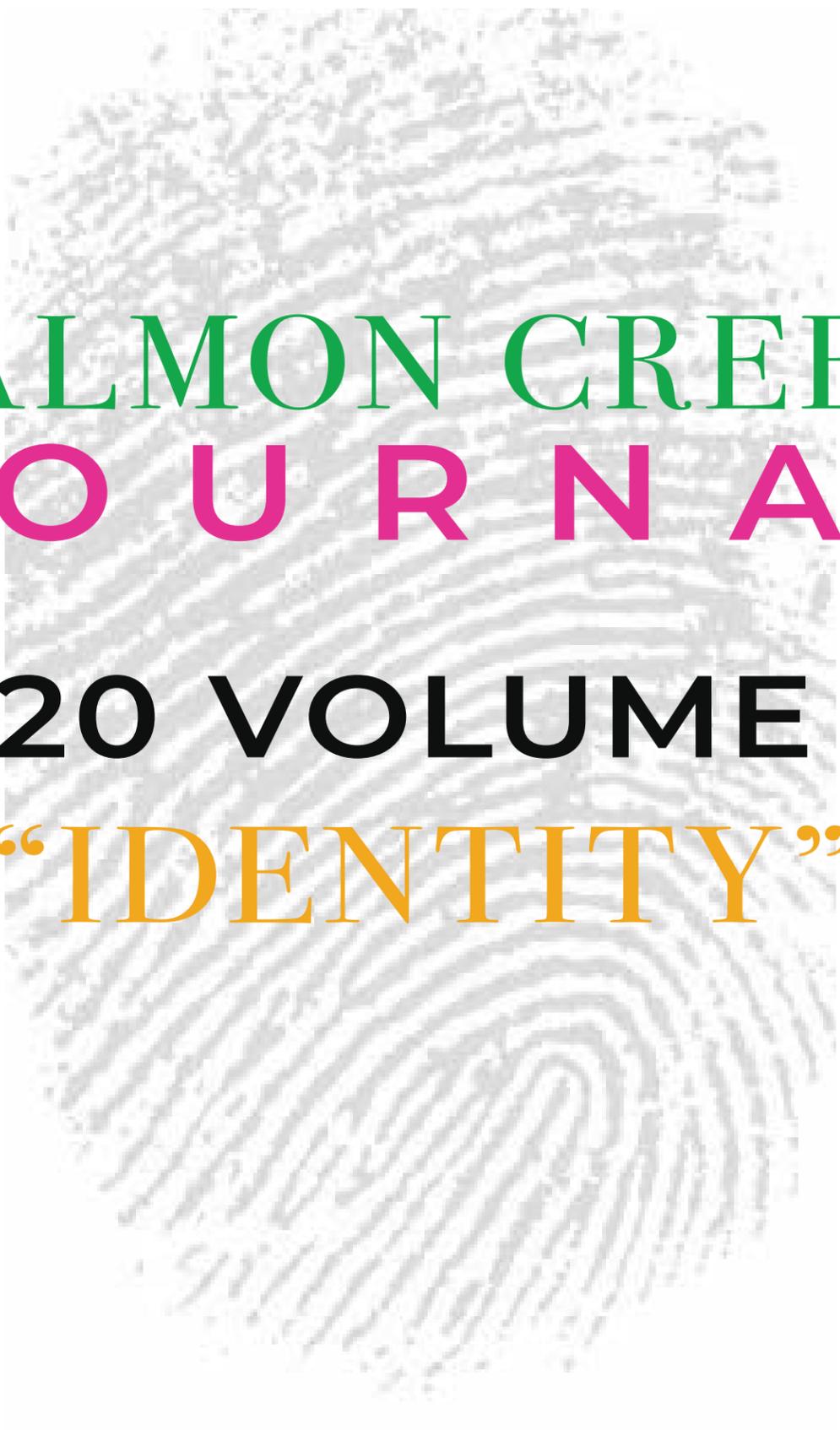


SALMON CREEK JOURNAL

THE
IDENTITY
ISSUE



SALMON CREEK
JOURNAL

2020 VOLUME 22

“IDENTITY”

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT



HIGH ABOVE HOME
DANIELLE DONOGHUE

WSU Vancouver campus is located on stolen unceded land of the Taidnapam, Chinookan and Cowlitz peoples since time immemorial.

SALMON CREEK JOURNAL

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ABOUT

Salmon Creek Journal, a student-run media platform; *encourages, publishes and elevates* the visual and literary arts of WSU Vancouver and surrounding community.

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"Imprint" Dadaist collage representing multiple accepted works from this year's journal created by Courtney Packard.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

WELCOME

Welcome to the 22nd Issue of the Salmon Creek Journal, published first in 1997 and each year since 1999.

ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As we celebrate the birth of another edition of SCJ and look back at its 23-year history I cannot help consider the origins of the journal name: Salmon Creek Journal. Washington State University Vancouver's entrance is on Salmon Creek Boulevard, named after nearby Salmon Creek.

... and the creek is named after the taxonomic family Salmonidae, which is a common name applied to a diverse number of species. Salmon in the Pacific Northwest are unique, requiring and depending on a rich biodiversity. Salmon require protected areas to spawn and free flowing river-highways for the life-long commute to rich ocean-feeding areas.

Since our organization and magazine name owes its genesis to Salmon, we freely acknowledge our awesome responsibility to mitigate the damage done in previous generations, and to do no further harm to our namesake patron.

We further acknowledge that WSU Vancouver campus is located on stolen, unceded land of the Taidnapam, Chinookan and Cowlitz peoples since time immemorial. In doing so, we also affirm our responsibility to bring healing into the world through art and literature. At least, in committing ourselves to the practice of art and literature, to do no further harm.

Finally, Salmon Creek Journal acknowledges that we are a student-run journal funded by the same. Every consideration was given to the many contributions of art, story and poetry particularly from our fellow students without whom this effort would not be possible. In this way, SCJ acts as a mirror of campus culture. We also welcome our public contributors of art and literature to our growing and diverse family.

ABOUT SALMON CREEK JOURNAL

SCJ has endeavored to reach out beyond the confines of campus in recent years. In 2019 SCJ launched the journal off-campus at Association of Writers and Writing Programs. The arrival in Portland of the AWP Conference was a unique opportunity to put WSU Vancouver student work in the hands of editors, publishers and university professors from all over the United States. We also met other student editor groups and interacted with enthusiastic newcomers to the SCJ family both inside and outside the Cougar community.

As with the 2019 volume, 2020 Identity Issue pushes the boundary of what SCJ can do as a student journal. We discovered that continuing on the "public journal" path is exponentially expensive. A comprehensive examination was made as to SCJ's short and long term futures. This process, in part, has led to the magnificent journal you are holding in your hands right now.

Over 500 artists, authors, poets and other creatives submitted material for consideration in this year's journal. The work came from students at WSU Vancouver, WSU Pullman and WSU Global, representing disciplines in English, Creative Writing, Biology, Political Science, Nursing, History, DTC, Fine Arts, Psychology and Engineering.

Students from over 40 non-WSU universities eagerly shared their work as well; from nearby Portland State and University of Washington to the overseas University of Edinburg (Scotland) and Sorbonne (France). Those creatives not affiliated with WSU numbered almost 300 with 26 originating from outside the US.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Dara Passano's "I Missed My Connection" offers a glimpse into the life of one who is constantly on the move, yet also stuck in place. Passano describes herself as living "out of a suitcase that is most often in sub-Saharan Africa."

View a day in the life of photographer Kamra Shields "Through the Lens" or Jason Vedette's textual representation of "Anxiety Versus Disorder." In each work I believe you will find the artist, author or poet expressed through the page rather than simply on it.

NO TRANSLATION NECESSARY.

As the 2019-2020 school year approached, I began thinking of ways that we might differentiate this journal from previous SCJ issues, but also from the current ocean of literary offerings (many which are variations on the same thing). I thought about how language divides people and how difficult and alienating it must be to be immersed in a dominant language culture that does not seek to explain or understand those who dream in non-English languages.

Something similar to this was expressed by Shreya Vikram in her poem "Gatekeeper" (pg. 21):

"far and deep I'd come to fear / a word that was not familiar"

Vikram writes of her unwitting compliance to traditional-dominant culture and how that was different from her parents. Vikram writes of her inspiration: "It was done obsessively, secretly, with shame and yearning. The damage was in my bones, I grew up with it, I denied it, I loved it. Soon, it'd become a part of me. I never had to stay silent; I did anyway."

Although Vikram's use of language is English, not all submissions originated there. The editors also accepted a translation from Russian poet, Kristina Kryukova. We are pleased to be the very first English language publication credit for this poet and asked if we could also publish the original Russian. With gratitude, she agreed. The Autumnal imagery persuades the reader of a changing world, one where heavy rains and scorching dry heat exist in the same seasonal space. Inclusion of non-English poetry and prose led to the happy accident of perhaps highlighting contemporary political discourse through art.

Russian is the third largest first-language spoken in Washington State as well as Oregon (Spanish is second). So, with this, I challenge the entire WSU community and beyond to encourage those that dream in a language other than English to create and express themselves in that language, whatever it should be, and then send that work to our editors.

My sincere hope is that future SCJ editors will continue this practice of pushing the definitions of art and literature and find ways to meet the student in their work and appreciate art and literature wherever it may be found.



Randal Houle
Editor-In-Chief

Not A Poem

Abhik Mukherjee PhD.

Dr. Abhik Mukherjee visited WSU Vancouver as a Post Doctoral Researcher through the Fulbright Scholar program during the 2018-2019 academic year. His home institution is NHSM Faculty of Engineering and Technology in Durgapur India.

What you call creativity, I call expressing subjective emotions or reaction. And they are always personal. I wonder how poets consider, rather are very eager to publish their poems that is meant to be read by all. If you are shy to bare your body in front of others who you do not love or are very close to, you should be shyer to bare your heart in front of all, indiscriminately. When a poet does not feel shy in publishing his poems, probably he has not bared his heart in his poems. Just like some Bollywood actresses in the movies of 60s and 70s used to wear skin-coloured tight fitting garments to create a sense of nudity among her audiences without showing their actual skin to prevent themselves and/or their audience from feeling awkward because they were unable to tolerate the glow and beauty of the naked bare body or to appease the censor board—I do not know. But since poems are written as a reaction to the interaction with somebody very close to the poet in a specific surrounding, and the reaction is very personal, it should not be published for all. On the contrary, people should not read the poems written by others they do not know personally, do not love and they know it very well that the poem is neither written for her, nor as a reaction to her interaction with the poet. Hence, in most cases, the act of reading poems is a sort of voyeurism. Now people can derive pleasure by reading poems, but that pleasure can be compared to the pleasure of watching amateur pornography, as the enjoyment it offers is basically voyeuristic in nature. Now I am not against reading poems, as neither I am against watching pornography. But the problem with watching pornography is that we can see the posture and gestures of the males and females and we can hear their pleasurable or painful moaning, but we cannot experience their feeling or understand their emotions fully. The pleasure we get by watching it is derived from our own imagination. We imagine their feeling and sometimes want to recreate the feeling in us that may lead to masturbation but not actual intercourse. If we have a real partner with us to have sex with, we must not require imagining other's feeling and getting provoked by that or to magnify our own. The same thing happens when we read poems written by others we do not know personally. We can see the skeleton of somebody's emotions presented to us by words. And the moment we get the dead skeleton, we start giving it a body by the power of our imagination. The more powerful our imagination is, more pleasure we derive from it. But this is after all an intellectual pleasure which leads us to the life of the mind and as Connie in D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* says, is far worse than the life of the body. Now cerebral pleasure is detestable as it is just the imitation of physical pleasure and like a mirage. As most of us do not have very powerful imagination, most of us do not enjoy and hence, do not read poems. Now some people may choose to lead a life of the mind as some people may get more pleasure by watching other people having sex than doing it themselves. So the people who are a voracious reader of poems are in some sense porn addict. On the contrary, as most of us love sex

(as it is our one of the purest physical instincts), most of us would love to interact with a nice person. In this way, most of us are the true reader of poems if we consider writing poetry is basically a way of shaping your life and thoughts and to display them through direct interaction with people. A nice person is always a poet.

Now, I am not against writing poetry in the conventional sense, nor against reading it similarly. I am against publishing it in the conventional sense, i.e. for the general public. There should not be any open-to-all poetry-journals. It should not be in print, not meant to be. A poem must be written for one. And one alone will read it. Because the journey from a poem being conceived in the heart of a poet to its being finally born (or not to be born) on a piece of paper is essentially a journey of love. Please do not mistake the poem with a baby as I have used the words, "conceive" and "born." The poem is the whole journey, the whole life, not only the written part of it. Poem is actually the life of a poet. To read it, someone needs to be close to its creator. Spending some moments with the poet in a one to one situation is reading the poem. And writing a poem is leading a life in a specific way and not just recording his emotions on the paper. So, a poet can be a poet even without writing a single "poem". Because may be the poet has shaped his or her own life in a way that it sounds like a poetry. The moment one gets close to the poet in person, one starts reading the poem, the moment one physically disconnects himself or herself from the poet, one stops reading the poem. That is why reading just the written words made by somebody without knowing him personally is a sort of peeping into someone's heart without being morally or aesthetically allowed to. But just some lovers are powerful enough to be poly-amorous, a poet can have multiple readers for a single poem. But there should not any universal poet, or a universal poem. No poet or poem is timelessly and universally valid. The vulgar urge on the part of the poet to be widely read can be read as the normal human greed for reputation, recognition and even worse, money forgetting the purest instincts of humans: innocence and integrity. As prostitution is legal in many places and should be so in all places on account of personal freedom, earning money by writing poems is accepted by so many people. Hence, the best journals of poetry are the best brothels. Yes, as one may choose to sell one's body to others, one may choose to market one's emotions to others. But why those poets are worse than some prostitutes is that some prostitutes at least pretend to love their customers for the time being as they know this is the best way to please them, most of the poets never care to go to all his readers (who bought his book and read them) and tell her the whole story of the poem being brewed up in his mind by being close to her and pretend to love her, just as it always happens in purely arranged marriage (another form of accepted prostitution), where love starts only after sex. Technically this is not possible too, as there are a large number of readers for a popular "poet". The poet does not know and does not want to know whoever is reading his poems.

I want to limit this discussion only to lyric poetry (and not epics or lengthy narrative poems) and not to include other art forms as I believe all the other art forms have a more or less specific form of expression and its creator can easily hide behind that form. Poetry is the only art form where creator cannot hide himself. He must be nude.



"HONKMASTER"

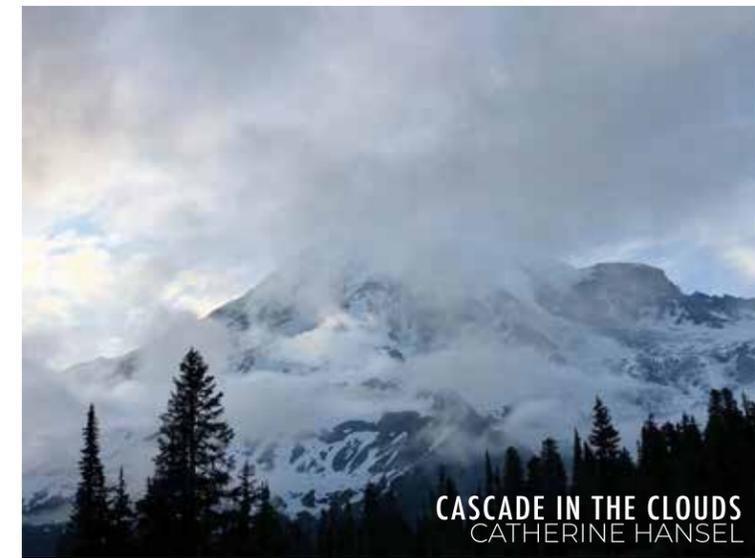
MARGOT

MANDATORY FUN

ALEXANDER ORTIZ

BADB IMAGINED BY A DIVORCING WOMAN

CONSTANCE
BACCHUS



I

Her hair is long &
she would not once want
to be a man.

She shrieks.
They ask what that was,
can only see a
raven perched on a wooden
precept post decrepit.

This is where she likes
to live in a battlefield
primordial rocks rained down stab
earth-

powers of her sisters & self
& everything flat dust sand
granite bones-

& yes, again the raven
who thought the noise aloud

perhaps persephone
knew
perhaps ceres guessed

III

& she doesn't
softly hide her wrath
it rides

it's solid
as granite crags
what is this raven,
but the way she feels
free flying when
it becomes so

much she must
use a different
perspective
playing chess from
a large erratic
tempting coyotes
& other wilds
she 'stumbles' across
naked
soot smeared
comfortable, soothed
falling asleep herself
sated

II

hair raging
ringed & unruly
standard hip width apart
ready

does she wear pants they ask
it's her own house,
so no

MEDICINE DOES NOT EQUAL BUG SPRAY

LIBBY SKALISKY

i have a butterfly at the bottom of my neck
it's wings beat too fast for my body to catch up to the
way it blows around the white
and red petals in my bloodstream

i feed it **pills** every day so it doesn't beat my heart out
of commission
so that the tremors in my hands stop long enough for
me to open the unsightly orange
bottle that rattles the insect intruding in my space
it's wings tickle my chin

my butterfly isn't the biggest or prettiest
other butterflies have only one wing or none at all
i'm told that the butterfly is natural that i should be
grateful
that there's a reason it's silently twitching on my neck
i feel like it's plotting something
sitting there so quietly
almost translucent until i take a step and a sharp spike
of pain flits up my body into my
heart

it's hard to breathe but I should be thankful

i have two arms
two legs

a **sound** mind

the boil of my skin rivals a furnace yet the feeling inside
the shame and contentment of handing my reins over
to this bug on my person **burns**

burns like a blue flame that you don't know seethes you
until all you have to do is reach
out
and grasp
touch
flutter

i can't look at it too well in the mirror but i imagine ivory
wings
crisp snowy wings like an angel or a mountaintop, taunt-
ing me from way up above so
high i can't see past the antenna blocking my view
so high my ears pop and i can't hear the way it clicks
insults about the way my very own blood cells
fight
against
each other
like a civil war is happening inside my very body
except both sides never win just slightly maim until the
repercussions
each gaudy wound and measly scratch
catch up to my weak mass of limbs and trip me into a
dressed up dirt deathbed

i stopped feeding it for a while there
i only missed a week falls so easily from my parched
tongue although the three months
of sloth like self torture slosh around my brain, calling me
a liar
a suck up
i'm Afraid
i make promises in front of antiseptic hands and white
hot trench coats yet the second
i'm on my own
the second i'm old enough to be considered an "adult"
i lie, cheat
steal myself from a future i don't think i
deserve

if i wanted i could feed it a drink made up of science and
sugar i could make it completely disappear
i'd have to nourish my body anyways
swallow hormones compacted into a gritty pill that dries
halfway down my throat
a residue left behind from the taste of something vile
i want to spit it out but the sludge is blocking the entrance
bug spray is valuable and i'm lucky enough to afford it
sometimes

i don't know which is worse
waiting for the day that my blatant incompetence lands
me in the emergency room

with three outcomes

deceitful death, with no butterfly

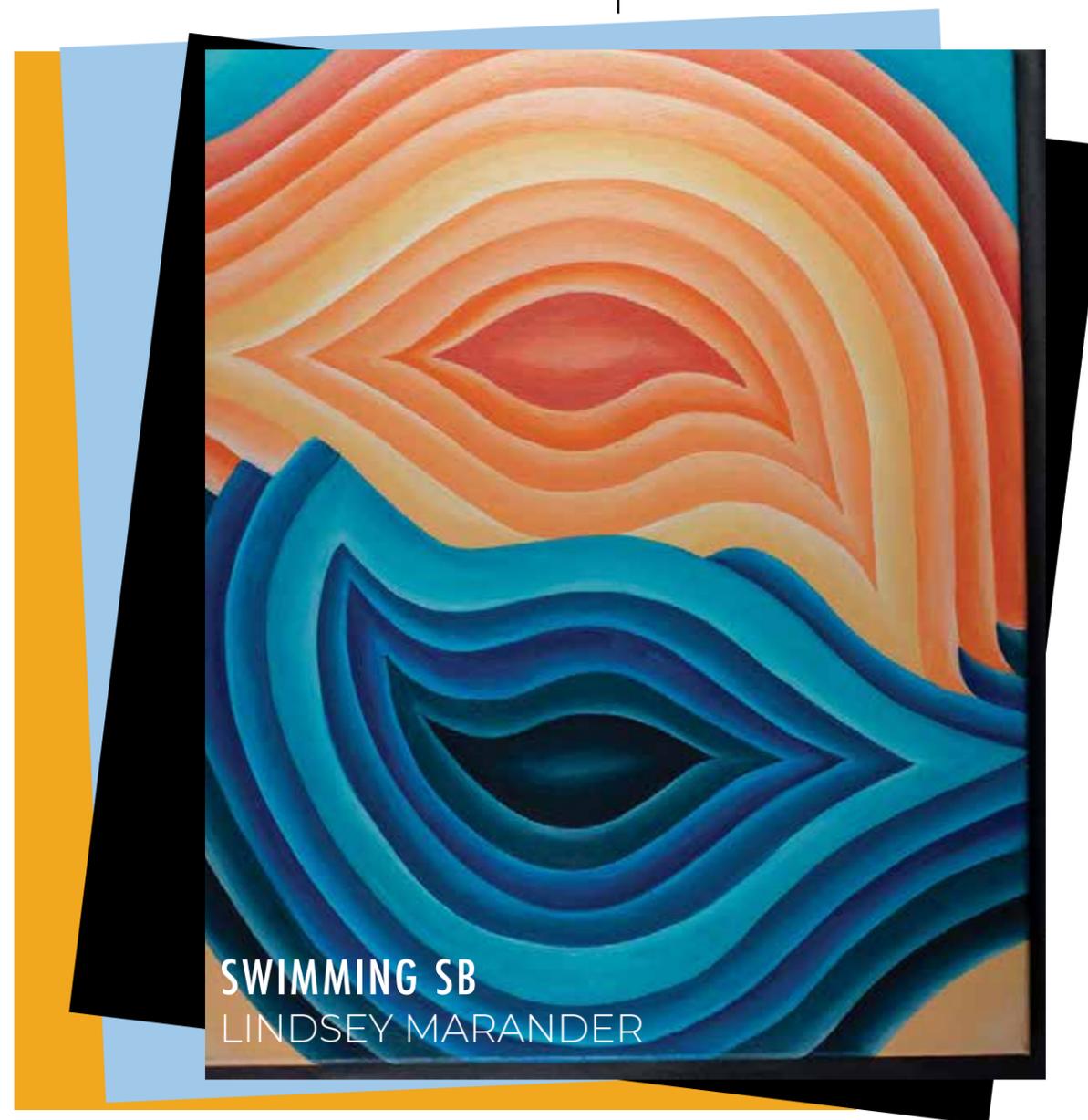
a cozy coma, with a sleepy one

or being confined to monthly pricks so sterile my head spins
watching the nurse smack
her gloves on and wield it like it's only a needle
not fearing the sting but welcoming the **constant**
making eye contact with the band on my arm so tight it
leaves a mark i can only wait
for time to take away
the sluggish flow of my blood feels almost exactly as i do
syrupy movements belying it's own value
my heart hits the ground running and my butterfly
my monster flaps once in acknowledgment

"your butterfly is weak" my mother tells me, excuses
me when i'm too scared to admit
to my flaws, to my own
being

"have you tried to spray it?" "yes" **no**
"have you taken your medicine?" "yes" **no**

but I will now



SWIMMING SB
LINDSEY MARANDER



JAIME

MALLORY HOBSON

You can't recall how long you've been hearing it: for what it's worth, it may as well have been all your life. You used to assume it was the bright green wall clock that hung in your bedroom. It was the kind of clock designed specifically for children, with fat, black hands pointing squarely at the friendly-looking numbers, second hand ticking pleasantly away above it all. You played and slept to the sound of it, like a heartbeat in the background, and never questioned the way it carried on faintly even when you were away from home.

