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REVIEW

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SUBMISSIONS FOR FALL 1997 ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Hair Style - S. Marc Goldberg 5
Eyes - Timothy Jones 6
Untitled - Jeffrey Dellapina 7
Imaginary Chris - Amie Arnold 8
Rebirth - Colleen M. Clohessy 14
Water People - Andrew Berlin 15
Writer's Block - joel b. boyce 16
This'll Only Hurt - Andrew Chmelko (New Voices Winner 1997) 17
Stars - Timothy Jones 29
Wrong Number - Amie Arnold 30
Screaming Tears - S. Marc Goldberg 31
The Final Detail - Clifford J. Aliperti 32
“Believe” Part II - Jeffrey Dellapina 38
Confessions of an Insomniac - Anonymous 40
The Toxic Sunset - Mike Betette (New Voices Winner 1997) 41
HAIR STYLE
by S. Marc Goldberg

Flowing Gently
Uninterrupted

Curves of Innocence
In A World
So Corrupted

Giving Form
To A Body
Of Essence

Coming To An End
The Curves Speak
With Silence
EYES
by Timothy Jones

Eyes,
wild and passionate
sincere and deep,
mesmorize me.

Stories are told,
confessions unfold,
takes me to you,
where I belong.

Eyes,
confused but hungry,
camouflaged but revealing,
ever blinking.

I stare all night,
absorbed in the vision,
selfishly captured,
I surrender to you.

UNTITLED
by Jeffrey Dellapina

My feet fall
one in front of the other
down cascading rocks
falling over jagged shores
the hand of God
makes its presence felt
streaming through tattered clouds
a dark blue light shatters
the fine water outskirts
boats await there
like men standing by trenches
in the unceasing war
It was the day I didn’t go out to play. I liked everyone in my neighborhood, and especially liked riding my new ten-speed with Simon, but I didn’t want to see anyone today. I wanted to change all on my own.

Simon lives only a minute away from me in Shady Knoll Apartments. The apartments are bunched together, with a courtyard for each. Simon lives in the group next to mine, and he’s been a friend of mine since I moved here last year. The outside of the apartments are really ugly, like they’re made out of soggy gray paper-mache. A lot of kids, especially boys, live in the apartments and are always outside riding bikes or wrestling in the courtyards. There’s always someone to play with, although most of the time I ride my bike with Simon. But when Simon came over today to see if I wanted to ride bikes like usual, I told my mom to tell him that I was sick.

I stayed in bed extra late and just lay there stiff, staring unblinking at the ceiling, thinking very hard about the world until I thought I would go blind. Then I got up and went to the bathroom. My hair was all over the place. I had gotten another zit. I slowly took off my pink silk nightgown, pushed the step stool to the sink, climbed up, and stared at myself naked in the mirror until my eyes glazed over and my form was white and ghostly and I couldn’t see it there anymore. When it had been too long, I put on that outfit: the outfit I had gotten for my twelfth birthday, the outfit that I wore everyday this summer. It was the green elastic waistband shorts and hawaiian shirt with the matching green collar. When I was dressed and had wasted a lot of time thinking about everything in all the different rooms of the house, my mom took me to my papa and nana’s house, like she does every Saturday night.

Every Saturday, my papa and nana take me to a diner near their house because my papa says they have the best fish fry. That’s when I learned that instead of going to a movie, like I usually picked to do after dinner, we were going to a tractor pull. My papa was excited about it, but Nana secretly rolled her eyes at me. I wasn’t happy about it, either.

“What’s a tractor pull?”

“It’s a competition between tractors to see which one can pull the most weight,” Papa said, slathering butter on one half of his roll.

“It sounds weird to me.”

“It’s great. You’ll love it.”

“There’s a flea market there, too,” Nana said. “If you behave, I’ll give you a dollar.”

I squirmed in the red colored booth as the waitress leaned over to refill my nana’s coffee cup. There was a bright red ring around the rim of the mug from her lipstick.

The tractor pull, from the moment we walked past the gate, was really strange to me. The field where the pull was taking place was to the side of the gate, and beyond that in a grassy field tables and booths were set up. That’s where I would meet Chris. Imaginary Chris.

The tractor pull field was set up like for a football game with bleachers, but they faced a field of dirt. We climbed up the bleachers. The first tractor started up and pulled into the dirt. It was a big red
tractor, rusty and full of grease, and it ran loud. Puffs of black smoke came out of the back and went into the air. The man driving the tractor made it go slow, wheel over wheel, trying to position it into the starting center. The wheels were muddy and covered with chains that clanked; he found his position and stopped.

The man got out of the tractor. He was big and greasy too, and he hitched a big weight to the back. The weight looked small and shiny compared to the tractor. It was a big block and heavy, I suppose, for any tractor to have hooked up to the back of it. It took awhile for the man to do it. When he was done, he seemed pleased and wiped the dirt on his pants before getting back in the tractor.

Once inside the tractor, he moved a big calloused hand over the clutch; the engine coughed and the wheels spun. The black puffs of smoke mixed with the brown dirt, and they both went up in the air. It was dirty, but the weight wouldn't move. The man in the tractor seemed disappointed. My papa muttered something underneath his breath. People in front and in back of us moaned and cheered for him to try again.

He didn't stop. He put his hand on the clutch, his foot on the pedal, and crunched up his face as if he was loosing his breath. My papa clasped and slid his hand into Nana's, squeezing it gently as the man in the tractor lifted his body to move forward, pushing hard, leaning that way and letting go. The engine made grinding sounds and the tractor sputtered, jumping forward, pulling the weight. The weight hissed and left a scar in the ground from where it dug in.

The weight didn't want to move—it had to. It wanted to wiggle on its side and stay there, be left alone, but the man kept leaning forward, biting his lip, making the engine grind, making the tractor jerk forward.

The man was done. He moved the weight as far as it would go. Everyone in the bleachers clapped that he had moved it so well. My grandfather jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, dragging my nana up with him, wrapping his big arm around her shoulder. His grin was a wide as the man who got out of the tractor, who looked happy and complete. Another tractor would come in soon to attempt the same thing.

I climbed down the bleachers. I walked away without being noticed, I was all dirty and hot. I walked to the stands and into the crowd of people who were admiring tables of junk being sold like they were treasures. I was quiet, talking to myself in my head, thinking hard.

I stopped at a jewelry booth. A man with a beard and a lady in a long skirt behind the booth smiled and watched me closely as I picked up a plastic bracelet and tried it on. I gave the lady the dollar and she handed me the change, almost missing my hand as she turned to face the man next to her. She laid her head on his shoulder as he turned to kiss her on the cheek. The evening sun beat down as I stumbled away.

I started to go back to the tractor pull when I noticed a group of young boys at the entrance to the booths. They were playing with remote control tractors. I stayed far back, leaning against the side of the booth so they wouldn't see I was watching. I watched them play with the controls that operated their cars, like the man and his clutch, watching the miniature tractors chase each other in the dirt. Instead of pulling weights, they were moving around quickly. I watched them scurry across the grass in little patterns. Sometimes, one of the tractors would bump into
another one, and would fall on their backsides. The boy who owned it would have to turn it back over for it to move fast over the ground again.

I watched for a long time, thinking very hard. I pressed my back against the steaming hot booth and struggled to see over the crowds of people who walked past me, blocking my view. In the crowd I saw a teenage boy and girl holding hands, a mother holding a baby, a father pushing another in a stroller and an elderly couple walking side by side. I had to stand tip toe to see around them to the group of boys. Then, all the people I had seen in the crowd mixed together as one and passed the booth.

I was watching the crowd and thinking hard until a tractor controlled by one of the boys went out of control, scurrying all over, and ran over me. I saw it coming at the last minute, but I couldn’t move out of the way. I looked at the tractor lying all peaceful and quiet on my foot and then up to see which boy owned it, and if he was planning on doing anything to get it off me. He looked into my eyes and smiled. I cringed back shyly, moving my head to look at the tractor again. He laughed, moved his fingers over a button on his control, and it was back to life. It shot off my foot and back into the dirt with the other boys and their tractor-cars. I looked up. He wasn’t looking at me anymore, even though he just ran over my foot with his tractor. I waited, but he was with the other tractors. His car scurried all about in the dirt until it jerked silent when it fell over a rock.

I went back to the tractor pull. I watched a tractor pull a weight across the dirt. I ignored the grinding metal, the clanking sounds, the smoke and dirt, and the way Papa was holding Nana. I thought about the boy that ran over my foot with his tractor and the look on his face. I made up a name for him that I might keep forever. I called him Chris.

In the back seat on the way home from the tractor pull, I rested my head on the cool window and watched everything race by into the night. I didn’t say a word while Papa and Nana quietly talked. I thought all about imaginary Chris and his tractor, how it ran over my foot, and how he smiled at me and laughed.

When I got home I was tired. I was sweaty and dirty from the tractor pull. I took off my clothes to put on my pajamas. I looked into the mirror naked and thought very hard about when I was going to grow into myself. I thought very long about everything standing there naked.
REBIRTH
by Colleen M. Clohessy

For you, my daughter, it will change
   I will make things right
It is my duty from my mistakes
   It is for you I fight

You are born of me today, my daughter
   From my own tears and blood
But you will not go where I have gone
   Or stand where I have stood

I was taken, daughter, from my own self
   Fed to hungry sinners
But today with you, there is rebirth
   Take your chance, my young beginner

See how I, your mother, has erred
   See the victim I once was
And take the courage I give to you
   To always rise above

WATER PEOPLE
by Andrew Berlin

What could be better?
A sunset looking over Great Salt Pond, Block Island.
The world seems to stop.
Everything that is made by man is insignificant
to a power far greater than life.
Yet we are blessed with its beauty for a short while.
   It spares us the great harm it can do for just a night.
   We can't control it, for it controls us.
The visual stimulation is something
   that all humans share.
Almost as if it is putting whoever watches in a trance
   Setting us all for one moment
   in the same frame of mind.
No other thoughts go through our heads.
This is the admiration we share.
   This is why we love the water.
WRITER'S BLOCK
by joel b. boyce

i'd kill my muse
if i could only
find her.
i think she
knows this,
and it is
for this
reason that i think
she's quiet.
if only she
would sing,
i'd slit her
throat and
write my
poems with
her blood.

THIS'LL ONLY HURT
by Andrew Chmelko
- New Voices Play Competition Winner, 1997 -

Characters:
Timothy Rosen (20 years old, shy, skinny, frightened)
Marissa (22, domineering, the leader of the group)
Sharine (21, gorgeous, disarming, sweet)
Peter (22, intellectual, angry, soft-spoken)
Ron (20, muscle on muscle, very aggressive)

Scene:
A secluded woods area near a college campus

Time:
Present

(LIGHTS UP. Four young people are sitting in a line facing the audience. All appear nervous and fidgety. All hold in their hands a piece of rope.)

PETER.
We gonna do this?

MARISSA.
I'm ready. I'm just waiting for you guys.
SHARINE.
On three?
RON.
Fuck that. Now.

(Altogether the four stand up and walk to four separate corners of the stage. They are now enshrouded in shadow and difficult to see. CS is revealed a thin, average looking, frightened young man lying atop a large wooden block whose four extremities are bound by the four ropes the people are holding. He gives the appearance of someone about to be torn apart by wild horses.)

RON.
Hey. You awake, Rosen?
(The CAPTIVE BOY wearily raises his head.)
TIMOTHY.
Yes.
MARISSA.
Are you ready to talk?
TIMOTHY.
You people are all sick. I can’t believe you’re doing this to...

(RON, MARISSA, SHARINE and PETER simultaneously pull on their ropes. TIMOTHY cries out in pain.)
PETER.
Timyyyy...you’re going to talk to us.

TIMOTHY.
Great way to make me talk, you know? Nothing brings out conversation better than dismemberment! Are you human beings, for Christ’s sake?
SHARINE.
You’re sure talking up a storm now, Tim. Keep it up, will you please?
TIMOTHY.
What the hell do you want to know?
MARISSA.
We’re going to figure you out one way or another, Tim. We’re fed up with your shyness and your going to end this secrecy now!
RON.
How come you never stick up for yourself, Rosen?
SHARINE.
Why don’t you ever look anyone in the face when they’re talking to you?
PETER.
What about me, Timmy? Do you feel comfortable with me, are you scared of me, what’s the deal here?
TIMOTHY.
You honestly want to know this? (beat) Why didn’t you guys just say so? My God, I’ll tell you anything you want to know, you can let me out of this!
MARISSA.
Gee Tim, I wonder if you’re planning to run away.
SHARINE.
I don’t think he is.
PETER.
Of course he is, look at him! See how happy he got all of a sudden? He’ll be runnin’ in no time!
SHARINE.
He can’t outrun Ron even if he does try to get away.
C’mon you guys, let’s untie him. We can just surround him or something.

(The four speak quietly amongst themselves briefly.)

ALL FOUR.
I don’t know, what do you think? etc....

RON.
Rosen, we’re trusting you now. You run away and I will catch you and seriously fuck you up.

(The four step out of the shadows and begin to untie TIMOTHY.)

TIMOTHY.
See that? That was all the motivation I needed to not go anywhere. Put the words “seriously fuck you up” together and I’m nice and passive.

(TIMOTHY is now untied. He stands and stretches.)

Oh yes. Circulation.

(He sits. The four move in closer to him.)

So go ahead. Ask me any-

(Instantly he propels himself out of the group and runs off SR. RON takes off after him.)

PETER.
Shit! Great judgement Sharine, unbelievable!

SHARINE.
You guys, I really don’t want to do this anymore. We’re scaring the shit out of him when all we wanted to do was get him to talk to us.

MARISSA.
Sharine, listen to me. If he gets out of here before we can come to some kind of agreement, he’s going to run right to the cops and turn us all in.

SHARINE.
Marissa, did you hear him scream when we pulled the ropes? I can’t do this to him. If he wants to stay quiet let’s just leave him alone!

(PETER approaches SHARINE.)

PETER.
Hey Sharine, remember how Timmy wrote to you all summer? Remember telling me all the sweet things he had written to you? “You are by far the most adorable girl I’ve ever met,’ ‘I really wish I could come and visit you.’ Remember how ecstatic you were?

SHARINE.
Pete, just shut up.

PETER.
And do you remember how every day since the day you guys came back to school he just kept getting more and more distant, and you couldn’t stop asking yourself why? Huh? Remember how frustrated you were that nobody else could figure out why he was acting so strange either? Sharine, we’ve got him here in the middle of absolutely nowhere. He doesn’t know what the hell we’re gonna do to him. Believe me. he’s gonna tell you why now!

MARISSA.
We’re going to figure out everything there is to know about the most reclusive person on the planet, Sharine. Isn’t that the least bit tempting?

(SHARINE breathes deeply. She is convinced.)

SHARINE.
We’ll intimidate him, but can we please not hurt him anymore?

MARISSA.
Unless it’s absolutely necessary, we’ll just use words.
I can’t believe you’re so soft on him.

I’d never heard him scream before. And it was over something I was doing to him.

(PRON re-enters holding TIMOTHY in a full nelson.)

Are you gonna run again, Rosen?

No.

(PRON tightens his grip.)

Make me feel it, Rosen! Are you gonna run again?

No!!!

You can put him down now, Ron.

Piece of shit took a huge swing at me back there; we’re puttin’ his ass back in those ropes.

Just sit him down, Ron. We’ll keep him here.

Nope, no deal. He’s not sitting unless I.e’s on my lap with my hands around his goddamn neck.

Sharine?

Not so tight, okay Ron? Just enough to hold him.

Whatever, as long as he’s in my grabbing range.

(PRON sits on the wood block with TIMOTHY on his lap, his hands still locked in the full nelson. SHARINE, PETER, and MARISSA arrange themselves tightly around the block.)

All right Tim, let’s try this again. Are you ready to talk?

Yes. Ask me your questions and let me go home.

We’ve all known each other for about a year now, Tim. In that time, we’ve managed to become pretty decent friends. All of us except you. You’ve always managed to shut us out somehow just when we think we’ve got you in our little group. That really hurts, Tim. There’s so much we want to know about you and do with you, but you won’t stop pushing us away. We’ve invited you out places with us, we’ve visited you in your room, we’ve tried to keep communication going over vacations. Nothing. Nothing works! We didn’t want to have to do this to you, but it really didn’t seem like we had much of a choice. You say you’re willing to talk now, so let’s hear it. What have we been doing wrong this past year? Enlighten us!

Well, I’ll start by asking you guys a question. (beat) When you accidentally make a little slip up and a whole bunch of people get the wrong impression of you, don’t you ever wish that you could gather all of them into a room and say, ‘Ok guys, sorry about that, here’s my side of the story’?

Yeah. Don’t we all?

I would say so. But can you really do that? Can you
really unload all of your insecurities onto a group of your friends like that? No! You gotta act like everything’s under control. Gotta look secure or else the next thing you know people are tossing the word ‘psycho’ around when your name comes up.

MARISSA.
We never thought you were a psycho, Tim.

TIMOTHY.
Don’t give me that. I’ve seen the kinds of people you guys call psychos. They’re exactly like me! Their heads are together, they’re never going to snap and slaughter their families or set fire to their houses while smearing themselves with Jello and singing “Winter Wonderland” in pig Latin! I got news for you, that’s what a psycho is. Not people who get a little tongue tied when they talk or walk a little awkwardly or take certain things to heart more than other people. If someone isn’t exactly like you, why do you have to fuck them over with such a rough label as ‘psycho’?

(beat) I knew it would come eventually with how fucking clumsy and nervous I am, so I didn’t give you the pleasure. I kept everything inside where you couldn’t find it and shit all over it!

(The group is silent for a moment. Then SHARINE speaks up.)

SHARINE.
Tim, I don’t mean for this to sound stuck up, but did you have a crush on me this summer?

(TIMOTHY laughs gently.)

TIMOTHY.
Sorry to be so transparent, Sharine. Yes, I did. Um... I know I’m like one of ten thousand with these feelings for you, but I couldn’t help it. I’ve never met anyone like you before. Beauty, kindness and endless charm almost never come in the same package, but you managed to snag it all somehow.

SHARINE.
I’m sorry, Tim.

TIMOTHY.
There’s no reason to be. You and Jeff look great together. I finally figured out that those are the kinds of guys who get these phenomenal women like you. If they’re not covered with muscles and confidence like Ron here, they have to be intelligent and smooth talking. I never could’ve been anything to you.

SHARINE.
Except a friend, Tim! And that’s what I wanted! Why are you trying to end it?

TIMOTHY.
I’m no good for you or anybody in any department, Sharine. Just look at my life. Not an ounce of muscle on my body, and there never will be.

(turns to RON.)

Guys like you don’t even have enough respect for me to call me by my first name. I never had any sense of security about myself.

(looks at PETER.)

For a while you were the only person I truly felt safe around, Pete. I felt like you knew where I was coming from. But then you started quoting this amazing poetry and showing me all these phenomenal plays you’d written. Jesus, I’d be fine if only I could express myself like that. But I can’t. Looks and intelligence. Most people have it made in at least one department, and the truly blesseed have the best of both worlds. But I’ve got neither. And as sad and pathetic as this may sound, you guys kidnapping me is the most flattering thing anyone’s ever done to me.

(RON breaks the full nelson.)
TIMOTHY sits and buries his head between his knees.

MARISSA.

Tim?

SHARINE.

It's over. Why don't you just leave him alone?

MARISSA.

Tim? We're not going to tell anyone about this. As long as you don't, you can leave now. (beat) Tim? I said you can leave now. If you don't know where you are, we're about a mile away from the-

TIMOTHY.

You go.

RON.

What's that?

TIMOTHY.

I know where I am. I'm not going to the cops. You guys can go ahead. I think I need to stay here for a while.

MARISSA.

All right.

(RON, PETER and SHARINE begin to pick up the ropes.

TIMOTHY raises his head.)

TIMOTHY.

Leave the ropes, please?

PETER.

Why?

TIMOTHY.

I'll take care of them, just leave them.

(MARISSA crouches down beside TIMOTHY.)

MARISSA.

Timothy? Don't lose hope. Please talk to us anytime you want to.

TIMOTHY.

Thank you.

(MARISSA exits. PETER approaches and crouches beside TIMOTHY.)

PETER.

I'm not as untouchable as you think, Timmy. Writing's just my escape. You oughta try it sometime, even if you're the only one who reads your work.

TIMOTHY.

Thank you.

(PETER exits. RON approaches and crouches. As this goes on, TIMOTHY doesn't look at any of them.)

RON.

Take it easy, Tim.

TIMOTHY.

Thank you.

(RON exits. SHARINE approaches and crouches.)

SHARINE.

Please look at me.

(TIMOTHY slowly turns to face her. She kisses him gently on the cheek.)

Jeff's a lot like you, Tim. And I love everything about him. Don't ever lose hope.

(silence)

Tim?

(silence)

Give me a call tonight, hon. So I know you got home safely. (beat) Don't be too late.

(SHARINE exits, giving TIMOTHY one last glance over
her shoulder. After a beat, TIMOTHY looks in the direction she left in.)

TIMOTHY.

Thank you.

(He reaches over and picks up one of the ropes. As he stares at it, a RADIO NEWSMAN’S VOICE is heard. While the VOICE is talking, TIMOTHY slowly adjusts the looped end of the rope around his neck and stands. He is looking around for something to hang from.)

VOICE.

Local police are still searching for 20 year old Timothy David Rosen, who has been missing since Friday afternoon. Police describe Rosen as standing about 5’8” and approximately 130 lbs. with dark hair and brown eyes. Rosen was reportedly last seen walking from an English class with a group of friends. How exactly he disappeared remains a mystery. If you should spot Rosen, or have any information as to his whereabouts, please call toll free 1-800-376-4453. That number again is 1-800-376-4453. Several of Rosen’s friends have already begun searching and are desperately seeking help.

(TIMOTHY looks above him. Gradually he stands on top of the wood block and begins to raise the rope.)

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

STARS
by Timothy Jones

Stars don’t reply to the endless wishes and desires of the loser, who seeks companionship of a distant love that once illuminated the night.

Stars won’t answer the haunting questions of yesterday; reflections and visions of magical moments linger as the second hand ticks.

Stars simply pass and give way to the rising sun, who poses the challenge: will you live today?
WRONG NUMBER
by Arnie Arnold

i hate it when the phone rings
and even before you answer
you get this feeling like
who the fuck would be calling
me especially at this hour
you pick it up
hear breathing
party music in back
hello hello you
say still saying
hello even after the caller's
messy attempt to hang up
decide against having
a conversation with a busy
signal have another
cigarette instead
thinking
who the hell was that?
its after business hours
it cant be about
credit cards or late bills
its saturday night
no one about a job
my few friends may have been
polite enough to ask
directly for me
it could have been a psychopath
but i think it was you
i could smell your beer breath
through the receiver
i hate when they prank
without saying a word

SCREAMING TEARS
by S. Marc Goldberg

Crying out loud
Screaming inside
The pain tears you apart
Nothing takes the agony away
Every day
The same routine
Suffer Run Cry
Beg for a cure
Every night
A similar scene
Stuck in a room without a view
The outside world escapes you
Clean floors surrounded
By white walls
Become second nature
Your privacy revoked
Life goes by quicker
Than you expect
Taking the past
For granted
Getting rid of the tears
Drives your thoughts
To search for help
And relive your life
A solution is needed
Drastic changes
Must be made
Several options but no choices
Your body now hollow
Void of feeling
Better than suffering
No more screaming
Your room is dark, except for the fifty watts burning from your desklamp. Even that light is stale, for smoke wafts through its glow. Your house is silent. Only you make the noise. It comes sparingly, only as quick as an idea enters your head. Then the keyboard will rattle for a few minutes until you sit back to think of a connection. You sip coffee from your mug, so large it could be a soup bowl. The stall lasts too long, so you rise from your seat to retrieve a bottle of whiskey from your liquor cabinet. Its harsh stench filters through your nostrils as you add some to the hot coffee. Sip and smoke—where are the ideas?

You had an interesting person or situation, and it alone carried you through the last two lonely weeks. Where do you go now? Maybe an outline wouldn’t have been that terrible an idea. Where’s the excitement? The turmoil? What shakes up real life? For others, real life is even more exciting than the paper life you create. Play God. A death is sure to wreak a little havoc. Kill the female lead? But you need her for the final chapter. How the hell are you going to get to that final chapter? Could write it now, but who buys novellas? Kill the male lead’s brother, the Congressman? Sure, but how? He could be murdered, but then you have to go back and intermingle this new subplot into your completed hundred pages. Damn it! Kill the male lead’s mother! Aha! A sudden stroke. Of luck for you, of death for her. Just like real life. A chapter of misery and comforting.

The whiskey burns your gut, but it has you rolling. You add some more to your mug, coffee be damned. You barely even taste the bitter brew now. Another one of your cigarettes has burned to the filter. Fuck it, light another, take one drag and let it burn. Mourning is over, but morning is nowhere near. Write on. No words to put on the page. You need another idea. Where is it? Maybe you’ll find it in the whiskey. You stand to think. You walk about your room, squinting at the titles of the many books that line your shelves. So many, so great, how many have you read? Three copies of *War and Peace*, but you pray to God that nobody asks you a question about Tolstoy’s work. Where did Tolstoy get his ideas? Probably Vodka. Hell, you’re sure that Hemingway sipped whiskey. But thinking of Ernest is not going to help you. You are not writing about the Spanish Civil War or bullfighting; you need Ernest to leave your head.

You sit down. You spread your arms over your desk. It’s coated with dust and ash. You can’t even reach its edges. When you realized that you were a writer—it was no passing phase—you bought the big desk. Oak finish. Hey, O’Sullivan’s are quite popular. You open its drawers and are met with the sight of newspaper clippings climbing over its edge. You pick up a handful. You clipped them for some reason; this must be it. You want to find that one article that somehow connects. You need it to spark you, give you a chapter. AIDS, a mob hit, a political scandal, mad cow disease, none of it helps you. You drop the clippings back in the drawer and slam it shut. It echoes through your empty house. You hold your hands under the bulb and see that they are stained black with news ink.

You take a walk. You turn the heat down
so it does not tire you out. You are all alone. Most of the time you are like this. Times like these it drives you crazy. You crave a conversation. People think you’re weird. You’re not, it’s just that your head is in the clouds a lot, and you tend not to hear what they say to you. Food. Food will keep you company. A sandwich will loosen the entire thought process. Ham and swiss with mayo. Tasty, but you need a drink. Where’s the whiskey? Back to your desk.

You enter holding your sandwich minus two bites, and are met by the glowing eyes of the screen. It mocks you. It is telling you that you’re not ingenious enough to fill it with your words. Bastard screen, you think as you sit down to type any old thing that comes to mind. You just killed the female lead without even thinking about it. The clipping must have driven you to this murder, because for some reason the mob did it. You look at the short stack of papers that you have worked so hard on the past couple of weeks and know they have just lost a lot of meaning. You take a red magic marker and begin to cut and add. A shady Italian is placed early in the story, and he happens to know the female lead’s father. Boom, you make her Italian, too. She’s suddenly a bigger star of your story than the male lead, who was previously the main character. Maybe you need something else for him to do. Maybe he’s Italian, and the hitman is his uncle. Now you’re rolling! Really, though? You light another smoke and sit back with this one. Did you just take something beautiful and turn it into crap? You’re not Mario Puzo. What the hell is this? you wonder. Your tender love story that threw a political jab has somehow turned into a cliched mobster tale. You throw the papers across your desk. You delete the line that killed the female lead. She’s still alive. You are God. You make a mental note to ignore every single red mark that you have made.

A final drop drips from the whiskey bottle. The dark bottle is as empty of its contents as your head is of ideas. Perhaps a change of scenery is needed. It’s been said that a writer is always writing. Two hours until the bar closes. You know that the whiskey bottles are not empty. Maybe those full bottles will fill your mind.

A stranger strikes up a chat. You respond, but do not even hear him. You are instead studying the stranger. He looks a lot like your male lead’s brother, the Congressman. He’s dressed well, even wearing a tie. His hair is brown and cropped close to the scalp, just as you had written. His blue eyes pierce through your soul, just as they did to your female lead. This is him, you think, the Congressman. No matter what bullshit this man tells you, you know that he has made a pass at his brother’s girlfriend. You know that he’s skimming government money. You can see past the charade of goodness and see him for the leech that he is. You excuse yourself to the restroom.

Maybe you’re a little buzzed, because you carried your whiskey into the lavatory with you. You rest it atop the toilet tank. You flush, downing the rest of the drink as you listen to the toilet whirl. You look on the floor, for no real reason, and notice a bottle hiding behind the toilet. You reach for it, trying hard but failing to ignore the mildew infested walls. Bleach. Somehow the bottle was not full, amazing from the condition of this bathroom. You open the jug and shake your head as the aroma of its contents pierce your mind. You are certain. A glug of bleach spills from the container into your whiskey glass—just a tad. It’s a bar, no one will notice, you assure yourself.
Excellent, you think as you spy across the bar to see that the Congressman's glass is still half full. You approach him from behind, tapping him on his left shoulder so he turns in that direction, and pouring the poisonous bleach over his right shoulder into his drink. He laughs at your playfulness and tells you to sit down.

He's talking again. All bullshit, you think, but you have to hang around. You have to see him drink. The best details are those that you have witnessed first hand, and this is a perfect opportunity. Sip it, damn it, sip it! You look to the clock in the corner and see that it is reading ten minutes shy of four. Time is running out. You shudder as the barkeep signals last call. The Congressman picks up his drink, drains the glass of all remaining contents and calls for another. You wait and watch.

He coughs, then calls for God. You watch. His chest heaves, a preamble to the trickle of blood that runs down the right corner of his mouth. You wait. The bartender is approaching. The Congressman coughs again, bringing blood up from his innards and spilling onto the bar. You tell the bartender that you think your friend has had enough. The bartender runs for the phone. The Congressman collapses to the floor and fills the bar with as much of his blood as he can possibly spill. Being the only other person left in the bar, you rise from your stool and exit. You have seen enough.

You nailed it! That's the chapter you've been looking to write all night long. There it is, staring back at you from your screen. Never has blood dripped more vividly in any of your writings. It took you all night, but that bastard Congressman had to be killed. You wonder whether you should go on with your writing. This bleach scene has enabled you to take the novel in many possible directions, and the ingenious manner in which you wrote it saves you from having to pad earlier chapters with detailed subplots. How much more of the night is left for you?

Was that a bird? You jump from your chair, pulling your robe over yourself— even though you are alone—and race to the window. Sure enough, dawn is breaking and a big black crow is cawing from a tree. The night is leaving you. You look at your screen and nod in appreciation. You press the “file” button and listen to the machine hum as it saves your master chapter. The key to the entire novel, you are sure. A ray of light beams through your window. Now it is done, the night is done. You are done. You close the blinds and pull back the covers to your bed.

You hope that your dreams are interesting. You lay with your eyes slits, trying to think hard about your story so you can fall asleep with images of your characters. Make them do something interesting. Something that you can capture perfectly tomorrow night. The final detail that you recall as you drift away are the nearing sirens of the police.
BELIEVE-PART II
by Jeffrey Dellapina

The summer slowly fades away in the rear view
I have remained in one place for so long

I have become a crumb
a clown in the corner of a closed circus

I continue to wear this uniform
but it has lost its meaning

it has adapted to my body three times a week
I have missed life and it has sunk into
the once plush grass

can this be beauty?
It is a family heirloom lost

is this what I wanted?
I have met objects, desires

people who I knew I'd be close to someday
but not this way

I was to be playing along side them
but I serve them and grovel to their needs

34 inches not 32

I have become the President of the United States
but my domain is so small

a cubicle
it once seemed so large

I have become more aware that dreams
can be shattered
This is broken glass on a clear bench

if I close my eyes will it be better?
a hand is placed on my shoulder

and I'm told nice job today kid
see you in two weeks

I have not become one of them
I am a detached unit

a separate waning entity
I have remained in an enclosed box

and the holes continue to get smaller
if you think that one dream can make you happy

you must go back to sleep.
CONFESSIONS OF AN INSOMNIAC

anonymous

April 11th (?)

There are times when your mind, sometimes known, sometimes unknown, refuses to rest. It can be frustrating, but sometimes it doesn't really bother me. I feel like it's my body's way of telling me that I need some time alone. My mind is craving the opportunity to run and play, unencumbered by ritualistic daily happenings. I know tomorrow I will suffer, but right now it seems worth it to sacrifice my body for the greater good it does my mind and soul. It is cleansing time. It is time for my brain to send my hand that certain message to grab hold of anything which, when scrawled across a piece of paper, will make a lasting impression. And so this catharsis goes on. I have awarded myself a non-verbal diarrhea in which my thoughts are puked out by this old orange pen from Camp Seven Hills. My nose is drippy as I sit here, wrapped in a ratty blanket, staining my fingers with tobacco, spitting out the contents of my cluttered head. There are so many questions. Like Tennessee Williams once said: "Life is an unanswered question. But let's still believe in the dignity and importance of the question." As I contemplate Tennessee's meaning, I come to the conclusion that I just may not, in fact, care to know the answer to some of my questions. So here I sit in a semi-lit room filled with deathly gray smoke, unable to sleep after too much fun with things that are "bad" for me. But the dishes are done, and the paper for archaeology is done, and this journal entry is done.

THE TOXIC SUNSET

by Mike Betette

-New Voices Play Competition Winner, 1997-

(Lights up on three kids about 20 years old, sitting at a dinner table made up very nice for Thanksgiving.)

STEPH.

This is very cool. Our first Thanksgiving alone. No parents, no seeing old relatives I don’t want to, not having to explain that Communications major doesn’t mean journalism.

JACK.

No bullshit traditions, no having to eat crap that other family members made. Not having to listen to people dumb stuff down for me.

DAN.

No more having to sit at the wobbly kiddy table.

STEPH.

Dan, more potatoes?

DAN.

Much more, and hand over the hot sauce, too. I hate not being able to use it on holidays. My mom says it’s disrespectful to change the flavor of food someone made for you. Fuck that. I don’t like the flavor, how the hell else am I supposed to eat that crap?

STEPH.

Hey, I saw a great play the other day. It was so intuitive. I really felt what the author was trying to say.

JACK.

Let me guess, it was about relationships between men and women and dealing with their frustrations and problems.
STEPH.
Well, kind of, but it had a twist.

JACK.
Of course it did.

STEPH.
What is that supposed to mean, Jack?

JACK.
Well Steph, if it didn’t it would be a rip-off of about a hundred other plays written each year.

DAN.
It probably still is.

STEPH.
It was a good play, just leave it alone. Why don’t you like good plays?

JACK.
Good plays-what does that mean? But yes, I do enjoy a play now and then. It’s just almost every one I’ve seen is about dealing with problems that seem so normal but so terrible, working them out and dealing with them.

DAN.
Well, maybe people like that.

JACK.
It’s so damned contrived!

STEPH.
Why? Because people enjoy seeing problems being worked out? Or do you think these problems just aren’t up to your standard of giving a damn about? I like seeing an author’s take on a subject and watching the actors bring it to life.

JACK.
Everyone has the same problems, pretty much. And it makes me sick when I see people come out of a theater saying how the author really spoke to them in one way or another. It’s because the writing is broad and lame.

DAN.
Maybe some people like that. There’s no real thinking involved. They can just be like “Oh yeah, I recognize that problem.” “Hey, she reminds me of that woman I know.”

JACK.
Dan, do you like hanging out with shallow, melodramatic people?

DAN.
No.

JACK.
Damn right you don’t. Now answer me this: why would you want to see a play where the author can write about anything he wants? "I can write an Alice in Wonderland trip and drag your mind along with it. But, he-

(Looks at STEPH)
-or she, writes the mindless drivel we all see everyday.

STEPH.
Well, I guess we can’t all be Shakespeare.

JACK.
Then don’t write!

STEPH.
What?

JACK.
Okay, I can’t say that. Mainly because I write. But the whole thing with “art” has gone downhill. Not everything that’s on stage is great. Just because one loser decided to produce it-that means nothing.

DAN.
Yeah, just look at CBS.

JACK.
Why is it that people know TV can suck, but because it’s a play it’s seen as more artsy, so it must be good?
STEPH.
So you think art is a crock of shit?

JACK.
That's not what I mean, and you know it. But I often think; is drawing repeated, fucked-up colors of things like Campbell's soup cans, and pop icons really art?

STEPH.
Because you don't think it has a point. Maybe you are just too stupid to get it. Plays are put out for a reason. To, like, teach a lesson and expand people's minds.

DAN.
To give artsy college kids something to do.

JACK.
Does everything have to have a point? Do we really need to analyze? Or better yet, do people need to write plays that need to be analyzed? Why do I have to learn from everything?

DAN.
Because learning is fundamental.

JACK.
No, that's reading. But I get the point.

STEPH.
So you're just lazy. You want to go see Arnold blow something up, where the closest thing to a relationship are some sexual tension lines with the romantic-if you can call it that-interest.

JACK.
Well, I know everything I see in plays. I learn every day. My best teacher is experience. Life. The real thing. So why do I have to go to a play and see a reenactment of falseness and forgery that I have probably already experienced?

STEPH.
And if you haven't experienced it? I doubt that you have gone through every problem in every play. You don't have to learn from it, but new problems could be intriguing to see.

JACK.
If it is truly a new idea, then I might enjoy it. But people write about things they know about, and I am a part of the collective knowledge base.

DAN.
Write what you know.

STEPH.
Well, first of all I think the collective consciousness is a load of crap. Not everyone knows everything, even subconsciously. But, if there is one, for the sake of argument-

DAN.
That's what we do best.

STEPH.
-How are people supposed to write something that strays from the collective conscious? That's all there is to take from. You can't write what you can't think of.

JACK.
But people should still try and write something new and intriguing, rather than soap operas.

DAN.
Hey, "Days" kicks ass.

STEPH.
Okay, so if it's not something new, you don't want to see it. What about if an author throws in a line that really says something? An insightful statement or thought that sheds new light on the subject so you can understand it better. Hearing a good quote you can use to explain an idea is great.

DAN.
Maybe if you're still looking for a good senior quote.

JACK.
And it will help me work through my problems, Steph?
STEPM.

Maybe, yes.

JACK.

Well then, I think not. I don’t need to hear those lines, because they are not truth. They are lines written after the author’s years of therapy. Lines that nobody would say in real life. Lines that may sound real pretty, but are real empty. Like some kind of prostitute.

DAN.

Like an Amish girl dressed as a prom queen.

STEPM.

You don’t want any fantasy?

DAN.

Oh, I have had my share.

(In a sexy voice)

Believe me.

JACK.

But there isn’t any anymore in plays. People just have real problems, and real boring ones, at that. Things in plays happen in real life, the only fantasy is the way the author makes it a bit more interesting to sit through and to make the author look smart. In real life, he talks just as retarded as the next guy.

DAN.

What about TV and movies?

JACK.

What about it? That’s faker than anything. Okay, people like to listen to dialogue as they would want to talk. That’s why people quote Quentin Tarantino so much. How cool would you be if you could talk like Samuel Jackson all the time like he did in “Pulp Fiction”?

DAN.

Check out the big brain on Jack. You a smart mutha fucka.

STEPH.

What’s wrong with people wanting to be like that? You don’t want to talk like it was out of a script? You can’t tell me that you don’t quote movies or TV. I’ve heard more than a few “Simpsons” references come out of your mouth.

JACK.

Yes, I quote, but that’s not what I’m talking about. I’m saying that people can’t come up with these kinds of lines on their own. And movies and TV and plays just perpetuate the problem. They make people look and act better and slightly funnier than they can actually be.

DAN.

Alrighty-then.

STEPH.

Well that’s pessimistic. We might as well speak like robots then. People say intriguing things all the time; just because they are written down doesn’t make them less poignant or worse in any way at all.

JACK.

People must have been so strange before scripting and even advertising. Nothing to model yourself as the perfect human being after.

DAN.

And I hate watching people try to copy movie lines and butcher them in the process.

STEPH.

But do you think people shouldn’t strive for anything? There should be no role models? I wouldn’t have ever gone to college if my big brother hadn’t, because I wanted to do what he did. If he would have just gotten a job out of high school, I would be having to enforce the no shoes, no shirt, no service rule right now.

JACK.

But your brother is real-those people on the screen are
not. They should look up to people that are in their real lives.

STEPH.
Well, we both know that’s unrealistic. People can’t look up to their alcoholic fathers, or their co-dependent housewife moms. These people need TV to look up to.

JACK.
I know. And I don’t know what to think, because I’ll admit that all acting and scripting isn’t bad. It’s like parenting, I guess. You can’t say who can and can’t be a parent, you can just hope to God they raise their child well.

DAN.
TV can be a better parent than most parents can.

JACK.
You can’t say who can and can’t see plays, or even write them. You can only hope that the audience and the author has enough brains to get something real out of it, and nothing more.

STEPH.
Your references shape your perceptions in life, and your perceptions can shape your reactions. I truly think it’s for the best, though. The more people can step away from their life and look at it, the better they may be able to understand and better it.

JACK.
But in plays it’s not what’s so, it’s what people think is so.

DAN.
You lost me.

STEPH.
Me too.

JACK.
I think I lost myself too. All right, what if I told you that the only reason the sunset is so beautiful is because of all the pollution in the air.

DAN.
Is that true, Jack?

JACK.
Absolutely. All the colors it makes are from the toxic fumes in the air.

STEPH.
Okay, so what?

JACK.
Well, maybe it’s like that, you know? Like, (beat)

DAN.
Like that perception thing again?

JACK.
Yeah, okay.

DAN.
You lost me.

DAN.
You’ve gone from play to soap opera.

JACK.
My hair looks terrible. Oh wait, oh- that’s it! A, a, a... a brush!

DAN.
Maybe a little, but also too, like, their cars never break
down unless it has something to do with the plot. The car has to be symbolic, it can’t just be a piece of shit. Or if the conversation goes into any sort of a lull, a new character comes in.

STEPH.
I think I agree with that.

JACK.

Good.

DAN.

Good.

STEPH.

Yup.

(beat. Phone rings.)

JACK.

Probably my mom. She said she’d call me here today.

(JACK answers the phone.)

Hey Mom. Yeah, we’re just sitting around talking. Me, Steph and Dan. Nope, nothing that interesting. Yup. Listen Mom, we’re still eating. Can I call you back afterwards? Yeah sure, I’ll call Grandma tomorrow, or the next day. Okay, talk to you then. Love you too.

Bye.

STEPH.

Well that was nice of her.

DAN.

Yeah, no shit. I know my mom is probably just happy that there’s one less plate to clean up at my house.

STEPH.

Oh, come on now.

DAN.

I know, I know. We’ve already talked twice today. I’m just kidding.

STEPH.

So back to this realism thing real quick. What do you think of musicals?

JACK.

Don’t even get me started on that shit. People breaking into song in the middle of any emotional conversation.

DAN.

(singing)

I know exactly what you mean!

(very loudly, using hand motions and emphasizing “exactly” and “mean”. beat, then somberly)

Suspended disbelief is bullshit.

JACK.

Very nice, Dan. And you know what else? People think in camera angles now.

STEPH.

Yeah, so?

JACK.

Yeah, I guess that’s pretty cool...or maybe it’s just pathetic. Once again, not thinking for ourselves.

DAN.

But it’s not like you think in a specific director’s way. I’d be exhausted if I thought like an “ER” director, and imagine how I’d turn out if I thought like Martin Scorsese- Scorsesy-Scorseesee-that guy.

STEPH.

Well, in that way the industry has made people think on a higher plane. I don’t believe for a second that people had better imaginations from radio days.

JACK.

True.

STEPH.

Now what about advertising?

JACK.

I think that’s kind of obvious. We all disagree with that, I hope.
STEPH.
(in a dumb hick voice)
Naked women, tools, naked women, tools. I better buy
my dumb ass some uh them tools!
DAN.
Duh-that camel looks so cool. I better smoke. That,
and because his face looks like genitalia!
STEPH.
Subliminal messages. That's scary shit.
DAN.
Yeah, who knows what they're brainwashing me with,
with their airbrushing.
JACK.
Man, you know what I just thought of?
STEPH.
What?
JACK.
This whole conversation is kind of dumb, too.
STEPH.
Well, thanks a lot. Hey, you're the one who started it.
JACK.
No, I don't mean that. But like, how almost all conver­
sations are so overdone. Like you said. See? Our real
life has become like a play. Real conversation, made
false. I really agree with what I say, but I'm also almost
embarrassed about it. It's become lame and contrived.
STEPH.
Well, what should we do about it?
DAN.
Well, it's kind of late now.
STEPH.
Well, we could all just kill ourselves and make this the
sad ending you love so much.
DAN.
Uh, no thanks.

JACK.
Yeah, that would kind of suck.
STEPH.
Well?
JACK.
Why do we have to analyze it? We did it, who cares?
DAN.
How very zen of you.
JACK.
That type of shit makes this conversation seem like
something made to sell jeans and soda to Gen X kids.
STEPH.
It's made our thoughts and lives very trivial.
JACK.
Everything we say turns to typical teenage jargon.
DAN.
It's all MTV's fault.
JACK.
Yeah.
STEPH.
It's nice and easy to blame, isn't it Jack?
JACK.
I don't even want to try and come up with some world­
saving, amazing discovery to solve these problems, or
to just stop watching TV and stuff altogether. That's
very unrealistic.
DAN.
No TV? Fuck that!
STEPH.
I guess we'll just have to keep on trying, working our
way along the pathway of life.
(stands up)
Trying to keep a hold of ourselves, and a hold of our
souls.
(walking downstage towards the
Keeping the faith and staying true to ourselves. Living our lives and keeping them real. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all!

(hands in the air. LIGHTS DOWN.)

JACK.

Damn it!