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Introductory Notes

Foreword from Philip Metres, Director of the JCU/YWW

We live in an age where many people have lost sight of the gifts of creative writing, the gift of the arts. Yet some of us still know and value its transformative power, its ability to ask questions and speak truths that too often are drowned out in the shouting in our public squares and comment streams.

Parents, in sending your young writers to this camp, you have given them a great gift—the gift of finding their own voice, their own truth, their power, their inner freedom. The origin of the term “liberal arts” comes from ancient Rome. According to one writer, “slaves were entitled to the study of any subject so long as it was dubbed ‘practical.’ Slaves could take math, some science and engineering, but subjects like history, philosophy and rhetoric were forbidden. These arts of persuasion were reserved only for the liber, the ‘free.’ Why? Because the ancient Romans didn't want to arm slaves with the tools of education that would allow them to say, ‘We should be free.’”

What I wish for you, dear writers, is what Edgar Lee Masters writes in his poem “Emily Sparks”:

Work for your soul's sake,
That all the clay of you, all of the dross of you,
May yield to the fire of you,
Till the fire is nothing but light!...
Nothing but light!

Special thanks to Ellie Rafoth, graduate student coordinator; Anna Hocevar, English department coordinator; Dave Lucas, poetry maven; Lydia Munnell, fiction maven; and our JCU interns Annie Ertle, Michalena Mezzopera, Katie Oltmanns, and Emily Rogers.

A Note from Dave Lucas

We have accomplished a great deal this week. We have traveled in time, argued with Shakespeare, and translated hieroglyphics. More importantly, we have found in each other a community of fellow writers and friends to sustain us through those times of doubt or fatigue that every writer faces. In this time of so much civic and cultural misunderstanding, it gives me hope to see eighteen young people working so hard to understand each other, and to understand ourselves, with nothing more than words. Let us never doubt the importance of that task, for if we are truly listening and reading and speaking to each other, in person or on the page, we are not only learning to be writers. We are learning to be human. We have accomplished a great deal this week. Now the work begins.

Thank you to Anna Hocevar, Phil Metres, Lydia Munnell, and Ellie Rafoth. Thank you to Anne Ertle, Michalena Mezzopera, Katie Oltmanns, and Emily Rogers. And thank you to all of this year's writers for the chance to translate, and argue, and travel with all of you.

A Note from Lydia Munnell

It's a stranger-than-usual week in Cleveland. Just being in and around the host city for a major-party convention has emotionally exhausted me, and without the chance to be around fellow writers, to write and to reflect, I would have been a sorry case.

But your talent, creativity, and empathy has been a salve this week; a cure for the times we're living in. For every time I shouted at the TV or the radio at home in the evening, there was a moment of ecstatic revelation in the morning, sitting around a classroom, talking about stories. These moments may have felt ordinary to you—long before this week of camp you became quite good at acknowledging different perspectives, understanding motivation, finding humanity. But that empathy—the kind I see lacking in so much of today's public discourse—seems to come naturally to you. And it's the same quality that makes you writers.

Special thanks to everyone who made this week happen: Anna Hocevar, Phil Metres, Ellie Rafoth, Dave Lucas, Annie Ertle, Emily Rogers, Katie Oltmanns, and Michalena Mezzopera.

And thanks, most of all, to the writers. Thank you for trying new things in your stories. Thank you for listening to one another. Your talent is unmistakable. I can't wait to live in the world when all of you are running it.

Ginny Kanzinger: GOOD EYES: A response to “Good Bones” by Maggie Smith

You have shortened your life in so many ways,
and yet, you’ve lengthened it in so many more.
You are alive now because you have made
enough right decisions and enough coincidental choices.
You curse the traffic around an accident,
but leaving five minutes earlier
could have put you in the wreckage.
You will never know every time this has happened,
but you are living proof that it has.
You say that the world is fifty percent terrible,
but it is also fifty percent wonderful.
For every stone thrown at a bird,
there is a bird finding food for its chicks.
For every stranger to knock you down,
there is one to lift you back up.
Do not keep this from your children.
This place is already beautiful;
You only need the power to see it.

Ginny Kanzinger: TEDDY

Teddy was my first memory. My first real memory, that is. After blowing out the three candles on my cake, decorated with every Sesame Street character imaginable, my mom decided it was time for presents.

I can still remember the smooth, shining gold wrapping paper covered in little stars and my mom's looping, elegant handwriting that read:

Happy Birthday, Sweetheart! I love you!

She didn't bother signing it. Perhaps she thought I would know it was from her because of the handwriting or the neat way in which she wrapped it so there were no extra creases or tape. But I really knew it was from her because she was the only one who got me anything at all.

I remember ripping the paper apart, my mother cringing in the background as the shreds fall to the floor, and then squealing excitedly as I discovered its contents. A brown teddy bear. The red satin bow around its neck still new, its eyes perfectly glazed and shiny, and its fur soft and plush.

My mom helped me take it out of the box and I hugged it, never wanting to let go. And I barely ever did. We were never separated. Grocery store trips, weddings, car rides; he was there for it all.

Five years later, when my father screamed at me that I was too old for a teddy bear, it was the first time I ever yelled back at him. I yelled and I yelled, clutching the bear tightly to my chest as my father tried to force it from my grasp and ignoring my mother's pleas, begging me to calm down. What about everything we'd done together? The time we cooked s'mores and he got too close to the fire? The time I saved him from the jaws of the neighbor's dog? The time we went hiking and got pricked by thorns? None of this mattered to my father. The last I ever saw of Teddy was as my father dumped him in the trash; a singed ear, torn leg and missing large chunks of fur. It's once red ribbon turned brown with age and its shiny eyes now dusty and cracked. That was the first time I said goodbye to a best friend.

Now, 25 years later, I am watching my own daughter blow out her three candles and open her presents. I smile as she picks a present with gold

wrapping to open first and laugh as she rips the paper like I once did. Hot tears burn my eyes as I look at a new red ribbon and new glass eyes and new brown fur; a new teddy bear, a new best friend.

Sidney Hilston: JILTED GANGSTER GAL

Let me tell you the story of a girl gone bad:
she ran away from home and left her dad.
Her family cried but they couldn't protest;
for she was already headed out for the West.

“Highschool Sweethearts”
that's what they're called,
the young love's wedding
hadn't been stalled.
She tattooed his name
on her left thigh
but he didn't seem to care,
he just wanted a wife.
Abusive by nature,
he got sent to prison
which completely threw off
her dreams and visions.
And so there she sat
alone and lost.
But that wasn't even the final cost...

She soon met another
and he was an outlaw,
though she didn't care
because that's not what she saw.
And swoon she did
when he showed her his car,
a Ford V8 and it could drive far!
Weeks had gone past
but she didn't miss home
because her idea of comfort
was anything but alone.

And she had friends,
they were a whole gang
ridin' through Texas
and robbing banks.

She killed a man
while out on the run.
It was her first *real* shot
from her boyfriend's gun.
The days were slow,
and the road was long.
--until the day she saw her face--
something was deadly wrong.
Though she was too busy
writing poems and plays
to notice the cops staked out by the lake!
They said, "Here they come!
The notorious bond!"
167 bullets shot to
infamy and beyond.

So that's the story of the girl gone bad.
She ran away from home and left her dad.
It's such a shame the lovers never wed,
but even worse, they both ended up dead.

Sidney Hilston: ARCTIC ADDICTIONS

We were stuck together like icebergs in the Arctic, thriving off of the frigid temperatures and the hurt they force fed us. We were always holding onto each other with our frostbitten fingertips--I guess after a while you get used to the pain. The pneumonia's like a safe space, and it becomes an addiction. It's funny how the cold kept us so close and comfortable.

In a matter of hours, the sun will waltz across the frozen sheet of ice we built in the dark. That sheet will crack and drift apart, separating our identity from one to two. Then we will melt into the ocean and get better. We'll be free and smooth and liquid. One day, maybe even warm.

But a part of us will always miss how the cold kept us *so* close and comfortable.

Grace McCormack: SPRING

When someone mentions spring, one would usually envision the melting ice, the singing of the birds, all colliding with the colorful array of sakura blossoms flying through the cloud-lined sky. But when someone mentions spring to me, I think of *her*, the one named after those gorgeous trees, the one who distracts me from the pastel world around me.

I met her back in middle school, our second year in our second term, near the end of our youth. Her vibrant, chocolate eyes clashed with the blue and pinks of spring. I was in love, but I was too much of a coward, shrugging off any possible encounter with a fake smile.

Although by this time, I had begun to notice something; we were both alone in this world. Only, she would get teased and taunted to the point where she only wished to be alone, hiding her face from the abnormalities around her. Anonymous faces filled with hate and confusion would target her, teasing and laughing, sometimes even physically harming... but she'd never cry, she'd never bat an eye, she'd simply walk away. Even when I mustered the courage one day, to defend her like a loyal knight, she would simply bow in gratitude and advance back towards her lonely life, one without familiar faces, and the infinite tormenting shadows of pity. I knew in my gut that I couldn't help with whatever was going on, no matter what my intuition said. So I let her.