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, the green wall clock was replaced by a small black piece that sat upon your bedside table. Its display was firmly digital, with sober red numbers flicking through the hours. But there it was, still: the quiet, dull ticking of a clock's heavy hands, hovering like a ghost in the background of your life. It was - *is* - a hollow sound, echoing through your ankles and your wrists, ticking through your veins like a second pulse.

The older you become, however, the greater your quiet alarm grows. You learn about auditory hallucinations, acute

and chronic tinnitus. You see doctors, even fly cross-country to meet with a specialist, only to come up empty. You meet with psychiatrists who administer medications and therapy and combinations thereof, and while they do dredge up the vague childhood memories of the green plastic clock that may or may not have started it all, they do very little to stop the ceaseless ticking.

Medical avenues exhausted, you become obsessed with other noise, instead. You play classical music on repeat until your friends seem impressed by your culture and your husband is sick of Debussy and Ravel and Bach, and then you switch to jazz until you both grow sick of that, too. You drive with the windows down, letting the sounds of traffic and the wind roll over you, swirling around your car until it drowns out the distant second-hand. You go to bed with headphones on, the low voices of podcast hosts murmuring and lulling you to sleep.

Inevitably, however, silence finds you. You wake up with your headphones off. You halt before a stop sign on a quiet patch of road. The music runs out, and you're left with the heavy tock-tock-tock in the back of your mind, beating against your skull, drumming its steady tattoo down your spine and across your eyelids. It makes you sick to your stomach, this noise, and even the blood rushing through your ears can't quite drown it out. You swear it's growing louder as you get older. You play your music at steadily increasing volumes (now you're onto swing music, all bright trumpets and jangling piano to knock the ticking away). You chatter to fill every lull in every conversation. You visit more psychiatrists, more otologists. You even try crystal healing, at your daughter's suggestion, balancing clusters of quartz and amethyst around your head, all to no avail.

Your husband, usually the calm to your storm, snaps at you to please just turn the damn radio off, I'm trying to read here. You do your best to be quiet with him, to ignore the ticking while he reads his book and you flip through television channels, but the sound is louder than television could ever be, and you end up crying in frustration. You visit more doctors. You fly to Europe,

spending more than you can afford, really, but you're at your wits end. It doesn't help. You're healthy, they say. Try more therapy.

You go back to classical music, but the metronome of the clock pounds louder than even the most thundering Beethoven. Your hair is greying now, fine silver threads weaving through the black, and you invite friends over for lunch only to talk over them all. They leave early. You don't invite them back, just turn up the television as your husband shakes his head and takes his book upstairs.

...

You stumble upon a clock at an antique shop, and your breath catches in your throat. It's huge and porcelain, shaped vaguely like a gravestone: a rounded, iridescent slab coated with molded lavender ribbons and pale-cheeked cupids, mounds of delicate roses frothing like blood at the base. A clock, gold-rimmed with cheap plastic hands and stark black numbers, is set in the middle of it all. It's hideous, and expensive, and the sound of the second-hand echoes the noise that's haunted you all these years. You buy it immediately, feeling a mounting sense of closure as you swipe your credit card.

Once home, you take it into the backyard and smash it to pieces, using your husband's old hammer to crush every staring cherub, each porcelain rose, until a pile of jagged iridescent shards is all that remains. The plastic clock is slower to go: it clings to life like an animal, gold rim denting without breaking, hands moving even while mangled. It's no match for your ferocity, though, and you hit it and hit it and hit it until there's no more sound but the thud of your hammer on glass and plastic, no thought in your head beyond the destruction of the ceaseless noise.

Black plastic innards crack behind the broken face. A battery rolls from the chaos, halting against fragments of shimmering glass. You've forgotten your daughter was visiting today: you were going to have lunch with her and your grandson, have a nice walk to the park afterwards. She stands, now, with your husband, staring at you from behind the patio door. You stab your hand on a downwards swing, on a shard of a cupid's arm: blood

rolls slowly down your fingers. The next blow destroys it, cherubic remains becoming so much rubble and scree. Your grandson's small face is twisted in horror, eyes locked onto the blood, the glass, as he cowers besides his mother. Porcelain dust shimmers through the air, shining in the sunlight, catching in your silver hair.

The clock is dead.

For a moment, there is only silence, and even with your husband's concern, your daughter's worried confusion, your grandson's wide eyes, all staring down at you, hunched over the razed clock—

For a moment, there is only silence.

The shore, pale sand shimmering and empty as the ocean draws away.

Then the waves rushing in as the tide rolls back, more vicious for having left at all. The ticking floods your ears with maddening precision, achingly relentless, no longer remotely distant but as near as if it were right behind you: the clock, heavy and plastic and ugly and evil, ticking forever just out of sight, second-hand scraping against your veins, clawing against your throat.

Dropping the hammer, you put your head in your hands and sob.

...

You don't visit any more therapists. You don't go to any more doctors. You talk to your husband and your daughter and your son-in-law, and they try to understand, try to offer suggestions. There isn't much that's new: you've had this problem longer than you've known any of them, longer than you can remember, and the worse it gets, the more hopeless you feel. You sweep up the broken pieces of the ugly porcelain clock, and by garbage day it's gone forever. You stop playing music, you stop talking over people, stop trying to fill every silence. Each tick grates into your skull, into your deepest thoughts and memories, but you don't say anything. Your grandson's face, crumpled with fear and confusion at the sight of your manic destruction, won't quite leave you—so you keep the television on low, the music off, the windows of your car rolled up.

You do wonder, of course, just what exactly it is.

You used to think it was a physical issue (tinnitus to the extreme? a broken ear bone?) then became convinced it was something mental instead (a hallucination? a nervous tic?). Lately, however, you've begun to wonder if it isn't something bigger than that—something deeper than that. You wonder if it's counting down, perhaps, or counting up. If that's the case, why you? Why, out of all these people on earth, are your seconds being measured?

You've never been one for religion. Vaguely spiritual, yes—you ostensibly believe in karma, knock on wood for good luck every once in a while. Now, though, you fling yourself into this newest outlet, scouring tales and myths of omens and prophets, demons and deities, hunting for meaning within it all. You grow convinced that the clock is counting towards something, some kind of major event. It has to be bad—nothing this infuriating could ever herald miracles—but you can't begin to imagine what it will actually be. Will it be global, you wonder? The End Times, the Kali Yuga, Ragnarök? Or will it be smaller, more personal: a death in the family, a horrible accident of some kind. You scrutinize your family's health and habits, beg your daughter to drive carefully, your son-in-law to make sure all the doors are locked securely at night. At first they play along, promising to be careful; but soon enough they grow irritated, and snap that they're adults, they know how to live their lives, they don't need constant reminders to not kill themselves. The ticking shudders through your teeth, through your aching joints, beating you down, and you wonder if it isn't your death it's prophesizing—maybe even causing.

Your death. You've thought about it in a practical sense, of course: your husband and you had a will and testament written up long ago, set aside money for funeral preparations. You've never been morbid, but now—as you continue to grow older and the clock continues to grow louder—you just can't shake the thought of it. Your death. Your pulse speeds at the thought of it (your own veins trying to prove they're still alive, you're still alive?), maddeningly out of sync with the ticking. You've forgone music, leave the windows rolled up in your car. What's the point? You wake at night with the ticking

pounding through you, bright spots of pain flaring behind your eyes and spiking through your ears. You try another doctor: he gives you migraine pills that do very little besides make you dizzy.

You wonder if anything, short of death, will make it stop. You don't tell your husband—there's no need to worry him needlessly, it isn't like you'd actually do anything—but you daydream of the end, the quiet blackness. You still aren't sure if you believe in life after death, but...if there is something, the ticking can't follow you there, right? It drips from your ears and the back of your neck; your skin crawls. You don't talk much to anyone these days purely because you can barely hear what they're saying in the first place: when you do say something, it's usually wrong, born from some misheard snippet of the conversation, and they look at you with the thin and piteous patience reserved for the elderly and confused. You dream of silence, of hearing soft noises again. You have to watch television with the subtitles on, now. You miss your classical music.

Your grandson visits with his fiancé, a sweet but shy young woman, perpetually unsure of what to say to you. You don't blame her; you know what you must seem like. Aged. Addled. You pour them glasses of lemonade, and your hands shake in time with the ticking. Each tick feels like a pinprick; thin, skeletal hands with needles for nails, clutching and scratching at your soul. You dream of darkness, and wake with dry eyes and a heavy, sick feeling. You haven't cried over this for years. There's no point, really. It drowns out your husband's voice and your daughter's telephone calls, and all you can do is wait.

When it finally comes—your grandson is older now, married, and the few silver hairs you once had are now threading through your daughter's dark hair. Your husband's lips are moving, but you can't hear his words. The clock rushes over you, ticking faster now, it seems, each tick tumbling and falling and tripping into the other, stumbling painfully through your tired veins. You hold his hand. There are no doctors; as before, as always, nothing can be done. You think you see the bright

green wall clock, just in the corners of your vision, but it's growing smudged and dark. You can hear it, though. You wonder when it will stop.

You hold your husband's hand.

Your grandson is there, older than you remembered.

You wonder when it will stop.

You can almost see it, the plastic face, the fat black hands. You can hear it, louder now, beating faster and faster than your pulse. You wonder when it will stop.

Your grandson and daughter are there. So are your son-in-law, your granddaughter-in-law.

You can't hear their words, but you hold your husband's hand.

All sound stops.

The clock is gone.

You try to hold your husband's hand, but he's gone too, now, grip fading—or maybe you're the one fading, you can't tell anymore—and you hear nothing but silence. Beautiful, peaceful silence. The sand, pale and shimmering and empty as the waves draw from the shore. A porcelain clock, cupids fluttering away as the roses wither and die, as the hands shatter quietly into oblivion.

You let yourself fall into the soundless night.

...

In the darkness, there is nothing.

The sand, empty. Noiseless.

Then—

The waves, more vicious for having left at all. The ticking circles you like a shark, like a bird of prey, echoing through your bones, replacing your absent pulse, your vacant heartbeat. You ache, suddenly and violently, at the ceaseless beating of it.

In the darkness, no longer soundless, the clock ticks on.

Hailing from the rainy Pacific Northwest, Mallory Hobson's work has appeared in such venues as Hex Magazine, The Salal Review, The Salmon Creek Journal, Bohemia Journal, and Dark Lane Anthology Volume 3. Her poem "City Dweller" was also recently nominated for Best of the Net 2018.

BRACING HOPE

LEAH BAKER

The lamps went out.
 I slept inside the courage
 of one little finger,
 one nook in the crevice of a shoulder and
 my thumbs lodged into the
 curl of my fists. I moaned into
 the first hour of morning, asked for your hand
 to cover the space of growing ache inside of me.
 Even when your hand was unwilling, it was warm.

I tried to be still, a comfort to myself
 but couldn't stop
 from hoping you'd soothe me instead.

I am waiting for the long obstacle of mediocrity,
 of wanting,
 to fall into the deep knowing of self-gratification.

Somehow, our two hungry mouths
 never really touch
 when we kiss, like two fishes
 both gasping hungrily for water to soothe their lungs,
 lips opening and closing,
 inhaling nothing but air.

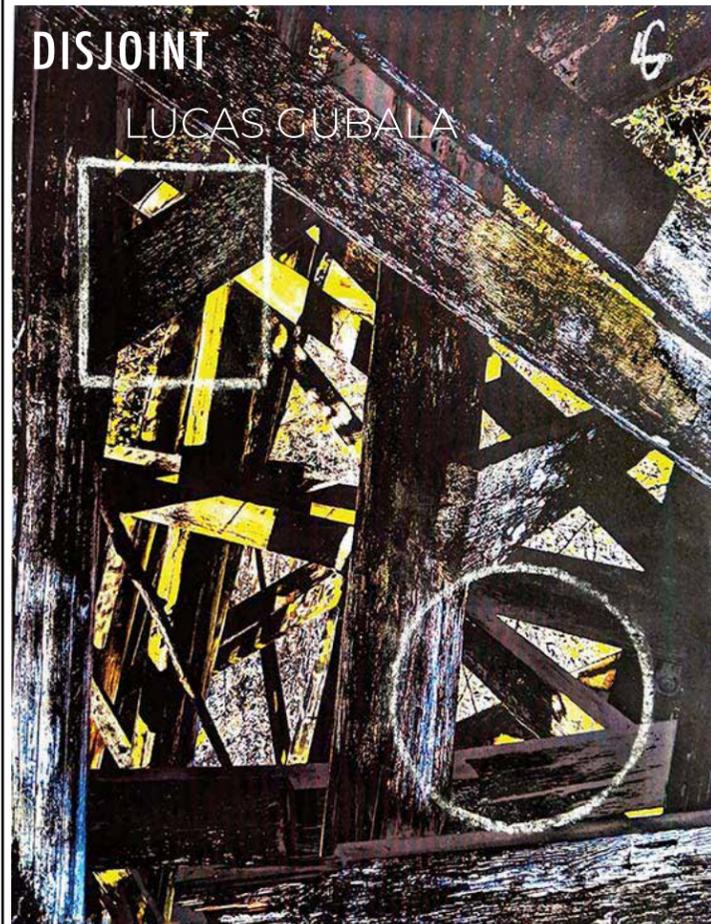
There is a half burned hole that forms on my tongue
 each time I think of
 the other women you touch.

My teeth sink into the stem of Hope
 they had been grimly bracing toward
 and abruptly snap it off.
 A song is a woman's voice
 breaking out like a fist pushing through fabric,
 a wash of scarlet across a pale face

sweetly sung, clear ringing.
 I learned Courage at the academy of night
 against the backdrop of my little self.

I stand embodied,
 I, perpetually the larva
 of my future.

Leah Baker is a high school English teacher from Portland, Oregon. "This piece speaks to my identity as a woman striving to connect relationally with others... how it looks to show up, to reach, to grapple with our own disappointments. For so long, my identity has been wrapped up in my singlehood, and I share in these pieces some of the experiences that have led me right back to that road."



GATEKEEPER

SHREYA VIKRAM

I can tell you how wrong we were
 to stay huddled when they told us

we were pretty little sparrows
 to look down and watch

our tongue curves secret smiles
 into herself

in place of speech- like a swallowing
 to walk with our hands slung

behind our backs
 to stay and say no more

than the we learnt
 we were taught from the womb

yesterday, I watched a woman cast
 out from the mold
 because she broke under it
 and I thought of how close

a death could seem to
 a new sort of freedom how it mounted

something - this word - to become
 beyond itself a fear

and I watched my tongue
 curl a last word down

the slip of my throat before
 I told it to and how
 far and deep I'd come to fear
 a word that was not familiar
 with the grooves of my teeth- I'd learnt, ma, to love the close kiss of our

second skin.

THEY

DES SMITH

They
Dwell in spires
living lavishly
We
Humbly live
in hovels

They
Send armed
Dogs
to put the people in
their places
We
Are lulled by caustic
pointless platitudes
by
ruthless representatives

They
Brought the weak
willed wretched who
were sent to represent we
We
Argue over the trite trivial
black blue Jim or them

Des Smith is a Humanities major at WSU Vancouver. He began writing poetry a year ago after taking a Creative Writing class. "I felt I had to express myself by writing a poem about the corporate takeover of the government. This subject is important to me, and I think it's important that I bring awareness to what has been going on in our country. I hope my words will encourage others to express themselves through literature, or art."

SUNSETS IN ROME
REED WONN

BOUNDARIES

SARAH
SUMMERHILL

In that moment, I remembered being fish. I remembered being hydrogen and oxygen, bird and wolverine. It was all there...—Linda Hogan, Solar Storms

I grew up religious. Not in the way you're imagining—no candles casting shadows of the Virgin Mary on our walls, no grace at dinnertime. I'd never even been inside a church until I was sixteen. No, I grew up a different sort of religious. Our faith was science.

My family's devotion to the systematic enterprise, as I understand, began when my father was a few years old and brought home from school the knowledge that his thumbprint looked strikingly like that of a chimpanzee. My grandmother, a devoted Nazarene, disciplined him accordingly, and though forced rattling of Bible lines caused them to materialize permanently in his mind, unquestioned love for the begotten Son never took hold in the same way. He stood his ground as a child, and when he aged and led his own children into the world by the pinky finger his daughters learned to notice how whale skeletons have five skeletal prongs at the base of their fin-bones before he pointed it out to them. The faith of modern science lived in the walls of our home like O-positive blood courses through the blood vessels of chimps.

And so I, as my childhood rushed on, became a devotee of modern science. I fought with ultra-religious kids about our transformation from monkeys and the fact that God did not heal their sick aunt from breast cancer—modern medicine did. Once, I got into it with a friend who claimed she could see God standing right next to me. I waved my arms around like a madman, asking "Can he feel this, then?" She screeched and told he would punish me for it—for not

believing in "him." I found that ridiculous. What wasn't, I sometimes think now, was her original statement, which had led to the whole fight: "God is everywhere. He's right next to me. He's right next to you."

Modern science encourages separation based on complexity. You might have been proud of yourself at one point for memorizing the taxonomic hierarchy, which ostensibly defines our intelligence, superiority, and claim to a life worth living: Kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species. Humans are different from canines, which are different from equines, which are very different from piscines, which are maybe closer to flora, which are closer to bacteria, which aren't really anything at all until they fucking kill you. In my family, we rattle off the hierarchy like it's a game. Kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

If, for a moment, you step outside these boundaries, which break beings into their own tiers, the world turns on its side. If that step involves allowing wild grass or river water to settle along your ankles and lap in your toes, you gain access to a side of the natural world which gives knowledge freely. You meet water with intimacy, and a mutual understanding rises in the steam that bonds you.

...

When I grew older, my free time consisted of riding my bike out into the "wilderness," wherever I could find it, and sitting among the trees and the waters and the earth and listening to the breath of nature tickle my ear. I heard the keel keel of birds, the scuffing of squirrels on the stalks of Evergreen trees which, to this day, are still home for me, the lapid rush of water against the banks of creeks flushed with vegetation, and weeds that if he found them at home, my father would spray down within a matter of weeks. I remember crying when he cut down the trees in our front yard for the worry that a bad storm might bring them down on our living room—those tall, beautiful Douglas Firs which were so

prominent in my life that felt like tall fathers whose legs I ran between to protect myself from the incoming threat of my sister when we played tag. I believed to be a part of that world, not a visitor to it, and certainly not a categorizable piece of it. I belonged there.

Indigenous people have known since time immemorial that divine knowledge comes not from laboratory spaces and white halls. This I learned sitting front in a 36-foot tribal canoe led by Tony Johnson, Chairman of the Chinook Indian Nation, fulfilling my need for a 3-credit diversity course and minded to find pieces of myself in the process.

On the blue-green slicing waters of Lake River, my shoulders rose time and time again to meet my ear, the bottom half of the paddle guided by my gentle palm as I submerged it again and again into the cutting waves. The pain of paddling I never understood until that moment: It felt as if something climbed into my skin and knifed a line into my muscle, allowed fire to escape my bone marrow and begin licking me from the inside out. But soon I began to recognize my muscle fibers constricting and separating beneath my skin, flaying outwards and filling the patches with new collagen, and beginning to bend and move parallel with the fierce fire of pain, and I earned the strength for a few more strokes.

Behind us, Lake River cut through a dome of all sorts of life: Evergreen trees; cypress trees; wild, light-colored green water grass; undoubtedly, silver-shaded smolt fish swarming beneath the surface of the rippling water; flocks of birds flying overhead, and, at one point, even a solitary bald eagle. Before us, Lake River split into the Columbia. The water faded from deep turquoise to shiny gray-silver, reflected a kind of light blue from the sky, so wide above us. In these moments I wondered how anyone could think the Earth is flat: The sky stretched so wide along the river, you could see it curve around the circular world.

I thought of how I've looked within surface tension and seen how small a thing as the feet of waterskippers bounce inside, bump light, break within; one leg mere atoms in water that bend in tension. This I saw plunging my body, eyes open, face towards the sky, beneath water time and time again as deep as I could possibly push myself. I came

RAINDROP'S BEAUTY
HANNAH BURBACH

to see my thoughts in front of me as electric lines, fibers of being split around water blue from the sky, delighted to see their electric sisters in the white curves of surface light. I've seen how they reach, five new pink fingers, and graze the stretch of light to glaze inside the surface of water, not just between the body of liquid and air but between the boundaries of life and light in the hard bouncy region of surface tension home only to the secrets of the universe and the feet of water-skipper bugs.

I understood that boundary. I understood breaking it with my fingers, first bending and then shattering, my hand still covered with water but orange and white-silver under the striking sun, while the rest of me lay beneath the surface and etched memories. I understood that these atoms which form my skin were once the feet of bugs, once settled in the cells between the bark and trunk of trees, once not the rings of a planet or the celestial body itself but the space between, minerals suspended in the atmosphere, uninterrupted in their transformation from one state of being to another. I understood the way they bonded to water, the way my skin dissolved away to release my insides to the world, where they could interact directly with light and sound and color.

Underwater, I could've died and not felt any sort of human instinctual sadness. I would've understood death not as an ending, nor a beginning, but an in-between: A soft, crossable boundary in which a large portion of the universe resides. I understood myself and those around me to live within a world of connections broken by dependence on technological advances. Standing in the midst of a city square, surrounded on all fours by pigeons and squirrels scampering up the sides of city skyscrapers, placeless, leafless trees planted in four-by-four patches of dirt and bark dust, are men and women wearing ivory and rubber from head to toe passing by with shards of metal and wire sewn to their hands and knees, moving within broken connections, dragged along by a loss of knowledge, unknowingly pressed to find it again.

When I sat in a red cedar seat among the fish and the waterbugs, I'd never been so far out on water without being a disruption to the wave's way. A year earlier I'd sat cushioned at the head of a gas-guzzling motorboat paving its way

across Yale lake, itself a man-made entity, disrupting any wildlife which lay beneath the surface with our liquid carbon and our deliberate speed. I ended the day with a sunburn, and a headache, for the force of the motor had gotten to even I, a player in the disruption game. But here, on the water, we moved slowly, fifteen people brushing back only the top layer of water as we moved; the bugs in the air undisturbed by the slight peaking of paddles towards the sky, unfazed by the gentle sound of water splashing the side of the canoe, or the ripple of the mild current we created greeting nearby rock settlements and growths of water grass. At our gentlest pulls, we made hardly a sound as we snuck through the cavern of trees, themselves slinking like veins across the sky above us, forming a tunnel in which only honeyed melodies of nature rang in our ears. Metal and a blueprint built the boat, and instead of running with the strength of human arms, it eats gas and spits the remains out into the water for the fish and the future to deal with.

