

Trepidation Nation (1st ed. - 08.09.04) - trepidationnationCj

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Acknowledgements

Trepidation Nation was commissioned by Actors Theatre of Louisville and premiered at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in March 2003. It was directed by Wendy McClellan with the following cast:

The Gallows Monologue from Sidney Ryan's Gunpowder and Blood
by Glen Berger

MORRIS..... Michael Rosenbaum

The Message by Hilary Bell

JULIET Beth Collins

MAX..... Robert Lee Simmons

Down to Sleep by Victoria Stewart

ANNE Natalie Sander

ELLEN Kate Bailey

Cobra Neck by Keith Josef Adkins

WOMAN Bobbi Lynne Scott

Seal Skin by Erik Ehn

WOMAN Eleni Papaleonardos

I Am Not Alone by Richard Dresser

BRAD Brad Smith

JUSTIN..... Justin Tolley

The Joys of Childhood by Kirsten Greenidge

CLAUDETTE COX..... Jamie Askew

Octophobia by James Still

SKATER..... Lori McNally

Hold This by Sheila Callaghan

YOUNG MAN..... John Catron

Naked Lunch by Michael Hollinger

LUCY Jenna Close

VERNON..... Dimitri Meskouris

Normal by Cusi Cram

CHASE..... Jason Kaminsky

LEWIS Daniel Evans

Euxious by Bridget Carpenter

WOMAN Megan Ofsowitz

I'm Here for You by Warren Leight

AMY Valerie Chandler

JULES Brian Nemiroff

Safe by Gina Gionfriddo

WOMAN Jen Grigg

Phobophobia by Julie Marie Myatt

PAUL Richard Furlong

Yes by Stephen Belber

MAN Chris Ashworth

Foreword

We've all experienced the touch of fear. From those vague apprehensions about turning the lights out at night to ordinary human worries about the world and our place in it, dread comes in all shapes and sizes. But what about the phobia—that particular species of fear that holds a special fascination because of its extreme, illogical nature? As part of the 2003 Humana Festival of New American Plays, Actors Theatre of Louisville asked sixteen playwrights to conquer their own cold feet and contribute short pieces to *Trepidation Nation: A phobic anthology*, a thrillingly diverse collection inspired by these irrational, all-consuming, and disturbingly specific fears.

We chose to focus this project on phobias because they offered unlimited potential for creativity. More than 500 phobias have been named and documented, and the variety is stunning—from A (*alektorophobia*, a fear of chickens) to Z (*zemmiphobia*, fear of the great mole rat), the list seems endless. These obsessions center around the idiosyncratic and the universal alike, at times appearing in clusters of neuroses, some strangely comic and others strikingly poignant. And with rousing results, these playwrights bring their unique voices to this exploration of aversion. We see characters plagued in ways both hilarious and traumatic as they face their fears (or do their best to avoid them altogether).

This anthology, first performed by the twenty-two members of Actors Theatre's 2002-2003 Apprentice Company, marked the fourth consecutive year that the Humana Festival included a piece commissioned from myriad writers around a central theme. From *Back Story*, a family narrative attacked from multiple perspectives, to *Snapshot*, inspired by a single photograph, a collection of playwrights has annually plumbed the depths of a provocative idea. For the 2003 festival, we asked them to look into the psyche, examining our fear and trembling and expounding on this oldest of human emotions.

—Steve Moulds

TREPIDATION NATION
a phobic anthology by

Keith Josef Adkins

Stephen Belber

Hilary Bell

Glen Berger

Sheila Callaghan

Bridget Carpenter

Cusi Cram

Richard Dresser

Erik Ehn

Gina Gionfriddo

Kirsten Greenidge

Michael Hollinger

Warren Leight

Julie Marie Myatt

Victoria Stewart

James Still

THE GALLOWS MONOLOGUE FROM SIDNEY RYAN'S *GUNPOWDER AND BLOOD*

by Glen Berger

(In the darkness, we hear an announcement:)

“Due to the unfortunate fencing mishap in the scene previous, the part of Robert Keyes will be played the remainder of this evening by the assistant stage manager, Morris White.”

(Lights up sharply—a tight spot—on MORRIS WHITE in an ill-fitting early seventeenth-century costume—either MORRIS is far too large or fat, or too small or thin for the costume—and ill-applied red Vandyke beard, standing on a platform attempting to get a period shoe on his foot. A tennis shoe is on his other foot. A noose dangles next to him, suspended from above. Upon noticing that the light is on him, he gives up on the shoe—leaving him with one stockinged foot and one sneaker—and stares straight out. He appears nervous to the point of fainting. He swallows, puts the noose around his neck, and croaks out:)

MORRIS AS ROBERT KEYES. I am not... *(Heavy breathing, more swallowing, then whispers:)* ...afraid... *(More breathing and swallowing)* ...to die...

(He feels about his person until he finds a folded piece of paper. With trembling hand, and clearly sick to stomach, he unfolds it, and reads:)

'Tis the last day of January, 'tis the last day of Robert Keyes. This year of our Lord 1606. I say “our Lord,” aye, I say it, though our goodly King would have otherwise. He would have that one Lord is reserved for the Protestants and another for the Catholics. And thus I stand before you.

(The paper is quite evidently shaking, for indeed, MORRIS is in the throes of a monstrous stage fright.)

I am Calm, Trembling Not, Assurèd in my faith, though I wear this adornment about my neck. Yea, at Ease, even as I know that after I

am hanged but not killed, my privates are to be torn asunder and burnt to cinders in front of me. Aye, there shall be a different fire in my privates than the fire they have previously known, but I am not afraid. Indeed, I see there the Fire already burning in yonder brazier that shall char my privates, my privates, which by decree shall henceforth be made public, and that organ I hold most dear, and have held most dear for all my days, henceforth shall no longer be my privates, but my publics! And I say it is most unbecoming a so-called Christian nation to publicize a Christian's privates and then cook them down to a black powdery ash.

Yea and verily, I stand here with mien serene, even though I know that those flames, which shall soon be licking at my privates with most indecorousness, are also reserved for my bowels, which I understand are to be indelicately ripped from the inside of my body, and transplanted to the outside of my body, where I daresay they shall not function as smoothly as they do now, and ye shall all witness the last movement of my bowels, as they are transferred to that brazier beyond, where they too, my bowels, shall be roasted in front of my eyes. But would that I had a thousand bowels for my Catholic faith! But, alas, God has granted me but one bowels, and one bowels I will gladly proffer to the goodly King James and his most rabblous parliament that narrowly escaped just retribution—hold out your hands sirs, I give to you—my bowels. And though my bowels shall crackle and moan in the flames, they are quiet now, I assure you. And though my privates shall spurt, sputter and curl in the unforgiving fire, know that they are most tight-lipped now—no stream of sparkling fear yellows the insides of my trunk hose. Nay!

(MORRIS' attempt to gesture dramatically has made him lose his place on the page and he panics as he searches:)

...but...but...where was I...what... Privates severed.....fear...disembowelment...quartered...displayed on pikes...dipped in pitch...crooves and...what the...what is...I can't read this!...croons?... Crowns!...and were all the Crowns and Kingdoms of this World laid at my feet...were I given the chance to remove this noose and slink away to freedom, I...I...

