

MUSE

Magazine for UNIL Students of English

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Students of English

A collage-style graphic on a yellow background. The word 'SPRING' is at the top in large, bold, block letters, with each letter in a different color: yellow, orange, red, green, blue, and grey. Below it, '2025' is in large, bold, block letters, with each digit in a different color: red, blue, green, and purple. In the bottom left, 'ISSUE' is partially visible in block letters, with 'SS' in yellow and 'ue' in blue. In the bottom right, '19' is in a stylized, glowing font with a dotted outline, and a partial red '1' is visible.



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Editorial

Dear readers,

Here we are, at the end of yet-another semester. Some of you have just started your BA, whereas others, such as myself, are nearing the end of their MA. But one thing we all have in common is the passion for the English language and our involvement in its development. I think it's safe to say that writing is the main skill we all strive to master.

But at times it can feel like creativity is fighting for space in our lives. Busy with personal problems, part-time jobs, friends and family, and deadlines, students often feel like making time for their imagination to roam free is impossible. That is exactly why initiatives like MUSE are so important right now. Encouraging creative writing and showcasing the hard work of students is essential to keep storytelling alive.

In this 19th print issue, you'll find a stunning selection of poetry and prose that is representative of the immense talent of English students. The wonderful and ever-growing team of editors also came up with special features, such as games and funny articles. We asked staff members for their juiciest literary confessions, and they did not hold back. Last but not least, the department's lecturer Kimberly Frohreich agreed to sit down and tell us all about education systems, censorship, *Wicked* and music!

Take a break from studying for your exams and writing your essays, and go outside with a little treat in one hand and this magazine in the other. Enjoy without moderation.

Take care and have a wonderful summer!

All best,
Andreia, editor-in-chief
On behalf of MUSE



Apocalyptic

Four horsemen astride their mounts walk gently on tarmac roads, that cage the noble old tenements their crumbling faces and dirtied windows silent long since, emptied tram lines, strange witnesses to the funeral march.

Long dead trees line the avenues the horsemen thought to triumph down, their work like Roman generals bringing swathes of the wretched to heel.

Like those they were not to find, they must instead wander empty cities, pick between barren fields their vain search for souls, like so many failed harvests, and blighted crops.

After the dismal party who came not to inherit the earth, buried in the soil and nesting in the tree-corpse lay in wait mushrooms, bees and worms.

Long after the horsemen left, and put their folly down, strange new flowers grew, with sunlight for their crown.

Grave acts

Content warning:
gore, mild body horror

Will you be my surgeon? The knife wielder,
He-who-will-cure-by-cutting.
I would excise me too.

If the scalpel goes deep enough,
Through layers of skin and fat and muscle
Will you find it? The heart-sickness
The Great Abscess, the wrong thing.

My mother promised me it would never be my soul
But I think she promised wrong,
for there are poisons in me deeper than you can conceive,
fast acting, life rending.

You cannot bring them out of me without killing your self,
For they move from the one to the other,
and to touch them is to become them.

Body open on the block, I've heard intestines writhe
the crawling, all sustaining worm
is in us before it is in the earth.
I writhe, I writhe, I writhe.

How will you tell, what is worms and what is guts?
hands slick between sinews,
One slip, one nick,
down goes baby, cradle and all.

Let us be what you made we,
But you must hold the scalpel.
Let us be what we made me
We'll fall, we'll fall, we'll fall.

Enter Monster

Through mists and fen and moor
He, gloom shrouded, roams.
Low grasses breathing out
Water so dense you could
Nearly swim through it
Do not hinder his long-legged stride.

This is his place
And you are not welcome
Wanderer.

Drenched as you are,
Haunted by this moonless night,
Where shine only his strange eyes.

You have come, seeking his head.
Wanderer,
You have come to spill his blood,
Wanderer,
With your damascened blade
And your well-greased shoes.

The heath has no use
For your castle-bred wealth,
Nor your thief's gold, nor your hallowed halls,
Wanderer.
You should not have come,
Wanderer.

But stay a while longer,
Where the marches meet the mists
Your fire-warmed halls
Will not miss you,
While he uses your knife as a toothpick
Worrying at threads of leather
Caught still on his many small sharp teeth.

And you will wander evermore
Upon the fog filled fen
A shade shot through with
An uncanny glow
Glinting blood-soaked red.

From Broken to Blooming

ANONYMOUS POEMS

can i really love?

can i really love?
when the one who says he loves me
fades away,
when the one who is supposed to cherish me
barely touches me...

when my heart is full,
my life complete,
my happiness built,
why risk it?

how can i trust?
when the friend becomes the boyfriend
and then the enemy.

how can i love?
when no one fully deserves me.
when i don't need anybody,
'cause all my needs are filled
by me, my friends, and family.

God supports me,
but religion divided us.
i will not renounce my faith,
i'll love Him my own way.

i'm on a new journey
hoping to go back to myself,
to explore my needs.

my real love is poetry,
'cause it allows me to shout
how much i can feel,
how much i can love,
how much i must love this
broken
hearted
poet!

November's Midnight Chill

The dark lake mirrors our embrace,
His slender fingers, mine enlace,
Our sweet encounter comes to an end –
A rose falls into my hand.

Can I let these six lines bloom?
My name gifted to the night,
That flower of delight,
Or should this acrostic fade to gloom?

Sweet is the hush of patient yearning,
In this quiet, final hour,
At last, his head is gently leaning
And I welcome his second flower.

November's Midnight Chill,
I long to know December's thrill,
To discover this dark-eyed boy,
To uncover his gentle joy;
'Cause unlike my rhymed poetry,
I feel free!



▲ The acrostic that started it all.

To My Fallen Sister

C.Z.

Ô sing, Melpomen',
The life of my dearest kin,
As I stand alone in this arena, bitter,
Reminiscing this fateful day that took my sister.

We were raised by the brightest of scholars,
And the most ferocious of warriors,
On the shores of this lake that is your mother's spring,
While dreaming of flying on Nike's wing.

Your eyes were sharp as an eagle's,
Your step moved swiftly as a horse,
Your arrows always found their target,
And there wasn't a single trick you forgot.

You inspired me by your feats and strength,
You taught me resilience and patience,
Perfecting my strategies, forging my courage,
And like you I wished to master the war's adage.

As sisters we claimed each other,
Even without sharing a mother nor a father,
We rode as one into battle to tear the frontlines,
You, daughter of the waters, me, daughter of the skies.

My greatest asset is my mind, you told me,
When I doubted my place in this infinity,
Yet my brain cannot comprehend,
This cruel play cut by Atropos' hand.

I should've been the voice of reason,
Able to reign the horse of passion,
Without letting a chance for pride to settle,
And send me against you to battle.

What started it was so trivial,
I cannot remember in my denial,
Instead, it is the anger, the frustration,
The treachery of vindication.

It is my judgement changed by the allure of greatness,
The sweet taste on my tongue of self-righteousness,
My heart refusing again to agree,
While my wisdom faulted me.

I want to remember the laughs, the memories,
The games and hopes while wishing for the centuries,
We could have spent growing and triumphing,
But all is tainted by this unacceptable ending.

We clashed on these forsaken grounds,
Spears shattering against clubs,
Swords performing a lethal dance,
As Eris' seized her chance.

Should I blame my father for overstepping,
As he brandished against you the shield all are fearing,
Or only myself, my hubris, my shameful part
While my own blade pierced your heart?

Now my weapons feel too heavy on my side,
Forever stained by your blood,
And while you cross the river of oaths,
I rage, I mourn, I cannot not go forth.

This gift of a life without end,
Given by my golden blood,
Without you is now cursed,
Oh, how I wish things could be reversed,

No matter if I can craft the greatest of all statues,
No matter my lamentations of lost values,
No matter I make my punishment always more tough.
It'll never be justice enough.

But they shall remember you as my dearest family,
I'll carry on your name and memory,
Until this world reach its omega,
It'll always be Pallas,

And,

Athena.

Trees & War

Trees

LUCREZIA FERRAÙ

You let my head go
And trees of intrusive thoughts
Were building up inside
I felt alone,
I was alone
For the first time,
Since I met you
Since you chose me...

These trees were tall
And they were growing incredibly fast,
As fast as thoughts could go.
They were beautiful and green
They were a creation of my dream
They were helping through sensation,
They were cause of my agitation.
Anxiety was building up
And I couldn't wake up
But was I asleep ?
I think we'll never know
I am just lost with my thoughts now
But at least...I am not alone.

War

LUCREZIA FERRAÙ & NADIJA KULISH

I don't like uncertainty
But,
After the war,
I come to terms with the idea
That things can change
And that,
We cannot control...
Everything,
Anything.

Things are falling on our heads,

In our hands,

Red and swollen

In our sky,

Gray and heavy

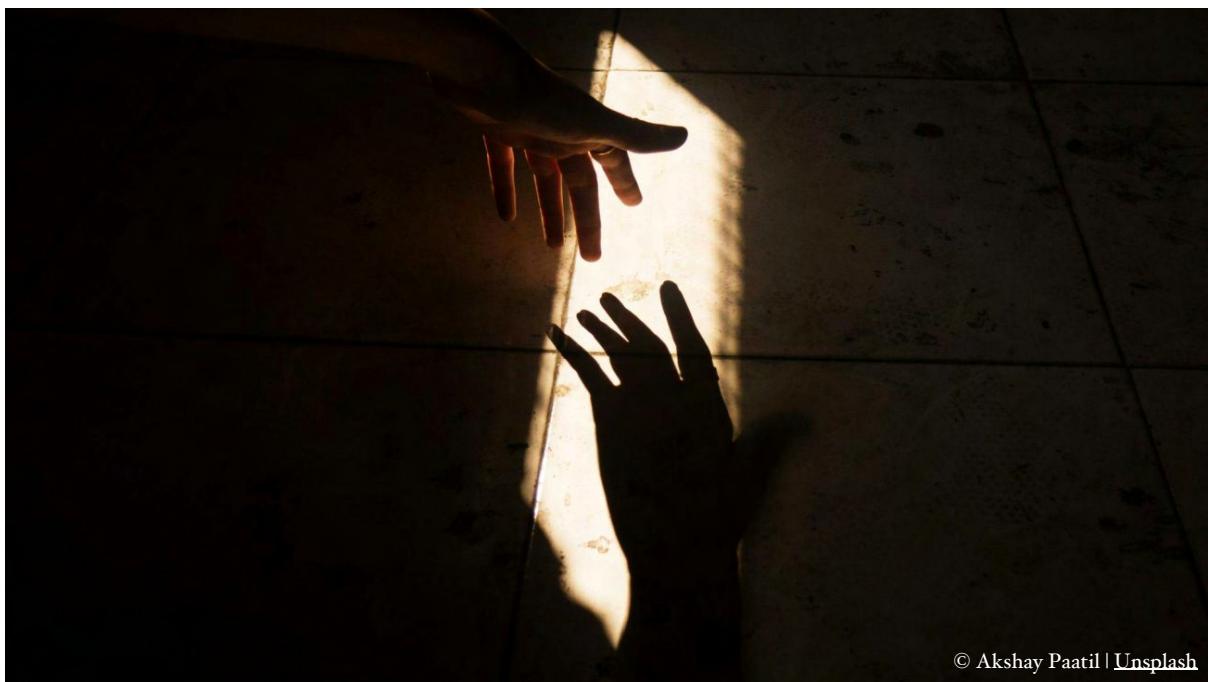
Full of particles,

Of what a time we called LIFE.

A brief explanation of the two poems:

Trees is a poem about the intrusive thoughts that invade the mind of overthinkers and neurodivergent people, that develop thoughts in a tree-like structure (= arboressence) and about how overwhelming it can be.

War is a poem centered on the topic of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Made with the collaboration of Nadiia, Ukrainian student and refugee.



© Akshay Paatil | [Unsplash](#)

Cupid

SIBYLLE DUVERNAY

I chose my apartment for its location. Close to the city center, but far from the busiest streets. Several metro stops from the most festive district, but not too far from my workplace and the campus either. I had a 15-minute subway ride every day, or a 20-minute bike ride. Really, the location was ideal. My neighbors were all very discreet, which had something to do with the fact that I was the only one in my building under 65.

In the last 6 months, everything has changed. Unbelievable madness. Aside from the Eiffel Tower, I think my street is now the most visited place in Paris. Even the Mona Lisa is bored, alone in her huge museum. Last November, the little photographer who ran the store in the building opposite plastered all his windows with signs reading "Liquidation totale avant fermeture définitive". So far, so good, nothing unusual. I even stopped by to buy some film for my camera, and, like a good neighbor and customer, had him develop my last shots. In January, he closed up shop for good and went off to his native Côte d'Azur for a well-deserved retirement. The store then became a travel agency but had to close its doors a few months later when it all began. Next to the late photographic store was a photo booth, which opened directly onto the street. As I had already spoken to the owner of the store, I knew he didn't own the photo booth, and no one had used it for years; out of solidarity, everyone on the street went straight to him to have their identity photos taken. After his departure, the photo booth was back in service. At first, I hadn't heard anything about it,

and it was only one evening when I bumped into one of my neighbors that he said to me:

– You should look at the news, it's about our street.