That same canoe was carved from a fallen cedar tree in the backyard of the Pacific Northwest, dug out and smoothed with hot rocks and water, painted with hues drawn naturally from the land and blessed with each carving and stroke of paint. Christians pray prior to shoveling food into their mouth at the dinner table, but in Indigenous culture, there's no need to give thanks before taking a bite: The prayer has gone into each careful step of preparing food, from the morning before a hunt to the capture or picking of a berry and on through the cycle.

I leaned over the side of the black and blood-red canoe, gliding my fingers across the smolty water. I pushed, first bending the atoms out of the way, then breaking their formation tension to slide my fingers within the boundary. Water traveled up by shirt sleeve and cooled down the fire in my arm, and I welcomed it. Behind me, our skipper Tony reminded us that the canoe wanted each and every one of us to paddle together in harmony, to keep it happiest.

"Kanawi kanamakwst—all together now," he called

out, lifting his voice above our heads and into the cavernous atmosphere. "Nice and easy together. No wasted energy. The canoe is happiest when we're all together."

With loss of connection comes loss of knowledge. Indigenous oral traditions rely on the knowledge of elders, those who have stood upon the higher points of the world and seen human bugs glide across water within tension, understood how our feet keep us afloat, how to teach generations through voice ways to operate upon the earth, about which corners of the universe you came from, how to move among the hanging trees and the bees. I understand my ancestors are the ones who attempted to erase away indigenous ways of knowing.

In modern society, we are expected to know things about a world we have no access to. With a few sharp taps on the screen of a bundle of glass and metal and wire, you can find what's considered a normal weight for a child, how much water a human needs to drink in a day, how long a baby is supposed to breastfeed for and when to cut it off, what sounds a bird makes, how tall every mountain in the world is, and how deep every valley; you can see photos of anywhere, every man-made structure on earth, every tree, every natural barrier, even solicits of the last uncontacted civilizations on Earth. Silver boxes remember birthdays, days of love, the colors of the sunset every morning, but not the sounds of the birds which call your backyard home, your sister's voice when she says she loves you, not the taste of beautifully laid out food, not the feeling of grass on your feet, and not the way your heart pulled itself into your throat when you yourself stood on the rooftops of the world.

By meeting nature at her home, out in the open world of light and color, where we belong, strings may begin to tie new connections, new beginnings. Mountains aren't measured in miles, creatures aren't categorized and civilized, and people aren't severed from each other by wires, or words.

...

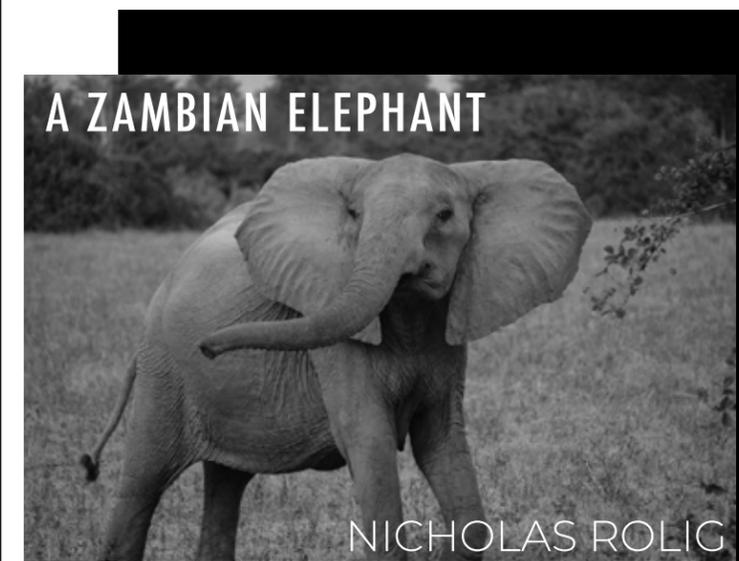
My dad is the smartest person I know. The other

night, he came home excited to discuss the multiple worlds theory. He explained to me about the atoms in my body, buzzing constantly to keep me in existence, and about how these atoms are infinitely buzzing in different ways in an infinite number of other scenarios taking place in the infinite universe, right this second. He said he thinks it's crazy that humans can't understand infinity. He said he thinks it's sad.

What's sad? I asked. I told him what I think.

When I see bees fluttering the pistons and cones of wildflowers, I think all the world lies before me. Each day pushes them to fly further apart, but I know one day, yet again, they'll come together so tightly they'll burst and become new beings. Around me now they buzz so tightly, in the legs of skippers, the fins and minds of whales, in my father's thumbprint. They glide through all rivers of Earth and all rivers I know nothing of. They hold up what I can't comprehend. I'm part of my body for such a long time, yet so little time at all—a part of the vortex, a part of waters so much deeper.

Resident of the Pacific Northwest, Sarah Summerhill is a senior English major at WSU Vancouver, minoring in Creative Writing. Summerhill explained that "growing up in the PNW without religion has shaped my view of the world; Additionally, it's about what it means to live in a world of torn ideologies, on soil that rightfully belongs to Indigenous tribes, and, at the heart, what it means for relationships to be complicated--and how that can almost make them stronger."



SEASONAL LEAF



JESSICA KHARITONENKO

I LOVE AUTUMN Я ЛЮБЛЮ ОСЕНЬ

KRISTINA KRYUKOVA

*Kristina Kryukova is an author from Russia. She lives in Moscow.
This is her first publication in English.*

A rusty autumn, a lemony autumn,
an autumn of dry Muscat.
Trees like shamans pray for longed-for rain,
singing and strewing the altar of earth
with sacrificial gold of their leaves.
At noon, sun still dries the ground exhausted by the hot
summer,
but evenings already persuade me
to take long walks under the dome
painted with starry frescoes.
To breathe! It's so nice to breathe at this hour.
To breathe the whole sky in,
to the last star, to the last atom,
and not to breathe out. To become the air, the space,
to dissolve entirely, and fill the lungs of someone else.
In early morning, dwellings of people, shrouded in fog,
look like Greek vestals wearing their thin woolen infulae:
they stand still, humbly waiting for what comes along.
This summer of 2018 was almost rainless,
though it had been showering till mid-August a year
before.
I remember we could hardly manage to mow the grass.
Now all the grass is scorched,
and only mauve clover and thistle glow here and there.
Throwing the windows open,
and letting in nights that are already full of autumn,
I can often sense the smell of rain,
but it plays hide-and-seek with me, making me laugh.
This game will be over eventually;
I'll find it, and it will douse me with the ice water of
October baptism.
I love autumn. I love it for its quiet humility,
for the din of bird flocks flying away,
for long rains and first frosts.
For starting a new turn around the sun.
In the buds that lie dormant, spring is already alive.
Intrauterine spring is already there...
Autumn, autumn... I love autumn.

(Translated from Russian by Sergey Gerasimov.
The author holds the rights for the English translation
of I Love Autumn)

Ржавая осень, лимонная осень, осень сухого муската.
Вымолить долгожданной влаги пытаются деревья,
словно шаманы, звеня и засыпая
земной алтарь жертвенным золотом листвы.
В полуденные часы солнце
ещё выпаривает измученную жарким летом землю,
но вечера, вечера уже склоняют свежим, прохладным
воздухом
к длительным прогулкам под небесным куполом,
расписанным звёздными фресками.
Дышать! Дышать полной грудью хочется в эти часы.
Вдохнуть от жадности всё небо до последней звёзды,
до последнего атома и не выдыхать.
Самой стать воздухом и пространством,
и раздать себя всю, без остатка, восполняясь
от следующего живого вдоха своего последователя.
Ранним утром земные жилища, окутанные туманом, как
греческие весталки
в тонких шерстяных инфулах,
стоят в почтённом смирении перед грядущим.
Этим летом, две тысячи восемнадцатого года, почти не было
дождей,
а в прошлый год поливало до середины августа.
Мы тогда, помню, еле справлялись с покосом травы.
Теперь же трава выжжена и лишь кое-где пылают
лиловый клевер и чертополох.
Распахивая перед сном окна и выпуская
уже совсем осенние ночи в дом, я слышу запах дождя
очень часто, но он будто играет со мной в прятки,

и это заставляет меня улыбаться.
Игра рано или поздно закончится, я найду его и он
окатит меня с головы до ног ледяной водой
ежегодного октябрьского крещения.
Я люблю осень.
Люблю за тихое смирение,
за стаи галдящих и улетающих птиц, за её долгие проливные
дожди
и первые заморозки.
За то, что она зачинает новый виток вокруг светила.
В её заложённых под зиму сосновых почках уже живёт весна.
Пусть это ещё внутриутробная весна, но она уже есть...
Осень, осень, осень... Я люблю осень.

ANGELINA TROCHE

In my head...

is a nautilus shell. if you cracked open my brain you'd find it in my hypothalamus. the area that controls your responses to excitement and fear and feelings. my nautilus shell has crevices filled with your face. and questions. god so many questions. all of it is floating around in my brain fluid. so i'm writing a letter from my reaction hub. hoping you, somehow, stumble upon this. maybe i'll drunkenly attach it in an email. from me. my name spelled incorrectly. a joke because you forgot the 'e' before the 'l'. or maybe i'm hoping that by the time i show you this, we're in a different place. so. here goes.

dear j,

we hadn't met in person yet and i think that was holding you back. but me, on the other hand, i can trust someone as soon as i'm comfortable with them. i felt like i could trust you. and you proved me right. but miscommunications along the way made me believe you didn't want anything to do with me.

i ended up at your apartment, 1:30 am. you let me follow you through your gated community so i didn't have to use a code - it would have been a pain in the ass. but it also made me think that you might not want me to come back. rather than dwell on what was going on in your complicated brain, i turned my car off. you met me by your car so i wouldn't have to walk upstairs alone.

i followed you inside, taking my Nikes off at the door leading to your room. the fan light was on and you didn't have anything hanging on the wall. it seemed lonely but you just shrugged and said you knew your room was barren. you didn't feel like hanging up a lot of stuff. you cleared your desk off for me. it looked like one of those tables that holds vases. you simultaneously admitted that i was a genius for bringing my laptop rather than relying on yours to help you get this assignment done. it was at eight percent.

i used your homework as an excuse. i'd always wanted to see the room you lived in. you had a certificate on the wall; said it meant a lot. you proceeded to show me the other two you'd gotten in previous years taking them out of the manila envelope on the desk in front of me. you were really good at what you do. lacrosse. such a Canadian sport. but you'd never bragged about yourself before so i let you. i wanted you to. because you claimed to hate talking about yourself. you proceeded to show me scores of games. pointed, with a smirk, to where "Conference Champions" was printed on both plaques. "that win was at your school." you said. i made a little bit of a big deal about your accolades and you started to shut down. i changed the subject. i didn't want you to close up on me.

you saw my rings and made a joke about how you remembered i had really nice hands. then you said you wanted to get a thumb ring. a black titanium one that said 'fuck you' but only so you could see it. you grabbed my hand, maneuvering ring after ring off of my fingers; you didn't know your ring size and told me to tell you what it was. i'm not a ring sizer though. and your fingers are wide. i had no clue what to tell you except that i didn't want you to stop touching my hand. touching me.

eventually you did, though. you laid down on your bed, parallel to where i was sitting. i started reading.

you couldn't take your eyes off me. or so it seemed. i was glancing out of the corner of my eye and it was dark

so i could've been imagining it. you talked about computers and politics - topics that i didn't even know interested you. i was seeing a different side of the boy that didn't care. the boy who said so much, but did so little. i didn't mind that you were paying me to do this assignment. i didn't mind that you were paying attention to me. i hadn't needed to drive to you. but you suggested it. "come here and we'll write this fuckin' paper together." and i had a feeling you weren't going to cancel. for once.

i wanted to see you. i dropped everything and got into my car. i'd only seen you from a distance or through photos. i had butterflies in my stomach the whole drive. before this night, i knew we were both socially awkward, in general. you had also made it abundantly clear that you just didn't care. only sometimes though. before this night i'd forced myself to see the sweet side of you. when all you showed me, for a while, were the asshole capabilities.

we'd known each other closely for almost a year and had never talked because social media is weird and dating apps are weirder. i never forced talking in person. sure, it had been disappointing when we didn't. but the thought of losing the attention that made me feel so confident scared the shit out of me. i never knew why i felt so confident when i talked to you. i wanted to bottle it up. for fear of you never talking to me again.

but when i was laying on my back, next to you, on your bed that donned only the bottom sheet and a comforter and two pillows; one with a pillowcase and one without - i felt it. full force.

i tickle scratched your back. you shivered from the feeling of my nails against your skin. you mumbled, "this is better than sex i think." i blushed and hid my face. you weren't even looking at me.

you were fidgety and i'd suggested the intimate act as a remedy. secretly i wanted to see what it felt like to lay next to you. see what it felt like to be with you. in the way that i had wanted for so long.

almost a year ago, you said we were an iconic duo. i'd believed you. you said i had a cute face. that one took a little convincing. you called me a goddess and hoped i would find a way into your rigorous schedule. that sunk in quicker than it should have. it had become all i wanted. just in time for you to disappear.

you turned to face me so i could scratch your forearms. as my nails abraded calloused fingers, you grabbed my hand. my heart started racing. you squeezed my fingers in between yours. you absentmindedly mentioned how some character in south park died in every episode. his name is kenny. it didn't make sense. but you said it in a funny way so i giggled. you let go of my hand. i stopped. you buried your head into my neck. stubble tickling my cheek. your arm wrapped around my waist. and i sighed, smiling to myself in the dark. i was in heaven. i'd wanted this for so long, but knew it was only temporary. because you didn't care.

i saw glimpses of the you that i'd wanted to be with so badly. the you i wanted to support. even if you hated everything about my school. except me. i saw the you i wanted to travel for. this night was one i hoped i'd never be allowed to forget. i knew it would end.

you called me pc because someone mentioned it in south park. i asked what it meant as i sat up. you put your hand up the back of my shirt, mindlessly rubbing the area of my back underneath my bra strap. i shivered. "politically correct" you answered huskily. i turned to face you. i wasn't wearing my glasses so your face was blurry. but i could still see your eyes. they were trained on my lips. god i wanted you to kiss me. my lips screamed for attention. but that's not how you were going to roll. except you did. because of my cute face.

i felt safe and your attention made me feel special. i hoped another night or morning or day or weekend would happen like this. again.

i hadn't felt wanted in a long time.

things happened between the hours of 4 and 5 am. you complained about how you wouldn't be able to sleep. and i didn't know if i was supposed to leave or stay. i didn't know if i was supposed to make another move or stand my ground. i didn't know. and you didn't either. that made me feel better. i copped out and put my shoes back on. i rubbed your head, hoping my lingering touch would make you, make me, stay.

god i wanted to stay. full experience. but the sun was about to rise and we had class. you walked me to the balcony of your apartment. you didn't put shoes on and your shirt was still off. from the tickle scratching of course. i didn't know again. do i give you a hug? kiss you goodbye? give you a high five? i settled for the cute smile, little wave. i only wanted to stay if you were sure about it. but again. you don't care. or do you just not know how much you care?

there were moments where i think you cared a lot. staring at me as i'm reading and sticking my tongue out. "put your tongue back in your mouth." laughing to yourself because i was furrowing my eyebrows in confusion. the tone of your voice when you ask me if i was ok because i'd knocked my water bottle off the desk, scaring myself in the process. you rubbing the back of my head when i sighed too deeply because politics were confusing, again. your finger poking my cheek to get my attention. you showing me a video accompanied with, "i think you'd like this". it made me wonder if you thought of other things i would like. it made me wonder if you thought of me as much as i thought of you.

little things like that are what i internalize. i'm doing it right now. two days later. reflecting on the few hours i spent with you. the levels in my hypothalamus spiking. as i attempt to figure out how to respond to remembering this night or morning. where you let me get to know you. you let me in. i let you in. it was a give and take.

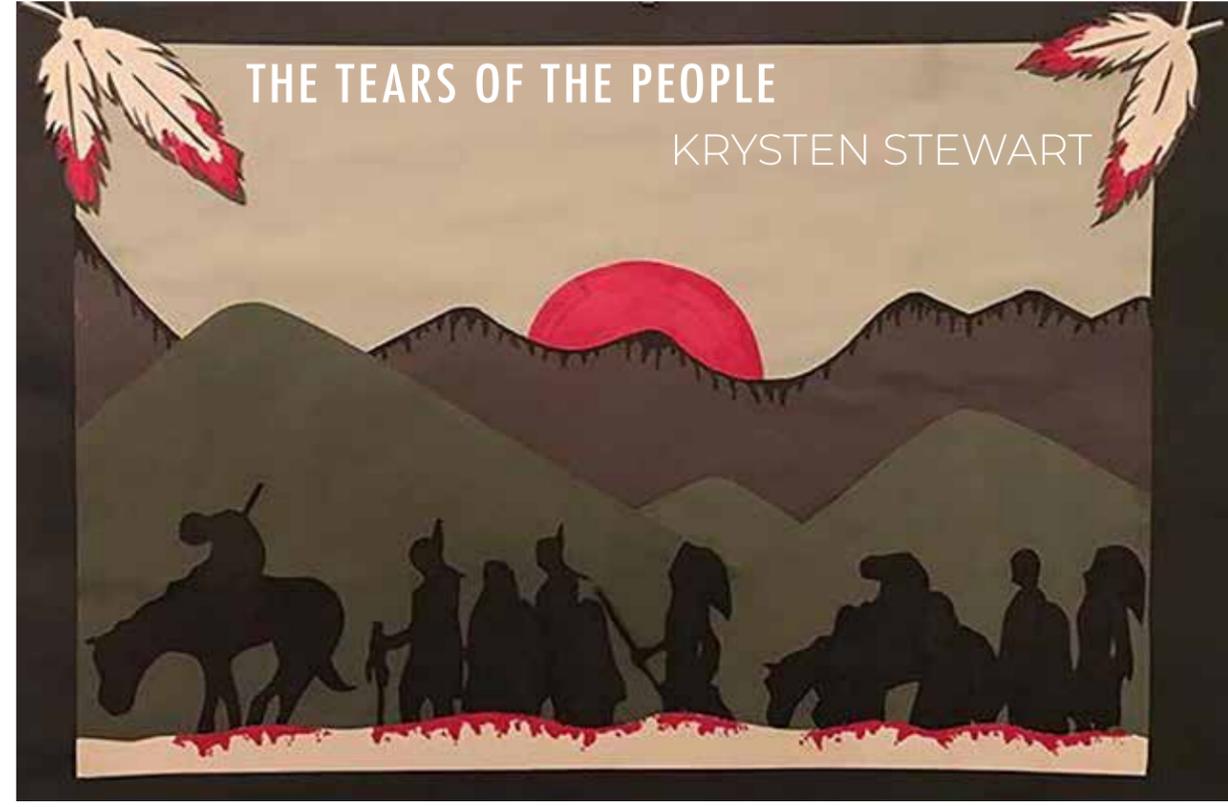
i wanted you to give me more. information and kisses and hugs and eye rolls. i wanted it all. i want it all. because i care. i want your barren room to have a picture of us. hanging on your wall. next to your certificate. because you're proud of me. and us. i want you to be sure. i want you to ask me to stay.

i want you to want me to stay.

all my love,
n



"This piece was a project I did for a design class. We were instructed to reimagine a popular painting and construct a collage. I decided to reference the heritage of the Japanese artist Hokusai and reimagine his piece, The Great Wave."



"This mixed media piece is especially near and dear to me as I represent my own Native American ancestry. Though that heritage is sadly far removed, I have blood ties to both Cherokee and Tuscarora tribes. I try to reclaim some of that lost identity and heritage in this piece. The image itself is a depiction of the forced relocation of the Cherokee people on the Trail of Tears."

EARLY MORNING CATCH

LAUREN REBITZKE

Frank Smith never believed in the so-called phenomenon that was the “Mothman.” While his hometown of Point Pleasant, West Virginia was eager to capitalize on the cryptid to bring in tourists, he himself never really wanted to buy into the excitement. It was simply too unrealistic and frankly, sounded like bullshit. A seven-foot tall moth-headed man? With wings? And nobody has hard evidence of this nightmare-fuel?

Mothman sounded to him like a desperate lie told by some hippies for their fifteen minutes of fame, but he did carry some mild respect in that their nonsensical creation managed to majorly impact Point Pleasant culture.

Majorly--

As in, the local government erected a statue of the Mothman off of Fourth Street downtown. As in, there is a museum dedicated solely to Mothman and Mothman trinkets. As in, they lost a KFC to turn it into a Mothman visitor’s center.

The KFC was shut down before that, but Frank felt that renovation was the final nail in the coffin. His daughter, Holly, was just as upset as he was when she found out about this loss of fried chicken. She was twelve at the time, and announced they had to start frying their own chicken and have to master the same mashed potato recipe. Which they did, but it wasn’t the same. Frank had to face it--no more day-old fried chicken for breakfast on his fishing excursions; he bemoaned this loss to his wife’s urn over the fireplace while Holly was at school.

Debra wouldn’t have actually cared, but she would have at least feigned sympathy.

She was good at that.

Frank himself was better at fishing; it was a hobby he’d had since he was twenty-nine, and thirty-six years later, he was still fishing on weekends out in the McClintic Wildlife Management Area up north. Most residents in Point Pleasant dubbed the endless acres of forest the TNT area. The land, after all, used to be home to an ammunition factory during World War II and to this day, explosives are still stored in domed, concrete bunkers buried beneath a layer of dirt. There was something Frank enjoyed about fishing out in a potentially dangerous area with history

thrust upon it; it was not necessarily the safest area, but he always found himself most at peace fishing out in the ponds early in the morning.

He and Holly used to spend many weekends together fishing for catfish. She used to giggle at the gaping catfish, their wild eyes, and would wrinkle her freckled nose every time Frank teased her that she ought to give it a kiss. She didn’t go as often anymore, especially once she began to attend high school, and nowadays, it is even more rare since she has gone away for college.

It didn’t bother him anymore. He grew used to fishing alone, especially since he had an early retirement. He was lucky enough to be visiting the TNT area more frequently than he had when working. With all this time on his hands, he decided he would try teaching fishing lessons.

Holly told him he was a great teacher once, and he took that to heart.

So, he put out an ad.

Weeks went by before he was contacted over email by a man named Scott Klein. And this email was not to inquire about his fishing advertisement, but rather, it was a simple request--

My wife and I are aspiring cryptozoologists. We are searching for evidence of the Mothman’s existence and we would really like to hire you to take us out to the TNT area as our guide.

Frank removed his fishing ad immediately. He shook his head at himself, Should’ve figured he’d attract randos.

His gaze shifted from his monitor towards his shelf above the fireplace. Debra’s urn was a nice teal. Beside the urn was a single photograph of her smiling, her dark hair was long then. He remembered her cutting it off midway through the pregnancy, because she got bored with it. The haircut complimented her dimples nicely and God, he missed them. He missed the way she would reach for him at night until she found any part of him whether it was arm, leg, hand-- and she’d give him a squeeze. He missed her breathy laugh, her hair strands in the shower, the way her eyes would widen ever so slightly in disbelief when he came home with a farfetched story--

He missed her.

And he wished Debra could had at least seen Holly once. Could have seen that Holly has her dimples--

He frowned. It’ll be twenty years since her death this year.

