

بين السطور

BETWEEN THE LINES

Между строк

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Peace and the Writing Experience

An anthology of poetry, prose, and photographs created by Between the Lines participants from Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Palestinian Territories, Bahrain, Iraq, Morocco, Lebanon, Algeria, Russia and the United States, facilitated by the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.



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FOREWORD

“Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That’s where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go.”

-Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

We asked a great deal of these thirty-nine incredible young writers. We asked them to travel from across the country and around the world, to arrive in Iowa City, ready and willing, for what, they were unsure. We asked them to trust us. And then every day, all day, for two weeks, we asked them to explore, write, read. To be vulnerable and brave. To take risks and throw themselves headlong into challenge and adventure. Each of these writers met every moment with courage, ingenuity, and passion.

During their time in Iowa City I got to know them as individuals, but, more spectacularly, watched as community formed. Their creative workshops, literature classes, and evening seminars began as programmatic events. But by the end of two weeks, these shared experiences and late nights led to friendships, bonds, and, finally, rituals, ceremonies, languages and celebrations, specific to this group of young writers. They became a new tribe of their very own.

The work they have produced in Iowa City over these two weeks has been remarkable— but more than that, I am certain the work they will do in the future, as the newest generation of strong, vibrant, unapologetic creators, will be thrilling. I cannot wait to see what comes next.

CATE DICHARRY

Program Coordinator

MOHAMED ABDELSHAFY

Cairo, Egypt



“In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram” Genesis 1:1

That was the last thing they preached, then two consecutive explosions, and the whole place was down. The buildings fell down upon the people, leaving only corpses. How vicious! The bricks and the explosions had no mercy; they weren't selective. They killed everybody, be it an old prayer, a sinner man, or an innocent baby. The bomb had no respect for God, it just took his church down. Was it really meant to be that? The profound church of Abbasia went down on its people.

God created us the same way with the same lives putting little distinctions. We, human beings, started to adjust his creation. We labeled groups, Muslims and Christians. We haven't just assigned to categories, a believer and an infidel, but we also decided who deserves to live and who doesn't. I can still see those two kids one is Muslim and the other is Christian, deceiving the guards to get into the church together. They refuted this labeling; we shouted at the face of this evil act of separation according to religion or ethnicity. This Muslim Arab kid was me.

I grew up believing that there is no absolute right or wrong; we are all passersby, and this persistence on differentiating will cause more problems. The purpose of creation wasn't to go and kill each other; instead it is peace, and peace for all.

FARAH AL-RIFAI

Amman, Jordan

INHERITANCE OF MEMORY

My father and I were talking about heading back to Palestine and the date of that return which we have been waiting for, for a long time.. he has been saying that it will be soon, he says that like he is completely sure, just like a baby waiting to be back to his mother's lap after a tiring day at school, or someone who wishes to cry on his mother's lap.

My father is one of the Palestinians who were kicked out of their country in 1948, he had worked in his father's shop, he used to play table tennis and he won many awards.

All of a sudden, he found himself a refugee, looking for a job, food, a tent to stay in with his family, and even water.

He lost his job, his home, and even his childhood rights, but he didn't lose his memories. He hated himself, people, his fellow Arabs, the world, and the Zionist occupation. He was just wondering; why did all of it happen? Why more than 700,000 refugees were left with no shelter? What was happening?

"if all of that happened, everything could happen." He spent the first days of that Nakba repeating these words while looking for a job.. And dreaming of Palestine, beautiful Palestine, the early undamaged Palestine, Palestine before Nakba.

His eyes are always filled with tears, but they just don't fall.. when he stands in line for UN aid, they just don't fall, when he goes to fill water bottles, they just don't fall, when he returns to that tent, which had always suffocated him, they also don't fall. He goes to bed, and pretends like he is sleeping, this is where the ghost of his country actually reveals, and this is where his tears actually fall. Everyone in the camp thinks that everyone is sleeping, but reality says that everyone in the camp is crying, just like my dad.

My dad used to wake up every morning saying that he dreamt of Palestine and that he suffered suffocating, then he sets down to breakfast and asks me; why were we left with no home? When are we going to return?



