2026

FAIL BETTER
THE BEST 10-MINUTE PLAYS

LITERARY CONTEST 2026

Edited by Elżbieta Grzyb

Warszawa 2026

Foreword

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to place in your hands this collection of 10-minute plays written by participants in the “Fail Better” literary competition, organised by the Centre For Foreign Language Teaching at the University of Warsaw. This year’s competition focused on failure; its place (or absence) in contemporary culture and language. The inspiration came from Samuel Beckett’s words: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

The impulse to explore these questions further came from the “Fail Worse” seminar, organised as part of the Trinity Arts and Humanities Research Festival at Trinity College in September 2025. The discussions held there revealed how many questions about the meaning of our choices and values remain unspoken. Is there a place for failure in a culture dominated by the pursuit of efficiency? Who defines what success means today, and on whose terms are we expected to achieve it? Is failure to exist merely as a “transitional stage” on the road to victory? And how can we speak about it in terms other than binary ones?

The plays you will find here, Dear Reader, are a creative dialogue with these questions. Their authors are a group of young people interested in theatre both as an art form and as a means of social dialogue. They include students, PhD candidates and graduates of the University of Warsaw, as well as people from a variety of artistic backgrounds. The 10-minute plays collected in this publication form a kind of “self-portrait” – or, to use a more contemporary term, “a selfie of a generation”. They reveal the inner lives of young

people, their relationships with the world, their struggles with the realities of everyday life, as well as their need for deep reflection on the reality that surrounds them. Although philosophical reflection is not necessarily what one would typically associate with a 10-minute play, these young writers took up the challenge posed by the competition theme and used the experimental potential of this form to pursue their own artistic goals.

Can a dramatic miniature be an appropriate means of expression for questions of such significance? The audience gathered at Pałacyk Konopackiego on 16 May 2026, for the festival presentations, answered this question in the affirmative, responding enthusiastically to the six shortlisted plays. We did not have the opportunity to award and stage a larger number of the submitted works, but we hope that this publication will allow them to reach a wider circle of readers and, eventually, the stage. Each of them is valuable and worthy of attention. Interest has already been expressed by Atelier Scena dla Młodych of Witkacy Theatre in Zakopane and by the Polish Theatre “Kopernik” in Zagreb.

Will the reflections on failure contained in this volume provide an opportunity to recognise our own needs and limitations? To what extent can the theme we have proposed be liberating, opening up space for alternative ways of thinking, acting and being? The participants in the literary competition and in the project promoting the 10-minute play in Poland have already offered their answers to these questions. Now, Dear Reader, we invite you to join the discussion yourself.

Elżbieta Grzyb

The **"Fail Better" 10-Minute Play Literary Competition** was part of the **II 10-Minute Plays Festival** project, organized at the Centre for Foreign Language Teaching at the University of Warsaw during the 2025/2026 academic year.

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Project Originator and Coordinator: dr Elżbieta Grzyb

To preserve the unique idiolect and voice of each author, editorial interventions were kept to an absolute minimum. Anyone interested in staging any of these plays is kindly requested to contact the author directly. Contact information for each author can be found in their bio.

We would like to extend our **heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed** to the realization of this project.

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1. The Rehearsal

By: Anna Kopyś

Anna was born and has spent her entire life in Warsaw, where she is currently pursuing a degree in psychology. In her play, she draws mainly from her own relationship with writing, making The Rehearsal an auto-reflection on perfectionism. Author's email: annakopys2005@gmail.com.

CHARACTERS

BOY (ACTOR)

VOICEOVER (AUTHOR)

MOTHER (AUTHOR)

DAUGHTER (ACTOR)

HUSBAND (ACTOR)

FRIEND (AUTHOR)

[Empty room. ACTOR stands in the middle, AUTHOR to the side. Both are in character]

BOY (ACTOR): It's 2016. I'm 14 and I'm in the last grade of middle school, and I tell myself as the fireworks explode above my head that this year it's really gonna be different. This year I'm going to high school, and everything will change. I think I'll join the football team. The guys on the team are always popular, and I'm gonna be so good at it that everyone will be impressed. So, in 2016 I promise myself - I'm going to practice football for an hour every day.

VOICEOVER (AUTHOR) *[In a monotonous voice]***:** Ten.

BOY (ACTOR): It's 2017 now, and high school is… fine. Boring. I talk to some guys in my class. I guess my grades are okay too? Mum says I should work on my maths so maybe this will be my resolution. It's not like I have a better idea.

VOICEOVER (AUTHOR): Nine.

BOY (ACTOR): Am I ugly? I don't think I'm that bad, but I tried to ask Amy out and she said she was sorry, but she didn't want to be my girlfriend. I know I'm not the most handsome guy in our class but I thought… Anyway, I don't need her. I'll get some other girl to date me, and she can be even prettier than Amy, and then she can be jealous all she wants but it will be too late. Yeah, this year, I'm getting a girlfriend.

VOICEOVER (AUTHOR): Eight.

BOY (ACTOR): I really, really need to figure out maths. College applications are due in February, so I still have some time to get around to it, but if I want to have a real chance to get in anywhere, I have to start working on my maths. Like, for real, no cheating, no avoiding it, I just sit down and figure it out.

VOICEOVER (AUTHOR): Seven.

BOY (ACTOR): So… community college is still like, education, right? It's better than nothing? I can totally get a nice job after. Speaking of jobs, mum says it's about time I started making some money, and as much as I hate it I think she's right. I guess I can try applying? Some retail or shit, I don't know.

[pause, AUTHOR gets out of character]

AUTHOR: Can we take a break? I mean it's fine, but don't you think it lacks something?

[ACTOR gets out of character, turns towards AUTHOR]

ACTOR: Uhh… maybe? I guess it's a little stiff?

AUTHOR: I mean, you're doing a great job, but I'm not sure if this whole idea is working out.

ACTOR: You said it, not me.

AUTHOR: I thought I could show something here, with the resolutions. That even if we don't always complete our goals, it doesn't mean we are failing at life as a whole. That maybe sometimes our failures put us exactly in the places we are meant to be. But it's not really clicking? There is no flow, you're just monologuing all the time and I think we can figure out something better.

ACTOR: Okay? What do you have in mind?

AUTHOR: Let's try it this way.

[pause, both AUTHOR and ACTOR change expressions and way of speaking]

MOTHER (AUTHOR): You know you can talk to me, right?

DAUGHTER (ACTOR): You wouldn't understand anyway.

MOTHER (AUTHOR): Try me. I was a teenager once, too.

DAUGHTER (ACTOR): And that's why you wouldn't understand! You think my life is just like your life! Well, it's not! I'm not like you!

MOTHER (AUTHOR): I know, I'm just trying to help. Don't bite my head off, Jesus.

DAUGHTER (ACTOR): Ugh, why do you always have to make things about yourself?! Just leave me alone!

MOTHER (AUTHOR): And what if I don't? What if I care about you and want to know when you have something on your mind?

DAUGHTER (ACTOR): Ugh!

[DAUGHTER (ACTOR) leaves the stage, MOTHER (AUTHOR) turns towards the audience]

MOTHER (AUTHOR): And here she goes again. I don't know why I even bother. It's not like she will ever appreciate it. *[pause]* What am I doing wrong? She used to tell me everything. And now she's all grown up, and she doesn't need me anymore. What more can I…

[AUTHOR pauses, gets out of character]

AUTHOR: No, wait. I've lost the vision.

[ACTOR comes back]

ACTOR: Why doesn't it surprise me?

AUTHOR: Can we try something else?

ACTOR: Really?

[AUTHOR looks expectantly at ACTOR]

ACTOR: Fine, fine.

[pause, change of expressions and way of speaking]

HUSBAND (ACTOR): No, no, no! Fuck! Fucking, fuck, it was today?

FRIEND (AUTHOR): What, you forgot?

HUSBAND (ACTOR): You know I was busy with work.

FRIEND (AUTHOR): I hate to tell you this, but I don't think Mary is gonna be happy with that excuse.

HUSBAND (ACTOR): I still have time, right? I'll just pop by the florist and get her some flowers or shit.

FRIEND (AUTHOR): Dude. It's your tenth anniversary. I don't think flowers are enough here.

