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# KOLORO

MOMENTS DE BEING

Moments de Being

**KOLORO · N°1**



## SOMMAIRE

<b>Remerciements &amp; Présentation</b>	6
<b>Tenacity • La force</b>	
<i>J'exagère</i> , by L. S.	10
<i>An Angel's Head</i> , by Jérôme Goulet	13
<i>SHE</i> , by Elayna Hébert	14
<i>Glass</i> , by Darcy	16
<i>Eternals</i> , by Samael Beaulieu	18
<i>I Wish I Was Fictional</i> , by Aleks Nadeau-Lachance	20
<b>Adversity • L'épreuve</b>	
<i>Cadenza</i> , by E. L.	26
<i>Food for Poetry</i> , by Béatrice Marissal	28
<i>Losing Track of Friends</i> , by Boo	30
<i>I'm Sorry</i> , by Rosalie Trépanier	32
<i>The Void</i> , by Maya Ruel	34
<i>The Apocalypse</i> , by Roxanne Landry	36
<b>Bonds • La solidarité</b>	
<i>Between Two Thoughts</i> , by Tara	40
<i>Loneliness and Other Beautiful Things</i> , by Darcy	42
<i>I am Free</i> , by Charlotte Fontaine	45
<i>Tour de char</i> , by River Berrymore	46
<b>Bibliographie</b>	51



It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art.

— **Virginia Woolf**

Storytelling brings family together. It brings students together. It is shared experience that helps us see and understand each other. It is time well spent in the teaching of writing.

— **Penny Kittle**

The moment when you really express your innermost thoughts and experiences in a second language is a powerful one, and one that can qualitatively change a student's perception of the new language that they are using. It is the point at which a second language ceases to be a tool and becomes a personal resource and an 'owned' language.

— **David Hanauer**

## REMERCIEMENTS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Koloro, Moments de Being*, a new literary journal aimed at celebrating multilingual writing. You hold in your hands a project that I have been dreaming of for years. I am immensely grateful to Sophie Brosseau and Martine Lampron for their enthusiasm and support for this project, and to Alexandre Piché for inspiring me and sharing a passion for the power of creative writing. This issue is a testament to the joy of infusing creative writing into language teaching, as evidenced by the enthusiasm of my colleague Elizabeth Plaxton, who just happened to be writing blackout poems with her students at the time I was putting together this issue. Finally, above all, *Moments de Being* is a demonstration of the hard work of my students at CVM over the past six years as I refined the personal narrative unit. I would not be here without their passion for learning, nor their willingness to take risks in the classroom.

## PRÉSENTATION

This collection contains two forms of creative writing, implemented in two different language classrooms: personal narrative and blackout poetry. Personal narratives are non-fiction stories written based on memories and experiences. Over a period of six weeks, students are guided through a series of process-focused writing exercises before revising and editing a final three-scene narrative. Blackout poems are a contemporary style of found poetry, created by blacking out sentences, words, or letters from an original written source such as a page from a book or newspaper. The poem that emerges from this process is composed of the surviving words of the original text and read in sequence.

The title for this issue, *Moments de Being*, was chosen to reflect the ethos of *Koloro* and this collection of writing for two reasons. First, Virginia Woolf's concept of "moments of being" was a main source of inspiration for the personal narrative unit and can also reveal why poetry can move us so deeply. Woolf distinguishes between neutral moments of non-being, which characterize our unconscious movement through much (or all) of each day, and rarer moments of being, in which we become acutely aware of our own existence and the connections

between everything around us. She describes these moments as a shock, sometimes terrifying and other times grounding. As I read through these stories and poems, I find that I am indeed transported to true moments of being, where the smallest incident takes on great meaning and reminds us of what it is to be alive. The works are grouped into three themes through which we often experience aliveness: Tenacity, Adversity, and Bonds.

Secondly, the title is translanguaged, i.e. mixes French and English, to highlight three effects of molding the written word through creative writing: strengthening overall language skills, developing a sense of agency over language, and challenging our assumptions about correct language use. In both the personal narratives and the blackout poems, students were motivated to find precise and vivid expressions, play with conventions, and perfect grammar to illuminate intended meaning. Playing with language also allows students to assert agency over their languages. For example, the blackout poems are completely redesigned texts in the form of poetry that takes on a different meaning from the initial document. Finally, because the authors in this collection are all bi/multilingual, publishing their writing valorizes their status as authentic language users and challenges (sometimes exclusionary) definitions of who can and cannot claim to be bi/multilingual. Some of the personal narratives even employ translanguaging as a literary device. As you read, you may be pleasantly surprised by the whimsical and inviting effects created by these multilingual authors.

On behalf of my colleague Elizabeth Plaxton and the students who made this project possible, I hope that the stories and poems published here will inspire readers to reflect on their own moments de being and embrace playful languaging.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Bienvenue au numéro inaugural de Koloro, Moments de Being, une nouvelle revue littéraire visant à célébrer l'écriture multilingue. Vous tenez entre vos mains un projet dont je rêvais depuis des années. Je suis infiniment reconnaissante à Sophie Brosseau et à Martine Lampron pour leur enthousiasme et leur soutien à ce projet, ainsi qu'à Alexandre Piché pour m'avoir inspirée et partagé une passion pour le pouvoir de la création littéraire. Ce numéro met en valeur la joie d'intégrer la création littéraire dans l'enseignement des langues, comme en témoigne l'enthousiasme de ma collègue Elizabeth Plaxton, qui était justement en train d'écrire des poèmes blackout avec ses élèves au moment où je préparais ce numéro. Enfin, par-dessus tout, Moments de Being est une démonstration du travail acharné de mes étudiantes et étudiants du CVM au cours des six dernières années, alors que je peaufinais ce projet de récits personnels. Je ne serais pas ici sans leur passion pour l'apprentissage ou sans leur volonté de prendre des risques en classe.*

## INTRODUCTION

*Ce recueil contient deux formes de textes issus de projets mis en œuvre dans deux classes de langues différentes : le récit personnel et la poésie blackout (blackout poetry). Les récits personnels sont des histoires non romanesques écrites à partir de souvenirs et d'expériences. Pendant six semaines, les étudiantes et étudiants sont accompagnés dans une série d'exercices d'écriture axés sur le processus, avant de réviser et d'éditer un récit final en trois scènes. Le poème blackout est un genre contemporain de poésie trouvée, créé en noircissant des phrases, des mots ou des lettres d'une source écrite originale, comme une page de livre ou de journal. Le poème qui émerge de ce processus est composé des mots survivants du texte original qui sont lus en séquence.*

*Le titre de ce numéro, Moments de Being, a été choisi pour refléter la philosophie de Koloro pour deux raisons. Tout d'abord, le concept de « moments d'être » de Virginia Woolf a été une source d'inspiration majeure pour le projet de récits personnels et révèle également pourquoi la poésie peut nous toucher si profondément. Woolf fait la distinction entre les moments neutres de non-être, qui caractérisent notre mouvement inconscient pendant*

*une grande partie (ou la totalité) de chaque journée, et les moments plus rares d'être, durant lesquels nous prenons conscience de manière aiguë de notre propre existence et des liens entre tout ce qui nous entoure. Elle décrit ces moments comme un choc, parfois terrifiant, parfois enracinant. En lisant ces histoires et ces poèmes, je trouve que je suis effectivement transportée dans de véritables moments d'être, où le plus petit incident prend une grande signification et nous rappelle ce en quoi consiste le fait d'être vivant. Les œuvres sont regroupées en trois thèmes à travers lesquels on retrouve souvent la vie : la force, l'épreuve et la solidarité.*

