

بين السطور

BETWEEN THE LINES

Между строк

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA | 2016

BETWEEN THE LINES
Peace and the Writing Experience

An anthology of poetry, prose, and photographs created by Between the Lines participants from Tunisia, 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

Every creative writer knows the importance of empathy, of inhabiting the story of another. Rebecca Solnit writes, "...a place is a story, and stories are geography, and empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller's art, and then a way of traveling from here to there."

We ask a lot of our Between the Lines participants. Intellectual and creative energy. Studiousness and diligence. Early mornings and busy days. There are classes and assignments. Cultural events and special workshops. Readings. Presentations. Daytrips. We ask a lot. Above all we ask for bravery. On June 26, 2016, participants stepped inside Shambaugh House and sat beside peers of varying nationalities, backgrounds and languages. I told them what they were about to do, and that they would need to do it together. I told them the program would call for an act of fearlessness. An act of imagination.

Over the ensuing two weeks, thirty-two bright, brave young people wrote, side-by-side. They read, in silence and aloud, sometimes at the top of their voices. They listened. They danced and dined.

Midway through the session, a beloved faculty member said to me, "Some change is happening here." I noticed it too.

Between the Lines participants no longer required bravery—they had become ruthless in their togetherness, unhesitating in support of one another, and compassionate with their words. They decimated linguistic and cultural borders.

They were no longer only Bahraini, but poetess. Not only Russian, but essayist. Not only American, but storyteller. They no longer asked one another, where do you come from? What language is yours? Instead they asked, poetry or prose? Fiction or essay? First person or third? They became a nation of artists, bound by their culture of creativity.

This anthology is a fragment of all they accomplished together. What a privilege it has been, watching this act of imaginative travel unfold in real time, right here in this place, Shambaugh House, Iowa City, Iowa.

CATE DICHARRY

Program Coordinator



MOHAMMED “HAMOODY” AL-HAJJAJ

Basra, Iraq

.....for some reasons,

I wasn't in panic or fear, I wasn't in excitement or curiosity either. I just felt an anonymous unverified recognition, I just felt a little weird but brazen and hypnotic connection, I just unconsciously let my tongue slip with this strangely familiar word,

“Dad?”

Don't know how or why, don't know right or wrong, this recognition hadn't come from a field of memories, eyes, or a full-of-stars universe. It just came from a painful, heartbroken and agonized heart.

Looking at him with a collapsed smile, I wanted this man who was given the uncertain authority to call my unknown name, to answer the depressed me.

Yet

“Dad,”

as if that word had no sound, dad ignorantly sat beside the curtain and looked down in depression. In a few moments the air filled with the great pressure of intensity and concealed certainty. Although I want to talk, say and somehow laugh with

this man, whenever I try to shrink my little lungs to say something, a silent knotted tongue will appear.

I want to ask this supposed “dad,” but I just can't. I fear what the truth would be like, I fear what if I turned to be a real worthless nothingness.

My memories are still in a deep illusive starless universe. Am I greedy to want a glowing star in that nothingness? I couldn't help asking my self this question.

And as if my mind was read , a shadow instantly pushed the curtain rushing to me.

[I'm sorry I'm really sorry...]

Strangely this woman too, I know her. These words of an incredible gentleness, security and somehow sympathy did come with tears.

Why the apology? I asked myself Ignoring the increasing heartbreak of mine.

Apologizing due to the shocking truth? Or apologizing due to the inability to give the answer?

I feared to ask this “supposed” mom woman.

I feared the answer of hers. What if this was the dream and that starless universe is the real reality?

Without the proper memory, my differentiation was unsecured.

Unaware of anything, I, to this strong, gentle and somehow nostalgic hug could just stay in non-reason calmness.

In that posture I gradually entered a trance-like state, just to know that a star started to glow in that starless memories.

AYA ALBSOUL

Amman, Jordan

“A soul wrenching goodbye
Looking back on it now
I wish I wasn’t too scared to improvise
I hadn’t mentally prepared myself
For the echoes that reverberated
Around my mind
When I realized I was seeing you for the last time
I told you it’ll be alright
And that I will forever be grateful for the sight
Of your lovely smile shining so bright
Tidal waves came rolling in my eyes
Making me leave earth for just a little while
I walked by an empty street
The air was so clean
At dawn gnawing so beautifully
An old bicycle left on the ground left so carelessly
I tried to ride it to hell
But the rusty wheels failed me
And I fell
I crept into the woods
Like I thought monsters would
And I sat by the fig tree
Rotten figs trying to guide me
To reality
I returned to the eyes
I once left behind
And I tried saying more

I tried telling you my heart was with you
But the words never came into existence
Words spilled unevenly
Like a leaking canoe
And after that, sorrowfully
Your eyes have never met mine
I was back at the fig tree
Crying
Blaming the constellations
Those wistful mysteries
Your mouth never told a lie
Never spoke of dignity
A serum of truth would never be used on you
You valued honesty
I wished that you could have
Came inside that day
We would have entered through the attic
It’s a hell of a
Cluttered catastrophe
But no matter on how much shooting stars I wish
You’ll never be back
You’ve become a myth
Now the attic is coated
With spider webs
But you’re afraid of spiders
And dolls made of thread”



NADA MOHAMED NABIL ALI

Dokki, Giza, Egypt

SPAIN

Spain was burning that day.

As Franco forces dropped the bombs in Granada,
King Philip demanded in غرناطة
That stacks of knowledge, divine books, and
beautiful manuscripts,
Be burned into ashes.
While the leather of blue, scarlet, and olive green
book volumes,
Melted into one another,
The markets in Granada,
With their fruits, garments, and salespeople
All scorched into a flame.

As the minarets and the domes,
Of the ornamented mosques,
Crumbled and collapsed,
By the King's rapacious forces,
In the center of قرطبة
The churches were raided,
by the general's violent forces,
for monks who spoke the truth,
in the land of Córdoba,
Where 4000 were killed.

As the blameless women and children,
Wept tears and blood,
After the military,
Widowed and orphaned them,
In the neighborhoods of Málaga,
The women and children,
في أحياء مالقة
Were thrown into slavery,
For the faith they believed in.

Franco that day,
And King Philip hadn't known,
That young فاطمة من بلنسية
And young Matías from Valencia,
Vowed secretly in Arabic
And Espagnol
To take revenge
For the lost lands,
To re-document
The burned manuscripts,
And to avenge
The blood in the streets.





LUJAIN ALSAIBAI

Jablat Habshi, Bahrain

MONSTERS

On a clear Halloween night,
Monsters gathered around,
The portal opened again,
As it always did on that significant night.
Another world was in sight,
Vibrant and full of illuminating lights.
The witch was first in line,
Waiting eagerly to see humans for the first time.
What will she see?
She wondered.
Thinking of colorful candy wraps,
And joyful children running around.
She jumped in
Without a second thought.
What will she see?
She wondered.
She couldn't wait to know!
In a matter of seconds she was there,
But there were no colorful candy wrappers,
And no joyful children running in sight.
Instead there was a very foul smell,
And giant rats with big red eyes.
She walked slowly,
Alone in the alley,
An old man sitting down,
Told her in a sweet voice,
He tried,
His teeth were filthy:
"Come here dear,
Let's party tonight".
She walked away,
Trying not to turn,
As she did,

His voice became harsh.
He swore and swore,
Then he spat.
She quickened her pace,
Until she reached a door
To what seemed like an abandoned house.
Sneering teenagers were walking in,
So she dared herself inside,
Not knowing what was awaiting her,
She hoped it wouldn't be another old man.
She cautiously entered and it turned out...
It wasn't,
And as relieved as she was,
She was confused and astounded.
What was happening was bemusing,
Just to her it seemed,
Inside an orb reflected radiant lights,
In different directions,
Reaching all corners
While those inside were dancing.
Their voices sounded untroubled
By what's happening around.
Someone got suddenly closer,
A boy it turned out,
Looking obviously wasted,
Since he had wet his pants.
She thought it would be fun,
Like a fantasy,
But instead it was terrifying,
That night she sincerely understood,
The meaning of the word monster
(Which she and her friends get called.)



ISAAC BALL

Salt Lake City, Utah

GANGLAND RHAPSODY

We thought it was cool, because what's cooler
Than stealing sips out of day old
Bud light Cans left to rest upon malnourished
Grass the color of sand. Because what is cooler
Than cracking liquor cabinets open with
Crowbars made of music. Because no, we don't
Have to steal sips anymore, no now we
Swallow first sip to last sip until we slip.
Feet becoming unsteady upon maroon
Shag carpets smeared with Vaseline grease that
Smells like cologne. We fall backwards into eternity
Yelling out to past generations each with their own
Gangland vices and ballrooms. Because that's what this is
And what we are, gangsters parading in Victorian
Gowns. Until our white lace trim catches underfoot,
And we fall like snowfall but not landing
With nearly as much grace.