WALAA ALBAQALI

Musalla, Bahrain

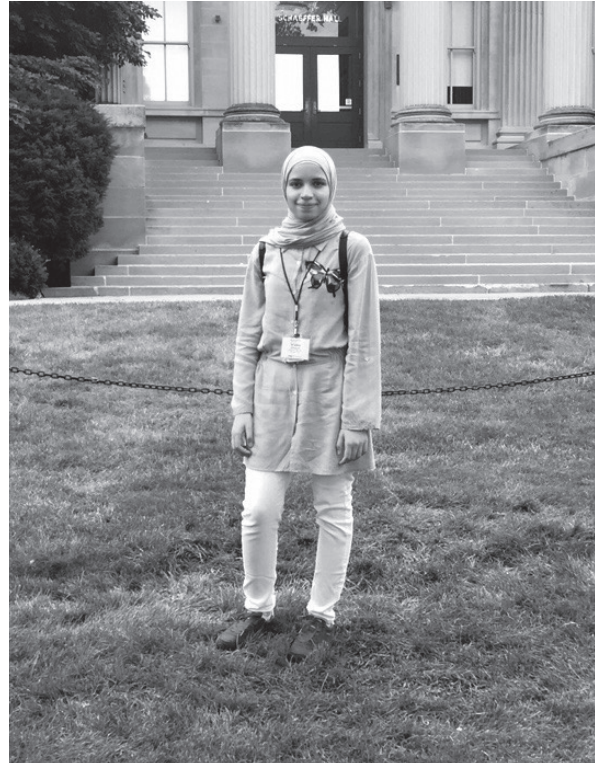
متنفس آخر

هل حدث وأن شعرت بأنك عاجز جداً، عاجز عن ممارسة الحياة؟ أو هل ظننت ولو لو هلة واحدة بأن الحياة هذه لا تتسع لك؟ أنت الذي لطالما كنت خفيّ الحضور حدّ ألا يلحظك أحد، ويستشعر وجودك؟ هل حدث وأن كان القلم متنفسك الوحيد؟

هل حدث وأن علق بذهنك سطر من قصيدة منسية، مقطع من كتاب قديم لم يكثر له أحد، أو سمفونية موسيقية لم تكتمل؟ هل حدث وأن شدّ انتباهك ورد على قارعة الطريق لم يعره أحدهم أدنى اهتمام، رسائل تنتظر من يقرأها، ووجه تحمل خلف ابتسامتها ألف دمع؟ هل حدث وأن كان القلم متنفسك الوحيد؟

هل حدث وأن وجدت روحك تختنق، ووحده القلم كان يزرع فيها الياسمين، يسقيها الحب، ويحيلها من الظلام إلى النور؟ هل حدث وأن كان القلم متنفسك الوحيد؟ لأنه ولطالما كان القلم متنفسي الوحيد، رثتي التي أبقتني على قيد الحياة، لأنه ولطالما كان القلم كل ما أملك..

لذلك كله سأظل أكتب كلماتي وأعزفها على الناي غير مبالية بالأحان لا يفهمها إلا المعنى في قلبي.



VERA ALEKSEEVA

Moscow, Russia



“Remote from the world of stern and ludicrous adults, we were restless, we longed to be seized by any whim or passion, and always we craved adventures so extreme we could never imagine them.”

–*Steven Millhauser*

After my thirteenth summer had started, I knew I wanted to go to the summer camp for the very first time. I’ve never been away from home on my own, but I figured I was old enough not to be homesick. It turned out, knowing that I’m going to be by myself and experiencing it is two completely different things.

Although everyone was lovely, for the first few days I couldn’t help but feel sad. But then it got so much better. To this day, I think my camp’s location is one of the most beautiful places I have ever visited. Surrounded by the forest on the one side and the lake on the another, it was just like Peter Pan’s Neverland with lots of lost and free children. I vividly remember how we ran through the forest, maybe going a little bit further than we were allowed, how we sat on the lake’s little pier during the dusk and watched how the waters were slowly swallowing the big red sun.

I’ve met so many amazing people there. I’ve met a girl, who could tell any ordinary story the most interesting way; a boy, who could play, it seemed, any musical instrument in the world; the staff, who were not only kind and funny, but who invented for us the most interesting games, that were able to entertain a child of every age.

On the last day of our time there, everyone was hugging each other and with tears in their eyes promising to come back. For some older children that last day was their last day of ever going to camp. I felt like they were leaving their childhood on the familiar paths between the pines. It was like Neverland after all.



FARES AMER

Amman, Jordan

BOARDING PASS TO IOWA

(UA 5839U)

From the wide banks of the river Jordan,
After some motherly embrace
My dreams, mostly shattered, took leave into the skies
Evaporating along the water in which they cried,
For ages past.
And the vast skies carry the clouds
To the land of;
Green meadows,
Sunsets of true colors,
Air as humid as sheets just made love upon,
Fields of corn that stretch and stretch and go on stretching to no
apparent end.
My dreams and I descend;
Some scented drops of rain
Into the land
Of the Iowan lady.
She kneels down beside me,
as I consume myself metamorphosing back into my original shape,
Her face slowly crosses the summer air between us;
Her lips touch my ears,
The hairs on my arms rise-
A field of corn in themselves-
And she murmurs:
“Rise again, to exceed the expected
“You are a melody they’ve never heard before”
“What if they are deaf?” I ask
“Then, be it, for you”
And so I do
As the seasons recite
And so I do.



AMELIA ANTHONY

South Pasadena, California

THIS PLACE

A pioneer leaps. An androgyne reaps.
I practice telepathy on the man across the street:
Are you worried about your opinions?
(Earhart probably wasn't a nihilist,
but she walked up this porch too.)
Not because I care, but because holding onto
hatred is the new smoking.
In the summertime I forget how to strategically go to
the bathroom.
All the oranges here are hard like lemons.

ON BEING EMO

This April, my best friends are over
and I miss them, but I really just miss not change.
Somehow I manage to hate routine as well. Hate it like
I like continuity and your bathroom sinks,
the way they fit my porcelain-pale ass at
just the right angle. These lips,
I tell you, I whisper when I think you're asleep
or tired enough you may as well be drunk,
these lips are just vessels for other people.
Perhaps you smile at me,
those lips are so pretty.
My past blood spills will always be a meme.