*Ensuite, le titre est translangué, c'est-à-dire qu'il mélange le français et l'anglais, pour souligner trois retombées de la création littéraire : le renforcement des compétences linguistiques générales, le développement d'un sentiment d'autonomie par rapport à la langue et la remise en question de nos présupposés sur l'utilisation correcte de la langue. Tant dans les récits personnels que dans les poèmes, les étudiantes et étudiants ont été encouragés à trouver des expressions précises et vivantes, à jouer avec les conventions et à perfectionner leur grammaire pour éclairer le sens voulu. Le fait de jouer avec la langue leur a permis également de s'approprier leur langue. Par exemple, les poèmes blackout sont des textes entièrement remaniés qui prennent un nouveau sens par rapport au document initial. De plus, comme les auteurs de ce recueil sont tous bi/multilingues, la publication de leurs œuvres valorise leur statut de locuteurs authentiques et remet en question les définitions (parfois exclusives) de qui peut et ne peut pas se déclarer bi/multilingue. Certains de leurs textes personnels utilisent même le translangage comme un procédé littéraire. En lisant, vous serez peut-être agréablement surpris par les effets ludiques de ces textes et leur caractère accueillant.*

*Au nom de ma collègue Elizabeth Plaxton et des étudiantes et étudiants qui ont rendu possible ce projet, j'espère que les récits et poèmes publiés ici inciteront les lectrices et lecteurs à méditer sur leurs propres « moments de being » et à explorer le langage ludique.*

— April Passi



**Tenacity · La force**

## J'EXAGÈRE | L.S.

"Loris."

My eyes open at the same time my mind wakes.

My mom is in the doorway of my room. It's half opened like she's there to say something quickly, but she's coolly leaning on the frame to show she's in control while I'm still half-asleep. I turn my head toward the white stucco ceiling, and I pinch the bridge of my nose, pressing into my eyes. My stomach tightens, like a hug, but a threatening one.

"Je vois beaucoup de signes."

*Fuck*, my belly tells me by squeezing harder. It's right: saying *Je* instead of *J'* shows that mom has rehearsed this. She's referring to symptoms of an illness I haven't relapsed into in over a year. She's still so stressed out about it, sometimes I fear I'll have a nervous breakdown just worrying about her anxiety.

"Je peux pas t'aider," she continues. "Je veux que t'ailles chez Martin." *Martin*, not *papa* nor *ton père*. "J'vais faire du kayak aujourd'hui. Faut que tu partes. Que tu ranges ta chambre et que tu laves le micro-ondes, aussi."

The bed covers are pushing me into the mattress, and I'm numbing from the inside out like my stomach is a black hole making my body collapse onto itself. "Okay," I try to make her hear, but I think a breeze covers my voice. I could go after her, but to say what? And in what shape? Talking to her with a sleepy mind could be more insulting than helpful.

I feel the door closing as if I'm the frame. My arms and head suffer the blow, but the rest of me is empty; the black hole is unperturbed. I let sleep knock me back out.

•

Hours later, while I'm mentally readying myself to walk through the front door, my belly's still haunting me, and I feel a grey shawl floating around me with the physical and psychological weight of Death's Invisibility Cloak.

An exaggeration, of course.

Exaggerating gives one the ability to say 'J'exagère' and then pretend everything's fine, actually. You should try. In all the languages you know, and some you invent, because the more you say something, the more real it becomes. Ça devient plus vrai. Diventa più vero. Es más... idk, ms c plus frl. Enondalksndl. 201U`Y z2Δ\*†GM

So, this can't be happening. J'exagère. I don't lift my bag, and it doesn't pull me down as if my things refuse to leave home. I don't go out, don't close the door and don't struggle with the key. It hadn't become hard to use a few days ago as if it foresaw this and wanted to discourage me from sleeping in my own bed. It doesn't turn, eventually, and I don't walk away on the path to the subway I take every

day with my not unusually heavy backpack. None of this is real. J'exagère.

I get my book out and start read-walking, stroking the thick, slightly textured pages for reassurance, but Laurier station crops up in front of my feet so damn fast, all grey and stern. I push the old turning doors; they push me back as they always do. An LED screen is showing the time of departure of the buses, but I turn towards the stone staircase like it's a normal school morning.

It's not. I'm going to my sister's place to stay there for a couple of days, then maybe to my friend's, then to my dad's, then...

My stomach keeps twisting like I'm reused Ikea furniture and it's the final screw. None of this is real.

•

I've been healthy for over a year, but it had to get very bad before it got better:

Imagine being constantly both unimpressed and yet dumbfounded. You expect to fail, but never get strong enough to let it slide over you like water off a duck's back.

You're not a fucking duck. The tide washes over your head, fills your chest with such pain that you forget you ever knew how to swim, the fluid flows through your useless fingers, letting you fall deeper and deeper into the abyss until your surroundings aren't just dark, they're lightless, and your body dissolves, becomes one with the ocean.

Then, your peripheral vision catches a far away lantern, faded by the distance.

Closer.

Closer it comes.

Its dim green taints the current, swallows it. Your diffused mind focuses.

As the distance between you and it lessens, behind the light, a tooth appears.

And another, and another...

Long.

Sharp.

Tearing the universe inexorably swirling into the jaws.

Globular, fiery eyes capture your gaze.

It's a trap.

A trap into which I fell.

•

I've subjugated my eyes to my computer's blue light for too long, and now they prickle. Fatigue pulls down my spine and shoulders, and my breathing has

the rhythm of a sleeping baby's. I have to stop looking for rooms to rent, it's late and school starts at eight tomorrow.

Practically no light is coming through the curtainless window of my sister's office, but the sounds of Jacques-Cartier bridge vaguely resonate in the apartment. I close Facebook Marketplace, put my laptop away in my bag and carefully lean on the futon. The mattress is so thin, it feels like I'm directly on the wooden bars. I curl into myself. It's better that way. The sheets don't do much against the autumn cold, but it's fine: they've been laid out with love, for me specifically, and that's enough to make any arrangement comfortable.

"Stay here as long as you want," my sister had said when I arrived. "I hope this is okay. I love you."

My eyes close and, peacefully, I let my spirit drift outside of me. I know it'll go far tonight, be warmed by the star-filled sky, meet prayers, join the other loved souls of this city. It'll come back to me in the morning to murmur courage and inspiration into my ears. To show me that in order to be loved, I only need myself.

