) تعاملني كأنني الرجل الأخير
و أنا أشاهد كل شيء يلقيني عليها
كأنها الأنثى الوحيدة ..

**

(جوليا) قصة تخلو من قوانين البشر

لا تحتوي ضوء النهار
و لا الشمس التي تحتل أبواب العاشقين للحظة
عند اعترافهم بالحب تحت القمر
(جوليا) تفاجئني في كل ثانية
و تبهرني في كل ثانية مثل المرة الأولى
و تكسوني بمعطفها الجميل من الحنان
لأشعر أنني من بعد طول عناء في الوطن

**

(جوليا) سترحل بعد ساعات

و تترك قصة
من وحي دمج العالمين ستولد
قصير هذا المساء
ماذا أقول لمحو ليلتنا الجميلة
حتى تصير الأرض مكاناً لا تستحيل به الحياة ..

(جوليا) تغادرني بعدَ العشاء
هل يستطيع القلب حفظ حياته بعدَ الرحيل
و هل يستطيع العقلُ تغييبَ الملاحق و الصحو
و إخفاء الضَّجيج عندَ وجود (جوليا)
(جوليا) تقول بأنها نسيَتْ أن تقبّلي
و تخبرني عن حُلْمها العربيّ
كأنّ حديثَ ساعاتٍ على ضوءِ الشموع كان بدايةً..
محاصيلُ القمح..
نورُ الشمس..
صحراءُ العروبة..
و باقي الحلم موجودٌ في رأسِ القصيدةً..

-7-

"نَسَمَاتٌ مِنَ الْعَرَبِ"

خرجتُ من بين أوراقِ الشجر
من بين سطورِ الحبِّ في (أيوا)
وُلدنا ..

وُلدنا في شتّى بقاع الأرض
و انطلقنا مثلَ غَمَامَةٍ
لنولدَ من جديدٍ
**

أفسّر لحنَ أغنيتي و لا أدري
أمثّل أقدارَ الحمايم نلتقي بعدَ الفراق؟
(أيوا) أنا لغتي شطايا ..
و الأخضرُ المنشورُ في حديقةِ جسمك
يشتريني !
يقتلني حيناً طويلاً ثم يحييني بعدَ اشتياقٍ..

**

كيف أميّز الأشياء؟
أعدا سأقتل أم سيُكتب لي عمرٌ جديد؟
أعدا سأرجع لحن قافية الأوائل
أم سأرحل للبعيد...

**

كانت تحاول جسّ أنسجتي
تقول وعدت فلا تخفّ

أن تتبعد !

ف(أيوا) الحب كما ترى

يمشي تحاوطه المرايا

و تصرخ في كل صوب تقول

"الحب مثل الموت وعد لا يرد ولا يزول"

**

قالت : دقّني بمعجزة الحدوث

فالقلب يهوى و الطبيعة تنتشي

و المعجزات هنا تكاد تسير

قلت اهدأي (أيوا) انا متعب

كنتُ أخفي القلب و الدمع العسير

نمتُ أنا و كان قلبي ينتحر

فحبي لصوتها المرخيّ بات أقوى

و حلمي تقاطع برهه مع حسنها

لينام ليل لا يطول..

استيقظ الماء قبلي

ليطرق (كطفل ليلة الهالوين) نافذتي

و يصمت صمت عاصفة بتول

**

إذا فراقنا صار محتوماً

بدمع الراحلين و صوتهم حول الرّحيل

و دمع سحابة تشقى بكارثة الهطول

فالصمت في دين الغمام تخلف

و فراقهم في ظل حكم الحزن أمر مستحيل..

-10-

"تدارك صحوة"

أبعدَ العشق و القلب الجميل*** يموت الحب تنتصرُ الأعادي؟!

مكانٌ في سباتٍ في مكان *** و حقدُ الحاقدين على البلاد

أذابَ العمرَ و اغتالَ الهيام *** و انطقنا ترانيم الفساد

و كان الوعدُ أن نمضي شتاء *** و قد راحَ الشتاء وسطَ العباد

و راح القلب مروح الرياح *** و باتَ الليل أحضانَ الفؤاد

فلا صوتٌ و لا موتٌ بليلٍ *** تصارخ فيه أصواتُ الرشاد

تهيمُ السائحاتُ على سريري *** و لا يدرين ما وجعُ الفؤاد

لقد مضتُ الشدائدُ في عتابٍ *** و راحَ القلبُ يبحثُ عن منادي

ليسبّ الحسن لا أدري جواباً*** فأدمعُ النساءِ على المداد

تعيش إلى انتهاء الشوق يوماً *** و في يوم تعيش على المهاد !
و إن راح المهاد ببيتٍ شعر *** فتحترف الظلام بلا رقادٍ
أتكفر قلبها من بعد حبٍ ؟ *** و يحتال النبيذ على الرماد
أحوّلها الفطام إلى شظايا ! *** فلم تدري السلام من الحداد ؟
أسوّلها الربيع إلى نفوس *** فباعوا الحبّ في أصدى مزاد ؟
فبعد العشق و الحب السماوي *** يموتُ الحبُّ تنتصر الأعداي
و يُكدّبُ صَوْتها من غير عقل *** إذا كان في تلك البلادٍ منادي
فماتت بين أسبابِ التفاني *** كما سبقَ النساءُ بلا معاد !!

-11-

"سبب خلق البعوض"

خرجت في الساعة الرابعة و النصف فجرأ الى السباحة .. كان كل شئى مظلماً و المكان مكتظاً بشكلٍ لم اتخيله ! يبدو أنها ساعة الذروة في منتجع البحيرة . لكن هذا لم يصدني عن الإكمال في مغامرتي ! فقد أخذت عهداً على نفسي أن لا أعود إلى منزلي بلا حكاياتٍ و رواياتٍ و نصائحٍ للمجانين أمثالي .. دخلتُ المياه الدافئةً بهدوءٍ و رحنُ اسبح .. يبدو أن الأشياء تكون أجمل عندما تكون بعيدة ! مرت هذه الفكرة على عقلي بعد أن تصدّقتُ عليّ بشئٍ من النرجسية .. فقد كنت بعيداً ! بعيداً جداً عن كل من يعرفني و كل ما يخصني .. فقد تركت عقلي نائماً في الغرفة و قلبي متقدماً عني بمسافاتٍ شاسعة ! كنت وحيداً تماماً مع جسدي ! لم استطع ان افكر .. فقد كان عليّ الحفاظ على طاقتي كاملةً للسباحة ! فلا أحد يستطيع إنقاذي ان غرقتُ في افكاري فالمكان هادئٌ أو في المياه فالمكان خالٍ.

سبحت بقوة و هدوءٍ لم أعهدهما إلى أن سحبتني الفضول تحت الماء لأجد شيئاً طالما بحثتُ عنه (لكنني وجدته في الوقت و المكان الخاطئين) ! لقد كان الخواء .. رددت هذه الكلمة بصوتٍ عالٍ بلا سبب .. ربّما هو الخوف من المجهول أو لأنني بت أسمع دقات قلبي بصوت واضح ! حاولت تجاهل الأمر و المضيّ قدماً إلى أن اقتحم عزلي الديك .. لم يستطع اقتحامها بجسمه فاقتحمها بصوته ! لكنّ الديك لا يصبح إلا مع الشروق ! كان هذا سبباً كافياً لأتخلى عن افكاري العميقة لثوانٍ يمكن ان تغرقها ! و أنظر الى السماء .. قد كان لونها أبيض مائلاً للزرق و القمر بازعُ و النجوم تأتي و تذهب .. كان هذا منظرأ لا يعوض ! قررت الاستمتاع بهذه المتع المحرمة لدقائق .. "الأشياء تكون أجمل عندما تكون بعيدة", ظلت هذه الجملة تردّد نفسها على مسامعي خوفاً من أن أنساها أو أن لا تدون ! أنظر إلى الشاطئ من هنا و إذ به تحفة لم اتخيل أن تكونها جفنة من الرمال ! حتى الأبنية صار لها طعمٌ مختلف .. و على النقيض فإذا نظرت للمياه تجدها مليئةً بالخييات و الحشرات ! هل يمكن أن يكون الواقع مؤلماً هكذا دائماً ؟

العصافير كانت تحلق على ارتفاعٍ منخفضٍ جداً ! ربّما كان الطيران مهلكاً لها و موسم الهجرة للشمال هو الجحيم الذي لا !
شئى اسوء منه سوى الموت

بدأ اللون البرتقالي بالتغلغل بين صفوف الأبيض و الأزرق .. أتذكر الأسود الذي كان مكتسحاً كل السماء حين بدأت .
رددتُ بابتسامةٍ ساخرة : دوام الحال من المحال ! كان علي أن اتجاوز عدة امثارٍ كي أرى الشروق بشكلٍ واضح .. بدأت أُعير انتباهاً أقل للهدوء و أكثر للسرعة .. بعد فترةٍ لا أحسنُ تقديرها وصلت .. كان عملاً إلهياً متقناً ! كيف لأحد أن يشكك في وجود

الخالق إذا رأى هذا المشهد .. إذا نجوت من هذه المغامرة سوف أقيم مناظرةً بيني وبين عددٍ لا أبه به من الملحنين على شرط إقامة في منتجج البحيرة و تحديداً بعد منتصف البحيرة في تمام الساعة السادسة ! لا اظن انني سأقول شيئاً لكنني متأكد اني سأكسب.