His attention returned to the email in the other tab on his computer. He never wanted to get involved in any of this Mothman business, but he did know the TNT area better than any tourist ever would.

And he had a feeling this Scott Klein and his wife would go gung-ho and get lost.

Frank’s stomach churned with a twist; he wouldn’t want that on his conscience, even if this couple was probably crazy.

He finger-pecked his agreement on the keyboard, then clicked send.

XxX

Frank normally wouldn’t invite strangers to his home, but it felt like the most appropriate meeting spot at four in the morning. Leaving early was prime time for fishing, and so Frank made it a habit to leave before dawn, even in the case of going simply to accompany two self-proclaimed ‘cryptozoologists’ on their hunt.

He was just finishing knotting his hiking boots when the doorbell sounded. He exhaled a sigh, giving his wife one last glance before standing up and went to answer the door.

His eyebrows furrowed together in confusion at the two strangers before him. They were utterly normal.

He could picture them at the Saturday market buying a basket of apples type of normal.

The man had a bulky black backpack strapped to his back, neatly combed dark brown hair, and wire framed glasses-- very normal. The most abnormal aspect about him were the numerous amounts of pins decorating the straps of his backpack. Frank honed in on the purple pin with a smiling, waving Mothman cartoon.

The woman’s hair was thick and curly which she had pulled into a bun with some baby hairs that hung loose as frizz. She had done a full face of make-up despite the early morning-- even sporting red lipstick and a pair of UFO studded earrings. She herself wore a purple backpack which matched the shade of her acrylic nails.

Frank smiled despite his surprise and stuck out his hand.

“You must be Scott and Rosie. Hi there. I’m Frank.”

Scott enthusiastically took Frank’s hand and gave him a firm squeeze. “You have no idea how excited Rosie and I are to finally meet you. It’s gotta be cool living in the Mothman town. And you fish in prime Mothman territory! Wow!”

Frank’s smile faltered. For a second, he had almost forgotten why they were here. “Prime what now?”

Rosie chimed in. “The TNT area was where Mothman was first seen, and we want in. I’m honestly shocked you haven’t seen him before. But maybe it’s because you aren’t trying to find him, y’know?”

“Honestly, I’ve never cared to.” Frank said flatly.

“This is your first time hunting then?” Scott seemed delighted.

It didn’t occur to Frank until this very moment he was going to be a participant in their hunting. And that made sense-- they were going to want to keep wandering around the reserve and there was no way he was going to feel comfortable fishing with them yelling and using their gadgets and whatnot.

They’ll scare every living creature away.

Including Mothman.

And that’s just Frank being generous to even give them that one.

Frank nodded slightly. “Of the, uh, cryptid kind, yes.”

“Oh, man. I think you’ll love it. You like to fish-- we like to hunt cryptids...” Scott gestured to himself and Frank. He seemed to be vibrating with excitement at their meeting. Frank was almost impressed by the energy these two had this early. They reminded him of Holly’s energy every time she was invested in a new series and wanted to ramble for hours to him about it.

“Kinda similar.” Rosie supplemented, leaning her head against Scott’s arm.

“I don’t think so.”

Scott pointed at him, smiling. “Same outcome.”

Frank opened his mouth to voice his disagreement, because he usually came home with a catfish or two. Rarely empty-handed. He shut his mouth, deciding it wasn’t worth it to start anything, and fuck it, he’s getting paid by the hour for this. So, he offered a polite smile-- the one he had practiced

throughout his life in sales to close deals. Warm, close lipped, no teeth. “Two sides of the same coin.”

This was a fool’s errand.

And Frank couldn’t help but continue to think that as they drove north towards his favorite pond in the TNT area. He didn’t want it to be, but if nobody has found proof of a Mothman before then why would this be different? It was a brief drive since it was only seven miles, but in those seven miles he learned that Scott and Rosie were thirty-five years old, married right out of high school, they own two cats and one collie whom Rosie affectionately dubs her children, they have never been to Scotland to find Nessie, but would love to get a selfie with it, Scott doesn’t know his limits with gambling due to a Las Vegas trip gone wrong, and that Scott’s a freelance photographer.

Frank was barely keeping up.

Rosie made a point to say from the backseat of the truck, “Scott’s got a good eye. He snapped a shot of Bigfoot, you know.”

“My daughter likes photography, too.” Frank noted in response.

“That’s awesome! She should definitely give cryptid hunting a try, too.”

Frank smirked at the thought. The very Holly who was pursuing a biology major would not want that. “What do you do, Rosie?”

Frank changed the topic.

“I make things-- like, crochet and sew. And then sell them online.” Rosie shrugged. “A lot of kiddos like my little crochet cryptids I make... you know, a little batsquatch would be so cute on your mirror.”

Frank only chuckled slightly, if only out of discomfort and confusion. Scott seemed to agree because he enthusiastically said. “Rosie, you should make him one as a thank you for his help!”

Frank’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh, uh--”

“That’s what I was thinking!” Frank felt her hand on his shoulder. “I’ll make you one, don’t worry.”

Frank wasn’t worried, but said. “Thanks.”

It was still dark out so he had nearly missed the

parking lot while talking to Rosie and had come in a little sharp causing his tires to slightly skid on the gravel. He still was in control, however, gripping the steering wheel with white-knuckles and pulled into park with some ease. Although his heart was racing from adrenaline alone, this was nothing compared to him swerving out of the way of a semi back when he was attending West Virginia University in his twenties. Holly was attending that university as a sophomore this year. His heart would stop if she drove intoxicated like he had back then.

He exhaled a breath of relief and then asked. “Everyone okay?”

“We’re good.” Rosie said giving two thumbs up, beaming.

Frank resisted the urge to press his forehead to the horn when Scott let out a low whistle and said. “You’re like Liam Neeson.”

Followed by Rosie remarking. “But like a Santa Claus Liam Neeson.”

Frank stared at himself in the side mirror of his truck, considering his beard. It was a bit long, and it was beginning to whiten. Maybe it was time to shave it before the holidays. But Debra always loved it when he had facial hair. And if Holly had heard this, she would have laughed and teased him. He’d have to call her later that night and tell her about it. They hadn’t talked in a few days--

But he knew she’d love it.

Frank opened his car door, and stepped out, gazing out at the fog clinging to the low branches of the red oak trees under the moonlight. Frank figured the fog should lift by dawn; however, they’ll just need to be careful navigating in it. He reached over into the bed of his truck to grab his backpack. Normally, it would be packed with bait and hooks, but this time it was just a first aid kit, an extra pair of gloves and socks, a flashlight, and trail mix. It was a lighter load overall considering he didn’t need to bring his fishing rod or a cooler for his catches.

He pulled his black beanie down over his ears and then waved his arm over at Rosie and Scott.

“Let’s get a move on.”

Rosie held up one finger as she was scrounging through

a side pocket of her backpack before finally pulling out what looked to be a cassette recorder. “Sorry, we just like to have it ready in case we hear anything weird.”

“Would Mothman be able to say anything?” Frank asked, more out of curiosity than anything.

Scott tilted his head slightly at him in thought. A beat and then. “I think it’s better safe than sorry.”

Frank nodded and waited until Scott finished unpacking his camera. Frank’s eyebrows shot up at how long the lens was on it. It was clearly built for professional photographs which shouldn’t have taken him aback so much since Scott was a freelance photographer. Frank only ever had seen those cameras behind a protective case on display in stores. Never this close in person. He knew if Holly saw the thing, though, she’d be all over it. She’s obsessed with photography; he cannot even begin to fathom how many candid photographs she has taken of him at this point with her small digital camera he bought her for Christmas a few years back.

Once Scott had secured the camera strap around his neck, he gave Frank a thumbs up-- a habit Frank was beginning to associate with the couple-- and the three of them, flashlights on, started down the beaten path Frank walked nearly every weekend for years. Not much had changed since the weekend before aside from more leaves browning. Frank especially enjoyed fishing in the autumn, because of the changing leaves and the cooler weather. He liked the panic of small wildlife searching for food. He loved the bird twittering that gradually became less frequent each passing weekend--

Debra told him once she hated autumn, because it felt so busy, especially with the lead-up to Christmas. It was busier roads due to school, then Halloween, then Thanksgiving. Stress levels rose when extended family want to visit last minute for Thanksgiving-- time to clean the entire house and bleach out the toilets and shampoo the carpets. Holly never knew her mother’s stress, but Frank did.

He understood why Debra hated it, but it was a shame she had to pass away during autumn amongst the chaos.

Frank wasn’t surprised to hear Mourning Doves cooing their song this early. The song always felt eerie to him, as if they were forewarning of an untimely fate. But that eeriness comforted him in that it was a good company, especially when

walking alone. Sometimes he and Holly would buy seeds for their backyard to watch them scrounge and flit about. He knew Holly had a large amount of photos of the doves, too. He said in a whisper, careful not to disturb nature. “Mourning Doves.”

Rosie hit a button on her tape recorder. “It’s pretty.”

Frank nodded. “They are.”

They paused to listen to the doves for a few minutes while walking before Scott finally spoke up. “So, Rosie and I are thinking that when it comes to hunting Mothman, we can set up a light source to attract him.”

“Because he’s a moth,” Frank said.

“Like a moth, yeah,” Scott echoed back. “There’s this story about the Mothman first sighting where a bunch of kids were chased back from the TNT area to Point Pleasant for miles-- claimed it was Mothman. They said he was flying up to a hundred miles per hour, or around there. I mean, it could be an exaggeration, but regardless, he was keeping up with a speeding car... but I think it was because he was attracted to the headlights. I think our flashlights could do the trick if we just arrange them right.”

This was a sound line of thought.

“Good idea,” Frank said. And then added. “Pray to God it works.”

“I’m actually an atheist, so no.” Scott said, pausing in his steps to gaze out at a shadowed form of a bird on a branch. He took out his camera and still took the shot despite the fog.

It was only another twenty minutes before they had encountered one of the TNT bunkers that were left untouched by the government. It was a massive, igloo-like dome, but a layer of dirt, grass, and trees had grown on top of the bunker, seemingly adopting the manmade object as part of the forest. It was a beautiful sight had it not been filled with ammunition.

Scott took a moment to take several shots of the WWII relics. The bunkers were sealed shut with cement that was graffitied with blues and reds and yellows. Scott pointed out the tiny mothman written in sharpie on a corner of the door. He naturally took a picture of that, too. Frank stood from afar watching Rosie circle the dome in slight wonder, examining it for any oddities.

Scott then came half-jogging back up to Frank and said. “I think we should set up here. I have a theory that somehow... Mothman was connected to the factory in this area. He only began showing up after it was built. It’s not like Bigfoot where even Native Americans mentioned him in their stories.”

“And so this dome would be perfect.” Rosie agreed, her voice rising in excitement.

“Just don’t touch it. One of these things blew up in 2010.” Frank said gruffly. “They’re not all that safe.”

Frank remembered Holly’s concern upon hearing this in the news; she made a point to text him “Be careful” messages to him every weekend, even up to today. He figured he’d find one on his phone once he had service again.

And so they began to set up their arrangement of flashlights. By this point, the fog had begun to lift and it was lighter outside. Frank wasn’t sure how well these lights would work now that they can see properly without them, but he didn’t make any remark about the potential counterproductiveness of it. Nonetheless he stepped back and watched as Rosie carefully arranged each flashlight pointing upwards beside each to create a fairly weak beam of light.

Frank was unimpressed, and surely Mothman would be, too, if he existed.

“Next time, we should bring a higher powered flashlight.” Frank suggested, because if they’re doing this anyway, they might as well try harder.

Rosie’s eyes lit up. “Next time, yeah.”

Scott then reached into his backpack and pulled out a plastic baggie with a rotting apple in it. Frank watched on in slight interest as they arranged the bait outside the baggie a few paces away from the flashlight beam.

Scott also pulled out another peculiar bait--

“Is that a fucking dead rat?”

“Maybe Mothman is a carnivore.” Scott said hopefully. “We could be the first to find out if he was.”

Frank shrugged. “Maybe.”

He followed through with their plan of hiding out in the brush to see if this will attract any attention from a

potential Mothman. While the bait wasn’t necessarily the greatest he’d ever seen, he still respected their thought behind it, and the logic. Cryptid-hunting, it seemed, would piss him off more than anything as the lack of proof of anything would get on his nerves.

He had the patience for fishing, but not the patience for waiting for the nonexistent to show up.

But then again, Scott and Rosie believe that they could be the ones to outwait the nonexistent.

He knelt down in the bushes beside Scott and Rosie in silence. They were more seasoned than he expected. They were quiet, careful-- He wondered how long they have been doing these hunts-- they did say they were aspiring so surely they were fairly new. And they did have all the gadgets.

He wasn’t sure how long they planned to wait, but just

He cracked a smile, knowing she’d have so many questions if he opened their phone conversation with just that. She knew he held some disdain for the cryptid that ruled their hometown.

Now he wasn’t so sure if he did. Maybe he liked the company.

It reminded him of when he would fish with Holly.

He opened his mouth to speak up once a half hour had passed. It was getting light out, and maybe they should try a different tactic in hunting the impossible. But he shut his mouth when he heard a movement in the trees. Rustling and a gust of wind. His head snapped up towards the branches, squinting at the swooping of a short figure. Something about it made Frank’s heart race, especially when Scott breathed out a, “Holy shit.”

That kept Frank grounded in the moment. Rosie already



as he would while fishing, he became heavily aware of the stinging air at his nostrils, the numbing of his earlobes and the tips of his gloved fingers. He shoved his hands in his coat pocket.

Holly once she got a job at sixteen would buy him those pocket warmers every month, and now he wished he had one of those. He’ll pick some up from the store once they head back. He wondered what she’d make of him now huddled in a bush waiting for Mothman.

had her tape recorder recording the movement and noise while Scott was focused on snapping the perfect shot of whatever-this-was.

Then the rustling stopped.

Too abruptly.

Frank felt everything in him slow, just as he would when he would feel the first bite on his tackle.

“There!” Rosie’s voice rang.

Scott’s finger pressed down on the button of his camera

with a click.

Suddenly Frank was wide-eyed staring off in the direction where Rosie pointed, that gleeful shriek branding his ears in a faint echo. Briefly— Frank was part of their excitement— felt his heart jump in realization that perhaps there were some unknowns out there.

Until Frank caught a glimpse of the beak and talons, snatching what he presumed was the dead rat from the ground.

He gaped at the creature flying away while Scott and Rosie were now huddled over the small screen of their camera, admiring their capture--

The wings of an owl, or perhaps, Mothman?

Lauren Rebitzke is an English major and a senior at WSU Vancouver. Rebitzke hopes to continue writing after graduating. Rebitzke's featured piece presents the idea that one's beliefs can alter, and so can identity or who you perceived yourself to be.



COLOR THE WORLD
KRYSTEN STEWART

"This work is a landscape self-portrait. The outline of the piece is a place I will always be tied to, a place I go to when I need to think, or dream, or just be. The collage layered beneath is monochromatic set off by pops of color. The black and white represents the darkness in the world, the hard times in life, and the color is where I am represented. In those dark times, I resolve to not let those moments change who I am, how I treat others, or how I perceive the world."



DELICATE DAISIES
HANNAH BURBACH

AMELIA MAY

KRYSTEN STEWART

It was well-known and accepted that Amelia May Bell was the most beautiful thing in the quaint town of Charmaine located deep in the heart of Louisiana. That fact was something she was well aware of since the time she was tottering around in pink, frilly dresses. An only child, and angelic in demeanor and constitution, her parents doted on her every whim and desire. She was their sweetheart, “sweeter than sweet tea”, their southern belle, and when she was grown they admitted having indulged her fancies a bit too much, possibly to the point of spoiling her. In her school years, she was the shining star of every pageant and play whether she held the main part or not. She pranced and flitted to and from any social group with ease, which won her not so many friends, but popularity and recognition. She was a cherry-lip stained beauty wielding pom-poms, flirting with the football players from the sidelines, and every so often she dared to meet one of them beneath the shadowy bleachers for a slobbery, secret smooch; afterwards, she always re-applied that shimmering gloss.

College wasn't really her thing, so she tried some modeling gigs which dazzled and entertained her for a while, so for five years, she bounced back and forth between major fashion cities: New York, Chicago, and she even had the once

in a lifetime opportunity to model on a runway in Paris. It was very last minute when one of the scheduled models twisted her ankle in a pair of diamond-studded Louis Vuitton heels. Then, she had felt fate was always smiling down on her. For Amelia, Paris was the culmination of her career and she had grown weary of the whirlwind lifestyle. But mostly, she felt lost; in a universe of exotic beauties, there were times she felt eclipsed. So, she returned to her hometown to reclaim a sense of her identity. There, everyone knew her; everyone either wanted her or wanted to be her.

To be admired filled Amelia with the greatest sense of joy. Oh, how she lived for it. When she walked into a room her heart thundered in the silence that often followed. She craved the attention of eyes on her; from men and women. It didn't matter. She was flattered by both the burning desire in men's gazes and the feline-vicious jealousy that made a woman's acrylic nails click, itching to claw those glittering sapphire jewels from Amelia's sockets. Yes, she enjoyed dashing the hopes of men who dared to make advances towards her, and she liked the drooping of women's smiles who knew their beauty was dim in comparison to her own.

She was beautiful, but apparently, someday soon all that beauty would all go away. It wasn't going to fade or wilt over years and years, it wasn't going to sprout up in gray and white hairs or finely crack and fissure her porcelain skin. No, it would leave her in the short season of her youth. What was supposed to be a routine check-up had turned into a series of tests, blood-work, and urine samples. Amelia had scoffed at the idea that there actually might be something wrong with her. She was young. Twenty-five. But now the white linen coat was telling her about chemo treatments.

"Are you sure?" Amelia's recently manicured nails cut deep into the vinyl table. "Won't you check the results again? There has to be some mistake."

"I'm afraid there's no mistake." The white-haired doctor's eyes were filled with sympathy. "Should I call someone for you?"

"No." Amelia snapped as burning tears filled her throbbing eyes. "You're going to check the results again."

Call me tomorrow. This can't be real." Amelia snatched up her bag and walked out on shaky limbs. She had assured her mother there was nothing to worry about. She had believed it herself.

Once home, Amelia poured herself something to take the edge off her nerves and plopped down in front of her vanity. She removed her oversized, cat-eye sunglasses and winced in the glare of the light. Mascara streaked down her cheeks, her cherry red lipstick was smeared at the corners. With a shaking hand, Amelia removed her straw hat, letting her golden curls fall around her shuddering shoulders.

In a spiteful moment, she drew in a deep breath and calmly reached for the silver pair of scissors.

Snip. Snip. Snip.

Clumps of silky, gold-spun hair slithered off the vanity and onto the floor, until it was a thick carpet under her feet.

She surveyed her handiwork in the mirror, buried her shorn head in her hands and sobbed; mourning the death of Amelia May.

Krysten Stewart is a WSU Vancouver undergrad, majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing. Her literary pieces and artwork have been featured in various literary magazines such as The Salal Review and The Salmon Creek Journal.

SAFE MEMORY

KATIE BABB

My camera is a keeper of ghosts, swift in their capture.
Film speckled with phantom moments.
Watch as I bathe our memories in the red moonlight of the darkroom.
I spill methodical magic and bring our memories to life.

How enchanting are the photographs,
My red cheeks in midnight air, your hair just out of place.

Hold tight to the last bit of stretched out sunset sky.
Use your fingertips to memorize my outline.
Let my pretty dents rest peaceful on your pillow.
Keep my ugly smudges on your dusty bookcase.

And even after your windswept mind is tattered like your favorite overcoat,
Don't forget me.

Katie Babb is a WSU Vancouver student majoring in Fine Arts. "With my art, my intention is not only to process the events of my life, but to create pieces that may serve as a bridge between myself and others. I am often inspired suddenly and late at night, resulting in layered works of art that are soft and somber. I am particularly interested in brushstroke, nature, relationships, feminism, longing, and self-image. Not wanting to forget, and in turn not wanting to be forgotten, are universal feelings. The color red seemed essential, as red often conveys feelings of love, anger, and fear. Additionally, red is the color of the safelights in the darkroom when developing film. I chose to use vertical irregular brushstrokes, as if the subtle rainfall of time has begun to wash away what was once a clear picture, a clear memory."

HIDDEN LAKE

EMILY SHIRRON



"Landscapes have the extraordinary capability to catapult you back to the moment you were there. Allowing you to reminisce on the memories the geographical location holds for you. At Glacier National Park, the dramatic transformation in the landscape due to the increasing temperatures from climate change forces one to reflect on the past. Landscape photos not only allow you to visit old memories but contemplate what the landscape was like before our impact."



TWAS LAW THAT BOUND THE WOLF

ALKAID TSUKI

Fenrir didn't believe them when the Æsir insisted that he would lack the strength to break Gleipnir. It was a ribbon, yes, and didn't look nearly as powerful as the last two they tried to tie him up in. The Allfather Odin and the watcher Heimdall made the effort to prove to him that it was stronger than the last two, each pulling on it until their muscles looked fit to burst. Unfortunately for them, he'd seen Thor pull a similar stunt in his efforts to look superior to all those around him.

"If you cannot free yourself, we will simply release you from your bonds without delay," Odin assured him, an all too confident smile tucked behind his heavy brown beard.

Fenrir wasn't falling for their ploy. But as his father, Loki, once told him, a trickster could never have too many precautions available.

"If I try and fail to free myself, you could very easily walk away and leave me bound," Fenrir growled, spitting in Heimdall's direction and swatting at the silky ribbon.

Odin didn't flinch, but Heimdall let the smallest drop of sweat spill down his brow.

I thought as much.

Fenrir exchanged a glance with Tyr, who was sitting beside the lakebed. The god of law nodded and shut the heavy book he'd been reading.

Fenrir nearly barked. If Tyr was by his side, even if Fenrir should fail, the Æsir could never bind him with Gleipnir. Tyr had been a loyal friend for the longest time, always feeding him where none would dare approach, reading to him when Loki was too busy with whatever adventure Thor dragged him along for, and standing up for him when the Æsir spat insults at him.

"If one of you places their hand in my mouth, to guarantee my release," Fenrir growled, "then I will permit you to bind me."

Odin and Heimdall both stared at one another. Of course, if they were trying to deceive him into imprisonment, nobody would risk their hand for it. Loki was right to trick these beasts in godly garb.

Just as he expected, Tyr approached, shedding his

leather vambrace and rolling up his sleeve. "You may have my hand, son of Loki," he said.

Fenrir nodded and opened his mouth. Tyr placed his hand between Fenrir's teeth.

He tasted like smoked wood, leather, metal, and bread. Fenrir kept his gag reflex under control and bade the Æsir do what they wished to do.

Odin wrapped the ribbon around Fenrir's legs and neck. It was uncomfortable, to say the least. The silk itched against his fur and it smelled like sun-dried salmon. Disgusting.

Odin backed up. "Now, try and free yourself, son of Loki," he said, bending far back in order to look Fenrir in the eye.

Fenrir scoffed and tried to pull his legs away. Surely this ribbon wasn't nearly as strong as they made it out to be.

To the unusual twisting in his stomach, the ribbon remained in place. Fenrir focused on his forelegs and pulled. When that failed, he resorted to bringing the ribbon to his maw and around his teeth and sawing at it. He could hear Tyr hiss from fangs drawing blood and Heimdall break out into laughter. Heat spread across Fenrir's face as he tried to pry his rear legs from his silky shackles.