(These words prompt MORRIS to hatch an idea, and he looks to wings desperately, and feigns:)

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THE MESSAGE

by Hilary Bell

(Juliet and Max are both in their 20s.)

(Wherever the symbol (-) appears in MAX's lines, it's to indicate a word that he can't say. He should signal this somehow—a grunt, a facial expression—not just sail smoothly over it. But it should also be clear that they are both used to this form of communication.)

(JULIET, wearing the costume of a Elizabethan gentlewoman, is breastfeeding a baby. She rocks with anxiety.)

(She glances at a note clasped in her hand and then away, further distressed.)

(MAX runs in. He too is in the period costume of a soldier. He is wild-eyed and pale.)

JULIET. Was it her?

MAX. *(Nods:)* She's at the bar.

JULIET. Oh God oh God. But it's too early, she said midnight. Why is she here?

MAX. I don't know! Why does a (-) do anything? She gave me a message for you, and said by the end of our scene she'd be gone.

JULIET. It must be about where to leave him.

MAX. Well, (-) her! We won't do it!

JULIET. If we don't she'll kill him with a wasting disease, remember? ...Then we have five minutes. What's the message?

MAX. It's going to be hard—you know when I get upset—

JULIET. You do it on stage though, you know you're able to do it. *(Embracing him:)* Come on, take a deep breath, it's important. Tell me.

MAX. *(Caressing her.)* I've missed you.

(She carefully withdraws.)

JULIET. Darling? We don't have long.

(MAX touches the baby's face.)

MAX. How did this happen to us?

JULIET. Don't, I want to get him to sleep: I couldn't bear to walk away while he's looking at me. Where must we leave him?

MAX. She said the message is for you as the (-) was caused by your appetite.

JULIET. *You* got caught in her garden, if you'd been more careful we wouldn't be losing our child to a witch!

MAX. You were craving silverbeet! You said get it any way I could!

JULIET. I didn't say give up our baby to save your skin.

(MAX is stung.)

MAX. I wasn't thinking, it was my only way out. Harry wasn't born yet, I didn't know how much we'd love him.

JULIET. *(Pause:)* Let's not waste time.

MAX. She said it was no coincidence we were doing "(-)."

JULIET. "Macbeth."

MAX. Shh!

JULIET. We can't be any more cursed than we are!

MAX. And it's not by chance that there's a (-) in the play.

JULIET. A what?

MAX. A (-)!

(He indicates someone short.)

JULIET. A child! A child's ghost! *(She gasps.)* What else?

MAX. She said to beware of (-).

(JULIET shakes her head: "What?")

Of (-). That we should never make a (-) again.

JULIET. Pact?

MAX. And if we're going to (-) from a (-), then we have to (-) the (-).

JULIET. Pay the price. If we're going to...

MAX. To (-) from a—

JULIET. I know, you just said that! Oh Max, please, please don't do this now.

MAX. I can't (-) it. I'm trying—

(A voice comes over the P.A.:)

STAGE MANAGER. *(Off:)* All Courtiers, three minutes. Three minutes, Courtiers.

MAX. If we're going to...to *(Whispers)* steal...

JULIET. Steal from a witch!

MAX. Yes, then—

JULIET. Pay the price.

(The baby cries.)

Jesus, oh Jesus. *(To baby:)* Shush, baby, I'm here, go to sleep sweetheart. This is the last time I'll ever hold him.

MAX. Juliet—

JULIET. Finish the message.

MAX. My life's threatened, I'm given one chance—... What would've happened to *you* if she'd killed me?

JULIET. You didn't seem to have any trouble getting that sentence out.

MAX. None of the words were in it.

JULIET. Can we talk hypotheticals later? I'd like to save his life.

(Pause.)

MAX. She said next time you want...

JULIET. Silverbeet! For Christ's sake, silverbeet!

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DOWN TO SLEEP

by Victoria Stewart

(Dimly lit, a girl's room with twin beds. Anne is breathing deeply, lying in bed. ELLEN sits up in bed, awake.)

ELLEN. What was that? Anne? Don't be asleep. Anne? What was that?

ANNE. What?

ELLEN. That noise. A creak. Outside the door.

ANNE. Probably Mom.

ELLEN. What is she doing up?

ANNE. Big day tomorrow. Do you want me to check?

ELLEN. No. It's better to let her be.

(ANNE sits up, lights a cigarette.)

ANNE. I'm not partial to wakes. Funerals, that's fine. They have some value. Wakes—they're just maudlin.

ELLEN. Or the opposite.

ANNE. Sure. Everyone's happy to see each other. It's a fucking reunion. "Did you have some of the ham? She gets it precut like that, in spirals. It's so clever."

ELLEN. We never see you anymore.

(Ellen coughs a little.)

ANNE. *(Stubbing out her cigarette:)* Suddenly everyone's allergic.

ELLEN. Do you think it was Mom?

ANNE. Who else would it be? *(She looks at the door.)* I hope I'm allowed to smoke tomorrow. It's bad enough to be back in the old room with you.

ELLEN. Do you think a lot of people will come?

ANNE. I could never sleep in this room.

ELLEN. It's snowing. Bad weather.

ANNE. And it was sudden.

ELLEN. Yeah. Probably not.

ANNE. Why would they?

ELLEN. We should get some rest.

ANNE. I don't sleep much.

ELLEN. You should try some relaxation, you know, techniques. You breathe in for three seconds, hold for three seconds and breathe out for three seconds. I learned that from somewhere.

ANNE. Why'd you need it?

ELLEN. I don't know. Just having trouble.

ANNE. I sleep three hours a night.

ELLEN. Is that true? I don't believe that.

ANNE. Yeah. There's something—it's this drift. That slow lapse. You know? Like a boat easing into the water but you don't know how deep the water is. You don't know what's underneath the surface.

ELLEN. But three hours—

ANNE. Anything could be there. When you close your eyes.

ELLEN. I mean, I would sleep for fourteen hours, all day if I could. When I can.

ANNE. "If I die before I wake."

ELLEN. Who taught us that? Grandma? Did Grandma teach us that?

ANNE. Dad.

ELLEN. Just some nursery rhyme. Some kid's prayer. When did we learn that?

ANNE. It's always been like this.

ELLEN. I remember you sleeping. I've seen you sleep.

ANNE. I simulate sleep. Close my eyes. Breathe deeply. But I stay awake as long as I can. Then my body has to sleep sometime.

ELLEN. How come I never noticed? We slept in the same room for 15 years.

ANNE. You were *sleeping*.

ELLEN. Ah.

ANNE. Mom knew.

ELLEN. What?

ANNE. That I didn't sleep. She asked me once. "Don't you ever sleep?"

ELLEN. What did you tell her?

ANNE. I lied.

ELLEN. So she didn't know. Because you lied.

ANNE. She knew anyway.

ELLEN. Go to sleep, Anne. Or don't. You don't have to "simulate sleep" if you don't want to. Now that I know.

(Pause.)

ANNE. El. Did Dad—

ELLEN. What?

ANNE. Touch you—I don't know. You know.

ELLEN. No. I don't know.

ANNE. Mess with you. You know.