نقاط بيضاء تتحرك من بعيد , كانت شيئاً جميلاً إلى أن قطع عزلتي المقدسة أحدها : "يا شب" , كان هذا النداء كل ما احتاجته روحي للدفن في أعماقي بلا موعد للقاء جديد , لكنني كنت منتشياً لدرجة لا تسمح لي بتمييز الأيدي والأرجل والأصوات , سبحت لثوانٍ معدودة قبل أن يتكرر النداء : "يا شب" , اطلع من اقرب مكان" , لم يمض وقتٌ طويلاً قبل أن أدرك كمية التعب التي تكثرت على صدري , افتَرشت الأرض بعد أن استخدمتُ اخر قواي في الخروج من المياه غير عابئ بالرجال الواقفين من حولي. تذكرت أنَّ الأشياء تبدو أجملَ عندما تكون بعيدة , لم اتقوه ببنت شفة بل لهثتُ فقط , ربما لأن التعب كان قد بلغ مني مبلغاً أو ببساطة لأنني كنت منتصراً .

تبين أن النقاط البيضاء كانت موظفي المنتجع المتعبين , وأنَّ : "السباحة ممنوعة هون يعني لا قدر الله اذا صار فيك اشي ما حدا داري فيك" , فقلتُ بصوتٍ مرتفع: "كوبس اجت ع هيك" و بيني وبين نفسي : "كلُّ ممنوع مرغوب" , أشفقُ على هؤلاء , كيف يعملون في مثل هذا المكان و لم يُدرك أحدهم هذه المتعة !

عدتُ إلى غرفتي كأنَّ شيئاً لم يكن , لكنني بالتأكيد لم أعد كما ذهبتُ , و في النهاية , بالتأكيد كانت هذه التجربة أفضل من الترتيب ببعوضة مزعجة منعتني النوم , فلولا تلك البعوضة لم اكن لأخرج من الغرفة اصلاً .. كنت أتساءل طول عمري لماذا خلق الله البعوض , إن لم يجمعني بهم موقف اخر ف إن هذا يكفيني جداً .

-12-

"وداعُ أيوا الجميلة"

إذا .. نغادر أيوا الان , انتهى الحلم الذي حلمت به لشهور و لم أعش منه سوى دقائق .. بالأمس وصلنا , تعرفنا على المكان و سمحنا للحب ان يلقي بسحره الأبيض في قلوبنا , و بعد أسبوعين من الأمس جاء اليوم , أضيفت أيوا الى ذكرياتنا و اليوم أضيفت إلى سجل خيباتنا فكل واحد منا قد فشل في الحفاظ على دموعه .

لن أرى المزيد من الأخضر .. من قلوب بيضاء كالتلج .. المزيد من عبقرية شاعرية .. لن أرى المزيد من الانتماء . لا اعرف لم اختارت الامطار هذا اليوم بالتحديد , فهي لم تتوقف عن الانهمار منذ بدأ الراحلون بالرحيل .. هل تكون السحب تبكي فراقنا أيضاً ؟ انتهى كل شيء , و عدنا من نقطة الصفر .

The Finalists' Work:

Doha El Jerrari (BTL '18, Morocco):

On the edge

The room was oddly foggy. My fingers twitched and twisted around the edge of the sink, fragile bones clustered beneath the skin. My limbs trembled as I shoved the third pill down my throat. The wooden door creaked under Ahmed's violent blows. The throb of its pull and thud thrust me into a fit of panic. The rhythm of his blows and hoarseness of his voice calling made my skin shiver.

"Leila! Is everything alright? You have been in there for almost an hour."

"I'll be out in a sec."

I answered, smothering a scream that had nearly slipped out as I spoke. And yet, my shrill voice must have betrayed some hint of the pain that was ripping my inners, for his blows grew fiercer. I pushed my spine into a straight poster, despite the unbearable pressure weighting me down. I managed, for a second, to stand erect, and peeked at the mirror.

Delicate blood red veins crept towards my dark colored pupils, poison needles spreading into my eyeballs. Shoulder blade sharp under the dry skin, hair motionless on the skull, rigid as withered leaves lying on the muddy ground; it was agonizing to see.

But then, what felt like numbness gripped my knees. I stumbled on my own feet, and before I knew it, I had collapsed on the floor. My chest swayed up and down as I reached out for fresh air. I could absorb none, however. The blows on the door grew even fiercer. Ahmed must have yelled behind it, yet I heard nothing but gentle whispers coming from afar. I had ears nor mind for nothing but the vigorous movement inside my belly that slowed down alongside the increasing pressure on my womb.

"Leila! Open the door for God's sake. Otherwise, I'm breaking in."

The stirring in my womb grew more restless, it increased, at first slowly, but then vigorously, until all I felt was a fierce struggle tearing my inners. My vision was blurry.

"Leila! I'm breaking in!"

The door swayed back and forth. A few vigorous blows were all it took for him to break the lock and barge in. He froze, and then ran towards me. I gazed at him, motionless.

"Oh my God, what happened? Leila, what have you done?"

He leapt over, reaching out for my arm in an attempt to pull me up. Instead, his hands brushed over strokes of blood leaking from between my thighs.

“Leila. The baby . . .”

“It’s gone.”

Shadows of tears hovered in my husband’s pupils. He stumbled on his words, at least the ones that could leave his throat.

“Are you in pain?” His voice bland, empty of any emotion. There was no worry in his tone, no grief.

“I’ll be fine. Just help me up.”

I shuddered when his skin met mine. One would assume after five years of marriage that I would’ve gotten used to his touch by now; I had assumed the same. However, I felt nothing but repulsion for him, even though I had no reason to.

A few drops of blood, possibly the last ones, slammed on the floor and merged with the water that had been there all along. I ignored the last blows of pain, the final moves of unease and restlessness inside my womb. At that moment, had I thought of what I had just done, I would have collapsed on the floor again and stayed there.

For the next few days, I floated on the bed, lost between dozens of blurry shadows moving back and forth before my eyes. Among them were my mother and husband, the latter with his irritating constant care and presence. His attitude towards the baby’s death frustrated me to no end. I had snatched the dream of fatherhood he had been nursing for five years away from him, and all he seemed to feel was a bothersome need to care for me.

“Please let no one in for the next couple of hours. I’m not feeling well,” I asked of him before he closed the door and left.

Not long after he did, a gentle knock woke me from a relentless nightmare that had been as constant a visitor as my mother of late. I startled once awake, and despite my grumbles, I felt grateful to whoever was behind that door.

It opened to a curly red haired young woman with fiery green eyes and freckles that I recognized instantly.

“Sarah! What...?”

“This is probably the last thing you want to hear right now, but I heard of what happened and thought I’d stop by.”

"It's been more than ten years. I didn't think you would . . ." A joyful smile snuck into my plump lips. And for just an instant, it all disappeared, the soreness in my limbs and knot in my throat.

"You didn't think I would remember. I wondered whether I would too when we parted ways. Guess I just figured this was too important to miss." She moved forward, pushing her curls off the forehead, and sat on the edge of the bed, carefully at first, but then as comfortably as she had been ten years ago in my presence.

"It's not. But thank you for coming."

"How are you?" Her glare pierced through mine. She knew, I thought, she always knew.

"I don't know." I whispered, more to myself than to the old friend in whose presence I delighted.

"You did not want the baby."

It was neither a question nor a suggestion, a simple statement. A statement I knew to be true but ignored. There was no hint of judgment in Sarah's voice. She knew, I thought, she always knew. I nodded.

Silence settled in the room. I did not know how I got either the courage or recklessness to say:

"I killed it."

"Do you regret it?"

"No."

Neither of us spoke. There was no need for words.

"I was not ready, I could not . . ." I mumbled in a stutter, tripping over my words.

"Don't. You owe me no explanation. You owe people no explanation, Leila." She interrupted me saying what I thought must have sounded really pathetic.

"It's just, I really couldn't . . ." I continued nonetheless.

"You did not want it. That's reason enough."

Neither I nor Sarah spoke. Words hung in the air for what felt like hours. My eyes batted incessantly, I kept gazing at every corner of the room. I would get lost in the tiny scribbles on the walls my three year old nephew had left once, or the holes pesticides had left when I had first moved in. All insignificant details, one would think, and they would be probably right, but I had to look away. Had I kept looking at Sarah any longer . . . But why taint it with assumptions?

"That was not the only reason." I said more to myself than to her. She could tell, for she didn't utter a word.

"I hate him. That was part of it too." For the first time, I completed that sentence. "I don't know why."

She listened in silence. It had always been that way. When we were still in high school, there came a day when I found my father coughing blood on the kitchen floor. I had run to her house at 3 a.m. only to burst into tears on the door mat. Sarah, eyelids weighted down by the remnants of a dream, had dropped down on the cold ground beside me for nearly two hours until I blew my nose and went in for a cup of iced water. When we were in college, and my mother had just told me about Ahmed's proposal, we spent the entire day walking around the city. Once back at my door step, I begged her to shield me from the inevitable. Instead, she pressed her lips against mine. Tears were still hanging from my eyelids when I went in to meet my betrothed.

History repeated itself that day on the edge of my bed. Once again, I grieved in silence, and Sarah listened to the unspoken truths. And eventually, despite the appalling lack of words contributed to the conversation, we both felt better in the end.

"I missed you, do you know that?" Sarah whispered.

"I know. I did the same." I answered ardently. "Ironic isn't it? How permanent we believed our moments were. Now they are no more than memories lurking in the back of our minds."