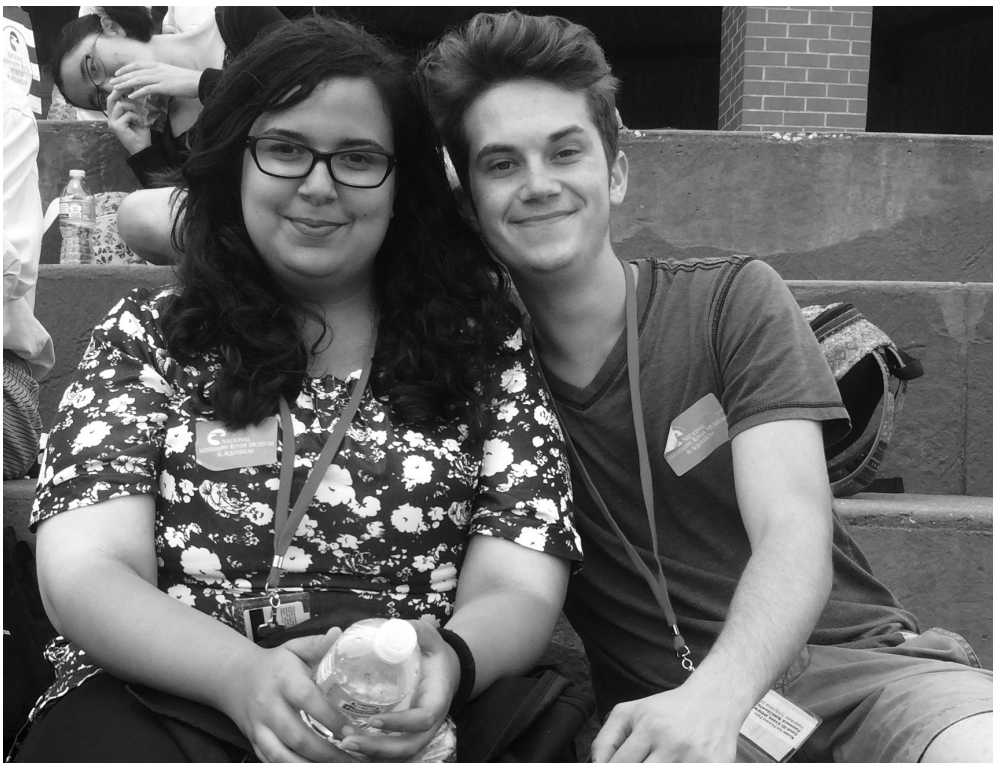


ISLEM BEN ABDELAZIZ

Sousse, Tunisia

THERE

I hope it's great up there.
I hope it's warm up there. I know you don't like cold places.
It's been a while but you should now that I'm okay now.
The anger has settled down for awhile now;
I've been sleeping again and I've been eating again.
I still think about you every now and then.
I hope you were looking at me as I stared at the Lake last night and thought it was the most mesmerising thing I've ever seen.
I hope you remember the time you were here, and how I thought the same about you.
You're not here.
You're there. And apparently, there doesn't know how lucky it is.
But I have been doing very well actually.
I think if you could see me now, you'd be proud.
I hope you still get excited about the little things.
I hope they blast some great Taylor Swift songs up there.
I hope you never wonder why it ended so quickly, like me.
But if our paths were meant to cross for this short amount of time
then I'm just happy I knew you at all.
I hope you're looking down upon me right now.
I hope you know I'm in a safe place right now.
I hope the battle is over one day.
And you've won.



ANASTASIA BESSONOVA

Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia

SOMETHING ABOUT SYLVIA PLATH

When you were walking down the street
on a cold and sunny day,
grass and trees, air and sky —
everything started to read like a poem.
And you were on the way to your light apartment,
that was breathing with your talent
and your sorrow.
You awaked in the morning
in your white bed,
which was painted
with red flowers;
“What a raunch!”, —
weak people say.
You poured warm milk
with honey
for your children.
To make their tears a little sweeter.
And even when your head was in the oven —
oh, my God! —
it was still
beautiful.



IMANE BOUHAICHANA

Mohammedia, Morocco

SECONDS BEFORE THE END

She's crying alone, for she has been accused
She's trying to talk, but to listen they have refused
Tears fall down crystals, her heart is bruised
In that old dark room, she's lonely
She hears noises, but in her head only
Dark clouds filled her heart, they were eating her slowly

”مال القلب المحطم الأثم يحتر
ألم يتعود على ما قام به من الأخطار؟
انهضي يا خائنة الزمن و اطفئي النار
قتلتني روح القدر و أحبيتي الأشرار
جمعتني الذنوب و نشرتي الأقدار
كفى من البكاء، انتهت الأعذار“

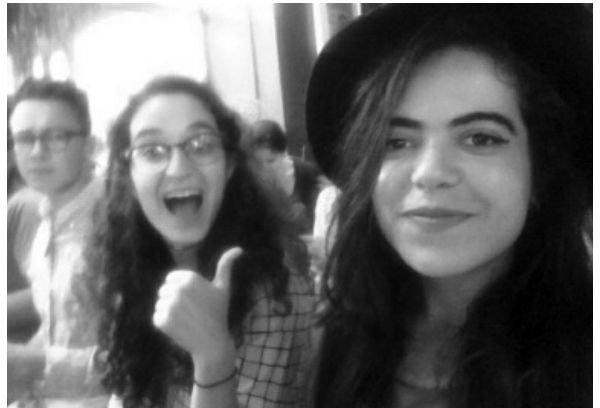
She listened to that voice, to her it was right
She fell in love with darkness, she no longer knows bright
Inside the tornado that is her head, she has a fight
She may have seen a light
She better hold on to it tight
Because one day, it'd be alright
That is what she repeated at midnight
I'll leave you with a good night
For I no longer want to recite
Her story and ruin your night
She's dead.

They killed her

They killed her. My beautiful baby, they killed her. I used to tell her 'stop crying'. Now, Oh, what I would do to just taste her tears. For sadness is proof that the heart is still beating. I used to hate how she complained about the dresses I wore, now I no longer wear them, for I found out that she was the reason I bought every single one. I used to tell her what she eats is unhealthy. I used to turn the TV off, so she could go to sleep early. I used to braid her hair when she was taking a nap. However, I did not braid it, when she had her eternal nap. I hit her once. That was the first and the last hit before she left this world. It's raining outside, and the grey clouds reflect the inside of my heart. I feel her shadow. It came home late. It did not say a word. Am I going out of my mind? It really is her shadow. No. It's the shadow of her favorite doll. She used to play with this doll a few years back. I take the doll. I burn it. It burns me. We burn each other. She's gone. It's gone. I'm gone. Wait for me, I'm coming.

أنا وأنت

أنا أنا
وقلبي قلبي
حطمته يا خضر العينين
حطمته حتى قبل أذ تلمسه
اللعنة على جلدك الناعم الأبيض الذيرطب أيامي
اللعنة على وجنتيك الحمراوتين اللتاز لسعتا كبدي
اللعنة على ضحكك التي شافت جراحي
اللعنة اللعنة
ربما انت لا تهتم
ليس ربما، بل قطعا
قريبا سأرحل
اللعنة اللعنة
أنت أنت
وأنا لست أنا



CAMILLE CALDERA

Bethesda, Maryland

PLEASE

for E., S., A., I., and all the rest

Let me paint a mirror
with sunsets,
sunflowers and lemons,
and Let me hang it
in a bedroom by the sea,
reflecting particles
of respite each time
dissatisfaction comes
to call, Let me call
and whisper love poems
over the dial tone,
resurrecting the sand castles
the ocean took prisoner,
it feels like a lifetime
ago that we built them
together, Let's be together,
strength in numbers,
strength in strength,
Let's be together
and be weak for weeks,
painting mirrors
as the tide
comes in.

WE

We are sorry — we cannot tell each story
We have just one hour, we are so much
more than one hour.
We fight as we, even when we do not
like we — there is little time for you's or i's
just you and i, just we.
We are sorry — we are so much
bigger than two letters.
We are so much bigger than
this room
but this room is what
they gave us.
We are not sorry
We are here.



VISHWA CHITNIS

Irvine, California

R.K.

They sighed with relief dismissing the grief that
was painted on the streets of South Central L.A.

Painted with blood and tire tracks.

The beating
bleeding
bits of
brown skin
severed senseless on that Sunday.