ELLEN. Why would you ask that? No. How could you ask that?

ANNE. He liked you.

ELLEN. He loved both of us.

ANNE. You were his— He didn't like me. The way he liked you.

ELLEN. That's—I mean—that's a leap. He was, you know, difficult. You know, with you. You're accusing someone who's dead. Some-

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COBRA NECK

by Keith Josef Adkins

Allodoxaphobia: fear of opinions.

(Lights up on a young African-American WOMAN entering a bathroom. She slams the door behind her, and locks it.)

WOMAN. *(Yelling at someone on opposite side of door:)* I do not have a neck like my momma!!!

(She begins pacing the room.)

I can't believe Freddie Jean Renfroe sat right out there, in the middle of margaritas, and said that my neck is shaped like a cobra, like my momma's. And that if I took my tail over to India somewhere, the people would follow me down the road with a pipe, and expect me to snake my way out of a basket. Ha-ha! *(To Freddie Jean on the other side of door:)* Well, that's just ignorant.

(Goes to the medicine cabinet, and begins searching it, frantically.)

(Yelling at door:) Besides, you can't talk, Freddie Jean. Not only do you have an extra nipple on your left breast, you have one growing on your nose. So there!

(Back into the medicine cabinet and sink cabinet.)

(Mocking Freddie Jean:) "It's not a nipple. It's an extraordinary mole dillybub, and my momma has them too." Well, I took a peep at you once in tenth-grade gym class. I sure did. And the only thing extraordinary was that you *had three damn nipples!*

(Finding cotton swabs, and getting calm.)

Anyway...who cares what she and her momma share.

(Looking at cotton swabs with a keen, seductive eye, and then she looks up at the mirror. A beat, then a sad yet surrendered recognition.)

Freddie Jean is right. It is a cobra neck. Just like my momma's.

(She slowly and tenderly caresses her neck. The front, the right and left side.)

Why did I have to be her daughter?

(She then finds a bottle of rubbing alcohol and sits on toilet. And during speech, she applies alcohol to her neck.)

The one woman in town who goes to a Tupperware party and opinionates that we're living on a toxic dump in this town, which is doubling our risk for cancer, get out or die, she pleaded. Watches their jaws drop to the floor, and then check for extra appendages before laughing. Then she ditches this death-trap to live on a tanker with a musician from Belize. And what about the backlash those opinionated opinions would have on small-minded folks in a small-minded town who wouldn't believe the sky was falling if it dropped over their heads. They laugh at you, momma. They put your picture up at the Pic-n-Sav, and somebody drew a mustache over your lips. They don't like know-it-alls and opinionators. Only truth-telling somebody they want is the one nailed to a cross.

(She puts the rubbing alcohol and cotton balls to her side.)

(Calmly:) So they just keep pointing out my arms, feet, and saying they're just like yours, praying some truth will come bubbling up from my inside, through my long snake neck, and spill on their shoes. I say, no, I'm one of you, I'm not like her. But they don't care. They just want a reason to post my picture up at the Pic-n-Sav, and draw a mustache over my lips. *(Then:)* And, oh, how I wish.

(Crosses to door, with her face into it.)

I do try. To opinionate. *(Takes a breath, then:)* Your weaved hair is aiding in the rise of self-hatred. But it won't leave the brain, Momma, connect to the voice and fall from my mouth. I try to telepathy it to 'em.

(She takes a second to "telepathy" the opinion to the party-goers.)

See. Nothing.

(Crosses back to toilet and sits. Pulling up sleeves to display scar-rings.)

It's because I wasn't born to speak something great, and educate a town strutting around with extra nipples. And even if I did say something great, it would fall flat, and not-a one jaw would drop to

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SEAL SKIN

by Erik Ehn

WOMAN. Her body is between herself and herself and whenever she is about to fall into her body she swims.

She works fast food fest feat fear and skinnies herself so she can fit through a door ajar should one appear. To skinny herself she swims.

First year college, chose by water, Mica Cavin thinks he can dance but she's a mile gone and Pacific, as thin as water in water. What does she study? She studies unbegun. Water in water in water in water in water.

Girl in wetsuit
Teenage girl
Ocean swimmer
Shell of the sea
Interiority
Spiral girl
Off from work
Midnight shift
The curl
Study work-study and supplement
Long,
Longmuscle crawl
Snotness gray
Shell at your quiet pulse and
Can almost hear the girl;
You can abstract
Fire and wave
Stare and swim
Fire and wave are third person worlds
She works and crawls
The midnight 3rd

The pool has no dynamic, the river is low in the winter and all year long she wants to throw her body out from under teeming; arm over 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 20 21 22 23, knocked against the pier,

rolled under, sawed at until there is nothing left between herself and herself and the door closes behind her, dark until she wakes like kelp at the washout grade of blatant day.

She will not be teened no not ready yet third third third; the question that hopefully in her twenties more moot and on from there until she is the unanswer prior to the question, sub-curiosity under the No one, No one See.

12 plus 6 at two AM swimming shell crushed by wave's finger the ocean has her celibacy. Red wisp, she follows, blent. You do not take her, you relocate her, the celibate celiba-sea. Otters are nuns and as long as she is in the water she is where her younger was, spiraling, capturing means; she is able to spend days in the flux of exceptions, over lapsing/massing parabola, collapsing nattering captions to image beyond capture, the ocean.

Water tumbles, thumb-knuckle blunt

Seal

Skin

She slid a herd of cattle across that madman griddle and raked her nails down the Lava soap; still she smells 18 and 18 smells her so she blues her body in agitation of tides.

How her body appears and how bodies appear to her: cracked, subject and subjecting, trying to fold a fan out of a dinner plate. The/his alkali, tang of failed baking powder Play-do volcano.

For two years she never sets foot on land and wishes that all seven. Either unbegun or done, out from where unformed gets inside your unformed and messes you all up, so better be same as sameless.

She says sea says shell is where you are. She makes her breaker relocate her, her sex is ocean wide. Then seal skin, you can't come in, her particularity is moon secant.

For two years I stopped counting until suddenly I was old. Kiss my neck and taste salt my skin is historical young man I am coincident with myself.

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I AM NOT ALONE

by Richard Dresser

(Lights up on JUSTIN, who is sipping wine and rapidly skimming his suicide note.)

JUSTIN. Darling...sorry it had to end this way...don't understand why you are condemning me to eternal nothingness...you know I cannot be alone...most men would hold it against you but I'm not most men...fondly, Justin.

(JUSTIN puts the note and his wine glass on the table. He steps up on a chair and puts a noose around his neck. He hesitates, takes a deep breath, gets down from the chair, and goes back to finish his wine. Then he gets back on the chair and puts the noose around his neck again. Knocking at the door.)

JUSTIN. Damn damn damn. It's always something.

(JUSTIN opens the door on BRAD, all in white, carrying a large pizza.)

BRAD. Bobby Bobby Bobby! Got your pizza, Bobby! Pretty fast, huh?

JUSTIN. Oh...yes. Come in, come in.

(BRAD enters and puts the pizza on the table.)

BRAD. Twenty-two buckeroos. Tipping optional but highly highly appreciated, bud.

JUSTIN. Excellent! Let me find my wallet.