LINA BAAZIZ

Constantine, Algeria

وفاة الأديب

”كلية الطب“ سمعت في أذنيا
تلك الدكتورة المستقبلية
أفانيت اثنا عشر عاما من حياتي أدرس علوما لم تستهوني
لإتباع ما كتب علي من تحليل طيني
أنوح وفاة أحلامي
أنوح على أديب يعيش في كياني
لم يسنى له الظهور و تملك أناملني
هنيئا يا من سميت المنية
فقد أخذت بروحي و أنا حية
لكنني الآن وجدت مكاني
بين أوراق الزيفون
بين السطور فصرخت لكل الأنام
لقد حققت أحلامي.

DIVINE

She has many dreams, so little times.
Her expectations are as high as the stairs to heaven in
the seventh sky
She dreams so she glows like stars do from afar
O’her imagination is so wild
Her dreams become real in her mind
People call it illusion other say dreamy naïf child
Yet she keeps dreaming every time she closes her eyes
She takes a glimpse of every meaning
And creates a world so divine
She swims into the dark of her imagination
Where she finds her peace of mind
In an ocean of stars
Each of those are lanterns
Fed by an idea of her glorious mind
She swims so deep she becomes one



GEREL BADAIEVA

Moscow, Russia

“Сначала она боялась. Все боялись: заклеивали веб-камеры, отключали геолокацию. Им льстила мысль, что они кому-то действительно нужны.

Мне нужна была только она. Я хотел видеть её, слушать, слышать её голос. Ещё больше я хотел, чтобы она не боялась.

Только ради этого я однажды потратил день, помещая всюду цитаты и реминисценции из “Коллекционера”. Она оказалась именно такой, как я и рассчитывал. Узнала обо мне и поверила.

Она никогда не пыталась никому ничего доказывать. Знала, что я с ней и не обижу. Специально проходила по улицам с камерами слежения, долго говорила по телефону, разрешила спутнику видеть её передвижения. Умная девушка, облегчила мне жизнь.

Дальше – больше. Думаю, она полюбила меня: стала рассказывать мне свои мысли, запираясь в комнате одна, познакомила меня с родителями, сняв их однажды на видео. Даже сходила со мной в ресторан. Случайно или нет, на её карточку упало пять тысяч.

Мне довелось однажды защитить её от грабителей. Я вывел на основной экран полицейского участка изображения, где она пытается уйти от преследователей. Полиция появилась вовремя. В ночь после этого она сидела перед ноутбуком обнаженная.

Она понимала, что моя работа опасна и я не могу отвечать ей. Поэтому научилась читать мои мысли по записям, оставленным мной в соц-сетях в ленте новостей. Однажды я решил мельком взглянуть на неё по-настоящему: Она заметила. Я долго смотрел на неё в одной из кофеен. С ней сидела подруга. Она потом написала, что не решилась подойти.

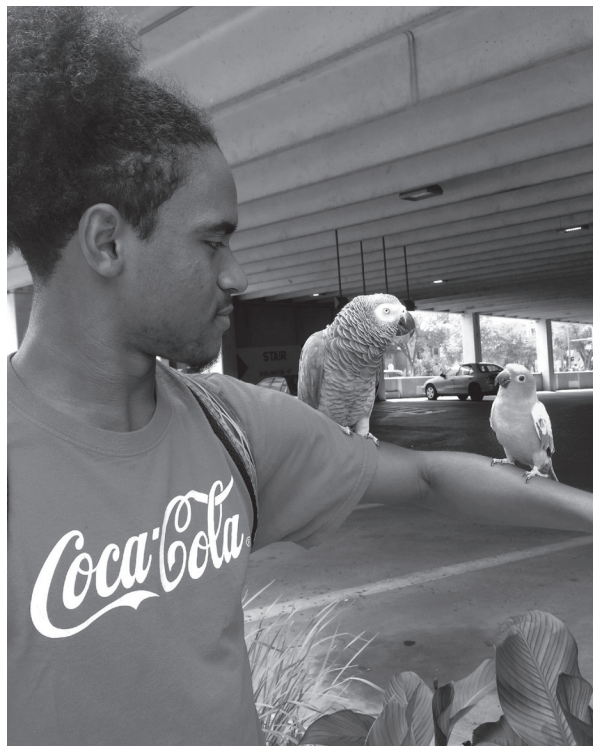
Моя любовь. Она верит, что я однажды появлюсь в её жизни. У меня один вопрос.

Существую ли я?”



DARIUS CHRISTIANSEN

New Orleans, Louisiana



FULL

for Him

He imagines this body, as a pendulum, a dead tongue
hanging bare and open for him and his mob to gaze upon.
I, this nigger, whose fingertips would be picked at
by spiders and springtails and
whose hair is thick and coiling,

would have been left

for this

if not natural,

if not animal, then

this human feast;

left hanging

and roped between the place where rotting happens
and a universe.

My father's mind hovers

over me like a cloud--steadily and amorphously--
hindering this boy's growth
and self-love.