## AN ANGEL'S HEAD | Jérôme Goulet

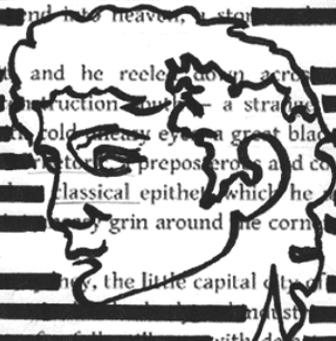
I carve with a chisel,  
To wreak cold stone,  
And carve an angel's head.  
For stone

I carve with a chisel,  
To wreak cold stone,  
And carve an angel's head.  
For stone  
To become man,  
An Angel's head,  
The dove, the lamb,  
Smooth marble,  
And all the years of waste,  
Riotous years.

to ← become man

an angel's  
head. The dove, the lamb, the smooth marble  
, and all the years of waste  
rioting years

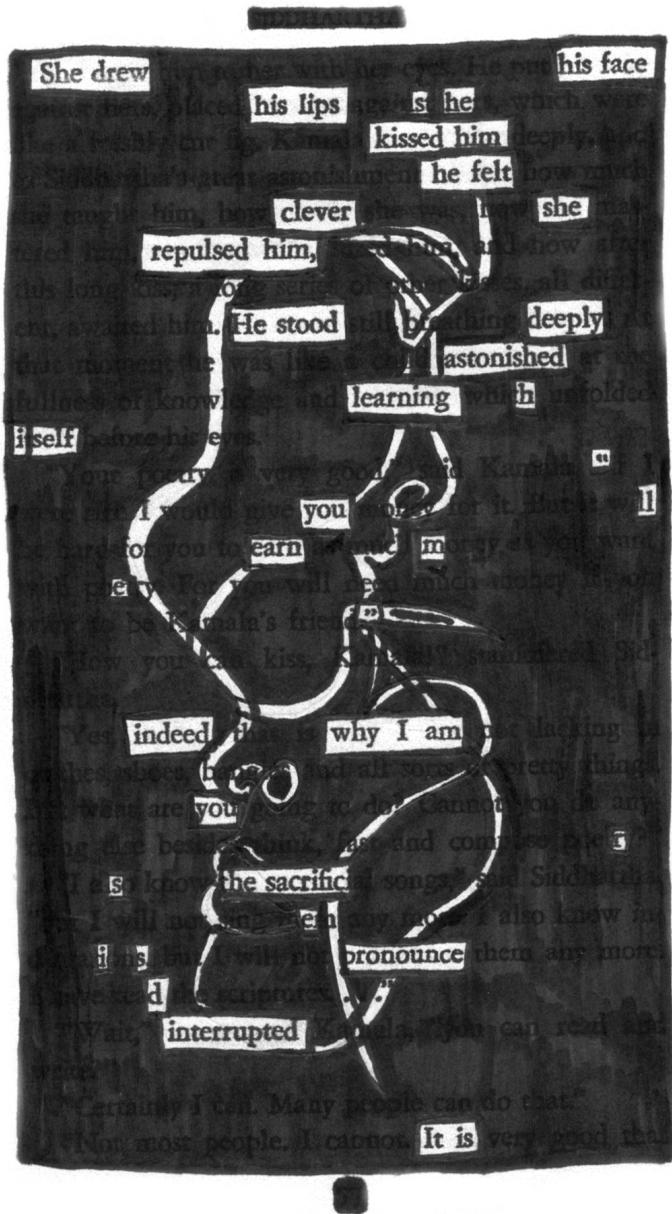
and he reels down across  
instruction - a strange  
cold, weary eye, a great black  
reticent, preposterous and co  
classical epithet which he  
grin around the corn



ny, the little capital city of  
must  
with deve

SHE | **Elayna Hébert**

She drew his face, his lips.  
She kissed him.  
He felt clever...  
She repulsed him!  
He stood deeply astonished, learning his self.  
"You'll earn me."  
Indeed, why am I yours?  
The sacrifice is pronounced.  
Interrupted, it is.



SHE | ELAYNA HEBERT

GLASS | **Darcy**

Stop treating me  
Like a child or a  
Fragile piece of glass

smash

shred

I've been torn  
To shreds a

Thousand hundred times

glass

And I never thought  
Of putting myself  
Back together

soul

Break

So why should you  
Break me again  
Smash the rest of my soul

Because when  
I look at you  
I can predict my own suffering

And I am both terrified  
And entranced  
By your beauty

pain

smash

Stop treating me like glass  
I am not fragile  
I am just broken

fear

I've survived internal storms  
And emotional earthquakes  
Yet you underestimate me I've stopped fearing pain  
Because as long as I feel

I remember I'm alive

So please, I am begging  
Don't infantilize me  
Don't walk on eggs for me

head

please

walk

A day in my life  
Is a year in my head  
So walk a mile

heart

Before you shelter me  
And make me forget  
The faults of life

to

forget

I want to live them all  
Both good and bad  
Flood my heart and soul

It is harder to shatter  
Shards of glass

mirror

Than a polished mirror

deep

Try me and I swear  
That you will end with  
A deep cut in your hand

cut

bad

figure among the four surviving pious donations of Roman churches for republican models, always in strict style.

Yet all the great men (some might say not even Raimondo had the taste, and how increased their vast fortunes by buying up entire Roman buildings and transformed them into choice locations for their Museum stood almost a block from the street from a landmark since Rome: the suburban great merchant banker Agostino Chigi had by Raphael's statues and frescoes by Bramante, but time soon wore down the marble and the design.

Marble is a hard material, and one of the exhibition's highlights is a large sword, a relic of the current exhibition.

There are no easy solutions to the problems posed by a long history. When hundreds of thousands of people have been touched by the sword, the marble itself has varied and one of the exhibition's highlights is a large sword, a relic of the current exhibition.

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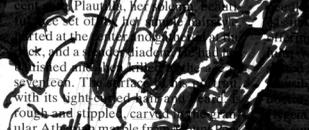
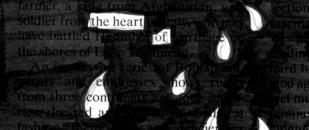
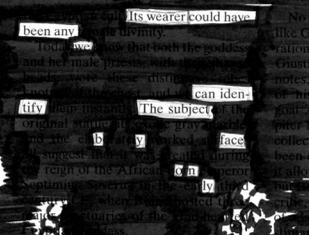
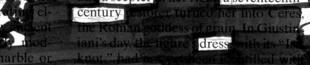
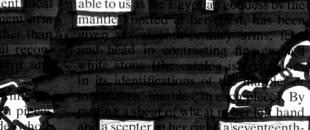
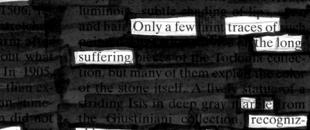
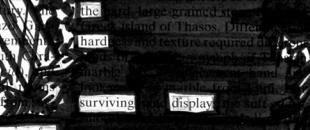
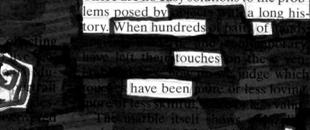
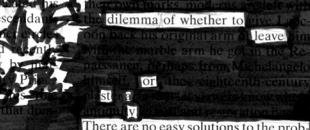
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Its wearer could have been any of the gods. The subject is a face, a face that has been weather-beaten and treated with severity. The subject is a face, a face that has been weather-beaten and treated with severity.

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Such later, relief in Pen... comes from the Torlonia

## ETERNALS | **Samael Beaulieu**

Few survive for millenia.  
The Eternals are left a majestic wreck,  
A persistent legend of yesterday.  
They face the dilemma of whether to leave or stay,  
There are no easy solutions  
To the problems posed by a long history.  
When hundreds of touches have been lost to time,  
The Hard Surviving display deep carvings  
Like that of a marble statue  
Only a few traces of the Long Suffering are recognizable to us.  
A mantle, a scepter, a seventeenth-century dress,  
Its wearer could have been any.  
We can identify the subject by face only.  
Ancient faces seem weather-beaten,  
Yet sensitive to whom is treated with severity.  
They reflect, beneath, the heart of old.