"It would appear that the dwarves crafted a powerful chain after all," Odin said calmly. "We must thank them for their efforts."

Fenrir growled and barked at the Æsir until they backed away. But not Tyr. He remained in place.

One more try.

Fenrir would not return to his home in disgrace. Loki hadn't been in a laughing mood since the Æsir banished Jörmungandr, but even he would find a joke in this debacle.

So Fenrir allowed his large, bestial form to fall away. In place of his paws were the long fingers and weak hands of the Lokison, acting as a shackle for Tyr's thick, callused wrist rather than his now pathetic mouth. His fur didn't shed, but shifted and became his messy black hair. His modesty was protected by a single green tunic that his mother had made for him.

Still the Æsir laughed, and Fenrir soon understood why.

The knots in Gleipnir did not remain their bulky size. Instead, they shifted with him and still held tight to his thin wrists.

Tyr neither smiled nor laughed. Clearly, he was as

unsurprised as the rest of them.

Fenrir sighed. “I surrender,” he said, hating the weaker voice of his Æsir form. “These bonds are superior. Release me from them at once.”

But the Æsir didn’t move. Odin was making no move to release the knots.

Fenrir looked up at Tyr, wincing at the crick in his neck. “I admit defeat, Tyr,” he said, gripping his wrist a hair tighter. “Bid them to release me from these bonds.”

Still, Tyr’s face didn’t change.

“Tyr?”

The man fell to his knee, reached out with his free hand, and pressed his palm into Fenrir’s head of curled hair. Fenrir’s throat tightened as Tyr pulled him into an awkward embrace, chin against shoulder. “Forgive me, Fenrir,” he whispered.

Fenrir’s throat became as dry as sand. He freed himself from Tyr’s embrace and faced the other Æsir. He lifted his bound wrists up towards them, commanding his arms to remain steady. “We had a deal,” he said, trying desperately to keep himself calm. “You must release me.”

Heimdall shook his head.

Odin spoke with deep authority. “Son of Loki,” he said, every syllable resonating painfully in Fenrir’s bones, “you and your siblings have been foretold to bring great misfortune and evil to the sacred walls of Asgard.”

“And you, proud Lokison, have been foretold to father the darkness of Midgard and swallow the Allfather whole,” Heimdall added. “Therefore, the Æsir have decreed that you are to be bound by Gleipnir until the time of Ragnarok.”

Fenrir bit the inside of his mouth. His palms felt similar to the skin of a sweating boar. “Is this true...Tyr?” he asked, neck as stiff and immobile as Mjöltnir. “Did you... help them bind me until Ragnarok?”

Any word would do. Any word that shed light on the falsehood they wove in front of him.

Silence gnawed at his rounded ears.

“It’s truth,” he said. “They speak the truth, Lokison.”

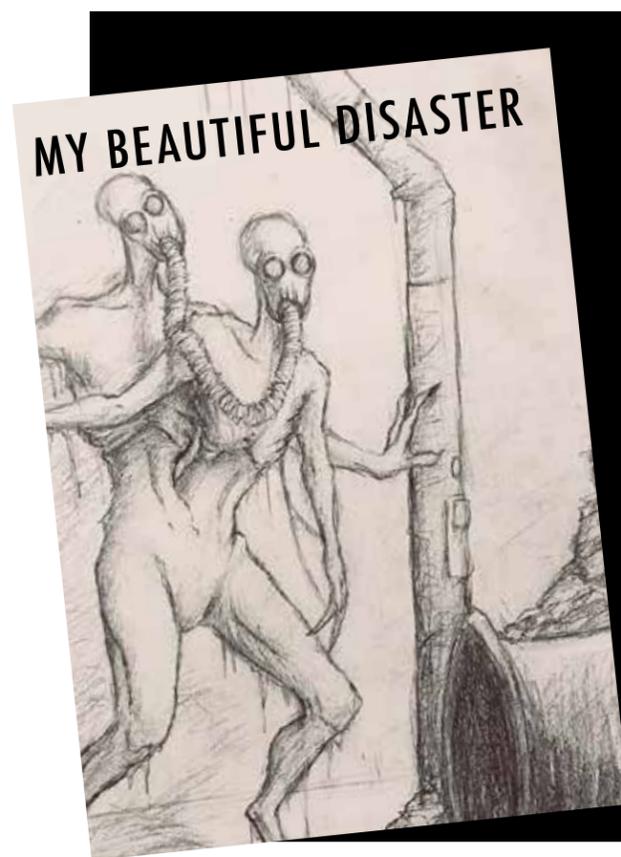
The cold sweat between his hands and Tyr’s hairy arm was nothing compared to the ice blossoming in his chest.

He slowly brought his vision back to Tyr, who remained kin to a carved stone: unflinching and silent.

“You’re the god of justice, Tyr,” Fenrir gasped, feeling as if Hel was strangling him. “Where’s the justice...in being punished for a sin I have not yet committed?”

Tyr didn’t answer. He didn’t even look Fenrir in the eye. He moved his hand from Fenrir’s head to his small shoulder. “Take your price, Lokison,” he whispered, speckles shimmering on his lower eyelids. “Let that serve as justice for your imprisonment.”

Fenrir felt bone snapping and caving beneath his grip. He pitched forward, the ice spearing his heart and stomach. He became a wolf again and bit down on the hand that fed him.



MARIYA CHMYKH

COURT OF OWLS

KAYLA HARRINGTON

I

Howls, the distant songs of wandering wolves,
Prowl against walls of stone
Which are overgrown with thorns and thistles,
scratching through the mortar and reaching toward the
gaping roof.

Rotted timbers lace the green-brown floor and flowers
Sprinkle the carcass of the castle.

I settle beside a thornless bush whose nettle leaves dash
spiders
And webs upon my vulnerable arms and neck
These soft greens remember fires
So long ago that even that charred stones have been washed
clean
Nevertheless, they impart to me a burning—
The only heat I feel on this chill twilight

Two great eyes, one blinking, one open, stare down upon us
Shedding were light and casting eerie shadows
The rest, so distant, do no more than outline a wall or cloud
Pinpricks of flickering lights like a city of candles in the sky
Agitated wind mimics the wolves' cry
as it scrapes across the buildings
Quiet chirps and crickets rustle the air
But the hollow calls of owls permeate
The night and muffles the rest

Gentle hooting echoes in empty halls,
While predators fall in silent flight
Watchers of the dead disturb
No air or breath of the resting
Nor the bones of the deceased
They join spirits in pervading the night
With life unseen and unheard

These tender keepers of ghosts
Sentinels with gold-ringed eyes
Searching the spectral hours
For lost souls

Their cries are a lament to placate the spirits:
Who rests in these stones and brambles? Whose
blood feeds the grass and mouse? Who
has done this terrible thing—
Who has done this?

A court once filled with laughter and dancing
No longer, a silence broken
By the soft questions of owls.
Where is the fortress whose strong ramparts
Housed sevenscore in times of trouble
And sixscore on holidays where court and
Crown were filled with festive songs
And the flagstones drummed with the sound of
dancing?

Where are the men whose bright clothing and drinks
Displayed haughty laughter and children who dodged
Thick legs chasing friends and fancies and hid behind
skirts
Of women who smiled and spoke of days when the sun
would shine?

Phantoms toss in shallow graves
Grating against merciless time,
Hear the soft sounds of avian protectors,
Are fooled by plaintive calls
And rest, deeming they need not be angry
For their weeping is heard.

II

Hours pass and the empyrean is obstructed
By dark clouds dispensing cold water.
The celestial is snuffed out
In a moment

Like the lights of the city
And the lives of the city
Shining brightly in one second—too bright

Then burning out once and for all.
They watch me, huddled in snug nests
Bright eyes bobbing to get a better view
Of the unwelcome stranger.

Perhaps they do not understand that I,
Like the dead, can find no rest in this place
Or any other. Instead, as the rain washes the warmth
From my blood, I bury my head in my arms
And listen to their song,
I can almost hear the words.

III

When night breaks, the world holds its breath
in the dark shadows of pre-dawn.
Soon songbirds shudder themselves alive
And fill the air with the rustling of leaves and timid
whistles.
Ravens and vultures scour the sky—their coarse cawing
is no comfort to the grave.
As the clouds catch fire, spraying hues of orange and
pink
The owls sleep and the spectres fall back into the unseen
realms.
The Sun, poking its golden head over the horizon
Burns away the nightmares and awakens the world
Into light

I, too, am wakened and squint at the unwholesome glare
Stiff and weary, I stand on blistered feet
And begin my task, by pulling thorns and digging into
The heart of the court.

Once the gaping maw of dirt and debris is sufficient to
consume
the dead, I hunt charred bones
From every corner and lay
Them to rest side by side
before blanketing them
In a layer of soft soil.

My hands are cut and smeared with old soot
As I dig weak mortar from a wasted wall
Gathering stones to build the grave
Starting with a diminishing ring
Of concentric circles

The next layer, one ring smaller
And the next is smaller still
Until there remains a half-sphere of stone
Compressing the bones.
During this work I noticed
Several balls of matted fur
Like little tombs for unfortunate
Mice—perhaps those who consume
Bones are the best suited to guard them
From themselves.
When work was done,
I surveyed the crumbled castle and found
A brown striped feather nestled on the grave
As if in payment for my toil

I passed this fine quill through my fingers
Several times, feeling the soft silky slide
And as I turned to continue on my path
I tucked the gift into my belt.

Maybe one day I, too,
Will find rest

Kayla Harrington is an English major at WSU Vancouver. "Court of Owls is a narrative poetic piece which compares the restlessness of spirits with the unrest of the one sent to ease them. The identity of the persona is never revealed overtly, but through his actions and his interpretations of the world around him, readers can get a sense of his nature. I have been writing fiction since 2009 and thoroughly enjoy the art of storytelling."

THE COLORS OF MY HEART



JOBANA LEON



BLUE

JOBANA LEON



Jobana Leon is a student at WSU Vancouver studying Biology. Her paintings are often inspired by the beauty of nature.

RISE

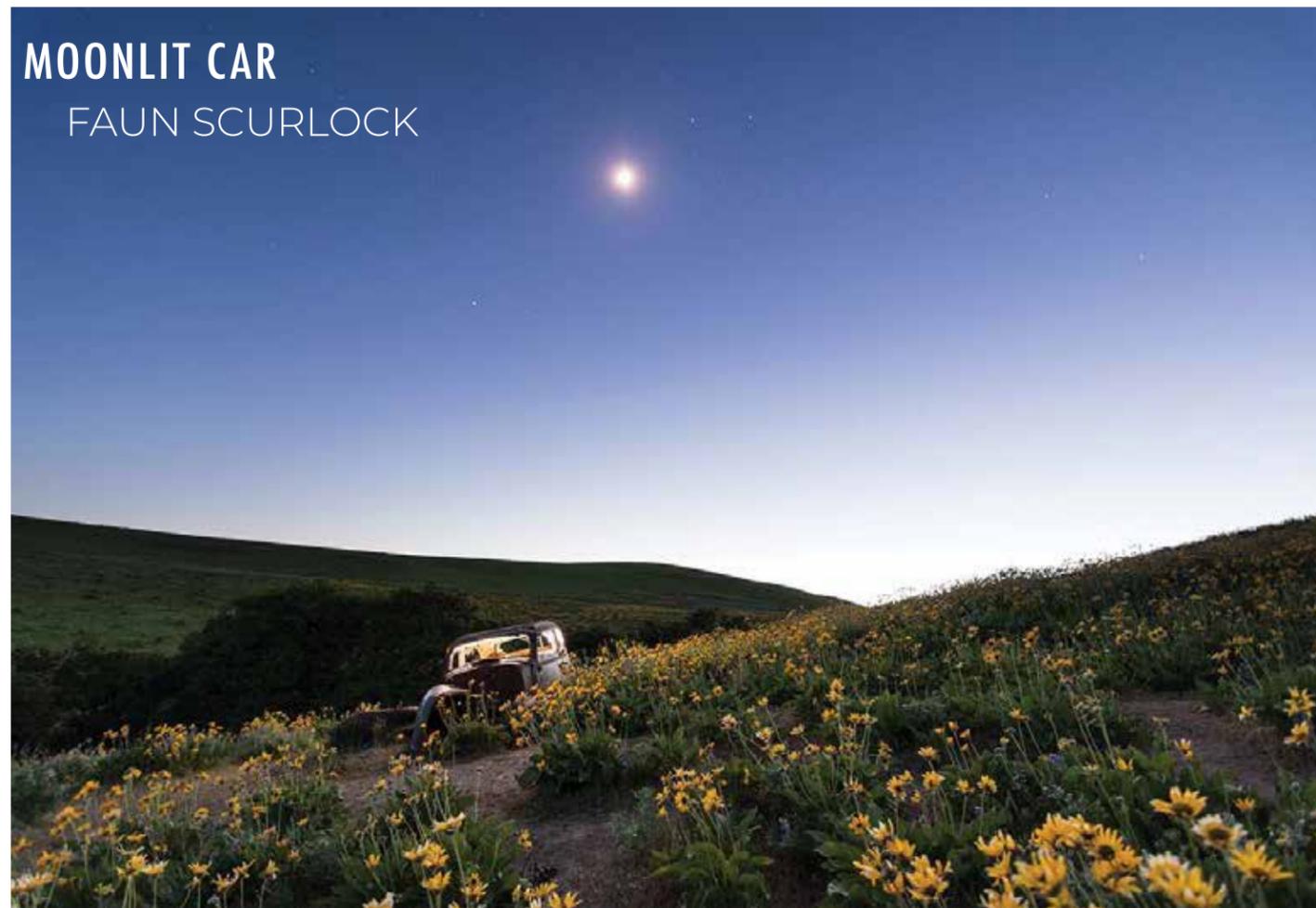
JENNIFER BARNES

I strive not to let tiny seeds of doubt
germinate in my fertile mind. they form,
spreading tentacles, a harshly critical
inner eye

that burns me like the glare of Mordor.
I want today to be the same
as yesterday: futile, dust
in fading light, the closing door
clinging to a false thread of hope.
However,
when the accursed missive flutters into being
I will have left the Shire of my comfort zone.

One afternoon in spring,
I look into your eyes. I don't recognize
the person reflected back at me.
I ask. You smile.
You must have known all along.

MOONLIT CAR
FAUN SCURLOCK



THE THIN GRAY LINE



TOM HOLTSLANDER

What is the thin gray line? The thin gray line is a sliver of reality between darkness and lightness, between happiness and sadness, between depression and amusement.

Think of it as a balancing beam on each side other, never-ending darkness and on the other a void of happiness.

Sometimes we fall from the balancing beam and into one of the sides.

Sometimes into the darkness. We are pulled into despair, anxiety, depression.

Other times we fall into unconditional happiness. A place of warmth, laughter, and freedom.

No matter how long the lightness and darkness last we always find our way back on the beam.

With arms stretched out we balance swinging from side to side. No matter how good or bad a day is we always find a way back to the beam.

An existence of mixed realities where light and dark level each other out into a mundane existence.

On the thin gray line we are neither happy nor are we sad we simply exist.

MONSTERS AND MOTHERS

KRYSTEN STEWART

I was in my senior year of college when I stopped believing in fairy tales and happy endings. At twenty-two, I shed my comfortable naivety and donned the armor of cynicism.

As I drove home for the holidays, my and thoughts swirled, white and hazy like the Wisconsin snowstorm, and my emotions were as frantic as the swishing wiper blades. My Honda Civic trawled hesitantly up the winding hill to my childhood home, and when it came into view, the hot tears pricking my eyes began to slide down my cold cheeks. There was just one illuminated window, the living room where the flickering light and shadows cast from a fire seemed to me, a soul fading. I sat weeping in the driveway until I saw a hand draw back the lace curtain and willowy shadow appear.

I dashed my tears away in an attempt to appear composed before I greeted my mother.

She had a cup of hot cocoa waiting; the marshmallows had already disintegrated into one filmy layer and it was just the perfect drinking temperature as if she had somehow known the exact moment of my arrival. It didn't matter that I would have taken a cup of coffee or some wine over the cocoa, I was enshrined in her mind as a pony and pink-obsessed ten-year-old girl forever.

We sat down by the flickering fire; it would soon go out.

My mother indicated I should sit in one of the overstuffed chairs where my father would have taken up residence. I regarded my mother with a scrutinizing eye and soft, pitying smile.

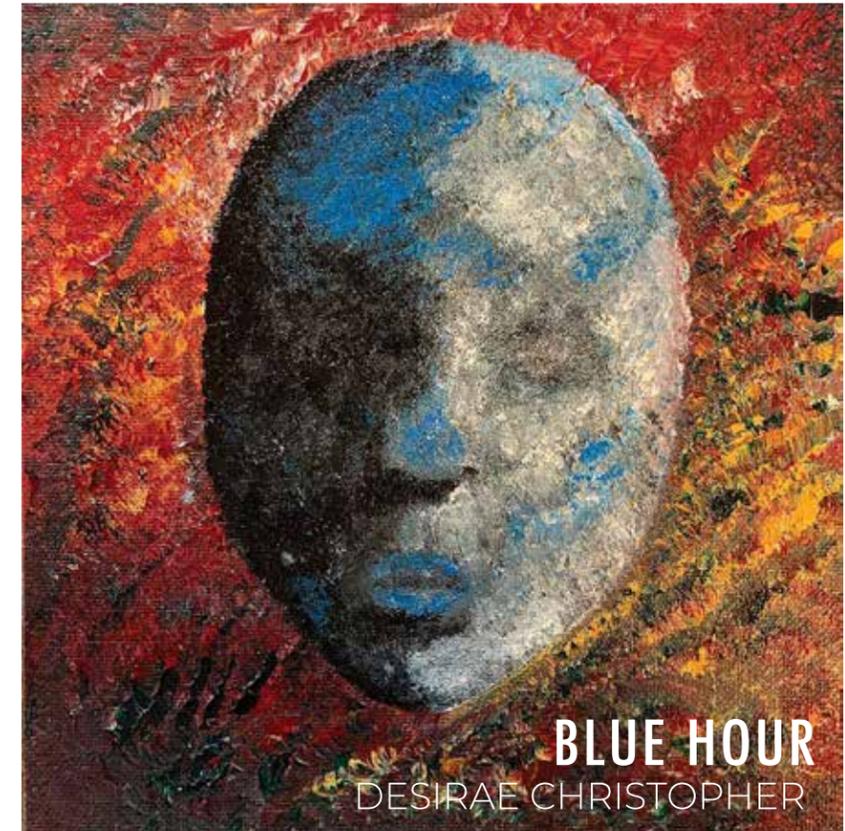
I didn't ask her how she was. I knew. I could feel it in her desperate embrace, I could see it in the hollowness of her eyes, why, I could sense it in the very bones of this house. Floorboards groaned in agony with every step, outlines of picture frames left their imprint on the peeling, floral wallpaper, and the walls appeared to me naked, bare, and vulnerable. Every picture of him, every belonging my father possessed was gone, but there were traces, remnants, and there would always be the memories—insufferable, suffocating memories.

“Thank you,” My mother smiled wearily, “for choosing me.”

I shrugged one shoulder. “I didn't have to choose. Dad left us. What choice was there to make?”

A dry log crackled and popped.

My mother spoke again after enough time had passed for us to blink away the tears that had threatened to fall



BLUE HOUR
DESIRAE CHRISTOPHER

since our first hello.

“How’s school? Are you taking care of yourself?”

“It’s fine.” I had to think about the second question. “I’m fine too.”

“Good. Good.” Her eyes wandered aimlessly before finding my face again. “And that boy...What was his name? Brady? Brody? Are you still seeing him?”

I didn’t bother telling her that Brody was two boyfriends ago, the ending was all the same. “No. We broke up.” I didn’t offer any explanation. She would say I was too busy, a man needed to be prioritized.

Somehow, it was always my fault.

Sometimes, I believed it.

Silence again stretched between us, strange as it was, it was more comfortable than the conversations that stirred heartache.

“You had a long drive. You should get some rest. I’ve prepared your room for you. It’s just like it used to be.”

I started to rise, a distant light appeared in her eyes. I sank back down when she spoke. “And when you wake up in the morning, be sure to make your bed and tidy your room. It’s important to be neat and clean. Nobody likes a slob.”

I noted the jagged stubs of her usually perfectly manicured nails.

“Secondly, you should be sure to get plenty of exercise. Nobody finds a saggy, stretched body attractive.” Her hand brushed over her arms and moved to her abdomen, and she clutched at the excess skin beneath the folds of fabric.

She hadn’t lost enough weight for one to think she was ill, but I noticed.

“And,” She continued without missing a beat, her wide eyes scrutinizing my face, “When you go out into public, put on some of that red lipstick I gave you for your birthday. We weren’t fortunate enough to be naturally beautiful, you and I. We have to try.”

She stood and crossed the room, pausing in front of the mirror, her gaze narrowed on her imperfections and flaws. Her lips curled in contempt at these perceived defects.

“Perhaps that was it, perhaps I stopped trying, or maybe I

was never enough to begin with.”

“Mom,” I choked, trying to find her through my haze of tears. “Please. Don’t...don’t do this to yourself.”

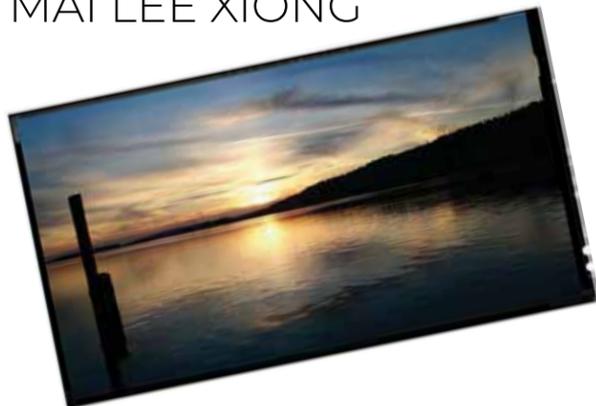
“Lastly,” She gripped my forearms and held me at a distance. “Don’t give yourself to a monster who swallows up your youth, your dreams, and your joy only to spit you out.” Tears dripped from her plucked, sparse lashes, mascara streaked down her face, and fear mingled with overzealous passion rippled through the muscles of her face. “Don’t be anything like me at all.”



I AM...



MAI LEE XIONG



IT COULDN'T BE HELPED

ELIZABETH RYAN

My name is Regina. You may know me from my exclusive modeling career, but I’m a fifteen year old girl in high school and everyone loves me. I didn’t ask to be born beautiful, with this perfect body and long, gorgeous flowing blonde hair, but I do my best to think of the less fortunate people and help them whenever necessary. You see, I was a genetic experiment, so my looks were custom ordered and I don’t have any real parents, but I have a lot of money, so I want for nothing.

That’s not to say that I’m conceited. Oh, far from it. I’m very modest, I assure you. While others are sighing over my radiant beauty, I’m sighing over the excessive attention. It’s really frustrating. I want to be a normal teenager, just like everyone else. I guess I just can’t help my excellent grades and my perfect athletic ability, you know how it is.