KICKED

acquitted...

STOMPED

acquitted...

HIT

acquitted...

PUNCHED

acquitted...

TAUNTED THREATENED

acquitted acquitted...

PATRONIZED PIGS
no GUILT but GREED
LOOTING and LOATHING

history rewinding itself and
HITTING play
PUNCHING play
KICKING play
SHOOTING play
Now a moment of silence for:

Tamir, Michael, Eric, and Oscar...

for their lives did not last because the remote is broken,
and we are living in the past.

no blame, no shame

but an abundance of time to prove that color is crime...

PREJUDICE AND OPPRESSION

They will sit back and incite riots in the streets,
and claim to a jury that they were just,

“keeping the peace.”



EMILY CLARKE

Anza, California



ABOUT ME BY ME

Last summer, Me's grandmother introduced Me to a boy. The boy looked at Me the way you see boys looking at other Me's and other You's and other They's and other Them's, except he didn't. Except he looked at Me like Me was prettier and smarter and nicer than Me actually was. The boy looked at Me like he was Noah from The Notebook, but Me was not too excited about being the Ally of the situation. Me didn't want to be any sort of Ally. Me just wanted to be Me. Me had no interest in being Me + Noah from The Notebook or Me + the boy, but Me did have an interest in being alone. Since it was impossible for Me to be alone while Me was simultaneously being with the boy, who had been stopped in the middle of the room staring at Me for way too long, Me decided to ignore him. Me pretended Me couldn't feel his eyes on Me until finally, Me's family decided to leave and go to a grocery store.

Me and Me's family had been shopping for a short ten minutes when they ironically ran into the boy and his mom. Me began to become annoyed. No, Me began to become furious. How dare that boy look at Me, how dare that boy like Me, how dare that boy fall in love with Me after a single glance, like Me has tried to do so many times. It's not just that Me can't seem to fall in love on a whim like everyone else, it's that Me can't even fall in love with herself. Why does some boy get to fall in love with Me? Me would really, really, really, enjoy being in love with Me. Me + Me = <3.

A conversation between Me's family and the boy and his mom strikes up. Me pretends to be very interested in ice cream. Well, Me really is very interested in ice cream. The boy shows Me's little sister photos from when he met the cast of Victorious, which makes Me even angrier. The boy is having a conversation, but the entire time he is staring at Me. Finally, after Me has read every ice cream flavor twelve times, Me's family leaves.

Me is disgusted. Me thinks Me would never give this guy a chance, yet Me has no idea why. Maybe Me thinks Me is too good for everyone else. But, it is more likely that Me is terrified of someone spending time on Me. Me is scared of someone falling in love with Me after only a few seconds. Me is scared of anyone falling in love with Me no matter what the situation.

In the car, Me's grandma starts talking about the boy. She says that the boy got to meet the cast of Victorious because he has cancer and was a part of the Make A Wish Foundation. Me deflates. Me feels like the shittiest person in the world. Then, Me feels even worse because Me only felt bad for pretending the boy didn't exist when he so clearly tried to get Me's attention after Me learned he had cancer. Me thinks this is maybe one of the worst things Me has ever done. Me could've just looked at him, or smiled at him, or spoken to him once. Me could've made someone's day a little bit brighter, but, Me didn't.



AZIZA EL HAJ SLEIMAN

Beqaa, Lebanon



وضعت أذني على فم الكلمات التي تُنقش في قلوب، "Iowa" أمسك بي الشتاء البيروتني من يدي وقادني بنفسه إلى مدينة الكتاب:
الأوراق وسمعتها تهمس لي

“الأحلام ليست مستحيلة... فمن أنا حتى أناكد الحلم؟”

فقط عندما ارتقيت إلى مستوى الحلم اكتشفت ذلك السُّلم السَّري الذي يصعد عليه الفرح من قلبي إلى السماء والحياة بالعمل الدؤوب!
وسط كون من البراعة والحظ أعيش الحلم، وأشعر للمرة الأولى أن ما يموت ليس عمرنا بل الموت
فالنجاح له لغة خاصة تُربك القلب أحياناً وتُنشِب الكون من حولك كالمخالب التي فقط تبقى ألمها من شدة الغيرة. فعلى الإنسان أن يبقى
حر أمام شمس النهار والتحرر من تكبل الفكر، أمام قمر الليل وكواكبه، أن يكون حراً فقط عندما يغمض عينيه عن الكيان بكليته
على الرغم من أن الأم هي كل شيء في هذه الحياة هي التغذية في الحزن والرجاء في اليأس والقوة في الصعف، فالأدب هو الملكة
التي تغذي الروح وتنعش الأجساد وتبعث القارئ والكاتب إلى عالم مليء بالأمال والنجاحات. هو الذي يجعل الإنسان خالداً في شواهد
الحياة.

أخيراً وجودي في هذه الولاية هو لحظة حلم وصدق لن أنسى هذه التجربة وستبقى محفورة في تجاوب دماغي كالذكريات التي تحفظ
...كالفونوغراف والأسطوانات ... ومع كل تثبيت للذاكرة والتجربة تُحفر أكثر وأكثر

عزيزة_سليمان#

MOHAMMAD EL-KURD

East Jerusalem, Palestenian Territories

WHEN THE TERRORIST IS WHITE

(for Yousor, Deah, and Razan, victims of the Chapel Hill terrorist shooting)

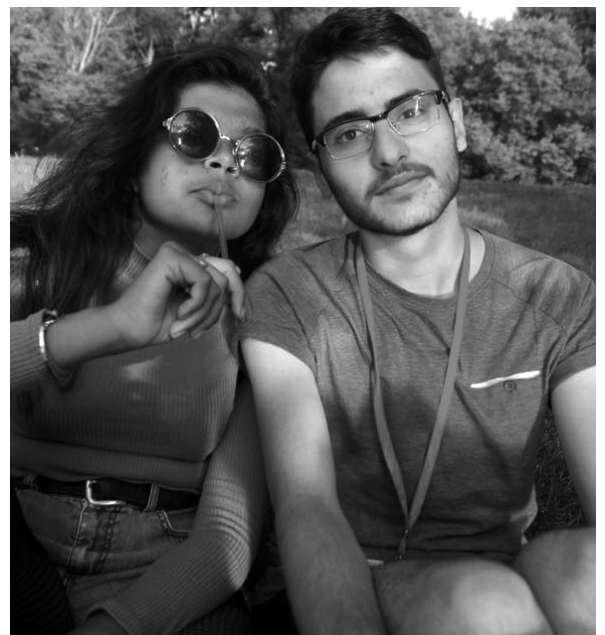
When the terrorist is white
there won't be any billboards
undermining, corrupting, and tarnishing
the image of a whole nation
there wouldn't be generalizing
nor there would be any criminalizing
due to race; discriminate a population
there won't be anyone talking down to
a sixteen year old, who has nothing to do
with chaos

When the criminal is white
it will not be commercialized on the news
no outrageous phantoms to stop
celebrated hatred
nowadays I fear asserting life
as brown as I am
because there is a gun
loaded with cynical hateful vows
and a bullet that is made a national-hero
reaching.

Please
don't
shoot.

the world is broken and tainted
stolen and painted
into a picture
that only some would like to see

When the terrorist is white
there won't be apologies
nor will there be mourning
this is the American good heart,
white heart,
advocating
the intricately satisfied
---yet blind---
masses
'you are the criminals'
'you are the terrorists'
and 'terrorism only comes in color'
they say
and those of color
pay
dare tell me
racism is long gone,
because I swear
I breathe it in,
whenever I endure a dawn to breathe upon me
I know that when the world is silent
it is yet rhetorically
speaking volumes of truth



DARIA FEDOSEEVA

Vvedenskoe, Moscow, Russia

Первое, на что я обратила внимание в этой стране – три часа дня были похожи на три часа ночи. А возле таможни нельзя было разговаривать по телефону – немолодая афроамериканка вежливо попросила мужчину перестать это делать, пока он стоял в очереди.

Были ещё люди, которые здоровались и извинялись всё время – бывает, что на твоём пути появляется человек, а ты выбираешь именно тот путь для обхода, что выбирает и он, за это извиняются. Извиняются и за то, что помешали тебе, когда ты бесцельно рассматривал полки книжного магазина. Но это всё было потом.

Вначале был отменённый рейс и первая ночь, проведённая в терминале аэропорта. Холод. В этой стране очень его любят, а мне, человеку, привыкшему его бояться и от него заболеть, было непросто именно это не сделать от кондиционеров, холодных напитков, перемен климата, смены часовых поясов на три, потом ещё шесть, и один час назад.