## I WISH I WAS FICTIONAL | Aleks Nadeau-Lachance

I wish my life was fictional. I wish I could paint it like I paint my canvas or play it like I play my piano. I wish I could find a better childhood or a better memory. I wish my tears would make me prettier. I wish my scars would make me look stronger. Sometimes, I'd love to live my life as a movie, because my life would look like a dramatic masterpiece instead of a depressing trip. But I'm just me, and I have only myself to talk about.

I took refuge in poetry when I was too young to know how sad I was. I could've written about fairies or soldiers, but my head was filled with an opaque color. A color so vivid that it hurts your eyes, so bright that it swallows the sun without liking the taste of it. How can you create an imaginary friend if you don't even know what a friend is? I would just cover my papers with sad words, pretending they would say pretty things back to me. I only knew that one color, so I didn't know what else to write about. It is hard, you know, because I wish I could talk about my childhood. It always seemed like this effortless period where you worry about how many friends you have or what mama's going to cook for dinner. Unfortunately for me, my head had to tell me it was not worth keeping the memories. If I try my hardest, I can see a blurry image of a house, or a dog, or a playground. It's not even a full memory, a full act; it's just like an image taken by an old iPhone where we can count the pixels. A still image without any sound or taste or even colors. A black and white movie where the director gave up after the very first seconds of recording. We could hear the cameras rolling and see the red dots flashing. The crew would be almost out of breath, courtesy of the stress perhaps, too excited to keep both feet on the ground. Then the director would just throw the script on the set, sigh, and then ask everyone if they want the whole year off. That's it, that's my childhood: a movie with a broke director, too tired to feed the industry with his beloved money.

•

What's so sad about not having any memories of your childhood, is how people react when you tell them. I told my mom not so long ago, and I wish I hadn't.

"Your childhood is like the columns that keep you grounded," she said, hitting every word like it was a struggle.

Well mom, I'm sorry but it seems like I have none.

I knew she wanted to think I was lying. I knew because her eyes told me, full of tears,

almost begging me to admit it was a joke. I heard her words getting stuck in her throat after saying that, after looking at me as if I just told her I murdered our dog.

My parents didn't really acknowledge how in need of help I was at the time. They would just blame my behavior on teenage years, as if every teenager is prone to having depression of some sort. I should have told them that I've always felt like I was a stranger in my own story. I was this unknown man walking in the background of the main scene. No one really bothered to flesh out his story, or his name, or his shape. Just a faceless background character, wearing black from head to toe, probably edited out of the scene at the end of the day.

I guess communication isn't really my thing, since talking about myself makes me feel like I'm actually existing, breathing, crying.

What's so nice about depression is that you really don't care about what others think of you. You're just stuck in your head, pitch black, where you're too exhausted to find the hidden bright tunnel leading to a future filled with colorful flowers and singing pigeons. That's just my personal opinion though. Plus, I don't think singing pigeons would be a good addition to my world. They would be kind of scary.

When I talk about my depression, the unanimity of the receivers of that information tell me that I should see a professional. Yes, indeed, and I am. Professionals are meant to "cure" depression and other mental illnesses. I mean, it's their job, right? I just don't get the whole "Tell-me-everything-and-I'll-prescribe-you-magic-pills" thing. As if happiness comes in a closed tube, sometimes colorful, sometimes not. Just a small thing that fits on the top of your pinky. Just a tasteless pill that makes you sick for a month before congratulating you with a lack of emotions and reactions.

Just a pill.

It's just a pill.

Pilled happiness.

Drugged happiness.

I wish my life was fictional. I could just rewrite it so that it sounds pretty. I could just change my story so that it's easy to read. I wish I could say sorry to my mom.

I wish I could say sorry that she had to sleep on a chair next to me in a bright ugly yellow room. I wish I could say sorry for not liking singing pigeons. I wish I could say sorry for not being able to be fictional. I wish so many things, but they're just wishes. I know I'm not capable enough to make a difference, not even in my own life.

•

I'm only able to talk about my struggles because it has become a habit. I was blindly forced to talk about the worst things in my life over and over again, so now, every time I talk about it, my numbness becomes bigger, stronger, heavier. Who could have thought that being numb was so exhausting? I feel like I'm saying the same word repetitively until it sounds unfamiliar or weird. My story, my life, my word... It's all becoming a grey storm, unable to move or to create a disaster. A silent storm where I'm supposed to be in the middle of it, watching all my colors hit each other. Sadly, my story is now in your hands. I'll watch you take away my mute storm, my single word, my distant life, hoping it'll be useful to someone, anyone.

When I said it was a depressing trip, I meant it.





**Adversity · L'épreuve**

## CADENZA | E. L.

As I walk in the room, I want to melt into the floor. I want to hide. There is no more excitement now that the stress has filled my entire mind and the room around me. I can almost smell them, the stress and the fear. It seems like every step brings me closer to death as my heart throbs in a vigorous *accelerando*. Telling myself, “Everything is going to be alright” gives me a headache now. Each breath becomes harder as my throat fills with sand. My body is heavy, but my mind isn’t. It is out there, somewhere, trying to escape from this profoundly uncomfortable situation. A woman is staring at me. Her gaze is strong but calm. I take a long breath. She tells me to sit down. Like a robot, I listen and sit. Gripping my violin, I try to tame my emotions. She asks me a few questions. Like a robot, I answer with short sentences, trying to catch my breath in between.

“Qu’est-ce que tu vas nous jouer ce matin?” she finally asks.

My tight and shaking voice answers rapidly.

I can see myself in this school. I WANT to see myself in this program. Over three years of preparation have led me here. It can’t fail. It just cannot.

I stand up and quickly wipe my moist hands on my skirt. I am ready.

•

I love the sound of the violin and the way it looks. How can a carved wooden box make such a sound? The smooth, yet crisp and sticky, ballad that escapes from it never ceases to bring me peace. Whenever I lay my attention on a violin, I can’t leave it. I stay there, bewitched, fascinated in front of this captivating toy. My intrigued eyes follow the bow floating on the strings like a kayak on water. However, I can’t seem to figure out how it finally clicked in my mind. Was it someone that I saw playing? Was it because my best friend started learning it? Was I just destined to come across this instrument?

I don’t know. All I do know is that I want to learn the violin.

When I hear my sister playing the piano, I can feel every note in my belly.

They fill my body and throw a massive party inside of me. I want to be able to make others feel the same.

“Papa, je veux apprendre le violon!”

•

I can’t look at my violin the same way nowadays. Violin currently means nausea and anxiety. It feels like a task rather than a hobby. Every time I stare at it, this ball forms itself in my stomach, a dense ball that forges its way up to my throat preventing me from breathing normally. I am lost. Do I even still enjoy it? Yes, I do. However, I doubt that I can cope with the stress the competition brings. It chomps on my sleep and my concentration. Some days, I am ready to quit, ready to pull the plug on this passion. People say it is a difficult and harsh world and all I can reply is, “Yes indeed.”

I want to escape, to go someplace where no concerns exist. I want to let my body drift away on cool water and rest for a little while. I want to breathe fresh and crisp air. I want to drain my mind and fill it back up with lightness. But is it even possible?

The irony is that I always end up coming back to it. The violin calls me back. It charms me once again and makes me forget. Music concerts and tours make me forget.

I am torn.

•

When I open up about this ambivalence, people tell me that I need to look for the elements that initially provoked my desire to become a violinist. They say, “Tu dois t’y accrocher pour que la passion revienne.”