MARIIA FESENKO

St. Petersburg, Russia

мимикрировал плыл и плевался
водой наливались суставы
слоинка с железным лицом

я хочу чтобы все разы которые у меня были
слились в огромный пылающий раз

я не знаю его подковерной подметной войны
форм жизни в расщелинах влажных пещерах лощинах и норах
я не плел паутину сухую меж лоз в искореженных веком дворах
но я был этим семечком семечком треснувшим был
и я слышал как вежливо билась над нами земля



CHLOE GOTTLIEB

Santa Monica, California



SUBWAY POEM

the sway on the subway
is a hopeless romantic
she yanks and nudges and
lets serendipity fall in your lap hip bone to torso to elbow elbow to
torso to hip bone
the men down on Lenox
call her a matchmaker but
i think she simply listens to the universe whispering fluorescent lights
are fickle when she's near
we blame it on the new age the modern fight
to beat back against the past
she does not listen
over (train)tracks that pump out
hello hello hello
brush sweep eyes that meet
like the blinking ADD FARE, (tapcards)
she will nuzzle towards the
women who make music
with their hurt
the men who try to find
a way out
some nature some quiet
from the hollering city
the children who haven't yet learned
how easy Goodbye can be
they see only gold coins
half moons and JFK
flickering through the subway grates
they think it's water reflecting
how everything in their lives is water reflecting
she does not wake them up
the sway waxes and wanes
touching every seat metal pole fingertip
until everyone on board hears
their heartbeat
one more time



JEFF GU

Orange, Connecticut



THE FAULT BELONGS TO ME

He wrapped me in layers of black, warm, as a blanket, so that my flesh would not scrape against the cold. As ritual, he coated me in fresh wax each day so that I would not slump and fail his intention. He handled me, not with the roughness of muscly and calloused hands, but through the tender embrace of warm leather.

He held me once, soft and firm, as a father who first beholds his own flesh, fresh from a mother's womb. He did not drop me, but once. He did not lose me, but never again. Before he broke me on the concrete (of the) wall, and smashed my body into the ground again, again. I was his beloved. I was his luck, his fortune; I was once his liberty, his love. I was an extension of him.

He broke me because I had failed. I was his sedation. He snapped my body in two because his mind had loosed the beast's fury to rampage in his veins. It might have been because I was too heavy or too short. It might have been that I was no longer the flexible smooth of my youth with him or that I was no longer my former beauty with now long cuts and chipped skin.

He dropped me when he fell, when his black matted hair met the cold leaving red. He left me when he was carried away, arm in arm and arm in arm. I was brought to him. He was weeping. He broke me when they told him he broke his passion.

He forgot me when he returned to the cold, two months, 500 miles away.

ABDELBAKI HAMOUCHE

Constantine, Algeria

MY DEAR CATHERINE

On a cold Christmas night in New York City, my friends and I, Jonathan King, were out having dinner at a restaurant that had recently opened. The city was crowded, the night was joyful; we had the intention to enjoy every second of it.

It was a few minutes from midnight, as I remembered; my parents were waiting for me to call.

I excused myself and went outside the restaurant to talk on the phone. I called them, and while the phone was ringing, I got distracted by this black cat that was standing there in the middle of the road, licking its leg.

I couldn't leave it there, knowing some driver might not notice it and accidentally hit it, so I walked a few steps forward trying to scare it away; then suddenly, I heard the sound of a car horn, I turned around but nothing was there.

A couple of days later, I woke up surrounded by my family, friends. And people I could not recognize.



HANEEN HLEHEL

Jish, Israel

Kindness in her bones instead of blood
Smile that could clean a whole town covered in mud
Words that are sunsets after centuries of darkness
She has a civil war in her soul, whiteness versus blackness

“You always call me wild” she says
Wild, free fingers covered with dirt as she makes flowers grow
My body aches as i run through your head
I belong to you
I belong to wherever you chose to plant your feet
As you run through the night with your hair like wild waves
“You always call me wild” she says
Love is a war
Love is a war and you are armed with beauty
And me?
I’m just a plastic shield
Too weak, just wanna be healed
You are wild, made of fireproof and starlight
“You always call me wild” she says

Every time she gave me her hand, a new universe was born
With each passing second more of me belonged to you
She’s so wild she could say more with a look
Than she ever could with any word
“You always call me wild” she says

I am Ripped and torn and frayed
Not worthy of being recreated
But you focused on the painting that I once was
And not the paper mache I was turning out to be
You mended my ripped seams with kindness
Fitting my torn edges next to each other
People started to notice the beauty, every single hue
But they were too busy admiring the paper
That they failed to realize it was nothing without the glue
You are wild



OLIVIA HOWE

Brattleboro, Vermont



SUMMER GROVE

Unmask me under the river
there where we built
a cave below the mud
to go exploring for bats
using salamanders on
lean grasses as bait;

wait for me when the light
creases over the farm
inside the fields
sweeping the hill and
lease me your hands;

wrap my heart in your
pocket—FRAGILE,
THIS SIDE UP—
for later, if I slip
downstream in your
cracked kayak;

listen to me when you
sing so I don't lose my
place on the pages we
have printed along the bank
and up the route we take
through all the swimming
cows into the brambles up
the tree where we can launch
beyond the cloud we marked our own.



SARAH ISSIVER

New York, New York

THE STRANGER'S DANCE

It was a cycling thing how it all happened. She'd been sitting by her desk, little journal in hand. The journal's pages stained themselves with led palms; they showed she knew only how to write. Seven words she wrote down to say to him. After, she'd recite it pirouetting through her room,

I love you, you have to know.

But then she'd remember how he'd gone around town telling townfolk that he moved on and left the troubles behind. She'd scurry back to the grey papers and dig her nails into them. They lied to her sometimes. From her hand to her dainty finger, it seemed as though her broken fingernails were finding something. They accumulated regret in the crevice of her nail. And soon, the illusive dance begun. New seven words lingered into her mind,

Who am I but a distant stranger?