BRAD. You're one hungry bastard, huh? You order our Maximum Pizza and it's just you?

JUSTIN. That's right. I'm all alone.

BRAD. This was an easy gig. If it takes more than fifteen minutes it's a free pizza, and I just did it in, what, nine?

JUSTIN. Something like that.

BRAD. Most customers time it. Sit there staring at the clock, praying for disaster, one minute late and BANG! Free pizza for them and a kick in the ass for us. That's life, huh?

JUSTIN. *(Trying to make conversation:)* So...is fifteen minutes usually a problem?

BRAD. Let's just say there have been incidents. Some dawdling in front of the van, some failure to cross the street fast enough by certain citizens, mainly in the "senior" category. But the good news is I never miss on the fifteen minutes.

JUSTIN. Congratulations. Would you like a beverage?

BRAD. What I'd like is my money, Bobby-Boy. I'm on a schedule here, and I'm only as good as my last delivery.

JUSTIN. Oh, right.

(JUSTIN gets the money as BRAD reads the suicide note on the table.)

BRAD. Hey, wait, you're not Bobby.

JUSTIN. Of course I am! Look at me!

BRAD. Then who's this Justin crybaby?

JUSTIN. Previous tenant?

BRAD. Look me in the eye, pal. If this isn't your pie then I'm in a world of trouble.

JUSTIN. *(Picks up the pizza:)* Relax. It's my pie.

BRAD. Then what kind is it? And no peeking!

JUSTIN. I don't recall...it was a while ago—

BRAD. It was eleven minutes and twenty seconds ago! *(Gets out a pizza cutter.)* Tell me the pie you ordered! I could cut off your digits and sleep like a baby.

JUSTIN. *(Freaked:)* Pep-pep-pep-peroni?

BRAD. *(Bites a towel so he won't scream:)* Jesus Christ. You are so not Bobby!

JUSTIN. I'm Bobby, I'm Bobby!

BRAD. Give me the pie...Justin!

JUSTIN. No! I've paid for it and now it's mine.

BRAD. Oh, really? Well what about Bobby, the real Bobby, counting the minutes, no pie, dialing his phone, and all of a sudden I'm one more poor bastard with no job.

JUSTIN. Oh, please, I'm sure you won't lose your job over one infraction.

BRAD. And I'm sure you don't know dick. I can't play loosey-goosey with the rules. My boss, George, has a one strike policy—

(BRAD's radio suddenly emits loud static.)

BRAD. See? Did you think I was kidding? Huh? *(Obsequiously into radio:)* Hi, George. Righto. I'm on the stairs, taking 'em three at a time! Almost there. Still got a few minutes. Over. *(Looks at order, then, to JUSTIN:)* Is this 391 26th?

JUSTIN. That's right.

BRAD. Then I'm in the right place. Except you aren't Bobby.

JUSTIN. This is 26th *Street*. There's also a 26th *Avenue*. And a 26th *Place*.

BRAD. That's insane.

JUSTIN. That's Queens.

BRAD. Dear God. I have to go.

JUSTIN. Please stay. Please. I have this condition. I can't be alone. The world closes in and swallows me up and I try to scream but no sound comes out so I flop on the floor gasping for breath while my life slips away because there's no one else anywhere. Just me, all alone in a dark and endless void and it's just too much to bear, too much without someone, anyone, even a stranger, even you, so I'm not alone and can maybe get through one more day...

BRAD. You're kind of needy, Justin.

JUSTIN. I get that a lot. You have to stay.

BRAD. Or what?

JUSTIN. *(Going to the window:)* Or the pizza takes a dive.

BRAD. *(Bites towel so he won't scream:)* Calm down. I can't deliver a wounded pizza.

JUSTIN. I am trying to save my life!

BRAD. Yeah? I'm trying to save my job!

JUSTIN. My life is more important than your job!

BRAD. You don't know the first thing about my job. I have seniority on half the staff. Things fall right in six months I'll be answering the phone. But right now I'm almost out of time! So give me the pizza!

(A standoff. JUSTIN holds the pizza hostage. BRAD wields the pizza cutter. BRAD fakes one move and suddenly has JUSTIN from behind.)

BRAD. If you won't surrender the pizza I'll cut your throat.

JUSTIN. I can live with that.

(As BRAD puts the pizza cutter to JUSTIN's throat, the radio emits static.)

BRAD. *(Obsequiously to radio:)* Hi, George. *(Pleading:)* I know I'm out of time...it just said 26th, how could I have known? *(Static.)* Good point. My bad. I'll cover the cost of the pizza. *(Static.)* I'm sorry, George. You believed in me when no one else did. Please give me another chance. These have been the happiest months of my life. *(Static.)* I understand. My best to your family. *(Beat.)* I can't believe I'll never hear that voice again.

(BRAD stands forlornly with his radio. JUSTIN goes to the table with the pizza.)

JUSTIN. No reason to leave now, is there? What have we got here? Mushroom and sausage! What a treat!

(BRAD numbly cuts the pizza with the pizza cutter. They sit at the table and eat.)

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THE JOYS OF CHILDHOOD

by Kirsten Greenidge

CLAUDETTE COX. (*Sits cross-legged with pen and clipboard:*) So. (*Smiles.*) Let's see here. (*Regards clipboard:*) Vassar: wonderful. I'm a Yalie, myself. Study abroad: fantastic. Although I see here you spent your time in Paris and the children study Spanish—personally I'm with you: *viva la France*—but maybe you could take a class? Or listen to one of those tapes, one of those language tapes. Yes? Now, the position isn't terribly difficult. School ends at three, violin on Mondays, ballet Tuesdays and Thursdays, pottery every other Wednesday, calligraphy every other *other* Wednesday and riding every Friday. (*Pause.*) No. No, no it's not too much activity: they're *bright*; they're *exceptionally* bright. Now where was...oh, yes, Riding-on-Fridays. Except every third Friday when Sequoia—my oldest and the one with *the* (*Motions around her eyes with her pinky finger, then whispers*) ...patch: yes. We don't talk about that. (*Zips her mouth shut.*) Every third Friday Sequoia visits Woody. Woody is our code name for Dr. Green. Dr. Green-the-therapist. Even though Sequoia's down to once a month we don't talk about Woody, either. (*She motions around her eyes, and then her ear in a circle with her pinky finger, then makes a slicing motion with her hand in the air.*) Which brings me to my next point: we have several rules we follow for Sequoia. Woody / Dr. Green-the-therapist suggested them and they seem to, um, keep her calm. (*Smiles uneasily and consults her clipboard:*) First, when preparing food: use spices that are white. Nothing green, nothing black and under no circumstances *ever*: red. She says spices look like eyes staring at her and Dr. Woody, I mean, Woody/Dr. Green-the-therapist explained we should treat her fears with understanding. Eyes: what a robust imagination: we may have an artist on our hands, I'm telling you. Now: two: when the girls are home we... (*Smiles*) we cover the floors—well, anywhere Sequoia needs to walk—with towels. I keep the linen closet stocked so you shouldn't run out: Sequoia has developed an aversion to our wall-to-wall. She says the bristles are like spears. Little spears piercing the soles of her feet. As you can understand we can't let her feel like that so... No, she cannot "*just wear shoes*": no, no, no, no, no. Woody explained that would be insensitive, monstrous even. Imagine clip-

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OCTOPHOBIA

by James Still

(In darkness, hushed voices:)

MAN'S VOICE. *(Voiceover:)* This young woman has the whole world holding its breath, Peggy.