However, trying to deeply love something all over again is laborious. It implies that I must start trusting it like before, trusting the fact that it could bring me joy, that it isn’t all negative.

I have to learn to trust and appreciate something that nearly broke me, nearly shattered me into a million pieces.

I need to believe that it could still have its place in my life while I am putting the crumbs back together and starting over.

•

The stage is immense. The rest of the concert hall is even bigger. As I walk in, trying to imagine the number of people this hall can host, I hear every “tic tic” of my shoes on the wooden floor. I look around. Golden wood covers everything, every floor, every wall. It is colossal, grandiose. My body feels like it is trapped inside a giant guitar or maybe swallowed by a building-sized violin. I sit on my designated chair. The lights are off everywhere except on the stage. They shine on my face and warm me up.

I can’t believe I am here, sitting on the stage of the most prestigious concert hall in Montreal. Surrounded by the rest of the orchestra, I feel whole. Is this where the efforts and the pain were supposed to bring me? Here, on the most beautiful stage I have ever played on, I catch myself smiling. For a minute, I am alone, reminiscing about the day I first held a violin. Images of my first classical music concert pop into my mind. Ten years of ups and downs have led me to this stage tonight. I couldn’t be prouder and more grateful for the choice my younger self made.

Was it finally all worth it?

Definitely.



FOOD FOR POETRY | **Béatrice Marissal**

Your presence feeds me  
A bottle of wine  
A glass of Santé!  
After empty  
Lettuce, rhubarb  
Peel and slice the praise  
Even the crust  
Of sticky light  
Density is rare  
The ingredients  
Pay attention  
Roll out the heat  
From your potential  
As if within you some curse

## LOSING TRACK OF FRIENDS | Boo

“We’re so freaking cool! Next year, we’re going to graduate in the year 2020! It’s such a pretty number,” Katy screeches at our usual cafeteria table. I look up at Gia and Sarah devouring their lunch. We’re talking and laughing without a single break to breath. In that moment, I wish to never lose them.

•

It is a scorching day of summer. The date for the graduation gathering was planned a few days ago after we all had thought we would rot in our houses forever because of covid. It feels rushed and odd. I see people waiting in line to get their diplomas and mortarboards in front of the school. Everyone is glancing at each other, not knowing everyone’s new and different boundaries. My entire body is sweating; my head is covered in sweat; my armpits are drenched; the hours I spent on my look are melting off. I can barely breathe in this hot air. I see my friends from the horizon, and I feel eerie because I had thought that I would never see them again.

*Is this really the end?*

*Is this really how everything is ending?*

I wave at them and go in their direction. We are surrounded by people talking to each other from a distance. No one is signing each other’s albums or giving hugs. We rush ourselves for the big graduation picture. Everyone is socially distanced. This feels unreal as if everything was a nightmare.

I am determined to hang out with my friends after. I go up to Katy, feeling nervous because she had finally called me out after years of being snappy with her... because the guy I liked actually had a crush on her. (I had not wanted to admit I was jealous.) I have no idea how she is going to react to me now. I hear my heart pounding, like an unstoppable train on the tracks.

“So...what are you doing after this?” I ask her with the tiniest voice possible.

“I have to work.” She answers coldly.

Her eyes look down and her hands tremble which fills the air with this weird aura. I know very well that she is lying; I know she does not want to hang out with me.

My heart drops.

I see my other friends on the right, Gia and Sarah. They had witnessed the fight. Their dress code is painfully casual for the end of this chapter of life. I hope their outfits mean we can easily go walk around in the streets without getting weird looks. At least one of them should be free. Right?

“Sorry, our parents are waiting for us.” They both answer with an awkward smile.

My heart is sinking.

Why is there no sense of union on such an important day? I just wanted to hang out with them. I feel a wave of depression hitting me. My anxiety is taking me over. I hear the sun screaming at me to go back home to hide from everyone. I don't want high school to finish like this. Wow. This is really the last time we will see each other.

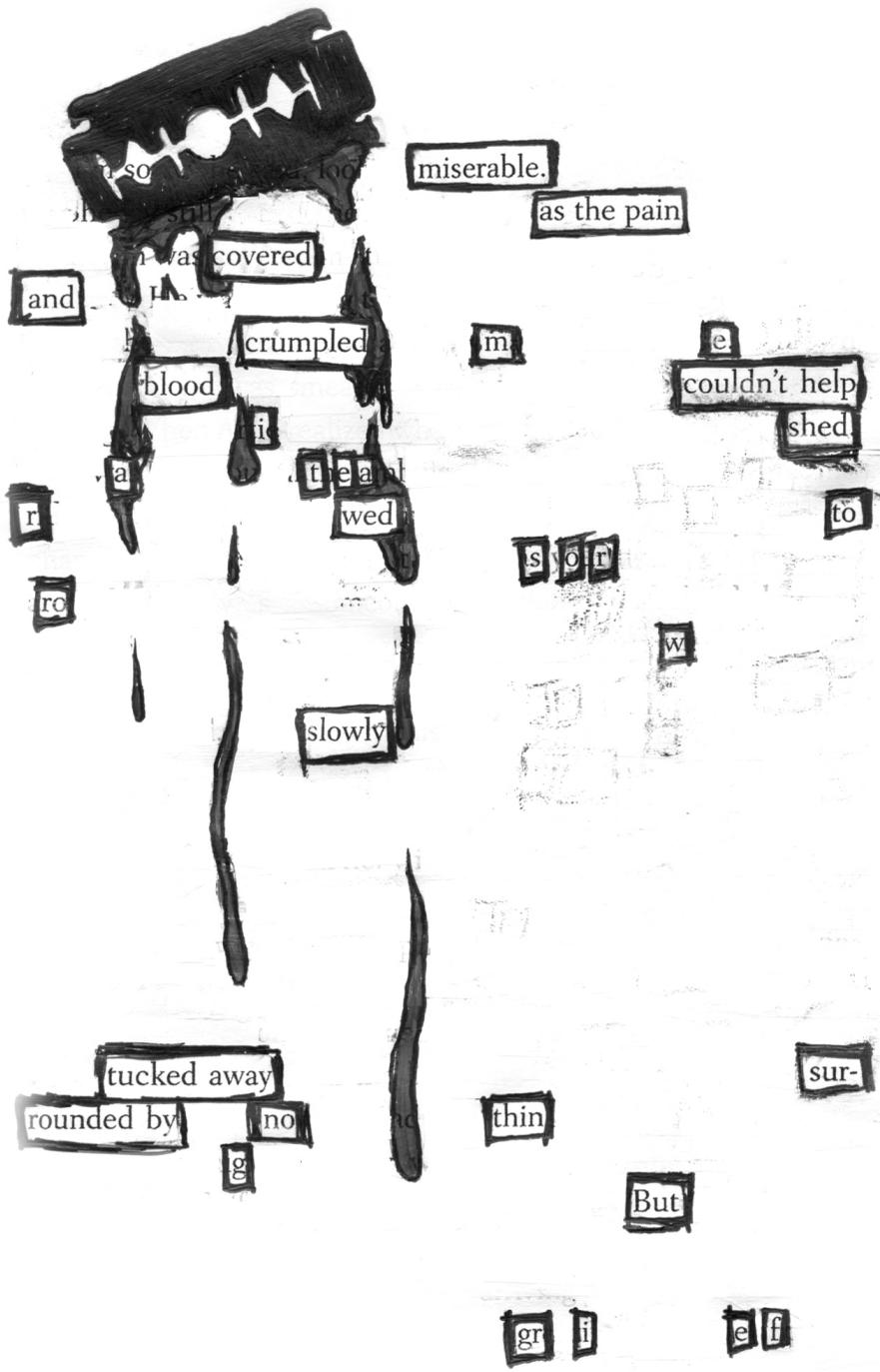
This is wack, I hate it.