Fast forward to my first year of high school, two years later. I hadn't lost my constant nagging of loneliness among all these "friends" of mine, shuffling my feet through the noisy halls, and eventually entering my first class after home room. And I see her, peering out the window as if she was lost in thought, in her own world. It was almost as if she could be the main protagonist in a story. My heart illuminated again, as if everything took on a filter, sparkling with color. Yet, even after being assigned to relative groups, she ignores me, like I'm an annoying side character, that "Friend A" that no one cares about. And then there's the other, the one she looks at, lost in his perfect appearance. I feel sensations of burning in my head, yanking in my stomach. Perhaps this is what envy feels like.

As the first term ends, and a new one begins, she starts missing school. I cloud my judgement from the endless reasons why this may be, distracting myself with a pointless video game. Though, I won't give up, as one evening changes everything.

Surrounded by the quiet hum of the metro, under the blinding LED lights, and suffocated by the chilly, empty atmosphere of late October, is when it all changes. She's broken. Her once vibrant eyes now colorless with loss, her expression holding no emotion, empty. She doesn't say how or why, she just mouths words of desperation, glimmering waterfalls escaping her clouded eyes. So I help, I bring her to safety, some place where she can smile again. And over time, we stick together, just the two of us, and we slowly fall together, into the spring. The spring laced with the last ice crystals of winter. The spring where the cherry blossoms flourished. The spring where she mutters the words "I love you."

It's been eight years since then. I haven't thought of her for the last three, yet she remains unforgotten. As I return from four long years at school, to a place called home, in the midst of April, the sakura petals waltz around me, dancing to an inaudible tune. A nostalgic feeling overcomes me, yet I can't quite remember why. As my footsteps echo against the cracked pavement, I ponder this, peering at the ground. Deep in thought, I end up colliding into a silhouette.

My world had changed, everything I saw, everything I heard, everything I felt, it took on color. The world sparkled like her eyes, tearing me out of monotone.

"It's been a while." she says, staring off into the wild fire of a sunset. She then smiles and looks back at me, the face I so longed to remember, now in front of me once more.

And I fall to my knees, staring into those gorgeous eyes, as I'm still hopelessly in love with her.

Grace McCormack: GRACE AND I

The other one, the person known as Grace, she is the one things happen to. Whether it's the content laughter of desirable company, the burning sensation of existing in a certain another's presence, the longing to return to a familiar place, or the simple wish to escape to a reality far from her own. That's Grace, the one filled with other-worldly plans, ideas, fantasizing about things she could only hope to accomplish.

Then again, I am the person who has had to deal with the suffocating feeling of loss. Trudging through the dark, spiraling abyss of my mind. I am the person who pours their feelings into a piece of paper, wishing rather to keep my emotions to myself than trusting them to someone else. I'm the person who doesn't trust a soul, not even myself, clouded by the haze of my mind. The person who lives in the dark attic of an abandoned house, only illuminated by the single, ominous ceiling lamp. The person no one would notice unless she said something. A bystander, invisible from the twisted world around her.

Then there's Grace. The name that is signed on a completed colorful masterpiece, the name plastered on stress-provoking worksheets, the name presented on silver plaques for the few notable accomplishments she had overcome.

She is the mask, the one who smiles at those around her. She is the one who wishes to be accepted by the many looming shadows called "people" around her. The one who will go out of her way to make those around her happy.

Then there's me, the one who looks down at her feet, wishing to disappear. The one who would rather die than talk to anyone else. The one who expressed words of despair in her words.

I struggle with the light Grace represents, sometimes it could be called a full out war, although that could be an overstatement. I constantly tell her, she wouldn't be able to live without me, ignored or not, I'm her other half. The unevadable.

We are both false and the truth, yet we are both the in between of the evening and morning, unable to decide. We are both always there, forever.

She smiles, I scream back. She holds my hand, I yank it back. Yet, freeing myself from her, taking control... it would never work. The way some things can never change no matter how hard you try. An infinite number of possibilities flung into oblivion.

Yet, writing this, it could've been either of us.

Noa Lifshutz: AVA

The earth had already perished once before, shattering away to nothing and ending all of humanity. It was mysteriously rebuilt millions of years later, or at least that is what the scientists said. All that the people know for certain is they now remember their past lives.

Ava is only a name, but it is her name now. She wears it with little to regret. It is the thing that a person always hears around them. She responds to it when she is called. The name that is always following her, watching her, sitting with her, abiding by her rules.

She was Penelope once. Penelope was the name of someone who childish and oblivious to the world around her. It gave her this feeling of someone who is unneeded and unhelpful. Penelope was the name of the girl who is alone at the playground. The one in the bright pink polka dot dress who sits in the sandbox laughing to only herself. She never liked to be Penelope.

Harper was a girl she used to be. One who was abandoned by the terrible fate of friendship. One who was torn by the past and only edging slowly towards the future. Harper was a name of the past that leaves a haunted feeling as she passes. A feeling that it could happen again. That she could be alone. Harper was not her favorite name.

She was Skyler and never again. Being her gave her this strange indefinable feeling. It was not as if she had disliked being her. Something just felt slightly off, like there was something missing about her. Skyler grew up becoming a makeup artist. The kind of women who worked in the basement of another. The toys sitting on the shelves as if they had not been played with for years, the books and pictures untouched with dust falling off them.

“So,” said her therapist, “What would you like to discuss today?” Ava looked at the auburn walls painted with gentle strokes to the lime green chairs with the buttons on them. She looked down at the chestnut colored

sofa she was sitting on. A discarded green and grey patterned lamp sat off to the side. A desk of brown and gold sat to the side with stacks of papers and pens on it. The room smelled clever and old, like a wise man.

She opened her mouth and closed it slowly before blurting out, “We all are alone in this world, right?” The therapist sat there for a moment contemplating the essence of her question. She looked into Ava’s eyes before answering, “We are alone in our life. We are the character in our story who goes on the journey alone. There is always people around us though. We are all surrounded by people. So to answer your question yes and no. No matter what, it is up to us if we are truly ever lonely.”

Noa Lifschutz: NOA AND I

I see her standing there,
Wind exposing her hair, taking its streaks,
Sidewalk molten to her branded shoes
Darkness that internalizes in her body
Movement of her hands
And the motion of her feet
I see this shadow on the rich damp soil
And think to myself
She is not me, she can't be

I see her sitting there
In the somber room which she lives
The man in the front drones on tediously
But nobody's knowledge concretes from this
Her hand tapping
Her mouth turning
Pencil in her hand
And I think to myself
She is not me she can't be

I see her talking there
She speaks with a hint of sadness
Air fills her screaming lungs
People surround her laughing monotonously
She says something else, "It's all a lie."
And the moment retrieves itself
The atmosphere quickly clouds with feeling
And I think to myself
She is not me she can't be

She seems to be me with her

She seems to be me with me
Noa and I
Noa and me
We are the same but opposite
Noa and I
Noa and me
She is me, she can't be

Morgan Meyer: WE

We used to laugh a lot.
Maybe a giggle every now and again. Full belly, snort, chortle
It's not that we stopped
Just turned the meter down
Way down. Why?
When we still laugh,
People seem to like it.
Except when we *don't*.
We used to be called 'happy baby'
That was when we were cute
We aren't cute?
Of course, We're beautiful.
We didn't say beautiful. We said cute.
Same difference.
Not in degree
No one is really asking you.
There is no *you*. Only *we*. And--

Morgan Meyer: RED AND BLUE

“Remember, the enemy is wearing a blue symbol on their chest,” the general reminds the troops before battle. All one hundred of us were heading into the cavernous mountains to fight the horrid Solemn. The abominable Solemn lived on the other side of the mountain and had been after the Grue’s since my grandfather’s time. I, like many here, lost family members to those Solemn. Blood lust hangs like fog in the air. Beside me my friend Kyle checks his own throwing knives. “All set,” he proclaims. Both of us are eager to fight in our first battle. We quickly snap to attention as we are called to our designated entrances before the caverns. I spent all night priming my axe, which was now being clutched in white fingers, my hands slowly beginning to burn in outrage at the grip. Nerves send goosebumps over my skin. In one breath we’re still.

In the next, we’re moving.

Everything is dark; we weren’t taught the dark. Everyone is quieter than I thought, deathly quiet. Before, in practice, all the fighters would unleash great battle cries, but all the warriors were silent now. There is only the swinging of blades and the death whines as great bears of men fall into the damp ground only to be stepped over in their final moments. Before me, Kyle stepped over a man. He didn’t look down. And that’s a blessing. If he had looked down he would have seen the Trainor who taught us how to wield knives, the one that took Kyle under his wing, and the one who adopted him after his father’s death in these very caverns. If he had looked down it wouldn’t have mattered. I move forward with a burst of energy and zoned in on a man with a blue symbol.