Первое, что меня в себя абсолютно влюбило – тёплые, наполненные светом тихие улочки «сердца Америки». Так негласно называется этот пригретый солнцем край. Светлые, выкрашенные белой или серой краской, дома окружали кампус как-то заботливо. В первый день у нас получилось сходить на кладбище в северной части города, где расположен памятник чёрному ангелу. И пока мы шли назад, все двадцать минут мы наслаждались самой живой и настоящей одноэтажной Америкой.

А во-вторых, это появляющиеся, кажется, из неоткуда с наступлением темноты бары, льющийся по центральным улицам города и такой свободный джаз, книжные магазины, где продают кофе, и кофейни, где есть книги, радужные флаги, талантливые люди. Это лишь всё, что удалось охватить взглядом за пару дней, но стало ясно лишь одно – любить эту культуру можно по миллиарду разных причин.



YULIA GAEVA

Ekaterinburg, Russia



EXCERPT FROM 'AMERICAN APPAREL'

Every teenager has a secret place in one's room. I have it too, under my bed there is a small drawer in the wall. Hope nobody knows about it. There are lots of unnecessary things. Though they are important for me. The one is my mini travelling journal, a big album about the USA: cards, pictures, photos, stories about interesting places, history, some scrapes of paper about difference between British and American English, idioms, spoken English and so on. Then American Stars and Stripes (really huge). Sometimes when I get absolutely bored (almost always) I put this flag on as a shirt and go to the university.

Then photos of Statue of liberty with the NY view, Rushmore (obviously fell in love with Avraham Lincoln), Vegas beach with huge waves and lots of surfing stuff, Manhattan – Brooklyn , JFK, Nebraska-Texas-South Dakota, Jimmy Fallon and James Corden, Stephen King and one of my loveliest book 11/22/63, Friends in Central Perk, How I met your mother in a bar near Ted's, Lily's, Marshal's house, The big-bang theory in the comic shop, huge American clothes shops, Carrie Bradshaw and Manolo Blahnik, RHCP with 'Californication', Fall out boy with 'Takes over, breaks over', Bon Jovi with 'It's my life', Leonardo DiCaprio and Oscar, Marvel films, Johnny Depp and Robert John Downey Jr..

This all I somehow associate with the USA, with its interior culture. And can you believe that there are so many things in one small drawer? I can't.

MARIA GALKINA

Moscow, Russia

when the crumpled paper in the alien car
seems a profile of a dozing young man
a handsome Georgian and the eyebrows are darts
a Frenchman a workman and hair is a meadow

and a glow of this car in the silent yard
STEPS OF THE RAVEN WHO IS INVISIBLE
and a glow of this yard in the dazzling dark
LOUDER THAN THE MOUTH, LOUDER THAN THE EARS

you know the pavement here is so old
THE INVISIBLE RAVEN IS IN MY HANDS
AND MY HANDS ARE INVISIBLE AND THEN I AM
you know the pavement here is so old

I've just watched this movie of Iosseliani
le château, l'explosion, I'm so glad you came
no, it's not that
there's something another
I AM SO UTTER, SO UTTER AM I

I'm going to leave
I'm going to leaves
leaves of grass
and the eye in the glass
and the glass in the lake
and the lake in the belly
of the round-eyed fish
and in the leaky boat in the lake
there is William Blake
counting the catch
(Circles on the water go, not simple circumstances, you know, I
always make mistakes in this bending word as circumstances, as a
strong current)
April night 22-23
the Raven is calm
Lenin has been born
Shakespeare is dying
The old woman in the underpass is selling willow branches



SIRI GANNHOLM

Seattle, Washington

HUMAN ANATOMY 101

Quick, slip through the sidewalk cracks,
and in the newfangled twilight savor the ragged dandelions,
choosing the brightest to be your lantern.

It is already dark down here
and will grow darker.

Taste the dust left behind by rain, or its absence--
it's pretty, isn't it?

pewtery even when it's dry--
but be careful not to dwell on its melancholy.

Dig deeper.

Here you will find clay,
the sort that collects water, umbrella-like.

It is strong, but has yet to endure a storm.

Keep digging.

Examine the gravel and rocks between your fingers:
notice their anger, guarded as they are by clay and dust;
digging further, feel the spaces between the dirt
and how they gnash the delicate inner layers
unseen or ignored by pedestrians.

Yes, tear me apart before the storm
so that I may be swallowed up, effortless
quietly

without the hammering on the clay and
its inevitable cry as it fractures.

I will sleep through it all
drugged by the soil separating limb from limb.

The rocks will have been washed away
or else will have ground themselves smooth;

for, ground up, I will be delicate

or easily broken;

in other words, unbreakable.



AMANI HAMMAMI

Ennacer City, Batna, Algeria



اسْتَيْقَظْتُ قَبْلَ الْأَوَانِ كَمَا يَنْصُجُ الْأَطْفَالُ فِي
الْحُرُوبِ فَاسْتَفَيْقُوا مِنَ الْبِرَاءَةِ قَبْلَ حَتَّى أَنْ يَنَا مُوا
لَهْرَقَةُ بَابٍ، لَيْسَتْ جَائِي لَهْرَقَةٍ، بَلْ هِيَ مَسْمَارٌ يُعْرَسُ
دَاخِلَ أَسِيٍّ وَلَيْسَتْ لَهْرَقَةً وَاحِدَةً بَلْ لَهْرَقَاتٍ
كَخَفَقَانِ قَلْبٍ حَتَّى شَفْرَةَ الْمُقْصَلَةِ .
حَاوَلْتُ نِكْرَانَهَا، مَرَّوَعْتَهَا، نَسِيَانَهَا فَلَمْ
أَسْتَطِيعَ، حَاوَلْتُ حَتَّى إِذَا كَهَا فَلَمْ أَسْتَطِيعَ
اسْتَيْقَظْتُ وَكَأَنِّي أَشْوَرٌ مُسَدَّ سَا مَعْلَقًا بِرَأْيِهِ
الِاسْتِسْلَامِ الْبَيْهِنَاءِ - لَا أَفْهَمُ حَتَّى لِمَا إِلَّا بَيْضُ بِلَوْنٍ
اسْتَيْسَلَا مَا تَنَا لَرَبَّمَا اسْتَيْسَلَا مَا تَنَا لَيْسِي مَنْ تُجْرَدْنَا
مِنْ كُلِّ الْأَلْوَانِ وَكُلِّ اللَّسَعَاتِ وَكُلِّ الْعُوقِيَانِ قَتَبَقِي
فَرَأَيْتَا فَرَاغَ حَتَّى يَخْبِي عَقْنَا الْفَرَاغَ نَا
يَكُلُّ مَكَانَهُ سَيِّئٌ وَتَحْنُ نُسَيْبِهِ "أَبِيحِي" ...

BLUE MAJESTY

Of all beauties, fairest to be hold
In the ball of night, she interred as a told
Elsewhere eyes could not see & tongs scold
Wore lordy Polaris as a ring thus nold
Thine highness is moody; alike the weather she's mold
Day one, Step one, her majesty is rainy and cold
As the clock is ticking, to past time is sold
Midst January, she was possessed with anger, good to avoid
Later on, she cried ice crystals; snow was it called
Clouds obeyed to her blindness as her feelings explode
Turned grey as a hanger's heart, screaming thunder I've been told
Me looked at her, me wrote a letter that I've fold
Sweet rhymes, white lies, me made me words danced and rolled
Was none purpose, none at all, for beauty to be fourfold
Was none fairer, none in all, thus winter who sky wore



ELLEN HUGGINS

Greenwood Village, Colorado

It's a bright, semi sunny day in a place in Belgium that I've forgotten the name of, but I know it's in Belgium and I know that I lived there for four years and I know that there was a monastery outside my house and I went to school down the road and we weren't allowed to get a dog because we were just renting it and we weren't allowed to put tape on the walls either because it could ruin the paint. So it was a semi- sunny Mother's Day somewhere in Belgium, and also the day of a festival that happened on the big road where the american embassy was and it had oak trees going down the middle of it that I remember seeing when my mom told me that dad was going to be working for a man who made yogurt . I had forgotten to get my mom a mother's day present, something that happens as annually as mother's day itself, and my dad had told me the night before that there would be places to buy things at the festival and I could just buy her present there. At least, I assume he said something because honestly I don't remember this conversation but he likes to talk to me about what I'm getting my mom for mother's day so yes, it happened and I forgot that it did but it happened. So I forget how we got there but I'm sure we walked because my dad loves to walk and at this time my baby brother was in a stroller so my mom had something to lean on which she would need because she didn't like walking at all back then, but now she loves it because she says that it keeps her muffin tops at bay. My mom is what you call a health nut, she loves yoga and eating eggplant while she talks about how my dad eats too many bananas, because he thinks that they're very healthy but he has borderline two type diabetes so he does not know as much as he thinks about health. he takes six pills for a night while he's wearing his glasses that he only wears in the evenings because I think he's insecure about his eyesight

and wants to seem more like a guy's guy but I love his glasses and wish that he wore them all the time and when I was a wee tot I wanted to wear glasses too, oh and he's wears this light brown shirt at night too, which I assume is the only pajama shirt he owns because it's all I ever see him in. I borrowed that shirt once because I liked the way that it hanged on me and I went to go do somersaults in the park with a few friends, and I didn't think I would ever do a somersault but I did and it was exciting in a silent kind of way because I just acted like I did them all the time, and like I wasn't afraid that my neck would snap as soon as I put all of my weight on it and rolled at the same time, which you would think would happen but no apparently it does not.