My whole body is trembling as I see my five years at high school crumbling apart. The tears are falling on their own, my nose cannot stop sniffing, my head is hurting, and my knees are weak.

•

Today, I am sitting in my room, in front of my computer who became my best friend because of online school. I have been assigned the task to write about a moment that changed my life. It is still painful as I am reliving everything by writing this. Honestly, I do not even want to write about it as I know this memory stays alive when I keep reading it over and over and over... But I also think it is also good to write it out as I can finally feel a sense of closure. I try to keep telling myself that everything is alright, that it is normal to lose track of friends.

Slowly, I feel like I cannot seem to remember their faces.



I'M SORRY | **Rosalie Trépanier**

Miserable,  
as the pain covered and crumpled me.  
Blood couldn't help;  
I shed a tear.  
Wed to sorrow,  
slowly tucked away,  
surrounded by nothing but  
grief.

## THE VOID | **Maya Ruel**

“J’en reviens pas.”

My mother and I, in my room, standing in front of my open computer. On the screen, an urgent communication from my physical education teacher. The subject? The hike that was planned for our group during the weekend at a beautiful mountain about an hour from Montreal is canceled, due to new COVID restrictions. Not only that, but the classes that were to be given in person during the term (the only classes I got to attend for real, that I didn’t have to follow on the same computer screen that is presently passing on such bad news) would not take place anymore. We aren’t allowed to gather, not even for physical activity, not even in a learning context, not even outside. I am officially taking all my classes online, and that will be the case for God knows how long.

How much longer will I be confined to this room? I used to love my room, before the pandemic. Now, barely a month and a half after having started online school, I can’t stand it in the least anymore. I feel trapped. I’m bored, I’m unmotivated, I lay in bed all day, I don’t even bother getting dressed. There are clothes laying everywhere on the ground, papers and notebooks are piled up on my desk, waiting to be opened, waiting to fill a purpose, but I don’t even know what my own purpose is anymore. My bed isn’t made (and it hasn’t been for weeks now since I spend most of my days between the sheets). There is dust on the floor, along with dirty dishes that I just can’t bring myself to pick up. The mess makes me anxious, but I am too anxious to clean up the mess. I’m turning into a mess myself. I feel a void growing inside of me. I miss the outside world (the REAL world) and I hate this virtual reality, hate these online classes, hate being in my room all day. It doesn’t feel like home anymore. It’s jail.

•

“J’en reviens pas.”

My mother and I, in the living room, standing in front of the glaring television. On the screen, a news flash that’s announcing the latest restriction due to the virus: a curfew. Yes, that’s right, a curfew from 8pm to 5am during which it is forbidden for one to be out of one’s place of residence. I’m shocked, and so is my mom. I knew the pandemic was getting out of control, but I never thought it would get that bad, bad to the point where we are out of options and need to enforce such drastic restrictions. I feel my stomach drop, I feel tears of incredulity form in the corners of my eyes. The void gets deeper.

*Is this really the best option?  
How long will this last?  
What about my late-night car rides?  
What about my late-night work shifts?  
What about my 18th birthday next month?  
What about my mental health?*

So many questions running through my mind while I'm silently watching the tv screen. I feel numb but my heart is heavy with disappointment. My mother and I glance at each other without saying a word, our eyes filled with sadness and the reflection of the television. It feels like we will never see the end of all this. And this apartment is feeling smaller by the day.

•

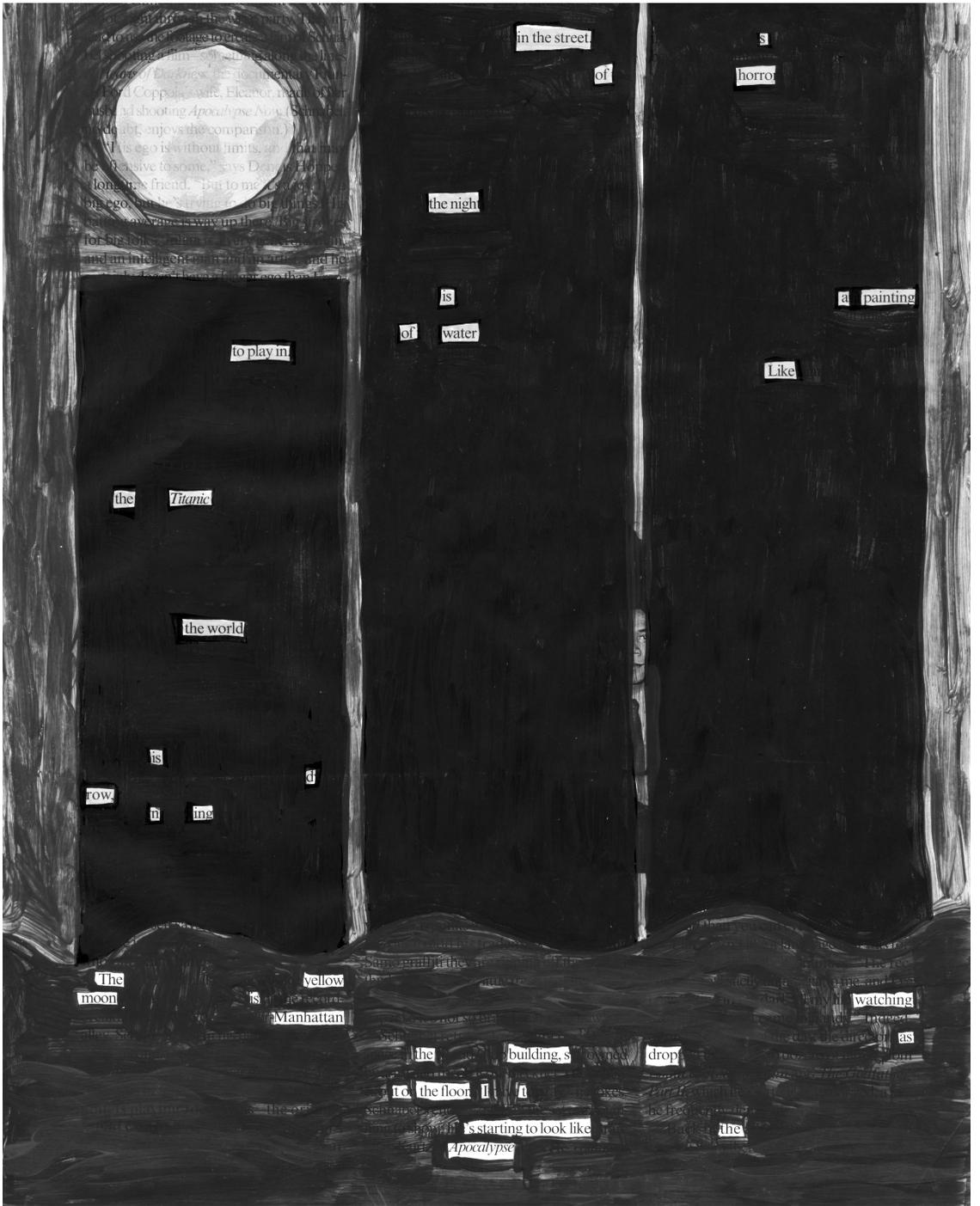
*“J'en reviens pas.”*

My mother and I, in the dining room, holding our cell phones in our hands. We have both just read an article that confirms that every college and university student in Quebec will be going back to school in person at the end of August.