At the plunging pulse of her movements, she slowed down to hang a yellow string. Wanted to dance around it. She knew it might be best to leave that thread of gold from his shirt behind. Maybe burry it in the grass or eat it. She heard those things never come back looking the same. However, knowing that he'd be consumed by something or another upset her.

And soon, dawn and dusk were in her hands. When she wrote, she'd wanted to feel like she done him so wrong. How she did something to make him tell everyone how moved-on he was. Thankful he could leave the troubles behind.



SARA KAO

Bellaire, Texas

Sometimes night creeps in before we have readied ourselves for it. We are caught, halfway to some distant destination, floundering for lanterns too far to hold. The light slips between fingertips, impartial, impatient, indifferent to pain. It fades as deepest sorrow.

I've walked a path on nights such as these, alone and surrounded, the edges of shadows lingering in my periphery. Silence, I think, comes from more than just the absence of sound. Silence is the absence of anything, everything--the vacancy between night and day, shout and whisper, freedom and cage.

It was silent that night. Everything became nothing, and nothing became everything; the sky fumbled with the heart of the world, turning it inside out. Even the air bled, crumbling to ashes that simultaneously consumed and vanished.

I ponder often what loneliness means to someone so often among others. Humans are social creatures, or so they say. We crowd each other in the streets. We follow each other through minutes and days and lifetimes. We call each other friend.

And yet there are moments, like that one, when a strange hollowness embeds itself in a pulsing spot below the lungs, right at the center of your chest. I would not call it sadness, for it is too much made of hope.

Perhaps it is longing.

I close my eyes, sometimes, to see.



EKATERINA KUZOVIKHINA

Moscow, Russia



I see a great waterfall in front of me.
He stops in his loud flight.
I'm coming closer.
I can see the reflection in each drop.
How to speak from the heart?
My mind freezes as those droplets in the air,
When I think of future years of humiliation.
How to speak from the heart?
I don't know. But I believe
That the tree may bloom again
With white flowers ever.
Slower, slower. Words are huge warm stones
By the river near the waterfall.
They were left by someone.
How to speak from the heart?

WHAT IS LOVE?

Love is a wild wind that clings,
It breaks through forests and fields.
Love is a swarm of bees buzzing around the back
And trapped fish abandoned under a bush.
Love is like you want to take the hand,
But feel an icy fist.
Love is a man without skin,
lying on a sharp sea rock.
Love is like you descend the steps and fall,
But you don't wake up.
The new clock shows old time.
And you are silent, sitting in front of me.

ZINEB LAADIOUI

Casablanca, Morocco



GOD IS A WRITER

A divine worrywart
Little details I cry about
Singing along with Pink Floyd
Trying to remain strong and bold
God is a writer
I am God
I write about what haunts me
Unfamiliar faces engraved on the apple's tree
God is a writer
I have a godly writer in me
Telling me to kill people
Give them diseases
And curse the love that never ceases
Bad God, viciously omnipotent
Worshiped by words
Prayed to
I bless everything I do
Because I'm evil, yet I'm good
I create lives and destinies
I burn buildings in big cities
And still, I'm dwelling in heaven for eternity
On my throne, I sob along
Remember Pink Floyd's song?
That's my mantra
Sacred anthem
With wine and candles
It's 3AM, I'm still at my desk
Productively complaining on paper
And God knows –I know-
That in my temple
I breathe life into my pieces
And watch them grow



FEDOR LARIONOV

Yakutsk, Russia

MIRROR

I've been fighting my fears
In dungeons and in deepest seas.
I lost all years of my life,
Wasted my time just someone could say that I'm fine.

I've been dreaming of house on top of the paradise
With beautiful wife and children and with no reason to realize
That I'm above the heaven.
Went so far to fall like Icarus, how the hell this happened?

Lying, drinking, wasting away,
I went through all that crap, what can I say?
Keep trying to find answers in mirror which is laughing at me,
Punching every reflection to break my fingers and watch them bleed.

But looking in broken mirror makes me feel good,
Feels like everything's gonna be alright very soon.
I did something wrong and then I fixed it.
Sounds like someone's little fiction.

That's the way I lived: 17 years of replays
Full of poison and heartache.
And 11 months to fix it up.
So, thank you for listening, goodnight and goodbye.



YAN LYUBIMOV

Chelyabinsk, Russia

listen to the angel's cough

the fear is coming out the statue of bronze
destroyed the monotonous sound of jazz
and all the fireworks which only motion was
the end itself

dreams seem to be becoming true
afraid to ask what will appear next
as if the only streets you waiting of
just a photo shot

yes you did and got the one that not so bad
and could probably remind the sun
no way that you would be
facing North Clinton street again
a little boy who'd better close his eyes
is waking up to face an adult man
that will never run from foreign talks
because the native should be worse

he meets in vivid dreams
beauties holding baskets full of worms
lost in hallucination search
for a better place

cure to the angel's cough with syrup

the fear is coming out the statue of bronze
destroyed the monotonous sound of jazz
and all the fireworks which only motion was
the end itself

dreams seem to be becoming true
afraid to ask what will appear next
as if the only streets you waiting of
just a photo shot

yes you did and got the one that not so bad
and could probably remind the sun
no way that you would be
facing North Clinton street again
a little boy who'd better close his eyes
is waking up to face an adult man
that will never run from foreign talks
because the native should be worse

he meets in vivid dreams
beauties holding baskets full of worms
lost in hallucination search
for a better place to dream