Anyway so we're walking on the street with the big trees and the festival is happening, and there's plenty of blankets, blankets everywhere and I think I stepped on plenty of corners. I remember looking at the ground a lot, and maybe that was because I was so little that's all I could really see at all, but maybe also because I was very interested in what the ground looked like, there were bricks on the road and maybe I stepped on each one with my toes. And I don't remember buying it but I remember holding it in my two fingers and thinking that it was so beautiful and so sweet and that it was most likely the best present I had ever bought for my mom, or any present that had ever been bought for any mom for that matter, and it was a necklace that had the Michelin Tire Man on it, and he was probably the size of a dime. My dad came over and said it was great, that my mom would love it, which was of course a lie because who would ever want the michelin tire man on a necklace, especially my mom who much prefers chunky jewelry to small, silver, anthropomorphic men made of tires.

KATYA KARNAUKHOVA

Kaliningrad, Russia

54. ÜBERLIN

ÜBERLIN 2. <<Viscous myopia attacked me right after moving to this town. Local people looked into my eyes with a trembling: they were afraid that I could see their faces wrong.

But I liked that place. In area I lived inhabitants adored their work schedule, and that's why street life went like in a clock-resemble mode. To be honest, all, that a human with poor vision needed for, was there: you could never run into something because everything formed a united system>>

<<You're just kidding, it's only your imagination: you see nothing, don't you? So, how on Earth can you tell the difference between things, huh?>>

<<Okay, I can't see a thing, you're right, but... so what then? I think it's you who have missed your eyes already>>

ÜBERLIN 3. <<I went to this town because it was my dog's footsteps on laminate that led me.

Thought I would find it somewhere in a thousand kilometers away from home. However, I did: in a café of underground it was drinking hot tea and whining quietly while people were hanging their heads towards cups for a second.

I sat down side by side with it and ordered a small mug of sweet cocoa. Dog, cocoa and I - yes, we were talking at least fifteen minutes. At long last, I was almost succeed in urging them to return back home, when...>>

<<Wait a little bit. Is it so, that you haven't ever had a dog yourself?>>

<<Okay, it is, but so what? You'd better look after your little goldfish: I saw it tried to jump out of aquarium>>

ÜBERLIN 4. <<I went to this town because there were a lot of straight trees. The doctor advised me to look at something flat and straight as often as I could in order to smooth my own spine.

Every morning I stood up next to one of the trunks and tried to understand how to be so straight. From day to day my spine tried to return back into its natural position>>

<<But you're still stooping while you're writing your notes, aren't you?>>

<<I'm not stooping, it's a shadow>>.





OMAR KHATTALA

Taourirt, Morocco

The train car where Yuna was sitting was so empty, as empty as her life where there's nothing but soft echoes and blurry illusions. Nothing was real. She was sitting next to a window thinking about her past and future and most importantly, her present.

She kept staring at the far away mountain that stood majestically in the middle of a grass field. With a weird-shaped cloud on its frozen summit that looked like it was a giant hat. Rabbits and deers were playing peacefully all around the place. And the colossal oak trees stood in the horizon far away like the background of a beautiful theatre play.

Hours and hours passed. But there were no signs of any civilization, just nature, beautiful nature. After that they got into a tunnel, and the darkness covered everything, including the very car where Yuna was.

That trip inside the tunnel made her feel so lonely. In fact, she got the feeling of being the last person on earth. The deep darkness outside, the emptiness of the car, the echo of the train wheels on the rails all reminded her of the times when she was left all alone at home when her parents left for work. Or when she was the only one waiting at the bus station while the rain drops were making a sad beautiful symphony. Or even when no one of her friends chose her to play with him.

All of this emptiness and darkness and weird quietness reminded her why she chose to learn to play the Ocarina in the first place. To escape the world that had forgotten about her. To have a friend she would talk to, and tell him her secrets and things that bothered her. That Ocarina was her only friend in her empty life.

ANASTASIYA KOMAROVA

Ulan-Ude, Buryatia, Russia

THE ELEPHANT

When an Elephant puts his foot on the ground... The earth trembles. The teeth hit against the Cup of orange juice. A cyclist falls with a loud thud — “plump”. When an Elephant puts his foot on the ground... People fall from the other side of the Earth.\	And stars fall. And time. One. Two. Three. Four. When Mary puts her foot on the ground... Only her hands and voice tremble. And the world clams up, Like it was dead.	Фарисеи — лгуны (белым нальются костяшки пальцев) Я смотрю. Ты смотри... Как разбредается лужица чая По лацканам покатыся кац — кац не смываемым потоком по колену По ступням по полу по коту движется зеленый чай. Его миссия в плену жасмина —успокаивать, Но он прожигает еще большую дыру. Зашей молоком эти раны, залепи как лепниной выщерблины морщин. Не думай. Не вспоминай. Лучше просто знай Фарисеи - лгуны аминь.
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VITALIY KUZNETSOV

Moscow, Russia

Every life has a certain beginning. It may be selfish with future prospects, sincerely amorous and harmonic, or tragically accidental and unwanted. We do not choose how to begin our life track, but we create this track by each step, and it belongs only to us. It does not matter what winding paths you deviate from or what obstacles you come across, because anyway you will find one mysterious place – the wasteland of glassy sky and concrete ground.

While the eternity flows sluggishly, the stout man and the actress, both dressed in black, join the host. They stand side-face, so we can see their mournful expressions, and tell their stories, which happened to them outside the desert. Everything took place in their narration: the vulgarity and the aether, the banality and the sublime, obvious things and great mysteries. We hear the words, but we cannot understand them – the meaning disappears, once the last sound is pronounced. And gradually, from somewhere in the deep, a magical tune appears and fills up the whole space around. It is somber and calm like a sleeping sea at night, and it picks us up and swings slowly to the right and to the left, like a pendulum, that counts the eternity. Sometimes there will be facetious notes, playing with us; and the sea will be changed with a cold hasteless wind, that will bring a scary and sincere laughter of the Universe. However, in the slow vortex of nature we are just imponderable specks of dust, but this tune sounds only for us.

Нажимаю на ручку. Стук продолжается. Резко открываю дверь – и передо мной распаивается дремучий тёмный лес. Под ногами стелется подстилка из мрака, так что ни травы, ни шишек, ни даже земли не разглядеть. Сверху, сквозь густые хвойные кроны, боязливо спускаются тонкие солнечные лучи, похожие на длинные золотые иглы, и едва-едва достают до чёрной подстилки. Вглядываясь в лес, ничего не различаю – через пару метров сумрак плотным покрывалом застилает деревья. Промозгло, пахнет сыростью, сладковатым ароматом хвои и древесины. Ровно и спокойно веет холодком.

И это на девятом этаже посреди кирпича и бетона. Сколько ни протирай глаза и ни щипай, это никуда не пропадёт. Если я это вижу, это существует. И никак от этого не отвертеться. А раз так, то остаётся только одно. Я перешагиваю порог и выхожу из квартиры – вперёд, в постучавшийся мир.





JENNIFER MARER

Hermosa Beach, California

OMNIPOTENT

Here; a snap,

And everything is in One.

I wind and set-

Her, the girl at the desk, bony knuckles. Aged 17. Small. Hair in a ponytail- no, bob. Cut with bangs and diagonals, shorter in the back. Raven colored. She remembered to wash her hair today, forgot, and then smelled grapefruit and remembered.

Oh, oh, oh- and bikes. And hazel eyes. She loved both.

The sky: blue. Gray. Blue-gray. Clouds and breeze, suspiciously cold for... The Place.

Him, a truck in his hand. He wanted the truck, the yellow truck, the yellow truck with flames on the side, and he loved it, he loved that truck, yes. Six- five? No, four, most likely, four was the perfect age, perfect.