"It didn't have to be that way. It still doesn't."

"We both have lives of our own. We can't just ignore that." I was disconcerted by the suggestion.

"We don't have to. We could find some way."

"Sarah, I'm married . . . We can't . . . I can't . . ."

But before I could complete my thought, Sarah grabbed my shoulder tight into her hands and slipped her lips into mine. I shivered from the familiar touch grazing my skin. And for no longer than a few seconds, we lost ourselves in a long and passionate kiss. Her finger tips scrolled down my arm. Yet, all of a sudden, fear came rushing through my body. I pulled away, limbs trembling uncontrollably, lips tender still. Doubt and confusion shone forth from Sarah's emerald green eyes.

"No, I can't. Please get out." I mumbled.

"Leila . . ."

"Please just leave!" I begged in a high pitched tone I myself hadn't anticipated. She headed towards the door lock in silence, but before slamming the door shut behind her, she muttered:

"Take care, Leila."

The kettle squeaked into my ears, water boiling inside, as my fingers brushed the paper's rough and crisp surface. Ink flowed on the yellowy page, the kettle's squeal pierced its way into my mind. Everything around me got blurry. I could barely see the words I had slammed on the pages. I had sat motionless for two hours jotting down whatever came to mind. My phone buzzed again. I didn't bother take a peak. I knew who it was and couldn't bring myself to pick up. I left it all on the table, diary, pen, thoughts. Ink the smell of metal had spilled all over my fingers, it even leaked into the mug as I poured boiling water over the tea bag.

Before I could take a sip off my mug, a soft touch stroked my hand from the elbow. It startled me. Images of soft finger tips grazing my skin and a tender voice whispering in my ears came flooding back to me. I brushed them off and turned to my sister. I couldn't afford to think back, not now, not ever.

"How are you doing, sweetie?"

"Miriam, my answer has not changed in the past couple of hours. I'm fine. Please stop worrying about me." I answered, grinding my teeth.

"I'm just afraid that I've been insensitive of late, with my son in the house, and after what you've been through." Her pupils widened as she spoke.

"We have already talked about this. You couldn't have left him alone at home. Besides, it's quite the other way around, I delight in his presence. I'm alright, you needn't worry about me, and when I'm not, you'll be the first to know."

"Promise?" She asked for reassurance.

"Promise," I nodded along.

Convincing her to leave me and take care of her son required even more resilience. She saw my yearning for loneliness as a sign of the broken and twisted fate the abortion had thrust me into, which may have been true, I couldn't really tell. Confusion and desire clashed in my mind, to a point where I could no longer tell them apart. Memories from that day a month ago built a camp in my mind and swore allegiance to my torment. There would come a time when I no longer thought of Sarah, of that day, when I no longer pictured her before me and yearned for her touch, I had told myself. All I could do was hold on to that hope.

Time slid before my eyes. Hours stepped aside for days to sweep in. And before I knew it, it had been three months and my sister was as constant a visitor as in the first week. She would run around the house all day, from one corner to the other, scrubbing whatever layer of dust had remained from her last visit. It didn't bother me. That was her method of coping, we all need one.

That morning, while my sister left to take care of some errands after a thorough cleaning of the bedroom, I went in and lay down on the mattress while the phone rang incessantly. I knew who was on the other line well enough not to check.

My fingers reached out to the night stand. I opened the third drawer and looked for the leather cover of my diary. I found none. I found nothing inside, nothing but layers of dust that survived my sister's eradication. A wave of fear gripped onto my guts. What if . . . ?

No, she couldn't possibly have. Drops of sweat started to leak onto my shirt. My hands reached out for every drawer, opened it ardently, only to slam it shut seconds later as that wave of panic raced towards whatever part of my body that somehow wasn't numb. I looked around, scanning every part of my room in search for the small notebook. It wasn't until later, when I looked down in exasperation and peeked at the edge of my bed, that I saw a part of the leathery cover on the floor. It had been underneath the bed, I realized. However, despite my relief, the itching question of how it got there swirled in my mind. And for a moment, everything in me paralyzed as the obvious answer slammed before me.

She knew.

Little did I know before that my sister's care would lead to such slow but ominous change. Throughout the rest of the day, I did nothing but avoid her, peeking into every room before going in. She didn't speak to me either. She knew. What else was there to say?

Not long afterwards, as I was lying on my bed, letting the dozens of ideas loom around me, Miriam burst into the room. She stayed silent for nearly a minute, in which I composed myself and came to terms with the horrifying talk waiting ahead. She took a deep breath before saying:

"How long have you known?"

I didn't look up. There was nothing to look at. I just mumbled, my voice filled of bitterness.

"Too long."

"Leila . . . I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing. I beg of you." I looked up, tears hung loose in my eyelids. Whatever she had to say, I couldn't bear hear it.

"It's a sin. God curses whoever—" she continued ardently.

I interrupted. My voice was frost cold.

"No need—No need at all." In truth, there *was* no need for her to shape my own thoughts and fears into words.

"Leila, this cannot be. You know very well that I would support you on whatever decision you make, but this is—It's not—It just cannot be."

It seemed she was just as disconcerted as I was, and who could blame her for it? I, for one, couldn't.

“Miriam, there is no need for this. I know it cannot be, I know it’s not—I don’t even know how or why.” Tears that had been hanging on my eyelids loosened their grip and came scrolling down my cheeks, nearly as sweaty as the rest of my body. My vision was blurry. I could barely see through the burning layers of tears waiting for their turn to drop.

She contemplated my distress before saying in a voice nearly as hoarse as mine would have been, had I dared speak.

“I just don’t understand. We were raised together, there is absolutely no reason for you to be—to be this . . .”

She stopped herself and looked down. Tears were streaming down my face and dropping on my thighs, my hands shook, hair as dry and rigid as straws hanging from my scalp.

“I know the concept is foreign. I know begging you to understand would be too much to ask, I barely understand it myself. But I need you to believe that I am normal.”

The words came bursting out of me, they were more poignant, more pathetic even, than I had intended. Her eyes shone in confusion and distress.

“Sarah, have you seen her ever since?”

“No. I couldn’t. I still can’t.” It pained me to think of the emerald green eyes and brick red curls. I yearned for their sight, for the touch of the long fingers and gentle moves of the tiny wrist.

“Leila, I don’t know enough neither to judge nor advice, but I think it would be best if you put this whole thing behind you—”

I scoffed. Miriam continued nonetheless.

“I mean, you had just lived an incredibly traumatic event, you weren’t in your right mind. You were weak and vulnerable. This—this cannot be permanent . . .”

“What if it *were* permanent? What then?” I asked eagerly, but I no longer dreaded the answer. It mattered no more.

“You’re married, and to a lovely person. Permanent or not, you cannot throw that away. It’s a gift most people pray for.”

“Well I prayed for none of this. I prayed for happiness, and I’m as distant from it as one could be.”

“Patience, Leila,” she suggested, not knowing what else to say.

“No more.” I said decisively, more to her than to myself.

Strokes of ash settled on the wooden night stand. I would occasionally reach out for the ashtray but my hands were too shaky. I soaked in a gulp of smoke while staring at the blank screen flashing before my eyes. My finger tips traced the symbols carved on the keyboard. "No more," I recalled, before taking a deep breath and punching the keys.

Dear Sarah,

It's been too long, my doing.

I'm aware that no excuse I give or reason I pledge would redeem me. Instead, I send you my thoughts, my demons. I wrap them up in a formatted document and hope they reach you in time and make you hate me less.

You must be as lost as I am. Truth is, I no longer know what to think, or how to feel. However, I know this much, I cannot deal with this right now. Too much change is occurring in the same time frame, and I fear I might lose my sanity in the process.

I hope you're doing well. I hope you're happy. And if not, I hope you're trying to be. But most of all, I hope you no longer despise me, for that I can't live with.

Love,

Leila

I waited for a while before pressing the "send" button. It took no longer than ten minutes before my phone buzzed. I picked it up and eagerly slid my glance through the words. "I hope you find your way."

I picked up a pile of papers lying on the night stand beside the ashtray, opened the file, and signed through them all. Ink spilled, leaving spots here and there. I rejoiced in them, in the spots and the scribbles. They were my scars, my pride, and the price for my freedom.

On top of the file, I pinned a small note. It was only decent to do so:

"Sorry for everything. Have a great life."

It was enough. I brushed the last layers of ash lingering on the tip of my cigarette with quick steady strokes, grabbed my car key, and slammed the door behind me. It was time for a new start. I had found my way.

The Finalists' Work:

Ekaterina Filonova (BTL '13, Russia):

This country

To this country planes do not fly – they run (like a soaked-through dog runs home – with its fur ironed to the body, ears pressed, eyes closed – forward and forward, drawing the smell of the master's hands in). In this country the air is packed into two kinds of bottles – the first – with ice – for the inside of the buildings; the second – with hot humming bees – for the streets. Here rabbits stand like soldiers – ears-guns look up, the triggers are pressed by the fingers, touch them – they shoot.

Small towns are all in little holes.

Here streets are talking to feet with tattoo-quotations on their brick faces. The roads, worn out by the dancing cowboy's boots, spread under the wheels. And the whole town is breathing with words, with poetry and stories.

But my tongue is toddling with the crutches, step by step, and the words it carries are heavy and awkward. They can't go out and fall back into the throat. The pile of them—head over heels – is spinning in my breast like clothes in the washing machine.