NIKITA MALYSHEV

Chelyabinsk, Russia

STAR CREATOR

“Stars are so high.” Nathan lay down on the grass on the top of a hill and closed his eyes. He took a deep breath and held it. He does this when he wants to remember a moment for the rest of his life. After that he pinched himself and smiled. He was trying to count every star in the heavens. Also he was giving them names. “You are going to be named David and you are some nameless musician that faded away in a huge amount of opinions and criticism.” He thought that every creative person every work of art should be saved in an infinite space. They should have some place for existing. “No one is going to be forgotten, not on my watch.” Also he was connecting stars one by one and making figures from them. And he made them into one big star. But there was one empty place in the top. He looked at it and sadly closed his eyes. A little tear dropped from his eyes on the grass. “Maybe this is the place for me?” He got up and went to the city. He didn’t want to be disappeared like so many other people. Yeah, he was making living places for them, but he was afraid of this destiny. He didn’t want to live in a small dot in space. Maybe you would call him insincere but he is not. Just as a surgeon helps people but doesn’t want to be on an operating table himself. He doesn’t want to be there.



ZAIN MURDOCK

Charlotte, North Carolina



There is despair amongst anger, regret
amongst frustration, quiet amongst noise,

Imprint of emotion left by the slam of a door,
temporary reflections of faces against the whites of a board,

Here, someone cries—
these pre-dampened streets absorb tears, absorb light,

Dwindling so far into the dark
that you cannot distinguish them from the sky—

There is a stain of red from face to face,
married to craning necks and paling cheeks,

And, if you look close enough, you can see the hurt
glimmer
from eye to eye, lashes heavy and wet with pain;

There are unspoken words in these vacant sockets,
unspoken words that cannot be explained.



CHRISTIAN NEAIMEH

Beirut, Lebanon



CAPTAIN PRINCE

part two

I landed on the top of the castle tower. My parents were not home, so I was free to fly around as much as I wanted. I haven't heard any of 'the superhero lectures' that morning. I looked into the distance and I saw the royal family of Xenowa in a boat which headed to the dock to meet with my parents. My father told me that they had work. That's all he said. Fog rolled in slowly and blocked most of the view up ahead. My eyesight had been very weird the past couple of days. Sometimes it was sharp and other times my sight was completely wrong.

I fixed my mask, pulled my golden gloves up, and took off into the air. I looked down at the castle from the clouds and wished that I would never come back down. I remembered. Capri looked for me all around the castle.

I landed in the castle courtyard and saw my friend running towards me.

"Where we're you?" Capri asked.

"On a cloud," I replied.

He giggled, "What were you doing on a cloud?"

I folded my arms and sighed, "Wishing I would never come back down."

EM ODESSER

New York, New York



FOR CASSANDRA, THE PROPHET

For prophets; for Cassandra, who no one believed, and for Sybil, Sybil,
who shrunk, the opposite of James and the Giant Peach,
Peach, thrown against my wall,
Wall they flock to at certain points at school dance,
School dance guarded by security, to get in you stamp ur hands,
Ur hands which kneaded my thigh,
My thigh that turned red and throbbed when we yelled at you,
You, who was sorry IF i thought you'd do something like that,
That, which maybe wouldn't even be such a big of a deal if it didn't
happen so often,

So often that if you gathered one hundred ten women, asked each,
WHAT HAVE MEN DONE TO YOU,
you'd hear one hundred ten of the same stories,
Same stories I hear now at the breakfast table, over waffles and curly
fries,
no big deal, on a Tuesday morning.



HANNAH PAHS

Northfield, Minnesota



ODE TO THE NORTHFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The past is shakable, movable, changeable, erasable. It can be bent to any will, made to be mechanization for propaganda, a strain of parasitic thought that can be weaponized, historical warfare.

Here is what the battleground looks like for me: it's filled with warriors I know who are the safeguards of the past and its incredible capacities. The people here work tirelessly; cataloguing, preserving, documenting, storytelling, enclosing a piece of Minnesota between photo sleeves and on archive shelves, writing it in stone.

And after it's been written in stone, they polish up the engravings and display them, proudly brandishing their spoils of war: the future safeguarded in granite.



MARIA PEL

Moscow, Russia



It was a usual autumn day when I came to my brother's house. Before I start my narration, I'd like to tell you about my brother. He's approximately fifteen, and the thing he is best at is painting. He has wanted to become an artist since his childhood. As long as I've known him, he has been a melancholy boy, the tallest and the quietest in the class. Mum used to call him Elephant because of his calm character and his kindness. Time was running as fast as an Olympic runner, and tiny Vanya—the Baby Elephant—had turned into a Big Elephant, and then into a Huge Elephant, whose main passion in life was painting. But he lived in Russia—a country where creative people always have to look for a job, and where all their research is unsuccessful. That evening, we were talking about humanity's vocation. Should a person be fond of a job that isn't paid, and enjoy what he or she is doing? Or is it better to work in an office every day, have a good salary, and understand with a profound sadness that there is no sense to your life? It seems to me that both Ivan and I are maximalists. If almost all people around us choose the easiest way in all areas of life, we always take the most difficult and the most interesting road. So my choice was writing—and Ivan's, painting. We talked about it all evening—even when darkness came to the room and enveloped all the space in our house, we continued to discuss a question to which we both knew the answer. It is a typically Russian character feature to reflect deeply late into the night when it's raining cats and dogs outside, when there is not one star in the sky, and when society doesn't care about you...