Surprised, I turned on my TV as soon as I got home. I then understood why so many people had been blocking my way home for the past few days.

"The photo booth that replaced Cupid". That was the evening's headline. Intrigued, I turned up the sound. Dozens of people were claiming that when they took their photo in the famous photo booth on my street, it wasn't their photo that was printed, but that of their soulmate. On the screen, we could see married couples proud of "not having made a mistake", and young couples breaking up in tears. And so, the show went on. Day after day, thousands of people flocked to the streets for the chance to test their love. For months, I witnessed every possible scenario. Families were torn apart under my windows, marriage proposals were made on first dates, couples married for 30 years went their separate ways. Nothing could predict what the photo booth would print: a husband, a mistress, a lost love, a "friend", a one-night stand, a lover, an ex. Anything worked. The authorities tried to regulate access to the photo booth, but it was too late; nothing could stop people from making the journey here for a simple photo.

Even the media were going crazy; on TV shows, everyone had their own theory. But who was running this photo booth? How could it never be wrong? Should we leave it and exploit this new

source of income? Should we move it and risk damaging it?

Personally, I didn't believe it. Not that I was afraid of losing the love of my life – she hadn't shown up yet. A confirmed bachelor since my last separation, I let life do its work. I would find love, without going through this scam. Nonetheless, I had a lot of admiration for the man who had launched this concept, as much for the simplicity and effectiveness of his idea as much as for the ingenuity he had to show to be able to access all those photos and never come up with the same one twice. It just went to show, you should never leave information lying around on the Internet. Really, how could anyone believe such nonsense?

My birthday arrived, the 25th, and I went out with some friends. We drank a beer, then another, and another, until nothing intelligible could come out of our mouths. How happy we were ! How drunk we were when they headed back to my flat with me for the after party – to be sure I find my way back home. Suddenly one of my friends came out with an amazing idea:

– Come on mate ! There is no one, go try this magic photo booth !

– Twenty-five, you've gotta find your “wife” !

The old leather chair. The bright, violent flash in my eyes. A picture. For an instant, none of us were laughing anymore. We all looked at the picture, impatient, shaking. A face appeared. An angel, the most... my brain was not able to find the right word to describe her, not after all this beer.

I did not remember the end of the night, but when I woke up in my bed, her picture was on the pillow next to me. I tried to figure out what had happened. The bar, the streets, the photo booth. Her face. Her dark eyes, her strawberry lips, her sun kissed skin. I had never seen this person before, I was sure of that. She was not from my class, not from my running club, nor was she part of my internship at the bank last year. A face like this one, I would have remembered it. I needed to find her, more than anything.

For weeks, I looked for her. On the campus, at my job, while running through the Parisian streets. Nothing. Not even a slight resemblance. I searched on the internet, on social media. I asked my friends. She was nowhere to be found, but I couldn't lose hope. Since her picture has been printed, she never left my mind. In my dreams, when I read, when I

cooked, when I showered. A hole I never knew has grown in me, and she was the only one able to fix it. I felt incomplete, truncated, empty. The days had no flavor, the laughter sounded hollow. I needed her.

Noticing the changes in my attitude, my friends decided to organize a dinner at my apartment. I didn't enjoy it. I looked at them and imagined the same night with her, laughing with my friends. Them, impressed by her, almost jealous of our happiness. Her hands on my shoulders when she got up to go to the kitchen, a discreet kiss on her neck while preparing the dessert, my hands on her hips...

– Don't you ?

I stopped dreaming.

– You're not listening, are you ?

– He said you should try to look at the police register, Adrien could help you !

– That's not permitted, argued Adrien, his nose was red from wine.

Not enough to make him forget his duty as a policeman.

– Come on mate, help him or he'll never have fun again !

I knew I shouldn't ask for it. I knew I should have pulled myself together, but the hope of finally finding her was stronger. I insisted, I opened one more bottle.

It was past 2 am when we entered the police station. Adrien took the picture, scanned and transferred it on his computer. We waited in the heavy silence.

“One match found”

I realized I wasn't breathing. He clicked on the folder. A child's picture appeared, next to robot portraits of the child, always older. The last one, the most recent, looked horribly like the photo from the photo booth.

– Gabrielle Blanche Virnot, disappeared on April 22, 2005. Blonde, brown eyes, aged 6. Father suspected; no body found. Note: portrait regularly updated according to procedure, read Adrien.



© Pixabay

A Key Change

ANDREIA ABREU REMIGIO

MY FACTORY-FRESH yellow 2003 Toyota Sienta, specially imported from Japan for me, wasn't what you'd expect a single, childless woman in her late twenties to drive. Who'd have thought a quirky people carrier could be so charming? It could seat seven people, the seats were beige and soft, and I couldn't hear the engine issues over Michael Bublé's new album.

I was excited at the prospect of riding my new toy up to Liverpool to present my new findings at the annual psycholinguistics conference. The last few years had been long though, the setbacks numerous. A never-ending cycle of research and publication that didn't leave much time for anything else.

Around noon I stopped at a petrol station near Birmingham. While waiting in the queue with my Tesco meal deal, a big meaty and balding man turned around.

"Going north, love?"

I looked around to make sure he wasn't speaking to someone else. "Uh, yeah."

"Can you take me? I'm trying to get to Manchester."

I don't know why but I said yes—a young woman giving an older male hitchhiker a lift was like poking a sleeping bear. But he looked kind. He was a small, ball-shaped man with a gap between his front teeth. He was wearing a cowboy hat and he looked like my

estranged father. I decided to take it as a good sign. So we walked back to my car and drove on. The day was relentlessly hot, as every day had been since June. The asphalt on the motorway still glistened from the morning's rain.

"Where in Manchester should I drop you off?"

"Anywhere in the city centre, love. I'm going to the Manchester Jazz Festival."

"How nice," I said with a wistful smile. "I wish I could go with you, I love music."

"I don't like jazz that much, but it pays well."

"Oh! Are you playing at the festival?"

I had my eyes focused on the road, but I heard him inhale deeply. He didn't answer. I decided to drop the conversation, aware that he might not want to talk the two whole hours to Manchester. A silent hitchhiker type.

"Are you a writer?" he asked after a long silence. "You ask a lot of questions."

I chuckled. "Sorry. No, I am not." I hesitated. "Linguistics scholar."

"What's that for?" he asked, genuinely curious.

"Well, I study speech. I'm interested in how people talk. I'm driving to a conference actually."

"Why do you like jazz, then? No speech in jazz now, innit?"

"You're right. Jazz is not my favourite kind of music. I'm more into pop. I was just listening to Michael Bublé."

He nodded slowly and I could make out a tiny smile from the corner of my eye. It was like he was digesting this new bit of information along with the rest of his sandwich.

“My daughter quite liked Bublé.”

I smiled politely. Noticing the past tense, I was now unsure how to continue the small talk, and I could feel a little tightness in my throat. Suddenly the sky started to darken with low heavy clouds that had appeared out of nowhere, like summoned by our interaction. The bright shimmer of earlier disappeared, giving way to good old English gloom. Michael Bublé would’ve hated it.

“You really like this car, huh?” he said, more statement than question. He patted with his meaty hand the dashboard, which was hot to the touch. A fatherly quality test.

“I do. Bit daft, really. I’ve never cared about vehicles, but I fell in love with Japanese cars last year while I was on holiday,” I said, tapping my fingers on the steering wheel. “Loads of these in the streets of Nagasaki.”

“Nagasaki! Bloody hell. I lived in Tokyo in the 70s for a while, Angela Carter-style. They had just opened the first Shinkansen line. Everyone moved like they had somewhere better to be.”

I laughed, and his chuckle turned into a dry cough.

“My father was into cars,” I confided quietly. “He loved music too. We would listen to his Queen and Dire Straits tapes in the garage, me singing, him playing an air guitar. He wanted to be in a band. But he went into accounting instead.”

He didn’t say anything back. The silence stretched as long as the clouds in the sky. I flipped on the wipers, but it wasn’t raining yet, so they just made an unpleasant squeaky sound against the glass.

“Did you ever want to play music?” he ventured after a while.

“I did, actually. I used to sing. But you know how it is... Time came to choose a grown-up career,” I said, half-answering his question, half-convincing myself that the psycholinguistics conference was the best place to be today. “The PhD just kind of fell into my lap when I graduated. I thought that was serious enough of a job. I wasn’t any good at singing anyway, I think.”

I could feel him looking at me. He nodded like he believed me. “Still sing in the shower?”

“Singing in the shower is for weird, happy people.”

“Fair enough.”

We drove in silence again for a while. The clouds followed us like a persistent question mark. Somewhere around Stoke-on-Trent, the rain finally

started, soft at first and then drumming on the roof. My wipers struggled to keep up.

“How long you been in linguistics?” he asked suddenly.

“Seven years. Give or take. I just finished a postdoc in London. Now I’m teaching and doing research.”

“And you still like it?”

His question made me pause. “Yes,” I said slowly. “But... Yeah. Sometimes I wonder if I took the quiet path. You know? The one where you don’t have to risk embarrassing yourself. Robert Frost probably wouldn’t be proud of me.”

“Nothing wrong with quiet,” he said. “But risk’s where the music is. As long as you don’t have any regrets. But then again, everyone does. Even musicians. We all choose our soundtracks, love. Some keep us safe; others set us free.”

I tightened my grip on the steering wheel. Something in his words caught at me.

When we finally rolled into the outer edges of Manchester, the traffic picked up. Busier streets, people scurrying under umbrellas. Couldn’t make out rain drops from sweat. I rolled down the window. The air smelled like wet tar and the heat made it hard to breathe.

“Drop you off at the square. Is that okay?”

“It’s perfect, love.”

I slowed down and pulled to the side of the road. His hand was on the car door handle, but he paused before stepping out.

“Are you going to analyse our conversation?” he asked, a smirk on his face.

“You wish!”

“Do you miss it?”

“Miss what?”

“Forget it. Just remember one thing, love: it’s never too late in the day for a tune. If you fancy some music after your big serious conference, come and have a listen. Name’s Ron Brown by the way.”

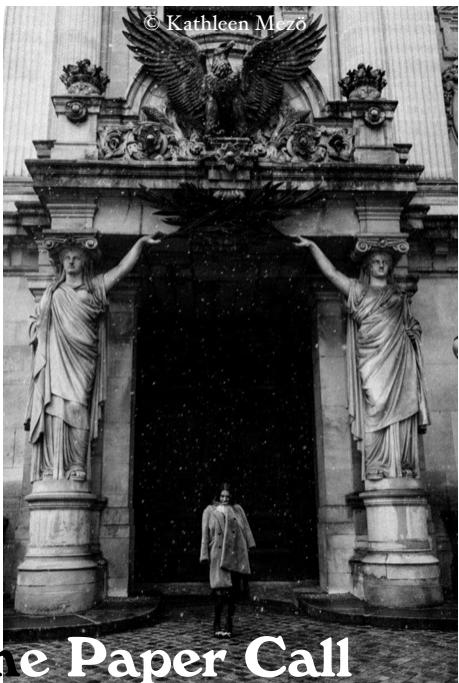
“Joanna Davies.”

“Sounds like a celebrity’s name,” he said, smiling. “Cheers.”

He gave me a nod of thanks and I was too surprised to say anything before he disappeared into the crowd, his cowboy hat bobbing between the hoods of rain jackets and ponchos.

As I drove away, I turned the radio on and “Why Worry” was on. At the next red light, something strange happened. I started to hum along. By the time I hit the main road, I was proper singing. As Ron’s shadow lingered in the passenger seat, I thought about my father, how he wouldn’t have wanted me to make the same mistakes he did. Maybe the conference was my own accounting hell.

I made a full circle at the next roundabout.



The Paper Call

ANDREA ABREU REMIGIO

FOR MANY YEARS, Diana Marko had collected magazines, clippings of casting calls, and interviews with actors she admired. She liked watching the pile grow, the towering stack and its lignin scent a quiet measure of how long she'd been chasing this dream.

The personal archive—which made up half of her belongings—moved with her from a small town in Switzerland to Paris a few years ago, when she left all the people she knew to do the only thing she knew how to do: pretend. Granted, Diana was only 26 years old, but she had been a theater girl ever since she could walk and talk; smiling to the camera, dressing up and setting up props to tell a story (but whose?). Acting was a new way of seeing old things: you could narrow down the human condition into a self-contained story on a self-contained stage and focus on one emotion at a time. Hiding behind the character, feeling protected by the big red expensive curtain—that was and had always been her calling up until that point.