I need to do my verbal laundry.

I'm standing in the center of the hut made of glass and wood that seems to be deserted. But in the country where the wind smells like marshmallows over the campfire, and the

shadows of trees dress women's legs in stockings, there are no deserted spots. In this country every corner is full of music.

I hear it, standing inside the hut. And its center is being filled with the sun.

[TITLE]

This fall started so gently.

With the smell of tea in the air

(golden leaves keep falling like in the snow globe,

all shiny and fragile). Tealeaves and sun.

With sleepy tiny faces, so tender, on the train.

With strangers passing by and leaving – while you stay.

You wish people would never let go.

It felt like someone had secretly opened the bottled summer -

they had wanted it so, but hadn't been allowed

to take. And we drank it while we had it, but now it's gone

and it's too late.

Today we put on gloves, tomorrow – coats,

scales and shells. You feel it's getting sharper.

But, God, it started gently.

An empty cup

So this is the scene you see every morning:

the beehive of people, buses and cars,

mist, cigarette smoke, no faces.

The air has been blistered

for so many days.

Touch it with your skin –

the blood is squeezed, begetting

huge crippled insects, elephant-like spiders,

on long bony legs.

Fat, ugly bodies on long, bony legs.

They slip on the ice,

among men, stray dogs and ladies

(with red lips),

unnoticed, gray,

any moment the legs can get broken.

Sleep

is the only remedy for this world, you think.

You think “God, I’m sinking,

God, this is it.”

Is it what is meant for us? Is this what we have?

You are at the station. It’s winter, you are freezing.

The train is arriving like a sticky caterpillar,
it opens its mouth. The passengers are like teeth.

“My God, why have you forsaken us?

Why have you forsaken me?”

you whisper before you step in,

before you are swallowed by the beast.

No way out. An empty cup is in your fist.

But wait.

It has already happened: the death, the cup, the twist
of the whole history.

Recall: the Resurrection,

the rebirth of you and me.

Many years ago,

in a city, not covered with snow,

and long before the first train.

“Why have you forsaken me?”

and He is filled with pain.

It`s His legs that can get broken,

it`s His blood that is being squeezed

through the wounds around the nails.

The sweat is mixed with blood.

An empty cup is in the fist.

The beehive of people who have no faces,

Ugly insects are on the ground, spiders are weaving the web.

The ebb and flow of fear, and ebb and flow of hope:

all this has already happened. So, you are not the first,

you are not alone, and you are not abandoned.

Your hand is in the Lord`s hand, who

has overcome the world,

even with its caterpillars, its cars, blisters and blood.

The flood of fear won`t floor you,

nor ugly death will get you.

So, darling, take heart.

(Matthew 27:46)

Uroboros

I'm afraid of becoming like Van Gogh one day,
with his childishness, impracticality,
love and kindness that no one needs, for
he is a burden to the family.

And he knows it (you think he doesn't?)

When all he creates, no matter how great,
looks like an attempt to redeem himself
for what he is and what he isn't.

God, I love Van Gogh.

I wish someone hugged him
more often when he was alive, when he needed those hugs.

I wish someone then saved him.

But I'm so much afraid of becoming like him.

I remind myself by cracking illusions like shells
that I'm not like them, that I'm (yes, darling) worse.

And all these star-catching speeches are surely not for me.

What I need is work, a separate apartment and some confidence.

No high thinking, no tales in my head.

Everybody had better fly out of the nest
before it nettles,

before the tension leaves bruises and lies

on your family shoulders.

Darling,

you see, I simply don't have what it takes

to hope to be (as if) equal to you.

You'll get some dirt on your fingernails

if you get to know me better.

I drag myself by the leash to keep my distance. But it smarts:

you are unreachable, untouchable,

and I'm so damn kinesthetic.

And you, oh, you – I tattoo the words into memory,

the paint is scorching, but, look,

it's snowing. Oh the beauty.

God today is eating wheat bread,

white crumbles are falling down

from his beard: one's on my cheek;

one's on yours – like a kiss.

I like to think we are connected

at least this way. Yet,

my fear is tiptoeing

on that trembling thread.

it smells springish

it smells springish today,
and the ground is shaking itself
like a dog covered with snow
when entering the leaving room.

yesterday I accidentally found out
that your tiny name itself
brings all the fragrance of your perfume,
filling me up to the brim.
tomorrow will come February
splashing through the water and mud,
with dirty dogs prancing beside him
and your name petals in his hands,
yawning and stretching.

Kristallnacht

The splinters of glass
are spread on the ground
like icy stars in the sky.

Only stars do not hurt,
only stars do not wound
the crying bodies
on their knees bent over
the burnt synagogue.

I am a child who used to go there.

I`m a child who used to pray

there

is nothing else left

for me to do now

but this.

When dirty men`s boots are

marching along the streets

where I used to play

hopscotch.

Now hop -

and they fire.

There was no command to hop.

Scotch – is what they plan

to do to us,

Jews.

Because we are who we are.

The sky is

as if velvety to the feel.

And God, the night is beautiful.

They will call it the

Crystal Night

later,

when the guilty are punished,

when people are not killed

because of their beliefs

or because of their eye-color,

or because of the form of their nose,

or because of the way they walk,

or because of the way they talk,

I hope.

I hop.

Somebody`s dead.

They will call it like this

when they repent,
when you, and he, and she
those who are on their knees now,
when my head, my heart
when my soul
when I am
are dead.

Then they will call it the
Crystal Night. I hope.

Like in that fairy-tale,
when Cinderella lost her shoe.

And, God, this is beautiful.

But, God,

this is it.

Lady Liberty

Here she stands,
snow-white in the night,
the Lady beckoning me with the promise
of a better life. Of a life, that is.

Without Pakistani rancid air,
without bans, taboos, embargos
on every step. To be a woman
is illegal in the world ruled by men.

But – lo! - they allow us exist,
exist - sometimes.

Asking in return
just a bit – in fact, a trifle -
to lie in their hands
meekly
- an uncharged rifle,
that is who you are
in a man's world. But I've got a cartridge.

When they cut us down, like roses,
and put us in a vase –
suddenly we develop roots,

gills and fish-scale. And one day – splash!

- we're gone. We're free. We are looking at that Lady.

Here she stands

nodding, with a radiant smile.

Welcoming us to her country,

and asking nothing, demanding nothing.

That is the Woman. Strong, fair and kind.

And here she stands.

And here I come.

The Finalists' Work:

Isabella Jibilian (BTL '13, U.S.):

I forgot who wrote this story.

At first we barely noticed the mold eating away at the edges. The fungus, hungry but slow going. Some forgetfulness: our friends from old cities we moved away from, the siblings of friends we rarely ran into. My mother had always had trouble at the supermarket, so my sister would whisper the names of the other PTA members, real estate agents, or sports coaches in town, so that she could smile and greet them as if she knew all along. We thought she could be going the way of our great grandmother, Alzheimer's at 89. But then we began to forget too – the names of our first grade teachers, of our friends' newborn. One night when we were watching the news, a newscaster had trouble introducing the guest expert. The next morning, we forgot the name of our postman.

My English teacher forgot about the quiet kids. She was still quick with the troublemakers. Eventually, I forgot the names of the quiet kids too. I began calling them, "freckles who lives on the North End," or "gap teeth who eats tuna fish for lunch." My English teacher began calling them by their essays: the girl, "a Marxist criticism of Metamorphosis;" the boy, just "Slaughterhouse Five." She later forgot the names of the troublemakers too, but with them, she would say, "Please take your seat, young man with consistent punctuation errors."

Eventually, English class became too difficult; we couldn't keep the characters' names straight. It was as if they were a foreign language—the letters unfamiliar, the words clumsy on our tongues.

One day, I forgot my best friend's name. We were making smoothies, and when I asked her, "Could you please pass me the strawberries?" it was gone. I looked at her, and she knew. The phenomenon had crystallized in her kitchen.

I read in the newspaper that some women began a trend of carrying around Rolodexes. My father saw one Rolodexer at the hardware store. The woman was madly flipping through her little book. But her plan was flawed. Even with a directory of names, she couldn't connect them to the faces.

Old women rolled their eyes at the struggles of the masses. Their lives changed very little, since they had long ago mastered the technique of greeting people with "young man" and "young lady." Similarly, with the aid of "sir" and "ma'am," Southerners were doing well.

To the disdain of single people and most of the tasteful population, affectionate couples only increased their usage of "honey," "sweetie pie," and "baby."

As for the gruff diner waitresses, they had little reason to alter their normal, “What can I get you, hun?”

At night, at the family dinner table, we relished using each other’s names. “How was your day?” “Will you pass the salt?” “I love you.” But I wondered—who would be the first child to be forgotten? Who would be revealed as the last one remembered?

One night, I walked the docks near my home, two blocks from my home, and I marveled at the boats, the stout women that bobbed, tied to nearby posts. Their owners named them things like Lucky Strike or Reel ‘Em In, but some were named like they were wives. Or mistresses. They were so lucky. They got to keep their words, their identities painted to their sides.

There were some names I couldn’t help but wish I could forget. A friend that turned sour. The kid who teased me on the bus in third grade. My old boyfriend, the kind of guy who chewed cinnamon gum and never forgot his library card. I didn’t want to own words stained by them. But they were pretty stubborn.

Outside of our little town, apparently corporations were trying desperately to solve the problem. They tried using facial recognition; they assigned people numbers. But while the

computers could remember, people still needed to keep one another in order. Cooperation was difficult.