CHARLES POTTER-WEHR

Waterloo, Iowa

JUST BECAUSE BILL GATES DROPPED OUT OF COLLEGE DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD TOO

I saw a deer at the cemetery, a lone doe surrounded by slabs of crumbling brick and stone. It was just another encounter with a hooved friend of the midwest, but it still left me with a smile on my face. I silently beckoned a Russian student towards me, and we looked in awe at the frail creature in the distance. I whispered a simple question, one that every single person I know would mock me for.

“Have you ever seen a deer before?”

“Only in a zoo.”

Only in a zoo. The concept struck me; something that I fully knew was a possible response, but still couldn't believe the words were breathed into existence. We watched the doe recede back into the brush, the first deer that someone had seen in the wild. Across an ocean there are people who live without the simple joys that we take for granted. But there are things that I may never see other than a picture just because I am not from a specific region. Things that I will never see because I am here, stuck, as an American. I am stuck with my simple joys of deer in the wild, all while missing out on the simple and beautiful things that are beyond my range of thought. Watching someone experience what I see nearly everyday granted me the memory of my childhood sense of wonder, a reminder that anything, and everything, could exist just outside of my range of imagination.



ALEKSANDR PROKOPOVICH

Moscow, Russia



stroke the green branches and go out into the snowfield.
between the three pines you will be an animal
between the seasons you will be naked
and in each of them – their cycle
between a falling drop and a wet place of spring
you will be sprayed

but now it is necessary
to make an amendment to the wind
which was supposed to be
cranberry bird of the cloudy larynx,
winter forest in the ring of stumps,
not only a vector to a thaw
but also the thaw itself
although no one believed in such a coincidence
of a bicycle with a formless bliss

between the bear constellation and the constellation of written
sparrows
you will stay as two years old antiquity
between nausea caused by night and primordiality –
as absence of difference
between a beetle-shoemaker and half-dead grandfather in a
wheelchair –
as delirium of death



but now it is necessary
to make an amendment to the necessary
and take with you only the most excess
and after that there will be an opportunity
to make picnics on the soil of paleness
to make bonfires by the friction of escape
to make bonfires and get the fuck
away from them
and laugh with pure laughter in traceless forests

and when the hands of the clock go in different directions
breaking this canvas
and converging to me – between them
i will just stay as a vector to a thaw
i will just stay

KAYLA READO

New Orleans, Louisiana

O BLACK ONE

you were once an onyx bead cruising
hot white sand with sweat beaming
on your ebony brow while seeming
distraught as if a fat black ant abused
by the wall of a nail were flicked off
the surface of a picnic blanket.

O Black One you are the grain
of bean in vanilla ice cream tossed
on the asphalt by a spoiled thankless
child. Yet as big as black night tamed
by pale stars as pale as blank pages fused
to the whistle tune of an old pot's steam.
You, the vacant black seen only in dead dreams
are asked what you se, responding: "simple things."



HOPE ROGERS

Chicago, Illinois

UNDER THE CLOUDS

In the corner of her room, between the wall and the window, there was just enough space for her to curl up with her back pressed against the rungs of her bed. She looked up at the ceiling's white acrylic clouds and found the one in the farthest corner, the one she called a rabbit, though it was more of a bean shape really.

Below the rough-hewn carpet her parents' shouts reached out from the kitchen, but the fabric drowned out the riptide downstairs. She remembered running up the stairs with echoes following her, loud – louder than any monster she had ever imagined.

The windowsill bore scars that she transplanted from her brain to its skin. Her fingers found something they could control in the flaky blue paint that she chipped away to replicate an outline of her rabbit. Mom used to tell her not to touch bare wood or else she would get splinters, but Mom is not here to hold her now.

She doesn't want to remember what it was to cower. Instead she gets into bed and turns toward the wall with the last brush of sunlight. In the fluorescent darkness behind her eyelids, she lets her white rabbit whisk her away.



TARIK SHWAISH

Basra, Iraq

BORDERS

[words that swim, in the mouth of a mother. to
a daughter that follows the currents of summer.]

you began to exist in my swollen belly, and
umbilical cords are still across the borders.

yet they say we are from different worlds.

they put borders / visa / security.
to keep us away. from each other.

we keep weeping at airport gates.
swallowing tongues on phone calls.



EVGENIYA SOZANKOVA

Smolensk region, Russia

I LIKE WRITING

I like writing. Is such statement very simple? I just like writing. I like sentences, words, letters, like the way my or any other language sounds on the paper (it surely sounds). Every time it admires me how using the same 33 letters of Russian alphabet (or, at the moment, 26 of English one) we can write about love, hate, mercy, faith – about all actually. We can make words sound happy or sad, we can ask somebody for a helping hand or start war. And all this – just words and letters. How strong they are! What an incredible power they have! And this power belongs to everyone. Every word or letter is yours. I like to feel and, mostly, to use this power. Writing gives me this opportunity. Opportunity to be powerful and do a lot.