Over the course of the battle I grow used to the sounds around me, but then I hear something off to my left. Some coward was trying to run. I follow him through the darkness. I track the thuds of his feet over the clang of swords behind me. Rapidly turning a corner, he stands there. Finally face to face with the Solemn, we both raise our weapons to fight. I stop. He stops as well. Beneath the blood on his face and torso I see myself. We stare into each other’s eyes. He looks as scared and young as I. No.

Yes, we both stand there until either decides. I do, and so does he. Both eyes harden, both cock their arms and swing. The axe falls with a crash as the glass breaks, shining at my feet. Where the Solemn once stood is now a wall of stone.

Molly Zachlin: THE CALLING CARD

The young man wearing the powder blue uniform sits across from me. “How are you feeling this morning, Evelyn?”

“Half dead,” I grumble, running a crinkled hand through my wiry silver tangles. I read the kid’s name tag: Joe. To my surprise, Joe laughs at my response. Most workers here pretend to be as hard of hearing as the residents whenever I make a snide remark.

“How about a game of cards?” Joe inquires politely, pulling out an ancient pack of Bicycles. Something about them strikes me as vaguely familiar. Maybe I’m getting dementia.

“Alright. Let’s play rummy. But you won’t win.” A smile flickers across his face as he deals the yellowed cards. I snatch mine up and begin to sort them by suit. Here’s an ace of spades. I notice that someone has written something on the card in dark blue ink. Who would deface a perfectly good – I gasp as I read the message...

I am 18 again, standing in the middle of the fairgrounds. The memory is so vivid that I can smell the candied apples and caramel corn when I inhale deeply. Throngs of people flit from one brightly colored tent to another. My younger brother already ran off with his friends to do the ring toss, so I have time to look around. I move toward the entrance of the tent to my right, around which many people are gathered.

“Step inside at 2 o’clock sharp to view wondrous feats of magic! Come to see the fantastic and strange! Prepare to be amazed!” bellows a short, squat man wearing a top hat. *Henri Marceaux*, the colorful banner reads. *World-famous illusionist*. I laugh aloud. Why would anyone believe in such nonsense?

It’s just a lot of clever tricks for the amusement of children. I decide to sneak behind the magician’s tent to see if I can catch any of their trickery in action. After weaving carefully through a current of fairgoers, I stealthily creep into the opening between the magic tent and the neighboring booth. I move quietly around the perimeter of the tent and suddenly trip, seeing the soggy ground rushing toward me and – my startling descent is suddenly

halted by someone or something grabbing my waist. I feel myself being lifted up and come face to face with a young man.

“Are you alright, Miss?” he asks with a concerned expression, although I can see amusement dancing in his dark eyes.

“Perfectly,” I reply peevishly, stepping away from him. I feel my cheeks grow hot as I brush mud off of my skirt.

“Coming to see the show?” the man questions, gesturing toward the tent. I now notice that his voice is lightly accented. Maybe he works here. He’s dressed like a worker.

“Perhaps. But I’ve seen shows like this before.”

“You sound unimpressed.”

“Well the whole thing is rather ridiculous, don’t you think? Pretending there is magic when there’s not?” I scoff, surprised at his serious tone. Some emotion flickers across his countenance, but vanishes in a fraction of a second.

“Ah, so you have a scientific mind, yes? Everything for you has a rational explanation?” he asks, smiling.

“Well, not everything but – ” The man holds up a hand to interrupt me.

“I have a wager for you. Why don’t you come at 2 o’clock, and tell me afterwards your explanation for all of the ‘tricks?’” I glare at this man wearing suspenders and patched up, dusty pants, his dark hair wayward and uncombed. He steadily returns my gaze, a roguish grin on his face.

“Deal,” I reply, extending my hand.

A hush falls over the audience like a light snowfall. I fiddle with a loose strand of thread on my dress. A low drum roll commences as the curtains fly back and a man steps into the spotlight. “Ladies and gentlemen!” the magician announces. His gaze sweeps the crowd, and I immediately recognize his devilish smile. I gape in shock. He is the man I encountered earlier. “I am Henri Marceaux, but you may know me better as the Illusionist!” Several people applaud. Henri pulls a deck of Bicycles out of thin air, and tosses a few into the crowd. I cannot fathom how he is able to float the cards so far. It is nearly impossible to throw a playing card. An ace of spades lands perfectly in my lap. I notice a message written on it in dark blue

ink: *Meet me behind the magic tent after the show. Yours, Henri M.* I glance up, and catch the shadow of a wink on his face.

“Evelyn.”

“Henri, I... I...”

“Evelyn, are you ok? It’s me, Joe...” I blink, and the bland nursing home decor swims into focus. I dash a tear away from my eye and take a haggard breath.

“Where did you get those cards?” Joe seems puzzled by my strong reaction.

“They were my grandfather’s actually. He used them for magic tricks and stuff.” He pauses. “He always used to say that magic was – ”

“A work of art,” I finish. Joe looks up at me in confusion.

“Have you heard of him? He told us he tried to hit it big as a magician back in the day.”

“Oh, I’ve heard of him,” I reply. “I’ll tell you all about it. But first, let’s finish that game of rummy.”

Molly Zachlin: JUMP

Jump

A word of modern English, known only from c1500; apparently of onomatopætic origin: compare bump, etc.

Heels hover the margin between sod and sky

Daredevils and dreamers plummet

Hearts thrash like hooked bass

Saxophones scream elated blues

Robbers wrest rubies from clammy hands

Cars tumble through stoplights

Thoughts suspend on a tightrope

Gravity goes on a lunch break

The universe holds its breath –

Sophia Malloy: Sophia and I

Everyone likes her.

She's the one who speaks for me the one
who moves for me who
breathes for me.

My laughs are not my own.

I wish I could speak my own words.
But if I spoke what would I say what
words could possibly convey the
feelings that I'm not even sure
belong to me.

Me.

Myself.

Sophia was me at one point. But I
tripped and she left me half-behind.
Everyone likes her. I'm not sure
if she likes me.

Sophia Malloy: JUNK MALE

The dim light flickered above us disapprovingly. We most definitely were not supposed to be there. Though upon further inspection of the situation, we weren't supposed to be much of anywhere.

Other than our classrooms or the occasional trip to the cafeteria, our rooms were the only place we were allowed in. But what kind of eleven year old boys would we be if we were content with that?

Given we weren't quite as wild back then as we would soon be forced to be, our idea of adventure was as simple as climbing a few rocks to a place unwatched. So for now here we were, hiding in a mining tunnel that would soon be blown up to expand the prison that was our home.

At the time we had no clue anything was out of place; we didn't know anything but the underground world around us. It was our normal. For all we knew, where the cavern walls ended, so did reality. Because of this we never felt like we were being held captive. What blissful idiots we were.

We sat there marveling at ourselves for successfully sneaking away unnoticed. We liked to eat our lunch up there at the edge of the mine shaft. It was kind of high up along the cave wall so it was a real trek to get up there, but so, so worth it.

You liked being away from the crowd, You wouldn't talk to me otherwise. You were more of a one on one kind of kid (you still are actually. I guess not everything changes.) You leaned over to me flicking unfortunate peas from your plate over the edge and onto the craggy rocks below.

"You ever wonder what it's like up there?" you asked, jerking your head up gesturing towards the rock sky above. This was why I risked getting caught sneaking out with you. I was a junky (still am) for your words, your real ones,

the ones you saved just for us at times like these. You could say anything at those times and it would sound like God himself were speaking directly to me.

"Ok, don't say anything. Just sit there gawking like I'm the Messiah." You started, bumping me with your shoulder. "Oh, sorry," I fumbled. "Yeah," I said following the trail your eyes had left upwards "I mean how can you not?" Your blue eyes flashed in a unamused sort of way (Your eyes used to be blue) then you went back to executing peas. It was then, I think. The first time I realized it.

You used to talk a lot more. Never around others, only when it was the two of us. I used to worry you had gotten sick of me and no longer wanted to be my friend. But I soon realized that it was just the way you grew. The taller you got the quieter you seemed. When we were younger, you were short. Like, really short. I used to tease you all the time about it. But you have grown a lot since then. You're still not particularly tall, but you don't need to be loud anymore.

At this point our bodies are free but our minds are still enslaved. We are scarred and battered. But now we have someone to protect. She and I laid on the beach as you sat, slightly deep fried, sulking under the tent. I sat up sliding my sunglasses down my nose so you could see me taunting you to the fullest degree.

"Why don't you come join us, JJ! The sun feels great!"