They turned to the poets. For the first time, employment offices asked people, “Are you familiar with poetry?” Poets were hired in the masses. The same writers who had resorted to day jobs as baristas and nannies were suddenly called up for service. They needed people who knew people best, who could empathize and characterize and make new names—or at least new descriptions. The starving artists were suddenly practical. Some purists scoffed at the sellouts that went corporate or became employees of the state. But the poet force, which worked crafting identities for the public, became well-loved.

My romantic aunt explained it this way: if we don’t have words for each other, syllables that are our own, how do we address a love letter?

My Catholic neighbor told me that the church was in a panic too. Cardinals and priests kept on forgetting the names of saints. They started doing services exclusively in Latin to hide their mistakes. At least people still remembered God’s name. I didn’t know what it would mean for the faith if they forgot.

Eventually, my family began to fade. When the creeping forgetfulness took my grandmother, my aunt, my cousins—we knew that our home was next.

One evening, my brother and I took my dog on a walk. We let our little terrier off her lead, to let her snuffle in the bushes. After a little while, it was time to go. I couldn't call her—I had forgotten. But my brother remembered. He called out for her, but she didn't come bounding out of the bushes as she normally would. And then we realized, that by now, she had probably forgotten her own name.

Now, in the sea of people that outside has become, it's home that holds me still. I don't watch the news anymore because despite the poets' popularity, they're not known for efficiency. It takes too long. The solutions that people find—in poetry, in mute hand gestures, in numbers and lists aren't effective.

Instead, I pull inwards, and hold the possessives like possessions I can't bear to lose. They are the same. My father, my father. My sister, my sister. Sometimes I just call them all *my love*.

I haven't lost my own name yet.

Though everyone else has forgotten it already.

I sometimes kick the covers off of my bed and lie on my back, looking at my sister's bunk above me, listening to her breathing. I whisper my own name over and over again to myself.

My mom and dad told me that they had always known what my name was going to be. They said that since I was the size of a pinto bean in my mom's stomach that they knew.

I think about what they call me. My classmates might call me the girl who comes late to class and raises her hand a lot. My English teacher calls me "Musings on magical realism." My neighbor, the eldest girl next door. My mother, my daughter. My brother, my sister.

I start with it all, my first name and my middle name and my surname too. But eventually I drop the middle name. And then I lose the last name. And I say my first name, written on the inside cover of my journal and sung in greeting by my best friend and whispered to me like a prayer by my mother when I was small enough to sit on her lap.

And so I sound it out. Over and over again. I savor each syllable. I listen to my sister breathe. In the night, it leaves me.

The Finalists' Work:

Alena Piksaeva (BTL '14, Russia):

Discomfort of Female Adolescence (Chapter 10, Excerpt)

"Crocodiles were born long before dinosaurs. They also saw them die."

I nodded as if I found this particular piece of information truly important. I feared crocodiles. I once read a story of a two-year-old girl killed by a crocodile at a lovely resort in Florida, with her parents and a bunch of other people watching.

"And turtles. Turtles were there too."

"I am not sure what I am supposed to take out of this life lesson, but thank you. Sounds quite fascinating."

"You should be either a crocodile or a turtle." He sounded serious, and I started laughing.

"You are drunk."

"And you are beautiful." He moved closer to me. "You can't even imagine how beautiful you are." Of course I could. He put his hand under my blouse, right on my ribs, and I felt his breath on my neck. He kissed it.

"Your neck is something else," he said. "Those veins. Sometimes I have weird fantasies about them." He moved his finger up the artery, to my chin. I imagined him putting it in my mouth and how I would lick it. And then his phone rang, and it was the most irritating sound I have ever heard. He looked at the screen. I couldn't see whose name was written on it. "Sorry," he said, "must answer it," and went to the balcony.

I sat down on a sofa. Was it the same room, the same sofa we already had sex on? I wasn't sure. It looked the same. But how different can be hotel rooms anyway? It didn't matter that much, but it was nice to think of something ours: our room, our bed, the table we already had breakfast at, the shower he once washed my hair in.

He came back looking older than he was a minute ago. He sat down and put his head on my laps. I put my hand in his hair. It was soft, maybe even softer than mine. He closed his eyes.

"You know what fucking irritates me the most?"

I raised my eyebrow. I could think of a lot of things that irritated me.

"People don't fucking know about the existence of time zones."

He opened his eyes. There was always something different in the way he observed me. I never knew what it meant.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"You are a vision. Not that I haven't noticed it before. But you truly are a vision."

"I look like my mother. Only she is more beautiful."

"I can't quite imagine it's possible." He raised his arm and touched my lips. There was a scar under his ribs that I'd just noticed. It was pale and very uneven.

"How did you get it?" I asked, touching the edge of it.

"I fall down the garage roof when I was seven. Hurt like hell. I broke an arm and a leg."

"I've never broken anything."

"I suppose you did not have an adventurous childhood."

“Oh no, I was a bookworm. My mom made me do sports; she was afraid I’d grow up socially awkward.”

“Really?”

“Kind of.” It was quite an exaggeration, to be honest. I was anything but awkward.

“Tell me about it, your childhood.” The thing is, there wasn’t much to tell. It was too perfect to describe.

“I was very happy,” I said. “I can’t imagine anyone being as happy as I was. I can’t imagine myself being ever as happy again.”

“You might be. Tell me more.”

“I was the only child at the time. My mother and father loved me terribly.”

“They don’t now?”

“They do. But they probably love my brothers more.”

“It’s natural. Now they love them for who they are and you for what you make of yourself.”

“What about your childhood? Were you a happy kid?”

“I was. Probably not as happy as you,” he smiled. “I started to work pretty early and I enjoyed it. It’s just I don’t think I was a child for too long.”

“Tell me more”

“We lived in a small town, population is about thousand people or so, probably less now. But my parents still live there. My mother is a very entrepreneurial woman, I’ve got it from her I think. In springs and summers, she was planting flowers, growing fruits and vegetables and selling them at fairs. I used to

help her in the garden a lot. Didn't like it but miss it now. In falls she made little baskets decorated with cones, and winters, she was knitting, I still get a scarf every Christmas. She always made me work for my share and she pushed me really hard to develop stamina."

"How?"

"She would always make up some challenges. And she made me aware of the way the world works. Once I didn't appreciate dinner she made and the next morning she woke me up at four in the morning and made me go to a forest and find mushrooms for dinner."

"Did you find any?"

"No. It was cold, dark and scary. And I didn't have dinner that day. Does she sound tyrannical to you?"

"She kind of does," I laughed.

"She isn't. I'm grateful to her madly."

"And your father?"

"He is a really good man. He showed me how to fix things, toys, furniture, cars. It helped me a great deal when I started working with computers. But tell me about your life. You only tell me about work. There must be other things you do."

"I honestly don't do much."

"Surely you do have time for a personal life. I mean, you are here."

"I only have time for trying not to fuck up. As you see, not very successfully."

"You are too young to sound that desperate."

"Being young now is harder than ever."

I looked at the mirror hanging in front of us: dark circles under my eyes, lipstick worn through in the middle of my lips, bruise on my neck, right where he kissed. Was it his intention to leave his mark? It probably wasn't. Anyway, it looked good on me.

"Oh I'm sorry," he said, noticing it. "I hope your boyfriend won't get too jealous." And he kissed me right at the same spot, again. I should get a boyfriend and check, I thought.

He touched the bruise again, carefully this time, and then we had sex on the wooden floor, and things were close to perfect.

"That was beautiful," he said when it was over.

"It is always beautiful."

He rolled over and put his hand on my belly. "Oh little one, sex can be pretty ugly."

"Why are you calling me little one?"

"What else should I call you? You are young," he said. I know he didn't mean to upset me. But he did anyway. Yes, I was young. But what could I do about it? For how many years would I have to listen to it?

"I am an old soul," I said.

He smiled and kissed me on the tip of my nose. 'That you are.'

He leaned back in his chair. I've noticed a hint of grey in his hair. I didn't know how old he was. Probably not as old as I thought. I was terrible at guessing. In my eyes, he could be anything from twenty-five to fifty. He probably was somewhere in between. There wasn't much grey in his hair, and his voice was a voice of a prom king, and his body was better than any guy's I've dated before. I knew I could just ask. Moreover, I knew he told it to me already but I forgot. It wasn't important after all.

"You have exquisite hands," he said. "It's the first thing I've noticed about you."

“I thought it was my dress.”

“It wasn’t. It was your hand, your arm and your shoulder. You were holding a glass, and you had rings on your fingers. And then you’ve made a gesture,” he waved his hand in the air, “and I was a gone man.”

“Are you rich?” I was drunk enough to ask it casually.

He laughed. “You did turn out a bit socially awkward,” he said. “I suppose I am. I mean, it’s really hard not to be rich when you don’t have time to spend your money.”

“This thing you told me about, your work—if you have power, do you really think you have to use force?”

“But little one,” he looked at me with almost amusement, and I got desperately angry at him. “You can only maintain power by force.”

“Do you believe in ultimate loneliness?” Oh god, I should write a guide to perfect date conversation themes, I thought. It was probably the wine, or the smell of flowers, or that sense of dislocation that made me ask questions I didn’t need answers to.

But he, to my surprise, looked interested. He put the glass on the coffee table and leaned forward. “What’s ultimate loneliness?” He didn’t look lonely, I thought. That’s what was different about him. Most of the people I knew did.