HUSBAND (ACTOR): You're right, shit. God, I fucked up. Uhm, I can try and make a reservation? At that fancy Italian place, she liked? Or get her some jewellery? What would…

AUTHOR: Wait. Stop, stop! Let's start over. This is boring as fuck.

[ACTOR drops the character, visibly annoyed]

ACTOR: Again?! Really?! How many times do you want to do this?!

AUTHOR: I'll get it, just one more try. Please.

ACTOR: Oh, come on, how hard can it be? You could have finished it three times over since we started rehearsing!

AUTHOR: I'm sorry, I know, I'm sorry. I just want to get it right.

ACTOR: Well, you'll never get it right if you don't finish the play! I get it, really, but I am so tired of this. We've started so many times, but how many scripts do we have?

AUTHOR: …Zero.

ACTOR: Fucking zero. It's not that deep, you know. Just write anything! It doesn't have to be revolutionary.

AUTHOR: I know that. *[pause]* Oh, shut up, I do know that. I just want it to be good, I guess.

ACTOR: You do remember there is a deadline?

AUTHOR: Yes, yes.

ACTOR: So, you see that you just have to sit down, stop thinking about writing and actually start doing it? You want to write a play? Then stop fucking around with the idea and write a damn play!

AUTHOR: You know what?

ACTOR: What?

AUTHOR: I think I just did.

2. The Circle

By: Aidan Harris-Cross

Aidan Harris-Cross is a writer, filmmaker, musician, and playwright whose work blends absurdism, philosophical inquiry, and dark humour with a deep reverence for classic cinema and theatrical tradition. His latest short film, The Last Round's on Me, premiered at the George Mason Film Festival in May 2026, the same month he earned his bachelor's degree in Film and Video Studies. Outside of filmmaking and writing, he maintains a strong interest in music and film history and is an avid collector of physical media, including an extensive archive of vinyl records and Blu-rays.

The Circle was among those recognized in this year's competition. The jury highlighted the philosophical dimension of the reflection it conveys: "A meditation on uncertainty, this play unfolds in a space defined by waiting and marked by anticipation. Its indeterminacy resists any fixed interpretation, seeming to lack definitive purpose while simultaneously reflecting human existence and the persistent struggle in a search for meaning."

Author's email: harriscrossproductions@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

FERGUSON

ELMER

SERVANT

MASTER

[A stool sits beside a large chalkboard. On the chalkboard is the outline of a circle. Under the circle is a piece of chalk and an eraser. On the stool is FERGUSON.]

[Ferguson picks at his teeth. He stops as the SERVANT enters with ELMER.]

SERVANT *[Stopping beside Ferguson]***:** Well, here we are Elmer. This is Ferguson.

[He gestures to Ferguson, who nods at Elmer.]

SERVANT *[Grinning]***:** The two of you will make one another's acquaintance quickly, I assure you.

ELMER: It's a pleasure.

FERGUSON: Aye.

[A brief pause.]

SERVANT: Now that you are well acquainted, gentlemen, you must make haste and get to work. It must be completed before the Master arrives. Farewell!

[He turns to leave.]

ELMER: Are you not the Master?

SERVANT *[Turning to Elmer]***:** No, my dear boy. I am but a humble servant. You shall know the Master when you see him.

[He turns to leave once more.]

ELMER *[Outstretching his hand]***:** But Mister, what work is there to be done?

[The Servant stops dead in his tracks and walks to Elmer with a stern expression on his face. He lays a hand on Elmer's shoulder.]

SERVANT *[Whispering]***:** Such questions are not to be asked, my boy. Be glad it was me you asked, and not the Master. He does not tolerate insubordination.

[The smile returns to the Servant's face as he pats Elmer on the cheek.]

SERVANT: Now, your work awaits you. Farewell, gentlemen.

[Exit SERVANT.]

FERGUSON *[Wagging his finger]***:** You mustn't ask questions like that. It'll get you nowhere.

ELMER: I do apologize, I didn't know.

FERGUSON *[Chuckling]***:** Well, that's plenty clear! You don't know much. You thought he was the Master?

ELMER *[Shrugging]***:** I don't know what he looks like! Have you seen the Master?

FERGUSON *[Reflectively]***:** No, I can't say that I have. We shall see him soon, though. I'm certain of that. Absolutely positive.

ELMER: You know this to be true?

FERGUSON: Why, of course. It is all I know to be true.

ELMER: Naturally. Well, are you to tell me what work is to be done before his arrival?

FERGUSON *[Shaking his head]***:** I tell you not to ask such questions! Besides, is it not plenty obvious to you?

[Elmer looks around for a moment.]

ELMER: No, I cannot say that it is.

FERGUSON *[Pointing at the chalkboard]***:** Do you not see the board, lad?

ELMER *[Looking at the chalkboard]***:** I do indeed. A nice board, it is.

FERGUSON: That it is. And do you see the circle upon it?

ELMER: Aye.

FERGUSON *[Folding his arms and closing his eyes]***:** Well, there you have it.

[Elmer scratches his head for a beat. He walks to the chalkboard. He picks up the piece of chalk and studies it.]

ELMER: I believe I understand.

[Elmer reaches to write with the chalk. Ferguson quickly stands up and puts himself between Elmer and the board.]

FERGUSON *[Grabbing Elmer's wrist]***:** You understand not a thing! Lay down your hand, Elmer!

ELMER *[Pulling back his arm]***:** Unhand me! Are you mad?

FERGUSON *[Pointing at himself]***:** Mad am I? That's a laugh! You know not what you do!

ELMER *[Nods]***:** That is all I know to be true.

[Ferguson walks Elmer away from the board.]

FERGUSON *[Disappointed]***:** Is it not clear that our work is of the utmost importance? Why would you forsake it?

ELMER: I know of its importance, but I know not what it is.

FERGUSON *[Pointing at the board]***:** You have seen the board and the circle upon it, have you not?

ELMER: Why, yes. It's awful round, that circle! Was it your creation?

FERGUSON *[Sputtering]***:** My creation? If only! Such perfection could only have come from the Master's hand.

ELMER: It is a nice circle. You say it's the Master's work, eh?

FERGUSON: It couldn't be anybody else's.

ELMER: Then what is our work, Ferguson?

FERGUSON *[Grabbing his head]***:** Can you still not see? Such perfection has been entrusted to us, Elmer! We must protect it. Why, without perfection we'd be no more than apes picking bugs from our heads!

[Ferguson grabs Elmer's hand and points to it.]

FERGUSON: And you, my dear boy, almost spoiled that perfection.

[Elmer shakes his head and rubs his chin.]

ELMER *[Pacing back and forth]***:** I see, I see. Oh dear.

[Elmer pauses for a beat and stares quizzically at the chalkboard.]

FERGUSON: Now do you see, brother? Now do you see what a sin it would be to ruin that perfection?

ELMER: I see its perfection, but might I posit a question?

FERGUSON: You and your questions.

ELMER: I see the perfection of the circle, but might our work be something besides protecting it?

FERGUSON: Besides protecting it? And being its keeper?

ELMER: And being its keeper.

FERGUSON: Something more?

ELMER: More, perhaps.

FERGUSON *[Shocked]***:** Perhaps? I think not! What more is there? What more could there be?

[Ferguson shakes his head in disbelief, and Elmer places a hand on his shoulder.]

ELMER *[Reassuring]***:** Now, now Ferguson. I, nor anybody else, could deny the perfection of the circle. But I do wonder...

FERGUSON: That's your problem, your wondering! Have you no faith?

[Elmer shakes his head. He walks to the stool and takes a seat.]

ELMER: It just seems so simple is all.

[Ferguson storms over to Elmer.]

FERGUSON *[Pointing at his chest]***:** As if there could be any task more sacred! And you lack all gratitude...

ELMER *[Patting his shoulder]***:** I think you misunderstand me, brother. I'm certain the Master has work for us to be done with the circle.

FERGUSON: That is all I know to be true.

ELMER *[Turning to the chalkboard]***:** Aye, but perhaps there is something to be done yet.

[Elmer stands up and grabs the piece of chalk. Ferguson runs and slaps it from his hand. He grabs Elmer by his shoulders.]

FERGUSON *[Bewildered]***:** Can you still not see, lad! Do you still not understand what you do? What you are meant to do? Do you not understand the ramifications? Is nothing sacred to you?

