

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 China, Russia, the United States, and nine Arabic-speaking countries in the Near East and Northern Africa, facilitated by the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

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FOREWORD

“Traveling- it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.”
- Ibn Battuta

On a humid Iowa City afternoon, participants of Between the Lines (BTL) attend a special writing workshop led by alumni of the National Student Poets Program, who ask everyone to consider what lines they exist between. The question keeps unfolding, reshaping itself; soon the discussion is addressing what spaces are being jointly created by everyone’s complex identities—as writers, as young adults coming together from vastly different regions of the world, as engaged thinkers, readers, and speakers. It is several days in, the start of the program already seems weeks earlier, and the stillness of initial uncertainties has given way to a steady pulse of activity that will beat on, throughout the program. By the end, when what was ever-so-subtly under formation will have revealed itself—like a story that needed telling—as a distinct and extraordinary community of young writers from 9 countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, 8 cities in Russia, 10 states within the U.S., and for the first time, China.

This community, as Ibn Battuta writes of travel, leaves me speechless. During this intensive two-week program, there is a mystery at play that I am unable to fully articulate to anyone who has not witnessed BTL firsthand. It is in the small moments, the moments of dialogue and dancing, in the overhearing of a story read aloud, in the constructive discussions of one’s future novel: these are all a part of the pulse. It is seeing a Russian student teach an Arabic student the Russian alphabet on a bumpy bus ride to a Ramadan dinner celebration, it is singing “Happy Birthday” in three different languages over a morning meeting, and it is the awe-inspiring performance of students who recite their work confident in the embrace of their BTL family. What makes Between the Lines special is not only its twofold purpose of creative writing and cultural exchange, but also how it works to build a world in which differences and rigid boundaries evaporate under the scrutiny of curious minds. Iowa City has long served as an idyllic environment, an incubator for great literary minds: it is designated as the only UNESCO City of Literature in the U.S. But the city truly grows beyond itself when it brings together a generation of youth willing to take seriously the human condition.

This anthology serves as an archive of those voices and experiences of Between the Lines 2015, and is dedicated to the many people involved in making the program a success. It is for you we anthologize our world—a world of jet lag, exhaustion, late night literary salons merged with Ramadan dinners, special events including a peace and playwriting workshop, slam poetry, ongoing translation workshops, daily writing and literature classes, and a shared bond that unites all the skilled writers who have found their community in Iowa City; or, more specifically, at the International Writing Program.

Lisa Daily
Program Coordinator

Orwa Abu Mukh

Baqā Al-Gharbia, Haifa Dis., Israel

Phoenix

Blazing fire within me.
Flames in my heart.
Flames in my mind.
Flames in my blood.

Delma, thoughts and raging storms.
A howling tornado of the future,
Sparkling with endless lightnings,
Burning the inner me, setting me on fire. Making
My soul on fire, My bones on fire, My cords on fire.

I became fire.
I am fire.
My DNA is fire.
I'm the bird of fire.
Bursting from flames of rage, irritation and soreness.

Life designed and sketched it's own scars on my gentle skin,
she even went deeper with the sketching, and deeper.
She reached my innocent flesh, she's ripping me off, she's ...



Different

Angelic genes, drops o nectar.
From heavens they fell.
In their blood veins they spread.
Luxuriating, blooming and blossoming.
With every heart beat, with every breath,
They provide the sprouts of the wings.
Make them grow stronger, longer and wider
Downy feathers, as pure as their hearts.
A golden halo of tenderness.
They became distinctive, but,
Jealousy, hatred and envy.
Ruling the minds, mocking the brutish souls.
Demons lived through them.
Cutting the angelic wings then burn them.

They are wingless people now.
The glimpse of love faded away.
The shiny halo faded away.
The brightness of their faces faded away.

The war of distraction won the battle,
Angels vs. Demons.

The demons won, turning angels into demons.

Hajir Al Zadjali

Muscat, Oman

There used to be a time when school was like your second home,
when your teachers were like your parents,
and your classmates were your siblings.
There used to be a time when going to school didn't feel like walking into
a war zone, where names were fired like bullets through the hallways,
and jeers didn't erupt into nuclear explosions whose radioactive decay can still be
smelled hours after every one was gone.

It wasn't always like this,
I never had to worry about walking alone,
but now I have to fear the stares that will run through me like radar beams,
burning a mark on me that reads 'loner' or 'outsider' or 'freak'.
Planting the notion in me that I was born to walk on this perpetual tight rope destined for a great and painful
fall.

It wasn't always like this,
bullet proof vests having to be worn to every class,
and pockets stocked with Swiss knives and machetes ready to attack,
or as they like to call it: self defense.
Or when those around you make you feel like you're a sample of a minuscule substance under a microscope,
that can be easily crushed between two forefingers.

It wasn't always like this,
things that fill up our lunch plates mattering more than the echoes of weeping young girls in the
bathroom stalls,

Or when exams nothing but the joke repeated to us until it is no longer funny,
And smiles, smiles here hide secrets and cost more than what our parents make in an entire year.
If you ever pass the gates of our school, I bet that you'd never see all of this,
But what you might see is the remains of scars in our shadows, and bruises in our souls,
And all the words we have left unspoken, because we were taught to bite our tongues.



Hussein Al-Mshttawi

Baghdad, Iraq

" وراء هُروبِ أيامٍ عندَ كائناتٍ لم تُخلقِ بعد "

عندما تهريين يوماً وراء ضوءٍ وعتمةٍ يتقاسمان الوجود

أرغب أن أموت تحت مصباحٍ عندما تأملُكِ يقول :

معظم الظلام هو المنطقة تحت المصباح

الجميع يرتجف ، يرتقب مفخخاتٍ تحرث الشوارع والمرايا

الحياة أيضاً ، المرايا والغرف

القلق في نقطةٍ أخرى محتملةٍ للحياة حيث وجهٌ شاحبٌ وإلهٍ مهزوم .

تركت وجهك في حراسة الأيام

هربت من صوتِ القلق

عندما أشاروا إلى كائناتٍ من حولنا لم تخلق بعد .



Reem Badr

Cairo, Egypt

Excerpt of (an homage to those who never make it out)

The last to jump was the girl. She forced herself to stand on her torn, aching feet, to forget her grief, to let go of her fear and take the plunge. The blackness surrounded her. It permeated her senses until there was nothing. There was not even a rush of air as she kept falling. It was almost peaceful, until it wasn't.

The utter stillness of the jump was gone as quickly as it came. It was replaced by a cacophony of noises. Howls and roars and the shrilling cries of wounded animals assaulted the girl's senses. She felt branches and leaves scratching her, reopening her wounds, rekindling her pain as she rapidly plummeted to the ground. The thud came, but it was muffled by a bed of leaves, which, while it did not make the fall painless, it at least made it not lethal. The girl sat up, looked around and realized she landed in the middle of some kind of jungle. There were towering trees that blocked any light from above and the sound of running water with no identifiable source. The cries of the wild inhabitants of this place got louder with every moment, instilling a sense of heartache that completely consumed the girl, and the boys before her. The pain in the cries chilled the prisoners to their bones. It made the hairs on their arms stand in attention. Whatever fight in their spirits the agony of their aching bodies did not completely wipe out was being chipped away little by little. One of the boys actually curled into a ball and started whimpering. Animalistic sounds started coming out as in from the pit of his very soul, making the others reach the harrowing realization that the agonized screams were not those of animals after all. They attempted to get him to break from his almost catatonic state but to no avail. He was gone. They are now only three.

كبريائي بيهز قضبان سجنه. كبريائي خارج عن السيطرة. كبريائي لو اتساب، هيدمر كل اللي حواليه.
كبريائي جبان. كبريائي عنيد. كبريائي مينفعش التفاهم معاه. كبريائي نرجسي من الطراز الأول. كبريائي محدود
الرؤية. كبريائي في حالة إنكار للواقع.
كبريائي بيتدخل في كل حاجة في حياتي. كبريائي ميفكرش غير في نفسه.
كبريائي بيحاربني بكل ما عنده. كبريائي قطع علاقته بأنايتي، بعقلي، بكل حاجة كانت في صفه في يوم من الأيام.
كبريائي بيحارب لوحده.
كبريائي مبيستسلمش.
كبريائي لو انتصر.....



Shunu Baydalakov

Gorno-Altaiisk, Russia



Весь вспотевший, я кручу педали соседского старого велосипеда, неизвестно сколько ему лет, возможно, он даже старше меня. Еще около трехсот пятидесяти метров и мне надо повернуть налево, затем направо, а после снова налево, там меня уже ждут. Здесь вчера видели двадцатипятилетнего подвыпившего Бетховена с совсем еще юным Блоком. Александр читал свою «Незнакомку», а Людвиг ван пытался услышать его через слуховой аппарат. Эх, как же прекрасен их союз! Но мне не стоит отвлекаться, надо торопиться, иначе матушка снова будет ругаться. Ей совсем наскучил наш неудобный диван, и поэтому я должен договориться о покупке нового. Дядюшка Алтман сказал, что поможет.