“It’s loneliness of facing a completely empty world. The moment you realize that you were born alone and you will die alone, and no human being in between can really be a part of you, you know that you are completely, ultimately lonely.”

“Let me tell you something,” he said. He got up, and was staying in front of me, focused and

serious. I would even think he was sober if I didn't know any better. "If you think you could meet someone and then be happy ever after, you are going to be greatly disappointed. I am going to save you years of your life, when you are trying to figure out how it works, why it works or why it doesn't, and just tell you now — it's not going to work, and there is no need to know the reason. There is no reason. It is just basic human nature. There is no substitute for who you are. No one can make you whole. And you are going to be really unhappy until you realize it and stop looking for someone. So rather than making a life full of loneliness and misery out of it, learn that you've only got yourself. And learn to fucking love it."

I was miserable. Drunk and miserable. I was the most miserable person I knew.

"That's quite a life lesson."

"Come to me," he said. And I came. You see, I had absolutely nowhere else to go.

Озеро с голодными утками

У Димы мамины глаза, золотистые, совсем кошачьи, и папин нос, как у греческого бога, картинку которого я видел в книге у Амоса, которую он стащил тайком от родителей, большую, с толстыми страницами и обшитой бархатом обложкой. Амос - наполовину еврей, наполовину болгарин, и глаза у него тоже половинчатые. Зелёно-голубые. Цвет неба и листьев травы. Или льда и плесени. Как посмотреть. Амос сказал, что его имя означает "наполненный мудростью", но он тот ещё врун, так что это может значить и опустошённый одиночеством и полный дурак. Кто знает.

Когда я сказал Диме, что буду писателем, он посмеялся и попросил никому этого не говорить, потому что "ты не хочешь, чтобы тебя звали чудаком", а на мой девятый день рождения, через неделю и пять дней, подарил тетрадь. Девяносто желтоватых листов. На первой странице он написал косыми буквами: "Нищий квартал в окне глаз мозолит, чтоб, в свой черёд, в лицо запомнить жильца, а не как тот считает, наоборот".

Я тогда долго над этим думал. И додумал до того, что брат у меня ого-го талантище. Мне с ним не тягаться. Спросил его, что это значит, и как он до такого додумался, и зачем написал это мне, а он отвечает - "будешь пиво"? "Буду", - говорю я. Меня потом всю ночь тошнило. Папе мы сказали, я отравился арбузом. И он поверил. Мама бы точно не поверила, но от неё остались только кошачьи глаза Димы и несколько чёрно-белых фотографий, она на них совсем молоденькая. И такая красавица. Не мудрено, что папа в неё влюбился.

Тем летом я сломал ногу. Катился вниз по перилам, а потом вдруг понял, что кубарем лечу по ступенькам. "Хорошо, что мозги не сломал", - сказал Дима.

Но лучше бы я мозги сломал, а не ногу, его вечно не было дома, и я оставался один. Слушал радио и читал книжки в толстых обложках, которые нашёл в коробке у папы под кроватью. Некоторые строчки были подчёркнуты, а на полях мне постоянно встречались заметки, написанные, я точно

знаю, женской рукой. Значит, кроме глаз Димы и чёрно-белых фотографий от мамы у меня остались четыре нудные книжки и один сборник стихотворений Ахматовой. В нём пометок было больше всего.

Как-то он пришёл домой в обед, и я уговорил его остаться со мной ненадолго. Даже играть необязательно, просто побыть вместе. Я уже с ума сходил от тишины. Он согласился.

- Ты знаешь, как умерла мама?

Он сидел на подоконнике, поджав под себя ноги и прислонившись лицом к стеклу. Я представил, что если посмотреть на него снаружи, то лицо у него будет совсем-совсем расплющенное и ужасно смешное.

- Нет, - ответил я.

Он снова замолчал, а я не хотел его доставать, поэтому вернулся к своим записям.

- Когда я играл в песочнице, она сидела вот на той скамейке и читала. Прочитав страницу, она смотрела на меня и улыбалась, иногда говорила что-нибудь. И опять возвращалась к книге. А потом снова смотрела на меня.

Когда в песочнице играл я, за мной следил разве что только он, да и то вряд ли. Так что слушать это мне было даже немного обидно. Но ужасно интересно. Поэтому я молчал.

- На ночь она мне читала стихи. Три или четыре обычно. А потом просто лежала рядом и ждала, пока я засну. По средам мы с ней ходили в парк, кормили уток в пруду.

Я тоже как-то был в парке. Вместе с Амосом. Его мама дала нам хлеб и объяснила, что его нужно раскрошить в воду, а не бросать кусками. Но Амос стащил с кухни помидоры и зелёный лук, и мы

съели всё вместе с хлебом, сидя под ивой. Тогда у него глаза были скорее зелёные, чем голубые, и я вспомнил, что однажды он сказал мне, что зелёный, к тому же, цвет кораблекрушения.

- Когда ты родился, я тебя ужасно не любил.

Я фыркнул. Больно надо.

- От тебя пахло молоком, а ты знаешь, меня от молока тошнит. И ты вечно орал. И лицо у тебя было красное. Мама постоянно держала тебя на руках. Качала и пела песни. А ты всё орал и орал, орал и ночью, и днём, и она целую вечность пыталась уложить тебя спать.

Мне не очень нравилось это слушать, и я захотел уйти, но попробуй подняться с пола с загипсованной ногой.

- А потом она решила, что пора тебе увидеть улицу. Ты лежал в коляске и спал. А она читала. Переворачивала страницу и смотрела на тебя, потом на меня.

- Придурок, - сказал я, потому что ничего умнее на ум не пришло. - Я пить хочу. Помоги мне встать.

Он спрыгнул с подоконника, дал мне подзатыльник и помог подняться. На одной ноге я допрыгал до кресла. Он принёс мне стакан воды, достал из карманов брюк мятную конфету, протянул мне.

- Будешь?

- Буду.

Конфета была вкусная, и я, немного подумав, сказал:

- Спасибо.

Он пожал плечами и снова забрался на подоконник. Наверное, он смотрел на скамейку, на которой когда-то сидела мама, потому что лицо у него было грустное-прегрустное. Я вдруг подумал, что он может заплакать, разрыдаться, совсем как девчонка. Если бы он так сделал, я дотянулся бы до

костылей и вышел из комнаты. В одной из маминых книжек я прочитал, что человека нужно оставлять наедине со своим горем. Правда, эти слова мама не подчеркнула. Ну и ладно, всё равно он не заплакал.

- Мама умерла при родах, - сказал он. - У нас должна была быть сестра. Она тоже умерла.

Я грыз карамельку, и казалось, что хруст слышен не только у меня в ушах, но и в комнате, в доме, даже во дворе. Он казался громче Диминых слов.

- Я хотел бы быть вечным ребёнком, - он снова прислонился лицом к стеклу, его слова звучали глухо, и я сделал вид, что не слышал его.

Потом мы играли в шахматы и шашки. Он всё время выигрывал, но последний кон проиграл. Думаю, он поддался. Это страшно разозлило.

Вечером он начал собираться на свидание. Надел рубашку, причёсался, но потом взъерошил волосы.

- Побудешь пока один. Думаю, отец придёт к девяти.

- У меня Амос ночевать останется.

- Ладно.

Они столкнулись на пороге. Амос осторожно нёс в руках вишнёвый пирог. У него мама пекла. Просто и-зу-ми-тель-но, как однажды сказал папа.

- Здравствуйте.

Амос был ну просто чудовищно вежливый мальчик.

Дима кивнул, а когда Амос ушёл на кухню, тихо сказал мне:

- Скажешь кому, прибью.

- Не прибьёшь, - сказал я. - Ты меня любишь.

Он фыркнул.

- Кстати, сам ты придурок. И пока меня нет, постарайся не разбить себе мозги.

Он ушёл, а мы с Амосом съели по куску пирога и сели на подоконник. Вернее, он сел, а я еле забрался.

- Думаешь, наш квартал нищий? - спросил я.

- Неа, - ответил он и тяжело вздохнул. - Папа говорит, наш район respectable. Это значит, богатый, он объяснил мне.

- Всё ясно.

Я прислонил лицо к окну, давая возможность кварталу запомнить моё лицо. А потом вдруг подумал, каким расплюснутым он меня увидит, и засмеялся.

- Через неделю, когда снимут гипс, ходим покормить уток?

- Ага. Надо только будет стащить побольше помидоров.

- И лука, - добавил я.