[He gestures wildly at the board.]

FERGUSON: Such human arrogance——to glimpse perfection and desire its desecration! Have you no conscience?

[He picks up the chalk, snaps it in two, and throws it back on the ground.]

ELMER *[Aghast]***:** Have I none? Have you? Look what you've done...

[Elmer falls to his knees and cradles the two halves of chalk.]

ELMER *[In anguish]***:** Look what you've done to all of us. The potential...

[He jumps up and grabs Ferguson by the lapels.]

ELMER *[Gesturing towards the circle]***:** We must make our mark! Is it not obvious to you? There is work to be done and you refuse to act!

FERGUSON *[Pushing Elmer away]***:** Ridiculous, these baseless allegations! You know not what you say, lad.

ELMER *[With great effort]***:** And what man does? We have been given a canvas on which to make something worthy of the Master's eyes, and instead you forsake what he has asked of us! For shame.

[Elmer reaches for the chalk on the ground, and Ferguson stops him.]

FERGUSON *[Through gritted teeth]***:** Fool! Stop at once!

[Elmer drops the piece of chalk and bends down to pick it up. Ferguson tackles him. The two men scramble on the ground for a beat over the two pieces of chalk, until they are interrupted by the Servant.]

SERVANT *[Entering]***:** Gentlemen! What is the meaning of this?

[The two men freeze, fists extended. They let go of each other's lapels.]

ELMER *[Panting]***:** Has our work been done, sir?

SERVANT *[Sternly]***:** That is a question for which I could not possibly have an answer.

[He pulls both the men to their feet.]

SERVANT: Now, make yourselves presentable: the Master shall arrive momentarily! Farewell.

[The Servant exits. Elmer and Ferguson begin pacing in circles.]

FERGUSON *[Angrily]***:** Now you've done it, now you've done it!

ELMER *[With a tremble in his voice]***:** I'll take no responsibility for your inaction; I will only beg for you to be forgiven.

FERGUSON *[Stomping towards Elmer]***:** Why you…

[The two men stop their bickering as they hear someone approaching. The MASTER enters, draped in a judicial gown and a barrister's wig. Elmer and Ferguson drop to their knees and avert their eyes. He walks slowly past them with his head held high, not glancing at them for even a moment. The Master stops at the chalkboard and looks it over for a beat. He picks up the eraser, and with a few quick movements, erases the circle entirely. The Master turns on his heels and walks straight back out of the room without expression. The two men look back up at

the chalkboard in disbelief for a beat. They then address each other.]

FERGUSON: Well, I believe he has made things totally clear.

ELMER *[Picking up one half of the chalk]***:** Aye. I suppose we must start again.

FERGUSON *[Picking up the other half]***:** That is all I know to be true.

[Ferguson stands up and helps Elmer to his feet. The two men, chalk in hand, begin to study the blank board in silence.]

[CURTAIN]

3. Rider? I Hardly Know Her

By: Sky Wojciechowski

Sky Wojciechowski is a queer educator and student of Alternative Education with Art Education at the University of Warsaw. They run drama classes for high school students and theatre improvisation workshops. They perform at Teatr Ochoty playing a fifteen-year-old fleeing from her father ("Toffi") and on the drag stages of various Polish cities. For their success, they thank the Machulskis' Theatre Studio (Ognisko Teatralne u Machulskich), thanks to which they acquired much-needed organizational and self-reliance skills, as well as all their friends who supported them along their theatrical journey. In the future, they see themselves in the profession of a healthy and happy person – and if that doesn't pan out, they will also be content with being a Warsaw city guide, a playwright, or a museum educator.

Author’s email: janekwojc@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

HARRY – A traveler on their way to start a new life.

X – A guy in his 40s, flirtatious when drunk.

MARY – A proper lady from the South Downs.

ROBBIE – A young man that fled from Russia.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO) – The voice that says all the announcements on the train. Adds unnecessary comments as well from time to time.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): The scene takes place on a train. There is one main character, let's call them HARRY.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): HARRY is occupying the window seat. They are, well. Hairy. They really are just a bundle of dark brown hair with a shape slightly reminiscent of a face peeking out from underneath, right around where you'd expect the face to be. They are on their way from Luton Airport Parkway to Brighton. It is around 8 pm on May 24th.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): We are now approaching Farringdon.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): Enter X. He swaggers in with a backpack on, two plastic cups in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other.

X: Oi mate! D'ya like a swig?

HARRY: No. Thanks though.

[X starts fidgeting as HARRY stares. Then he checks the news.]

X: You heard? Trump got charged as guilty, finally. Now that's something interesting.

HARRY: Uh, yeah, we'll see if anything happens.

X: Not really into politics, are you?

HARRY: Not really, especially since I have no impact on this.

X: Interesting accent you got. Where you from, Germany?

HARRY: Poland, actually.

X: What brought ya here then?

HARRY: Visiting my friends. I'll be in Brighton for 10 days. I wanna take part in Brighton Fringe, you know.

X: Ah, Brighton. Fun city.

HARRY: Very. I wonder if he knows the whole “queer capital of the UK” thing.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): We are now approaching: East Croydon.

X: Ah, my stop.

HARRY: Which explains a lot.

X *[leans in and whispers]***:** By the way, you are massively attractive.

HARRY *[ruffling their own hair]***:** Um, thanks.

[X starts to leave, then as he’s about to exit, runs back to HARRY.]

X: Are you single by any chance?

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): It was at this moment, Jackson knew he fucked up. - Vine

HARRY: Iiiiiiiii’m not, no. Not single.

X: Ey, whoever you’re with is lucky. I really gotta go, it was nice chatting.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): Exit X, waving goodbye. Enter MARY, hurried, carrying berries in a basket. That’s it. HARRY’s trying to recover from what just happened. Was this guy really into him? Why would he? And what if HARRY said they were single. Would it be an erotic evening or would their blood splatter on some pavement after they were drugged and dragged all around the shady, shaded streets of downtown London. Would he…

MARY: I’m so sorry, dear, is this seat occupied?

HARRY: No, no, go ahead.

MARY: Would you like a few strawberries, dear? Got them fresh from my nan’s today.

[HARRY reaches for the strawberries and shoves some inside of the hair, where the mouth would be.]

MARY: I can see you’re not doing so well. What’s got you down?

HARRY: I’m fine.

MARY: No, no, please talk to me. I can sense something is wrong.

HARRY: Oh yeah?

MARY: □ I’m an empath. □ Now, no more slumping, tell me what’s going on or that malaise of yours will spread onto me and lord knows it would take me eons to recover from that.

HARRY *[MARY starts brushing their hair]***:** Alright. It’s just that… What the fuck?

MARY: It’s all in tangles. We gotta let that negative energy out somehow.

HARRY: Stop touching me. Please.

[MARY continues to brush HARRY’s hair. They keep at it for a bit.]

MARY: So you were saying?

HARRY: I was. But I’m not going to continue until you get your hands off me.

[MARY lifts her hands up, leaving the comb still in HARRY’s hair.]

HARRY: So, I'm here to see my friends. Brighton Fringe is happening soon and I wanted to see what that was like. I missed my train cause the flight was delayed and I wanted to inform the guy that would wait for me at the station but there's no goddamn signal on this route even though we were in the middle of fucking London.

[Let's say some of HARRY's hair starts catching on fire from anger and is then promptly put out by the sprinklers on the train from Bedford to Brighton that has sprinklers installed inside.]

MARY: See, now I'm all wet.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): First time in a while HARRY made any lady wet.

MARY: Is that how you treat nice women that want to help you?

HARRY: You did not help me.

MARY: And is that how you're gonna treat your future wife?

HARRY *[confused and angry]***:** My future what now?

MARY: Oh, we all know a young man like yourself is gonna get a lady and settle down one day. But with that attitude I sincerely doubt the relationship will last long. Or end happily.

HARRY *[puffs up again but doesn't catch fire on the account of also being wet]*: Not a young man. Not gonna get married. Not into girls much for that matter. You really know nothing. …erm?

MARY: MARY.

HARRY: HARRY. Displeasure to meet you.

MARY: Same to you, young whatever-you-are.

[MARY moves seats, spilling a few strawberries, that HARRY gobbles up.]