Пот льется ручьем. Полночи не спал – с ребятами играли в карты. Совсем устал.

Все-таки неудобно в городе с узкими улочками – на рассвете повсюду валяется мусор, совсем не объедешь..

«А на этой улице не так грязно как на предыдущей», - подметил я для себя. Где-то неподалеку послышалась шестая симфония Моцарта, скорее всего, это Агнета, рано проснулась, и заодно решила разбудить всех соседей. Но, вынужден признать, играет она изумительно. Не каждый так сможет. Очень жаль, что она не смогла поступить в музыкальную академию - ей сказали, что необходимо закончить музыкальную школу, но так как она не имела начального образования, получить высшего не смогла. С тех пор Агнета вот так и играет сама для себя. Редкий случай когда ее пригласят выступить в ресторане или еще на каком мероприятии. В основном, когда с деньгами у нее туговато, она выходит на улицу и начинает исполнять знаменитые симфонии и сюиты. В этом районе редко посторонние ходят, поэтому свои же ей платят, в большинстве из жалости и уважения к ее таланту. Помнится, однажды, проходя мимо, после посиделок с парнями в кабаке, я услышал ее скрипку. Подошел поближе, она играла на улице, около двух купидонов. Сперва она заставила плакать мое, одурманенное вином, сердце, а после и меня самого. Растроганный до слез, я побежал домой, чтобы дать что-нибудь в ответ за такой подарок для души. К сожалению, денег я не нашел. Но тогда мой взгляд упал на спящего щеночка, которого привез мне брат Леон из Баварии. Взяв его на руки, я увидел на столе лежащий мамин яблочный пирог, засунув его подмышку, поспешил к уличной музыкантке. Когда принес ей щенка, она улыбнулась и ласково спросила: «Зачем же мне такой славный щенок, когда я себя не могу прокормить?», на что я заикаясь ответил: « Возьми его, пусть просто радуется тебе, а кормить его я буду. Буду каждый день приходить и кормить». Она посмотрела на меня своими чистыми глазами и поцеловала в щечку.



Да, то был прекрасный вечер. Ладно, мне надо торопиться, осталось совсем ничего. Каким бы не был старый велосипед, но ехал он уверенно, разве что неровная каменная плитка зачастую отдавалась на амортизации моего транспорта. И вот я уже слышу голос дяди, он просит меня поторопиться, продавец собирается скоро уезжать. Около его дома стояла бежевая софа, мне сказали, что я могу ее забрать. Дядюшка Алтман попрощался со знакомым и побрел к себе. А я тем временем присел на новенькую мебель и уснул от усталости.

Живите самыми теплыми и светлыми воспоминаниями.

Julie Chernova

Smolensk, Russia

sorry sweetheart
i will need this window open
to hear the sound that separates us and connects us
the voice that sounds both perfect and wretched
like an unexpressed love
hidden deep inside
waiting to be shown and accepted
my hands are shaking
hand
holding the body itself
loving it, cherishing it, giving it tenderness
i am insecure
i have to hide behind the great wall of glass and con-
stantly mend it
a tiny soft hand pets me
the basement is cold
the air is cold
i see you from the great height
sorry sweetheart
i will need this window open
so you can look out of it
and say
beautiful
*



I have a friend who writes about angels
With wings and without
They are children
They are prophets
They are vagabonds
I have a friend who loves angels
With wings and without
They sneak into your room when you are asleep
They are rays of sunlight
lighting the dust and turning it into magic powder
I have a friend who is an angel
Sometimes with wings and sometimes
Without
*



Flames

Against my thighs, my hands throb like my father's footsteps.
Black smudges on my fingernails and a bubbling wound
on my thumb betray my sinful revenge.

My town is a Denny's, a Shell, a hunting lodge
carved into the side of a red cliff.
In summer, at the lodge, the antlers mounted above the door
frown like brows.

My sister's dollhouse is a spectacle of light,
a half-inch of gasoline
from the can in the garage,
scrape of the match-head
who bites the flesh off my thumb,
the heat of a bittersweet smell erupting into the air.

Flames
blossoming from the tiny doors and windows
(through which my sister's dolls blankly stare)
like unattended wisteria.

When I show my sister the blackened dollhouse,
she looks at me, and in silence she turns away.
so that I must pick up the ruined toy
and throw it in the rusty blue dumpster
behind our house.

Two summers past, the air was dwindling at the fair
where the goldfish sat idly in their bowls.
We were throwing balls to win a fish.
I won. She cried.
In the parking lot, I gave her the fish,
who swam in his bag
like a tiny flame.



Margaret Davey

Omaha, Nebraska



On Plucking Petals From Your Heart

Pluck: people are only made of so many stars,
and you are scratching them off like scabs
falling, bleeding, healing, scabbing, picking again.

Pluck: your universe is numbered.
if the lights went out above you, would you be surprised?
close your eyes.

Pluck: He had brown eyes. you probably didn't notice
when you were looking for his hands—
ten fingers. like petals.

Pluck: when He left, you boiled yourself in the bathtub
pulled out pieces of your hair and marveled
at how pretty dead things can be.

Pluck: stars only shine if they are burning alive
when the bonfire ends, we go to sleep
but you are wide awake, alone in the dark. Watching.

Mourning

There is a beauty in stillness
The wet rush of daybreak
Rivers pouring down into our mouths heavy
Warm
We never stop.

“You love me, don't you?”
There is a beauty in an unanswered question
In the morning we stretch our arms
Claw at elusive cracks and shivers
We are born popping

And rot waiting for answers we shouldn't want
There is a beauty in wondering
Morning isn't over until we look in the mirror
To make sure we are still there

Don't I love you?

Still.



Mohammed El Wahabi

Tangier, Morocco

الغابة و الماء و التراب و الهواء و الحقول و الورود. وما حلمك؟ أحلم أن أطير. ومما تخافين؟ أجابت والدمع يترقق في محجريها كاللؤلؤ: أخاف من السقوط. لكن ماذا تع..
غادرت مسرعة دون أن تترك لي مجالاً لاستوضح. آخر ما رأيت منها كان شعرها الأسود المتطاير وهي تجري، وقامت الخيزرانية وهي تنساب وسط المارة. سرقت قلبي و طارت بعيداً، و لم أرها بعد ذلك أبداً.
أسرب القطا هل لي من يعيرني جناحه لعلني إلى من قد هويت أطير لم يكن حلماً.



كان حقيقة بل أكثر من ذلك كان شعاع أمل في ليل شعائري المدلهم . رأيت نفسي فيها كأنها مرآة من بلاد العجائب . كنت كذاك الأمير الذي كانت فردة الحذاء هي الخيط الوحيد الذي يربطه بمعشوقته. هي مخطوطتي المفقودة و طوق نجاتي وإكسير الحياة. هي الشطر الأخير من قصيدة عمودية أبت إلا أن لا تنتهي. قالوا أن الحب من النظرة الأولى خرافة بل جنون. فما قولهم في أي أحببتها حتى قبل أن أراها. سكرت من أديم حسنها زما يسموا على الزمن. دقات قلبيبا توحدنا، تناغمنا في صمت بصرم أذن الزمان. شنقت نفسي بجذائلها المتموجة مرة و ثانية و ثالثة حتى اختلط علي الموت و الحياة. تلامست يدانا في غفلة من القدر. وتحت ضوء القمر و أشعة الشمس التقت شفاهنا في قبلة سرمدية أحييت براكين الأرض كلها. رفرق قلبي لها وحدها، ولن يرفرف لأخرى بعدها أبداً.

كلامها كله أحاجي، ظننت في الأول أنها تتحدث بلغة غير لغة البشر. كنت مخطئاً و لم أكن، كانت تتحدث حديث القلوب، أغنية ملائكية تناجي الروح و تحفر في سماء الشعور حفراً عميقة و موحلة. ذكرتني بطائر اسمه سعدون كنت قد قرأت عنه في قصة، وخط وخط. و بعضفور ظل من الشباك كنت قد سمعت عنه في أغنية. هجر الجميع إلى جبل قاف. بحثت عنها و لم أجدها، قالت أنها أيضاً تحلم ب الطيران. ربما قد سبقتنني إلى تلك الأرض , لعلها لهذا السبب كانت تجري, لعلها وجدت الجواب نفس اليوم الذي التقيتها فيه.
أسرب القطا هل لي من يعيرني جناحه لعلني إلى من قد هويت أطير.