The Finalists' Work:

Caitlin Plathe (BTL '13, U.S.):

partial

underneath rain trees

I am looking for

chemistry, a second

of some kind of clarity--

this poem is

arriving, as I am,

partial.

it is

looking, too,

for something under

neath fingertips and firehearts,

beneath the light of the rain

tree, I am still looking,

I scream,

for more than this,

for the wind to seep

in--for the world, to slow

down faster,

so I can breathe

in

i am no plath

but i often wonder how the rain
tastes in boston and if these words
and outpours
are enough to fill my bones,
if they're enough to create more bones,
if i have a true understanding
of what my once bound skin even was in the first place--
i am unsure
do not tell me where i belong in this
state-of-mind, i will decide
if this storm is too much to bare, but
bare with me, i sometimes forget
that when i swallow a white bird whole
the nest follows, too
i changed my name so i would forget
but i couldn't and i didn't so
when you left something inside me
cracked & unwound like a spool
and for some reason the
february air still haunts me

TWEETS FROM THE IOWA CITY POLICE LOG

MALE WITH DEAD BIRD IN HAND
ASKING TO CALL 911
BECAUSE HIS BIRD IS
DYING

5 INTOX MALES OUTSIDE
THE AIRLINER BAR
URINATING
EVERYWHERE

PASSED OUT FELLA

A THOUSAND PEOPLE IN THE ROADWAY,
JUMPING ON CARS--
MAKING IT IMPASSABLE

DRUNK PEOPLE FALLING DOWN THE HILL

APPROX 5-6 PEOPLE LAUNCHING BEER BOTTLES
WITH SOME SORT OF CONTRAPTION

LARGE PARTY
PEOPLE LOOK TO BE WANTING TO FIGHT
NO ONE IS FIGHTING

CAUGHT A RACCOON
IT'S VERY ANGRY
SICK RACCOON, IN FRONT OF YARD,
STUMBLING
DEAD RACCOON IN STREET
BABY RACCOON STUCK IN DUMPSTER
DEAD RACCOON IN ROADWAY

SON WALKED HOME FROM SCHOOL
WITHOUT PERMISSION
IS TRYING TO EAT RAW MEAT

(ACTING CRAZY)

FEMALE YELLING SEXUAL THINGS

SMELL OF MARIJUANA/
COMING FROM 3RD FLOOR SOMEWHERE

ONE MALE SITTING ON THE BENCH,
nothing unusual

Listen.

This moment is only going to last
just that, a moment, a glisten
ing second. Seconds, minutes,
in months you will forget and
regret the times you burned
your hand on bubbled seconds&minutes
because you stayed in them too long.
It's fast. So strong you can't keep on,
but you'll learn to whisper, to tell
your mom that you miss home, so
that when the light goes out you
won't forget. You will write and write
and write until the threat is over.
Until you gain your composure.
Ice your hand, your mouth as
the minutes fall
out, as the seconds become
unholy hours, until you realize you are no
coward. Listen. Fall asleep slowly.

"pray to end abortion"

a crowded coffee shop burning
lattes and a people quietly mumbling
cannot begin to understand
what it means to make and take
decisions, a decision that lasts
lifetimes, beyond you, me, beyond
the snow-swept sidewalks
whose white is blinding,
there are places inside all of us,
a city inside my lungs screams
and sings for opportunity,
to be heard, founded--
this is mine, this self
ishness, this desire to live
wholly, completely, to fall
crash in love and back
out to see stars soar, to see them
trace outlines of stories you never
understood. this, T H I S
is my life, this is the body
I did not choose
to inhabit, but the choice

I did make was for those desperate

singers, the city inside

my palms and my marrow and

I am who I am because I was not

forced otherwise

I was lucky that way

a sign passes, a white man and his sign

PRAY TO END ABORTION

I watch from a window, behind the lattes

the mumbling, behind my choice

to keep going--

I wonder if he knows

what any of this means

i met a boy

who has this musky orchard smell,

and smiles at me with all his teeth.

we walk with our palms faced out

and he tells me about his palace--

his palace with his acres & his horse

who likes only him, he swears,

and no one else--

he tells me about his new york

life in his new york apartment

and how this hill was nothing

like the view from his new

york window--

i kiss him first--

i thought the taste of his breath

would make me forget, but

everything is blurred

with the sweet orchard smell,

he traces my freckles and i make up a story

about constellations and how they are tattooed

on me if only he would look close enough,

but i can't let him, but i won't let him--

his breath begins to feel

stale on my lips--

i pull back and smile at him

with all my teeth

The Finalists' Work:

Rand Safi (BTL '08, Palestinian Territories):

هناك ، في زاوية القلب

صباح آخر في شهر آب ، استيقظت رند على صوت المنبه المزعج ، أغمضت عينيها في محاولة لملاحقة آخر تفاصيل الحلم التي لم تتجح يوماً في الإمساك بها .. تضحك على نفسها أنها لم تتخلّ عن تلك العادة الطفولية لاسترجاع الأحلام و تنهض من سريرها لتبدأ روتين الصباح و الاستعداد للذهاب إلى العمل.

في السيارة في الطريق إلى العمل ، تجلس و كما تفعل كل يوم بجانب زوجها تمارس محاولاتها اليومية في ضبط موجات الراديو باحثة عن صوت فيروز الرقيق ، لم يفلح شراء القرص المدمج لأغاني فيروز في إيقافها عن محاولاتها المستمرة للبحث عن أغنية الصدفة الجميلة . " صدفة و رسالة صباحية لا أحب أنا أن أختارها" تردد لزوجها الذي ينصحها أن تستخدم ال CD . كثيراً ما تبتسم رند عندما تمسك نفسها تندن مقطع جميل من رسائلها الصباحية خلال نهار العمل و تؤكد لنفسها أن الأمر استحق عناء التنقل و البحث بين قنوات الراديو المختلفة و الاستماع لتلك النبرات الرتيبة لمقدمي النشرات الإخبارية و عناوين الصحف . و تعنز بموقفها الراض للاستماع للأخبار صباحاً و تحيي محمود درويش و تهز رأسها موافقة و هي تردد " و الجرائد ذاتها : أخبار أمس ، و عالم يطفو على القتلى كعادته."

من شباك مكتبها المطل تتأمل الغيوم الجميلة في السماء و تأخذ صورة لمشاركتها مع صديقاتها ، تكرر رند عبارتها لنفسها : إن الغيوم من أجمل المظاهر الطبيعية الممكن مشاهدتها .. ثم أطرقت و فكرت للحظة هل كنت سأحب الغيوم بهذا القدر لو كان شباك مكنتي يطل على البحر مثلاً ! تركت السؤال معلقاً و اتجهت إلى جهاز اللابتوب .

تفقدت البريد الالكتروني للعمل و أجرت بعض الاتصالات و أكملت القيام بعملها و دندت " بحبك ما يعرف هن قالولي .. من يومها صار القمر أكبر " و في انتظار اجتماعها القادم استرقت رند نصف ساعة من اجل تفقد بريدها الشخصي ، رسائل من فنادق سياحية ، اسعار مخفضة لحجوزات الرحلات ، اضافات صداقة على حساب اللينكد إن ، برنامج النشاطات للمركز

الثقافي في المدينة ، اقتباسات جميلة من موقع جودريز و رسائل اعلانية .

جذبها عنوان بريد الإلكتروني من مصدر آخر ، كم هذا القلب هسّ ، سافر بها العنوان و أرجعها 10 سنوات إلى الرحلة التي كانت ، أعادها تمشي في الشوارع و تقابل الأصدقاء الجدد ، تتأمل الحروف و الكلمات بعين ثانية ، هذا البريد الإلكتروني كان قادراً على الفور أن ينبت زهرة في زاوية قلبها . عادت رند إلى شيكاغو ، إلى تلك التجربة التي لطالما تمننت أن تكون أكبر عندما خاضتها حتى تستطيع أن تحفر تلك اللحظات في الذاكرة بشكل أعمق ، حتى تقرأ و تكتب و تغني أكثر.

تابعت قراءة الرسالة بشغف ، انها دعوة لمسابقة الكتابة التي كانت قد شاركت فيها قبل 10 سنوات ، لم تستطع رند أن تفسر الابتسامة التي ارتسمت على وجهها فهي حتى الآن لم تقرر إن كانت سوف تشارك في هذه المسابقة أم لا ، اتصلت مباشرة بوالدها شجّعها على الكتابة و التقدم لهذه المسابقة مبدداً مخاوفها ، هو الذي رافقها في ذلك اليوم للاجتماع ، عندما كتبت النص الذي أهلها للمشاركة ، كان النص يعتمد على الرمزية و اختارت الشمس رمزاً للبدايات الجديدة و أحياناً رمزاً لبداية النهايات. تذكرت رند كيف بدأت الأفكار تزدهم في رأسها و هي تكتب و تتسابق الكلمات لحجز مكان لها على الورقة و تذكرت شعورها عند انتهاء اللقاء لانتظار النتيجة ، سلكت في طريق عودتها مشياً هي و والدها طريقاً جديداً طويلاً و جميلاً ، يطلّ على مناظر جبليّة جميلة و ما زالت حتى الآن تتذكر والدها بهذا المشوار بعد أن غدا هذا الشارع الآن من أكثر شوارع المدينة انشغالاً. بعض التفاصيل مهما كانت صغيرة تبقى محفورة بالذاكرة تماماً مثل ذلك اليوم .

اتخاذ هذا القرار لم يكن سهلاً ، رند لم تكتب منذ فترة نصاً طويلاً ، هي التي اعتادت أن تكتب كلما هزّها أمرٌ بعمق ، تكتب رند عندما تذهب إلى القدس و تكتب عندما فقدت جدتها ، هي التي تعتبر الكتابة أمراً خاصاً و لا تشارك كتاباتها إلا مع الدائرة المقربة من الأهل و الأصدقاء. أحتاج إلى حدث جلل لأكتب ، خاطبت نفسها لا توجد لدي القدرة على الكتابة دون الإحساس التام بما أكتب. عدد المتقدمين سيكون كبيراً ، من مختلف الدول و مختلف القدرات . أكملت عملها اليومي ، و في زاوية قلبها رند الصغيرة جالسة تمسك قلماً و تزهو شغفاً تريد أن تكتب.