You glared and gave me the finger crossing your arms back into a pout, then wincing in pain as your skin connected with itself. I giggled and turned to the girl who had become my sister. Her smile looked free and unrestricted. She had darkened a lot from when we first escaped. The sun had done her good, it'd done us all good. (Yes, even you, JJ). She made us come to the beach every day that summer. She said it was to enjoy every moment of our first normal year, whatever normal meant (Whatever it still means). But I always

knew the real reason was to create a barrier between our lives back underground and the new one we had forged up here. If she was darker it proved the sun had seen her. It added a skin tight blanket of proof she was really free. She looked back at you, the grumbling lobster shrouded by a gloomy shade of umbrella.

“Oh come on JJ! Come join us, it’s not like it can get much worse!”

Those words were oh so very untrue and you must have known that. But, you took one look at me than one look at Kay and loafed yourself over to our towels. Whines of unwillingness seeped out of your singed pores. I knew you had done this for her. When you laid on my towel and rested your head on my lap. It was then, I think. When I accepted it.

Now I’m sitting here next to you. Trying to keep my mind off of the inevitable. I hope that if I can write down all our memories, every last one, if I can figure out a way to convey the weight of what you mean to me in words. That maybe if (When, not if) you wake up you can read them and understand who you were and maybe you still are.

I’ve apologized to you every day for the past two months but you don’t know me so you don’t know why. The doctor says you may not wake up this time. But you will. You always do and each time you don’t remember me or Kay or even yourself. I hope that one day we can read this letter together and your memories will be more than what I’ve written. The doctor says you might remember on your own one day. But the chances are slim.

This is now. I think, You are my sun. All my light is carried in you I know that now. But you don’t know my face.

Genevieve Wagner: AMERICA, PLEASE

America, I feel like the child of a drunkard
and a business tycoon
I am raising my kids, my generation,
completely on my own.

So busy yourself with the zeroes
that will never shrink or go away
even if we elect the man in the red hat
or the lady who smiles too wide
I will turn my music up louder
and go to work, practice what I have learned.

America, you need to keep your eyes
on your own paper
let me live the life I love,
I will pay the bills, I will vote each fall,
but don't expect me to cover my heart for you.

America, let me have a word with you
America, think before you speak.
America, please.

Genevieve Wagner: THE SUMMER OF '52

It was the summer of 52' in New Jasper, Ohio. It was the furthest I'd ever been from home but the closest I'd ever been to the Great Ohio River. It had been a year and ten months since I'd moved here from Redmond, Washington. Before that, I had lived in Omaha and De Moines and before that Fort Getty in Rhode Island and Fort Saulsbury in Delaware. Those two were during the war. I guess I never really had a home. See my Daddy was in the Air Force and my older brother, Heck, he was in the National Guard, so we had always moved around a whole lot ever since I was a kid. Since we weren't settlers and we didn't have our roots planted anywhere, we could blend in real good when we moved to a new town. And my Daddy always told me and my younger brother Harvey that our skin was thick as molasses and he was raising us to be strong like the sun shining high on a summer's day.

Despite my upbringing, when I first arrived in New Jasper, my skin felt more like gelatin and I always preferred to hide from the sun than lay out and bask in it. But that all changed after I met Alexander J. Birmingham, the most beautiful boy I ever saw.

He was from Xenia, a big town on the far side of the county, and he came to New Jasper to try and start-up a restaurant on the edge of town. Now, my town had maybe 2,300 people tops, so when a big-town feller visited, everyone's mama or grandmama was tryna see whether the chap has "prospects," at least that's what my neighbor Ginger used to say, and then the poor young thing would be plucked-up like a sack of bread in a bakery before the dawn breaks and they'd be hitched with a frilly wedding and that would be that.

But Alexander and I clicked faster than most women can type a telegraph and we made plans a few days after his restaurant opened-up, to runaway to Chicago. I had hoped Harvey wouldn't miss me too much. I knew he'd be entering the service soon enough, get shipped off somewhere new, barely a grown-up. But I doubted he would ever understand how lost you can feel when you're 19 and living without a purpose.

The night Alexander and I ran away, I had been in New Jasper two years and one month. That was longer than any place I'd ever lived in my entire life. Before we reached interstate 90 and headed westward, Alexander wanted to grab a couple of cheeseburgers and milkshakes from his new restaurant to celebrate how fleeting it can be to be in love in a place you don't call home.

We drove by the new building, it looked fresher than a load of clean laundry and Alexander said to me, "Those are the golden arches. They're our symbol so that when you see 'em you'll feel at home and come on in inside." In that moment, I was thinking real hard about what he was saying about home and how it can be welcoming if you'd just trust it and go inside.

I didn't end up going with Alexander to Chicago or anywhere else for that matter. I decided to stay in New Jasper, to make my skin thicker, to become more like the sun.

Rachel Lee: LEE AND I

Lee is the face I see
Above my dresser,
Hair tied back for recitals,
Bookish glasses fixed upon
A rounded, girly face.
Lee is always eager
For essays, ACT's -
She's prissy,
A prude -
Presenting,
Performing
With all of her will
For the eyes of others.
Lee doesn't know
That rest is different from sin.

I claw through prim and proper
When I write.
Test scores and F major scales
Become ghosts
As the unreal
Takes root.
I feel, I live,
The mirror is not my familiar friend,
Nor do I need it to be.
Finding my own way, I
Scare my sensible partner into
Outbursts of anxiety and grief.
This balance -
This is all we know.

Rachel Lee: BETTER THAN YOU

He was pale-skinned - my first doll - with lovely, silver eyes. My aunt told me that he was antique, that he had been bought by her mother when she was young, still learning to label the parts of a plant and to say “please” and “thank you” in public. I loved this shoebox-sized companion she had given me; I brushed through his chin-length hair with my fingers, carried him tightly on family outings and trips to the post office.

His name was Hawthorne, named by my aunt’s mother some forty years ago, but when I first brought him up to sit on my bedroom nightstand, I called him “Dolly,” and Dolly he remained, eyes fixed forward, lips never moving to articulate his true identity.

“Dolly,” I said, untying and retying his dark shoelaces for no important reason. “I’m going to see a friend today. Do you want to come with me?”

I met my friend that afternoon. She adored Dolly’s labeled, blue cotton jacket and smooth, black hair, but lost interest by the time I had mentioned my aunt’s role in gifting him to me. I left the story at that in favor of following my friend to her open porch to drink lemonade and play with her dog. After letting the dog back inside, we ran out into her backyard, empty-handed, to join her in playing a game of hide-and-seek with her two brothers. As we crouched, grass-kneed, behind bunches of daffodils and curved birch branches, deep, abyssal clouds had begun drifting in from the horizon.

The rain was not far behind. My friend sheltered her hair from the pelting sheets of water as she ran to her back door, and I did the same, realizing, wide-eyed as I dashed across the lawn, that Dolly was unsheltered also, still waiting on the porch as rain blackened the wooden flooring.

By the time I had changed into my pajamas that night, ready to climb into bed, the damage was evident: Dolly’s metal eyes had begun to rust.

I had cried at his soaked clothes and matted hair when the dye in them had been running. Of course I had, but now that he was dry - dry, except for the place in his eye sockets where not even a Q-tip could reach - I had accepted my mistake.

Once I was deep under the covers, I reached out my hand, still dirty under the fingernails, and turned off my lamp. Now, as I reached

unconsciousness, some images of the day still clung to my mind, all of Dolly, all of his changing eyes.

Last week, when I came home from my shift at the gas station, I made a straight path for my bedroom. The hot, August night had exhausted me; I had no energy to change my clothes or even to find my television remote. I passed by the sofa, by a bookcase stocked with picture frames - soft, grayscale photographs of friends and family, looking back at me.

There was the face of my childhood friend, the girl who I had followed - for ten years or more - through playgrounds, up streets, down alleys. There were the grins of my parents, who still told me what to study, what to wear.

I reached my room. From a wall shelf near the corner, I saw Dolly. As I climbed onto my bed, I could see the rust on his eyes, now redder than ever. He didn't just look. He watched me, down on me, he watched.

Did he see anything through those rusted eyes? Or did he see only an accessory, a follower, too foolishly afraid to grasp her own identity?

"Oh, Dolly," I whispered, barely awake.

The wall shelf collapsed. As it smashed against the ground with a jarring slam, I lurched out of bed, my heart half-bursting. Dolly was slumped over on his chest, unmoving.

On the back of his blue cotton jacket, I read the name "Hawthorne."

Grace Lee: WAVES

“No.”

She’s just a toddler, only two or three, curly pigtails swinging as she shakes her head in defiance, lower lip pushed forward, chubby arms crossed over the pink frills of her bathing suit.

Her family is at the beach, cousins splashing in the sparkling blue water. She dips her big toe, painted a bright pink, into the frothy waves that creep up the shore.