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): Exit MARY.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): We are now approaching: Balcombe.

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): Enter ROBBIE. He wants to Rob ye.

ROBBIE *[standing next to HARRY's seat]***:** Hey thug. You're not looking for any trouble, are ya?

HARRY: No, sir, of course not.

ROBBIE: Well, I am. Hands up, gimmie your most valuable possession.

[HARRY spits out a half-eaten strawberry.]

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): O mai gad. Ma beris.

ROBBIE: Is that all you got, punk?

HARRY *[plucking out the comb from their hair]***:** I got this too.

ROBBIE: No, dude, I mean, like, valuables. Cash, your phone, a carton of eggs, maybe a luxury watch.

[HARRY reaches into his hair and pulls out an old Nokia phone.]

HARRY: It has a really long-lasting battery. And it doesn't overstimulate me at all. And if it breaks, I'm fine too.

ROBBIE *[realising this really is all that HARRY's got, sits down next to them]*: Jesus... Dude, I'm so sorry. So how are you?

HARRY: Confused, scared, maybe a bit excited. It's my first time here and, as you can see, I don't have much to lose.

ROBBIE: Oh yeah, same here.

HARRY: Yeah? What brought you here?

ROBBIE: See, four years ago back in my homeland they wanted me to join the army to fight in some stupid war. I knew I would die. I mean, look at me, scrawny as hell and not much intellect either. Fleeing was my only option. I've been making do around here. Learned the language. Almost lost my accent. Slept in those fancy airbnbs when I still had the money. Then it was single rooms. Then homeless shelters. In the meantime, I tried to find a job wherever they'd take me. No luck. So now I do what I gotta do.

HARRY: Do you think I'm gonna be the same?

ROBBIE *[Takes out a cigarette and tries to light it]***:** Dude, I don't know. Why you here anyway?

HARRY: Don't. These sprinklers will get us all wet. But yeah. Same as you, really. War as well. I stayed back home for a long time. Way too long. I kept trying to help my people. But I just couldn't take it anymore. The thought of other countries supporting us kept me going. But after four years… I decided to take matters into my own hands.

ROBBIE: I thought just like you at first, but soon after It was clear they didn't care. It was clear they wanted me dead. It would just be easier for them.

HARRY: Exactly! I kept on going despite everyone around me. I felt strong, capable.

ROBBIE: I bet you are strong. You're gonna end up way better off than I did.

HARRY: So what should I do?

ROBBIE: Dude, I don't know. Live a little. Have fun while you have time. You seem like you can make things work just fine.

HARRY: You think?

ROBBIE: Yeah, dude! I'm already starting to like you. And your accent sounds so similar to what mine used to be! What part of Russia are you from?

HARRY: I'm from Lviv actually.

[Exit ROBBIE.]

ANNOUNCEMENT (VO): Next station Brighton, our final destination. *[as if starting to break down]* Final. Nal. Fi. Sti… Final…

[*The train crashes. Train lights go out, the new light is cold, probably moonlight. Harry wriggles themself out of the crash, grabs their stuff and looks around. From underneath the rubble another person appears: the person whose voice was the announcement all along.]*

ANNOUNCEMENT PERSON: Okay, so let's get one thing Straight: Right here we have an attractive, but troubled and feisty young man. Any ladies th-

HARRY: Fuck off.

4. A Modern Man

By: Laura Urraca-Makuch

Laura works as a journalist for Reuters in Gdańsk. She grew up in Germany in a Polish-Mexican family and has always been fascinated by diversity, especially by the things that connect us as people. In her free time, she enjoys going to the beach or watching cozy detective series.

Author's email: l.urracamakuch@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR – speaks of facts

SECRETARY / JANE – speaks of feelings

JUDGE – speaks of truths

JOURNALIST – listens. Asks only follow-up questions.

ALAN GOODMAN – wears a crisp suit. Has a loud confidence about him, the kind only the most ordinary and small-minded people possess.

[Alan struts down a busy Manhattan street, wearing his suit and looking at his reflection whenever he catches a glance. The line he walks is perfectly straight, paying no mind to any obstacles or people around him. Sound does not affect him either, he is listening to music on his Walkman. A very upbeat song not matching his unnaturally serious facial expression. Alan stops to fix his hair.]

NARRATOR: On Monday, August 3rd at 9:19 am you were walking to your office in Lower Manhattan. You always show up exactly 20 minutes late.

[Alan runs the remaining distance to his office and rushes in. His secretary is holding a stack of papers and approaches him.]

SECRETARY: Good morning, Mister Goodman

ALAN GOODMAN: Not now, daddy's busy.

[Alan slams the door to his office in his secretary's face. He takes a phone call in his office.]

ALAN GOODMAN: Talk to me Joey

[Alan is busy looking at his reflection again. He's practicing his smile only half listening.]

ALAN GOODMAN: So, what do you think of Jane? Joey I couldn't care less about those cockroaches, evict whoever you need to, I'll pay the legal fees, now focus, Jane. I know I have great taste in secretaries, but be honest - isn't she a little old? Keeps her grateful, that's right.

NARRATOR: You hired Jane at the behest of your older colleague, Paul. In an e-mail exchange from May 23rd, Paul wrote "you can keep fucking as many coked up bimbos as you like but hire someone halfway competent for optics". You replied "ack." Paul had recently been promoted and did not like his inferiors to have prettier secretaries than him.

[Alan's secretary pokes her head into his office.]

SECRETARY: Sir, the journalist is here.

ALAN GOODMAN: No.

[Secretary gets tense, closes the door and knocks.]

ALAN GOODMAN *[yells]***:** Come back later.

[Secretary turns red in the face, knocks again.]

ALAN GOODMAN: Fuck off, I'm busy.

[Secretary opens door to Alan's office. They stare at each other in silence.]

ALAN GOODMAN *[sighs]***:** You're way too serious, makes everything so unsexy, what do you want?

SECRETARY: The journalist is here.

ALAN GOODMAN: OK, whatever, I'll give him an autograph.

[Alan chuckles and waits for his secretary to join in. The journalist squeezes past the secretary and Alan leans back in his chair, sighing.]

JOURNALIST: Mind if record this?

ALAN GOODMAN: Whatever

JOURNALIST: Right. I was thinking we could start with your background

ALAN GOODMAN *[cutting off journalist]***:** Look it's really very simple. Harvard educated, no rich parents, no got lucky, just hard work and pure talent, climbed the corporate ladder, flipping property, revolutionizing the field, maximizing profits. You have me to thank for all the beautiful skyscrapers little guys like you dream of working in.

JOURNALIST: wasn't your father-

ALAN GOODMAN: Stepfather.

JOURNALIST: Right. About your enrollment in Harvard, in the records-

ALAN GOODMAN: I mean no disrespect, but the Ivy League system is very complicated, I wouldn't waste my

time trying to understand it if I were you, buddy.

JOURNALIST: What about the people who committed suicide?

ALAN GOODMAN: You saying I'm responsible for every nut who jumps off a bridge? You can't afford rent anymore, you work harder. Look it's been real nice talking, but I think you have everything you need.

[Alan starts listening to music on his Walkman and closes his eyes. journalist walks out.]

NARRATOR: On August 3rd at 10:23 am you wrote an e-mail to your secretary saying "Get me a drink and get that asshole fired – note to his boss should do - Manhattan rent prices are very volatile, might shoot up at any moment. Would be a shame to lose another newsroom."

[Alan pulls out his phone and starts swiping on a dating app.]

ALAN GOODMAN *[talks as he types]***:** Fat. Ugly. Woke. Ew. Time to optimize this bitch. My name is Alan Goodman. I am twenty-six years old. I live in Hudson Yards. I believe in taking care of myself, in a balanced diet, in a rigorous exercise routine. 6'2, Harvard educated, self-made.

[Alan puts his phone down and starts doing push-ups in his office.]

NARRATOR: On August 3rd you wrote an e-mail to barneyvacation@gmail.com saying "What would be a good time to see you? I'm in NY until the end of the summer and need to put some fun on my agenda lol." You received a reply three minutes later "Unfortunately my schedule is

keeping me in the valley atm. Hmu when you'll be in St Barth's for the holidays, I'll send a heli for you ;)"

[Judge walks into Alan's office while he's still doing his push-ups and sits in the seat, he had previously occupied. Secretary and journalist walk in and take seats off to the side of the judge. narrator walks in and stands to the other side of the judge. judge knocks gavel on desk.]