في الأيام التالية انشغلت رند بمهام عملها اليومي و لم تستطع أن تسترق لحظات حتى تفكر في المسابقة و لكن هناك في زاوية القلب ، رند الصغيرة تعتني و تسقي زهرة نبتت بجانبها .

بعد مرور اسبوع أمسكت رند بالقلم و قالت سوف أكتب ، مخاطبة نفسها : أريد لهذا النص أن يكون كاملاً ، سأقوم بالبحث و سأكتب عن موضوع عالمي حتى يحسه كل من يقرأه . تواردت المواضيع إلى ذهنها و سجّلت كل ما خطر بذهنها : الألم ، العالمية ، الفتيات ، التّوحد ، البحر ، المطر ، الزوايا ، الزهور ، السفر ، الأم ، الفقد ، الغيوم .

عادت رند إلى متابعة عملها في الأيام اللاحقة ، لم يخط قلمها أي كلمة بعد ذلك .

انشغلت رند بالتحضيرات لسفرتها المقبلة ، كانت على موعد مع البحر و الطبيعة و صفاء الذهن و لقاء مطربها المفضل . فكرت رند هناك سوف أكتب . حزمت امتعتها و أخذت دفتر ملاحظاتها أمله أن تعود به مليء بحروف كلماتها و قصصها . بعد مرور 10 أيام عادت رند من الرحلة و عاد دفترها فارغاً و لكنها عادت بقلبٍ ممتلئٍ . خلال الأيام التي تلت البريد الإلكتروني ، أصبحت رند ترى الأمور بعيون أخرى كانت تحاول أن تبحث عن التفاصيل التي سوف تكتبها .

راقبت تشابك الأيدي ، مظاهر العيد ، وشوشات العشاق ، الأطفال على إشارات المرور . بكت حين غنى القيصر ، رقصت طرباً و ضحكت من قلبها و رند الصغيرة في زاوية القلب لا زالت تحمل القلم و تنتظر .

بعد مرور عشرين يوماً على البريد الإلكتروني ، ما زال الدفتر خالياً و لكن القلب عامرٌ . لم يتبق الكثير من الوقت للكتابة و التقديم للمسابقة . في لحظة يأس أقرت أنها لن تستطيع المشاركة ، لأنها تتمكن من كتابة النص في الوقت اللازم .

في الليلة السابقة لموعد التسليم ، جلست رند على سريرها تستعد للنوم ، رند الصغيرة في زاوية القلب تبكي رافضة القرار و متشبثة بالقلم . لم تستطع رند أن تنام هي الأخرى كانت على وشك أن تبكي . فكرت في كل الأيام الماضية و هذا الشغف الذي عاشته و الزهرة التي نبتت في زاوية القلب ، قامت من سريرها و ي تردد : لا ، لا أن أدعها تذبل و لن أفلت القلم .

أسرعت إلى الدفتر و سبقتها كلماتها ، تسابقت الحروف على الورق و لم يستطع قلمها اللحاق بها . قالت : لن التزم بالخطوة و لن أكتب عن أي موضوع سأكتب شغفي ، سأكتب قلبي و زاويته مهما كانت النتيجة سأكتب قصتي و مسوداتي و لن أخجل أوتراجع كان هذا هو القرار الذي أخذته الساعة الثانية عشر ليلاً في 30 / آب / 2018 .

المسودة الأولى :

لم تتم سارة في الليلة الماضية ، كانت تستيقظ مرة كل ساعتين ، تنفقد هاتفها و تحسب كم تبقى لشمس صباح يومها المنتظر .
في الليلة الماضية أعدت قائمة طويلة من الأغاني لتستمع إليها في رحلتها الأولى إلى البحر ، لم تعرف ما هي الأغاني التي
ستستهويها هناك أمام امتداد الأزرق. كل ما كنت تفكر بمنظر البحر يصيبها مغمصٌ خفيف و تلبك معوي تماماً مثل ذلك المغص
الذي يسبق اليوم الدراسي الأول أو ليلة الامتحان الكبير أو مقابلة العمل الأولى .

عندما جاءت أمها إلى الغرفة كانت سارة مستيقظة في سريرها ، مبتسمة و مزهوة بالفرح ، ساعدتها أمها في توضيب الحقيبة و
قد حان موعد الانطلاق . لم تراقب سارة الطريق و لم تهتم بالمناظر الطبيعية ، كانت غارقة بالتفكير بما هو آتٍ.

وصلت السيارة إلى الشاطئ ، شهقت سارة و فرحت بانعكاس أشعة شمس السماء على مياه البحر و إن لم تكن قادرة على أن
تفتح عينيها و لكنها لم تبالي . نزل والدها من السيارة فرحاً : ها أنا قد وفيت بوعدى يا سارة ، هذا هو البحر الذي لم تتوقى عن
الحديث عنه منذ سنة . ساعدتها والدتها بحمل حقبيتها من السيارة ، ابتسمت سارة و أخذت نفساً عميقاً .

سارة الصغيرة في زاوية قلبها تركض حافية نحو الشاطئ ، تثير حبيبات الرمل بين أصابع قديما رغبتها في الحكمة و هي لا
تستجيب لذلك و لا يههما ، تتسابق قدماها الأولى أمام الثانية منطلقة باندفاع نحو البحر غير أبهة بالحجارة الصغيرة التي داست
عليها . ، تأملت سارة المدى الأزرق الكبير و هي تستمع لأغنية بعيدة في سماعات هاتفها ، همست لعجلات كرسيتها المتحرك
إن كانت بحاجة للحكمة بعد أن علفت بها حبيبات الرمل .

سارة قد تكون فقدت قدرتها على المشي لأسباب عديدة، نتيجة حرب في المنطقة ، نتيجة عدم أخذها التطعيمات المناسبة أو
حتى نتيجة حادث سيارة ، لا يهم ذلك في الحقيقة و قد تكون سارة من أي بلد عربي أو غير عربي و قد يكون هذا البحر ، بحراً
أو نهراً أو محيطاً في أي مكان . لا تهتم هذه التفاصيل جميعها ، كل ما يهم أن سارة تحلم بأن تشعر بحبيبات رمل الشاطئ
العالقة بين أصابع قدميها.

المسودة الثانية :

رامي ، صاحب الابتسامة الدائمة ، يجلس كل مساء في المقهى يتحدث إلى الزبائن و الوافدين الجدد دون خجل و بمختلف المواضيع كان رامي متقفاً و ضليعاً بمواضيع الأدب و السياسة و بمجرد أن ينهي الحوار الجاد يعود إلى اطلاق النكات و الأحجيات . كل مساء و ما أن يجلس رامي إلى طاولته تحضر له النادلة طلبه المعتاد قهوة حلوة و في كل مرة تحضر له النادلة كوب القهوة يمازحها قائلاً : من أحلى انت ام قهوتي ؟ و مهما كانت الإجابة يضحك الاثنان و يعلق قائلاً : إذاً على مسؤوليتك ! و يحتسي أول رشفة و دائماً يخبرها أنه متأكد أنها أحلى من القهوة.

في إحدى الليالي و بينما رامي جالس في المقهى وفدت مجموعة جديدة من الزبائن و كعادته عرف رامي بنفسه و بدأ في اطلاق النكات التي ضحكت لها المجموعة و حين جاء موعد الأحجيات ، رفع رامي صوته و قال : من الذي يمشي على أربع ، ثم يمشي على ثلاث و يبقى كذلك ؟ ساد الصمت المكان و ارتفع صوت أحد الشباب الجدد يبدو أنك أخطأت في هذه الأحجية يا رامي ، أنا سمعتها من قبل : من يمشي على اربع ثم اثنين ثم يمشي على ثلاثة و هو الإنسان الذي يحبو صغيراً ثم يمشي على قدميه و بعد مرور الزمن يتعكز بعكازه .

قال رامي و من قال أن هذا صحيح دائماً : الإجابة هي رامي و من مثله . نحن نحبو على أربع و من ثم نمشي على ثلاث : قدمين اثنتين و عين واحدة . و ارتدى نظارته الشمسية و تناول عصاه و قال مماًزحاً : أليس كذلك يا عيني و شق طريقه إلى بيته ببصيرته و عصاه . و رامي البصير في زاوية القلب يتأمل اكتمال بدر تلك الليلة .

رامي قد يكون فقد بصره لأسباب عديدة، نتيجة تعرضه لشظية ما ، و قد يكون ولد هكذا و ربما حالته نتيجة حادث سيارة ، لا يهم ذلك في الحقيقة و قد يكون رامي من أي بلد عربي أو غير عربي و قد تكون القهوة فعلاً أحلى من النادلة . لا تهم هذه التفاصيل جميعها ، كل ما يهم أن رامي يحلم بأن يغازل فتاة قائلاً : أراك أجمل من القمر في السماء هناك.

في نهاية هذا النص أحب أن أتوجه أنا رند و رند الصغيرة في زاوية القلب و حديقة الزهور التي نبتت هناك بالشكر لمن خطرت لها فكرة هذه المسابقة ، أزهرتم زاوية في قلبي ، كما وجب التنويه أنني مدينة لقلبي و قلبي اللذين رفضا أن يمر هذا البريد الإلكتروني مرور الكرام. و هذا النص ما هو إلا نتيجة اصرار زاوية قلبي ، أمضيت أكثر من ثلاث ساعات في الليلة السابقة لموعد التسليم أكتب لكم قصتي هذه و رند الصغيرة في زاوية قلبي ترقص و تقفز فرحاً.