Finding a studio hadn't been easy, being broke and not having a French guarantor didn't help either. But now she was settled in in her cozy 9m² apartment in the 15th arrondissement. She liked to tell everyone she met that she had a view of the Eiffel Tower, when in reality she could only see the very tip of it from her bathroom if she sat at a weird angle on the toilet. She didn't tell anyone about her hoarding tendencies though. If she had known then how one particular item among this paper trail would change her life, she might have thrown it into the Seine, letting the evidence mix with the garbage leftover from the Olympic games.

Like every single morning, it was the first thing she saw when she opened her eyes. But that morning was important. It finally felt like her big break. This time the stakes were high—her reputation, more than her wallet, was on the line. Not getting this role wasn't an option. Diana had just spent weeks brushing up on her Hungarian and

German for this audition and she knew, with absolute certainty, that she was perfect for this role. It wasn't just a matter of skill—it was in her blood. Her mother's family had once been part of Hungary's elite, though their wealth had never trickled down to her because of her mother's choices.

The two-minute walk to the café was fraught with difficulties. Deliveries blocked the sidewalk, road work, a flock of pigeons eating an old croissant on the ground and the feathers flying everywhere; again, if she had known that these obstacles were trying to protect her, she would have backtracked. She was wearing slightly torn black tights, second-hand black heels that she'd owned since she was fourteen, and a brown dress hidden under a faux fur maroon coat. Casting directors would probably ask people to change into appropriate costumes anyway, as the audition was for a historical Netflix series. But Diana knew she had to make a good impression, even if only for a matter of seconds.

She knew this café all too well. The one where all the waiters knew her name and smuggled free cappuccinos to her while she'd learn her lines. The one where she and her boyfriend had broken things off in a public ceremony of hugs and tears. She daydreamed that in the future the owners would hang a picture of her with her first César Award, on the wall right where she usually sat.

"I've put on some weight," she said to Ivan across the booth, who always helped her learn her lines. Ivan Degri was one of Diana's best friends from school. Inspired by her courageous drive, he had followed her to the capital to pursue his studies in History of Art. Life was going quite well for him too, as he had just been accepted for an internship at the Louvre.

"You look fine."

"I'm being serious Ivan. You know I can't start being cast as the fat girl. Especially not right now." Her career was going too well to be stuck in a trope this early.

The waiter suddenly appeared out of nowhere with the two pieces of chocolate cake that Diana had ordered, which he awkwardly tried to set on the table without messing with the innumerable pages of script laying there.

"I haven't had breakfast."

Ivan just nodded.

Diana frowned. Ivan said nothing.

After rehearsing for about 45 minutes, Diana said bye to Ivan. She liked arriving early to unfamiliar places: she enjoyed exploring, smelling, thinking... and mapping out the exits. In the metro, Diana held a tight grasp on the rolled-up script, her moist hands probably soaking up the ink. She had meant to read them over one last time, but the urge to people-watch while on public transportation was too much. That was her favorite way of preparing for an audition—observing real dynamics, analyzing facial expressions. Getting her mind off the character for a moment and taking a step back into the real world.

Ten stations across two metro lines, three dead rats and one harassing drunkard later, she'd made it to the theater. Before pushing the old door open, she bit her bottom lip hard. The sharp iron taste meant business.

the shadow

C. M.

Her footsteps have been haunting me for days now. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

One could imagine her to be a conversation long overdue, feelings unheard or unseen, words ignored. Truly, she is much worse. She is the personification of my own thoughts, worries and anxiety-induced overthinking. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

She takes the form of a beautiful young woman. Brown and luscious strands of hair caress her shoulders and dance across her back as she walks. She smells good, she always smells like him. Her heels devise a plaintive melody on the ground as she follows me, always three steps behind. It is a sound which transcends silence. That confident and defying smile is always playing on her red-kissed mouth. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.* It makes me sick.

She follows me into my home and waits until I'm seconds from slumber to crawl into bed with me. She gets comfortable under the covers and snuggles up against me. Sleep avoids me, as she whispers into my ear until the sun starts to rise. She tells me about things that didn't happen, things that aren't happening, things that will never happen. Things that are as stuck to the enclosures of my mind as my hair is to her glossed lips.

It really isn't her fault. She doesn't know how to stop herself. And even if she did, chances are she wouldn't be able to. She is, after all, only a projection of my imagination. She is a story I created by pulling, pushing, twisting, tearing apart the truth, and then putting it back together. She is entirely unrecognisable from what she used to be at the start. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

If you look closely, you will see that her eyes lack a certain depth, that they seem eerily empty. Her hair flows in non-existent wind. Her skin is airbrushed, her teeth too white and her smile too pretty to last. You won't hear her breathe or move, the only sound emitting from her is the broken rhythmical tune of her shoes. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

Sometimes I want to push her away. I want to lock her in a room and never let her out, but that would leave things unsolved and hurting. I feel guilty for having her around. I feel guilty for making her come to life. She is the personification of a twisted, perverted, and ugly truth which created a monster to hunt me. She didn't ask for this. Neither did I, really, but my brain had other plans. *Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

(Sometimes, when I'm with him, she disappears. Silence is finally heard again. I can breathe. I can sleep. I know one day she will leave for good. Perhaps after another conversation, another evening, another night. I look forward to that day, my back is getting tired of pulling this shadow around.)

It's the sentiment that counts.

MAXIME JAQUET

I cannot believe it's time already. It was so short. I mean, it felt briefer than usual. No... It hasn't rung yet. The noise... probably the twins downstairs, playing. Leanne and Will sure play a lot. Often. Pounding their feet in a frenetic tempo, too chaotic to be conducted. Shouldn't they be doing their homework? I suppose Maria lets them.

Something sharp in my back.

— What the?!

Fell asleep before I could put my book on my nightstand; now it has folded pages. I'm a mess. I guess Maria and the kids would have put it away for me, had they seen it. They surely would have... Right? I can't think like that. They deserve better. I guess I am lucky to have them, to have her. I shouldn't complain.

What time is it? This late, huh?

They need me.

Like always I am the last one up. I hate it. What kind of a father wakes after everybody? A deadbeat one. If only my younger self saw me. He would knock me out. I think I deserve that at least. Meanwhile, the feet pounding vanishes.

It's peculiar. I like this pseudo-quiet before the day starts, the moment of "silence" right as the concert is about to commence. The unison of the audience, disturbed by the inadvertent coughs and sit shifts. Life being lived! Life being lived downstairs, while it still hasn't reached me in here.

My eyes itch.

The coldness of the ground hits my feet and moves through my body like a searing rod through flesh, while my mind desperately tries to pull me back under my blankets. It's comfortable here, unlike out there.

But they need me.

I gather my courage. Great! My eyes hurt. I forgot to change the light bulb in the bathroom, again. Too much light. The lamp in the room should

suffice if I open the door entirely. The kids start pounding their feet once more. Lucky for us, we don't have any ranting neighbors. They all went away during the holidays! Oh...

That's why the kids aren't doing their homework. Can't believe I forgot.

I pass my hand in my hair but touch only skin. I then open the second drawer with excess strength, it reaches the end of its rails in a ringing and deafening noise; a high pitch pipe and a timpani. Why do we have two drawers for one couple? Probably Maria's suggestion. I seize my brush. Logged between its bristles are the vestiges of my hair. I massage my head with evenly spaced strokes, the same as always. I don't know what hurts most: my scar on the back of my head or the fact that I can't fathom this bald look. Well, at least Maria fell in love with me before I lost my hair. And I love my kids and my wife. Guess I am lucky that way. Could've been worse, you know?

... Yeah... I know.

I get out of the bathroom after having taken minimal care of my being. I reach for my clothes. Bang!

— JESUS CH****!!!! Fudge!!!!

I hate this stupid bench. Why would someone put a bench at the end of a bed? Damn my toe hurts. My cursing must have carried downstairs for I hear the kids' pounding getting closer to my position. My quiet is gone, the concert begins.

They enter, they cheer, they run, they play around me while I try to dress. I used to have that energy once. They look happy. I release a subdued smile. Are they? Happy? Time to go *play* the dad.

— Raaaaaaa! Who ventures into the lair of the mighty Drevorgh?! I hunger and I see two delicious kids! Raaaaaaa!

They shout and flee towards their mom. Cowards!

It works too well. I am glad I can still put on a performance this convincing. Or they aren't very bright.

Screw these thoughts! What has gotten into me lately? They looked happy at least! I make my way down the screeching stairs lit by this flickering light that does not know what it wants in life. Lit up or turned off. Just like this room. Either living room or kitchen. Just like a man who lives while others sleep.

— Makes no sense. I whisper.

My thoughts go away as I see her sitting on the couch. Maria. The dress, the jewelry, I know them, I gifted them to her. But her face, I can never seem to know it, as if it renews itself. Silly me. We've been together for what, twelve or fourteen years? She smiles at me while the kids tuck behind her in fear of the mighty Drevorgh.

I guess I am lucky.

— You look good! She intones with her voice, almost singing.

— Why do we have two drawers in the bathroom?

— You asked for them, honey. She answers, while slightly tilting her head.

— Weird...

— You got up early today. She says while playing with Will.

— What do you mean? It's real late.

— Funny! I didn't want to wake you so I left your book by your side, hope it's okay. Food is on the counter. Would you like to sit with us for a bit?

— No, I think I'll go early, so I can leave early as well.

— I didn't know you could do that.

I think she wants me to respond.

— It's okay... For the book.

The false note spoils the harmony.

She looks at me with loving eyes while I flee this minor tone towards the door, keys in hand. Coward!

— Bye! I say as I open the door.

I wait a second. No response. They are laughing. I shut it and head towards my scratched car. Maria shoveled the snow out of the driveway. Suddenly, I catch it. Coming from the window.

— I love you.

— Love you Daddy!

What a rush, what guilt I am feeling. They seem sincere. Their message: earnest. Like a musical note carried by the air, forever etched in the unattainable. I cling to it. The night is tightly set. I look up. The coldness reminds me of the one that hit my feet. And the emptiness that stares back at me attacks my soul, and my mind caves as the echo of their love wanes. My shift, my day really, is about to begin while theirs is ending. But I have to do it.

They need me.

Probably more than I need them.

Rooms with a View

WILLIAM FLORES

The Luna Lux Base was the new crown jewel of the self-proclaimed Visionary Hundred, a group consisting of the twenty richest men in the world. Together, they funded this luxurious recreational settlement on the moon, which cost a whopping 2 trillion dollars to build. Devon Dusk, the mastermind behind this endeavor, convinced about half of his fellow Visionaries to follow him on a week-long trip to inaugurate the new base. The remaining half was skeptical because of Devon's notorious failure to set up an inhabited Mars colony a few years prior, which caused the death of six astronauts. This time would be different, assured the maverick billionaire. After all, he had made structural adjustments to his space company, keeping only the most competent workers, and replacing the other ones with the company's next-generation robots.

Delilah Grant, a veteran employee of Dusk's space company, was to be the Mission Control Ground Commander during the upcoming flight to the moon. Although she profoundly disliked Devon Dusk, she was loyal to the company, or at least its long-term mission: to make humanity a multi-planetary species. Ever since she was little, Delilah dreamt of one day traveling into space. However, her heart condition, which she inherited from her father Jeffrey Grant, did not allow her to do so. Although the realization that she could never blast off in a rocket ship was crushing to 12-year-old Delilah, that didn't dissuade her from contributing to humanity's expansion in the cosmos. And so she studied rocket science, literally, and became the Chief engineer at Dusk's space company. Behind every major innovation in rocketry was the hand of Delilah.

And so, on July 25, 2039, Devon Dusk and his opulent party ascended into the sky like the virile demigods that they were. They were now well on their way to reach Luna Lux within the next two days. As part of the company's structural adjustment plan, Mission Control was almost entirely automated, except for Delilah who had to keep an eye on things, in case anything unexpected happened. This was not the case during the moon-bound trip of the Visionaries. They arrived safely at the new base, live-streaming the whole thing so that all of their followers could witness this most extraordinary moment in human history. Never have there been so many people on the moon at the same time! The number of viewers wasn't what the Visionary Hundred were used to back in the good old days, but the success of their flight warranted popping a few bottles of Prosecco. The alcohol was perhaps necessary to make up for the relatively bland food coming out of the food synthesizer, which transformed the Visionaries' organic waste into a nutritious paste. Even demigods had to make some concessions if they wanted to travel to space. And so, as the richest men in the world were having a week-long booze fest on the moon, sharing all of it online, Earth and its inhabitants were struck by another heatwave. The southern United States was hit very badly. Delilah was worried. The news talked about many wet-bulb 35 incidents, where people dropped like flies and died because of the fatal mix of humidity and heat, which effectively impeded the body from cooling down. People like Delilah and her father, were particularly vulnerable to such incidents, which is why she always made sure to stay indoors in air-conditioned buildings. Not everyone could afford the energy bills resulting from air-conditioning, however. A little over a decade back,

the administration of the now disgraced Ronald Chump forced the United States to adopt an expensive coal and gas energy mix, locking the country into fossil infrastructure, as the rest of the world moved on to cleaner and cheaper renewables. Even Delilah's parents struggled with energy bills, despite their daughter being a Chief engineer. As part of Dusk's structural adjustment plan, her salary was cut by a third. "Remember, we could easily automate even your job. So consider yourself lucky that I value you enough to keep you here," the billionaire said in the e-mail announcing Delilah's wage cut.