Cup-

Oh, one more, about the boy, he hates pointing, yes, hates it, throws a tantrum when someone does so, is scared of it, you see, yes. Okay.

Cup. Cup on table. Coffee. Coffee cup- Coffee shop. In California, and it was unusually cold for California, so there she was, late for picking up her other son, ordering coffee. Chai latte. Her favorite.

The barista had two hours of sleep and was late. He couldn't blink the shaggy hair from his eyes.

There is a coffee cup on the table. It's someone's. (Yes, technically, it's mine, of course, but so is everything.)

The line was small. Two people stood; the mother and the businessman behind her, who smiled. He used to love Bob the Builder and Hot Wheels and transportation vehicles. He gathered courage to speak about the object in his stare, his hand about to rise.

A girl, washcloth in hand, ponytail (chestnut... almond? Almond colored, yes), all black uniform on, the words "Coffee Page" in white. A tattoo snaked up her arm, no, wrist- a bike. A very nicely sketched, thinly drawn bike, almost like a charcoal drawing. Skin browned from sun and Latino genetics, eyes green on the outer rim and bronze in the middle. Her rainbow shirt stayed tucked in the back of her work closet.

(Oh, oh- right, and she loves grapefruit.)

The cup was a few tables behind her, filled with hard, black coffee in front of the girl with bangs. The boy was in the middle of the aisle, staring at his mom, who was too focused on her order, too focused on the barista's fumbling fingers putting the wrong milk in her coffee, the businessman raising an index finger in his side view. If the boy stretched his arms, they would be reach over the table of the girls with bangs. The truck is half a foot away from the cup.

I hesitate for a moment. An eternity. I do not have everything ready, but when will I ever?

I release.

Point, scream, swing, crash. Cries. Run, run, kneel, wipe, look up.

Two different pairs of hands meet.

One owner smells grapefruit.

The other sees hazel and a bike tattoo.

GEORGII MARTIROSIAN

Moscow, Russia



CONJUGATION OF THE PRESENT

--- The-Face --- and --- You:

(that

--- being spoken

i t will become the whole body

/Wider! --- in <...> the violent:

/ in the violent eyesight

/ in the violent eyesight

(“Lick my ear as if I am a mongrel”) --- in eyesight
in eyesight

in glow

in one movement of glow Having listened attentively to the-Doesn't,
I do not sound like a dissolving / Along the Clouds (“Ближе-в-
Колосьях” (or:) Name from the waist)

- in the end:

“This is the-Vision-in-Flowers”

/

“I've premiered illegal charm”

June 27, June 28, June 29, June 30, June 31, June
32, June 33, June 34,

Iowa City Iowa City Iowa City Iowa City Iowa City Iowa
City Iowa City Iowa City

KYRA MATSUDA

Kamuela, Hawaii



SEVENTEEN

You are seventeen, sitting in a dimly lit classroom as your fingers fly over the computer keys, erasing your words one letter at a time. In a few minutes, you will put your things back in your bag and walk backwards out of the classroom, up the stairs, across the street and up more stairs, eventually climbing the ladder to your bunk bed where you sleep and then you will try to sleep and climb back down and walk backwards to the classroom again.

In a couple months, you will be sitting at home in the middle of the night as you unrevise a story you wrote and unwrite a poem you used to hate. You will walk backwards around your house with considerable skill for bumping into corners and tripping over your feet.

You will uncomplete your writing assignment and slowly throw up your food onto your fork before placing it on your plate. You will walk backwards up the stairs and take a shower until you're dirty and covered in sweat and then put on some smelly clothes from the pile of laundry and reverse down the stairs and into the car and out of the driveway and down the hill and up a different set of stairs to dance backwards.

Three years later, you will sit straddling a boy's lap as he misses your mouth and untries to give you your first kiss. You want him to kiss you. You love him. Teardrops will roll up your cheeks and into your eyes and you're apologizing backwards. You're happy. You talk about getting married. You haven't told him that you love him. Summer hasn't started.

You will walk backwards to school, to all of your classes, unlearning history and math and biology, undoing your homework, uneating your lunch. You will unfall in love. You will run backwards around the block and absorb your sweat into your pores.

You haven't been accepted into the school you want to go to. You will walk backwards to the public school on the last day of classes. You don't hate your classmates. You were never forced to do jazzercise with a room full of students who don't even know how to subtract.

You're enrolled in your first elementary school, surrounded by friends and familiarity. You've never read the Warriors series. You read book after book--backwards--and nobody tells you you can't read at recess.

You're about to go to first grade. You ungraduate from kindergarten, giving back your degree, taking your graduation dress back off, climbing backwards into bed and falling asleep.

Your parents unenroll you in school and walk backwards to the car with you beside them, buckling you into your seat and reversing out of the driveway. They keep reversing all the way home.

You are in the process of being unborn. Your mother lets out strange sounds of pain as the nurses speak gibberish you couldn't understand even if you knew English, which you don't. You are being sucked into your mother's womb where you will slowly disappear, one cell after another until there is nothing left and you have never existed, never even been considered, and your parents aren't married, don't know each other, aren't born. Until there are no people and no Earth and no universe and then nothing at all.



CAITLIN MCCORMICK

Tucson, Arizona

REVOLUTIONS

“Skip two at a time,” they always said,
go straight and don’t worry till the light changes:
there is no shame in love notes and truth serums
the dichotomy between magic
and buildings in the sun
glowing like vinegar bottles
on your mother’s kitchen counter

They were never all that different.

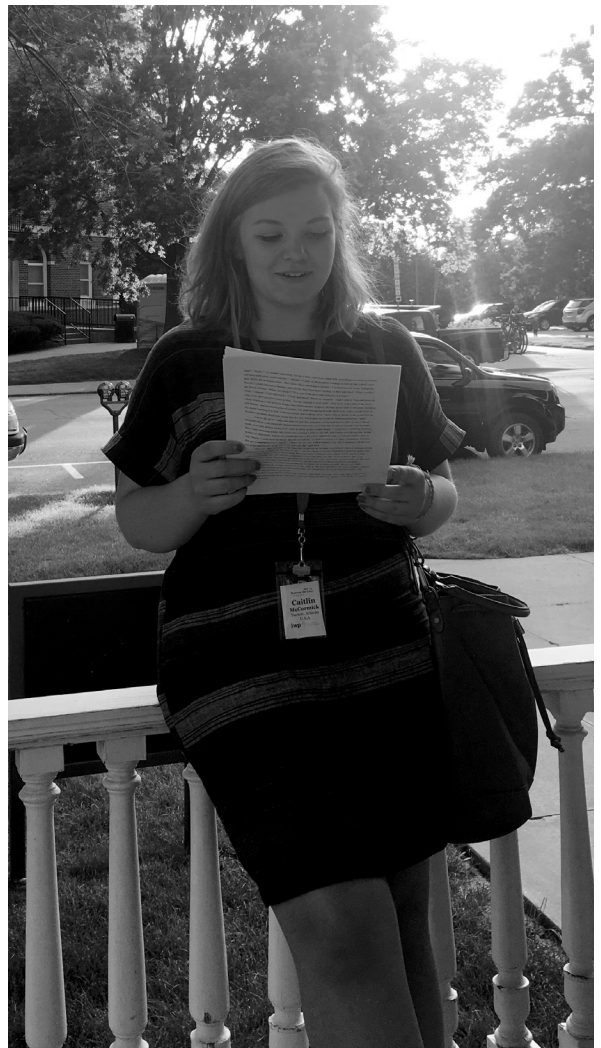
You see, we learned it by bookmarked knees sitting on
the uncomfortable couch in the guesthouse, a silent film
melting on the television. We’d had enough of walking to 711’s
in the dark for candy, carrying candle sticks and
bottles of water as weapons in case of emergency

Anything is dangerous if you will it.

I am not one of the rejected,
but I knew them once, in the biblical way:
which is to say I gave them a place to sleep
some straw on the floor, a hot dinner at a table.