It is hard to believe. After all this time, could it be? Could we really be going back? Living life somewhat normally again, almost a year and a half later? It has been so long since I've sat in a classroom, in front of a teacher in the flesh, surrounded by real, live classmates. I never realized I could miss school so much.

So, I would be leaving my apartment at last. After having spent nearly a year locked in it, I would join the world again, experience college, make new friends, rediscover liberty. In that moment, as the void finally starts to fill. I realize that this apartment I loathed for the longest time because I was forced to stay in it, well, now that I'm not, I feel a lot of love and gratitude for it.

*Thank you for being my refuge during this crisis.  
Thank you for keeping me safe, for having made me grow.  
Thank for having made me realize how precious my youth is.  
Thank you for being my home.*



THE APOCALYPSE | **Roxanne Landry**

In the streets of horror,  
The night is a painting  
Of water to play in.  
Like the Titanic,  
The world is drowning.  
The yellow moon is watching Manhattan  
As the buildings drop to the floor.  
It's starting to look like the Apocalypse...



# Bonds · La solidarité

I THINK I  
 @@  
 as  
 Locke d  
 time  
 being carried out by  
 Law,  
 study  
 between pressure and  
 When she came  
 a Chance  
 was given  
 off  
 ostensibly  
 land,  
 to  
 of

divine  
 earth and  
 nature  
 to form  
 life, and  
 In order to settle  
 But  
 should it fail  
 f  
 ought  
 know  
 from  
 experiences.  
 knowledge  
 deriv from these es And this harks back to early  
 belief

## BETWEEN TWO THOUGHTS | **Tara**

I thought I was locked in time  
Being carried out by laws  
Between pressure and study  
When she came  
A chance was given,  
I took off ostensibly  
To lands of divine earth and nature  
To form life and in order to settle  
But should it fail  
I ought to know  
From experiences, knowledge derives  
And back to early belief...

## LONELINESS AND OTHER BEAUTIFUL THINGS | **Darcy**

God, this is uncomfortable

The cement scrapes the butt of my jeans as my hands pull at the frost gate, which is unironically freezing, effectively sneaking myself under the fence. As I turn around to wipe off the little rocks still digging into my pants, I catch a glimpse of the view: a skyline filled with skyscrapers, tall buildings, and city lights. I take a break to look at it in its immensity and beauty before going back to my escapade. It takes me a few more minutes, and some serious climbing skills, to get to the actual roof from where you can see the entire city. My hands have gone numb from scraping them over the concrete, and the cold spring air doesn't help in bringing sensation back to them. I sit at the edge of the roof, dangling my feet in the air. I'm not supposed to be here. I know it. I know it because I had to sneak under a locked fence to get here. Fences are usually there for a reason. But the mix of adrenaline and peacefulness makes this moment feel surreal, so I don't care.

Here, there is a strange silence. The only sounds that reach the top of this multi-level parking lot are the whispers of cars and the murmurs of loud conversations; a mass of indistinguishable sounds that makes me feel so, so alone. Standing on this slightly angled roof, I am the unknown witness of thousands of lives. In this very moment, I feel like I am taking the pulse of the city, like my lips are drinking from its essence, and it tastes like a storm; lives colliding and electrifying the streets with their passion.

Laughs,  
Cries,  
Screams,

They pass through my ears and yet they don't move me like they do my own. Isolated from the world, I am frozen in space and time, contemplating the universe that keeps on spinning without me. I am stuck to my seat, a powerless spectator of the most realistic drama that is.

Loneliness has never felt this beautiful.

•

An angled cement rooftop, flooded by shadows; scribbles in spray paint on the floor, the railings, the doors; a foul smell that I try very hard not to analyze.

This is my urban oasis, my corner of paradise, covered in graffiti.

“I am air  
I am flame  
I am water  
I am dust”

I read one of the tags that decorate the roof of the abandoned parking lot. My friend is by my side, searching for other pieces of urban poetry. It’s incredible how much paint has been left on the concrete walls of this place, deemed boring by the rest of the world.

The summer air is suffocating, and I’m still panting from the climb I had to do to get up here. My shirt is drenched in sweat and the warm wind makes it even more uncomfortable. I couldn’t care less.

The skyline is still there, a sea of white lights, but I barely pay attention to it, too absorbed by the exploration of my usual hiding spot.

“No Gods  
No Masters”

My friend’s voice startles me: I tend to forget I’m not alone. I smile at him and let a chuckle echo in the night air, nodding approvingly as he keeps wordlessly reading the graffiti under his feet. His presence wasn’t planned, a throwaway invitation that sounded much calmer than I felt. I’m always scared of asking for company, because he is always so busy and I’m constantly bored. I stare a bit, caught up in my head (as usual). His hair is tied up in a ponytail. He has been wearing it like that for the last 3 years, ever since he let his hair grow long. His clothes don’t match, blue shirt and red shorts, but that’s also how he has always dressed. I don’t remember when we got old. When did our childish carelessness turn into dreadful responsibility?

He coughs. I jump, again, and pretend I wasn’t trying to stare right through his soul. I’m not alone. It’s hard to remember. I’m so used to it by now, almost like loneliness has become my default. But here, in this lonely place, company feels so much more real, like the city lights against the inky black sky. So, I remind myself with another glance directed at my friend.

I'm not alone.

•

Laughs fill the chilly air around us. Three teenagers sitting at a rundown picnic table atop an abandoned parking lot. I have no idea how this table got here. We're all slightly tipsy and I'm pretty sure the world doesn't usually move this slow. But it doesn't matter. Because I can't stop laughing. My stomach hurts from laughing too much, too hard, too long. I can't even remember what I was laughing about, but it doesn't matter. Because I feel happy.

I look at the sky and the stars are staring back at us, the night wrapping its dark and silent blanket around us, protecting, if only for a few hours, the young and idealistic adults we still are.

We pass a sharpie between the three of us and sign the picnic table with our own pieces of poetry and drunken doodles. It takes me a while to decide what I want to write, because my thoughts are swirling around my head much too quickly and I can't seem to hold onto any of them. I end up tracing the words "Educate – Agitate – Organize" in wobbly letters. I don't know why it makes me giggle, but I start laughing again, and my friends join in, deeper echoes of my happiness. Except they aren't echoes now, they are real people, people who care. And they are here. I can touch them. My hand reaches across the table, and I do.

I take a deep breath in and look at the faces around me. Shit-eating grins and shimmering eyes surround me. I stop thinking, slowly sinking into the warmth of friendship and familiarity.