“Are you sure you don’t want to swim?” Her dad stands in waist-deep water, motioning for her to climb onto his back, *piggyback-ride*, like they always did.

“No.”

“C’mon Caleigh- it’s fun!” a cousin called, head bobbing as a wave crashed in, sending delighted screams and laughter across the water.

“No.”

Caleigh stomped up to the umbrella chairs, where her grandpa sat on a beach towel, eyes shaded against the sun. “Not gonna swim?” he asked.

“No swim.” She kicked a handful of sand into the air. Something about the ocean, the water, the waves... Despite the heat, a cold, tingling feeling crept up her spine. *Fear*.

But she would never admit it. Like the superheroes in her favorite picture books, Caleigh was brave, fearless. She wasn’t afraid of anything. “Let’s play.”

“Okay.” Her grandpa sat up, rubbing his back, stiff with old age and arthritis. He grunted a little as he moved in across from Caleigh, helping her arrange puzzle pieces, tousling her curly hair. Anything for his youngest granddaughter.

Caleigh remembers being on a boat. No- a canoe. That was it.

There was a boy across from her, a mop of brown hair matted to his forehead and icy blue eyes squinted against the sun. It was humid- the kind of humidity that clung to your skin and hung in the air, the kind you could almost taste.

The boy's palms were clammy as he rowed the boat into the open ocean, nervous on his first date.

The girl shivered, thinking to herself, *This was supposed to be fun.* But everything is still, quiet, the air around her making it hard to breathe as the boat glided onto the jade green water, its V-shaped wake rippling on the slick, oily surface.

Suddenly Caleigh is on a different boat, this one bigger and with more passengers. She is with her grandpa, just the two of them together, riding the ferry to the amusement park. Her hair is done in braids and she swings her brand-new tennis shoes back and forth, trying to think of pink cotton candy and carousels and lemonade with too much sugar. But something about the water transfixes her, haunts her as it rushes past the sides of the ferry- too fast, too dark, too... alive. She shivers, looking up at her grandfather whose wide eyes were staring somewhere beneath the surface of the grey-green water. He noticed her big brown eyes looking up at his and smiled weakly. "Never liked the ocean, I guess," he muttered, wiping sweat off his forehead. "Can't swim..."

Caleigh shakes her head, trying to push the memory away.

"You okay?" the boy asks, worriedly glancing up at her face.

A warm wind picks up, and for a brief second, the water's oil-pastel surface is wiped away, revealing its depths, murky and dark.

Caleigh pales. "I think I'm going to be sick."

The girl sits on a small wooden stool at her grandfather's bedside. Her curly hair has straightened, lengthened into long waves that fall below her shoulders. She holds his bony, frail hands in hers, the smell of rancid milk and laundry detergent stinging her sinuses. The hysteric screaming of the woman next door can be heard through the nursing home's thin plaster walls. "*Every day at 10:30 she does this,*" a nurse aid had warned her.

Her grandfather's room overlooked the ocean, foaming white waves crashing onto the rocky shoreline. "*One of the best views!*" The nurse aid had chirped.

"Hey grandpa," Caleigh whispered.

His bloodshot eyes bored through hers, unrecognizing. “I’m not anyone’s grandpa,” he croaked. “I don’t know who you are.”

“It’s okay.” Caleigh squeezed his hand. “I love you.”

“Can you help me?” Her grandfather’s eyes, suddenly pleading.

“Anything, grandpa.”

“The ocean- the ocean...” He became frantic, eyes darting side to side.

A sudden cold seized Caleigh’s gut. A shiver ran down her spine, every hair on her arms and neck standing on end. She crossed the room and yanked the curtains down. “That better?”

But her grandfather was already asleep.

Now, she stands alone amidst a crowd of wailing family members, rushing EMTs, and pale-looking lifeguards. In the distance, the scream of an ambulance grows louder and the crash of waves fills her head as Caleigh’s heart pounds somewhere in her throat. Somewhere in the background of it all, the nurse aid’s voice drones in her ear, “In the morning we found his window banging open. Some lifeguards called us—he must’ve walked into the ocean...”

Foam, like the spittle of a rabid animal, collects around the jagged rocks on the shoreline.

“They saw him and the waves- around 2 am, they told me. The paramedics are trying- it may be too late- I’m so sorry...”

Swoosh. Pound. Swoosh. Pound. The rhythm of the predatory, white-capped waves matching the blood rushing in Caleigh’s ears.

“He hated the ocean, you know,” the nurse whispered. “Most patients loved that view- but every night he wanted me to pull the curtains. He hated it.”

Caleigh nodded, flinching as a drop of spray landed on her arm. “Me too,” she said.

Grace Lee: FLY*v*.

1. *To move through the air with the aid of wing or wing-like parts*

Outstretched wings are knives, slicing through the air.

Feathers like satin, or rippling water,

Silky,

smooth,

and fair.

The image of power, beauty, and grace, the eagle glides above the limitless sky.

And back on earth, a mile below, watches a little girl with hopes to fly.

2. *To pilot an airplane*

Lowering into the cockpit, gingerly placing her hands on the controls,
and the pilot's voice in her ear,

steady, now, steady!

As the plane begins to roll.

Blue skies above, sloping hills below; the journey's just begun,

And two words: The Eagle

painted on the plane's side, glittering gold in the sun.

3. *To flee*

Up in the air she

is limitless,

weightless,

free.

In the crisp, clear wind her troubles and worries flee.

For looking down from above they seem so infinitely small,

And the eagle soaring beside her

a reminder

that she is not alone at all.

Robert Miron: ALWAYS CHEESY

The man was most definitely cheesy,
In every sense of the word.
To begin he was truly into,
That substance formed from curd.

Yes the guy would munch on cheese all day,
And it made his pants fit tight!
No matter the shape wedge ball or bar,
The man would take a bite.

Another way the guy was cheesy,
Was that he never forgot to smile.
Whenever a friend came over,
His hospitality made them rile.

However the man was also dishonest,
And this brought him lots of success.
Swindling people in business deals,
Made him financially the best.

So although his friends called him “the cheese”
Due to his financial prowess,
He started to lose favor.
People heard of his illegal bets.

And so the last way cheese man was cheesy,
Marked his last day under the sun.
As a partner discovered his mischief,
And holed him up with a submachine gun!

Now you know the story,
Of the man who was in all ways cheese.
So go smile and laugh and chomp on some cheddar and have a spectacular
time,
But just remember being “the big cheese” doesn't actually mean a good life.

Robert Miron: A REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION TO THE NYMPH

I do not see why the defiant nymph,
Cannot simply wake up and see the truth:
That she and shepherd should not be apart,
To do so would give her a broken heart.

To start the shep is now a good deal rich,
And if this is not enough to get hitched?
Then I shall make a strong argument too,
That shepherd gets these fancy things for you.

Nymph do you see shepherd born so wealthy,
Or do you think he instead sees you lovely?
And thus feels so inclined to go and steal,
So that your love he may finally feel.

Shepherd is also an outstanding poet,
And this writing is clearly how he shows it.
The man tries not only to please with stuff,
He enchants also with lyrical fluff.

So nymph, I beg you please to reconsider,
The dashing rogue you treat as kitty litter.
So that one day you too can be as one,
Two beings tending to the flock of love.

Isaiah Underwood: Temptations

He was the youngest of the group
Hangin' with the adolescents who indulged in mystery soup
They raved about it leaving him curious about trying a scoop
He was pressured into testing it out for proof
Slowly but surely he phased into another universe
Struggling to find a cure to speak at least one verse
The boy was trapped in somewhat a somniloquy
Experiencing a foreign joyful meraki
His body was overtaken by the heat of the night
On the verge of becoming more than high
The boy hasn't been seen since it seems
Was this the best nightmare or a terrible dream?

She was a goddess unlike no other
He was the product of a poor and saddened mother
Longing for affection and sensation
He saw her sinful physique as a source of temptation
She gave him a certain stare
He gave her a significant glare
As they followed each other up the winding stairs
The king sized bed, where the two came face to face, teeth to teeth
Wanting to find some healing between the sheets.

Isaiah Underwood: LOVE AND BASKETBALL

I don't have many fond memories of my father, a strong, black, educated man who set my foundation for knowledge and wisdom. However, I do remember an experience I had with him that made me who I am today.

During the warm, brisk, summer days my father would often take us to the local park, which was adjacent to our house, to play basketball. At the time, I was no NBA guru, but my father was. I can recall one instance in which my father gave me a tutorial on shooting. He guided my arms in a slight vertical position while I held the scarlet-orange Spalding-brand ball. My father advised me to shoot with the flick of my wrist and aim for the square in the center of the backboard. "Son, it's like archery. If you have good accuracy and aim for the target in the middle, you can never go wrong," he explained. I tested an experiment with my shooting skills, but I struggled to get positive results. I felt as if I wanted to surrender myself and give up. However, my father gave me words of inspiration. He said, "David, keep trying! Don't ever give up! Every day in every way you and I are getting better. You have to fail first in order to succeed. I guarantee victory awaits you at the finish line."