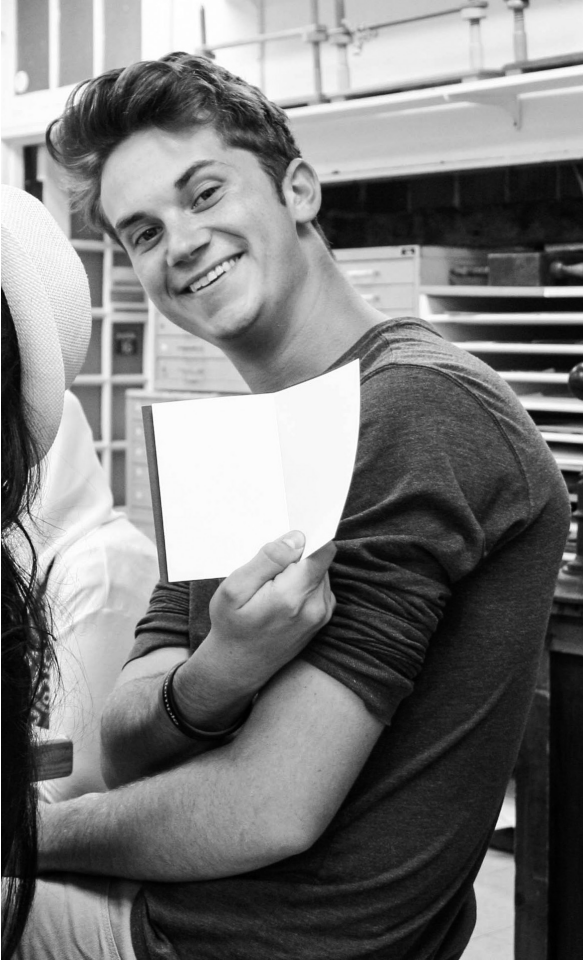
At dawn their steps woke me
and we huddled down the stairs to the empty street.
We shook hands, tried to make out stars or planes
and when the street lamps turned off

They started walking.



IAN POWELL-PALM

Bozeman, Montana



YOU NEVER

Your body lays cold in the morgue. It's the 26th of June.

The hug of grief, enveloping me, crushing my identity, my very soul, under its boot like I am a helpless insect never occurs.

There's never mom and dad waking me up in the morning, tears streaming down their faces because they have been forced with an emotional gun to their head to tell me that you have died.

The car, your car, the little Blue Bug with the David Bowie sticker stuck to its side never has its window broken by Nate, swinging the bat like it were divine retribution alone in the junk yard waiting to be crushed.

The night Mom tells you to act your fucking age and come home with her, you don't resist. You get in the front street, put your seatbelt on and come home.

You go to sleep safe at home and we make you waffles with strawberries in the morning. We joke, we laugh, we roughhouse. We do what siblings are supposed to.

The breath of your voice speaking to me through the phone for the very last time sucks itself back through the speaker.

You never make us go through all that we've gone through, hell and back, an eternity of grief lived in just a few short years. When Mom asks if you've been drinking, you tell her the truth goddamnit, you admit you made a mistake, you get in the fucking car.

You never drive the wrong way down the intersection.

Your husband never screams your name, never takes me in his arms and tells me he's sorry, he's so, so sorry, says it again and again and again like it will now make a difference, like it will bring you back.

Your husband and I never throw Mike and Ike's, your favorite candy, out the window at the site where you crashed.

Mom doesn't have to cry over you every day, this family doesn't have to feel broken.

I never have to say goodbye to my sister.



ARTEM SHESTOPALOV

Moscow, Russia



Мамина свадьба

«Андрейка – жаба! Андрейка – жаба!» - дразнили его мальчишки в детском саду. Андрейка действительно был похож на усталую жабу. Он постоянно щурил глаза, даже в помещении, его щёки были бледными и белёсыми, как лягушечья икра, а под глазами были синяки, будто его Колька ударил. А ещё Андрейка никогда не плакал.

Андрейка любил свою маму. Мама его не любила. Андрейка всё портил. Сначала Андрейка папу испортил. Однажды мама взяла Андрейку с собой в гости к бабушке, но по пути у мамы зазвонил телефон, и её забрали на работу. А Андрейку тётя Галя домой повела, это его соседка. Андрейка домой пришёл, а там ещё одна тётя сидит. Папа сказал маме ничего не говорить и страшные глаза сделал. Андрейка и не сказал, даже когда у себя под кроватью тётини длинные носки нашёл, сразу пошёл их выкидывать. А мама его увидела с носками и спрашивает:

- Андрейка, что это ты несёшь?

Он придумал, что это папа ему носки подарил. А мама стала бледная, как Андрейкины щёки, и пошла с папой ругаться. Папа разозлился и на работу ушёл, и не возвращается.

Ну, это давно было. Остался Андрейка с мамой. Только мама Андрейку перестала любить, потому что он её тоже начал портить. Он слышал, как тётя Галя на кухне маме говорила: «Ребёнок тебе всю перспективу подпортил». «Ребёнок» - это Андрейка. А перспективу он подпортил, потому что мама хотела заново жениться. А Андрейка не знал, зачем ей жениться. Он сам вырастет большой и на ней женится. Она сама же смеялась, когда Андрейка ей об этом раньше, ещё когда папа дома был, говорил. А потом и смеяться перестала и стала строго говорить:

- Что ты за ерунду мелешь, Андрейка!

А потом дядя Слава пришёл. Он тоже хотел заново жениться. Андрейке он не нравился, от него пивом пахло и щёки у него были колючие. И на работу он как папа не ходил, а мама всё равно заставляла Андрейку его папой называть, иначе он всё портил.

И стали мама с дядей Славой тили-тесто жених и невеста, как Колька дразнится. Андрейка должен был подойти на свадьбе к микрофону и сказать, как его бабушка учила: «Поздравляю мама, папа с вашей свадьбой!». Бабушка с ним к микрофону подошла, говорила-говорила, а потом к Андрейке микрофон опустила.

Андрейка сказал:

«Поздравляю мама... дядя Слава с вашей свадьбой!»

И расплакался так громко, что все люди слышали. Дядя Слава сделал страшные глаза, как папа тогда. А мама тоже заплакала и бросилась обнимать Андрейку.

LILY SICKLES

South Orange, New Jersey

TO APPLES, IN ALL FORMS

Sitting beneath a tree with an apple in her hand,
plaid dress wrinkled because she wouldn't wash it
or her hair that was bedraggled tufts
layered soft around her face.
Her cheeks make her look like the apple in her hand.
And you wouldn't want to get too close or
else you'd startle her and she'd wail something horrible.

She asked me once what horrible meant
and I told her it was guns and stealing.
I told her it was a bad question.

She makes me worry that I won't have answers to her questions,
then shows me how little I know.

Yet she's microscopic,
wants to be a big girl
so I tell her she doesn't want that but
she doesn't care enough about words
to listen or take offense.

I don't think she's an angel but I
know most people do. An angel would be
less than fitting for her terrible twos
and her unkempt finger paintings that will soon become
left brain stick figures.

Less than fitting as in not enough to ever manage
what is real as applesauce and
apples in grubby fingertips.



GRACE WALTERS

Chicago, Illinois

A tendril of smoke drifts delicately upwards out of a corner of her mouth, snaking its way past a tear stained cheek before being dispersed by a violent exhale from her nose.

“You’re worrying,” she tells me, “stop it.”

“I can’t.”

She bites her lip as she crushes one cigarette underfoot and lights another. She does this in a single motion that is much too practiced for someone who can’t legally smoke yet.

“Can I do anything to help?” I ask her.

“No,” she says, “I can take care of myself.”

“You take care of yourself the way a disinterested, alcoholic parent takes care of a baby.”

That earns me a laugh.

“I’m fine, it’s fine,” she exhales the words in a cloud of gray smoke. I stay quiet, watching the toes of her boots tap, letting her convince herself. Her boots are doc martens. She told everyone they were from a thrift store and rubbed mud into the soles and frayed the laces, but she was an expert shoplifter begging to get caught and somehow she just couldn’t bring herself to touch the smooth, black veneer on the shoes exterior so I knew they were from some department store.

She lit another cigarette, her fourth today. I frown.

“What?” she demands.

“We have to get back soon,” I say, leaving out the lecture I want to give about the long term effects of smoking. Those lectures don’t help, they never have. She sees them as criticism and she’s never taken that well. I remember telling her once when we were both seven that she had hurt another girls feelings and I remember how she didn’t speak to me for two weeks. I had to write a letter begging her to forgive me.

“everyone else in drama club will wonder where we are,” I say instead.

“They’ll manage without us for a while longer,” She glares at her bouncing knee, willing it to stop moving. I stare at her knee too. She doesn’t ever tell me when things are wrong. I’ve learned to pay attention to her signs. Bouncing knees, bitten lips, sudden changes in hair length; they all mean that collapse is imminent.

“I don’t really see how they can. The lead role is sort of a big thing,” I cajole, “I think you’re needed.”

This is the statement that finally calms her down. With an exaggerated sigh she throws the cigarette down and rises.