That was two years ago. Delilah stayed because of her passion for the job. But with the heatwave, and the Visionaries' lavish lunar display, she felt sick to her stomach. A day before the scheduled return flight, a warning signal appeared on her display. Apparently, one of the company's internet satellites was losing altitude and straying from its intended orbit. This happened every now and then, and the solution usually involved adjusting the orbit by remotely turning on the satellite thrusters for a minute or so. Delilah was just about to do that when she received a call from her mother, telling her that her father had collapsed because of the heat. He was going to be okay, but doctors said he could have died. For a while, Delilah couldn't think straight. Her father could have died. He didn't deserve this, nobody deserved this. Delilah was lost in her thoughts when the warning signals grew louder. Duty called. And so, she skillfully brought the satellite to a new orbit. She was done for the day.

The next day, she heard about internet outages hitting various parts of the world on the car radio,

as she was headed for work. She didn't think much of it. At Mission Control all systems were running perfectly for the return flight of Dusk and his billionaire friends. In the background, the automated systems were scrambling to course-correct the altitudes of hundreds of satellites. Word must have gotten to Dusk, as he directly contacted Delilah.

"What's going on?"

"You mean the satellites?"

"Yes, the satellites, what else?!"

"Have you ever heard of Kessler syndrome?"

The other end of the line went silent. After a while, Delilah continued.

"Right now, dozens of satellites are crashing into each other, creating debris that will crash into more and more satellites, eventually enveloping the planet in so much satellite debris that any attempt to leave Earth's orbit or re-entering the atmosphere would be a suicide mission, meaning that your return flight will have to be delayed."

The silence on the other end gave way to a whimpering question:

"How much delay?"

Delilah kept a matter-of-factly tone.

"I'd say thirty, forty, maybe fifty years."

Screams and cries on the other end. The demigods were now weeping.

Delilah kept her composure.

"I suggest you relax, and make good use of the food synthesizer and those rooms with a view on our beautiful Planet Earth. It's gonna be a while. Oh, and don't worry... from up there you can't hurt her. Enjoy."

Postcard from the year 2225

WILLIAM FLORES



May 3rd, 2225

Hi there!

I know that time capsules work the other way around, but I hope that this postcard somehow found its way to the past. This card depicts the administrative district of Earth's capital, Pangea.

See the globe in the middle of the square? That's a hologram depicting the Earth as it is viewed in real time by Earth observation satellites. Pretty cool, huh?

From a specific angle, the blue olive branches on the two towers look as though they are embracing the globe.

As you can (hopefully) tell, things are better now. So, if you're from, say, the early 21st century, don't despair. Keep fighting against the monsters of your time. It's about the long game.

Take care,
Yours truly

On Soups

LADY SPRAXIC

I don't like soups that are just perfumed water.

I like the dense and murky ones, for example, the spring pea soup – less renowned than the butternut one but just as glorious – which mysteriously tastes like rosemary. Dense soups contain not yet explored secracies, not quite visible wonders. There is something majestic about them, a humility conscious of its greatness.

I like my soups how I like my friends: full of surprises. I have one who tasted goat cheese fondue before me although hating cheese – all kinds – is one of her life mottos. More than extreme jealousy, I felt complete astonishment. A hundred or two years ago – depending on if you think which one, from lived impressions and objective facts, is closer to Truth – one of them said that she preferred red wine because it was more contemplative. I object. Red wine is foul and prone to stains. I learned that it was not the color of the grapes that gave red wine its colour, but the maceration of their skins in the liquid. I am not entirely against maceration as a concept, just

not in my glass: I completely support the use of maceration in perfumery. Though that might be because I approve of the Odorous Science as a whole. In the perfume world, another

unsettling concept occurs: the fragrance pyramid. It is composed of three degrees: the top note, the heart note and the base note. I think it might be a little simplistic to reduce perfume,

the physical manifestation of invisible essence, to static notions such as maceration and pyramids, but the damage is done.

I want the top note of my perfume to smell like sparkling wine, the heart note like peas and zucchini soup, and the base note to taste like leaving my parents' home for the first time.

Exit but Make It at a Five-Star Hotel

LEAH DIDISHEIM

I sigh, pull my suitcase and open the door of the five-star hotel. I still don't understand why we're doing this. Does she even want to be here? Oh, but yes, I know about our dear traditions. More important than life, apparently. Every year we come here. It's always the same. To use our heritage together. As a united big happy family. How true it is this year is unreal.

"Hi! So good to see you. How are you? Oh, you know..., fine...", we basically all say at the same time after checking in at the reception desk. It all started with a phone call from my dad not even two weeks ago. I think in some ways, I knew it was going to happen eventually. Yes it was a shock. But I can't say I was surprised to learn about it. What I was surprised at however, is that the plan to come here hadn't been cancelled. That it was still an option – and a wished-for option at that – to come here. With her. For the last time.

My cousin is already in the room when I open the door. It is nice to be together in some ways. To share our sadness together. I can't think of what the staff is going to think seeing us cry together every day in the lounge though. "I cried a lot when I learnt about it. Now I'm ok... it depends on the days I guess," I answer my cousin. I didn't know yet that I was going to cry every day. Seeing the others cry or hurt won't help. Or you could say that in some ways it will. She hasn't cried once. But she wants to. She feels her body wants to, she tells me while I unpack.

We talk a bit while we get ready for the evening. Am I happy with who I drew for our Secret Santa? Not really. She's fine with hers. "Imagine the person who got *her* though? How horrible is that? I thought about it last week," I tell her. We ponder on this while we finish getting ready. Our room is beautiful, as always. Outside, it had started to snow. And it won't stop for the next two days.

I look at the mirror in the lift. My cousin went downstairs already. You know what, I'm sick of being sad. When someone dies, you're sad because they're dead, because you didn't know it was going to happen. You couldn't plan it and act accordingly. But when someone lives with an expiration date, you're sad because they're still alive. And everything they do. And everything you see them do. Well, you can't shake the feeling that it's the last time. Yes it's great. We're all here together. As this big family. But every picture taken isn't taken because of that. It's taken because, deep down, we know it's the last one. I sigh, wipe the tear on my cheek, glue a smile on my face, and the elevator opens on to the first lively evening of our stay.

Why is Writing so Difficult?

LEAH DIDISHEIM

So, I'm sitting at my desk, looking at the blank page, right. I've waited all week for this. The house is clean. I've finished my readings for next week. I've done all the chores I could possibly think of, just to have this additional hour to finally, finally write. It's my passion. What I want to do with my life. I shouldn't struggle so much to do it, right? And it's not like I don't have the ideas. I have them. I've been on the second draft of my novel for forever. And then. Then there's this other novel I've put on the side for so many years. This one novel that makes me want to cry. Because I'd stopped doing it purposely. She could never leave me if I didn't finish it right? Because she was eternal. That's right. You heard it. And it's not like I believe in this stuff you know. I'm quite realistic. But she was supposed to be eternal. So it didn't matter if I didn't finish interviewing her about her incredible, no, extraordinary life and did my other book in between. Because she'd still be here after. Except she's not. She left me before I could finish it. I mean I have enough stuff to keep going, but can I? I haven't even been able to talk at her funeral. For god's sake she was supposed to have ten more years. Her mum died at 105 years old. And she was only 95. And still living alone in a house with stairs. Why did she want to go? Of course I understand, Grandma. Yes, I get it. Grandpa hasn't been here for a while. Your siblings left before you. And you hate dependence. I get that there wasn't really any other option but to leave those still here. But I guess I am mad. Because I wanted her to see more. I wanted her to be there at my wedding. And see my first child. She saw my cousins' children. Why not mine? It's unfair. But to be honest, that's not even what I'm mad at. I guess I'm mad because she didn't realise it was hurting us. I guess I'm mad because she didn't realise we loved her. Maybe she couldn't. She just expected we'd feel like she felt towards her parents and her grandparents. But it's your fault if we didn't, grandma. I guess you shouldn't have created this family if you didn't want us to care.

So, no. I can't bring myself to write. Because there are always more important things to do. There are always things that need to be done. I'm sick of being an adult I guess. Everything else makes me put my one passion to the side. Maybe I do it on purpose you know. Self-sabotaging. It's easier than to fail right? Bullshit I know. But if it's not compulsory, I don't know what to write. And I know I write well. Discipline sucks. My brain sucks. I can't get to stop overthinking everything. Like I cannot take a break without thinking about everything else I have to do. And you know, it's not like I don't have other stuff. I have uni. Theatre. Associative work. Laundry. Feeding myself. Sleep. Giving classes. Sports. Where am I supposed to find the time to write 500 words a day?

Look at that. 569 words. I guess I just did.

3:4

GAIA

Content warning:

Strong language, Emotional distress,
Abusive relationships, Implied death

She sends me a text.

i fucked up pls come over

My neighbour.

I exit my apartment and knock on her door. She opens right away.

We look at each other. Tears start flooding her eyes. I enter and close the door behind me.

'Bitch you better be joking.'

'Can you help me?'

'Can't do miracles!'

She starts sobbing. She grabs her cigarettes.

'Why would you do that?' I point at her.

'I don't know!'

She puts a cigarette between her lips and lights it.

Her hands tremble in the smoke.

'Sit down, get your shit together. I got you.'

She does as is told.

'It's my fault.'

'Yes, indeed.'

She hides her face in her hands. I hand her a glass of water so she stops tormenting her hair.

'Look, I don't give a fuck. Right? But there's only one thing to do.'

'No.'

She gets up and runs into the other room.

This is going to be hard.

I follow her.

She's sitting on the couch, a cigarette in one hand, the glass in the other.

'I can't.'

'You will.'

'No.'

'Well, then I will. For you.'

She doesn't answer.

When I moved here, she left a note on my door.

hi i'm your new neighbor, this is my number, call me whenever, can't wait to get to know you! xoxo

We instantly became friends. She's alright. She's like me but younger. A bit taller. Different eye colors.

Once, we were lying on her couch, smoking cigarettes in the dark so that mosquitos couldn't come inside.

She told me a secret.

'My ex-boyfriend once told me to shut the fuck up ~~in~~^{to} the middle of a bad argument. Girl, they had to call the police. I broke every piece of motherfucking furniture in his house.'

'Really?'

'Hm-hm.'

'You was that angry?'

'Yes, but also, I think I wanted to tell him, like, it's either talking or this. There is no way out, you know?'

'Yeah.'

'I don't know why I don't like to talk about that.'

'People wouldn't understand.'

'Yeah. But it's pretty logic, right? I mean what should have I done? Shut the fuck up?'

'Yeah.'

'Yeah.'

'I think you are amazing.'

And now, look at her. This bitch is not okay.

'Talk to me.'

She looks at me in despair. She looks helpless, small, fragile.

'What are you thinking of?'

She puts the glass on the ground and lets the cigarette fall into the water.

She takes my hands.

'I am afraid that I am not good enough. But, still, I don't think I deserve this. I am afraid...'

She starts sobbing again.

'Look, I don't know what to do, this is too much, I can't... I can't handle it anymore. I'm tired. You know what? I'm tired.'

Her face is wet, tears, mucus.

I grab the sleeve of my sweater and I gently clean it.

'You know you can do anything, right?'

She doesn't answer.

'Remember who you are. Make a choice. Follow it.'

She stops sobbing.

'You already made a choice. Right?'

She nods.

'Good. Let's go.'

I told her a secret, too.

It was outside, in the field, at night, under the Stars.

'So, one night, just before the sunrise, I was walking home alone after a party, right? I was still a bit drunk and I was so tired, oh my god, so tired. So I stopped to catch my breath. I look at the sky in front of me. And guess what?'

'What?'

'You would never guess.'

'What?!"

I turn towards her.

'A meteor shower.'

'No way!'

'Girl.'

'How was it?'

'Beautiful, amazing.'

'Yes, but like, how was it?'

I stopped to think about it a bit.

'It was... It was shiny and broken, and all the pieces were drifting away but still, it was its own thing, going somewhere. And then it disappeared, like a caress.'

'Wow.'

'Yeah.'