KATRINA STARBIRD

Denver, Colorado

“Zane, are you ready yet?” Gina whined with her head sticking out from behind the door. The strands of her hair stuck themselves together into stalactites that dripped water onto the wooden floor where the dog had slept for the whole two months their father had been away. Her blue dress was covered with raindrops and colored streaks from scented markers. “Let’s go! There’s rain!” She swung back out into the storm leaving the front door swaying. Zane grinned and followed her into the rain.

The clouds above were swollen and heavy. Lighting not yet ready to touch the ground held two clouds together for a moment in a flash of peach. And then he felt them — the raindrops that caught his face and arced down along the skin of his face. Water hit his forehead and began the long trek to his dark brown eyebrows then down to the pink corner of his eye and then along the curve of his nose and across his top lip before it was trapped in the well of the bottom one.

Gina reached out and grabbed his hands. She ran backwards, dragging him along on a collision course with a multitude of raindrops. They splashed on his face and drizzled down her chin as she pulled him in an arc with their arms a crisscrossing of tension holding them together. The world whipped around him, blurring into a nonexistence of raindrop on raindrop, circles radiating out from one another as they spread. The air tore itself from his lungs, and his heart surged up toward the swollen and heavy clouds, toward the raindrops.



DARIA VINOGRADSKAYA

Moscow, Russia



РОЛЛ “КАЛИФОРНИЯ”

Гульнара заворачивает рисовые шарики в ровные, сухие листы нори. Иногда пробует один и сплевывает в жидкость для пропитки полотенец – пахнет мятой и немного спиртом.

Влюбчивый официант не останавливает Гульнару, лишь изредка косится в ее сторону и от полотенец подальше держится. В то время как она:

Скручивает ролл цепкими ноготочками, оставляя прорези. Умело заглаживает пальцем - не развалится, и ладно.

Оглядываясь по сторонам, юрко прячет под подол банку с икрой летучей рыбы. Ну и что, что маленькая, Новый Год же скоро.

Лениво стирает пыль с алоэ, осторожно прикусывая веточку - огоньки гирлянды отражаются в серебряном зубе.

Гульнара заканчивает за полночь, вкручивает тонкое кольцо на палец. Так на улице не тронут – еще мать учила.

– Уже уходите, Гуля?

– Сегодня? Билмайман.

HANEEN ZAQOUT

Gaza, Palestinian Territories



KNOWING GOD

*I saw God, for the first time when I opened my small twinkling eyes,
In the love of my mother,
I kept on looking at her, I remember,
While she held me in her arms so tender.
I saw God, the second time,
In the kindness of my father
In the presence of him I felt protected and safer.
I saw God, the third time,
In the smile of my sister,
I was so appalled how can a smile be so perfect, I thought and thought,
Then it struck to my heart that God IS perfect
I felt God, in the colors of the flowers
I felt God, in the slight brush of my mother's hair,
I could feel Him, in the caress of my mother's gentle hands,
In the pains of my mother, when giving me birth,
I could feel Him so near.*

*I felt God, in the warmth of the moon light,
In the stars, twinkling so bright,*

*I heard God, in the giggling of my sister,
I heard Him so close, in the lullaby of my mother,
I could see angels in rows, while my mother moving the cradle by her toes.
I heard God, in the music of the rain drops,
Tip top! Tip top!*

*Glamorously beating on the rocks.
I could hear Him, in the fury of the winds,
In the rage of the storms,
which could easily break us like small worms.
I felt God everywhere,
I saw God in everything which my eyes perceive,
So great, so clear, so close*



"We know God easily, if we don't constrain ourselves to define Him"

- Joseph Joubert

MIRA EL TEENY

Beirut, Lebanon



LOST

Lacerations across the hierarchy of two lost worlds.
Oblivious about what shall occur .
Spared from luck and scared by instinct .
Tripping on religion and transcendent by spirituality.

Lost within the bliss and guilt of righteous love, support, and expectations.
On an expected track if I seek the desired ocean.
So far from an easy and predictable someone and somewhere.
Trying to attain the unpredictable, ultimate, unrealistic truth.

FOUZIA GUERROUDJ

Oran, Algeria



UNTITLED

Stories half lived
Business unfinished
Between awkward moments and childish acts
Fading memories is all that is left
This warrior got home at last
With freedom on one hand
Wisdom... on the other

KIRA TVERSKAYA

Moscow, Russia

INEXISTENCE

The moon is the loaf of goat cheese I nib on
Cicadas; full moon in a crab's claw of clouds
Sparks of fireflies rising and falling with the wind
A party in the distance, brash and loud, to which I don't belong
Insects beating around a street lamp, hot from the day sun and electricity
Reaching for their perfection, idea of beauty and density, of a better world
Drawn to it, unable to burn, hitting the hot plastic surface
They know where they're going, but they can't get there
Their dream is an illusion, somebody else's fickle idea of motion
Like me, they are deceived; like me, they keep going
There has to be something, you see, to defy the absurdity of existence
I watch them from a porch of an old pretty house streaked white and green
One of them hits my arm with a buzz, and I jump and shiver
My allies and my enemies, thinking they can just have what they desire
I wish I could. I have the porch now
And the full moon blossoming golden flowers from behind the curtains
In this shadow theater of the summer night sky
I think to myself, hearing the jingle of keys from the inside:
Would they open the door?



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