JUDGE: Order. Alan Goodman, you stand accused of bribery, sexual coercion-

[Alan is still busy with his push-ups]

ALAN GOODMAN *[Alan slowly gets up and starts turning to face the judge]*: Embezzlement, fraud, unethical conduct yada yada, I know the drill. Good morning your honor, a pleasure to see you as always, would you like the usual… Where's judge Morris?

JUDGE: Found guilty of corruption, malfeasance, procedural misconduct-

ALAN GOODMAN: Alright, alright, let me call my lawyer.

JUDGE: Your lawyer has been found guilty of embezzlement, obstruction of justice, perjury-

ALAN GOODMAN *[snaps fingers at secretary]***:** Ok calm down, I get it call Paul.

JUDGE: Your boss has been found guilty of sexual assault, fraud-

ALAN GOODMAN: Woah, don't get your panties in a twist, where's all this coming from?

JUDGE: would you like me to assign you legal counsel or would you like to represent yourself?

ALAN GOODMAN: This is ridiculous.

JUDGE: I will have to ask you to choose a form of legal counsel, unless you would like to immediately plead guilty.

ALAN GOODMAN: Fine, I didn't go to Harvard Law for nothing.

[Alan rolls up his sleeves in an attempt to look sexy. He starts pacing in front of the judge, narrator, secretary and journalist. He is flashing them the smile he had practiced earlier. He's flexing his muscles a little.]

ALAN GOODMAN: Ladies and gentlemen of the Jury. I will not be wasting your time today. We all know I am a man of good character; my only crime is having been too successful and therefore victim to my adversaries' nasty attacks and rumors. I encourage you all to grab a goodie bag on your way out, enjoy your afternoon and forget any of this unpleasantness.

JUDGE *[knocks gavel]***:** Found guilty on one count of trying to bribe the Jury.

ALAN GOODMAN: How dare you-

JUDGE: First witness: Jane.

JANE: Alan is a man who tries to bring everyone around him down. I will not be analyzing why that is or how he feels, because I don't care. He's a man-child who throws constant tantrums and was stupid enough to give me full access to his e-mail server, out of sheer laziness. Misogynist piece of shit. He's also so dim witted as to put all his crimes in writing and make some of the most embarrassing spelling mistakes I've seen in my life. Yesterday he demanded I give him a blow job under his desk if I want to keep my job. I have until this afternoon to decide what I'll do.

JUDGE *[knocks gavel]***:** Found guilty on one count of sexual coercion.

ALAN GOODMAN *[fuming]***:** Do you people have any idea who the FUCK you're dealing with? My name is Alan Goodman. I am twenty-six years old and the most successful man on this rotten dump of an island. You better think very carefully about what you say next. This shit doesn't happen to men like me. I'm too big to fail.

JUDGE: Correct. You're held upright by a rotten dump of a system. You have failed to fail.

NARRATOR: Having never given up any of your individual freedoms or wealth for human connection you stand before a jury today, alone. In your moments of failure, you have turned to anger, revenge, threats, bribes and lies. Congratulations on your success. The system expires today. Best of luck.

[Judge, Jane, Journalist and Narrator exit the room. Alan scrambles to find something in the office to aid him in committing suicide. THE END]

5. Let's Get On With It

By: Alessandro Peretto

A native of North Carolina, USA, Alessandro is currently an undergraduate at George Mason University. His main inspiration stems from cultural belief systems such as religion, mysticism, folklore, and philosophy. He also draws inspiration from music and dabbles in songwriting as a lyricist and singer. He is currently working on a number of projects, including his first full length novel. *Let's Get On With It* is author Alessandro Peretto's first foray into playwriting. New to existentialism as a philosophical and literary discipline, he writes mostly in the realms of fiction, fantasy in particular, and poetry. Author's email: alessandro_peretto-writing@yahoo.com.

CHARACTERS

VALET

ESTELLE

GARCIN

INEZ

UNCLE

[A drawing-room in Second Empire style. A massive bronze ornament stands on the mantelpiece.]

[Valet enters with Estelle]

ESTELLE *[to Garcin]***:** No don't look up. I know what you're hiding beneath your hands. I know you've no face left. *[Garcin removes his hands]* What! *[A short pause, then in a tone of surprise]* But I don't know you!

GARCIN: I'm not the torturer madam.

VALET *[aside]***:** Of course you are, you fool. Why do they all say the same things?

ESTELLE *[To the Valet]***:** I never thought you were. I-I thought someone was trying to play a rather nasty trick on me. Is anyone else coming?

VALET: No madam. No one else is coming.

ESTELLE *[She starts laughing]***:** Oh! Then we're to stay by ourselves, the three of us, this gentleman, this lady, and myself.

GARCIN *[angrily]***:** There's nothing to laugh about.

ESTELLE *[still laughing, To the Valet]***:** It's those sofas. They're so hideous. And just look at how they've been arranged. It makes me think of New Year's Day – when I used to visit that boring old aunt of mine, Aunt Mary. Her house is full of horrors like that.… I suppose each of us has a sofa of his own. Is that one mine? But you can't expect me to sit on that one. It would be too horrible for words. I'm in pale blue and it's vivid green.

VALET *[aside]***:** Of course you can't, what cruel and unimaginable torture that would be, having to sit on a sofa that clashes with your dress.

INEZ: Would you prefer mine?

ESTELLE: That claret-colored one, you mean? That's very sweet of you, but really – no, I don't think it'd be so much better. What's the good of worrying, anyhow? We've got to take what comes to us, and I'll stick to the green one.

VALET *[aside]***:** Sure you will, just like all the others of your ilk.

ESTELLE: The only one which might do at a pinch, is that gentle-man's.

VALET *[aside]***:** And there it is.

INEZ: Did you hear, Mr. Garcin?

GARCIN *[with a slight start, He rises]***:** Oh – the sofa, you mean. So sorry. Please take it, madam.

ESTELLE: Thanks. *[She takes off her coat and drops it on the sofa. A short silence.]* Well, as we're to live together, I suppose we'd better introduce ourselves. My name's Rigault. Estelle Rigault.

INEZ: And I'm Inez Serrano. Very pleased to meet you.

GARCIN *[bowing again]***:** Joseph Garcin.

VALET: Do you require me any longer?

ESTELLE: No, you can go. I'll ring when I want you.

[Exit Valet, with polite bows to everyone. As the door closes behind him, a quick smirk twists his lips. He exhales in a low sigh and walks down the corridor into the dark.]

[Room in sparse style. In the corner by the door is a coat rack with 3 jackets of different styles on it. In the center are two armchairs facing a television. In one chair sits an older gentleman.]

VALET *[enters]***:** Hello, Uncle. Anything interesting today?

UNCLE: You ask this every time, and the answer remains the same.

VALET *[removes jacket and places it on rack]***:** Well, if I don't ask, I can't know. Which is functionally the same as your answer. So, I might as well ask on the off chance.

UNCLE: The off chance of what? You know that's not how this works.

VALET *[drops into the other armchair]***:** But who's to say it won't ever work that way?

UNCLE: I don't know, Nephew. God, Fate, The Universe - or better yet, me, the head valet of this establishment.

VALET *[scoffs]***:** You're really laying it on thick today, Uncle. Did you sneak into the attic again?

UNCLE: You know the answer to that as well. Let's not go round again. If those answers don't satisfy, how about all of time itself?

VALET: You know, that may be your best answer yet. Still not good enough to make me stop asking, but very good attempt.

UNCLE *[snorts in derision and throws hands in the air]***:** Why couldn't it have been your brother who came to work with me. He wouldn't ask so many inane questions.

VALET: You say that, but you still answer every time I ask. At this point you'd feel like something was amiss if I didn't. And anyway, you know exactly why I'm here and not my brother.

UNCLE *[harrumphs and waves the comments away]***:** You still think much too highly of yourself for your own good.

VALET: At this point, why bother thinking any less? It's not like anything would change.

UNCLE: I suppose you have a point. Your changing now would be a bit odd.

VALET *[sits up in chair]***:** Wouldn't it just. Hold on Uncle. There they go.

GARCIN: You disgust me, both of you. *[He goes towards the door]*

ESTELLE: What are you up to?

GARCIN: I'm going.

INEZ *[quickly]***:** You won't get far. The door is locked.

GARCIN: *[He presses the bell-push. The bell does not ring]*: I'll make them open it.

ESTELLE: Please! Please!

INEZ *[to Estelle]***:** Don't worry, my pet. The bell doesn't work.

GARCIN: *[Drums on the door, pushes Estelle away, Bangs on the door again]*: I tell you they shall open. I can't endure it any longer, I'm through with you both. Go away. You're even fouler than she. I won't let myself be bogged in your eyes. You're soft and slimy. Ugh! Like an octopus. Like a quagmire.

VALET: This one speaks surprisingly well for such a fool.

UNCLE: His type always does. The act wouldn't last very long if they couldn't. Though, this one might be less of a fool than you think.

VALET *[points at Uncle]***:** Point.

ESTELLE: I beg you, oh, I beg you not to leave me. I'll promise not to speak again, I won't trouble you in any way – but don't go. I daren't be left alone with Inez, now she's shown her claws.

GARCIN: Look after yourself. I never asked you to come here.

INEZ *[going up to Estelle]***:** Well, my little sparrow fallen from the nest, I hope you're satisfied now. You spat in my face – playing up to him, of course – and we had a tiff on his account. But now he's going, and a good riddance it will be. We two women will have the place to ourselves.

ESTELLE: You won't gain anything. If that door opens, I'm going, too.

INEZ: Where?

ESTELLE *[Garcin is still drumming on the door]***:** I don't care where. As far from you as I can.

VALET: Of course you are.

UNCLE: That one's quite a bore isn't she.

VALET: You don't know the half of it. She wouldn't stop talking the whole way down, and yet somehow, not once did anything not totally rote and trite come out of her overly painted mouth.

UNCLE: Impressive. It's been a while since I've seen one quite this bad.

GARCIN: *[He grips the door-knob and rattles it. The door flies open with a jerk, and he just avoids falling]*: Open the door! Open blast you! I'll endure anything, your red-hot tongs and molten lead, your racks and prongs and garrotes – all your fiendish gadgets, everything that burns and flays and tears – I'll put up with any torture you impose. Anything, anything would be better than this agony of mind, this creeping pain that gnaws and fumbles and caresses one and never hurts quite enough. Now will you open? Ah!

VALET: Quick! How far do you think they'll go?

UNCLE: Why feign excitement? You know exactly what's going to happen.

VALET *[despairingly]***:** I know, I know. But it's so tiresome dealing with these fools all the time. They all say the same things, do the same things, think the same things, over and over and over again. Is nothing novel ever going to happen? The monotony of it all is becoming mind boggling.

INEZ: Well, Garcin? You're free to go.

GARCIN *[meditatively]***:** Now I wonder why that door opened.

INEZ: What are you waiting for? Hurry up and go.

GARCIN: I shall not go.

INEZ: *[Estelle does not move. Inez bursts out laughing. Estelle springs at her from behind]*: And you, Estelle? So what? Which shall it be? Which of the three of us will leave? The barrier's down, why are we waiting? … But what a situation! It's a scream! We're – Inseparables!

ESTELLE: Inseparables? Garcin, come and lend a hand. Quickly. We'll push her out and slam the door on her. That'll teach her a lesson.

INEZ: *[struggling with Estelle]***:** Estelle! I beg you, let me stay. I won't go, I won't go! Not into the passage.

GARCIN: Let go of her.

ESTELLE: You're crazy. She hates you.

GARCIN: It's because of her I'm staying here.

[Estelle releases Inez and stares dumbfoundedly at Garcin.]

INEZ *[Pause, Garcin goes to the door and shuts it]***:** Because of me? All right, shut the door. It's ten times hotter here since it opened. Because of me, you said?

GARCIN: Yes. You, anyhow, know what it means to be a coward.

INEZ: Yes, I know.

VALET: There we go, hopes dashed. The monotony continues. Though I suppose these three are at least mildly entertaining in their folly.

UNCLE: They do make for better viewing than most groups.

VALET: But in the end, it will come to nothing, as all else does.

UNCLE: I don't know about all that. The fool and the "bitch" might actually get it… Eventually.

VALET: Really? What makes you say that?

UNCLE: Time and experience. Time and experience, my nephew. At some point you will start to be able to see these things as well.

VALET: Another cryptic non-answer. You're in a mood today, aren't you?

UNCLE: No more than usual. You're the one who's been touchy of late. What's gotten into you?

VALET *[rises from his chair and starts pacing]***:** I just don't know what I'm doing here anymore. I mean, what's the point? It's not like this place actually needs staff like us to function. So why am I here?

UNCLE: Didn't we go over this earlier? You know exactly why you, in particular, are here.

VALET: Yes, but why are there staff here to begin with? Management clearly doesn't need us here. All we do is escort the newcomers to their rooms. We don't even do the sorting of newcomers into rooming groups ourselves.

UNCLE: The point, as you say, is not about the newcomers, or what we do. The point, if there is one, is that we are here, and we perform the tasks that management gives us. But you know all this. We've had this conversation many times before. Why ask again? I thought your complaint was that you are sick of the monotony.

VALET *[sits back down and turns eyes to monitor]***:** I know. I think I might need to take a trip to basement and blow off some steam.

UNCLE: It has been a while since you went down there. You should do that on your next day off.

GARCIN: Will night never come?

INEZ: Never.

GARCIN: You will always see me?

INEZ: Always.

[Garcin moves away from Estelle and moves across the room towards the bronze ornament on the mantlepiece.]

GARCIN: *[Strokes it thoughtfully, swings around abruptly, laughs]*: This bronze. Yes, now's the moment; I'm looking at this thing on the mantlepiece, and I understand that I'm in hell. I tell you, everything's been thought out beforehand. They knew that I'd stand at the fireplace stroking this thing of bronze, with all those eyes intent on me. Devouring me. What? Only the two of you? I thought

there were more; many more. So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all that we were told about the torture chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell – is other people!

UNCLE: Huh. It usually takes a bit longer for one of them to come to that conclusion.

VALET: I suppose, though they all get there at some point.

VALET: Why do they always go for the knife? They all know that they're dead. The fool literally just gave a speech, a quite long-winded one I might add, about being in hell. I mean, I can understand wanting to stab the fool for all the nonsense that comes out of his gob, and wanting to stab the "bitch", for obvious reasons. But why bother when you know full well nothing will happen?

UNCLE *[cocks an eye at the Valet]***:** You say that like you don't have ample experience with the power of impulses.

VALET *[shrugs]***:** That's true enough, I suppose. But that doesn't stop it from seeming silly every time I see it.

INEZ *[Laughs]***:** Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes – all useless. It has happened already, do you understand? Once and for all. So here we are, forever.

ESTELLE *[with a peal of laughter]***:** Forever. My God, how funny! Forever.

GARCIN *[looks at the two women, and joins in the laughter]***:** For ever, and ever, and ever.

[They slump onto their respective sofas. A long silence. Their laughter dies away and they gaze at each other.]

GARCIN: Well, well, let's get on with it.…

6. The Irony of the American Dream

By: Stanisław Godlewski

Stanisław completed his bachelor's degree at the University of Connecticut and is currently pursuing his master's degree at the University of Warsaw. The inspiration for writing the play The Irony of the American Dream came from his personal experiences during his studies in the US, where he lived with a group of American friends of Polish descent. Observing the dynamics of their relationships and the assimilation process of second-generation immigrants, the author created a bittersweet portrait of young men searching for their identity. In a satirical yet reflective way, the play analyses the clash of ancestral trauma with a modern, often destructive understanding of freedom in American culture.

Author’s email: Sgodlewski23@gmail.com

CHARACTERS

DARKO: A rowdy 18 year old Serbian-American

JONAS: A savvy but mischievous 18 year old Croatian-American

NIKOLA: A well-mannered 19 year old Bosnian-American

BOGDAN: An easily persuaded 18 year old Montenegrin-American

[A messy off-campus apartment near Penn State University. Crushed energy drinks, open pizza boxes, old

Balkan basketball posters, and a giant flat-screen dominate the room. March Madness is coming to an end on a warm, sunny evening in State College, Pennsylvania.]

[Jonas is hunched over a laptop. Darko is pacing, hyped up about the match. Bogdan is eating chips while sipping on Busch Light on the couch, reading articles about the consequences of illegal streaming. Nikola is sitting at the kitchen table, focused on creating a parlay for tonight's game.]

JONAS: Got it. Stream's live. It's kinda janky, there were some rather odd advertisements but I pushed through them.

DARKO *[grinning]***:** Legend. This guy's doing God's work. Now we get to watch the finals on this big ass tv screen for free!

BOGDAN *[laughs nervously]***:** You sure we won't get caught watching it like this? I mean, we don't even have a VPN.

JONAS: Quit bugging man. What are they gonna do? Have the FBI come over and arrest us? This isn't Bosnia in the 90s, where they'd barge through the doors and kill us on sight

DARKO: You hear that crowd outside? That's the sound of history. When Penn State wins again tonight. Oh man, it's gonna be a circus.

BOGDAN: Like last year?

DARKO: Exactly like last year. Dumpster fires, flipped cars, people dancing in the streets. It's not chaos—it's tradition.

JONAS *[grinning]***:** It's freedom, bro. It's the American Dream.

BOGDAN *[chuckling, unsure]***:** I mean... it did look kinda fun on Tik Tok.

NIKOLA *[calmly, without looking up]***:** Flipping cars and smashing windows isn't the dream, it's just vandalism.

DARKO: Says the guy who files his socks by color.

NIKOLA: Because it's called having respect for things, for people, for yourself.

JONAS: C'mon, Nikola. We all grew up hearing stories about struggle. Your parents survived war. Shouldn't you want to live a little?

NIKOLA: They survived it so I wouldn't have to act like I'm still in it.

[A tense silence.]

BOGDAN: My dad always talks about escaping the shelling in Podgorica. Said he used to fall asleep to mortar sounds. Now he works two jobs and still sends money back home to my grandparents. Maybe that's the dream?

DARKO: Nah bro. The dream is getting to do what they couldn't. To yell, to run wild, to not look over your shoulder every time you hear an explosion in the distance.

JONAS: Yeah, it's ours now. We were born here. We've got Penn State jerseys and no curfews. Tonight, we're kings.

NIKOLA *[glancing over at Jonas, with disapproval in his eyes]*: You think lighting a fire in the street makes you a king?

DARKO: It makes me feel alive. Nobody cared who we were in high school. Now, we throw one chair through a

window and suddenly we're all over tik tok.

NIKOLA: Oh good, then everyone can say, 'look, more violent foreigners'.

BOGDAN *[still conflicted]***:** You really think it's part of the dream? I don't want my face to be seen and have my scholarship gone like those guys who got arrested last year for taking a street lamp down and hitting someone in the head by accident as it fell down to the ground. That was fucked up for real.

JONAS: Bogdan—look at me. The American Dream means doing whatever the hell you want and calling it freedom. Do you want it or not?

[Pause. Bogdan hesitates, then nods.]

BOGDAN: Okay... okay, yeah. Let's do it.

NIKOLA: Then I'm out. I'm gonna go watch the game with my Sig Nu brothers, where they'll just crack some beers and vibe type shit. Plus some pledge sisters from Delta Delta Delta are coming over. I've been texting one of them like crazy. You guys remember Stacy from Penn Bar that we hung out with? I'm going to go ask her out after the game. She'll want to go out with a gentleman like me who doesn't participate in barbaric activities.

DARKO *[smirking]***:** Suit yourself, you simp.

JONAS *[shouting to Nikola]***:** Guess you'll miss out on the real American Dream, pussy!

***(Setting:** Just off-campus, late at night. Chaos is everywhere. Screams, chants, sirens, and fireworks fill the sky. Smoke lingers in the air from all the couches and cars burning. All hell is breaking loose.)*

DARKO: That was the best fucking shit I've ever done in my life!

JONAS: That one cop almost grabbed you!

BOGDAN: I can't believe we ran from riot police.

DARKO: You flipped a fucking porta-potty!

BOGDAN: What the hell just happened?

JONAS: We lived. Penn State's the champs.

BOGDAN: For once... we weren't Croat, Serb, Bosniak... We were just us.

DARKO: Yeah. Unity through fire.

JONAS: They tore each other apart. We destroy together.

BOGDAN: Do you think they'd be proud?

DARKO: They should be.

JONAS: This is the dream.

DARKO *[raising rakija]***:** To the real American Dream, gentlemen. Bog Vas Blagoslovio!

***(Setting:** Same off-campus apartment. The room is trashed: empty rakija bottles, beer cans, upturned furniture, a traffic cone on the kitchen table standing there like a trophy. Outside, sirens are reigning the streets, waking the boys up from their hangovers.)*

BOGDAN: Yo boys. They posted a video of us jumping that fence behind the library while we were running away from the cops. It's got like 8,000 views already!

JONAS: We're going viral boys! What a legacy. We did it. We actually fucking did it.

DARKO: Still think the cops will actually come?

JONAS: Nah. They've got real stuff to deal with. We're just one TikTok among hundreds.

BOGDAN *[still uneasy]***:** I dunno, man... they had our faces. Sort of.

VOICE: STATE COLLEGE POLICE, OPEN THE DOOR IMMEDIATELY!

DARKO: Oh fuck.

JONAS: I told you we should've burned our clothes and worn ski masks!

BOGDAN: I'm not going to jail. No no no. I haven't even finished my financial aid application for next year.

NIKOLA: Relax, you degents. It's just me.

DARKO: Dude, what the hell!?

JONAS: Bruh, you bugging for real dude. You scared the shit out of me. I thought you were the Opps.

NIKOLA *[chuckle]***:** What, too soon? Or should I say, too shitty? My frat brothers couldn't stop laughing at the cafe this morning. That video was hilarious, I ain't even gonna lie. Y'all look like you were about to shit yourselves after pushing down that porta potty.

BOGDAN *[heart still racing]***:** Yeah dude, we're going viral on Tik Tok right now. No cap. Some bystander got a video of us hopping the fence after we knocked over the porta potty. I'm pretty sure someone slipped over... you know... whatever leaked out of the porta potty. Go Nittany Lions!

NIKOLA *[laughing]***:** Man, y'all clowning for real. I can't believe you guys. You get one night of pretending to be kings of the world, and the next morning you're afraid of a knock at the door. Was the clout worth it?

DARKO: Okay, Officer Buzzkill. What do you want?

NIKOLA *[to all of them, smug]***:** To report that I asked Stacy out last night. She said yes. I told her that she was my champion and what not. I'm quite the rizzler I guess you can say.

JONAS: Stacy? Penn Bar Stacy?

NIKOLA: The very same. She has her contact name for me as Nikola Jokic in her phone now.

BOGDAN: That's not even your guy, man. He's Serbian, you're Bosnian.

NIKOLA: Doesn't matter. She liked that I didn't flip a car or punch a mailbox last night. And she liked that I promised her a champions dinner after I won my bets last night. We are getting sushi tomorrow night. She said that I had quote on quote, 'gentleman energy.' So you know damn well that she let me destroy that if you know what I mean.

DARKO: So your American Dream is dating a Tri Delt and drinking White Claws at rooftop bars? Lame.

NIKOLA: No Darko. My American Dream is dignity and pride. And of course, a hot girl who respects that I didn't go full Buffalo Bill on College Ave.

JONAS: Buffalo Bill? What are you saying bro?

NIKOLA: In the 1800s, Americans nearly hunted buffalo to extinction. Just because they could. That's what unbridled freedom does. You destroy until there's nothing left. You call what you did last night unity? Our parents watched mosques burn. Churches shelled. Bridges blown

to dust. We were supposed to be different. They would be ashamed of you gentleman.

DARKO: Brotha, our parents, grandparents, fuck, even our ancestors would never have imagined that all of us would be living together. A Bosnian living with a Serb in the USA. This would never happen where we come from man. But in America, this is possible. And now, we didn't destroy our property, our families, our economies, and our futures like our ancestors did. We were different last night Nikola. We destroyed shit together. We were more unified than Yugoslavia for crying out loud.

NIKOLA: That's not unity. That's just synchronized stupidity.

BOGDAN *[lowers his head down in shame]***:** We thought they'd be proud of us...

NIKOLA: Proud? They didn't run from war so they could watch their kids riot on national news. They wanted better. They wanted peace.

JONAS: So what now?

DARKO: We lay low. Bet the cops won't even show up. TikTok doesn't count as evidence, right? We just say that it was AI generated content in court.

BOGDAN *[still checking his phone]***:** Yeah, I mean, we're just some background dudes. There's like fifty other people in that video.

JONAS: I'll bet you five bucks they don't even knock on the door.

DARKO: Double or nothing. No sirens, no charges.

STATE COLLEGE POLICE: STATE COLLEGE POLICE! OPEN UP! YOU ALL ARE UNDER ARREST FOR DESTRUCTION OF SCHOOL PROPERTY!

JONAS *[sighs in embarrassment]***:** There goes the American Dream...

7. This time, let me down, gently

By: Alicja Tomczak

Alicja is a student of Finnish studies, which means she studies the language and culture of Finland. She fell in love with theatre at the age of seven, when her grandmother took her to see Fiddler on the Roof, staged by the Jewish Theatre, which was still a touring company at the time. However, it was only during prof. Elżbieta Grzyb classes that she moved from the audience to the desk to try her hand at playwriting. In her writing, she draws inspiration from her own experiences, adding a comedic twist to them. She hopes this is reflected in the play included in this publication.

CHARACTERS

JEREMY

BELLAMY

JEREMY'S EX

***(Setting:** BELLAMY's bedroom, her bed is the centerpiece of the stage.)*

[JEREMY sits on BELLAMY's bed in her room, mindlessly scrolling on her phone. She doesn't even look up when BELLAMY enters the stage holding a tray of snacks]

BELLAMY: Sorry for the wait, cutting all those veggies took longer than I thought.

JEREMY: Nah, it's cool.

[BELLAMY sits besides JEREMY nervously fidgeting with her hands.]

BELLAMY: Listen, I got to ask you about something important, something I've been meaning to ask about it for a long time now.

[JEREMY finally looks up from her phone.]

JEREMY: …sure? Shoot.

BELLAMY: Alright, here goes nothing. Jeremy, do you want to be my girlfriend?

[Uncomfortably long pause]

JEREMY: Umm no?

BELLAMY: No?

JEREMY: Yeah, no. Shit, that sounded bad, you caught me off guard. Let's go back, let me rephrase that.

[Time runs back. BELLAMY stands up from the bed, grabs the tray of snacks and walks backwards off the stage leaving JEREMY alone in the room.]

JEREMY: What the…

[JEREMY stands up from the bed, examining the room trying to understand what just happened.]

JEREMY: Bellamy?!

BELLAMY *[voice slightly muffled]***:** Yeah?

[BELLAMY enters the stage, no tray in her hands this time]

BELLAMY: Jeremy, is everything alright? You sounded a little shaken up, did something happen?

JEREMY: Why did you walk out like that?

BELLAMY: Like what? I was in the kitchen making snacks for our movienight the whole time.

JEREMY: Really? I could have sworn that we were talking not even a minute ago, before you walked out on me.

[BELLAMY lets out a sweet chuckle.]

BELLAMY *[clears her throat]***:** And why would I do that silly? Oh come on, like I would do that just to mess with you, besides you're the one that's always playing tricks on me in our… So anyway, what were we even supposedly talking about, huh?

JEREMY: Oh, well um you know, we talked about… us.

BELLAMY: Us huh? That's a little cryptic don't you think, wanna tell me more or do I have to beg for scraps?

[JEREMY sighs, her head dropped low to avoid looking BELLAMY in the eyes.]

JEREMY: By us I meant our relationship, you asked me to be your girlfriend.

BELLAMY: Aww, don't be so embarrassed about it. That's so cute, did you say yes in your little fantasy. I mean obviously you did, why am I even asking that. Right?

[Pause. BELLAMY's smile slowly falters as she doesn't hear the confirmation. …Oh.]

JEREMY: I'm sorry alright, I want to say yes, I really do, but don't have the same feelings for you that I had at the beginning.

BELLAMY: Did I hear that right? You stopped having feelings for me, yet you kept hanging out with me and giving me false hope just for what? What have you wanted to accomplish by doing all this? Did you think that you'll

magically regain feelings for me? If so then you're either incredibly stupid or incredibly naive.

JEREMY: Oh come on Bel, don't be like that.

BELLAMY: Like what?! We've been hanging out for months now, I lost count of how many times I've invited you over. You've met all my friends, my mom, I've cooked for you numerous times. I thought that you cared for me when I spilled my heart out in all of those late-night calls. All this meant absolutely nothing to you, and you still have the gull to tell me “not to be like this” when I’m rightfully upset.

JEREMY *[visibly cringes at her own words]***:** No, I didn't mean it like that. Please just chill out for a second, I’m sorry that I made you upset by what I just said- What I'm trying to say is that I'm sorry and if I could turn back time, I would have broken it to you sooner.

BELLAMY: Well, that's not how the world works-

[Time rewinds, JEREMY ends up sitting on the bed with phone in her hand and BELLAMY walks backwards again out of the stage.]

JEREMY *[whispers to herself]***:** Shit, shit, shit this is really happening.

[JEREMY stands up from the bed and begins to walk back and forth around the room as she's scrolling through her contacts. Finally, she brings the phone to her ear.]

JEREMY'S EX: Jeremy? Why are you calling me, especially at this hour?

JEREMY: Please listen, I need your help. You remember the girl that I'm seeing, right? Well, she's going to ask me,

I mean, I believe that she’s going to ask me to be her girlfriend and I-

JEREMY'S EX *[cuts her off]***:** Well, aren't you happy about it? You couldn't shut up about that girl for like a month straight, but if you're not feeling this relationship right now, just break it off with her. Just like you did with me.

JEREMY: But I completely fumbled that.

JEREMY'S EX: Exactly, but that's on brand for you. From what I remember you fumble most of your social interactions on a daily basis, it has its charm. It will probably work this time as well.

JEREMY: Oh come on, don't try me with this “just be yourself" bullshit. We both know this wouldn't work.

JEREMY'S EX: Well, then you have to think of something else, because you just can't trial and error through a breakup.

JEREMY: Yeah, yeah I can.

[JEREMY ends the call and throws her phone on the bed.]

BELLAMY *[voice slightly muffled]***:** Jeremy, is everything alright?

[BELLAMY enters the stage.]

BELLAMY: Were you talking to someone? I heard voices coming out of the room.

JEREMY: That? Um.. my mom called, i-it's nothing.

BELLAMY: Oh, how is she? You never talk about your mom.

JEREMY: Cus' it's complicated, I don't want to bore you with it all. You definitely wouldn't like to sit through hours

of me ranting about my issues with my mom. I mean who in their right mind would stand that?

BELLAMY: It sounds like you really need to talk it out though, I wouldn't mind. We can cut our movienights short and just talk.

JEREMY: Yeah, of course you wouldn't mind. Let's try something else.

[Time rewinds again.]

JEREMY: Ugh I can't think of anything when she's staring at me… so maybe?

[JEREMY stands up from the bed, phone in hand she begins to type out a message.]

BELLAMY: WHAT THE FUCK JEREMY?! YOU CAN'T BREAK UP WITH ME THROUGH A MESSAGE WHEN YOU'RE IN MY HOUSE!

JEREMY: Shit.

[Time rewinds yet again.]

JEREMY *[whispers to herself]***:** This is hell, why did I even come here?

[JEREMY stands up from the bed before plopping back down with a sigh.]

JEREMY: Bel? Could you come here for just a second?

BELLAMY *[voice slightly muffled]***:** In a moment, I'm almost done.

[BELLAMY enters the stage holding a tray of snacks in her hands.]

BELLAMY: Missed me already?

JEREMY *[JEREMY pats the bed waiting for BELLAMY to join her]*: Sure did, that's why I called, I want to tell you something, it’s kinda important so could you please sit down.

BELLAMY: What a coincidence, I want to tell you something too.

JEREMY: Yeah, a coincidence indeed. Let me start first. So I've been thinking about it for a while now and I think that it's finally time for me to say it. Bellamy, I-

BELLAMY: I don't think we will work out.

JEREMY: …no, I don't think we will.