A year had passed and my father suffered from a fatal car accident. Ever since the loss of my father, I felt as if something was missing like a riddle waiting to be solved. Some nights, I often felt lonely, longing to see my father again. One dreary and rainy day, my mother gave me advice. "Son, I know times have been rough without your father, but I want you to know that he loved you entirely and is smiling down from heaven on you." My mother was a very God-fearing person. She pulled out her King James Bible and read a scripture that I have committed to memory. She read aloud, "Philippians 4:13- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Last year brought much joy and happiness. I committed myself to my school's basketball team, leading our team to a state championship. I still am overwhelmed by the victory, applause, and gratification of our championship. Although, that day I kept hearing a certain voice as I paced up the court, dribbling the ball. "David keep trying, Don't ever give up! Every day in every way you and I are getting better. I guarantee victory awaits you at the finish line."

My father never left.

Stephen Simone: SUPERS: POKER FACE

A new motivation. This is what Gray Peters had sensed after his escape into his secret lair hidden beneath Hulhund's signature Poker Building. A different taste crept into his mouth as he walked casually into his headquarters. An unfamiliar feeling, the emotion of hatred and anger for the three heroes who had undone his schemes of world domination and had wrongfully, he believed, destroyed his dreams of recognition. Little did the heartless leader of the criminal Solitaire, Ace of Spades, who Gray came to be called by, know that he had obtained it as Gray Peters as well as Ace of Spades. He would plan for revenge, for the end of the heroes who had defeated him.

After his notorious plan had gone in smoke, Ace of Spades, and his henchmen, Cy Blood, Porcupine, and the Vanished, aka Troy Masters, Fritz Vega Borges, and Gabby Lopez, were handed over to the police by Todd Peters, the Shrew Man. His friends, Karen "Harpy" Morse and Tonio "Bone Marrow" Anderson, were looking for innocents that were hiding after Gray had announced his plans for alien invasion. As for the supervillains, anger boiled within them, their greatest humiliation had come before them. Shrew Man ordered the police that they were to be placed into safer, separate cells at all cost.

"You wanna know something, brother?" Gray asked Shrew Man. The two were once family siblings turned mortal enemies when, as a teenage mercenary, the kingpin had murdered his own parents and sister, sparking Todd's eternal hatred for him. "This feud between us is never gonna end. I just thought I would remind you. This hatred for me, it destroyed you on the inside as much as the trauma you felt when I killed Mom and Dad, and especially Ava."

"Let's just make sure you're locked up real good, Gray." Todd spat out the words with frustration. He had wanted to kill Gray for hurting more innocents, but didn't. "You took something away from these people. You destroyed homes, families, everything they cared for. And all this just for

respect and fame?! This this tops up Ava's death. What you just did to them was one of the worst acts you have ever thought up in that insane noodle of yours." As he said this, Harpy came by and told him: "There are still a few innocents. Bone Marrow's got them taken care of. I thought I could check on you and Gray." She smiled at him but kicked Gray in the nose. "That was for killing my brother." She flew away to help Tonio.

Todd turned to the cops: "Take him away. Lock him up in one of your escape proof cells. Keep a strict eye on him at all times. I'm done with him." He looked at Gray with increased hatred than before.

"I'll be back, Todd." Gray warned him. "We all know it."

The van's back door shut and as it turned to the prison, Gray's cries of vengeance were silenced when the vehicle moved further from Todd's sight.

"No sign of Dr. Xander and any other card players." said the chief of police to Shrew Man, "But we know for sure, Solitaire won't be up to any more games today. They're shuffled up in hiding."

He left. Todd, however, believed that the others would be breaking Gray out. He would have to wait until the right time.

Shortly after, Gray/Ace of Spades was locked in a safer cell in the Hulhund Insane Asylum. He was furious about his loss and imagined his brother laughing at him. Every time he slept, he thought of Todd. He thought about how he should have killed him when he had the chance. Showing mercy only proved to be his downfall.

He heard a scream. The screams of the guards as they lead dead and motionless on the floor. His minions must have disposed of him. He grinned when Porcupine, Cy-Blood, and Vanished showed up in his cell.

"You're free, boss." Porcupine exclaimed, "Welcome back to the mainland."

"You three were the perfect ones after all these years when I founded Solitaire." He complimented the three of them planning to break him out. "Cy-Blood, find a weak spot on the floor. As soon as you find it, Porcupine will dig us out of here." Troy looked for a vulnerable area with his sensors.

“Anomaly detected, sir.” He stated in a more robotic tone. He tore up a steel tile. When he was done, Porcupine drilled until he reached the entrance of the Poker Building, Solitaire’s lair.

“Excellent.” Gray smirked evilly. “Now, let us have a dish of revenge with a side of Shrew Man’s blood. It’s good to be back into the real world.”

Presently, news of Gray’s escape from the big house were everywhere in Hulhund. He relished being feared after he unleashed his failed and infamous plan to weaken the governments from the inside. Now he was nothing but an empty shell of revenge, plotting to exact it on Todd like he did to him. He didn’t bother waiting for his goody-two-shoes brother. He, in his masked form of Shrew Man, was behind him.

“You showed up.” Gray remarked without any sign of emotion in his voice. He grinned. He wanted a little verbal confrontation with Shrew Man even after he defeated him.

“Do I really want to know what you are planning?” Todd asked, “Figures. I should have had you put in isolation confinement.”

“You should have. You knew holding the world ransom wasn’t enough for me. You knew you should’ve shown mercy.”

“What I should have done was left you dead. I really wanted to kill you, but that would be considered extreme and cheating, and breaking the one rule I want to follow.”

“Restrictions have their ways, Todd. You let me live because I am your brother. After all, family members don’t kill family members.”

“Ironically, you killed our parents and older sister. I should’ve killed you because you were busy traumatizing people, Karen included.”

“You and Karen should’ve killed me because I murdered our family and her little brother. Showing mercy was my downfall, and you took advantage of it, Todd. Mercy is always a villain’s downfall.”

“That only applies to heartless masterminds and killers like you, brother.” He grunted, “And to think we would call this chance encounter a family reunion.”

“I know what I am. And like it. Accept it. Our family’s dead because of

me. One thing's for sure... there is still some chance of forgiveness for us.”

“Forgiveness? What are you getting at?”

“Here’s the deal. You, Shrew Man, think of me a criminal. A murderer. You, Todd Peters, wanted to forgive me. But you don’t. You fight villain after villain, your own brother included, until you avenged Mom and Dad.”

“You are in no position to be called that, Gray. You are a monster. You stomp on lives, kidnap and torture people, turn them into your puppets, and what’s more, you consider yourself a flipping messiah as you did when I was born. When Mom and Dad “rejected” you to take care of me. So, I feel you. I really do. But, if you want to be forgiven by me, you have to stop those fiendish activities you cook up.”

“You don’t even know the real reason I killed them. One of our own family members was a criminal himself. I was just usurping him.”

“There was no reason. You just did it because you, as the insane, selfish, monstrous, heartless man you became, resented the attention I was getting and you killed them, started Solitaire, killed more people, brainwashed your friends into serving you, and emotionally tortured Karen forever.”

“Still vengeful and merciful. We don’t need to fight. Not today. If you want to stop and kill me,” Gray said, “you know where to find me and what I will be planning.”

He walked away. Todd knew that he was planning vengeance against him and his friends. But he wanted to know what Gray was planning and how he will achieve this. He also knew that he had to stop him at all cost. Even if it meant killing him.

But, he did say something about either of their parents being criminals, possibly a mob boss. Todd wondered what he meant by those words. His brain had become conflicted: He would either enlist his friends for help, or he would find Gray alone. Either way, he will find and stop Gray’s nefarious schemings, and he will get answers about Gray’s fall from grace, Todd’s transformation into Shrew Man, and their everlasting feud between the two.

Hannah Selhorst: DOROTHY

Dorothy practically hissed at me when I first called her that, Dorothy. She said her name was Dot, because Dorothy was swept away to munchkinland where she was banished to bad songs and children forever. We met at our parent's house, both fifteen even though her I.D. said she was twenty four. Our parents were the absolute only thing we had in common at the time; we were both plunged into a world of suits and heels since birth. I didn't resent it though, I found economics and business fascinating. Dorothy, on the other hand, was furious at the thought of growing up for finger-tip length pencil skirts and a cubicle. Regardless, she was required to attend these business dinners as was I. As much as I liked the business world, the thought of having the potential to ruin something for my dad made my heart stop. So, I wasn't excited for it, dreading it, in fact, but once I started calling her Dot and we abandoned our parents to the heads of swordfish, it was the best day of those fifteen years of my life. She was like nothing I'd ever known and everything I ever wanted. Her lips looked eternally swollen from Marlboro kisses, and she sat on a branch high up in a tree that night, flicking ashes down at me until I climbed up and sat down next to her.