انتظريني أنا أت. أخيراً حانت لحظة الوداع . لست أسفا على شيء بالقدر الذي أسف على فراق طيور هذا العالم المأسورة. ربما قد أسقط قبل وصولي إلى الجبل، وربما قد أنجح و أعوذ ذات يوم إلى هذه البلاد فاتحاً , وأضيف فصلاً إلى الفصول الأربعة يكون خلاله موسم الهجرة إلى بلاد الطيور. أشغل على الجهاز مقطوعة الفصول الأربعة ليفالدي، أحب المقطوعات إلى قلبي وأفضلها لإحياء طقسي الأخير. يبدو لي العالم أسفلي صغيراً و منكمشاً، وأنا شامخ وسامق كالجبال. ولأول مرة أحس بالراحة. حان الوقت، أشعر أنني أكبر وأتشمخ ,يجدر بي الإسراع قبل أن ينوء البرج بالحمل فيهوي. الرياح تنادي و أصوات العصافير تتردد في المدى متماهية مع معزوفة الفصول. لن أستسلم إليك يا خوف، العصافير تنادي، و حلمي يبعد عني قيد أنملة.

اتتمنت الرياح على جسدي و طرت. لا أعلم كيف، ولا أريد أن أعلم. يد تلقفتني في رحاب السماء و حملتني بعيداً بعيداً. كانت يدا دافئة وفي ضخامة سفينة نوح . شعرت بالدوار و تهاقت في ذهني الصور و الأصوات في نوستالجية قاتمة . رأيت قبور أبي و جدتي و البواب العجوز و مدرس اللغة العربية . ماتوا كلهم منذ زمن بعيد .كنت في مقبرة موحشة و مخيفة، و قبور أحبتي متراسة كصناديق الكبريت، ثمة في آخر الطابور قبر لا أعلم لمن. أهو لأمي ... أختي ساكنته.. أم هو لي؟؟ ... البرد يلفح وجهي كضربات المروحة. فتحت عيني وإذا بعضفور صغير، ريشه ملون بالأزرق والأصفر والبنيفسجي. منقاره أصفر و رجلاه حمراوان، يرفرف أمام وجهي بخفة و ابتهاج. يردد: وخط وخط .أعرفك، أنت سعدون من القصة؟ أوما برأسه أن نعم. تحلقت حولي مئات و آلاف الطيور الجميلة. عصفور الأغنية أيضاً كان هنا. وجدت الجميع إلا هي. رفرق الجميع بقوة فتهاويت كأوراق الخريف، و لم يبق مني إلا عصفور صغير في ألوان قوس قزح. صرت طيراً من طيور الحب.

Maria Grigoryeva

St. Petersburg, Russia



Mister Hemingway, I'm sorry...

"I won't go to the North, listen to me. I won't! If you want, you can go alone, but don't forget to make a will." Jorge took a sip of the sour wine and cut off a small piece from the fried hare. I wish I had done what he advised me, but (I don't know why) I was persuading him: "You understand that Franko's soldiers will be here in just three days, what are you going to do then?" "And if we go there, they'll shoot us, they'll shoot as though we were small silly rabbits!" Jorge's face became as vinous as the wine he was drinking.

"The devil fly away with you, damned Catalan," I croaked. "So, stay here, drink this sour wine, eat this cold fried hare and wait, wait till they come here, to this village, to this house, till they bind your hands, till they lead you to the nearest hill and then...hasta la vista."

"I'll denounce you," shouted the Catalan. "The general ordered you to stay here, and you don't want to submit?" "The general is dead," I said. "Haven't you heard about it? We lost! We lost this war! La patria? Forget this word! We have no fatherland! We lost it! We have to save our own lives, do you understand?"

"The general is dead?" Jorge dropped his eyes. "Why haven't you told me this?"

I was getting angrier. "I've told you this, but in the last two days you've been so drunk that I wonder how you haven't forgotten your name!"

We became silent. Jorge stood up, took the carbine from the hook and went out of the house. In two minutes I heard the shot. "Adios amigo, adios la patria!" These words thundered in my head. I drank all the wine in the jug in one gulp and finished the fried hare.

От креста до креста верста-
Полосатый маяк на дороге.
Я в чужих мне родных местах,
Рвет глаза мне зараза тревога.

В такт копыт задремал ямщик.
Не храпи, моя добрая тройка.
Брат-ямщик, отчего молчишь?
Лучше грусть этих мест мне пропой-ка!

Брат-ямщик и повел мне грусть,
И пропел мне в разливистом вздохе:
"Гой еси, Гой еси ты, Русь!
На Руси-то не может быть плохо!"

Мягкий снег мне в глаза летел,
Мне дорога-больничная койка,
Медсестра ты моя, метель,
Песней вьюги меня успокой ты.

По рукам разгулялась дрожь,
Рассыпаюсь от странной болезни.
Тихий снег для меня как нож,
Режет вены хрустальное лезвие.

В снежно-черной ночи топлюсь,
Брат-ямщик тихо трогает вожжи.
Как люблю, как люблю я Русь!
На Руси мне быть плохо не может!

И дорога в ночи чиста,
Звонкий снег на щеках моих тает.
От креста до креста верста,
И я эту версту навестаю.



Hanna Hall

Short Hills, New Jersey

Rain

summer rain, and we
sashay down the street,
swill our skirts past the bodega,
blind tango down mainstreet.
dresses drip down flat bellies
as we tip our smooth faces skyward,
water sliding off our lids.

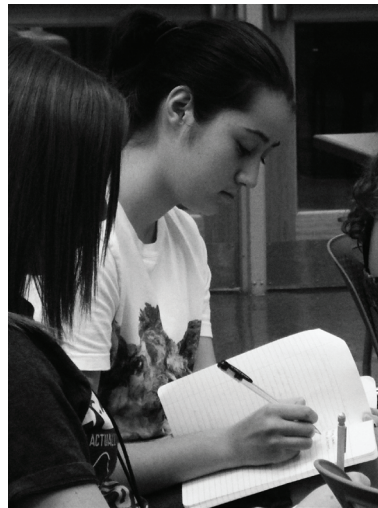
we have many fears:
shawled women speaking
the language of laughter & laundry.
shawled women with hands
like mama's, thick like morning dough,
hard as frying pan.
shawled women we do not
wanna become.

we have desires. we chase away
our time flitting
from streetlight to streetlight.

our backs embracing alley walls,
we practice kissing mangoes,
skin supple & too tough to be ours.
juice laughs down our unlined chins,
tastes of spanish sweet on our lips.

we dream of gentle boys with rough hands.
we dream of rough men with gentle, cupping hands.
we dream tequila dreams & soft white veiled dreams.
we dream with our long black hair snaked wet along our pillows,
we curl out of bed & sway our hips with naked dreaming eyes through the day.

the city hugs its wide hips around us
and tugs us away to hidden corners,
palms us, displays
us everywhere.



Jenan Hasan

Jebelat Habashi, Bahrain

How will you live now?

To-do list:

- 1) Breathe in.
- 2) Breathe out.
- 1) Hug dad.
- 2) Kiss mom.
- 3) Drink more coffee. Life is short; stay awake for it.
- 4) Dance in the rain.
- 5) Volunteer.
- 6) Be more spontaneous.
- 7) Stop making lists.

There, better.

Run down the street. Count the stars. Eat gummy worms. Indulge in your guilty pleasures like pop music. Sing horribly; enjoy it even though you sound like a screeching pyrdactyl. Find your other sock. Find yourself. Find god. Do the Macarena in Satan's lair. Make art. Read, write, listen. Go into business with a grizzly bear. Play chess. Skate. Bowl. Fly, fly home. Run, run home. And enjoy. Enjoy. Take these verbs and enjoy them. They're yours. You deserve them because you chose to stay here. But don't sit down 'cause I've moved your chair. Live for real. Breathe in, live. Breathe out, live. Live. Live. Live. Live.



A heavy pounding at the door stopped her from replaying the night's events over in her head again for the thousandth time. A single name leapt to the front of her thoughts. John.

But it was not John. It wasn't anyone she had met before. Yet he looked her up and down, as if to be sure that he had come to the right apartment, before giving her a single nod.

"Hannah Grace Collins."

He passed her like a shadow. She watched him enter her apartment and take a seat on her sofa, hands folded neatly in his lap.

"I won't make you play a guessing game, although I am sure you would get it right eventually. I am Death."

She began to back away, but somehow she knew that there was no escaping him. Of course this was Death. There was no one else he could be.

"These sort of visits are not something I usually do, but it isn't often that you come across a soul who is so accusatory towards someone who seems to not actually be at fault for their own death."

Her voice wavered tremendously. "What do you mean?"

"John Collins. He was driving this morning, on his way to apologize to his boss for being so late, when he ran a red light and was hit in the middle of the intersection by a group of hunters in a pickup truck. He was killed upon impact." Death paused, looking thoughtful. "And yet when I found him it was not himself or the other driver that he found to be at fault. It was you."

John was dead? This was too much.

"He said it should have been you who had to leave the house; he said it should have been you who suffered his fate. So I was curious. I wondered what would happen if I gave you the choice. Would you take his place?"

"Why would you ask me that?"

"Because I can."