'Why is this a secret?'

'I don't know. There was nobody there. I turned around to see if there was somebody. But I was alone. It was just me.'

'Oh. I see.'

We have always understood each other, since the beginning, you know? And now too, I understand her.

So I begin.

I start it for her. Just to help her a little.

But then I let her finish. She has to do it anyway. There would be no point otherwise.

So she does it, and then it's over.

And from now on,

nothing will ever be the same.

Even the drug dealers take the day off on a rainy Sunday morning

ANONYMOUS

The pitter-patter of the raindrops wakes you this morning, just like they did the last. Reluctantly, just like you did the last, you roll over and check your alarm clock with an exasperated sigh. With fifteen minutes before its dreaded chime, it's no longer worth you trying to squeeze in a few extra minutes of sleep.

You quickly hop under the shower – cold and humbling – before you get dressed, grab your stuff and head out. The library is shut on New Year's Sunday, so your only option for relative peace is the café in town. It's not ideal, but Starbucks is open every day of the year, so you take it. They have good chai, and you have enough points for a free drink, anyway.

The rain has slowed to the occasional droplet of water – it's not even worth taking an umbrella at this point, so you don't. You have far too many books to carry to justify lugging around an umbrella that you're not going to use, so you leave it at home. Between your books, computer, and the general weight of your overthinking, you don't want the extra burden, anyway. You'll take the wet hair, if worse comes to worst.

You decide to walk to town instead of taking the train. It's a ten-minute difference and it grounds you. Walking through the little path through the woods is soothing, it's one of the little pleasures you get. It's almost magical. It reminds you of hiking and the joys that it brings.

So off to work you go on this rainy January morning, through the woods, to the train station, and across the road to the Starbucks. It's unusual, though, almost eerie. No one is there. Not the weekday crowd, not the occasional driving lesson, not even guys in trench coats hanging around behind the station, waiting for their clients.

You cross the road, stroll into the café. You're the first one in, this time. You smile, as you make for your favourite bench, the one with the bigger table and the plug socket. You go and get your drink and joke with the barista. She's sweet and asks you what you're doing there on this rainy Sunday morning. Studying, you reply. You have exams. Ah yes, she

sees the students, recognises them, recognised you as well. The regulars, you joke. The ones who come in at stupid o'clock in the morning and leave close to closing time. Even on Sundays. You both joke about working on a Sunday, how only the two of you do it. And the other baristas and students. You joke how even the regular train station drug dealers are in the comfort of their own homes. How even the drug dealers take the day off on a rainy Sunday morning.

You joke, and you go back to work, warmed by your chai and the light-hearted conversation. You go back to your makeshift desk and plunge into your texts. The drug dealers may be taking the day off, but you do not allow yourself such luxuries. It's worth it, though, and you smile through your revisions. The texts, reading them and analysing them, as long and complicated as they may be, bring you joy.



© Anonymous

Meet Me at the Ferris Wheel

SALOMÉ EMILIE STREIFF



Some soft folk music resonates in my ears as the ghost of a hand passes through my hair. I play with the cotton of the pillowcase; it's soft and feels familiar. I press the tissue to my eyelids as I used to do. I feel like a kid at the carnival who arrives a few days after the festivities. She's standing among the scattered confetti, hands in her pockets, looking downcast. She has pretty ribbons that tame her brown locks, blush on her cheeks from the hurry. If only she had been there just a little earlier.

Maybe she'd have had a look at the leftover candy canes in the half-empty stands. Maybe she would have seen the bright posters and the van's tracks in the mud—wonder.

And if she'd run faster than she already did, maybe she'd have caught a glimpse of the last ride and its sparkling lights. Maybe, just maybe, she'd have heard the floating notes of the pretty carousel fade into the evening. She might have passed the little girls in their colourful dresses on the way back, the boys with their magic-filled eyes. She would have glimpsed at the countless parents and their tired smiles in the parking lot. She would have paused and wondered what holding such small hands feels like.

And if she hadn't had all those pitfalls, maybe she could have enjoyed the Ferris wheel—the one that goes so high it feels like it's touching the sky. She would have raised her hands and felt the butterflies of happiness in her stomach. She would have felt like it was over too quickly, because that's how life feels for those who get to celebrate in time. She would have drunk tons of Coke and eaten all the hot dogs, waffles, crêpes, and stupid fast food that might have hurt her stomach on the way home. She would have begged for one last ride, and with a belly full of sugar, she would have got back in line to relive this suspended time over and over again—until the fairground workers closed the stands and she, too, would have gone home with the certainty that she was very lucky to be able to cherish its ups and downs, the laughter and the shivers. She would have colours on her dress and magic shining through her. She'd feel a little nauseous, but just enough to make him laugh. He who'd waited for her at the entrance and wouldn't let her go until the exit. He would have devoured her with his eyes and held her hand. He would have ruffled her hair and reminded her a thousand times what love feels like.

I would have loved to meet him at the Ferris wheel.

The Devil Under The Same Roof

ERIKA CASTRILLÓN MORALES

Content warning:

Drug abuse, Domestic violence,
Mentions of sexual abuse

“Open the door, you whore!” He has been giving kicks from the other side of the door, trying to get into the house. May is sitting behind the door, covering her ears to ignore his shouts. She cannot take this anymore. He fled five days ago, and nobody heard from him until now. Every time he leaves, he always comes back home in a frenetic state. May can only imagine the worst. He has been wandering around trying to get his hands on anything strong enough to make him pass out. Being the big sister weighs heavily on her.

After half an hour, the screams stopped. May peeps through the window and sees John’s weak body lying unconscious on the floor. There is not a single noise at the deepest of nights. Her heart is divided between thinking her brother is nothing more than a piece of garbage and feeling a bit of pity towards him.

May remembers how John was always wicked. As a kid, he was restless and disruptive. In primary school, teachers never ceased to complain about his behavior. Once, during a break, some younger kids followed him into the bushes near the playground. When the teacher came looking for them, she found John showing pictures of naked women to

the little kids. On another occasion, he stole a neighbor’s cat and smashed it into a wall. He then burned the poor creature on the house’s terrace. By the time he was a teenager, it was clear that John was rotten and utterly mean.

His relationship with May was highly problematic as well. He never liked her. He used to bother his sister by physically harassing her. He started to pick on her and call her names when they were about seven years old. Luckily, May had long nails and would scratch him like a cat. John would end up crying and exaggerating his wounds. But their mom, Anna, a woman weak in character, took it against May and would beat her ass up. She could see the scratches on John, but there were no signs of the so-called violence in John would have inflicted on May.

May is the eldest of four siblings. She is followed by John, Edward, and Michael. For some unknown reason, Anna spoiled John rotten. She let him do whatever he pleased. He was her golden boy, and John became a mommy’s boy. Anna hid all of John’s faults from her husband and the father of her children, Thomas. A rivalry grew between John and May. The latter was well-behaved and got along well

in school: Always getting good grades and compliments from the teachers. But at home, things were cold with their mother, when Anna refused to see John's faults. If May dared to cry, their mother would force her to stop.

The father was a cobbler who used to work offering his services on the corner of a main downtown street. They lived from day to day. Thomas gave Anna the money he earned the day before to prepare lunch. John, being the oldest of the brothers, was in charge of bringing lunch to their dad. He was a school drop-out and was always at home. Because May was a girl, it was considered too dangerous to have her walk long distances in the streets full of strangers. Also, she had school. But John was always reluctant to do it. Instead, he would walk to the kitchen to eat his father's lunch and then would take a guiltless nap.

Seeing him through the window, May's mind recalls the multiple times John returned home from one of his getaways. With time, May could distinguish what kind of substance he had taken that day. His arrival was the announcement of a new cycle of confrontations with a hectic John, saying he was going to murder them all. Sometimes, neighbors had to call the police to break up the fights. Anna was unable to acknowledge her son's troubles. John could not stand anyone looking at him. It used to freak out his demons. He wanted to fight and was a real danger to the family. He used to threaten his younger siblings if May didn't leave him alone and stopped sticking her nose between him and their mother. If May ran into to him on the streets, he used to throw lustful looks at her and told her that if she kept bothering him, he was going to "screw her" with his buddies.

May scratches her legs and forearms. Her accelerated heartbeats are mixed with an increasing headache when remembering the past. When Thomas died, things escalated for May. Rumors came to her saying that Anna was calling May's friends asking for money, that she would later give to John. He would demand too much from his mom, and she would do everything for him. The two remaining younger brothers had emotional and economic needs that May ended up filling. On

many occasions, John would call from jail. He would be caught with drugs in his pockets or high in the streets. Anna would beg May to take her beloved son out of that place. Eventually, May was known in every police station in the city. May would bring him some food and would take him back home, sometimes even bribing the inspectors with money that was not much of a surplus.

John went through long years of drug abuse and, at some point, was able to complete rehab. He got a decent job for a few years and became a counselor for young boys flirting with substances. A time of apparent peace and optimism ran in the family. But John's addiction was so overpowering that he went back to it, trying hard drugs this time. It's been more than fifteen years since the first time John came, kicking the door and destroying everything. May decides to pray and searches in a secluded space in her interior for some faith. She begs her forgotten God to take him. She wants to be free from the burden he is. She wants him dead, for everyone's sake.

May closes the windows and goes to her room to try to get some sleep. She discovers her mom, Edward, and Michael nervously peeping at her in the corridor. She can see in their looks of distress, she asks everyone to return to bed. "We'll deal with this in the morning" she says to them as she has so many times before. Lying in bed, May bursts into tears.

Mr. Robert, the next-door neighbor comes first thing in the morning looking for May.

"Is John home?" He asks her with a concerned look.

"We really don't know, we haven't heard anything today.", answers the young woman.

"I have something to show you, May." He hands her today's newspaper. The photo shows the body of a young man bleeding, lying on the floor. The headline reads "John Doe dies during police break-in in drug den."

"I think it is him", states Mr. Robert.

"It is him." Confirms May with a calm voice, after having recognized John's shirt.

La Routine

AGS

Bloodshot. He had read it on Health.com. Lack of sleep reduces oxygen to the eyes, making blood vessels dilate—something about red eyes.

For a second, he pictured himself with vampiric eyes, arriving at work and terrifying the world. Quickly enough, however, the realization that irises weren't the ones that turned red hit him and he switched to noticing that he hadn't blinked in far too long.

His eyes burned the way they did before falling sick, though by now, he associated it more with waking up than illness. He didn't know if his eyes were bloodshot, but it certainly felt that way. Could eyes *feel* bloodshot?

The consistent sound of his clock disappeared under the morning ringing, and a sigh of relief mixed with the alarm—followed, almost immediately, by the daily groan of realization as whatever hopes he had fostered of dreaming evaporated with the morning dew. For the hundredth time since he had laid down last night, he switched positions. For the hundredth time, it did nothing but remind him of the tension in his back from the constant turning in the night.

Dorian sat up, only to slump forward like a ticking metronome.

Metronome. Music.

He turned to his phone, where the soft, regular melody was still playing, and his feet fell to the floor—cold.

On the screen: “Sleeping Playlist,” written in bold white letters. A compilation of every song he had downloaded off the internet to avoid paying for

Spotify, mixed with whatever artists the app had randomly given him for free. What a joke. Still, somehow, the attempt at a solution had given him the illusion of control over his insomnia.

The sunlight peering through the shutters did nothing to alleviate the dreamless night's apathy in his mind, and he dragged himself to the bathroom.

He looked like a child pouting. His cheeks angled down to the corners of his mouth, his asymmetrical nose almost pointing at it.

Smile, he thought, staring at the mirror with a jaded look.

His body obeyed—surprisingly enough. Smiling usually helped with the swelling in his cheeks. Today, it did nothing.

He shaved, he showered. Somehow, standing in the water was more restful than lying in bed.

His hand reached for the foundation his ex had left behind—practical, close enough to his skin color. It had proven a precious ally in the war against dark circles.

Water—half of it on his face, the other half down his dry, dry throat. He winced. Water never tasted good in the morning. Something about the lack of taste.

Hair—automatically, his hand reached for the brush, raising it to his head. There was nothing to brush; he had buzzed off his curls a few weeks ago, hoping it would be one less thing to worry about in the morning. Still, he just liked the feeling of those plastic spikes against his scalp. And what was a morning without tradition?

Socks, pants. He buttoned up his shirt, eyes closed.

Bread. Butter. No jam—no time. More water—to compensate for the staleness of the bread.

The usual morning voice in his head insisted on narrating every action he took, like some overzealous dictation mode for blind iPhone users. Blind... It *was*, in a way, how he felt after sleepless nights. One thing out of place, and it would be impossible to find.