And that's how we lived for the next few years. Fall of Junior year she talked me into cliff diving, and car surfing that spring. But it was winter the next year when things turned, when her adventures were too much, we were bridge jumping, which didn't seem like a big deal after cliff diving, but she hadn't checked the depth of the shallow pond below. She was unconscious the second she hit the muddy bottom to that glorified puddle.

I drove to the hospital almost immediately after, rushing to her room to see her sitting up on the hospital bed, boredom sinking the tips of her mouth. She pulled out a cigarette and held it in her signature pout, lighting it behind her hand.

Before I could even ask if she was okay, or tell her not to smoke in a hospital room, she spoke. "Let's get out of here, I have something to prove to the people on that bridge." And that's when things stopped working

between us. That's when I stopped going on these little suicide missions, when I stopped vying to please her adrenaline crutch. Two years into college, she texted me, "Found a new bridge jumping buddy. Let me know if you ever pull that stick out of your ass." And that was the last time I heard from her for a long while.

Everything seemed rust colored back then, back in the days of aching feet and pumping blood. Dorothy had that way about her, that way where she makes you see the world in different shades of red. Memories of her taste like rose macarons and smell like wet paint, fresh and pungent.

When I finally graduated, top of the class out of Cornell business school, I had done what I'd seen so many people my age do, revisiting my childhood town, wandering and remembering the memories made in each place, the bench I had my first kiss, the park I attended my first real party, and my feet led me to the bridge that caused Dot and I's downfall. I stood on that bridge and her voice almost scared me over the edge. "Parker, you gunna jump or what?" I spun around to see the ghost of my teenage years, a cigarette in her mouth and *actually* aged twenty four. She smiled and blew some smoke my way, "I don't suggest it, I've never come out of this one conscious."

When my surprise finally faded, I spoke. "Dot, it's been--"

She cut me off, a blush on her cheeks as she grinned at me and said, "actually, it's Dorothy."

Hannah Selhorst: Hallie and I

Hallie owns the world.
She wears heeled boots
Stitched to make tracks
She dances in crowds
With hips greased loose
And waist moving independent.
Her secrets are loud -
She wears them like the skirts
I would leave in the back of my closet
Or the tattoos
She's too young to have.

She owns her words.
They can touch you
Under muscle and bone
Because they burn
Like the lingering sweetness
Left in your sore throat
From your first cigarette,
Maybe your last,
But certainly not hers
Her words are liquor

Hallie owns herself.
She sees shadows in the dark
And she befriends them.
She hears voices
Sees eyes unaccompanied,
And her step never falters
Her ankle never twists
Because she may be 7 inches taller
in those shoes

But she is grounded in the dirt
And she knows the label on that pill bottle.
Does not define her
So she takes back her life.
And I still sit in the syllables
Of the orange bottle for the yellow pill
And that is nothing to dance at
And not something to drink to.
And even though
I don't understand it,
Hallie owns me.

William Zhang: HOW HE COULD HAVE DIED

If he dies old, he would be in the hospital, with a nurse leaning over the side of his bed. A tiny old television sitting in the corner of the room, flickering on channel thirty-eight, playing a late 90's sitcom. At the foot of his bed sits a bowl of soggy, uneaten oatmeal. On the nightstand next to him is a can of oxygen, the only thing keeping him alive until the end. A musty, transparent gas mask attaches to his mouth and nose. No relatives are in the room with him; they all live too far away, unaware of his condition. He coughs. The mask clouds up with an opaque gas. A sharp pain bolts across his left side and he inhales sharply. He exhales and his body stiffens as the mask darkens entirely. Sighing, the nurse stands up. She lights a cigarette and breathes in deeply.

If he dies young and innocent, he will be at home. Mother grasps his right hand and holds his little sister's left. Tears flow from both of their eyes. Father sits on the edge of the bed, telling him that it'll be alright. Grandma sits in a grey velvet chair next to the bed, holding a plate of untouched chocolate chip cookies, still warm from the heat of the oven. A lamp next to him glows softly, casting looming shadows on the walls and illuminating the entirety of the room. A sprinkle of rain dances on the rooftop, trickling down the glass windows. A pile of phones sits on the kitchen counter, buzzing and ringing with messages of prayers and love, never to be seen by the one who needs it most. He takes the wig off of his bald head, telling them to thank those who helped and supported. He thanks the doctors who tried. He softly tells his family that he loves them, and that life moves on. He calmly passes. His family, shaken with grief.

If he dies young and wild, he will be on the road. Far away from home. He's driving with his friends in an old 2004 Jeep. It's nearly three o'clock in the morning. The lights fly overhead like an endless flock of birds. They're out after a late night of drinking at college parties. They agree to go out and grab some food. He volunteers to drive. He doesn't feel tipsy. He feels free, like a balloon rising up in the sky. He zooms down the road going sixty-four

in a thirty-five zone. *There's no one around*, he thought, grinning. Their music pounds throughout the city. He rolls down the windows, exposing the sunroof. He steps on the gas, speeding up. He shouts at the top of his lungs, laughing. A red light flashes on the road. He continues his pace, ready to go straight through. A car appears out of the intersecting road, turning into his pathway. He realizes too late. He slams on the brakes, yanking the wheel to the right. His friends scream, intoxicated with fear. The chilling wind blows through the streets.

If he dies right now, he would be inside the womb. Never to meet his sister. Never to meet his parents. Never to experience the joys and fears of life. Never to be born.

Kiara Mercado: LOVE

1. n. “A feeling or disposition of deep affection for someone, typically arising from a recognition of attractive qualities.”

4. v. “to have or feel love towards (a person, a thing personified) (for a quality or attribute); to entertain a great affection, fondness, or regard for; too hold dear.”

Love is comfort with a person that's dear to you;
Is feeling, an emotion, that can't be described; just said.
We always say the word “love,”
Thinking about definition four instead of one
And when we mean one, we're lying to ourselves.

Love can be described as many things,
But the definition itself is not enough
To define the true emotion that one can bare.

Kiara Mercado: THE RING

The ring that I gave to my love, on that starry night, where the wind took the sand away from the shores, sweeping her off her feet and where I gave my heart to her, unified us both. I remember when she said that magic word, “Yes”. That was the start of a new ending.

Five years later we were still together, in our early twenties so we still didn't have kids. We decided we were still young and should enjoy our love. We took walks in the place we made our vows, saying “I love you” each night and each morning. I remember one day, we were on our hammock. We took a nap outside under a tree. Sharing the room we had, we slept.

I wake up, now in my thirties, no kids, don't need any. The ring I once gave her, I keep. I weep in front of the gravestone that gets flowers each visit. They aren't much. I lay on the grass with her by my side one last time before I go, remembering when she said “I love you,” with a kiss on my cheek, now cold and empty. The only warmth left is her ring and the girl who stole my heart.

Morgan Malone: THE MISFITS AND I **IN BLACKOUT**

~~Although I didn't want it to, enduring stupidity on a daily basis really puts a strain on your soul. Having to deal with the misfits taunting, laughing, pointing, excluding, and isolating you based on a lie is something no one should have to deal with. What really upsets me about this whole thing is that I have these beautiful memories with them, painting the town and each other, but that's all they are. If a friendship can be broken in a matter of days over a lie, was it even real? Probably not. It seems as though something in them that was pitted against me had been building up for a long time, and they chose to completely tarnish my name instead of coming and talking to me. They left me, a puddle of tears and regrets, in their wake. They have no idea how much it hurt because of the strains on their soul.~~

~~But I could not let that strain win. I could not let them win. I picked myself up, dusted myself off, and moved on. Well...tried to move on. I heard somewhere from someone that if you could take an opportunity to get your revenge on someone who wronged you, then you're not over it. That rings true, I guess, because if I saw the girl that put her hands on me days after I~~

~~gave her “the best night of her life” (her words, not mine), I would bash her head in until the sobs — mine, not hers — stopped because it all was too real and hurt so much that my head pounded and my hands shook. It was all too real, because on that first day when the walls were closing in and I had to opt out, it seemed as though my world had ended. But I’d never been more wrong. Although, Misfits, I do not live my days for you I sure as hell live them against you. And it gets easier and easier day by day. Because that’s all you are — misfits.~~

Morgan Malone: TABLE 25

They continued talking in hushed voices, in an intimate way it seemed. Something I wish I was doing. It all looked so damn romantic. It pained me to see her face, so beautiful, so ethereal as it was slightly illuminated by the soft vanilla candle in the middle of the tablecloth covered booth. I couldn't even pay attention to the way the sparkly, candy apple red dress hugged her every curve or the coy way she played with his lapel the way she used to with mine, because he grasped her hand, leaned in, and kissed her. Not in a way that would make the other patrons uncomfortable, but in a way that flustered her, that made her blush, look down, and smile. I winced. Another chest pain.