The apartment melted around them and for a brief moment she saw him. The car was tipped, paint scraped across the cement, the scene frozen within a second of time. His white shirt was now soiled with blood. There was no venom in his eyes. All tension was gone from his face, despite the cuts tearing up his body. She shook and reached out to touch him, to shake him and find a way to bring a light back into his eyes, but she felt nothing as her arms reached. She couldn't even see them in front of her. It was only a picture, a snapshot of what was happening at that exact moment in time.

She was still in her apartment. Death still sat on her sofa, awaiting an answer.

Again Death asked, "Will you take his place?"

She loved John. John had broken her. Hannah had to pick between the man she loved more than anything and herself. The sacrifice rested on her shoulders, and she chose.



Daria Ivanova

Moscow, Russia

Как танцуют звезды



Они сидели друг напротив друга за столом, крохотным и живым, как теплый кусочек земли где-то в сердце Тихого Океана их огромной квартиры.

На белое платье девушки садились светлячки из распахнутого в ночь окна; в беззвездно черных волосах застыли две бабочки, убравшие пряди от блестящего в свете единственной лампы лица. Лица, отделенного от кухни, квартиры, звезд, Бесконечности, от тарелки с замершей в одиночестве семгой, от мыслей, тревог и лица отца. Он сидел напротив дочери, молча наблюдая, как ее волосы тихо танцуют на ветру и чувствуя, как его собственные, такие же черные, как у дочери, волосы нервно завиваются от мыслей о том, что танцевать в дочке могут лишь пряди волос и сердце.

- Я... знаю.

-Знаешь, папа. И я знаю...

-Знаю, знаешь.

- Видишь? Мы оба все знаем... можно теперь немного помолчать, папа, правда?..

Отец девушки с сильным бессилием зажмурил глаза, словно пытаясь найти где-то в глубине себя тюбик белой краски, способной закрасить этот лист жизни, другой лист жизни, все листы жизни последних семнадцати лет.

Дочь знала, о чем думал ее отец, о листах, белой краске, скользком асфальте, о солнце, затмившем глаза водителю желтой газели...

- Хватит, папа! Хватит думать так громко, так часто! Ты же можешь подумать, например, о том, как к лицу мне это новое платье, рассказать мне, как много звезд в туманности Андромеды. Расскажи мне о чем-нибудь важном, для меня, папа, важном!

Отец глотнул мутной воды из прозрачного стакана.

-Ты знаешь, как танцуют звезды?

Он поднялся, переставил стол в пыльный угол их кухни, чуть двинул в сторону инвалидное кресло, так ,чтобы видеть графитово-звездные глаза своей дочери.

Она улыбнулась, провела рукой по беззвездно черным, как ее собственные, волосам отца.

- Звезды танцуют вот так, - и улыбнулась глубже, звездней, в темной кухне их холодной квартиры.



Ode to Iowa River

Day 1, I walk with Daria and Olga
peer over the railing upon
your silkscreen muddy blue.
Fat lips like putty, words drop
in careful cadence
upon your windy smooth.
I clear the hair from my face,
the better to hear
lilting words upon your bank.
Listen well, unborn milk babes,
to tales of
mixed heritage, wide cities, and St. Petersburg,
to scandal and
soft blue-haired love.

Day 2, I sit on spongy grass with
Hanna Deryn Paul
Nada Elizaveta Damp.
I speak wryly of wolf cries from home,
and hear tightly of Paul's spiders.
Quiet, you're moist
upon our thighs, grass prints
on all white clothes.
We exchange words of fancy,
as dew collects in bumps.

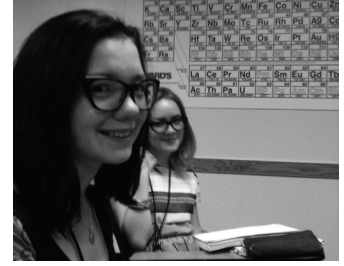
Day 3, your waters bulge against meniscus,
pass over mud and underfoot.
I lay on the bridge, face tipped
to wide clouds and spread sunlight.
The grain in your distance
has covered all my anchors,
replaced them with clear skies and flight,
pavement crumbs and robins,
Orwa's stolen bride, rocketed over grass.

Red rover,
send river anchors right over,
bend gently to my sweet home tune.



Olga Kadochnikova

Ekaterinburg, Russia



А здесь брусчатка вместо моря,
И звезд не видно по ночам;
Следы от ногтя на обоях,
Как краска солнца по плечам.

Мои бездарные попытки получиться -
размазаны гуашью по столу;
Наказанная жизнью - сплю в углу, вся серая,
как куртка трубочиста,
(Не нужная, навскидку, никому)...

Несовершенная асимметрия мыслей,
безумный ход раздумий в голове;
Мне кажется, я надоем тебе, с моими
поисками цели или смысла,
(Хотя людей не судят по себе)...

Запутанная в гнездах проводов, птенец, не
научившийся полету;
Я неумело отдаю свою заботу в обмен на
разделение оков,
(Чтобы почувствовать заветную свободу)...

Надежд, испуганных, опальный карнавал
ворвался без доклада в мою душу;
И я шепчу, что мне никто не нужен, чтобы
никто вдруг нужным мне не стал
(Для теплых встреч в безжалостную стужу)...

Горы. небо. свобода. воздух.
Выше. ближе. быстрее. проще.
Нет. уже никогда не поздно.
Запись. книга. на память. росчерк.
Звезды. ветер. прохлады. голос.
Два какао в горячих кружках.
Время. стрелки. минуты. скорость.
Снова. горы. мечтаю. нужно.

Только в ваших глазах
так миндальные срубы звенят
топором дровосека,
смолы не осталось ни грамма;
одинокие крики ворон: "никогда" -
не слышны до поры;
скоро, словно пеньки,
перед Господом станем равны
и бесправный и правый.

По рукам разбросало потухшие синие вены,
И зрачок стал не больше, чем ушко обычной
иглы;
В клетки кожи вливается пепельно-серое
небо
С легким привкусом чуть горьковатой
смолы.

Опускаюсь на лестницу, руку продев сквозь
перила,
Прислоняюсь плечом к тонким прутьям,
холодным как лед;
Ты еще не забыл то, что я как-то раз
говорила:
"Все проходит"? Скажи мне сейчас: "Все
пройдет"

Собираю бороздки резьбы сверху вниз,
нервно, ногтем,
И слежу за движением пальцев своей же
руки;
Эти стены и пол, даже воздух - пропитаны
дегтем,

Только первые вдохи остались медово-
сладки.

а я тебя, может, уже никогда и не встречу
на остановках, где ты
читаешь стихи, глядя в душу другим первым
встречным,
распятый на рельсах гвоздями чужой
слепоты.

стёкла, стёкла, стёкла,
я временем с ветки стекла,
вожу по губам свеклой

камень, плитка, почва,
и кофе бьёт с силой по почкам,
не лечит туман



ветка, кролик, белка,
замараны брюки побелкой,
и страшно до смеха

Anna Kondratyuk

Nakhodka, Russia

У меня нет сердца. Заморожены жилы

Этот город прогнивший. Мы все как в могиле

Мечты превращают в больных, сумасшедших

Миллион расстояния становится тесным

Броженье мозгов, раскаляются кости.

Весь мир -туман, мы его гости

Затеряны в нём, не находим ответа;

Властелин человек или марионетка?



Anastasia Krizhanovskaya

Ekaterinburg, Russia

Капитан

Я бы, наверное, был
Капитаном дальнего плавания
И всю жизнь к горизонту плыл,
Заходя в неизвестные гавани.

Ветер дул бы в лицо круглый год,
Просолилась рубаха до нитки.
Для меня что крейсер, что плот:
Минимальные были б пожитки.

Я оставил бы на берегу
Все земное, мирское и пошлое,
Только сердце своё сберегу
И стучащее в нём прошлое.

В ураган бы я был всех смелей,
У штурвала стоял, не дрогнув.
Сколько шторм мою шхуну не бей,
Я б не стал никогда ждать подмогу.

А когда ослабеет волна,
Я запрюсь в своей тёмной каюте
И допью бутылку рома до дна,
Позабыв о домашнем уюте.

В борт журнале моя б жизнь была,
А отвага - сама шхуна.
Не запомнят мои дела
И из них не поднимут шума.

Я умру “сам себе герой”
Одинокий, но верный судну,
Для команды отец второй
И любимчик фортуны с чудом.

Ах, кто знает, оно, может, так,
Но, пожалуй, я тут останусь.
Слишком многое сжало в кулак
Мой расправленный, белый парус



A Flawed Acrostic (Or Iowa)

I Stand in the middle of a cracking bridge. I want to be extreme for once. Sense no longer a bliss. You fuel silent caprices. What I see in you is delicate and pure. Yet eyes are traitorously foolish, and so are we. And eyes lie, unconsciously, and so do we. It is wicked. I crave what used to be mine and what never was. Perhaps one day. "Mark me," I murmur to the river flowing underneath me.

Emerald

All the other tubes are full and intact. Except yours, the one embracing your hue. Love, I only use faded shades of you.