You see, the genetic lab in which I was born decided that it would be best that I have as normal of an upbringing as possible, so they gave me a lovely mansion with all the staff needed to care for my every need, but I still have to go to high school. It’s a bit of a drag, but there are things that make it better. My best friend is Alice. She’s a bit of a plain girl, but I guess that can’t be helped either. We don’t get to pick what we’re born with after all.

I go to a normal public school and everyone there

loves me, even my teachers, but that can’t be helped either. I’m very nice to all of them, I have to be. It’s good practice to treat everyone with dignity and respect, even when they’re being nasty or haughty. Today is Wednesday, which means pizza in the school cafeteria. I don’t bring my own lunch today because I really like the pizza. Under ordinary circumstances I stick to the best certified organic foods, but on pizza day, I splurge a little. Come on, it’s pizza!

Today is also a fun day, because we have a test in ancient history, it’s my best subject. Well, I should say it’s my favorite subject, because I can’t very well use my grades to judge by can I? But I think it’s my best subject because I know so much about it, beyond what’s necessary to know. I just find it all so fascinating. I’m working on a research project for it, you know, in my spare time. Not really something I have to do; I just enjoy it so much.

I miss my horse during school hours. Wouldn’t it be lovely if they let you ride to school? Maybe I should suggest an equine course to the principal. I make a mental note of that for later. I will compose a letter and take to him straightaway. For now though, I make sure my hair is perfect, my make up in place, and my outfit perfectly fit. Poopies, I have a tear in this shirt. I liked this shirt. That’s okay, I’ll throw it away and get another one from the closet.

I sigh to myself. I’m so scatter brained today. I forgot that I have choir practice today, I shouldn’t have put on that shirt in the first place. The door bell rings, but I never answer it, that’s Hemsley’s job. In walks Alice, she’s in tattered clothes again today. I’ve asked her repeatedly to take something of mine, but she refuses. She must come from a poor family, they have such stubborn pride. Today it’s torn jeans and old shoes. I smile politely, and continue getting dressed. It’s so thoughtful of her to show up early and keep me company while I get ready. It’s so dreadfully lonely in this place.

“Regina? Are you almost done?” Alice is digging her toe into my plush rug, but it’s okay. I can forgive her for being uncomfortable.

“Just about!” I reply, adding that perfect note of cheerfulness so Alice doesn’t worry about her words.

We could take the car, have the driver take us to school, but I prefer not to. A good walk is what we need, and it’s only a few blocks. Alice is usually quiet on our walk to school, but I try my best to bring her around with interesting conversation. Eventually, we’re talking up a storm by time we reach school.

Homeroom is kind of boring, so I start to study for my test. Well, not really, I’ve already read this before. In fact, I’ve already read all of my schoolbooks in my spare time. I have them practically memorized, when the teachers call on me, I usually tell them which page to turn to. It’s kind of funny really.

Ah, Ancient History class, my favorite. I eagerly await my test. It’s a little long this time, there’s a lot of paragraph writing. It’s okay though, paragraph tests are my favorite. I’m always the first to finish my test. Mrs. Flowers doesn’t want hand-ins, or I would have already taken it up to her. I flip my paper over so no one can copy me, and I wait patiently until everyone else has done the same.

I look around at the various things in the room, my mind vaguely wandering over the objects on Mrs. Flowers’ desk. She keeps a pen holder, filled with her various colored pens, dry erase markers and a pair of scissors. The scissors makes me smile, Mrs. Flowers is in a quilting bee, and I often see her there. I’m fascinated with crafts and love to watch the ladies sew their beautiful quilts. I’ve suggested designs which have been used.

Everyone is finally done with their tests and has flipped them over. Without a word she takes all of our papers and stacks them neatly on her desk. The bell rings and it’s off to our next classes. I have math next, followed by English. I find them both too easy, so they’re a bit tedious, but I guess it can’t be helped.

Lunch comes and I am ecstatic. I know it may seem strange, for a girl like me to get so excited over school pizza. But there’s just something about it that makes me so happy. I even trade my fries to a boy I know. He can’t eat the pizza for some reason or another, so he gets my fries and I get an extra pizza and life is good. It’s the little things, I guess. I once

found where the school gets their pizzas and ordered a case. They just weren’t quite as good. I’m chowing down on my pizza when I see Mrs. Flowers out of the corner of my eye. She’s frowning at me but I’m not sure why exactly.

She approaches me and leans down, whispering in my ear. “See me after school please.” With that, she turns and leaves.

I blink at her diminishing form. The moment wasn’t unnoticed by the table, but I shrug my shoulders. It could be anything, so I put it out of my mind. Conversation at the table resumes, and I am far too concerned with enjoying my delicious pizza. Emily is complaining about something, and the table goes quiet again. Emily said something negative about her mother, I didn’t catch it, but I realize why all eyes are on me. I don’t have parents. I smile, shrug and reply “It’s okay.” Someone coughs, or clears their throat, which ever, it does the trick and conversation resumes, even if Emily is now being quiet.

The day progresses at the pretty usual pace and I almost completely forget about Mrs. Flowers, but I decide to swing by her classroom before choir practice. She’s sitting there grading through papers and again I wonder what this is about. She looks up at me, but it’s not the usual smile this time. She looks kind of tired and very upset. Mrs. Flowers isn’t that old, in fact she’s kind of young for a teacher. But today, something seems off.

She gestures for me to grab a chair, so I pull one to the front of her desk.

“Yes, Mrs. Flowers?”

“Regina, it pains me to do this, and I understand you’re under a lot of pressure these days, but this is just simply unacceptable behavior.”

“What is?” I am very confused by this point.

She sighs and rubs the bridge of her nose. It occurs to me that she has gray eyes. Not the pretty light blue like mine, but this strange sort of smoke color. She’s staring right at me now, concern lining her face. “Regina, there really is no excuse for this, and we have a zero-tolerance policy.” She winces slightly. “It pains me to even evoke that.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand.”

“Cheating, Regina. Honestly, if you were going to cheat, you could have at least reworded a few things.”

I’m speechless. Absolutely speechless. Cheating! My brain can’t even form the word. “That’s not possible.” It’s a whisper, these sounds that leave my mouth.

Mrs. Flowers pulls out two stapled packs of paper from her desk drawer and places them on top of everything else. “I read every word myself. You and Jennifer have the exact same paper.”

“That’s not...” I jump up, grabbing them in the process, and look at the two tests myself. After flipping a couple of pages I drop them back to the desk and place my hands on both sides. “This is impossible! She cheated from me!” I slam my hand on the desk.

“Regina. The seating arrangements are clear. Jennifer sits one row up and one column over, she could not have been able to see your paper.”

“Then she switched this! Wrote her name on my paper!”

“How? Snuck into my classroom? Regina, the handwriting is all yours. I know my student’s handwriting, and these are your papers.”

“No!” I yell, smacking my hand on the desk repeatedly. “NO! NO! NO!” I’m no longer in control of my hands, slamming them repeatedly into the desk.

“Regina! Calm down!” Mrs. Flowers places her hands on the top of her desk, attempting to steady the objects that were shaking around, threatening to fall off.

“NO!” I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know where they came from, but I know, absolutely know that everything just went wrong. I do not cheat!

The world froze. For that one moment, the world tinged with red and black. I hear her gasp. I hear the noise start, but then the screaming. I see the handle of scissors. All that is there is the handle sticking up, and her arm and the red, the growing red blotch on the desk. She screams, but I stop hearing her. All I can see is the handle of her scissors, all I can feel are vibrations. My mind has stopped.

A loud gasp brings everything back to focus. I looked

over at the sound of the gasp breaking the broken. Alice is here. I had forgotten I had asked her to meet me here. It was slow motion. Everything was as if I was watching it somewhere else. This isn’t mine. This isn’t me. This is a bad dream.

Mrs. Flowers had stopped screaming, and she was sobbing heavily, gripping her elbow, head bowed on the desk, the blood pooling around her forehead. I started to reach out, offer some comfort. I don’t know why that was my reaction. I hit the floor hard. Everything went blurry for a moment and then it was hard to breathe. There were noises somewhere above me and I realized Alice was sitting on top of me, her tattered sneakers in my long beautiful hair.

“NO! NONONONO!” I couldn’t help it. This isn’t right, nothing is right. “NO! NOT ME!” I screamed. And I screamed.

It’s my world. I’m beautiful, I’m special. I’m not mean, I’m always nice. I have a sunny disposition and I’m always kind to animals. Everyone is my friend, everyone loves me.

“Daddy...” I whispered. Why did I say that? I don’t have a daddy. I don’t have parents, I was raised in a lab. That’s what’s wrong. I am just a genetic experiment after all. Bred to be loved; bred to be beautiful, things just went wrong.

....

“It’s sad really.” The first whispered.

“She just couldn’t keep up with it.” Another voice chimed in.

“Did you see the way she looked at me that day? It could have been me.” Emily shuddered.

“She always took on too much. I can’t believe she kept it all up for so long.”

The whispering followed Alice throughout the day. It wasn’t so much that they were about her in particular, but that she noticed them more. It had been a week since she had wrestled Regina to the floor, and she didn’t want to be back here today, but it seemed best to do so.

Knocking on the door, Alice waited patiently. When at last she was called in, her movements felt wooden and stilted as she made her way to the offered chair and sat down.

“I’m glad you came in Alice.”

“Yeah.” Alice wrung her hands in her lap.

“We’re all very grateful to you. Mrs. Flowers especially. What you did was very brave, although foolish.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t really think about it, I didn’t know what Regina would have done.”

Alice fiddled with a thread from the tear in her jeans. Her mother had never approved of the shoddy clothes Alice preferred, and that reminded her of Regina. She smoothed the thread down.

“It’s unfortunate, but she’s being taken care of now.”

“What’s going to happen to her?”

He shook his head as if to say he didn’t know. “She’ll get the help she needs. Tell me more about Regina. You seem to be the only one who knew anything about her.”

“Regina kind of went crazy after...” Alice paused and frowned. “After her parents died in that car wreck.” She desperately wanted a drink of water. “She said some really mean things to me, and I never wanted to see her again. But, Mr. Hemsley, you know him?” Alice looked up at Principal Tucker.

“Yes, her godfather.”

“Mr. Hemsley begged me. He said that Regina had scared off all of her friends and buried herself so completely in her own fantasy life, that he was worried for her safety. He offered to pay me, but I didn’t want the money. I thought that maybe I could reach her someday.” Alice looked down at her lap, trying to hide the tears in her eyes.

“Don’t blame yourself, Alice. Sometimes, these things just can’t be helped.”

Elizabeth Ryan is humanities major and a WSU Vancouver undergrad. Ryan is a fiction writer and has been writing creatively for most of her life.

RED OVER BLACK

LUCAS GUBALA

Lucas Gubala works with acrylic, mixed media, and comics. Gubala is a student of computer science at WSU Vancouver.

EVERYTHING

NIKKI KAUR

I can see it in your face, the shock, the horror, the desperation.

Tell me, will you slow my mind so that I may ease yours?

Tell me your questions and burden me with your doubt.

Doubt it, that’s okay. All it is, is everything.

It’s everything.

The rush of every worry plaguing my gray matter,
ah, yes, the deep red pneuma lit up like a flare in the sky,
summoning the darkness to my face,
bringing a cloudburst to my eyes.

It’s everything.

My fingers tremble as I attempt to force the lines of my mouth into a curve.

My cheeks, they hurt so much,
after living with this facade, over my identity, this mask imposed upon me,

by those who claim strength.

It’s everything.

Laugh it away as my deficit.

The thing that makes me vile, vulnerable, veal
for your teeth to cut into with your smile.

How can you smile?

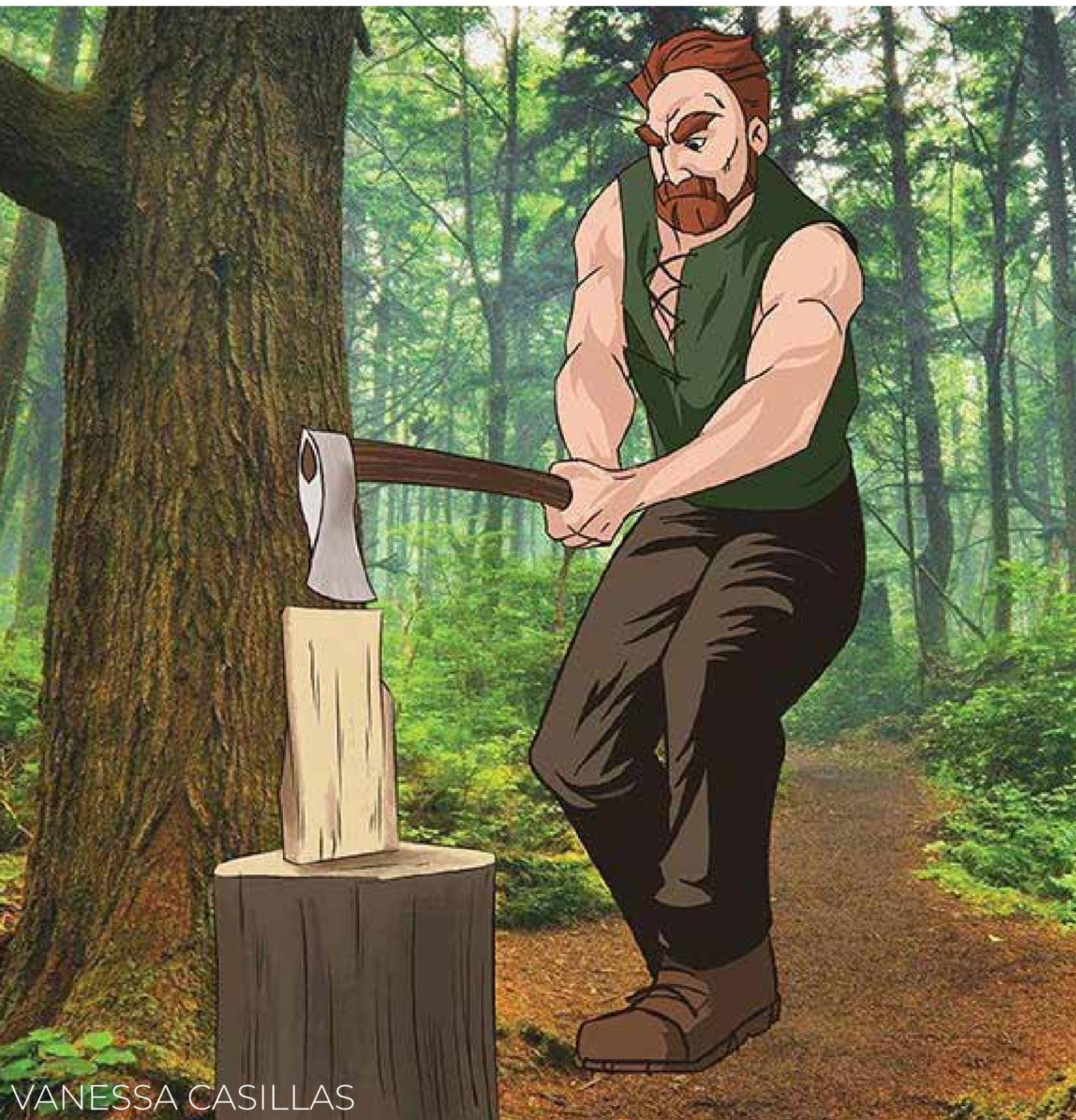
It’s everything.

I feel it in my throat, a lump,
a malignant blight boiling my insides.

Leave me,

I am a vestigial force, blunt cuts splashed across,

By everything.



THE WOODSMAN

VANESSA CASILLAS

The quiet, fall breeze weedles through the air.

The trees bristle with a fervent chill.

Occasionally, an incessant chopping noise can be heard from afar,
Followed by a great thud that verberates the Earth with godly might.

The axe resounds perniciously,

Portending to all woodland creatures of the woodsman's caprice.

From afar, it's difficult to tell what the man's intentions are.

Creator or destroyer?

Noble or Wicked?

Conformist or Ambitious?

Deciphering these things are fruitless,

if not impossible to deduce from mountaintops.

But if we proceed further along, these answers will begin to emerge.

He is not striking a live tree, but rather a dead and withering trunk.

As such, the decaying evergreen will tumble and a young sapling will take its place.

If not, maybe a raccoon family will come and dwell in the hollow thing.

Either scenario would thus allow for new life to take shape.

In any case, our observer won't know until time decides otherwise.

That is, if the woodsman and his axe don't first get the better of them.

Vanessa Casillas is a Finance major at WSU Vancouver. "I decided to tell the story of a woodsman whose identity and ambitions are unknown. I hoped to capture a sense of mystery regarding the woodsman's identity, and whether he could be considered a friend or foe."

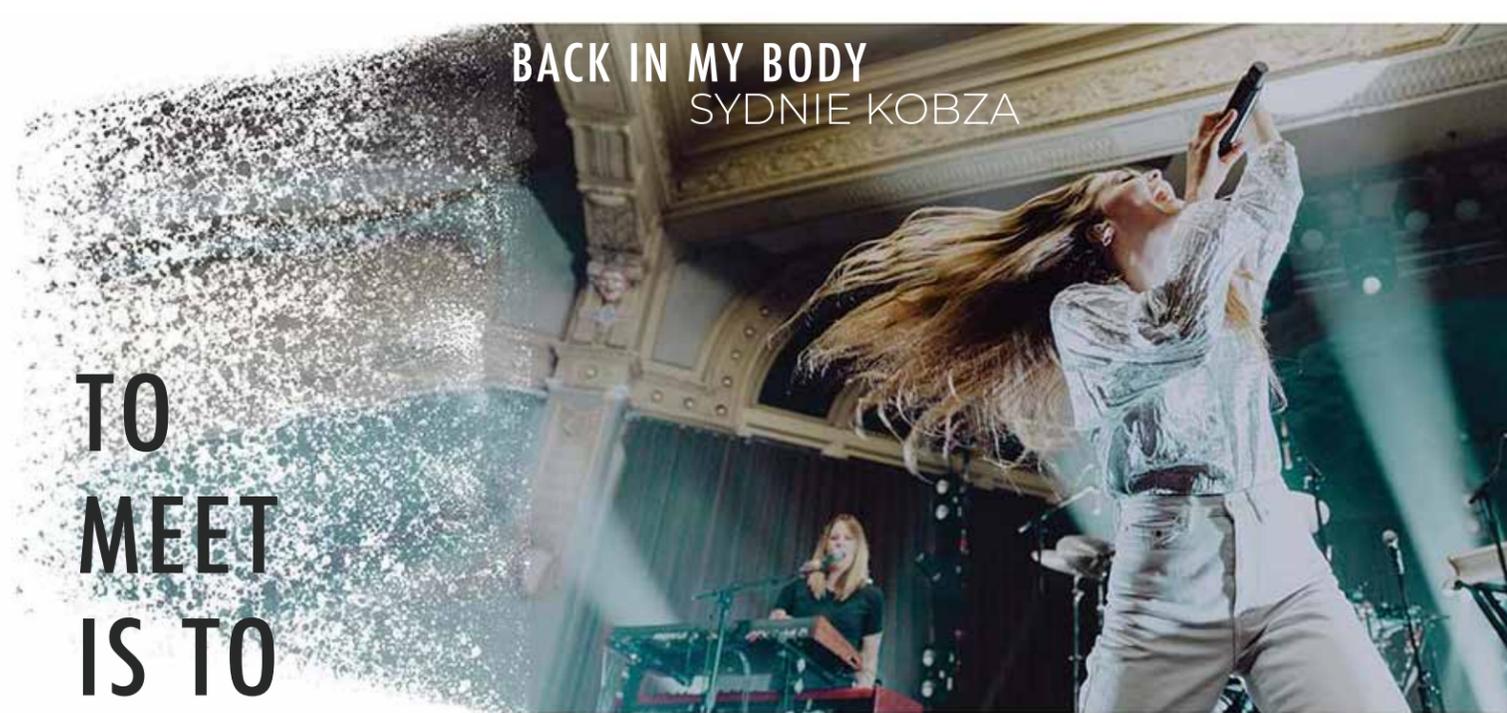
FOREIGNER'S GOD

EMILY LOZIER

The night falls away to the
amaranthine veins of synesthesia,
lurid in the shadows of
my textured bedroom walls.
The soft blues and lavenders
become a gospel painted pride
that works as gauze between
the severed and the bruised —
the ones like me and you.
And here I am, sedated
by the disconsolate chorus
of a tenderness that knows
it is offered too late.



STORM
FAUN SCURLOCK



BACK IN MY BODY
SYDNE KOBZA

TO MEET IS TO REPEAT

MEGAN ROBB

I internalize everything—
What you said, what you didn't,
How you looked at me, how I see myself
How you looked away

What you said, what you didn't
Sticks in my mind like
How you looked away
As my shy eyes eyed yours

Sticks in my mind like
Every dreamed conversation, replays
As my shy eyes eyed yours
I watched you walk away, knowing

Every dreamed conversation, replays
How you looked at me, how I see myself
I watched you walk away, knowing—
I internalize everything

THERE WILL BE PEACE

MEGAN ROBB

Each step there is a sickening crunch!
Dead, dried crustacean carcasses
crumble under the weight of my scarlet sneakers.
Another step—crack! The sound frightfully familiar.
Passed the swelling grey-green waves I see my
past, struggling, drowning in the frothing surf.
My cheek and cheeks
smart in memory—tears well and drip
dropping on shells as I move forward
toward my spiritual refuge, my childhood escape.
The brine reminds me, of all my tears shed
at the ocean bed as the salt of my body
meets the salt of the sea,
of where I can always find peace.

THROUGH THE LENS

KAMRA SHIELDS



Kamra Shields is a Digital Technology & Culture major at WSU Vancouver. "A collection of photos taken using no view finder and flash. The set was inspired of capturing random moments of the people around me during the span of one day. There was no setting up the shot or trying to get the perfect picture it was just allowing the photo to be exactly how it was in the moment."

GO FOR THE KILL

NIKKI KAUR

Today my day started like any other. I woke to see my partner already awake, anxious as always as another day of my senior year begins. I rushed to ready myself, brushing my teeth, combing my hair, grabbing the fluffiest sweater I have. I brought to the Writing Center an arsenal of high protein foods and highly concentrated coffee. However, I did not think to bring any other forms of protection.

I used to wear armor. Not literal armor but a kind of mental shield. Each day I knew that someone—usually a male peer—would have something to say to me. Each day there was at least one flirtation. Harmless right?

No.

I used to wear armor and today I wish I had. After years of having the same man as my new shield against the discomfort of encounters I realized I still live in the same body.

I used to wear armor. If had maybe I wouldn't have felt the tinge of blade-like humor pierce my brave exterior. I don't think they understood, nevertheless I wish I had been prepared.

I used to wear armor. Today I want it back. I hadn't experienced uncomfortable flirtation in years. It still has a way of making me want to run from that particular battle. When one goes to war, they don't explain why. They just go for the kill.

I used to wear armor. As a woman I had to.

NEW YEAR, NEW LOVE MARY NGUYEN





SKIN OF THE EARTH
JANET RODRIGUEZ

DEAR, YOU

NIKKI KAUR

After almost 3 years, I grabbed a bottle of expired Percocet, and in that moment, I was no longer a scar. I became a raw third-degree burn for everyone all over again and I never gave you an apology to start healing it.