He remembered a few weeks ago when his cousin had come squat at his place after her husband had quite literally kicked her out, calling her a... what was it? *Drunken, cheating whore?* She had smiled and insisted that this was just a “casual Tuesday” and that she’d “wait here for him to calm down.” The implied request to stay had worked, and soon, she had moved everything around and he had been late to work every morning, almost getting lost in his own house.

He sighed again. This time, no relief—just the hope that the difficulty in breathing would lift. It didn’t. It was as though a smaller version of himself, still in denial of his constant insomnia, had decided to sleep on his chest, pressing down like a weight.

Keys. Coat. He hesitated to wear a scarf and told himself the cold would keep him awake.

The irony of it—after a struggle for sleep, he was about to start his marathon of staying awake.

It was like pressing download fifty times on a lagging computer and getting nothing—until suddenly, the sun came up, and every overdue hour of sleep file hit him at once.

But he’d manage. He always did.

It was all about the small moments of breaks—waiting at a red light or during his students’ rare moments of concentration.

An instant to close those burning eyes.

He walked out.

Car. Glasses—Glasses!

Dorian leaned his forehead on the car roof.

He’d do without glasses. Again.

He slid inside the vehicle, passing a hand through his absent curls and adjusted the rearview mirror before letting out a short, decisive breath.

“Come on.” He muttered, like a coach to his own life.

The engine started. He drove.

His class was circling in front of the door like a flock of chickens.

“Mr Dead eyes’s here.” Basil whispered, somehow mocking and alarmed at the same time, as Dorian cursed himself for forgetting his glasses.

Again.

What kind of name was Basil, anyway? Who named their kid after a cooking plant?

He opened the door, letting the flood of children pour inside.

They were all there.

Felici, whose parents’ divorce ensured they never showed up to a parent-teacher conference together. Milton, who never entered the classroom until everyone else was inside, too afraid to get trampled by the bigger kids.

The voices swelled around him, chaotic but familiar.

Dorian rubbed his temples, exhaled, and lifted his head.

“Good morning, everyone.”

The chorus of greetings hit him like a wave—loud, mismatched, half-hearted, but real.

It would do.

He forced a smile.

Education Systems, Censorship, *Wicked* and Music: An Introduction to Kimberly Frohreich

SOPHIE BUHLER & NICOLE HLAVOVA

Nicky: Hi! So, could you tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're from and how long you've been in Switzerland?

Kimberly: I'm from Orange County, California. I grew up right next to Disneyland actually!

Sophie: Oh, wow. That's really cool!

K: Yeah, it was fun. I did my bachelor's at UC Santa Cruz, and I studied French in high school. So, what brought me here is that my parents asked me if I wanted to spend a summer abroad in France, and of course I said yes! I was 16 and I struck gold by getting a host family in Nice with two host sisters: one a year older and one a year younger. The family took me all over the French Riviera that summer. It was like a dream come true for a 16-year-old from California.

That kept me going with the language and I wanted to come back. And so, I did my year abroad in Grenoble. For a lot of American college students it's kind of a rite of passage to spend some time abroad. So I spent my junior year in Grenoble, and I met someone! After finishing my degree in the US, I moved back over here. We were in Lyon at first, but then I ended up enrolling at the University of Geneva to continue my studies in order to teach English. But my bachelor's wasn't worth as much here, so I basically had to start over. That was back in 2003 before the university changed to the bachelor's/master's system.

That's when I met Professor Soltysik-Monnet. I took a couple of seminars with her and loved them. I also met Professor Madsen around that time, who's still a professor of American literature at the University of

Geneva. I then continued to do my master's there and, then an assistantship opened up under Professor Madsen and I applied and got it! So all of that meant that I was staying here.

My PhD stemmed from my mémoire, which was kind of fun, and it's topical again now, considering the movie *Wicked* just came out. My first conference was organized by Professor Soltysik-Monnet with one of her old colleagues in Geneva. I was wondering if it was that one (Kimberly points to a poster in the office). It might've been that one right there, yes, in 2008, *Writing American Women: Text, Gender, Performance*. That

was my first conference! I was still a master's student at the time, but I gave a paper and went on to submit it for publication. And so that was also my first publication, which was about the figure of the Wicked Witch of the West. The musical *Wicked*, the Broadway musical, had just come out at the time. So I followed that figure's progression in the original *Wizard of Oz* text, the 1939 film, the novel that *Wicked* was based on and then the musical.

S: Oh, that's really cool!

K: Yeah, it might be fun to go back, rework that and publish a kind of follow-up paper with the

Kimberly and one of her host family's sisters in Nice, summer of 2023.



"My PhD stemmed from my mémoire, which was kind of fun... I ended up writing about, not just the Wicked Witch, but the whole fairy tale of *The Wizard of Oz*... looking at the body through disability studies."

current film. It's just that I'm working on other projects right now, so we'll see if that actually happens. But that conference paper was the basis for my master's thesis which I did with Professor Madsen. I ended up writing about, not just the Wicked Witch, but the whole fairy tale of *The Wizard of Oz*: the different adaptations and what they said about gender, sexuality, the body, and the figure of the freak. So also looking at the body through disability studies.

My PhD, which I finished fairly recently, was kind of in line with that but focusing more on race, looking at adaptations and rewritings of the figure of the monster: what they say about race and how we think about race now.

N: That's really interesting.

S: Have you noticed many differences between studying in America and studying in Switzerland?

K: I can speak a little bit from my experience in France as well as in the U.S. as a bachelor's student. In literature... well first of all, in the U.S. you have to do 'general education requirements'. I don't know if it's the same as in the UK?

S: Um, in the UK you have to get your GCSEs in at least Maths and English, I'm pretty sure.

K: And that's at the university level?

S: No, no, that's when you are 16. I think past 16 you're sort of free. You have to do an apprenticeship if you don't go to school until you're 18. But I think that's it.

classes were 'tell us how you feel about this book' – that sort of thing. It was very open.

N: Oh really! It was the same for us in the UK, that's why I prefer it here because you actually go into it.

S: Yeah, yeah. We'd have like a book a module each week which was just too much content!

K: It's intense. Yeah. It's really intense. Then, in France, there was this stark opposition, where it was a whole semester, one class was focused on one book. And a lot of intense close reading, which I really liked.

I found that Geneva was this nice sort of in-between where it was like three novels each semester. Professor Madsen at the time, and Professor Soltysik-Monnet, depending on what they were teaching, also integrated film and television in their classes. I just loved that. I'd say they were both my mentors. And Switzerland felt like this nice middle ground, in terms of the amount of reading and digging a bit deeper.

N: That's really interesting! So, can you tell us a little bit about what you are currently working on?

K: Yeah. So, what I'm currently working on – with the very little time that I have because I'm at 80% as a high school teacher and I have two kids – I'm trying to turn my thesis into a book. I was in touch with a publisher, a university press in the U.S. before Trump got elected. This was last year, and they seemed interested. But I didn't manage to send off the manuscript. And now, Trump has been elected and to be

N: Yeah, and there's nothing fixed at uni. You kind of just do whatever you want!

K: Okay. Well, at university in the U.S., you have to do almost two years' worth of general education requirements. So, if you choose something in the humanities as a major, then you have to do a lot of general education requirements in science or math, that sort of thing. So for instance, I took a class on the rainforest and another on oceanography.

S: Ooh!

K: Yeah, they were interesting. But it's a very different approach to how you should be spending your time as a university student. Over there, the idea in education is to have well-rounded graduates who know a little bit of everything. So obviously, you spend less time on your major, which is partly why I only ended up getting half a bachelor's worth of transfer credits in English when I moved here.

I majored in literature. It could be as intense as reading a novel a week per class! But it meant that there wasn't much close reading. So, it was more about exposure and I found that a lot of the

"[In the U.S.], the idea in education is to have well-rounded graduates who know a little bit of everything... In France, there was this stark opposition... one class was focused on one book. And a lot of intense close reading, which I really liked."

perfectly honest, I don't think that they're going to be interested anymore because of how much the book will deal with race. So, I think I'm going to have to look elsewhere, to a European or UK publisher maybe.

N: That's frustrating!

N: Yeah. That's awful that it can affect sort of that sort of thing!

K: Yeah. At the same time though, I'm thinking, thank goodness I didn't try for a job in the U.S.! Because at one point when I was heading towards finishing my thesis, and the assistantship in Geneva was ending, I sort of had to think about what was going to be the smartest move. My husband had already gotten a tenured position as a teacher in Geneva and so that seemed to be the smartest move, you know, to head in a direction with job security. And maybe try to do some university and academic interests on the side.

"It's funny because I read the MUSE interview with Elvis Coimbra Gomes, they used to be one of my students actually."

That's one of the reasons I opted for 80%, so that I would be able to teach at university from time to time. But yeah, there was that question in the back of my mind – should I look for jobs in the U.S.? My husband had suggested applying because he loves going there. Oh, he's French by the way and we live in France. Of course, he wasn't telling me to apply in Nebraska! He was hoping for Hawaii, California, if I could find something in those areas. And I was just thinking, well, let me try to get the book published! And now I'm thinking it's just too crazy over there. I've heard a lot of people are leaving academia now.

S: Do you miss America much?

K: A little bit, yeah. Mm-hmm. Every time you go home, there's this idea of needing to "recharge the batteries." I'm sure you know how that feels. But there are things that drive me crazy when I go there.

S: For sure. Is there anything you prefer about living in France in comparison to living in America?

K: Yes. Not having to worry about school shootings, especially now that I have young children. I lost a university friend in a mass shooting actually. And I know two other people who were present at two other shootings.

S: I'm so sorry to hear about your friend, it's so unfortunate that this isn't an uncommon situation in America.

N: That's so awful to hear. I can see how France is more appealing to live with children from a safety perspective.

from the car companies so that it wouldn't go through, so people would just keep buying cars and building more freeways. And yeah, it didn't go through.

S: That's crazy.

N: So... what do you do for fun!

K: What do I do for fun?

S: Any hobbies?

K: As a working mom? Haha. Um, gosh. Well, I'm a dancer. I've done ballet dancing since I was five. I don't know if I should use the present tense because I don't do it very much anymore. I do more contemporary, a mix of contemporary, modern, and Pilates. It's a very hybrid sort of dance class that I take.

S: Is that like a bar class type thing?

K: Not even, no. I've had to give up ballet because of back problems. So it's a class that has more stretching and is better for the back. Otherwise, my husband is a singer, and I come from a family of singers as well, so there's music at home and sometimes I participate with him and we make music, yeah!

S: That's lovely!

K: I don't if there's anything else. It feels like I don't have time to read very much for pleasure, unfortunately, but I also enjoy cooking.

S: Yeah. Do you have a favourite spot in Lausanne to visit... or in Geneva?

K: Yeah, because I'm not in Lausanne very much. In Geneva, where do I like to go? Hmm.

S: Or France!

K: Let me think about that, hmm, my favourite places to go... Well, I do like the lake. Lovely. And actually, okay, Bains des Pâquis in Geneva. I really like to go there to have lunch, they have really nice fresh food there. Whenever we have visitors, that's the place I like to take them, I just think that the ambiance is

really cool and to go swimming there as well. But otherwise with my children, my two boys, we go to Annecy and swim there.

N: Yeah, swimming in the lake is what I'm really looking forward to in the summer. I'm really excited!

K: I know!

S: Yeah, it sounds gorgeous, I haven't swum in the lake yet so I'm really excited to when it gets warmer!

K: Yeah. It's really nice.

N: Although Christmas time here is lovely as well.

S: Yeah. So nice with the markets.

N: And then aside from French, do you speak any other languages?

K: No, I did take Spanish when I was a university student in California. At the time, I thought I was going to stay there and become a high school English teacher there. I was advised to learn Spanish, but it went away without practice.

N: I see.

S: Yeah, it's hard. Do you have any movie, song or book recommendations to conclude the interview?

K: Let's see. I'm trying to think of something that I've read lately that I've enjoyed. It's funny because I read the MUSE interview with Elvis Coimbra Gomes, they used to be one of my students actually. There was some question like that, and I remember thinking, I need to think of something in advance, but I forgot to! I do listen to a lot of audio books because I do a lot of driving. Okay, maybe there's some in my library that I've listened to.

N: Are they more for fun? Those ones?

K: There's a mixture. I started listening to *James* by Percival Everett. Ooh, I have one I could recommend. It's not like last year recent, but *Frankenstein*, it's a sort of contemporary take on *Frankenstein*. I think it's a British author, Jeanette Winterson and she has two timelines. She dramatizes the moment that Mary Shelley is writing the novel and then brings in this Victor Frankenstein-like character who's creating cyborg robots that people are buying. That part is narrated by a transgender doctor. Yeah, it's really, really interesting.

S: That sounds really good actually. Okay brilliant! Thank you so much. And thank you so much for doing the interview as well. We really appreciate it.

N: Yeah, thank you!

Kimberly giving a paper at the University of Geneva at the "Approaching Posthumanism and the Posthuman" conference she organised with some colleagues in 2015.