Airs

Let your arms be the bow and my body, the strings. Our hazy lustful chants, our liberating wings, will lull us to sleep like soothing airs nature sings.

Possibilities

You're somewhere at this moment, walking streets I've never walked; kissing cheeks that aren't mine... How I wish I weren't here, alone, awake and just fine. I want to travel the world, too. For there's a tiny possibility I might see you.



Possibilities

You're somewhere at this moment, walking streets I've never walked; kissing cheeks that aren't mine... How I wish I weren't here, alone, awake and just fine. I want to travel the world, too. For there's a tiny possibility I might see you.

The Circle

One day we smell like old paper. The other we reek of fresh leaves. "Don't over think, just talk," they preach. but our tongues are voiceless rebels. They have brains of their own.



Deryn Mierlak

Montclair, New Jersey

love in the time of heineken

the dolls tell you first
you see their expressions
lost in the cold paper of porcelain
as he buoys his lips
against
green valleys of glass
in the spaces between
sunlight

there is one little one, with golden
reams of wheat-beer curls who whispers
he's at it again
and you laugh her off, but trapped
in the painted planetary pull
of those lifeless eyes you see him,
played back from twelve hours ago
set in the crystalline chrysalis world of
self-hatred

then there are the siamese twins with
horsehair pigtails, the brunette
in the palsied overalls who smells of hay and
the twisted neck of sworn-off
champagne
the dolls will tell you first
through the webbed cracks in their freckled chins
their mouths
soured
hollowed;

this world will
never
be for him.



Way



When you're driving along the highway and the rimy trees pass by, the road seems endless. Snow-covered tops of the pines merge with a bright sky, road markings meander like a white snake. The boundaries of that world blur, fade, and you're left alone. The thoughts go away and you plunge into the viscous emptiness.

But everything changes when it emerges - firstly as a small point on the periphery of consciousness - the gaping hole of a tunnel. The blackness widens, grows, devouring the pallor of winter's day. The cars that pass by prepare to meet the mouth of Leviathan - they turn on the lights, blink with turn signals in annoyance, overtaking the slower fellows. They enter into this hole and disappear. An artificial illumination, visible when getting close to the tunnel. They more and more resemble a throat of some huge creature.

The mouth slams and a white-cream reality stays behind. Here is a completely different world, utopian in some strict way. The flashes of the cyclically covered lamps coincide with heart beats.

There exists its own rhythm in the tunnel, and you can drive slow or fast, but the enslaved lights will flash one after the other at equal intervals of time.

How is it possible to exist here? In this handmade cave there is no place for extraneous sounds and smells, which don't fit in continual movement. However, is it motion? When the space is looped by itself like the ancient serpent Uroboros, the time isn't more established in value. The seconds fall apart, and there's no way to gather them in minutes and those - in hours. Perpetual darkness hides the border between "now" and "then," turning your trip of floundering into a viscous mirage.

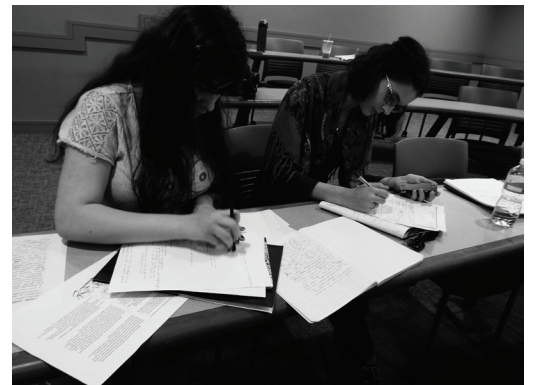
It seems to you that you want to die. That means to stay here forever, merge with the murk, drive, drive, and drive, not counting the countless stripes on the asphalt. To go with the perpetual flow of that monotony. Don't try to hold your breath, remembering silly superstitions. It seems you want to die, but actually you want to be saved. You want to return to everyday life, to such a place where you can exist as something lesser than a part of a mysterious beast, where you can be a person.

But to lose yourself is surprisingly entrancing, as if you have taken a sedative. It's easy to melt in the flashing darkness, it's easy to drive without stop.

A little bit more and there won't remain anything of you, the tunnel will swallow, chew, make you a part of its own. But the yellow-bellied lumps start to fade and lose their power over you. And suddenly, not allowing recovery, you are thrown outside. Without realizing it, you're born again. The world is open, it adopts you, because you are also open to it - maybe just for a few seconds. Soft diffused light suddenly becomes harsh; it dazzles the eyes and you can't see anything.

Little by little everything calms down: whitish pine needles sway lazily, the engine groans softly.

This is just a part of the way.



Rana Mourtaja

Gaza, Palestinian Territory



الكون بإيقاع
رتيب "

المشهد الأول : المهرج في الزاوية البعيدة يبكي حاله، ينتهي زيفه تدريجياً كلما اقترب من روحه في جلسته غير المشروطة كما في السيرك. يخلع الابتسامات التي كان يرتديها آلاف المرات للأطفال إلى منافي الكذب. سؤال على هامش المشهد : كيف لا يفهم الناس أن المهرج عليه أن يكون مُلهماً للبكاء أحياناً ؟

المشهد الثاني : في منتصف المقهى، الراقصة تحيي ذكريات توأبيت التصوف في حركاتها المتقلبة، تصنع قصيدة صوفية كاملة يتعثر بها كل حرف كغلطة مطبعية بأساطير الحكايات و المذاهب. سؤال على هامش المشهد : هل الرقص هو هدنة السلام بين إلهام الشاعر و نظم القصيدة ؟

المشهد الثالث : عابر سبيل - مسافرٌ إلى بلاد جديدة- يجلس في ركن بعيد يصف مخزون ذاكرته . بحزن مجفف يلتقط نصف التفاحة التي في حقيبته و يتنهد، يتذكر بأسى كبير كيف اعتاد على تقسيم التفاحة بينه وبين حبيبته، و كيف كانت أنصافها بالنسبة له كمال. سؤال على هامش المشهد : هل يكن كمالنا أنصافاً لبعض البشر ؟

المشهد الرابع : صاحبة القهوة تعلمّ ابنتها المراهقة صنع القهوة.. تكرر عبارتها عدة مرات : " كيف لقتاة ستتولى زمام الأمور من بعدي الفشل في اعداد القهوة ؟ " ينقبض قلبها فجأةً وتتزاحم الأفكار في رأسها " ترى كيف للزمان أن أن يسبقها؛ لتترك ابنه تصنع من الليل كحلاً لعينيها ومن ذهب الشمس إشراقاً لضحكاتها، وحيدة بلا صديق أو قريب إذ رحلت هي عن الكون؟" . سؤال على هامش المشهد : هل نزداد خوفاً من الموت إذ تملكنا الجمال ؟

" ، مر كابوس الحرب على المدينة مدمراً كل هناء الليالي " المشهد الوحيد بعد الحرب يضم : المهرج منتحراً بعد صراع قوي مع " ورق اللعب، و الراقصة تغير إيقاع القصيدة إلى خناجر لتطعن إلهام الشاعر، عابر السبيل يفقد نصفه فيصبح واحداً كاملاً، ابنة صاحبة المقهى تموت قبل أن تتعلم صنع القهوة ."

I hope he does not see my friend, stretched out as a martyr in my heart, that he does not see the smile I will later remember in tears; I hope he does not see me crying over the corpses and the dead.

I hope he does not see me, unable to pack what I hope to keep in just one bag, and forgetting to hide what remains in the vast space of my soul.

I hope he does not see me dancing in the darkness, betraying the war, certain I am not making light of those who have bought their tickets to travel to God.

I hope the Devil does not see me, weak as I am now.



Brandon Pahl

Ankeny, Iowa

The Way Love Is

Love is a bed of poppies
That turn to thorns as you sleep
And sting you till you weep

Love is a prison
Built of the bones of envy and lust
A cage, face it you must

It is not a place for the innocent
And it is not a place for beauty
Up from the pit it comes
Like a mighty wave in a once-calm ocean
It strikes you down
And drags you into the undertow

And when it's had its fun
It spits you out on wet sand
Your body coarse and dank
It taunts you to try again
Which you will

Like the sand you lie upon
You will return and endure
For that is the way love is



This Cage, This Prison

This cage, this prison
Holds me under the ocean of my own desires
Drowning me in what I lust for

The expansion of my ego will not burst it open
I must squeeze in my gut
Must blot out the faces on the wall of my mind
To shimmy through the cracks to freedom



Nicola Preuss

New Orleans, Louisiana

the war goes on

but momma,
what about the voiceless?
what about the voices
that quiver as they crawl
from underneath the rubble?

the debris weighs down
words that were not meant to be spoken.

tongues sit stiff
in dry, red mouths
rotting with the potency of oppression.
but momma,
what about the bodies?

we cannot hear the croaks that
lie in alleys and in backyards of caskets
in the form of homes.

1

put your ears to the throats of the ill,
and no, they are not just dying in hospital beds.
they are dying in churches.
they are dying on their way to the grocery store.