Here is my reverse suicide note. For almost 4 years now, I have carried that day around with me and every day I carry a little chant in my head that I repeat every morning and every night. I tell myself, “I am alive. I am okay. I am wanted. I am needed.”

I do not pretend to be free of the shackles of depression, I do not ignore the weight on my chest, and I see the monster under my bed.

I let a man take a needle to my hand and leave behind a different kind of scar. The kind that serves as a reminder every day. This is my semicolon. A semicolon typically means that the author chose to continue their sentence. For me and many others it means that we have chosen to continue our sentences as well.

It’s funny to me sometimes, life used to seem like a prison sentence. The semicolon forever etched on my hand tells me, “Life is not your prison, you don’t have to try to escape it.”

Life was a prison when I was a slave to the thoughts in my head. Life was a prison when I felt I was isolated. Life was a prison when nobody understood.

A small and insignificant etching on my body helps keep me alive, it is as insignificant as my appendix in many ways, but at least this serves a purpose.

It brings me home to you.

So you see, it’s not over. I choose to persevere, I choose life. I thought I went to sea and drowned on my own, I never did learn to swim.

I thought nobody knew how I felt. I thought my sexuality would cause everyone to hate me. I thought I was a freakazoid brown girl forever to remain as “other.”

I thought I could forget those who left. I thought I had to grow up to be nothing and nobody. I thought if I left, then you would all be happier. I thought giving up would be easier.

Worst of all, I’m not sure I thought at all. Here is my real apology, one that I hope will last for the rest of my life. Here I am today, I am alive, I am content, I am successful, and I am safe.

This is my apology that I will extend to you for the rest of my life. I will never stop trying. I have not stopped trying. I will always give my all to live the best life I can. I will live for the girl who did not think she’d see the day she’d have her first kiss, first love, first drive, first graduation, first “big girl job.”

I will live for the mother who cried for nights not knowing what to do to make my pain go away. I will live for the father who blamed himself. I will live for the sister who could not understand. I will live for the friends who shook me out of my stupor, and for the people I hurt. I will live as fully as possible. My education, my career, my love, my sobriety, my attitude, my every breath is for you. I will live till I am old and wrinkly, and I will finally start celebrating my birthday.

I will live.

I know that this is hard to think of, and your emotional scars twinge when you are reminded of the pain that forever branded you. However, you have to believe that I am not only okay but that I am happy in ways I never imagined.

The unicorn dangling on a chain twinkles at me when I’m scared to drive, and thinking of the times I nearly crashed to get it over with quickly. The little insignificant unicorn that I bought for \$3 has an aura of childlike innocence, magic, and hope around it.

The innocence I remember within myself. The kind of magical pixie dust that I could’ve sworn was in my every breath. The kind of hope I feel now.

I remember the big plans I made as a little girl and the wonder I had. How could I leave her dreams unfulfilled and wonder fruitless? My tassel from my high school graduation still hangs next to that unicorn. Reminding me that of all the times I fought for my education, and fought for a fulfilled life. I took the plan I made when I was seven to be a doctor-model-zookeeper-lawyer-queen of the world and made something of myself.

I graduated at 19 with a Bachelors and surprised everyone, including myself. I will get that doctorate I always dreamed of. That little girl’s dreams still live on within me and I work every day to prove to her that I can be what she wished for.

I owe it to you,
I owe it to me,
I owe it to the monster.

NOTHING

NIKKI KAUR

There's a face people make. They don't know it,
yet the edge in their eyes changes as they grind
the words, struggling to hold back.

When I tell them I was on the cliff's edge,
I brought myself back from the precipice
of what seemed to be a sweet descent into
nothing.

It's nothing.

The siren song that haunts my dreams,
the parasite behind my eyes,
the way the world seems to go so damn slow.

It's nothing.

The life has been slowly trickling out of
my eyes, my heart, my lungs.

It's nothing.

Am I nothing?

No feeling, no thinking, just dazing through the days.
Flashing through my life, neurons firing, hoping
for some finality, some faith. Some fear of it all
crashing down like the crisp, torrential, blue waters,

rapping the shore of my drained, strained, maimed
amygdala.

Why are there suffocating waves?

Why are there exposed oceans?

Why do I feel their immensity?

The creation, decimation, duration.

Thoughts are not so enduring, yet
every atom of me screams, they distort
and twist their limbs, snaring themselves down every
synapse.

It's nothing.

Don't look at me. Don't say that. Don't
give me your masses of pity, too heavy
to carry in my tired hands.

Don't pretend you understand. Don't go and
tell your friends how enlightened you've become
to inescapable mutilation, crusading upon the abyss of
blue, left to be scanned, assessed, ushered away.

It's nothing.

Nikki Kaur is an alum of WSU. "I do not believe that mental illness is one's whole identity but rather it influences their identity by causing one to walk around with a mask. These poems speak to my identity by allowing a peek behind the mask and how much I hope to help others advocate for themselves and others who struggle with mental illness."

LUNGS

SARAH SUMMERHILL

Sarah Summerhill is in her senior year as an English major/Creative Writing minor at WSU Vancouver. "This is a poem about the climate crisis as it pertains to the Pacific Northwest, and specifically about the 2017 Eagle Creek Fire in the Columbia River Gorge, a major source of identity for the Oregon/Washington area and a place loved deeply within our community. The climate crisis is at the core of an entire generation's identity, as we wonder how it will shape our futures and our lives."

set my skin afire, warm my cheeks, em-
bed my heart with glowing embers,
and I'll take your breath away,
cause your raw pink skin
to become base again.

you've tendered my organic
evergreen landscape
with nuclear pigment.
electric pink aside orange-corrupted skies
tower over scintillating city-lights,
mirrored in my cool belly.

beneath swims silver smolt in summer,
spawns of mossy green and cardinal
upon the fall, when leaves strip from trees
and you pick them to cover your body.

when the flames cease to burn
my bark, they'll find your heart,
and lungs.

CAPEHORN SUNRISE



FAUN SCURLOCK

MARYLAND

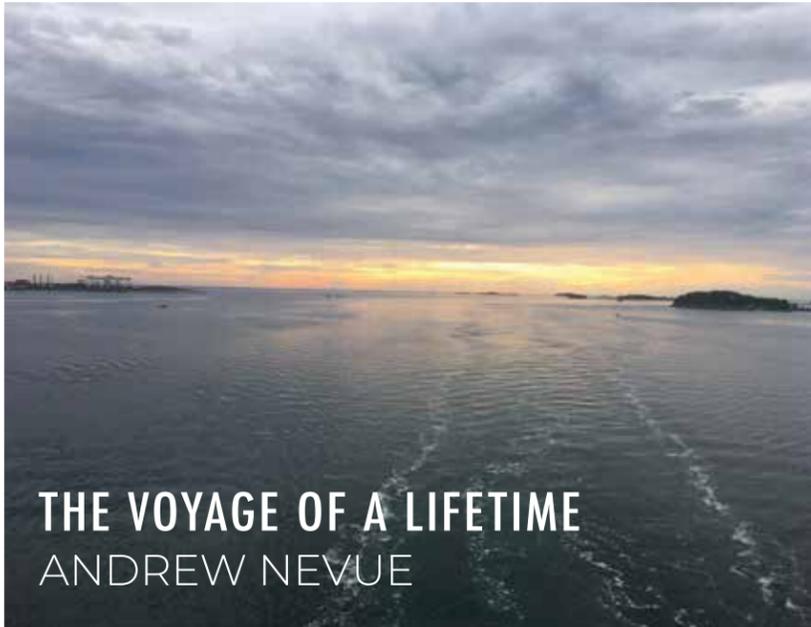
On that night I met you in a rainstorm
 I did not know you would keep cool nights so warm
 Our summer days spent swimming in the lake
 Your presence made me forget my heartache

Did I love, or did I look in a mirror?
 Either way you were part of me, dear
 Your emerald eyes and your soft golden hair
 Forgive me if I linger a stare
 You and I used to go like the wild

CATHERINE HANSEL

Reciting poems like a lovestruck moon child
 To this day I find it quite astounding
 You read my mind with your words still resounding

What I have written inside my memoir
 We had moonlit adventures, both near and quite far
 Sometimes I think you were only a dream
 No other will match that of you and of me



THE VOYAGE OF A LIFETIME
 ANDREW NEVUE

MARITIME PARK

ANDREW TERRELL

gravel trail
 leaf cowl
 bend beside the waterfall
 unity will be a clear
 tumble into
 a white pool
 or duck business
 mud flat
 boot cushion flat
 small strip of shade along
 a wall it
 goes up

HOPE

MEGAN ROBB

Eight weeks. Valerie knew the test would be positive, as soon as the headaches had begun, she was sure. She was pregnant. Seeing the crossing pink lines, she breathed a heavy sigh and sunk down onto the cold tiles of the bathroom floor. She held the home-test in her hands, cradling it as if it were already her child. Desire flooded through her, but her racing heartbeat and tears raining down her cheeks suggested that fear was heading forward like a head-on collision.

“Hey, Valkyrie, you okay in there?” her husband’s rich baritone voice carried her pet name through the door, sweet and caring—it killed her. Max was always there supporting her even though she was the one constantly robbing him of the family he so desperately desired. Getting pregnant was one thing, making it to term was another feat altogether. She rose from the floor, wiped the tears from her cheeks and practiced her excited smile. Lights, camera, action. She pulled open the door and beamed at her husband, thrusting the pregnancy test into his hands, the hundred-watt smile still tugging at her lips. Max smiled broadly and encompassed his wife in an all-consuming hug. She could feel his love and his hope in his embrace. She began to cry softly, clinging onto her husband in a tangible way that she figured she would never be able to do with her offspring.

“I can’t believe it,” he murmured nuzzling her hair. She shook her head in agreement. She didn’t believe it would last, the last two miscarriages had taken her faith when they passed through her. Now depleted, she had only numbness and anxiety—when would it happen?

Ten weeks. The doctor’s office was nearly at max capacity with pregnant women sitting and leaning everywhere, their perfectly growing globular stomachs

purposefully sticking out—mocking her. Val winced and leaned against the check-in counter, her cramps were becoming more regular, but at least she wasn’t bleeding... yet. Val stood with her husband, her hands in her coat pockets. She balled her fists until her fingernails dug into her palms, easing the pain in her mind.

“Valerie Hoult?” a small nurse called, and Val followed without a word. The woman was wearing all pink scrubs with rattles and pacifiers on it, she smiled exuberantly at Val as she asked the same trivial questions she’d asked twenty times that day. Once weighed, measured, and poked Val sat on the exam table. She felt just as emotionally exposed as she did physically sitting there in that white paper dress, waiting for the doctor to shove medical equipment inside her body and tell her that her baby was dead. She didn’t need to have such invasive testing done, she knew something wasn’t right. She knew her baby was dead inside her—just as they were the last times she had come into this office, sat on this table. Once is a fluke, twice is a pattern, three times would be divine intervention—if God did exist, he obviously didn’t want her to have children.

The door opened, and Dr. Alba glided in, shaking hands with Max before finally resting his warm hand upon her shoulder.

“It’s good to see you again, Valerie, how have you been?” the doctor asked, his expression annoyingly sincere. Val wanted to shake off his hand and tell him exactly how she’d been, in devastating detail—but she couldn’t. An outburst of that magnitude would cause irreparable harm to her husband and she had already damaged him enough.

“I’ve been good, thank you.” She said giving a small wan smile. The doctor nodded and walked over to his equipment, sat on the stool and opened her chart.

“Your pregnancy test came back positive. So, it looks like we’ll be doing an internal ultrasound to see how far along you are, check the placenta, as well as to see if there are any visible signs of fetal abnormalities.” He nodded as if this were mundane, as if the idea of fetal abnormalities was just something doctors said but didn’t actually happen. Val knew better.

“The last time there were no ‘visible abnormalities’ and

yet there were—is there another, maybe a better test we can do?” Val asked, irritatingly on the verge of tears. Dr. Alba’s expression softened, he scooted his stool over and took her hand.

“We need to do this test first, to see how far along you are. After we have determined your due date, we can discuss testing options. I know you’ve had a rough go of it but try to have hope. There is at least a sixty five percent chance this pregnancy will be completely normal and lead to a natural delivery and healthy child.” The doctor patted her hand before turning on the ultrasound. Val leaned back onto the table and tried to remain calm.

She didn’t want to look at the monitor, didn’t want to hear those heart wrenching words. Val drifted off, ironically thinking about the first time they found out she was pregnant. Oh, they had been so excited—started shopping immediately

for baby things every time they were at the store. When she was about fourteen weeks along, they started setting up the spare room as a nursery. They bought a crib, a rocker, a diaper service, but were stumped at what color paint to buy. Yellow? No, her baby book had said that yellow walls can make you think your baby is jaundiced when they’re not. Green? Too sickly a pallor. Pink or blue would be perfectly fine choices, but they wanted to know the sex of the baby first. Val remembered smiling at the woman behind the paint counter as she rubbed her newly growing belly. The woman gave them paint samples to take with them—they could come back when they learned the gender. They never did. She miscarried the next day.

Val was pulled from her thoughts like a drowning victim

from the water.

“You see that? Perfectly healthy, measuring at about ten weeks.” Dr. Alba pointed to the screen and Max grabbed her hand, watching his child on the monitor. Val extended her unrestricted arm to touch the screen, it was blurry, but it was definitely a baby. But something was wrong—the machine was glitching.

“What’s that?” she asked a pit falling in her stomach. Dr. Alba smiled and turned a dial. The mechanical echoing of a heartbeat thundered through the room. Val looked to her husband. His eyes were closed, head tilted slightly upward as if he were listening to a rhapsodic composition. She felt it then, the dreaded hope, the crippling sense of wonder and excitement. She was sure it would soon enough be squelched. She squeezed Max’s hand.



They set an appointment for an amniocentesis six weeks out. Val wasn’t optimistic, but set the appointment anyway—better safe than sorry. They drove home in silence, neither minding the quiet ride. When they arrived at home, she took off her shoes and walked toward their bedroom, stopping in the doorway of the guest room. To the untrained eye, it looked like everyone else’s spare

room. It had a bed, a dresser, and a little table with a lamp. What couldn’t be seen, however, were the boxes of baby supplies stashed inside the closet. The crib, still in its box had the receipt taped to the top, and the changing table, dismantled and leaning awkwardly against the totes of baby clothes with their tags still on, and unopened containers of baby wash and diaper wipes. Val looked away, her body was weak with exhaustion and emotion. She walked the last few feet to the master bedroom and fell onto the pillowtop. Val slept restlessly—she dreamt that she was painting the nursery but every time she would finish, the walls would suddenly be bleached back to white.

Eighteen weeks. The past eight weeks had run by with all the speed of a snail. Each day was dreadful, each happy moment clouded with fear and uncertainty. And yet, despite this, hope lingered in the air like pollen in the breeze, she couldn’t always see it, but she knew it remained. They had done the amniocentesis two weeks ago, and now they headed in to learn the results. Val and her husband walked into the clinic wondering what their fate would be. They had come to a decision—if this pregnancy wasn’t viable, or if she miscarried again, they were done trying. Val couldn’t help but feel she that she had bullied Max into agreeing but she honestly thought that if she lost another baby, that she would be driven insane. Insane people do the same thing over and over again expecting a different result—she felt as though she was losing her fragile sanity already.

The wait was long, but at least this time she had a protruding stomach like the others—she now belonged to a club only fifty one percent of the population could boast potential membership in. A nurse called her name and Val and Max followed with heavy steps. The doctor breezed into the room once the weighing and measuring were done. He sat on his stool, the script of her future written within the file in his hands. Dr. Alba positioned himself and smiled up at them, Val’s breathing increased.

“The test showed no abnormalities, no defects, no chromosome imbalance. Your baby is perfectly healthy.”

Val looked to her husband with tears racing down her

face. Max leaned over and kissed her, hard and quick—she tasted salt and exhilaration. Val couldn’t wrap her mind around the idea that nothing was wrong—she was sure she had been cursed.

“You’re certain?” she asked choked with emotion. Dr. Alba switched on the ultrasound and asked her to move up her shirt. The doctor squirted the warmed jelly onto her abdomen and moved the wand around her swollen belly. The monitor showed a perfect tiny human, kicking and sprawling—even sucking its thumb. They watched the screen as if it were the most beautifully engrossing movie they’d ever seen. Their child was growing steadily, she hadn’t messed up or pissed off God—this time.

“Would you like to know the gender?” Dr. Alba asked positioning the wand to get a better look. Val and Max unglued their eyes from the monitor to gaze at each other. Years of marriage had made it easy to have silent conversations—they nodded in agreement.

“Congratulations, you’re having a baby girl.” The doctor said beaming. Val laughed while she sobbed, finally feeling the weight of suspicion and dread lifted off her shoulders.

Forty one weeks. She had to come on her own schedule, Val thought whimsically as she cradled her newborn. Just when the doctor had set an inducement date Val had gone into labor—her little girl already didn’t like being told what to do or when. She smiled down at the slumbering infant, caressing her plump pink cheeks. Max sat on the edge of the hospital bed, alternating between petting her hair and their daughter’s. She was exhausted but exuberant, high on new baby smell. Her nurse came in to take vitals and Val handed over her baby begrudgingly.

“Have you picked a name for her yet?” the nurse asked smiling down at the waking newborn. Val and Max exchanged a loving glance and nodded. When they were talking about names, Max had come up with an idea that had pierced her heart. All the while she had been struggling with the multiple miscarriages and what that meant for their marriage, Max had been a supporting force. He had loved her when she hated herself, lifted her up when she was depressed. She asked him why and he said simply that he always had hope—now they both would.



YEAR'S END
TOM SPENCER

THE SPLIT INTERIOR

VANESSA CASILLAS

From destitute beginnings
To academic privilege and esteem,
Many long, arduous hours were relinquished to reach this point.
Yet despite these rather indebted sentiments,
Ambivalent feelings still reside.

Two dichotomous identities clash for dominance.
One berates the cacophonous din of the other,
While the latter chastises the former for its mask.

They eventually put their feud aside and come to a consensus:
They are one and the same,
Despite their sometimes intransigent and unappeasable nature.
They make it work,
Accepting themselves as part of a single identity with dual histories.

The road ahead will not be easy, but will have rewards worth reaping.

I HAVE MISSED MY CONNECTION

DARA PASSANO

I have missed my connection. I know it's my fault. I took the wrong bus, then walked the wrong way down the wrong terminal, and then instead of going directly to the gate I queued up for a Health Boost Green Juice. When they announced the flight I was trying to decide which booster I wanted for the extra dollar-fifty.

"But miss," says James, "we called you many times."

James is the FlyDubai airline rep. He's eyeing my juice cup like he knows I'm a liar; that I could have made the flight if I hadn't stopped for an overpriced apple-ginger with a shot of wheat grass, and he's right. But I haven't slept in more than forty hours and I'm bleary. It's easier to blame the shuttle buses.

"You seem like a nice person," says James. "I'm sorry this happened to you but there's nothing we can do. The next available flight is the day after tomorrow."

I stare at him. I didn't budget for a hotel. This was only supposed to be a transit.

"Please," I say. The people in the airport are hazy. They're going around me in slow motion. "Please, please, please."

James reaches across the counter and takes my hand. "Don't be scared."

I'm not scared, but I know my part, so I say, "If only there were something you could do."

James strokes my fingers. "I get off in a few hours." His eyes prickle. "You are welcome to stay at my place."

I retrieve my hand, say no thank you, and walk away from the counter, but he follows me through this terminal and into the next. He says he's on his break.

I want to escape him but I'm tired. My ankles are swollen and I have a headache. I sit down. James sits next to me. The seats are full of crumbs. I shake my empty juice cup, trying to melt the ice. There can't be more than two water fountains in this whole airport. It's villainy.

James takes a breath and dives into his pitch. I am pretty. Am I married? Himself, he is not married, and actually, if I was wondering (I was not), he came here from Uganda precisely so he could make money so he could get married but how can he get married now, it's been five years and he's gotten so old (he's younger than me but I don't point this out), he tries but he only meets other expats and expats don't invest in relationships, they make promises and then they leave. Also, his money isn't much, it's hard to save, Dubai is expensive. He can't go on Facebook anymore because the pictures of his happy friends and their happy children depress him.

I agree. Everyone is lonely and everyone is craving and that should make it all terribly simple and yet, somehow, it isn't simple at all. Also, Facebook is shit.

My headache is making me nauseous. The waiting area is loud. It smells of feet. The shops are selling camel-shaped chocolates wrapped in golden foil, and plastic Aladdin lamps. Not one pure soul is handing out baklava samples.

James scribbles down his email address. “We can be friends. You never know.”

But I do know, and the last thing I need is another man who needs me; who fumbles inside me for my light, my spark, so he can appropriate it. As soon as James is out of sight, I throw his address in the trash.

I go to the toilet just to have something to do. The sink is dripping wet. There are no more paper towels. The trapped air smells of poop and cheap perfume. Transit sucks. It’s not travelling. It’s a moment between moments, a crack in the pattern, and what if one day the crack is too wide?

I squelch back to my seat and check my phone. Still no messages.

It’s been weeks since I texted Veso’s fiancée, and still no reply. So much for good deeds.

I watch the flight monitor. Scroll, scroll, scroll. There are lots of better places I could go to. Sri Lanka, for example. I could fly into Colombo and climb Sigiriya, or even fall off it, like that one time when I went climbing with Veso and his friends, who were nice enough guys but who really should have told me; I guess that’s how we play things.

It had been a beautiful spring day, the sun hot on my neck. I was probably twenty feet up when I suddenly, I don’t know, felt tired. Not in my muscles, but somewhere down in the core of me. I tried for a grip point, missed it, didn’t care, and let go.

Veso had the rope. He stopped my fall but I swung and smashed against the rock face, shredding my arm and bruising my side from hip to chin. One fractured rib. He rushed to belay me down.

“I’m fine,” I said, and I was. He was not. He was shaking. “I slipped. No big deal. You take a turn.”

That night we watched a movie about a woman who cracked apart. She ran so fast she ran into the sky and then floated there, unable to fall. It was a terrible story; no plot arc.

James is back. “My shift is over,” he tells me.

“You’re on standby for tomorrow’s flight.” I’m not going to thank him for a favour I hadn’t agreed to.

“You can always cancel it.” He crouches in front of me. “Look, my place isn’t far.” He touches my knee. “I am a good man, you can trust me.”

Rule number one: Never trust a person who tells you to trust him. “No,” I say.

Rule number two: The world was created from a vision of what was possible; don’t be the one to narrow the vision.

“Well, ok fine,” I amend.

I follow him through the passport gates. The airport doors slide open. It’s July on the Arabian Peninsula. I had expected to step into sunshine but this is the sun itself. It’s so hot my perspiration evaporates before it can make it onto my skin.

James takes my bag. We board the sky train.

He shares an apartment with four other men but they are at work now, or so he says. He gives me a towel. I stand under the shower’s cold, saline spray and look up through the skylight to an artificially tinted sky. I might still be in an airplane. I have no idea what time it is. James has made up his bed with clean sheets. He offers to bring me a glass of iced tea and maybe he does but I don’t know it; I’m already asleep.

I wake up to the sound of a guitar playing. The bedroom is small and dim, like a cell. There’s a stack of mattresses along one wall and a row of boxes along another. The walls are white, the floor is scuffed linoleum, and the ceiling is that cheap puckered grey stucco that is too close and too sharp, like stalactites. The points stretch towards me as I lie on my back. They are coming for my jugular.