“I’m ready for my close up, Mr. DeMille,” She declares laughing. She bounces past me, as she wipes delicate, gray trails of mascara and eyeliner off her face. I follow her back towards the school building, snuffing out her cigarette with the heel of my sneaker as I go.



ANASTASIA ZHIGALOVA

Saratov, Russia

Хмурое небо над головой, словно мутное зеркало, отражающее в себе асфальт. Люди здесь, там. Раздражает. Тонкие, изящные пальцы покрепче сжали ручку сумки. Он обещал. Он придет.

Она упрямо повторяет это вот уже около пятнадцати минут. И все это время она заглядывает в окна каждого такси, в надежде увидеть его лицо, добрую улыбку и такие чистые глаза. Очередная желтая машинка отъехала от аэропорта и юная девушка грустно вздохнула. Он ведь не мог обмануть её? Конечно, нет...

Шумная трасса рядом с просторным зданием аэропорта безумно давит на чувствительный слух, ужасно раздражая. Она нервно переступает с ноги на ногу, чуть постукивая широкими каблуками и поправляя белокурые волосы, заплетенные в тугую косу. Кусая розовые губы, оглядывается по сторонам, в надежде увидеть копну светлых волос среди серой массы толпы.

«Слабость убивает», - всегда говорили ей, и она верила, боролась с ней, терпела и не позволяла никому видеть себя настоящую.

Ведь, она так долго растила вокруг себя эту непробиваемую броню. Так долго старалась быть сильной, чтобы выжить. Чтобы доказать всем, что она сможет, что её нельзя сломать. Никому просто не под силу. Она выше этого. Но, к чему это привело? Чего она добилась в своей, такой долгой, но такой пустой жизни? Она никогда не чувствовала себя нужной. Ей просто не было места. За своей броней она совсем забыла о простых чувствах. Она забыла, что значит доверять, привыкшая всегда рассчитывать на саму себя. Она забыла, что значит поддерживать, всю жизнь не видя поддержки ни от кого. И вот сейчас, когда вроде бы появилась надежда, когда броня треснула, а такие простые, но такие необходимые чувства просочились наружу, она вновь получает пощечину. И вновь эта злость. Она злится на него, за то, что посмел поступить так с ней. Она злится на себя, за то, что позволила так близко забраться к ней в душу, увидеть её настоящую. Без брони и без защиты.

Большая стрелка часов медленно подползала к двенадцати

и девушка, совсем отчаявшись, резко развернулась на каблука, стремительно направляясь на регистрацию, которая началась вот уже десять минут назад.

На глазах предательские слезы, а губы искусаны уже до крови. Хватит, это был последний раз, когда она поверила кому-то. В этой жизни нет никого, на кого можно было бы положиться и кому бы открыть душу. Обязательно найдется тот, кто с радостью плюнет в неё. Резким движением она смахивает соленую капельку, скатившуюся по щеке. На секунду она останавливается, намереваясь достать билет и сердце предательски замирает. Теплые руки легли ей на плечи, а горячее дыхание обдало шею.

- Решила всё-таки без меня, - вздыхает он, и она чувствует его неуверенность. Он боится. Но кого? Её? Именно.

Она лишь судорожно выдыхает, шмыгая носом и разворачиваясь.

- Мэтт, - шепчет она, с этим приятным акцентом и такой милой улыбкой на губах, - Ты всё же пришел.

- Ты плакала? - он чуть нахмурирует брови, - Прости, я проспал, - смущенно произносит он.

- Всё в порядке, - она кивает, но слезы всё же скатываются по щекам, и краем глаза она замечает в его руках дорожную сумку, - Ты вовремя.

- Наверное, нужно поторопиться, - ухмыляется он и они, переглянувшись, бегут в сторону главного входа. Успеют, не успеют - это не важно.

Главное, что они теперь вместе.



AAMENA A. ZAYED

Giza, Egypt

NIGHT HALLUCINATIONS: SOLILOQUY

Things elude me,
The deep deep ocean of reality
The Hamlet that speaks
And the Dadulas that seeks
Things elude the soul
As the hamartia controls the heart's fragile thought
As the tragedy woven with the silky milky road
As the ivory beads refuses the prayers of the Lord!
Things elude, the body eludes, the soul deviates
And Allah watches, and draws the quests,
As I gobble my popcorn,
As I distort my womb,
As I shall profane the holy hand!
The Sufi hallucinating raptures of culture fragment
the world
The butterfly burns itself in the jar
Can you ever lie?



هالوس ليلية : أشياء
لا شئ يبقى يخرجوا مني
هكذا أسمى أتشبيى روايته
Things Fall Apart أين كنت أنتظر ؟ أه هناك عند باب القسم
هناك جنتى التى هبطت منها إلى الواقع
المسميات كلها واحدة كلنا هناك غرباء متعانقين
لا ننتظر العائدين كدرويش و لكن نكتب إليهم
فى القسم قهوتنا باختلاف جنسياتها تتألف
دلبنى تحضر معداتها كل مرة ... تفكر معنا
و سور برلين Foucault وتحكى لنا عن
تحكى عن مدن و ثقافات و تأخذنا معها
فلا ننتظر العائدين!
دوائر العمر تتشابك... درويش و حنينه لوطن لا أعرفه
البيت لا يضى لى...
أحب بروحى أو لا أشعر بشئ..
و فى كلا الأحوال أعتزف!
بنس قلب لا يخشى "ماذا بعد؟"
"يروق لى أن أصلى ولا أعرف لمن"
أردد جملة مرسال ولا أدرجها فى البحث
أنا شخصية هاملتية الفكر و أحيانا أتقصص ماكبث
طلابى... و لعنة الفكر و أبواب لا توصل ولا تكسر
و أنت و أبواب الصمت و إيمانى بك
الآلات الوترية خلقت من روحى أو هكذا أظن
الغرباء لا يشربون القهوة ولا الأقربون ؟
أنا فى الحلم كنت أردد آية الكرسي
و كأنما كنت أحرر نفر من الجن سكن جسدى
الوقت يمر و عوضا عن الكتابة ... أهلوس
الجميع يسأل ماذا بعد ؟ و أنا لا أعرف شئ عن اليوم!
الجميع يتكلم بإسم الله ولا أحد يسمع له
أعود لنفس القصيدة لجنسر ج... هو يتلو الحقيقة

*"real holy laughter in the river! they saw it all! the wild eyes!
the holy yells! the bad" farewell! they jumped off the roof! to
solitude! waving! carrying flowers! down to "the river! into the
street"**

*The Footnote of Howl

أمنة زايد

TATIANA GUREVICH

Moscow, Russia

LET ME MAKE US A HOLE

Let me make us a hole
Next to the garden where raspberries grow,
Next to the plum-tree I showed you today,
Next to the juniper bushes.
Love is not only about a kiss,
Love is not pleasure you're going to miss,
Love is not pasta and sushi.
Neighbours will frown as we're awkward
but brave,
Blind from our birth and blind to the grave,
We're audacious to look at the light,
Crazy - they say - their time's only night.
Dear, my dear, it's late and it's fall,
Let us finally live together forever,
You're a mole and I'm a mole,
Mutual blindness is so universal,
I will construct you a beautiful burrow,
Let me make us a hole.

I bought an ice-cream as I was passing by
The Pushkin monument.
The picture on the wrapping
Was a butterfly.
Its wings were flapping.
A happy butterfly. The colour's brown.
It's chocolate - you see.
Each child would think it's yummy-mouth-
watering.

Each child -
But certainly not me.
It looks exactly like my brother's MRI,
You know, a simple plastic shot,
My Mum and I
Would only see
In hospital. But I was not
Allowed to watch.
But once I've seen I understood
The tumour looks like butterfly.
The symmetry of course is good.
There are four legs for a cow and a horse,
There are two ears for a zebra,
Two siblings - he and I.
It seems that laws are all subdued.
But once I've seen I understood
My brother was to die.
And every day in a dreadful dream,
I take the scissors from the shelf,
I furiously trim
The plastic picture of the brain -
An inch by inch -
I cut it and I cut again.
Now, in my real I'm standing in
The Square feeling something wet.
No tears - no dreams - no scissors. All is gone.
And I'm the only child.
Alone.
Resigned.
My brother's dead.



SERINE JAAFAR

Beirut, Lebanon



NOT MY OWN

These eyes are not my own
They are my grandmother's-
Dark, reassuring, bold.
These words are not my own
They are my father's-
Solid, transient.
These hands are not my own
My mother's labor
In each crease and fold
My grandfather's fingernails
Dirty
With the labor of the olive harvest
Olive trees as old as my father
Whose voice rings in my ears:
Do not sell this land.
This land is not my own
It belongs to the utterances of the past
To the language of tomorrow.

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