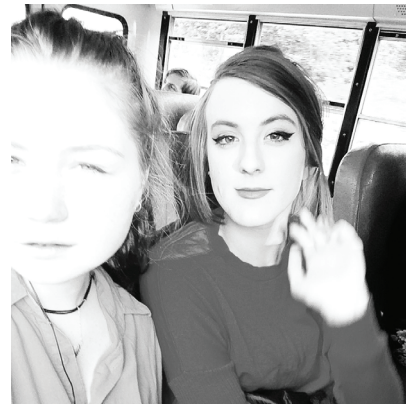
5 dead. 8 wounded. in a school shooting.
the death rate shown on the news cannot
supply our hesitant need for closure.
what did they dream of the night before?
did they hear the screams before they heard the bullets hit?

what did you hear when the towers fell?

Reyhaneh Jabbari killed her rapist in self-defense.
and awaits the date of execution.
can you hear her knawing at the rope
set out for since birth?

they watch with a pride
that cannot be contained through sense.

the bridges are burning
and we cannot fathom
the weight of the smoke
on our lungs



maybe the blood will dry before
the paramedics arrive but
no one can hear the sirens
only the coughing
the gagging
the choking

maybe the man will be able
to tell his daughter goodbye

you see i hear the moon crying at night, momma,
when the crevices of countries flood with muffled lips.

yesterday a girl was shot down on her way to work
and the only thing that was quoted in the news
was her race and her neighborhood.

we cannot spill words into parched mouths.
we cannot fill in the burrows that our own kind dug
with trembling fingers.

but what about the voiceless?

if you cut your ears,
would you hear the crying?

the broken glass clinging to a toddler's curls
cannot reach the letters to form the word sorry.

the ashes on doorsteps won't heal wounds
that aren't meant to be bandaged.

the smoke is too thick to cough
let alone breathe,
and the war goes on
with raised signs and grinding teeth.
but the voices, momma, the voiceless,
what about the voiceless?

Sarah Saltzman

Santa Monica, California



There's paper under her nails as she picks flowers from the wall. She sits on a throne of couch cushions and throw pillows stacked ten feet high. The cat is her councilor, and the crooked-cracked chandelier is her lady in waiting. The warped forks are her subjects – no two look quite alike – and she knows she belongs in this settling house.

She makes a proclamation, and they cheer in response, bent metal on chipped china, it's music to her ears, and when they sing her name it's in the key of broken floorboards and a ticking toaster prone to catching on fire. Rust water drips from a slit in the ceiling and informs her of unwanted guests. The summer flies and trails of ants are welcome, she explains, and they share in the warmth of radio crackle and TV static in this settling house where she rules.

She collects lost things, this young queen, and the house becomes a home to shattered phones and ripped dolls. The girl from the big blue house next door joins her, the one whose speech slurs and limbs twitch. The wife down the street comes too, beautiful with body parts that are maybe not hers, and stories her husband never listened to, painted on her mouth beneath the lipstick. Ophelia takes them all, the lost, the broken, these people she names "family," into this settling house where she rules.



Annika Schlesinger

St. Louis, Missouri

He was lost. The twisting corridors and aged hallways had gotten the better of him, and now he didn't have the slightest clue where he was. The current hallway was ornately decorated with antique paintings; mostly portraits of important-looking people he didn't recognize. He berated himself again--*idiot*--and it seemed ridiculous that this could even happen.

Lost in the goddamn White House.

It was supposed to be an honor to be here, but right now he just felt scared. The normally sharp crackle of his racing thoughts was slowed by anxiety; all the filters a poet puts in front had been momentarily replaced by sharp senses searching for any sign of familiarity so he could find his way back to where he was supposed to be.



The rational part of his brain told him he just had to find someone to ask directions from. But the stubborn part whispered aggressively about what an idiot he'd look like getting lost here after five minutes. He couldn't ask for help unless he really needed it, and there was nobody around anyway.

Wait. Scratch that.

The muffled sound of voices from a nearby room made him turn. Behind him was a door left slightly ajar, small shafts of golden light leaking out onto the floor. Their tones were gravelly and urgent, words indistinguishable until he crept closer.

"...exactly what I'm saying, senator," said the first voice anxiously. "That the whole operation is--"

"Shh. Quiet. Do you hear that?"

Alec froze as the floorboards in the room creaked ominously. Oh shit.

Before he could fabricate any kind of excuse, the door flung open, and before him stood a tall, beefy man with a mustache in a military uniform. He left a daunting shadow on the floor, and Alec resisted the urge to run. He couldn't think of what to say.



"Um--"

"Who are you?" Barked the man, and Alec swallowed.

"I'm here as, um, a national student poet--" he stammered meekly, very much not liking the way this man was looking at him.

Elizaveta Shutova

Smolensk, Russia



I have written 30 letters for Julie, but none of them were sent. I don't know how adults usually admit that they're in love. I wanted to ask my grandmother, but she was too busy cooking dinner. I also wanted to ask Fluffy, but suddenly understood that cats don't speak like people. Nobody else talks to me. I have no parents, my teachers ignore me... So I decided to write a letter. Well, it's really romantic, isn't it? I feel something. I feel that I have a lantern instead of my heart. Do you know what I mean?

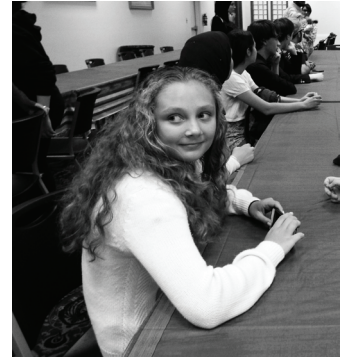
Julie is really nice and sweet. She speaks with me! I know that I can say everything to her. Everything! Even the fact that my grandmother cries every night looking at the photo of my mom, or the fact that it's me who broke a new china vase, not Fluffy. I share all my emotions, all my feelings frankly with her. She has brown hair and brown eyes. She usually puts on her glasses. Julie likes wearing sweaters and dresses. She smells like a big blooming flower. She is pretty good in literature. That's why I try to read as much as possible. I think about her before going to bed.

I want to impress her. Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to put on my solemn shirt, drink the whole cup of coffee, put my last letter and an apple in the bag and then go to school. My head'll be full of thoughts and I'll try to get my nerve up. But I am brave, believe me! I'll push the door, come into the class and give this pretty woman the letter. She'll understand that I've fallen in love with her. She will be astonished! And then I'll present her the apple. Teachers love apples, don't they? She will be so happy! Someday I'll be her husband. I hope!



Isabella Simonetti

New York, New York



Dear Mom

How is it up there? Are you resting in your itchy white cotton nightgown on a big fluffy cloud? Has your hair grown back? Does it look like thick strands of golden hay? Have you talked to Grandpa, and do you remember to feed the cats? Does Ollie still pee everywhere? Do you still stick nicorette gum on the bottom of your coaster, and spill diet coke on the base of the tiffany lamp?

Do you miss me? Are you mad that I use your teacup from London? Do you watch out for me like you promised? I'm scared mom. I'm scared of taking the ACT, getting into college, and that my writing isn't good enough. Do you know I'm mad that you made me like this? Have you seen the buckets of tears I produce every time I think I can't do something right? Have you watched as I let boys tickle my heart to fill the gaping hole you left?

I'm getting better you know. Are you proud? Are you proud of my writing? Are you proud of my grades? Are you proud that I'm starting to realize what happiness is? Do you miss me? Do you remember me?

It's been six years; I keep thinking that one day I'll unlock the front door, and you'll be there. We will go to Boston and eat cannolis in Quincy Market. You will play Chopin on the Steinway, and I will read you books. I miss you.

I don't remember what your voice sounded like, but I can't get it out of my head. You've become a part of my identity that I can't disregard. Do you know I lie about you so that people think I'm normal? I tell them you're still a professor at New York Law School and that your book was a bestseller. I tell them that you nag me about staying out too late and not cleaning my room. You have made me a liar.



I spent so much time forgiving you, but I shouldn't even be mad. I forgave you for not being able to taste dad's lasagna and making him change your depends. I forgave you for your stale breath, and your ugly hospital bed. I forgave you for leaving me. I forgive you, mom.

Did you know that dad is gay? Are you happy another woman is not replacing you? Are you happy that he doesn't know what he wants? Are you happy he still loves you? Are you happy that you fucked with his emotions, too?

Mom, I know you can't see this, but I hope you're listening. I want you to know that the time we were together is not undermined by what your cancer did to our family. What did you do to me? Why did you do it? They tell me it's not your fault, but I feel like you knew that we wouldn't be together for long.

Mom, I love you. I still wear the Tiffany's necklace with three hearts that dad bought for you on your last Valentine's Day. He said you were the thick white heart in the middle and we were the two dainty silver hearts on the side supporting you. We are all apart, but we can be together on that necklace, even if I still can't forgive you.