WOMAN'S VOICE. *(Voiceover:)* That's right, Dick. She's lovely, the picture of concentration.

MAN'S VOICE. *(Voiceover:)* You've been there, Peggy. You've been in her shoes. What is going through her mind?

WOMAN'S VOICE. *(Voiceover:)* You're thinking about one move at a time, trying not to get ahead of yourself. All of the practice, all of the sacrifice, all of that is gone—and all you're thinking about—is this one moment.

(The lights come up on a young woman wearing a glittery-spangled skater's costume. And ice skates.)

SKATER. I'm skating. I FEEL myself, SEE myself, I HEAR myself skating. I hear my past, I hear my heartbeat, I hear God—laughing. I think that he's laughing because skating around and around on frozen water is something he never imagined we would invent. I just don't think he thought it through far enough. Maybe we've been around too long if it's come down to ice skating. God made roses. Man made ice skating.

(Beat.)

My dad says that roses have been growing on this planet for over 35 million years. That sounds like a long time. I was skating when I thought about THIS for the first time: that dinosaurs couldn't survive, but roses did. I bet God just shakes his head about that one.

I'm skating. I'm thinking about a moment when I was eight years old... It's snowing, it's Los Angeles. I'm in the backyard, wearing a one-piece bathing suit surrounded by my father's roses which he loves more than he loves my mom. When he calls his roses "Hybrid Perpetuals"—it sounds like he's making a wish. I hold a rose against each ear like—ear muffs... Like hearing the sounds of the

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HOLD THIS

by Sheila Callaghan

Based on the phobia “Alektorophobia”—fear of chickens.

YOUNG MAN. Hold this. Here. Take it. Hold it. Take it. Hold it.

No, he says.

Take it. Put it with the other ones.

No, he says. They aren't alive, he says.

Don't think about that. They're sleeping.

They are not sleeping, he says. Their chests flutter when they sleep.

Listen. I can't pay someone to do it. Do it. Take it. Hold it.

So he holds it. In his right hand. Cream-yellow puff of fuzz. Orange pencil-point beak. Its chest does not flutter.

Voices are banging behind him. Commercial people making their commercial. His mother's voice the loudest among them. “We only have nine more. Try not to give them *all* heart attacks.”

But most of them do not die from heart attacks. Only two. Most of them die from the heat of the commercial lamps. Baby chicks can thrive in sunlight, in moonlight, in infrared light that does not exceed temperatures of 70 degrees. They cannot survive 800 watts of stage lighting.

So he holds it. In his right hand. He thinks of. An infrared light bulb. The black X's he drew on all the eggs that were about to hatch. The pickle jar lid filled with marbles and drinking water, marbles to keep the chicks from drowning. The new velour sofa his mother ordered after she was told how much the agency would be paying her.

He hears a man's laugh behind him; a pointy, pick-axe laugh. “It got cooked. This must be how they make chicken nuggets.”

His mother does not laugh. She contemplates her son over the frames of her Ray Bans. This is the first time it occurs to her that he might be gay.

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NAKED LUNCH

by Michael Hollinger

(Lights up on VERNON and LUCY sitting at a small dining-room table, eating. There's a small vase with too many flowers in it, or a large vase with too few. A bottle of wine has been opened. VERNON regales LUCY as he vigorously devours a steak. LUCY discreetly nibbles on her corn-on-the-cob.)

VERNON. Larry thinks the whole show's a fake. He says the guy's just an actor and all the crocs are trained. I said, you can't train a crocodile! It's not like some poodle you can teach to ride a bike. It's got this reptile brain, a million years old. All it knows, or wants to know, is whether or not you're juicy. Anyway, this one show the guy's sneaking up on a mother protecting her nest. And she's huge—I mean, this thing could swallow a Buick. And the guy's really playing it up: *(Australian accent:)* “Amazing—look at the size of those teeth!” But just—

(He stops, looking at LUCY. Pause. She looks up from her corn.)

LUCY. What.

VERNON. What's the matter?

LUCY. I'm listening.

VERNON. You're not eating your steak.

LUCY. Oh. No.

VERNON. How come?

LUCY. I'll just eat the corn.

(She returns to nibbling.)

VERNON. What's wrong with the steak?

LUCY. Nothing.

VERNON. Then eat it. It's good.

LUCY. I'd...rather not.

VERNON. Why not?

(Pause.)

LUCY. I'm vegetarian.

(Beat.)

VERNON. What?

LUCY. I don't eat meat anymore.

VERNON. Since when?

LUCY. Since we, you know. Broke up.

(Pause.)

VERNON. Just like that?

LUCY. Well,—

VERNON. You break up with me and boom next day you start eating tofu?

LUCY. I'd been thinking about it for a while.

VERNON. First I ever heard of it.

LUCY. Well, I'd been thinking. *(Pause. LUCY picks up her corn again, guiding him back to the story:)* So anyway, the guy's sneaking up on the mother...

VERNON. Was it because of me?

LUCY. *No...*

VERNON. Something I said, or did...

LUCY. It's nothing like that.

VERNON. You were always fond of cataloguing the careless things I said and did...

LUCY. I just did some soul searching, that's all.

(Beat.)

VERNON. Soul-searching.

LUCY. About a lot of things.

VERNON. And your soul said to you “no more meat.”

LUCY. You make it sound silly when you say it like that.

VERNON. Then what, what did your soul tell you?

(Beat. LUCY exhales heavily and sets down her corn.)

LUCY. I decided I didn’t want to eat anything with a face.

(Beat.)

VERNON. A *face*?

(He gets up, stands behind her and looks at her plate.)

LUCY. Vern...

VERNON. I don’t see any face...

LUCY. This doesn’t have to be a big deal...

VERNON. I don’t see a face. Do you see a face?

(He lifts the plate toward her face.)

LUCY. There’s other reasons.

VERNON. No face.

(He sets the plate down again.)

LUCY. I’ve been reading things.

VERNON. What things?

LUCY. You know, health reports...

VERNON. You can’t believe that stuff.

LUCY. What do you mean?

VERNON. You can’t! One day they say bran’s good for you—“Want to live forever? Eat more bran.”—the next day they find out bran can kill you.

LUCY. Whatever.

VERNON. Too much bran boom you’re dead.

LUCY. There are diseases you can get from meat.

VERNON. Like what?

LUCY. Well, Lysteria...

VERNON. That's chicken. Chicken and turkey.

LUCY. Or Mad cow.

VERNON. *Mad cow?* Did you— That's not even...that's *English*, they have that in *England*. This isn't English meat, this is from, I don't know, Kansas, or... *Wyoming*.

LUCY. Even so,—

VERNON. No. Now you're making stuff up.

LUCY. I'm not; I saw an article—

VERNON. You're just being paranoid, this whole... You know what this is? Do you?

LUCY. What.

VERNON. Carnophobia.

LUCY. "Carnophobia"?

VERNON. It's a word, look it up.

LUCY. It's not like I'm scared of meat...

VERNON. How do you think this makes me feel?

LUCY. Look, let's just drop it.

VERNON. Huh?

LUCY. We were doing so well...

VERNON. I invite you over, cook a nice steak, set out flowers, napkins, the whole nine yards...

LUCY. I appreciate the napkins.

VERNON. ...figure I'll open a bottle of wine, apologize...maybe we'll get naked, be like old times.

LUCY. So let's start over.

VERNON. Then you get *carnophobic* on me.

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NORMAL

by Cusi Cram

Cast: CHASE: male, 28
LEWIS: male, 30

(New York. The waiting room of an ICU. CHASE sits and stares out. LEWIS enters with two deli cups of coffee.)

LEWIS. I tried...

CHASE. Tried what?

LEWIS. To figure out how to make coffee in your apartment. There were just so many instruments and so many different kinds of coffee. I think you said what you really needed was Arabic something...but...there were two bags that had Arabic on them and I thought what if it's the wrong Arabic, what if the one I choose is totally inappropriate.

CHASE. It's fine, Lewis.

(LEWIS hands CHASE the coffee.)

LEWIS. I'm no good with choice. I'm a Folgers and a Mr. Coffee kind of guy.

CHASE. Don't sweat it, man. I'm fine with deli coffee. It's an adventure.

LEWIS. Like Janine got it into her head to paint the den a color, you know she's sort of gotten into decorating. And she bought this little book of colors home and it stumped me, totally stumped me. Every room I've ever lived in has been white.

CHASE. *(Sipping his coffee:)* In France, they call this kind of coffee *pipi du chat*.

LEWIS. And what does that mean?

CHASE. Cat piss.

LEWIS. Aren't you involved in some coffee thing?

CHASE. A buddy and me do some importing of top-of-the-line beans from Brazil and Morocco, mostly. You can't go back after you've had Marakesh Mud.

LEWIS. That's where you were last Christmas, right? Morocco?

CHASE. We had a run-in with customs. It got complicated...

LEWIS. Mom said. I mean, she was just so thrilled that you were spending Christmas in Casablanca. She talked and talked about it. Janine got a little...I dunno. I mean Christmas in Baltimore, just doesn't have the same ring to it.

CHASE. It was an interesting Christmas.

LEWIS. Ours was pretty interesting too. Everyone but me got strep throat. I thought, I have two weeks off from school, I'm just going to sit in my very berry den, that's the color we decided on, sort of raspberry/strawberry blend, it's a little loud but warm, as Janine likes to say. I didn't do much sitting.

CHASE. I was stuck in Casablanca for two months! It was a customs nightmare. *(Beat.)* There was an upside, I had the exclusive company of a half-Moroccan, half-Swedish ballerina, named Tamir.

LEWIS. And where is Tamir ballerina now?

CHASE. Probably somewhere with her husband.

LEWIS. You talk to any doctors?

CHASE. I was thrown out of the ICU.

LEWIS. And, I thought you would have bedded the entire nursing staff by now and all the female interns, at least the pretty exotic ones. Mom's been in the ICU for what two days and you haven't scored a uniform yet?

CHASE. Lay off, Lewis.

LEWIS. It's just you can charm every last good coffee bean out of North Africa but you can't the low down from a doctor.

CHASE. I got the low down.

LEWIS. And what? It's like top-secret information? What did the fucking doctor say, Chase?

CHASE. Seems that I was interrupting rounds, interrupting his teaching. None of those interns asked a single question about Mom. She was just a bunch of numbers and tubes to them.

LEWIS. She's not their mother.

CHASE. I got the Peruvian Doctor to talk to me.

LEWIS. The one that smells like vanilla?

CHASE. He smells of Bay Rum. Good Bay Rum, I might add.

LEWIS. Who cares what he smells like. What did he say?

CHASE. He wasn't going to say anything. But then I started mentioning some people that I know in Lima, and he came round.

LEWIS. Peru has coffee too?

CHASE. It does but it's not very good. I manage some bands there. It's part of this world music company I started with a Paris-based conglomerate. I appealed to him as a son.

LEWIS. To who?

CHASE. The Doctor.

LEWIS. The world music thing. I didn't know about it.

CHASE. I'm involved in a lot of businesses, Lewis.

LEWIS. I know, I know, music was just never one of your things. I'm the musical one.

CHASE. I told him how Mom had raised us alone and put us both through college on a nurse's salary and how I had sold my first company for three million dollars by the time I was twenty-five.

LEWIS. And what did you tell the Peruvian doctor about me?

CHASE. That you were the principal of a huge high school in Baltimore.

LEWIS. I'm the assistant principal of a junior high, it's not that big. Never mind. What did he say about Mom?

CHASE. They've managed to stabilize her and control the clotting. She'll probably be moved out of the ICU tonight. They want to keep her under observation for a few days.

LEWIS. Well that's better than I thought.

CHASE. It would be so weird without her. I can't even imagine it.

LEWIS. You know Mom, she always pulls through.

CHASE. Yeah.

LEWIS. I'm sorry...for whatever I said. I just... I guess I'm tense.

CHASE. It's OK. I mean I get it. I mean who has this life but me, right?

LEWIS. But...I mean...that's the point, right?

CHASE. Of what?

LEWIS. Your life. The point is that it's not like anybody else's. I mean...right?

CHASE. The point is...the point is...that it is exciting, my life is exciting.

LEWIS. And everyone else's is, therefore, boring?

CHASE. I didn't say that. I have a life that is exciting to me. I hope your life is exciting to you. I really do, Lewis.

LEWIS. No you don't. Look, I'm fine with my suburban life with my wife who's just plain Irish-American on both sides and my two kids and my big mortgage and my ever-growing mountain of debt that precludes me from ever traveling. But you judge me. I mean admit it, since college you wanted to get as far away from Mom and our growing up as possible.

CHASE. Let's go and see Mom.

LEWIS. I'm not finished. I just want you to admit...

CHASE. (*Interrupting:*) Admit what? Admit that I'm afraid of every single thing that constitutes everyday American life. That I am terrified of big houses you can't afford filled with children whose orthodonture you can't afford and a wife who the more money you

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EUXIOUS

by Bridget Carpenter

(A woman sits at a metal table, bright light. She has a cut over one eye and her hand is bandaged.)

WOMAN. I'd like a glass of water please. —I suppose most of the people ask for the one phone call, right? Oh...the bag...

(She shrugs, dumps the bag out. Stuff. A cell phone. It rings. She twitches. Doesn't answer.)

No that's...I'll just...

(Phone stops ringing.)

I mean it's not like it's a good time to talk. You've just started to ask questions. So.

(The phone rings again. She jumps.)

Usually I answer first ring.

(She stares at the phone; it stops ringing.)

I know I know it's a dreadful cliché, I have a cell phone and I drive an SUV, *mea culpa*. My son Ian continually says, "You're getting cancer of the ear, mom." Very precocious. I know, everyone says, "You're too *young* to have a second-grader *and* a production company." *(Laughs.)* I say, *(Serious:)* deal with it. Ian just drew a cartoon for the school paper, it's a picture of God's throne in heaven, and next to it there's a telephone answering machine. And in a bubble over the answering machine it says, "Hello, this is God, I'm everywhere right now, and I can't get to the phone." *(Laughs.)* He has a little Unitarian friend named Kevin.

(The phone rings again. She jumps.)

No I'd rather not.

(Phone stops ringing.)

Everyone in that minivan was all right, weren't they? The people in my ambulance didn't know. Of course I'm concerned, I'm concerned and troubled. *(To herself:)* "Croubled." ...I drive an Escalade.

My husband calls me the demigod of Wilshire Boulevard. Yes yes yes emissions, the environment, global warming blah blah blah—please, I’ve heard it, and I’m sorry but I spend a *lot* of time in my car and I *need* to be *comfortable*. Bob *Redford* is an environmentalist and *he* drives an SUV and nobody gives him an attitude. I drive best when I’m above things. There should be a word for that. Is there *any* word on the condition of the people in the minivan?

(The unheard answer is “no.” She starts to touch phone, then stops.)

I wear a headset in the car, it’s *not* a hazard. Well considering the current situation you could say that it was *momentarily* hazardous but I wasn’t the car running the red light. —My *job* depends upon my availability. If you could see our slate right now...the number of projects we are juggling... Insane. The point is, I don’t miss a call, because *every* call is significant and important. My husband would say “Sigportant.” He has this thing...if I say that I feel, oh, *weary* and *strange*, he’ll say “wange.” He thinks it’s very funny... He always says “there should be a word for that.” Instead of my using two words.

(The phone rings again. She trembles slightly. Phone stops ringing.)

What do I remember before the impact. It’s a little difficult. Well because you’re going to think I’m crazy. I was driving, the phone rang—no caller ID number, so I assumed it was my husband, and I clicked on and said, “Tell me you didn’t forget about soccer practice” because he always forgets, only...it wasn’t him. There wasn’t any voice. There was just a, a sound, a hum, I don’t know. *Not* a dial tone. More like a song. But not music. There was a feeling, if you could *listen* to a feeling, it would *sound* like what I heard. And—this is the crazy part—I knew it was God. Calling. On the phone. I knew it. This was God. I just listened. I felt so, so...wonderful and sad...euphoric and anxious... *(Pause.)* It was like feeling every emotion you could possibly feel all at once no I am not on medication. I *do* understand what this sounds like, there should be a word for how idiotic I feel telling you that I heard GOD through my headset driving on fucking Santa Monica Boulevard! I DON’T KNOW WHY HE WOULD CALL! WHY HAS NO ONE CALLED YOU PEOPLE ABOUT THE FAMILY IN THE MINIVAN!

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I'M HERE FOR YOU

by Warren Leight

(A hotel room, New York. Small. Cramped. JULES sits on the bed, channel surfing. A decent mild-mannered guy, early twenties. A bit naive for his wife AMY, mid-twenties who now bursts into the room. She is, at the moment, out of her mind.)

AMY. Fuck me.

JULES. What?

AMY. Fuck me Jules. Take off your clothes and fuck me.

(She gets on top of him.)

JULES. What's going on?

AMY. I think it's pretty clear. She's using him.

JULES. What?

AMY. Fuck me. *(Looks down at him:)* Is something wrong?

JULES. Um...um. It's just, what about, you know. The mood. The setting? I thought you and the couples therapist said that I should—

(She takes the clicker. Turns the TV off. Still, JULES isn't aroused.)

AMY. OK? Fine. There's my mood. Let's go.

JULES. What about...protection?

AMY. Screw it. If she can have a baby, I goddamn well can have a baby. C'mon.

JULES. *(Sits up:)* What is going on?

(She pushes him back down. Tries to force the issue. No go.)

AMY. *(Looks down at him:)* Not much—

(She gets off of him. Angry.)

JULES. Amy, I can't just flick a switch and—

AMY. He can.

JULES. Who?

AMY. JOSH. “Dad.” He just can’t flick it off.

JULES. Look I can try again. I just wasn’t—

AMY. It was a set-up. This whole trip. “Why don’t you kids come join me in New York. Jules and I can get a few meetings in, and”—this part kills me—“it would be nice for the whole family to be together again.” Bullshit. He...he—

JULES. I thought it was nice of him.

AMY. He’s...he’s ridiculous. He’s fifty-three years old. He’s dating a woman who says she’s younger than me, and now he’s going to be a father. A father! Is he completely over the deep fucking end or what.

JULES. I don’t know.

AMY. You don’t know? You don’t know! He’s already a fucking father. Not that he has any idea what that means. So now, it’s like, he botched it the first time, so he wipes the slate clean and gets to go again.

(She starts to pack. Slamming drawers and closets. Stuffing a bag and a suitcase.)

JULES. Where are you going?

AMY. Well fuck him.

JULES. You know, maybe...maybe it will be a good thing—

AMY. WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

JULES. I’m not on any—

AMY. And don’t say you’re not on anybody’s side. Whenever people say that it means they’re not on your side.

JULES. Amy, calm down. OK. Take a breath here.

(She keeps packing.)

JULES. Where are you going?

AMY. I mean he is going out right now to buy the right crib, the right stroller. The right this the right that. He didn't even know our names until we were nineteen.

JULES. That's not—

AMY. We were just, "the girls," as in, Do the girls really need back-to-school wardrobes? Do the girls really need to come with us? Can't the girls leave one toilet seat up in one bathroom in the whole goddamn house?

JULES. Look, it's upsetting.

AMY. FUCK YOU.

JULES. You have every right to be—

AMY. Don't patronize me Jules. I hate when men do that.

JULES. AMY—I am not men. I am not all men. I am not your father.

AMY. You're all the same.

JULES. Thank you.

AMY. You are all ruled by your dicks. Completely incapable of honesty or decency or even simple basic common sense. I mean, do we think this woman—

JULES. I never liked her.

AMY. —really got pregnant by accident? Accidents don't happen. He's probably not even the father.

JULES. You don't know that.

AMY. Wake up. She's out for him for his money. She's playing him like a fool. It's all your fault.

JULES. Me?

AMY. You introduced them.

JULES. She asked me to. She's an actress, he's a—

AMY. See? Mom thinks she set him up. From the beginning.

JULES. He told your mom?

AMY. He has to. Not that he did. He had me tell her. Which is why he flew us in.

JULES. Am I missing something here?

AMY. Look—he has to get Mom's...permission, because she handles his money.

JULES. What?

AMY. She always has.

JULES. They've been divorced for—

AMY. They're not divorced.

JULES. I thought you said—

AMY. Not technically. She walked out on him when she walked in on him. When he and John Huston picked up some Brearly girls.

JULES. Your dad knows John Hughes?

AMY. Huston, you idiot. Not Hughes. John Huston. The African Queen not Pretty in Pink. I knew I shouldn't date someone dumber than me. Mom thought it might give me some control, but—

JULES. Date? We're married.

AMY. Well, so are Mom and Dad.

JULES. Wasn't he married to Sheila?

AMY. SHELLY.

JULES. The tall one?

AMY. Sidney. No they weren't married. I mean, he went through some ceremony in Barbados once on their honeymoon but technically he and Mom never split. She still handles his finances and he says it's good because this way no gold digger will try to get his money, or they can try but they can't because he's married so it's not his to give away and it gives him a way out.

(She starts packing again. Closes suitcase, goes to door.)

AMY. Until now.

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SAFE

by Gina Gionfriddo

WOMAN. I went to a cancer group. I went for a while, actually. *(Pause.)* The cancer group was full of those women you avoid at parties, you know, the sort of righteously clean-living people who bring their own mugs to Starbucks. Not that that's a bad thing in and of itself. I mean, save the trees. Good for them. They're just not people you want to know. Each of these women had her *thing*, some natural, spiritual, nutritional *thing* that was going to keep her from getting sick again. I heard about macrobiotics, directed visualization, the yeast connection, the sugar blues...Rolfing, Reiki, chelation...

We had this young man come one night. He'd had two brain surgeries in the last five years and his odds, I gather, were less than 50/50. He also had a lot of substance-abuse issues which don't go over real well with people who think refined sugar is a drug. But they listened to his story and they thanked him for sharing. Then this woman gave a presentation about essential oils. Aromatherapy. She got about midway through when the boy just stood up and said, "fuck this." Then he stormed out. And I went after him.

He was a mess this kid. Twenty-three years old. Doing a lot of cocaine which...I've never done it, but it struck me as something a person with two brain tumors probably shouldn't do. We had a cup of coffee and he was just...he was furious. He'd been sick his whole adult life. What I went through, he went through twice and that I can't imagine. It's one thing to go through it when you don't know what to expect but to go through it once you do know... *(Pause.)* Anyway. I gave him my number, but I didn't really think he'd call.

I went back to the group the next week. I couldn't help it. There was a woman in there who was 14 years out. She was annoying as hell—her thing was raw foods—but she was 14 years out and it made me hopeful just to know that she existed.

The week after that, he called me. He said he'd met a woman who walked down forty floors to get out of the World Trade Center. She was still pretty messed up but she was going to a group in Brooklyn

and it was helping her. He had gone to the group with her and he said it made him feel better and he thought I would like it, too. So I went.

The Trade Center thing sort of put me off. I mean, I'm sorry for what they went through and I don't doubt that it was terrible, but as far as their ongoing struggle... The odds of them having to flee a burning building again are negligible. The odds of my cancer coming back are considerably more sobering. But I went.

The best I can describe it...it's like nap time at preschool. Big loft in Brooklyn. No furniture. Lots of candles, some kind of spices burning. You walk in and take a blanket and then you just...lie on the floor. And the man...the leader...plays a CD of bells and he talks over it. He says stuff like, "Here and now, in this room, you are safe. You are fine." On and on like that. Repetitive, present-tense reassurance like you do with a hysterical child. Often I don't even listen. I like the bells and the spices. I like being on the floor with all these people.

It works. I feel better. And maybe the reason it works is nothing more sophisticated than nap time at preschool. Time out for comfort.

It's the one place I have where I'm allowed to not be over it. All the groups, the therapy...is all about coping. Aggressive positivity. Even professional people—therapists—when you say how scared you are they want you to make a list of things to do instead. Go jogging! Take a bath! Get a cat! All the time I was sick, people expressed their concern in the form of constructive questions: "What can you do?" "What can *we* do?" How many treatments...what kind of foods... And that's all very nice, but what I really wanted was for someone to stop—just for a minute—being solution-oriented and proactive and positive and to just say, "This sucks. This is very, very bad." Because it was. It is. And buying a puppy and eating raw foods and breathing clary sage is not going to change that.

Being "over" cancer, it's like... The best I can describe it is it's like the end of that movie *Halloween*. You know that movie? The bogeyman is so bad, they can't kill him. They stick a knitting needle

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PHOBOPHOBIA

by Julie Marie Myatt

n.: a morbid fear of developing a phobia; fear of fear.

(PAUL stands dressing in front of his girlfriend, LISA. It is his first day on the job as a traffic cop. He's nervous. His uniform is brand new. This is his big "start" on the "force." Shoes are polished. Uniform starched to cardboard. Impeccably shined badge waits in LISA's hands.)

(She is careful not to actually touch it...she lets it rest in her hands. Hence, PAUL's constant asking for various articles of clothing and help in his getting ready pose a terrible problem in not smudging, dropping, or "ruining" the badge, or this big moment, in any way, shape or form. Also, LISA has one if not all of the possible phobias/fears that PAUL mentions.)

PAUL. Do, do I look scared—Hand me those socks—Please. I've been through all the training. I proved myself—Belt...right there by your feet, honey... Though this has been no easy road...no sir; I don't need to tell you that. You've heard what I've been through. You saw me through it—watch the badge—fingers, Lisa, fingers, more grease than a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken on a simple set of ten human fingers, and I'm not going to even start with that... Lord knows they put me through every godforsaken thing to test my courage. Shoved me in, in, those tiny boxes with no air, crammed me in elevators full of people, most of them with a serious case of B.O., I might add...dangled me from high buildings on nothing but dental tape, floss really is stronger, you know, covered me in spiders, then snakes, then dolls of every shape and size, none of which, I soon discovered, could even close their stupid eyes...my shoes are right behind you, sweetheart...thanks...not to mention, being left alone in a dark room, with no chance of light, without a soul to speak to for a month, sent me to a Yankees game on the most crowded day of the year, without a seat, and made me sing the national anthem, a cappella, without even a toot to set me in key...sent me out on a raft in the middle of the Atlantic with nothing but a teaspoon to push my way back to shore, I got rickets en

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YES

by Stephen Belber

(A MAN stands alone before a large crowd, his arms stiffly at his side. He is not a man of whom it would be said he is comfortable in his body. Silence. Eventually, he speaks, but when he does it is in a small, somewhat overwhelmed voice.)

MAN. You may be wondering. *(Beat.)* What I'm doing. *(Beat.)* Why I'm here. *(Beat...)* At first my doctor said...he thought...he said he thought, that I don't like being stared at. *(Beat.)* Which is true. *(Beat.)* I don't.

(Silence, as he boldly attempts eye contact with the large number of people now staring at him.)

I don't like crowds.

I don't like public speaking.

I don't like thinking about having an erect penis.

(Beats; and then, re: his penis.)

It's not. *(Beat.)* Although the idea scares me. Especially in public. *(Pause.)* When people are staring at me.

(Beat; he takes off a layer of clothing, most likely his shirt.)

Eventually we thought it was nudity. *(Pause.)* Fear of nudity. Which may not be far off. But not really on either. *(Beat.)* I mean...I guess...to a certain extent.

(Beat; he takes off another layer, perhaps his undershirt.)

For awhile I went to a specialist who treats people who have a disorder in which they fear...rectum...or *recti*. *(Pause.)* Rectums. *(Beat.)* But then it turned out that someone was trying to set us up together; romantically. Me and the specialist. *(Pause.)* Like some sort of trick rectal blind date. *(Pause.)* It didn't work out.

(During the following he takes off his shoes and socks.)

My mother thinks I'm afraid of flowers. She thinks that they represent, for me, beauty, and that beauty is a concept, a notion, a reality that I'm simply unprepared to accept; or embrace; or be bowled

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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