Library of Games

CREATED BY GIULIA MASSY

❖ Welcome to MUSE's games and quizzes ❖

This is where stories meet play; from guessing first lines to decoding book titles in emojis, this page is all about literature with a twist. Take a break, test your instincts, and have fun with words, characters, and everything between.



Bookish DNA : What's Your Vibe?

Find out what kind of story mirrors your soul.

1. **Which of these moods best matches your writing style?**
 - ♣. Brooding but romantic
 - ✿. Curious and symbolic
 - ★. Sharp and cynical
 - ♥. Quiet but intense
2. **What would you most likely obsess over while writing?**
 - ♣. Your characters' unspoken desires
 - ✿. The shape and rhythm of your sentences
 - ★. Whether your plot feels disturbingly plausible
 - ♥. The small moments that change everything
3. **Which sentence sounds like it could start your story?**
 - ♣. "There was something in the silence that felt ancient."
 - ✿. "She found it by accident, tucked between two worlds."
 - ★. "The warnings came too late, as they always do."
 - ♥. "It began with nothing remarkable, and ended the same."
4. **Your favorite metaphor would involve...**
 - ♣. Shadows, mirrors, or blood
 - ✿. Clocks, feathers, or dreams
 - ★. Glass, wires, or rust
 - ♥. Smoke, skin, or paper
5. **What kind of reader are you trying to reach?**
 - ♣. Someone who aches for beauty in the dark
 - ✿. Someone who still believes in wonder
 - ★. Someone who wants to question everything
 - ♥. Someone who lives in nuance

Mostly ♣'s Gothic Fiction

You are drawn to the flicker between beauty and ruin. Shadows feel like home, and your heart beats to the rhythm of storms and whispered secrets. Your story would rise like mist over the moors, echoing with the fierce passions of *Wuthering Heights*, the haunted nights of *Dracula*, and the tragic dreams stitched into *Frankenstein*.

Mostly ♡'s Fairytale/Fantasy

You move through life with wonder tucked behind your eyes. The impossible feels natural to you; magic hums beneath the ordinary. Your world would open like a door in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, stretch across distant hills like in *The Hobbit*, and shimmer with the timeless marvels of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Mostly ★'s Dystopian Fiction

You are a watcher of the world and a challenger of it too. You see the cracks others ignore, and your spirit bends toward truth and defiance. Your story would smolder in the ruins of broken cities, carrying the quiet resistance of *1984*, the chilling predictions of *Brave New World*, and the fierce hope of *The Hunger Games*.

Mostly ♥'s Literary Fiction

You find depth in stillness and poetry in the everyday. Your story would drift between drawing rooms and lonely roads, where love, ambition, and regret leave their indelible marks — just as they do in *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *To the Lighthouse*.



Once Upon a Sentence

Can you recognise a story from just its first line? Read each opening line carefully – behind a few simple words, an entire world waits. Guess the book that began it all. Answers at the end.

1. "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."
2. "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there."
3. "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal thank you very much."
4. "Call me Ishmael."
5. "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."
6. "Is a truth universally acknowledges, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."
7. "All children, except one, grow up."
8. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."



Emoji Bookshelf

A handful of symbols, a whole world of stories. Find the books hidden in these silent signs. Answers at the end.

1.				4.				
2.					5.			
3.								



Your Mentor, in the Margins

Who's guiding your pen from beyond the literary veil?

1. **What makes writing satisfying for you?**
 - ◆. Capturing a thought before it disappears
 - ❖. Pointing at a truth no one wants to see
 - ★. Conjuring a world that doesn't yet exist
 - ♥. Releasing what you feel but can't say aloud
2. **Which writing advice speaks to you most?**
 - ◆. Follow the mind's current and trust the drift
 - ❖. Write it like it's already banned
 - ★. Create a myth they'll live inside
 - ♥. Write with your wounds
3. **Pick a literary image that stays with you:**
 - ◆. A hallway of locked doors
 - ❖. A paper marked "confidential"
 - ★. A sword made of starlight
 - ♥. A bird trapped in a storm
4. **If your story were a place, what would it be?**
 - ◆. A flickering mirror
 - ❖. A room with no exits
 - ★. A forest that never ends
 - ♥. A cliffside under thunder
5. **When you get stuck writing, you...**
 - ◆. Write nonsense until something true appears
 - ❖. Scroll the news until a new fear emerges
 - ★. Go for a walk and imagine your world breathing
 - ♥. Dive into the feeling anyway

Mostly ♦'s Virginia Woolf

You are introspective, poetic, and deeply attuned to the inner workings of the human mind. Woolf would inspire you to experiment with stream-of-consciousness writing and explore the beauty of everyday life. Your writing style is fluid, reflective, and emotionally profound – perfect for capturing the fleeting nature of time and memory.

Mostly ❁'s George Orwell

You are a sharp observer of the world, unafraid to critique society and challenge the status quo. Orwell would push you to write with purpose, clarity, and conviction. Whether through dystopian fiction or political essays, your writing carries weight and meaning – just like *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

Mostly ★'s Emily Brontë

You are a passionate, deeply emotional writer with a love for gothic romance and intense storytelling. Emily Brontë would admire your ability to craft haunting, atmospheric tales filled with longing and obsession. She would encourage you to embrace your wild imagination and pour your heart into your writing.

Mostly ♥'s J.R.R. Tolkien

You are a born world-builder with a vivid imagination and a love for mythology. Tolkien would be your perfect mentor, teaching you how to weave epic tales filled with rich history, adventure, and deep themes. You thrive in stories of grand quests, unlikely heroes, and the eternal battle between good and evil.



Lines by Hand or Code?

Can you tell the voice of a real author from that of an AI? Each sentence below hides its true origin – guess wisely. Answers below.

1. “There are darknesses in life and there are lights, and you are one of the lights.”
2. “The stars have no memory, and that’s why they shine.”
3. “She wept like the rain weeps – not from grief, but from the weight of being.”
4. “I am rooted, but I flow.”
5. “Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.”
6. “Every mirror holds a different truth, and none of them are yours.”

Answers

Once Upon a Sentence	Emoji Bookshelf	Lines by Hand or Code?
1. <i>1984</i> – George Orwell 2. <i>The Go-Between</i> – L.P. Hartley 3. <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone</i> – J.K. Rowling 4. <i>Moby-Dick</i> – Herman Melville 5. <i>Anna Karenina</i> – Leo Tolstoy 6. <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> – Jane Austen 7. <i>Peter Pan</i> – J.M. Barrie 8. <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> – Charles Dickens	1. <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> – L. Frank Baum 2. <i>Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland</i> – Lewis Carroll 3. <i>Little Women</i> – Louisa May Alcott 4. <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> – Jane Austen 5. <i>The Queen’s Gambit</i> – Walter Tevis	1. <i>Dracula</i> – Bram Stoker 2. Artificial Intelligence 3. Artificial Intelligence 4. <i>The Waves</i> – Virginia Woolf 5. <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> – J.R.R. Tolkien 6. Artificial Intelligence



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Staff Confessions: Literary Edition

CREATED BY ROJDA KALINDAMAR

We asked the staff to confess their most questionable literary habits – no names attached, no reputations harmed. From unread masterpieces to opinions that could cause minor academic riots, they did not hold back. We'll keep their identities safe... unless, of course, you're good at guessing.

Anonymous 1: 🎭

Anonymous 2: 🛡

Anonymous 3: 🐈

Anonymous 4: 🎯*

Anonymous 5: 🧳

One book I pretended to read (but didn't): Be honest... we've all been there.

🎭 Proust's *Recherche* from beginning to end

🛡 *The Book of Mormon*

🦊 Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. A first year student came up to me after an ILA class, trembling with enthusiasm over Gibbon and I didn't have the heart to admit I hadn't read *Decline and Fall*. I think I just said, 'wow, that's impressive.'

🎯 I plead the fifth

🧳 Joyce's *Ulysses*

The hill I'll die on (literary edition): What's that one opinion you'll defend to your last breath?

 You must not discriminate on the ground of sex and sexuality, race, class, origin or physical difference.

 Samwise Gamgee is the true hero of Middle-earth.

 Reading Tolkien is not stupid (I have quite a few more if you want).

 Audiobooks aren't books.

 We need a different approach to our bodies: "My body, my choice" has terrible blind spots.

A literary opinion that might get me fired: Time to spill the hot takes.

 Run mad as often as you choose but do not faint.

 Out of all the stories about Sherlock Holmes, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the worst one.

 The fox in Ted Hughes's dream who told him that studying literature was killing him.

 Bad literature might have more cultural impact than good literature

 Gosh, I can't think of one ... does this institution care so much about literary opinions?

Where would you absolutely perish... Regency England? Pick your doom.

 The nineteenth century with its scientific definition of race and gender.

 The Middle Ages

 The future in which everybody hands in AI-generated essays, and people only talk on ZOOM, but mostly they exchange photos on TikTok (hopefully, there are other futures possible).

 The trenches of modernism wouldn't have been kind to me. Or anything before penicillin.

 Definitely not Regency England... Modernism in South Africa?



© Christian Lue | [Unsplash](#)

Tinder Tales: The Classic Edition

CREATED BY ANDREIA ABREU REMIGIO

Ever wondered what would happen if the authors we all study put down their quills and picked up Tinder? I tried to imagine what their profile bios would say, with a little twist on famous quotes. Tragic, romantic, maybe unhinged... Enjoy!

William S. Age 52

8 miles away

“To swipe left, or not to swipe left... that is the question”

- ♥ Bard by day, poet by night
- ♥ Looking for a young Juliet (iykyk)
- ♥ Fluent in iambic pentameter and the language of love ;)

Jane A. Age 40

12 miles away

“It isn’t what we say or think that defines us, but who we crush on”

- ♥ Sarcastic, witty, and independent
- ♥ If you ghost me, I shall turn you into a cautionary tale
- ♥ Darcy types only, no #Wickhams allowed

Virginia W. Age 59

4 miles away

"Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to Tinder."

- ♥ Swipe left if you're not a feminist
- ♥ Stream of consciousness included, no extra charge
- ♥ Dating me would be a modernist slay

Byron the Lord Age 36

15 miles away

"A mistress never is nor can be a friend."

- ♥ Poet. Rebel. Lover
- ♥ Swipe right and I'll take you on a trip to Switzerland
- ♥ If you like your romances dramatic and your poetry passionate, let's talk

Geoffrey C. Age 57

21 miles away

"Love is blind but I ain't"

- ♥ Storyteller, poet, and OG road trip buddy
- ♥ Fluent in Middle English (but I'll translate for you, babe)
- ♥ Let's pilgrimage to the best pubs together

Mary S. Age 53

6 miles away

"Looking for someone to bring my love life back to life."

- ♥ Into some weird kinks
- ♥ Dark academia is my only vibe
- ♥ If you're emotionally unavailable, at least be interestingly tragic

Edgar P. Age 40

3 miles away

"Nevermore will I swipe left for true love."

- ♥ Poet and ornithologist
- ♥ I'm broke but I'll write you love letters
- ♥ Let's make each other's hearts beat *a little too loud*

Oscar W. Age 46

9 miles away

"To match is the rarest thing in the world. Most people swipe, that is all."

- ♥ Witty and charming <3
- ♥ #Fashionista
- ♥ Looking for someone who appreciates the finer (and funnier) things in life

Emily D. Age 55

5 miles away

"The soul should always swipe right, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience"

- ♥ Looking for a long-distance relationship
- ♥ Might write you a love poem, might just ghost you (literally)
- ♥ Let's overanalyze everything

And one last special profile... The man who assigned several texts published in this issue...

Douglas K. Age 70

0 miles away

"Love is a battlefield, and sometimes we get wounded in the process"

- ♥ Don't even bother if you're not going to write me 500 words everyday
- ♥ I occasionally cosplay as a 9-year-old autistic French girl. It's not what you think
- ♥ My only ick is when people share my secrets

AITA: Classical Literature Edition

CREATED BY CINDY ZHANG

Welcome to Guess the AITA!

The principle is very simple: the plots of various English novels and plays have been turned into AITA posts. What is AITA, you may ask? AITA, or Am I The Asshole, is a Reddit online community where people can come and ask if what they did is wrong. The other members of the community then judge them and either decide they are not the asshole (NTA), the opposite "you're the asshole" (YTA) or "everyone sucks here" (ESH). Now, this game reimagines classic English stories into this format, and your task is to figure out which ones are featured here. Ready? Set... Go!

Also: warning for spoilers ahead!