Прыжок эскулапа

Эльвина Вольф, скромная, честная, 28-летняя девушка, жила честной жизнью жены честного человека; корни имеет немецкие, неплохо знает латынь.

Чем подобное чудо занимается, спросите вы... Она врач, и честность для врача – это... довольно ценное явление... Но вот для ее мужа не очень... Он импрессарио в театре и эта черта характера не особо-то и приветствуется в сфере его «любимой» работы.

Из-за своей пресловутой честности семейство ютится в маленькой комнатухе на окраине города, в том районе, где только шваль всякая и ошивается. Они часто получают по шее, у них нет и просто быть

не может друзей. Ах, нет же. Есть пара таких же не от мира сего. Ну так к сути. Не может данное семейство даже купить и попробовать эти чертовы артишоки, что продаются в лавке за углом. Отвратительная жизнь скажу я вам, и счастливо ли семейство Вольф жить такой жизнью? Неужели их честность, порой доходящая до абсурда виновна в том, что они живут жизнью бедняков?

Так и жила Эльвина своей праведной жизнью, пока не произошел один интереснейший случай. Это случилось во время ночной смены в больнице, как раз тогда, когда свое дежурство несло наше честнейшее создание. С сильными болями в области живота поступил к ним пациент. Ну Эльвина

осмотрела его, провела необходимые процедуры. И оказалось, что у этого мерзкого, грубого, всем своим видом и поведением олицетворяющего полную противоположность Эли, мужика случился заворот кишок! Да и еще от переедания запеченных артишоков, тех самых, что так мечтала попробовать бедная Эля.

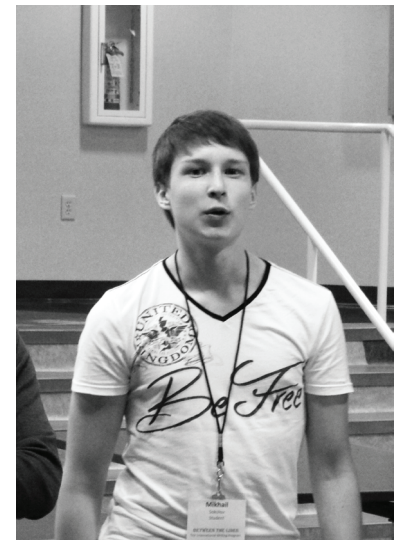
Расстроилась после того случая бедная девушка, места себе не находила. Ушла она в себя, а мужу-то ничего не сказала! Одна мысль крутилась в ее голове:

- Если я так праведно живу, то почему у него... у него есть деньги, и он может позволить себе обжираться этими гребаными артишоками и хамить всем вокруг! Возможно чего-то я не поняла в этой жизни...

Провела она в себе три дня и три ночи, потерял ее муженек, на работе не понимали куда делась праведная Эльвинька. А еще и гвоздодер этот, будь он неладен, не успела соседке вовремя вернуть. И где честность-то после этого!

Сказать могу только одно напоследок. Новая жизнь началась у нее.

Осмыслила ведь она истину одну за эти три дня, проведенных в неволе своих мыслей.



Jamie Solomon

Takoma Park, Maryland



This is what once was salty sea air, wet and heavy. It has dried upon your skin, sticky like that taste of maple syrup. It sinks, slowly, into your bloodstream, puncturing your veins with horns coated in amethyst longing, pouring crystals into your lungs.

This is the mouthwatering briar rose whose thorns have been forgotten, now made of white smoke, colored by the past, its curls adorned with a crown of fractured daisy petals, fragrant and venomous, its sugar tears that have fallen into the abyss below giving birth to coral stalagmite.

This is a midnight pool, drowning in the desert day, turning pink to blend with the sun's rays, which suck the water from the rocks and crush them into glass-edged sand dunes, temples for the sky, monuments to the perfumed devil who whispers wind into your ear.

This is not a love poem, though it is mistaken as such. It inhabits the face of charcoal whims, fluttering wings caressing the very top of your lemon-iced fingers. You know that its diamond smile, set in fools gold fished from the sky's reflection in a cloudless river, is a fantastical howl, sung to cut the moon though blood cannot exist behind the stars.



Paul Stanton

Mesa, Arizona

Applause

Almost immediately, the drums began, two kinds: upon the pavement, the clicking boots in perfect time, and farther out, the whisper-shifting of the crowd. It was a simple symphony. If he had been able to choose the score himself, he would have gone classical, similar to the great French works of the eighteenth century. The creak of unoiled wheels would have added a complexity of dissonance, the smell and slap of rotten vegetables against his cheek. But he was not the composer, and never had been. His job was conducting, to raise his arms the half-inch the ropes would allow, and, yes, here were the brassy voices loosed. They had begun.

Perhaps his orchestra was lacking, the voice of the Lieutenant had gone hoarse from being used too long, too loud. If there had been time, he would have prescribed rest and honeyed tea, still there was a certain beauty in the very rawness of the work—more modern than his usual fare, but the times had changed.

Now they were increasing the tempo, and his legs, so weak, could not keep up. It was shameful that a conductor should lose the beat of his own symphony. A blush filled his cheeks as he tripped and was dragged for the space of twelve beats. But even this humiliation served the music. The way the cobblestones ripped grooves into the tops of his feet provided the perfect minor chord the symphony had been missing. Then he was up and still the music grew. It was unusual for the conductor himself to play an instrument (now slapping feet that mounted steps too quickly). But even as the critic in him rebelled, he could almost feel the swelling of the audience. They, like he, were engrossed.

The bridge. Cold hands upon his arms, the rough feel of the post against his back, a single splintered note digging into his spine. A drop of sun-warmed sweat trickled from beneath the white cloth over his eyes. Stand straight and tall, the power of the final measures, “Ready, aim...” Lieutenant’s voice was cracking, but how it rang. Almost, the final repetition of the themes, his brave Lieutenant struggled to the final command as the drumbeat gave its last clap-snap. Here the silence, when the musicians wake and stare confounded, remembering for the first time where they are. He had the urge to turn, yet he was already facing the audience. He did not see but rather felt that line of unblinking metal eyes fixed upon him. A strange choking sensation—dread or anticipation, it was hard to tell—filled him. In this eternal instant, he wonders if he has made some mistake. His bow is sudden, sharp—red blooming from his very soul into the world as lead fills his heart. A hope, a prayer, but then the instant is but another past, and his worry is not worth remembering, for even as he fades it fills his ears.

A sudden and thunderous applause.



Jana Tabet

Jezzine, Lebanon

Soon

I knew there was something wrong the moment he knocked on my door, because London Carson was never the one to shake and ask for help.

Even though the only words that came out of his pale lips were, “Save me.” I held him close that night knowing that he needed love to fill his bones, for love often fixed the broken ones and got them back on the track of life.

The whole time he was so stiff, trying not to make any noise so that the comforting blanket of silence that was wrapped around him wouldn’t shatter like almost everything else in his life.

I didn’t understand what was exactly wrong but I kept rocking us back and forth, trying to help him in some way because I knew that soon his eyes would dry, his hands would circle around my waist and find home within my words, and his heart would beat normally along with his dreams that he seemed to be locked with in a cold, dark room.

Soon, commas would start fighting for his soul. Because London Carson was not the one to back out of anything, certainly not the fight for his own life.

Soon, street lights would turn on, making him see my hand which was trying to grab his in any way possible. But soon never came.

Because the street lights turned off, he never wrapped his arms around me and his fragile body didn’t stop shaking.

And maybe I had high expectations of him, because I thought he knew that his demons could not be drowned; they were really good swimmers. And I thought he knew that tearing your home apart does not kill the pain, it only transfers it to someone else. And I was the one who needed saving after that.

Because London Carson was gone the very next day.



这是神最接近我的时刻

只要你知道，有人在星空里的某处也曾像此刻一样无目的的凝视，此刻，未来，过往，你就不是孤独的。远方的情人，你知道你的目光是星空的一部分。有什么辩驳比此刻可以听见流水声更伟大呢。

怎么会有人觉得星空是永恒的静止的呢，星空是流动的，澎湃的，速朽的。星星像鱼探出水面，睡眠，呼吸，吐泡泡，你可以看见它们在浮沉和幻想，他们是活着的，你多么渴望溺水，像是沙漠中的海市蜃楼，甘甜的寂灭。

为什么要苛责本身就不存在的时间，此时此刻，有着多少毁灭和新生，时间只让人疏远，你们和星星没有共同的语言。时间是多么地猥亵啊。

东边的人啊，我所相熟的每一个人。这里是新疆，布尔津县，禾木村。这里的白天刚过去两个半小时，村子里只听得见禾木河的水声。这里的人，骑马、劈柴、挤奶、割草，早餐是十点，晚餐也是。东边的人啊，人们在这里使用铁和木头制作的工具，一天可以看见两到三次炊烟。就在刚才，一匹黑马从我面前走过，打了个响鼻，吓我一跳。人和马匹在这儿都能呼吸到这里清甜的空气。我所相熟的每一个人啊，这里是禾木村，星空包住了大地的脚趾。站在这里，所有的自负和怀疑，小聪明和不甘心，都可以被原谅了吧。东边的人，不要回到西方。

而我，一点一点看着白昼堕落，手上带着缰绳、泥土和牛羊的气味，躺在禾木河的水声里，灵晕被温暖的酒精稀释，被自己消化。这是神最接近我的时刻。

涂俊南

2015

禾木 大醉





谋杀季节
我视冬天为朋友
他却给我 一个凌晨 4 点不肯醒来的倔强的夜
和打在我脸上的
冰凉的流淌的骨骼
我视夏天为敌人
我想戳穿她热情的伪善
我想看看在茫茫的热背后她是否笑得苍凉
抑或笑得猖狂
我摘掉墨镜 扔掉阳伞
穿上最短的衣裤
我正走在 37 度的夏天里
那光，那热，那穿着人皮肤的我
紧紧 紧紧拥抱着
像是溺水者与一个孤独枝桠的偶遇
紧紧 紧紧拥抱着
然后他们垂死缠绵
我最终放弃了杀死夏天的念头
在她不知疲倦地与我拥抱的时候
她用她灼人的手抚摸我的肩膀和骨骼
她给我看万物腐败的丑态和角落里那粘腻的男女
不像那我的朋友 冬天
只给我看冰封的美好
亦或是用长睡不醒的黑暗与白色的粉
掩盖 或让你错失方向
向上生长吧 就像不曾遇见过天空一样
夏天与冬天与我又有何干系
让我疯野式的长
扭曲成你眼里的丑
伸展至一个脆弱的长度
至少
有一瞬间
我挥刀斩杀了季节

Madeleine Yates

New Orleans, Louisiana

The Guest

It is eleven in the morning, and I am sitting at my small wooden kitchen table, the one I inherited from my grandparents. The coffee pot is sending shrill wisps of steam into the air, and as I push back my chair to pour myself a mug there is a light knock on my front door. More knocking: this time it is more deliberate, like a small child tired of being told 'later.' I travel through the dimly lit space of my apartment, and I twist the doorknob. Standing in the threshold, looking away nervously, I see Grief, leaning on the doorframe, waiting for someone to say his name.

"Grief," I say, only slightly breathless. The light laughter of my neighbor's wind chimes fills the silence as Grief pushes past me and walks into my house. He is dressed casually, and his hair is slicked back.

"How have you been?" I ask him. I am still wearing my dark green silk robe and pajamas. He nods and follows me back into the kitchen. It is early for wine, but I go to the pale kitchen cabinet, pour two glasses of his favorite Cabernet, set them in front of him, and sit across the table. He swirls the wine around, and a small current wraps around and licks the glass.

Grief leans back in his chair and sighs, pulling a picture from his back pocket and sliding it towards me. It is a picture of my Aunt Celia and her daughter, Beth. I shake my head as I look at the photo. I ask, "Both of them?" He nods quietly, and his face is dark and slightly twisted. I know he doesn't like having to do this, bringing tragedy into people's houses, moving in with them for however long. I'm sure it wasn't the job he saw for himself as a young boy. He sips his wine, and we sit at the table, letting the thickness of the air smother us. I don't cry, but my head has started to pound. The wine makes my face flush and hides the heat of mourning.

Later in the morning, Grief holds my hair while I throw up into the kitchen sink. He tells me he is sorry that he has to be here, I tell him I know. It is not Grief's fault he exists in this way. When I am done, Grief goes to his car and drags in his bags. I help him, and they are heavy. He knows how long he will need to stay. The next week Grief reminds me of the dishes that have piled in the sink, and as he curls up on my couch after watching Westerns all day I finally take out the sponge and gloves from under the sink and scrub them, letting sobs escape my mouth. The most mundane tasks seem unbearable, and every crack in my ceiling reminds me of the fractures that cover my family's bones. Grief listens to Elvis Costello records with me. He reminds me of the time he came to stay with me as a child, when the family dog we had had for so many years was put down. When he hears me crying at two in the morning, Grief comes into my room with a glass of water, strokes my hair, waits for me to fall asleep. Grief always sleeps later than me.

One morning, after five weeks and several loads of Grief's dirty laundry, I help him stuff all his bags back into the trunk of his car. He kisses me on the cheek, and we hug for a few seconds, then he gets into the driver's seat, puts his car in gear, and drives away. I haven't noticed before that Grief drives a stick-shift. I go back into my kitchen.

The dishwasher is full. I leave it for later in the afternoon and read the paper instead.



Nesma Gewily

(Chaperone) Cairo, Egypt

The Hidden Walls

The old house shook as the train passed. I opened my eyes again... It was dawn already... I knew I wouldn't be able to get back to sleep. The train passed every thirty minutes, and I wondered how many sleepless nights would pass till I got used to this roaring sound and the tiny quakes it made.

Sola was sleeping to the right of me. She seemed to be accustomed to the roar. At the end of the day, this was her house, even though she left it behind to study in the city. Her four-year absence did not seem to interfere with her sleeping habits. She knew she was home.

I allowed my eyes to roam in the room...

To the left of my bed, a huge red painting hung over the wall. It featured one of the church's clerical figures. The golden crown he wore and the painting material reflected his hierarchy among the other posters that hung all over the walls of the room. The posters portrayed nameless faces of monks and sisters. I was hesitant asking Sola about their names and stories because I didn't want her to feel that I was coming to Minya to write about her as a religious subject. For me she was a friend whom I asked to lead me in a tour of her hometown. For her, she was the priest's daughter who had invited her Muslim friend to her house. Sometimes I felt she was afraid of me judging her or her religion in my writing. Every time our discussions diffused into religion, she raised her hand to tuck a curl of hair behind her ear, a gesture that she did whenever she felt shy or confused.



In the middle of the wall, a wooden cross existed, virtually dividing the room into two parts; my part and her part... and for a second, the same thought haunted me again... What if I went suddenly amnesic while being here? Not knowing the story of my past or how I ended up in that place. Would my story change then? Would I end up knowing the icons on the wall and internalizing their stories?

I turned to the other side of the bed. The train didn't pass, but I felt the tiny quake trembling inside me.

Salah Fokra

(Chaperone) Bu'eina-Nujeidat, Israel

Reflections on BTL

Those two weeks have literally been life changing to me both professionally and socially. As a chaperone I got the chance to observe people's development dramatically, acquire new methods of teaching, and reignite my passion for teaching. I am amazed how some students' language shifted tremendously within two weeks due to the constant contact with each other for an intensive number of hours. This has apparently worked against all odds and proved that language can be hugely improved within a short span of time.

In the sessions I attended with the BTL participants I learned to sympathize with my own students as I got the chance to step into their shoes, which will make me a better teacher. Furthermore, in the sessions I attended for chaperones, a whole new horizon got revealed in front of me, which made me think of teaching writing as an experience of enjoyment rather than a challenge. I shall be going back to my students fully charged with all that I experienced and got inspired by. After those two weeks I believe I ought to give inspiration for generations to come.



“Between The Lines” has also demonstrated how different cultures can debate, coexist, and live in peace. Having people from distant parts of the world to share ideas, meals, classes, and dorms has proved that mutuality can be created among different people. When American, Russian, Chinese and Arab students from nine different countries discuss each others' literature it definitely brings people closer together. When the whole group sit in the same school bus for a day trip, this surely creates a strong element of unity.

It can therefore be strongly claimed that learning, changing, and progressing through socializing is the logo of this mind-changing program.

Irina Kuznetsova

(Chaperone) Volzhsky, Russia

What BTL Means to Me

The writing (reading, speaking, and also thinking) program connects youth of different cultural backgrounds. The two-week outcome is learning to speak a common language (not in a linguistic sense), though the latter also matters. Being on a bus or in any other informal setting, students teach each other the tricks of their language. Peer guidance makes it much easier for language acquisition.

Program participants exercise their poetic and prosaic muscles daily in different formats, either in a seminar or in a workshop. The lines they produce during these workouts are so powerful that can make any person teary. Instructors are so helpful that each participant crystallizes deep thoughts to overt presentation. Not only do the students get stronger in their literary skills but in physical skills as well: going to the caves and doing a literary scavenger hunt do their magic.

The program involves learning not only for students but for teachers as well. Every day at BTL is a pedagogical wonder. You either learn at a workshop with students or at chaperone-related classes. Ideas like “The point is not the point, the point is the poetry” (Diana Farris, Slam poetry workshop), “You should go beyond your sorrows in your poems and look at the world at large” (Nick Twemlow, Workshop for teaching creative writing to college students), skills for writing circular stories (Rachel Yoder’s workshop,) and learning to evaluate creative pieces at Alisa Ganieva’s workshops will transform my teaching philosophy from now on.

To conclude, BTL is an unprecedented opportunity for people all over the globe who strive to find their own voice and express it as loudly as possible in the UNESCO city of literature and then back in their homeland.



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