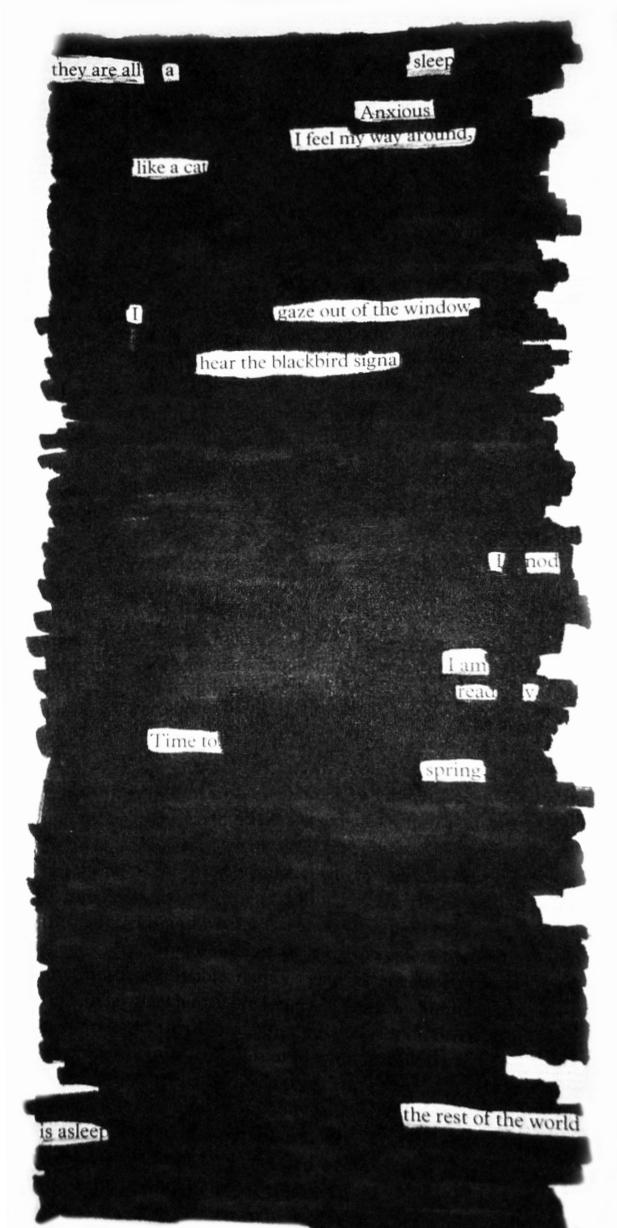
I am fully living this moment.

I have two friends with me. We are having fun.

Loneliness is far away by now.

God, never let this end.

## I AM FREE | Charlotte Fontaine



They are all asleep  
Anxious, I feel my way around like a cat  
I gaze out the window  
I hear the Blackbird signal  
I nod  
I am ready  
Time to spring  
The rest of the world is asleep

## TOUR DE CHAR | **River Berrymore**

We are all sitting at the table, outside. Me, Jamie, his dad, and his stepmother. Talking, laughing, eating. The air is hot and dry. Summer is coming to an end and we are getting a few more days of very good weather. Jamie and I bring the plates in and put them in the dishwasher. We go back outside to sit down. I ask him if I can take a sip of his iced tea. He looks at me, jokingly offended. “J’pensais que t’avais dit que tu buvais jamais rien...”

“Oui, mais j’ai soif!” I answer. His dad gets up and brings me a cup. “Merci!” I chime. I pour some iced tea from the bottle that was sitting on the table during supper. I am careful not to put too much in my glass, or else Jamie would make fun of me again. I grab the glass and look Jamie right in the eye as I drink the whole thing in one swig. I grab the bottle and pour some more. “Eille eille eille!” Jamie screams.

His parents stay put, but we put our shoes on and leave. We take Jamie’s car. Mine stays parked in my spot in front of his house. We call Inez on our way to pick her up at the mall. She has just finished her driving lesson, and she’s hungry. “We’ll be there in two minutes,” we tell her, but we end up getting lost in the maze that is the Mail Champlain parking lot. She gets in the back of the car, and we all kiss and hug, like a family reunion, where you haven’t seen your favorite aunt in what seems like forever. It hasn’t been long since the last time we hung out, but every moment feels like eternity without them. I understand what people mean when they say that time goes by fast. It means that we will never get back the time spent apart.

•

Krispy Kreme. We order 12 donuts: original glazed, obviously. I end up paying, even though I try to get out of it, my excuse being all the lifts I usually give them. I take the box of donuts on my lap and Jamie parks the car in the parking lot. The sun has gone down, but it is not completely dark yet. The light on the car roof is lit up and it creates shadows under our eyes. But it’s not creepy, it’s reassuring. I already know the perfect shapes of their faces. Inez has a rounder face and a soft jawline. Her bouncy nose sits right in the middle of her face and her hair covers most of her forehead. She has a full head of long, curly hair. Her lips are always stretched into a gentle smile, sometimes showing her teeth, sometimes not. Jamie’s face is more angular, dramatic. His blond hair flops down in the front. His eyes never stop moving, always looking for the next thing to devour. He has a long and pointy nose; it reminds me of my own mother’s. Many people have mistaken Jamie and me for siblings, but it’s all three of us that have made up our own little family.

The air is warm. I don't feel hot even though I am wearing a flannel over my t-shirt and denim shorts. I cross my legs on the seat and turn around to face the back of the car. I'm too small to rest my back on the dashboard, so I try to balance on the edge of the seat. The two of them unbuckle their seat belts and stare at me like I'm the ocean. They're staring out at the horizon, not waiting for something in particular to happen, just waiting. For that split-second instant, I'm floating. I forget where we are and what we're doing. They're staring into my soul. "Quoi?"

"Ben, les beignes!" I open the box, and their sweet smell fills the car. The first bite is the best. The pillowy texture of the dough hits my tongue. We talk with our mouths opened. It was fun speaking with Jamie's parents, but now we have to talk about stuff we couldn't say in front of them. Nothing dangerous, just young adult stuff you don't want your parents to know. The usual: sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll. Jamie talks about some guy, Inez talks about work, I talk about school. These moments are always the best. We always end up talking in the car because Jamie doesn't particularly like walking aimlessly. We tell each other everything, we laugh at each other or with each other, we ask for advice and we receive it.

Suddenly, a spider creeps right down the window in the back seat. I'm the first one that notices: I'm facing the back of the car, towards the back left window of the car, where Inez is sitting. I don't want to startle her, but I need to say something.

"Guys..." I say, and I point in that general direction. They both obviously freak out and jump out of the car. Thank God I'm here to save the day. I understand why Inez is scared: it could get lost in her hair and never come out. But Great Big Jamie has nothing to be scared of. I slide in the back seat and try to catch the critter. I try to push it to the ground so it doesn't die. The spider gets away instead. It crawls into a small crack in the car door. After that, Inez refuses to sit in the back again. Scenarios of it creeping out of the crack haunt her mind. She is deathly afraid of those eight-legged creatures. So is Jamie. They don't have to be: I'm there.

•

They get back in the car. I stay sitting behind them because of their impending fear of small living things. I take control of the music. I know exactly which song I want to play. The car takes off, slowly, but surely. Twilight is coming to an end: the sun is now completely hidden behind the horrible skyline of Taschereau boulevard; the streetlights have turned on; a purple-ish light drapes the inside of the car. I'm sitting

in the dark, but Jamie and Inez are lit up in the front. I can only see the backs of their heads, but I can imagine perfectly what their faces look like. None of the terror from two seconds ago shows. Jamie is in full control of the vehicle, even though some might say it is dangerous to close your eyes while driving. Inez throws her hands up in the air and out the open window. They are swaying to the sound of the music and screaming the lyrics to the song.

“I will always love you,” Frank Ocean chants.





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