1. AITA after upsetting my uncle?

skull-holder posted:

My father, H, died recently. My uncle, C, took the throne and married my widowed mother, which I find despicable, especially so soon after the funerals. I also believe he murdered my father. In order to find proof, I pretended to be mad. Later, two of my friends, whom I suspect to have become spies for my uncle, mentioned a theater group coming to the palace. It inspired me to commission a play reenacting the murder of my father. My uncle immediately ran off after witnessing it, so he's clearly guilty. However, my mother got mad at me for upsetting my uncle. We got in a fight; I ended up killing the king's counselor who was hiding behind a curtain and trying to protect her. I am starting to doubt my plans and desire for vengeance, so I am asking here if I am the a-hole in this situation.

Comments:

Thatannoyingpeasant: NTA. Justice needs to be served! Death to the King!!!!!!

Illuminations808: I feel like ESH to some level. Your family is all kinds of messed up. You should leave for a while to cool your head and think your ideas through without being in the middle of all the drama.

2. AITA for refusing to marry?

Somebodytolove! posted:

I met Mr. F.D at a ball some time ago. I find him quite snobbish and mean, but I try to keep everything civil between us, even if he has wronged another good man I know, Mr. G.W. Mr. F.D was friends with Mr. C.B, who was supposed to marry my sister. But after C.B went on a business trip with his sisters and F.D, my sister received a letter saying that C.B will not return to our hometown and that he is going to marry someone else. This crushed my sister, and I have strong suspicions that F.D and one of C.B's sisters have pushed him to cancel the wedding. Later, F.D came to visit and proposed to me. I immediately refused, calling him rude and a bad person for contributing to the cancellation of my sister's wedding and ruining G.W. He left, but the next day, he gave me a letter explaining his point of view. So now I am doubting myself and my judgment. AITA?

Comments:

silkyrobes: NTA. It is completely fine to refuse a wedding proposal, especially if you don't get along with F.D. It would be a recipe for disaster if you did!

Catlover4: After reading your updates in the comments, I'd say everyone kinda suck here. For you personally, it seems you've had biases and prejudices that altered your judgment.

3. I do not like the holidays, and I wonder if it makes me an a-hole.

Justanoldhardworkingguy posted:

I do not like Christmas. People stop working at that time and still expect to get paid. I was asked to donate to the poor to make them "merry" when we have structures for them working just fine. It is also during Christmas Eve that my coworker died, bringing unpleasant memories. But lately, I've been seeing ghosts? First, my dead coworker warned me to talk to people and share time with them. Then the ghost of an old man showed me my early life, like my childhood and the first time I worked. After that, a fat ghost let me hear people I know who still wish me Merry Christmas while I wasn't there, and a ghost in black clothes showed me what would happen after I die if I kept my current attitude. I'm starting to wonder if I am the bad person here.

Comments:

Isthatthegrimreaper?!!?!: NTA for disliking the holidays but YTA for not donating. Helping your community, especially the less fortunate, is always a good thing to do. It strengthens the society.

4. I got upset at my wife, AITA?

Oneguyfromvenice posted:

So, I recently married my wife. My lieutenant, C, recently attacked and injured two men while drunk. I had to remove his title. Ever since that incident, he has tried to win back his position, and he's been using my wife to get in my good graces. My friend IA even fears something is going on between them. I never had doubts about my wife being unfaithful; she's always been a great, loyal woman. But IA has noticed C using D's handkerchief that I gifted to her in our early days. Enraged, I confronted her. I first asked her to hand me the handkerchief. But she couldn't find it. It set me off badly that she gave away my gift, which belonged to my mother. I yelled at her and stormed off. I do feel bad about my actions, wondering if I made a mistake and the situation isn't what it seemed like. AITA?

Comments:

User10297: NTA. You REALLY should listen to your pal IA; he seems to have a good head on his shoulders.

User4778: You're not the A, and IA did bring really strong evidence that your wife is cheating. I'd listen to that guy carefully.

5. AITA for not liking someone?

Matchmaking101 posted:

Recently, I met Miss J.F, a young orphan woman. I do not like her cold attitude and I have suspicions that she has a relationship with Mr. D, my friend's husband. My suspicions grew when a mysterious admirer gifted J.F a piano, and she later received letters from an anonymous person that might be Mr. D. But my brother-in-law, Mr. J.K, is defending her, saying I should help her not become a governess because of her poverty. He also affirms J.F is interested in someone else, not Mr. D. Things escalated during a picnic, where Mr. J.K called

me out for being mean not only to J.F but her family too, especially Miss. B. I feel conflicted and guilty, wondering if I am the A and what to do next.

Comments:

Ilovemydog: YTA. J.F didn't harm you directly, right? And you only have suspicions about this love affair, not solid proof.

Check-my-music-out: Based on your replies in the comments: yeah, you're kind of TA.

6. ALTA for running away from my wedding?

idonotlikemycousins posted:

I worked at Mr. E.R residence for a while as a governess teaching Miss A.V, E. R's ward. I've slowly fallen in love with him, despite the mysteries surrounding him. However, I've kept this a secret. Then one day, E.R proposed to me, turning down an extremely beautiful socialite for me. I accepted his proposal. But at our wedding ceremony, his biggest secret came to light: E.R was already married to B.M, a woman from Jamaica. B. M's brother is the one who came forward about this secret, forcing E.R to show everyone he has been hiding B.M on the third floor of his house. Horrified, I ran away. Now, I still have feelings for E.R. But I am extremely shocked about what happened that day, and I don't know what to do.

Comments:

Usero9780: NTA, he hid an entire FIRST WIFE in his house! How can you still go along with the wedding in that case?

7. Am I the A for wanting to burn down my husband's house?

My husband has put me through a lot. Our marriage started great, but he quickly grew cold and distant. He clearly despised the people attending to me, like my nurse C, yet I heard him sleep with one of them. Then he started using the wrong name to call me and forced me to leave Jamaica. In the end, he locked me up in one of his mansions for God knows how long, and I don't even know where I am. Lately, I've been dreaming of setting the house on fire when I sleep. I feel more and more tempted to make that dream a reality... but would that make the A?

Comments:

You are too early for comments, check later!

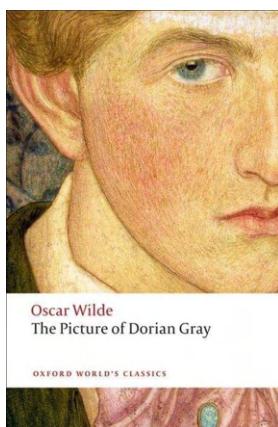
Answers

1. *Hamlet* by Shakespeare
2. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
3. *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens
4. *Othello* by Shakespeare
5. *Emma* by Jane Austen
6. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë
7. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys

Would you read these?

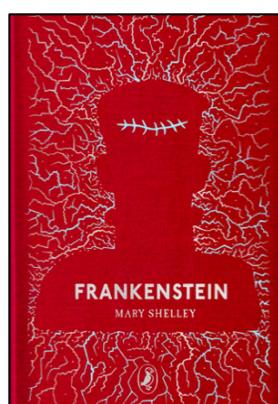
CREATED BY LYDIE ROY

There's this old adage we all know and are tired of hearing that says "not to judge a book by its cover," although it is rarely actually applied to books. However, in libraries and bookshops, who hasn't decided on whether to purchase or not a story, based on the appeal of its title? And what would happen if some of the most well-known books had completely different names that aligned to modern tactics of marketing? We gave some of the most beloved English literature classics "clickbait" titles to experiment...



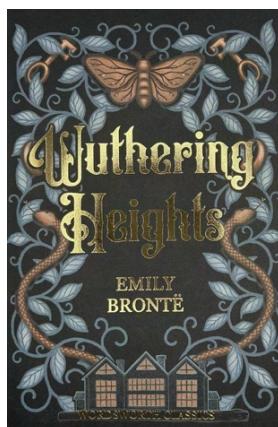
1. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde

Man finds unexpected secret against ageing; doctors hate him! Discover it for yourself.



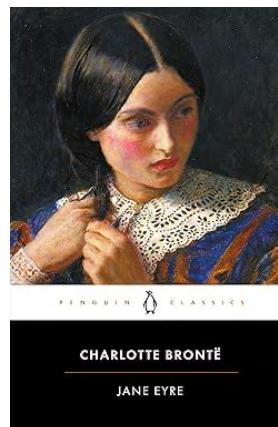
2. *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley

When people assume you're the monster but you're not: "everybody calls me by my father's name and I'm pissed."



3. *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë

Twin flames getting together ends in haunting nightmares: the risks of meeting your other half.

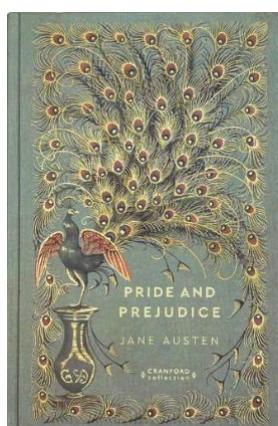


4. *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë

Man locks up his wife in the attic for years, is surprised when left at the altar by new girlfriend.

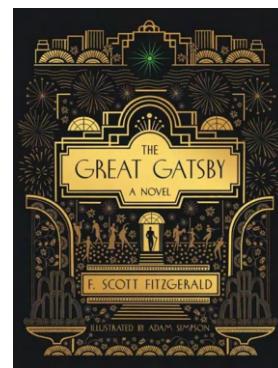
or

The true story behind his "crazy ex" that he doesn't want you to know.



5. *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen

How NOT to propose to the love of your life, including mentioning the inferiority of her birth, and a recipe for the most EXCELLENT boiled potatoes you'll ever see.



6. *The Great Gatsby*, Scott Fitzgerald

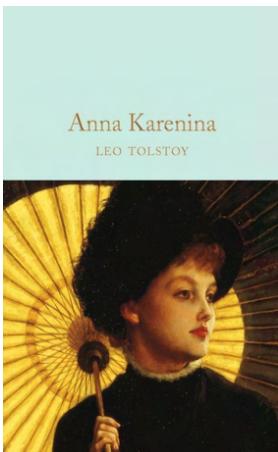
Man spends his whole life and fortune trying to get his ex back only to get dumped and die in a pool; don't repeat his mistakes!

7. *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Feeling tired? Doctor discovers new side-effects of fatigue: seeing people in your wallpaper.

8. *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy

Russian high society ruined these people's lives! Here's how to find purpose in hay fields and faith instead.

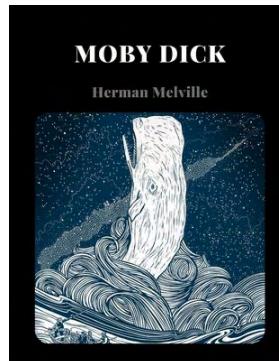


9. *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, Edgar Allan Poe

10 reasons why trying to bring someone back to life is a terrible idea, from a scientific p.o.v.

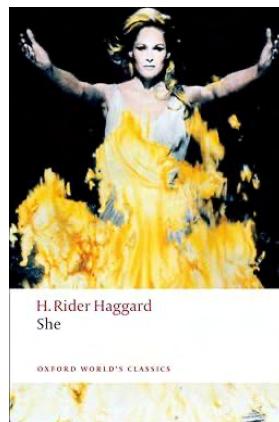
10. *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville

The origin of American men's obsession with big fish is not at all what you would expect!



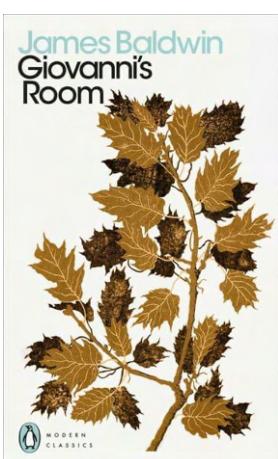
11. *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson

The simple trick to living life fully and becoming all the people you want to be.



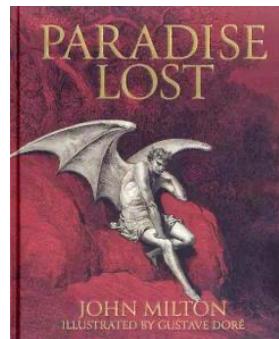
12. *Giovanni's Room*, James Baldwin

Step-by-step tutorial on how to get rid of your homophobic boss.



13. *She*, Henry Rider Haggard

Is matriarchy too dangerous for society? A group of hetero-cis men discuss the issue.



14. *Metamorphoses*, Ovid

You could be drinking your ancestors' blood by eating berries: discover how that happened.

15. *Paradise Lost*, John Milton

Changes in temperatures might not be humans' fault; the mystic origins of seasons.

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Sup La ass alir

There were several roads nearby, but it did not take her long to find the one paved with yellow bricks. Within a short time she was walking briskly toward the Emerald City, her silver shoes tinkling merrily on the hard, yellow road-bed. The sun shone bright and the birds sang sweetly, and Dorothy did not feel nearly so bad as you might think a little girl would who had been suddenly whisked away from her own country and set down in the midst of a strange land.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum