

Papa's **"For A Highway"** from Michael A. Miller's El Paso

PAPA: *(After just finding out that his house is being demolished by the city to make room for a highway)*

They are ripping down my house for a highway. Like it was nothing. I built this house to last. As a refuge from the cruel world outside those four brick walls. You don't know what it took to get a house like that. The son of slaves. I grew up in reconstruction. After the hell of slavery, reconstruction was the heaven on earth we had been singing about. Families could stay together. Home could be built. Businesses could be owned. We were allowed to be human. For once time was on our side and boy we made the most of it. But the world can turn on a dime. There were those who didn't like to see that we were human. That we could run the same race and run twice as fast and win just something. They wanted to back the clock... I was a man. Black flesh, red blood, white bones, green money and brick walls. I saw my dreams rise from the sand and now I have to see it turn to dust. My house is being ripped down ... I'm alive and already feel forgotten. My house is going to dust.

Rusty's **"Dreamer's Rock"** from Drew Hayden Taylor's Toronto at  
Dreamer's Rock

RUSTY: Do I got a choice? Does it really matter? Okay, I can't go to Hawaii. I'll never own a Porsche, I'll never have all those things I see on television. I'm lucky if I get a new pair of jeans for the first day of school. What's there to be happy for? I'm terrible in school, so I can't walk that side of the tracks, and as for going the traditional Indian route, that's even worse. I hate cleaning fish and I'm a terrible hunter. I don't fit in here. Last year my father took me hunting, I shot my own dog. I can't do anything right. You wanted to know my problems, there they are. I hope you enjoy them...

Look at you. I have no idea what kind of outfit that is but you don't look like you're too bad off. And judging by the way you talk and the things you've said, you're doing great in school and you know a lot of things...

At least you both have your own worlds to fit in and return to. I'm stuck smack dab in the middle of a family war, between one uncle that's called "Closer" because they say he's closed every bar in Ontario, and my other Uncle Stan, who is basically a powwow Indian, I never know what's going on.

Jerry's **"Look At The Way You're Looking At Me"** from Harold  
Pinter's Betrayal

JERRY: Look at the way you're looking at me. I can't wait for you, I'm bowled over, I'm totally knocked out, you dazzle me, you jewel, my jewel, I can't ever sleep again, no, listen, it's the truth, I won't walk, I'll be a cripple, I'll descend, I'll diminish, into total paralysis, my life is in your hands, that's what you're banishing me to, a state of catatonia, do you know the state of catatonia? do you? do you? the state of... where the reigning prince is the prince of emptiness, the prince of absence, the prince of desolation. I love you.

Everyone knows. The world knows. It knows. But they'll never know, they're in a different world. I adore you. I'm madly in love with you. I can't believe that what anyone is at this moment saying has ever happened has never happened. Nothing has ever happened. Nothing. This is the only thing that has ever happened. You eyes kill me. I'm lost. You're wonderful.

Ben's **"Father At The Game"** from David French's Of The Fields, Lately

BEN: He rushed out the door and down to the school-yard, the first game he had ever come to, and my mother put his supper in the oven, for later ... I hadn't reminded my father of the game. I was afraid he'd show up and embarrass me. Twelve years old and ashamed of my old man. Ashamed of his dialect, his dirty overalls, his bruised fingers with the fingernails lined with dirt, his teeth yellow as old ivory. Most of all, his lunch pail, that symbol of the working man. No, I wanted a doctor for a father. A lawyer. At least a fireman. Not a carpenter. That wasn't good enough ... And at home my mother sat down to darn his socks and watch the oven ... I remember stepping up to bat. The game was tied; it was the last of the ninth, with no one on base. Then I saw him sitting on the bench along third base. He grinned and waved, and gestured to the man beside him. But I pretended not to see him. I turned to face the pitcher. And angry at myself, I swung hard on the first pitch, there was a hollow crack, and the ball shot low over the shortstop's head for a double. Our next batter bunted and I made third. He was only a few feet away now, my father. But I still refused to acknowledge him. Instead, I stared hard at the catcher, pretending concentration. And when the next pitch bounced between the catcher's legs and into home screen, I slid home to win the game. And there he was, jumping up and down, showing his teeth, excited as hell. And as the crowd broke up and our team stampeded out of the school-yard, cleats clicking and scraping blue sparks on the sidewalk, I looked back once through the wire fence and saw my father still sitting on the now-empty bench, alone, slumped over a little, staring at the cinders between his feet, just staring... I don't know how long he stayed there, maybe till dark, but I do know he never again came down to see me play. At home that night he never mentioned the game or being there. He just went to bed unusually early...

Ben's **"Guys, We Need To Talk"** from Wade Bradford's The Roomates

BEN: (All alone, practicing what he will say to his roommates.) Hey guys. Hi. We need to talk. If it's a good time. You guys are moving out by the end of the month. The reasons are selfevident. (He closes his eyes and imagines the impact. He winces.) I need you guys to move out. It's time. I need... I want... I want you guys to know that it has been great living with you. But now I need my own space. But now, we need our own space. Molly and I need... want... feel... prefer. Molly thinks... No, not Molly. I think. You see, when you get married. Two people don't live with other people when they are married. Unless it's their own children. Look. Guys. You have been driving me crazy for the last fifteen years!!! (Closes his eyes. Winces.) Oh, don't cry. I didn't. Look. I want, need, demand, proclaim, ordain, decree - I like that - I have decreed that the time has come. Yes, the time has finally come. (Pulls hair.) I can't do it. I just can't. (Clears throat. Concentrates.) Molly, how would you feel about living with two extra guys?

Shel's **"Okay, Cellphone"** from Leon Aureus's Banana Boys

Shel: Okay, cell phone, me and you need to talk. We've been through a lot together. The last 6 months here have been... marginal. I've given your number to a few people, and so far, no one calls you but The Boys back home. This sucks for both of us. I mean, we came to Ottawa to find someone. To end The Quest. Twenty-four years old, and I still hadn't had a serious girlfriend. Or any sort of girlfriend. I almost had you disconnected. (pause) Don't look at me like that; I didn't go through with it. And do you know why? Because the day we stopped looking... was the day we met Her. I went twenty minutes out of my way, in minus-thirty-degree weather, to walk Her home, breaking the ice in front of Her with my CSA approved boots so She wouldn't slip and fall. She's wonderful. (He beams.) I have Her your number, and She said She'd call. So... cell phone, if ever you were going to ring, if ever you were going to make that special connection... let it be now. You're fully charged. We're sitting in the bathtub where you get the best reception. So... ring. (It doesn't ring.) C'mon. Please? (nothing) She's really special. She's got these beautiful eyes, and really great hair, and... I'm prattling, but... the way She –

*The phone rings. SHEL is startled, then fumbles the phone and picks it up.*

Hello? (pause) Kathy! Hi! (pause) No, I'm not busy, just... waiting... for you. (pause) Oh man, that sounds lame, doesn't it? I didn't... uh... (pause) Really? Well, I think you're sweet too...

Beneatha's **"Me, I'm Nothing"** from Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin In The Sun

BENEATHA: (A young Afro-American girl struggles with her disillusionment)

Me? ... Me? ... Me, I'm nothing... Me. When I was very small...we used to take our sleds out in the wintertime and the only hills we had were the ice-covered stone steps of some houses down the street. And we used to fill them in with snow and make them smooth and slide down them all day... and it was very dangerous you know... far too steep... and sure enough one day a kid named Rufus came down too fast and hit the sidewalk... and we saw his face just split open right there in front of us... And I remember standing there looking at his bloody open face thinking that was the end of Rufus. But the ambulance came and they took him to the hospital and they fixed the broken bones and they sewed it all up... and the next time I saw Rufus he just had a little line down the middle of his face... I never got over that... That was what one person could do for another, fix him up— sew up the problem, make him all right again. That was the most marvelous thing in the world... I wanted to do that. I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know—and make them whole again. This was truly being God... I wanted to cure. It used to be so important to me. I wanted to cure. It used to matter. I used to care. I mean about people and how their bodies hurt... I mean this thing of sewing up bodies or administering drugs. Don't you understand? It was a child's reaction to the world. I thought that doctors had the secret to all the hurts... That's the way a child sees things—or an idealist.

Mime's **"Sometimes I Dream In Chinese"** from Betty Quan's Mother  
Tongue

MIMI: *(Recounting a significant dream involving the disappearance of her father)*

Sometimes when I dream, I dream in Chinese. Not the pidgin Chinese I've developed but the fluent, flowing language my father used to coo as he walked with me, hand in hand. There is this one dream. I am walking with my father in the alleyway behind our house. I am seven years old. This is just before my father... before... My father and I are holding hands. In perfect Cantonese we talk about the snow peas in the garden that are ready for picking. Father doesn't know it, but for the past week I've been hiding amongst the staked vines, in the green light, gorging on snow peas until there can't be any more left. I'm about to tell him this – air my confession – when we come across a large kitchen table propped against the side of the garage. "A race, my little jingwei" my father says. "I'll go through the tunnel and we'll see which way is faster. One, two, three, GO!" We run; him in the tunnel, me on the gravel. I finish first and wait, expecting to meet him and rejoin hands. But he doesn't come out of the shadows. My extended hand is empty. I wait and wait and wait. I start screaming, (in Chinese) "Father! Father! Come back! Please come back! Father!" (in English) And then, I wake up.



Lila's **"I Remember"** from William Inge's A Loss Of Roses

LILA: I remember my first day at school. Mother took me by the hand and I carried a bouquet of roses, too. Mama had let me pick the loveliest roses I could find in the garden, and the teacher thanked me for them. Then Mama left me and I felt kinda scared, 'cause I'd never been any place before without her; but she told me Teacher would be Mama to me at school and would treat me as nice as she did. So I took my seat with all the other kids, their faces so strange and new to me. And I started talking with a little boy across the aisle. I didn't know it was against the rules. But Teacher came back and slapped me, so hard that I cried, and I ran to the door 'cause I wanted to run home to Mama quick as I could. But teacher grabbed me by the hand and pulled me back to my seat. She said I was too big a girl to be running home to Mama and I had to learn to take my punishment when I broke the rules. But I still cried. I told Teacher I wanted back my roses. But she wouldn't give them to me. She shook her finger and said, when I gave away lovely presents, I couldn't expect to get them back.....I guess I never learned that lesson very well. There's so many things I still want back.

Mother's **"It Doesn't Bother Me"** from David Moberg's Constellations

MOTHER:               It doesn't bother me. When she laughs like that. She laughs at nothing or sometimes talks like in different languages that nobody can understand. She doesn't mean to, I mean she doesn't do it on purpose.

But Dad says she might always be like this. But that I should remember that no matter what she does or says that deep down in my mama's heart, a part of her still loves me... just like she always did. Like she did before the accident.

That the part of my mama that loves me will never change no matter what. And I believe that, I mean, I want to believe that....I mean I don't think that Dad would lie to me.

But still.... how can my mama still love me if she can't even remember my name.

Juniper's **"I Kissed A Boy Once"** from Wade Bradford's Tomorrow's Wish

JUNIPER: I kissed a boy once. At least I tried. I don't know if it counts if they don't kiss back. But I tried to kiss a boy and it almost worked. Most of the time Grandma and I don't get to see folks much, but we go into town. Sometimes. And Grandma says I just have to be careful to mind my manners, and Grandma says I'm real good at being careful, but sometimes I get so bored in that little town. Only one video store. Only two churches. And the park only has two swings and a pool that never gets filled up anymore.

But in our little town there is a boy named Samuel. He's a bag-boy at the grocery store. He does it just right and never squishes the eggs. And he has red hair and green eyes. And... (Laughs at the memory.) Freckles all over his face! And Samuel is so nice. So nice to me and Gram. He would always smile and always say "thank you" and "your welcome." If he says, "Have a nice day," then you do. That's how good he is at his job. And I always wanted... I always wanted to be close to him, or to talk to him, without Gram around.

And one-day when Grandma had a really bad cold I got to go to the store all by myself. And I bought some oyster crackers and some medicine. Then I got to watch Samuel all by myself. Watch him do his bag boy job. I just stared and stared, trying to count all of those handsome freckles. Then, he asked if there was anything else I wanted. I just whispered "Yes." (Pauses, closes eyes in remembrance.) And then I grabbed him by the ears and MmmmmmmMM! (Pretends she's grabbing and kissing him.) That was my first kiss. It was the most romantic moment of my life.... Until the manager pulled me off of him.

Brett's **"Mother-Substitutes"** from Jason Richards' This Will Not Look  
Good On My Resume

BRETT One day, while I was watching Jenny's kinderdance class from the back of the studio, perched on a small chair with the rest of the mothers or mother-substitutes, the teacher had to suddenly leave.

"Would you take over for a moment, please?" she said to me, rushing out. Serves me right for sitting closest to the door. Okay. Sure. How hard can this be? I stood in front of the class.

"All right, let's try a simple step-together-step-touch," I said, demonstrating, moving to the right, and then to the left. And forgetting for the moment that they had probably just learned how to walk. Forward. I was now expecting them to dance. Sideways.

A glance in the mirror tipped me off. One went down. Then another. And a third. Ohhh, that had to hurt. The fourth watched speculatively, chubby legs planted firmly, thumb in her mouth. It refused to try the step. It was destined for great things in life.

"Let's all clap in time to the music," I said with enthusiasm, clapping in time to the music. They tried. It sounded like an erratic echo chamber.

I then noticed that a few had hands that kept missing each other. Coordination! Of course! I'm sure that's also in the lesson plan! So when they had tired of clapping, fourteen seconds into the song, I said, "Okay, everyone, let's try something else. Put your arms out straight. Now close your eyes and touch your nose with the second finger of your right hand."

Dunks, the whole lot of them. Especially the few who fell down as soon as they had closed their eyes.

Zara's **"Dog Anxiety"** from *Joseph Arnone's Monologue Blogger*

ZARA: She asks me to watch her puppy Oscar. I say sure, I mean, how bad could it be to watch an innocent, harmless, cute little puppy? Right? Right? WRONG! It was a nightmare if there ever was one. Look at me! Do you see the bags under my eyes? I look like I went twelve rounds with Muhammad Ali. I look horrible!

She tells me, like it's noooooo big deal. She says, "Zara would you mind watching my puppy for me for three days?" I said sure no problem. No problem!

This dog has NOT stopped barking his tiny squeaky voice! Didn't stop barking for the entire night. Like a wolf howling in the night. Kept me up! I tossed and turned and tossed and turned some more. I felt like a 1980's break dancer.

Finally it's time to go to work. I was actually excited to go to work for once in my life. Work was somehow a better option than staying home with Maar, Maaar, MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!!

But guess what?! When I walk in my kitchen, I find myself Sliiiiiiiiiiiiiiding alllllllll the waaaaaaaaaaaaay ACROSS the kitchen and FLAT DEAD ON MY BACK! I have bruises the size of boulders...*DOG PEE PEE.*

Yeah, huh.

(beat)

...

And where was Oscar? Somehow Oscar the expert trapeze artist positioned himself ON TOP of my cabinets. Did I mention how small this puppy is? The size of my foot. Don't know how the hell he got up onto the cabinet. Miracles of God, ANYWAY, he couldn't get down. The genius was afraid to jump! Mind you there was a load of shit and piss to go around, spread alllllllll over the cabinet tops.

SO, I'm going to shut up now before I find myself passed out in a hospital from dog anxiety.

DANCING QUEEN By Victoria Huerta

MATILDA:

Stop it! I can't dance, so stop trying to pull me onto the dance floor! If you dare push me into the middle of that dance circle, I will literally...! I don't know what I'll do, but I'll do something! The best I can do is jazz hands, okay? My feet don't know how to step and my body does stupid movements! I will not embarrass myself in front of everyone for the sake of entertaining you!

Yes, just because I can't dance, doesn't mean I don't dance. How could I not? I love music! At three in the morning, alone in my room, I dance to my heart's content. I bop and groove like I'm in a Broadway show performing a dance number! Why do you think I listen to so many musicals? But none of that means I am good at dancing!

If you saw me dancing, you'd think I was having a seizure! I look like a worm on drugs! Ugh, this is why I didn't want to come to this party! I could have been at home right now sipping some hot chocolate and watching anime! Or doing math homework — you know how much I hate math homework! Or talking to my cats while I catch up on my writing! (No, there's nothing pathetic about that!) If I were at home, I could be... I could be dancing alone in my room. Yes! There is a difference between dancing here and there! Here, everyone is looking at me and judging me for not being able to do the footwork for whatever new dance is trending on TikTok. There, the only ones judging me are my cats, and they don't judge too hard.

But I can't dance! You're not going to make me dance! Remember when I had to take dance class in 6th grade, so I told the dance teacher I sprained my ankle? But he wasn't convinced, so I had to jump off a tree and actually sprain my ankle? That's the length I'm willing to go to not dance in front of a crowd! And you think I'm just going to herp de derp jingle jangle jive hop onto the dance floor because you asked nicely? Absolutely not!! I don't dance!

Well... Fine! I'll dance! But only if you dance with me!

## MY IDENTITY

By Rachel Wyatt

I come from a long line of powerful women. I know so much about them, because it was very important to my mother that I know who and where I came from. One thing I wish I knew more about was my indigenous roots. I find myself reaching out to find myself but I don't even know where to start. I've gone to powwows, and done so much research, but there's still so much I'm missing. I don't know where I fit in all this. One thing I've always admired about indigenous culture is how accepting they are. I emulate that in my everyday life, trying to make connections where I can. Through lots of workshops and studies done in classes I know lots about my own history that I otherwise wouldn't have even thought about. No, I don't live on reservations, or have any sort of regalia, but one thing I do know and feel confident in is how I smudge. I find it brings me peace in this crazy storm of life, and when I do it, I feel a connection unlike anything I've ever felt, almost beyond explanation. I know someone is watching over me. I feel connected to myself and what's beyond that. My mother is the most important woman in my life. She has taught me so much about where I've come from. Everything I am, I owe to her. She makes me myself, and makes me Metis. I know lots about indigenous culture. All together, my knowledge is just fractions, scattered into different places. What I want, what I need, is to know where I fit in. I know I'm Metis, but I can't see beyond that. I want my kids to grow up knowing more than I do about their culture, and this beautiful thing we've been gifted into. That's what it is. Beautiful. The family that it provides, the security and acceptance it brings, and the way they value each and every person in their community. It's beautiful. It's so much more than that. It's home.

YOU DID IT FOR ME

By Cynthia Tinschmidt Leal

I have never told you completely about how grateful I am. And, you know, we're always focusing and thinking about the present or the future, and you don't usually think about the past, but I do. I find myself constantly thinking about the happiness, the sadness and the moments of the past. But especially, I always think of the things that led us here, in this new world, in this new adventure. (Thinks about something else and then decide to say it.) I truly admire the love of a mother, how unconditional it is, how you put my aspirations, dreams, happiness and future first and then is when you think about yourself. I remember the most about our years of only being a mother and a daughter, and not having my father anymore. I remember the most how we would cry for our loss, now our angel, and how things were becoming "normal" again. But our situation last year wasn't the best, so you made a decision, you made the most difficult decision that a mother could make and you did it for me. You did it for me. You decided to leave everything behind, everything we had known for an opportunity, for a chance of a future I couldn't have in our country. And every day now you have to deal with the bad treatments and the weird looks when you struggle to speak in English and don't pronounce words "correctly." But you always, always find the other side of things, you don't let anything or anyone to make you sad, and I admire that.

Echas pa' lante sin importar que, mamá.

One day, I wish I could be just like you.