“Dave. DAVE!” my oafish manager, Lee, bellowed. When will he learn to say it, not spray it? “Are you going to stand there with your head in your ass or are you going to go host table 25? I'm not paying you for wasted air, wasted time, and wasted money!”

“I'm on it, sir,” I said in a monotone voice, shoulders slumped, as I walked to the table where the love of my life sat (well, at least the love of my life for the first two years of college). Seriously, it's not just the candle -- Taylor glows. She always has. Tonight, she has an eerily beautiful candlelit glow. When I first met her on the beach at our campus kickback, however, she was a stunning, phoenix-like bombshell, only further enhanced by the massive bonfire. There were what seemed like millions of people at the beach that night, but she stood out. When she arrived on campus freshman year, there were whisperings, rumors, and questions about who she was and where she came from. But none of that mattered -- we worked out in the beginning because while everyone saw her as a phenomenon, I saw her as a person. Although I loved her cappuccino eyes and radiant smile, her quick wit and giving spirit is what really made me weak at the knees. She was a kind, sweet, gentle soul who led soup kitchens every Thanksgiving at her church and cried during ASPCA commercials. She also kept me on my toes with frequent, invigorating debates and pushed me to do my best in every subcategory of my life, even more than I did for myself. Everything, whether it be studying for finals or vying for a promotion from the busboy to waiter

at Gionino's. But soon the motivation of a passionate girlfriend turned to that of a drill sergeant, making me want to stop altogether. I soon learned that life had always passed me by, and I regretted it, because it was ultimately what led to our demise.

Damn her, she recognized me instantly after I gave my whole "Welcome to Gionino's, how may I serve you?" spiel.

"David? Oh, my goodness, it IS you! How are you?" I swallowed the growing lump in my throat as we exchanged pleasantries - good, thanks, how are you, etcetera. The golf ball in my throat grew to a grapefruit when she introduced the man sitting across from her as her husband: "This is Chris - we're celebrating our one year wedding anniversary tonight!" she exclaimed. He smiled and kissed her clasped together hands. He, this tall, sinewy man with a head full of raven hair and a beard to match, and lively, Hershey kiss eyes that beamed. His actual smile? A sly grin that was almost a sneer -- as if he knew something no one else did. I hated him, yet he was everything my scrawny ass had always wanted to be. I hated the way he looked at her, like the most beautiful thing in the world couldn't compare to the sight of her in that candy apple red dress with the nails and lips to match. He had her; it was obvious and clear. I hated that he had her. I hated that I did not.

I'd always been a selfish man. Cruising around Miami in my ebony Porsche with my eggplant double-breasted Tom Ford suit and Ray-Bans, entitled aura, not a care in the world. I thought I was "winning" at life. But as soon as I met the lithe, winsome Taylor, my whole worldview and my whole life did a complete 180. I really got a taste for the finer things in life, and it had nothing to do with the expensive Rolls Royces, designer clothes, luxury Calabasas estates, Ralph Lauren cologne, and ski trips to Vail on the company's money. I became rich in a completely new way, one that opened up my heart, mind, and soul after being closed for years. When I saw Taylor across the bar at Gionino's, I nearly choked on my *zuppa di porcini* and knew she was the type of girl that would be approached, not solicited with a come-hither motion. I tried to use the typical one-liners that would usually get even

the smartest, less oblivious girls in bed with me, but she wasn't buying it. She knew, and didn't miss a beat. She told me up front that those pathetic lines didn't work on her:

“You know, you already have the package physically, but mentally, I don't see it.” We continued our back-and-forth all throughout the night until we were forced out at two in the morning, and the rest is history.

She swept me off of my feet, can you believe it? She stimulated me in a way that no other brainless model with tits and ass would - she mind-fucked me, was always challenging me, and never backed down from a thought-provoking debate. She was a feisty, fiery flame that zoomed and burned from one task, one destination, one goal to the next, and I could only keep up. I was a mere drizzle and she was a hurricane. With things usually being the other way around for me in every aspect of life, I was more than happy to be recognized by the state as being along for the ride. She was my pride and joy now, more than any of the material things. Taylor grasped my hand, flashed her signature toothy grin I fell in love with and said, “Chris? Babe, what are you thinking? With that goofy smile on your face.” I chuckled and said nothing, because I knew. I looked into those celestial, hazelnut coffee eyes from across the red-and-white checkered tablecloth covered booth in the cheery, mom-and-pop Gionino's where we first met, and I knew she had finally won.

Faye Fahsbender: 100

I remember the day my father went to space. Mom and I went and watched them count down. Each second on the clock hurt my insides. Mom and I saw as Dad was carried into the air. There were no clouds except the one made from the bottom of the rocket. That was more like really intense dry ice, though. I held Mom's hand and cried into her grey sweater. It itched my face and her tears wet my head. As the technicians stood with us, they whooped and cheered insensitively. Only one man resembling the KFC mascot knelt to my level and put a firm hold on my hand.

"Your dad's doing a great thing, son." He reassured.

I knew that, but I still hated that he left me here on dumb, old Earth. He left all of us like we didn't deserve him.

Before I knew Dad had to leave, he took me up to the roof. I climbed up first, then he followed, our favorite telescope under his burly arm. It was the clearest night we'd seen yet. That's why we used the good telescope. I stood up the telescope and pressed my eye on the eyepiece. I could feel Dad's warmth as he stood right behind me. When he spoke, the air tickled my head and neck.

"How amazing is this, Simon?" He said, with the same wonder that I felt.

I smelled his dinner beer on his breath. I couldn't even reply. Venus was right there. The whole universe was just right there. It wasn't a picture of the planet, that WAS venus. That red sphere was a whole world, and my eye was claiming it. I looked up from my planet to see my dad's astronomy face. His eyes glowed and his mouth fell stupidly open. Even his whiskers were dowsed in starlight. I felt a sudden burst in me.

"Dad! Turn around! There's a shooting star, it's number 100, we got them all!" My prepubescent voice squeaked.

He snapped out of his daze and turned around.

"Buddy, I didn't see it. You know the rules, we both have to see it." I felt the disappointment in his voice. We were almost there. We had made a pact to spot 100 shooting stars together, and it was like our last one never existed. It was gone.

I have never stargazed since then. I moved to the city, so that I had the excuse of too many busy lights. I was cooking noodles for one when I heard a knock at my door. I turned off the heat, and walked to open it. Through my peephole, I saw a distressed Ms. Bates. I opened the door with a sigh.

“What’s wrong Ms. Bates?” I asked lacking interest.

“Simon, my cat is gone. The good one, Rudy! He leapt up my fire escape, I think he went to the roof. Could you please help me, Dear?” She begged, coated in a thick Chicago accent.

Admittedly, I knew that, out of her five cats, Rudy was the tuxedo. I really did not care to know that, but this woman bothered me so much, I subconsciously memorized her cats. I looked at the small woman, her mouth gaped like a goldfish, and her hands actually folded in pleading. I couldn’t not help. My noodles would have to wait.

We climbed up Ms. Bates’s fire escape with reggaeton and fire sirens below us. I helped her to the roof of our building, and watched her scamper, looking for her “little rascal,” as she called Rudy. Without thinking, I looked up. Looking at the sky again was a breath of fresh air. Beautiful stars tonight. *Almost* the clearest sky I’ve ever seen. I claimed the world above again. I didn’t think of Dad at first, but then I saw it.

A shooting star.

Dad.

It was a perfect one. Lost in space, I knew Dad had seen it. Even if he was adrift in the unknown, I knew that he thought of me. He remembered me.

“100,” we whispered together.

Faye Fahsbender: LAME

The warrior is wounded
Invaded by a merciless sword
Strong steel is broken
To reveal a baby's soft skin.
Weakness cackles at his pain.

A nose tucked behind a story
Plot tuning out jeers
A cloud of paper and colored ink
Stuffed full with rain.
It smelled like this heavy damp—
“Lame,” “nerd,” “square,” they'd say.
Only a pang of pity
He, like Batman, had powers dwelling within.

Swift whistling stick
Release of a bow
A crisp, dull sound, yards away
A satisfying sound lamed the deer
Heartbeat screamed in his ears
With panicked, blurred vision,
He saw the boy who lamed him.

In the black dress, she wept,
Hating for hoping.
Faces downturned,
Yet she felt the burn of sympathy still.
Silence was the decorum,
But, oh, did she want to cry out.
They showed her the gold dress
Embroidered, lamé, soft
In the gold dress, she sighed.

It smelled of who she was:
Rose and rain