There’s a single window, its curtain pulled aside and tied with a red ribbon. The sun is setting, thank god. The view is of apartment blocks and pavement. James is curled up on another mattress, his back to

me, snoring softly.

I knuckle the sleep grit from the corners of my eyes and venture down the hallway. The apartment is two small rooms plus a bathroom and a kitchen/lounge.

The man with the guitar doesn’t pause for me, just lifts his chin in acknowledgement.

Another man is packing a shisha bowl. He doesn’t care about me either. I drink three glasses of iced tea while looking out the window at the sky train track. It’s only a few meters away. The trains glide silently by, their windows flashing like a film reel. Many of the faces that pass look back at me. We lock eyes, then release; lock, then release; then the film is over. I put the glass in the sink.

“Smoke?” I hear behind me. “Sure. Thanks.”

I pad over and sit between them on the floor. It’s apple, my favourite. I relax. Maybe I’ll just stay in Dubai.

Someone is holding my toe. I must have dozed off.

“Do you want to get some dinner?” James asks.

He’s dewy-fresh from the shower. He looks better without that dorky FlyDubai polo shirt.

We get back on the sky train, this time with Ravi, the guitar player. It’s still too hot but now the heat is blooming up from under our feet instead coming down at us from the sky. We sit at outside tables and order bowls of fried noodles. The band of my bra is soaked through with sweat.

“You’re from Canada,” Ravi says, and I nod as I slurp. “Are you an immigrant?”

I hate this question. “No,” I tell him. “In Canada, it’s the white people who are the immigrants, not people like me. I’m from there.”

“I think Canada would be better than Dubai,” says James. He’s pushing his noodles around with a plastic fork, his lower lip stuck out. “Cheaper.”

“Harder to get home though,” says Ravi. “You wouldn’t get to go home every year.” “What is home.”

“Oh, my friend. Home is family, and family is everything.” Ravi turns to me. “You want

to see my daughter?” He opens a folder of photographs on his phone.

After dinner, we’re wired. We’ve spent the day sleeping and now we’re upside down. They tell me that’s ok, Dubai is upside down too. It doesn’t sleep. We can go to a mall or walk along the harbour or go up the Burj Khalifa, there’s a fountain there that dances to music or—

“Music,” I say. “I like music. But let’s go to a place with real music.”

Back on the sky train, we ride to the end of the line, then walk through empty neighborhoods. It’s too dry for insects and too clean for rodents. We crouch under a fence made of aluminum sheeting and crawl into a construction zone.

I can hear the music. I follow Ravi carefully through the dark, picking around rebars and concrete blocks and sudden pits. James takes my hand but I pull away. If one of us falls, what’s the point in dragging the other down too?

We duck under scaffolding and push through hanging sheets of plastic. Between finished walls, open to the sky, one hundred men are standing and squatting, shoulder to shoulder and thigh to thigh, facing the centre of a building-to-be where three musicians are playing a long-necked guitar, a hand drum, and a sort of flute.

We squeeze in. The crowd shuffles and shifts, making space for us. Everyone is silent, listening. The music contracts and swells, beating like gills. It’s exhilarating, this music, but frustrating, too; I perceive it in flashes. Each time I think I have heard it, its rhythm changes.

Exploratory fingers nudge my crotch. I grab the hand and bend a finger back until it snaps. The hand goes away and my focus returns to the music. There are bats overhead, dancing.

In my language, we don't care about what is female and what is male, if there even is such a thing. We care about what has a spirit and what does not and you can disagree about this, you can choose your pronoun, say this stone, o'ow, has no life but this other stone, wa'aw, is animate.

As I listen I feel out what's alive for me: the drum, the bats, the holes in the ground, the smoke rising from the men's cigarettes, the wind, my nostrils, and the breath that flows between them.

Some of the men are alive. Others are dead. The dead ones are obvious. Like when you look out across a field of wildflowers and see that some of the blooms are bright and new, and others have been blasted apart by the rain and are now only stubs, dark and crumbly and not alive, except that they might snag your clothing when you pass them.

We are such a lot, each person one and alone but multiplied too many times, as if creating more humans could fix things. When Nokomis opened her legs and pushed the first humans out, and the water got jealous and flooded the Earth, the spirits should have left it at that. A ball of ocean bobbing across the galaxy.

Rule number three: Never give a human a second chance.

I gave Veso so many second chances. It was humiliating. And by the time he told me the truth it was too late, too dark, and he was driving too fast. I had just met his fiancée — which was confusing because up until that point I had thought that I was his fiancée; I had thought I had arrived, that I was no longer in transit, that it had all been worth it. But no. All along there had been her, tall and blonde and shaped like a Coke bottle.

I'm shaped like a thumb. I had assumed Veso preferred thumbs. I had needed two bottles of wine to think it all through.

Veso's eyes were on and off the road, making me nervous. He never drove this fast. He was saying, "Splintered,

that's the only way I can describe it, this has splintered me, I can't take it, I can't function, I'm in pieces, less than pieces, I'm splintered."

I lolled there in the passenger seat, marvellously drunk.

I had been drunk in the supermarket, too. I had stumbled in, squinting at the bright lights, hearing things fall and scatter around me, boom-boom-boom, while woozily trying not to cry.

How frustrating, how enervating, not to know where my own body was. Everyone had been watching me. I had been afraid the cashier would call the cops, have me picked up for public drunkenness, another drunk Indian.

"Quarters." I had tried hard to announce. "Can you give me quarters for this dollar?"

I had called him and Veso had come to where I was. He had found me in the parking lot, trying to retch.

"Splintered, splintered." "I'm hungry," I said.

Veso pulled into the parking lot of another supermarket — America has lots of supermarkets, they're everywhere, you're never without an opportunity to consume — and off he went, a wallet in his pocket, reflexively locking the doors behind him. I pressed my cheek to the cold window glass. There are still faint scars on that cheek from the smack of wa'aw stone.

I was never scared, you know, when I fell off that cliff. When you fall, you start out by flying.

He came back with bread, lettuce, and cheese. I cried as I ate. I chewed my tears.

Veso didn't know this. He wouldn't look at me. The muscles in his jaw flashed as if there were lightening in there underneath the skin; as if he had swallowed thunderstorms.

I remembered his fiancée's proofs. The emails and text messages. The family Christmas card. The photo

of them leaning against a tree, wearing matching red turtlenecks. The wedding announcement.

There's a commotion in the lot. One section of the crowd is moving and murmuring.

There's a loud noise, like splashing.

The musicians don't care, they keep playing, and I think: good. I don't ever want them to stop. I want this transit to go on forever. I don't want to arrive at where I'm going and I certainly don't want to go back to where I came from.

Another section of the crowd rises from their squat, then another. I wish the men would be quiet. James takes my arm. He has long fingers. They wrap all the way around my bicep and meet again at his thumb.

"We have to go." "No."

"Quickly." "No."

The splashing becomes a crashing. The crowd ripples and heaves and finally I see why. Water is pouring down the plastic sheeting and jumping off the walls. There are no drains here and the walls are flush so the water has nowhere to go. It's rising. The men near the walls are pushing to get out but the men near the exit are not reacting; they must not have noticed the flood. The pushing turns to angry shoving but the people, like the water, cannot leave. Everyone is blocking everyone else's way. Ravi is gone.

"The pipes have burst," James shouts. "I don't know how to swim." I laugh. We're in the middle of the desert. Who needs to swim?

My shoes are wet. And now my ankles. My knees.

Men try to run but slip and fall. Whole sections of the crowd collapse into the flood, screaming.

In our language, water is inanimate. It cannot be ravenous. So I think, maybe this isn't water at all, maybe it's some other kind of sentient thing that belches and rushes and climbs and devours, so determined.

Or maybe the water has come alive, like the way

the scaffolding and walls have come alive, the way they are now throwing out their chests and opening their arms, embracing us hard. When the water boils down their chins and rises to their navels, we rise with it.

The crowd goes mad. I lose James. My feet leave the ground. Then a hand grips mine and I know it's his.

"James," I call as loudly as I can over the roaring water and shouting men.

He tugs me through an opening in the bodies. His lips are moving but I can't hear him.

The water keeps getting higher. He loses his feet too.

I catch an elbow to my head and a knee to my stomach. The men around me are panicking, wild. I kick invisible legs and invisible legs kick me back. I want to float away, be unpinned, let go, be swung, but all around me the men are lunging for someone to save them. They are climbing on top of my shoulders and head and I can't shake them off.

I gulp the air before going down. Underwater I get turned around, disoriented. Someone kicks me in the jaw. After half a minute, the breath inside me has turned to fire.

Breath has a life, just as the wind does, because they are of the same element.

I am the wind, I remind myself as I ram against the bodies around me, struggling to rise. I surface, gasp, and am pushed down again.

I fly away to come back again.

They are drowning and they will take me with them. It doesn't matter that I can swim.

We are all going to drown together.

This time, when I surface, James is right in front of me. His face is inches from mine. I hold his eyes. He's not afraid. He's still gripping my hand.

We are high up now, almost at the very top of the building-to-be. The water has short-circuited the lights and blown out the electricity but even in the darkness I can see the whites of James's eyes. I look up at the stars and when I look back, James is smiling.

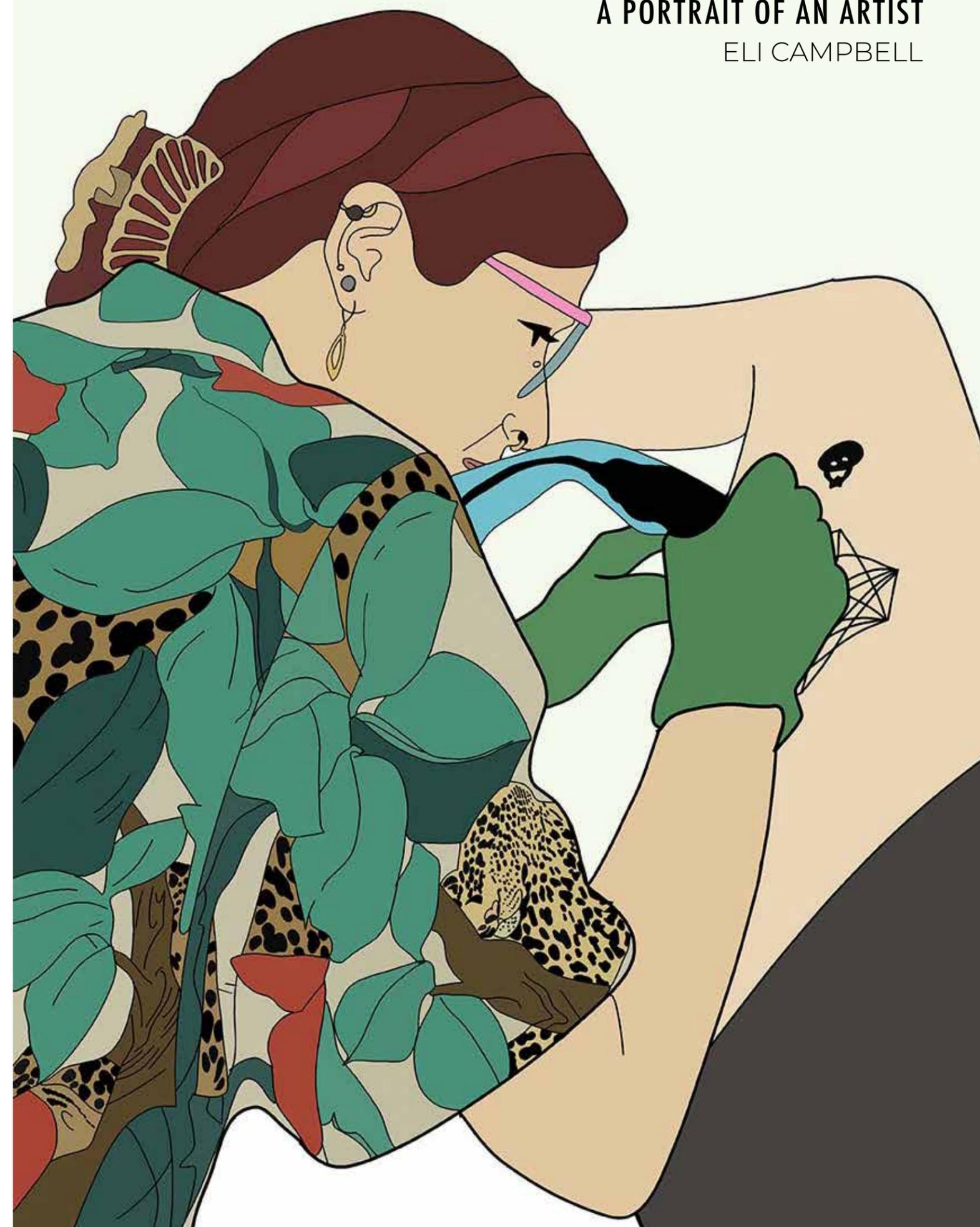
Dara Passano is the author of The Guardian UK's "Confessions of a Humanitarian" series, as well as the satire collection, GIVE ME MY CHOCOLATE OR THE TURTLE DIES. Passano's work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net and has appeared in The Apple Valley Review, The Southern Humanities Review (forthcoming), Ruminare, Arcturus, Meridian, Typishly, The Tishman Review, Points in Case, The Manzano Mountain Review, Thought Catalog, Crack the Spine, THE PERFUME RIVER ANTHOLOGY, and elsewhere. Passano lives out of a suitcase that is most often in sub-Saharan Africa.



ROMAN LIFE
REED WONN

Reed Wonn is a Psychology major at WSU Vancouver. "Rome has many identities but most often people think of Ancient Rome. Rome is full of history and the stories of memorable historic figure who lived in the eternal city thousands of years before. However, walking through Rome I found that the city also had a new, modern identity. I loved walking through Rome to find ancient walls adorned with modern art and graffiti. I felt like I captured one of these memorable occurrences in this photograph."

A PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST
ELI CAMPBELL



BAD REPUTATION

EMMA LASSITER



TOUGH

FRANCES MORRIS

Frances Morris, an undergrad student at WSU Vancouver will graduate in Spring 2020. Morris enjoys writing short stories and wants to share these with the world. She hopes to publish a novel in the next couple of years that will launch a book series.

The reason why I'm so messed up is because my mom never told me she loved me. I guess that could be because she left when I was two, disappearing from our lives like water flowing down the tubs drain. But she still remains, like the bubbles that foam on the tubs porcelain surface. Slowly disappearing but leaving a thin film behind until the next bath is drawn.

My mom left me, my dad and my older sister behind. Angela and I are six years apart. The only memory I do have of my mom is her taking us to the zoo. But that could be due to the fact that the only photo I have of her is us three outside the elephant exhibit. Angela is smiling, I'm asleep in the baby buggy, and mom is standing coolly to the side looking out of the frame. From what I can tell, I take after my dad in looks. Angela, however, is a spitting image of her.

"Jessica," Angela would always say, "mom will be back."

She'd say it with such confidence that I believed it; at least until my eighth birthday. Mom had texted dad she'd be back to celebrate it. It was easy to remember, I was born on the Fourth of July; the best holiday, after Thanksgiving and Christmas day. We were all were very excited to see mom for the first time in six years. Six years. Angela had decided to get up with dad to pick mom up from the airport. I was dragged along as well. We waited. Her flight was supposed to get in at seven that morning. It arrived. She didn't. Dad texted her, he tried calling but all he got was her voicemail which was conveniently full. We left the airport, Angela broken hearted, Dad disappointed and I left angry.

That day I knew mom would never be back. Even if we were the last people on earth, she would never come find us. Angela however believed that mom would come home. She believed until her high school graduation. Sending out her graduation announcements she made sure moms was tracked by the postal service and waited and watched its progress. The only address we had of moms was a random P.O. Box in Missouri, far away from the suburbs of San Jose, California. She

was excited when it was marked delivered. Angela waited for a response or an R.S.V.P. or anything from mom. But nothing came. All that was returned was some kind old lady's hand written note congratulating Angela on her graduation, a gift card and the note stating how we had the wrong P.O. Box number. It was nice that the lady gave Angela a gift card. But Angela threw it away and cried for two days.

I sometimes imagine what life would be like if Mom had stayed. We'd be a typical American family, one with 2.5 kids, a goldendoodle and a cat. In this fantasy of mine the dog's name was Max, the most boring dog name I could think of, and we'd have a black cat. Instead of joyriding my dad's jeep on my thirteenth birthday, I may have just rode my bike without a helmet. Angela wouldn't be afraid of the dark, and dad would smile more and be happier. He wouldn't have to work as hard or stress that we weren't making ends meet.

Dad showed us how to be tough.

How to pick ourselves up when it felt like our whole world was crumbling around us. Throughout this whole ordeal, my dad really stepped up. Becoming a single father overnight, he raised us. Angela was the easiest to raise. She was the kid who got straight A's, never got grounded and always helped with the chores. I however was the rebel. I made up for Angela's calm demeanor with my own crazy antics and behavior. My dad had to constantly ground me. And I deserved each and every grounding, gladly serving my time.

Mom,

If you're out there, we are fine.
We've managed to get on without
you.

You're not missed.

- Jessica

INQUIETUDE

ALKAIDTSUKI

It is an alarm that people are so constantly warned about, but never truly expect to experience in their lifetime. It's like a horrible pipe dream; you think about it and once in a while contemplate life after its encounter, but even then you doubt.

Right up until the day it comes true. The alarm flashes with white, amber, and red, its vicious siren drilling into my ears. It rests above my father's bedroom door, where he futilely tries to get some sleep.

The little sandman has evaded him often for some time now, bestowing upon him the curse of insomnia, so it's of little surprise when he fails again.

The siren screams, colors spinning and merging as paramedics and police get the call. "There is an active shooter on campus," the monotone voice says to me, words spilling out as if they were informing students of the lunch special.

Lights are shut off overhead, doors on either side of the library's lone classroom locked tight. The windows have no solid curtains, allowing murky light to spill across the abyssal floor. "Get under the tables," our advisor says, and every one of us obeys without a second thought. Really, could we afford to?

I duck under the table, backpack close beside me. I watch the towering doors stare at us with their one black eye while I make a weak effort to keep my breathing under

control. In, out. In, out. Keep calm, you idiot, or they might find you.

The siren repeats its death sentence.

"Everybody, turn off your cell phones," Mark tells us, shutting his own tool off and jamming it in his pocket.

...

I stop breathing altogether. My backpack was on the other side of the room, wasn't it? Could I afford to crawl across the room to turn it off? Could I afford to let it turn on? What if work called me? Would the shooter hear its traitorous ringtone? "I don't have my backpack," I whisper, gulping down the large lump forming in my throat.

"It's on the other side of the room."

"Then leave it alone."

I turn to repeat this statement to Mark; my phone is in my bag, which is on the other side of the room. What stops me is a roughly two-foot-tall bag stuffed with books and phone. My backpack.

A pale, trembling hand reaches into the pocket and pulls out the phone. With a subtle quake that only future me will notice, I click the one button that puts it on vibrate. One disaster averted. One to wait out.

Outside of the building, leafless branches sway in the cold wind. The hateful searchlight scours for our hiding place. Beside me, club members are trembling as I am trembling, crying as I wish to cry. One presses her neon green sweater sleeves to her face in an effort to hold her façade of calm. I only realize later that with that color, in her hidden corner, she was glowing like a beacon. Already, I can see the shooter's silver revolver. It's pointed at her first, the brightest light in the room.

"Take it off," I should say. "Hide it behind the podium or something so he can't see you." It's only when the adrenaline runs its course, permitting oxygen to find its way back into my brain, that I realize this potential disaster.

...

Dizziness, the loss of oxygen in the brain, is the second symptom that we should have caught. A headache that won't fade away. When I arrive home,

he fills a plate at the dinner table, then disappears back to his room. Hardly surprising. He's done this many times before. My dad's eating habits are often like moon phases. Sometimes, he'll eat a decent amount. Other days, he scantily eats a bite.

The difference is that this time my brothers disappear with him. They fade in and out like the silhouette of a phantom shooter. Or is it all a hallucination, brought about from the fear molding to my bones?

"Dad says to pray for him," my brother says.

Prayer is big in our family. We say a prayer every night as a family before bed.

But when Dad tells us to pray for him, the siren screams with the dreadful accompaniment of angel horns. Breathing a Hail Mary becomes an effort to choke through the heavy lumps in our throats. My youngest sister starts crying first. The sister before her cried next. We all hug each other and whisper, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

The alarm is not silenced when the paramedics come to my family's house, merely muted. They help my dad across the wood floor, assisting him as he steps down into the living room and up into the dining room. Outside, in the cold blackness, sits a metal gurney at the feet of the deck. Amber lights flick through the trees while the paramedics buckle my dad into the gurney, giving us a reassuring smile while they prep him for the ambulance. "We're going to take care of him, kids," they tell us.

...

Then they roll him away like a shooting victim, straight to the emergency room.

Back in the library classroom, I hide under a table, clutching my phone to my chest and praying nobody calls me. I hide in the darkness of a locked room, waiting and expecting to see the crazed eyes of the beast that would dare to come after our small, insignificant school. When the siren stops and the robotic, uncaring voice says, "Threat resolved," I finally pull myself out from beneath the table and offer a hand up for those

still on the floor. My legs shake; they hold me up while we all collect our composure, but silently threaten to drop me like a dead weight. I don't notice it until a while has passed; I collapse into the nearest editor seat and cry. And I cry again and again while I explain it all to my mom after she comes home. "Some idiot accidentally pushed a button and set off the active shooter alarm," I tell the family, putting up a brave face to convince myself that it was all stupid, that the counselors and support services at school were all unnecessary, over the top even.

But my thoughts remain the same, even hours after I was no longer bunkered beneath the tables.

"I could have died."

"I might never be able to drive back up my hill and see my family again. They might not even know something's wrong until they try to call me."

"Would anybody really miss me? Did I make enough of a difference to warrant tears for me?"

I cry in my mom's shoulder and let the cold wave rush down my spine, the spikes and hard lump crawl through my throat.

...

Not even pathetically diverting words like, "At least I know how to write a shooting situation now," can change the terror those five horrible minutes left with me.

In my home, five minutes becomes five hours. My mom calls from the hospital.

"Dad had a stroke," she tells us. I don't hear the words from her. My brother picks up the phone before I have the chance. It's around midnight when we get the news and about three in the morning when Mom finally gets home to sleep with my youngest sister as company rather than my dad. I have work in the morning. It's a full day's work.

My mom calls me during my lunch break. My dad had a minor stroke, but nothing serious. The whole family is at the hospital with him, watching movies by his bedside. I don't get off work until 6. The work keeps me going until I get in the dark blue, foreign hallways of St. John's.

My dad is in a bed as wide as he is, in a corner of a pale white room with the lights on low. His hearing is damaged like a gun went off beside him. One ear is deaf. The other

is impaired.

I bite my lip and feebly attempt to keep my eyes away from the dotted hospital gown he's been required to wear.

His symptoms were no hallucination, no shadow on the wall with a false pistol.

The verdict was there, black and white on the page like an autopsy report: Stroke.

My dad could have died.

I might have never been able to see my dad again.

What if I disappointed him? What if I wasn't the daughter he needed me to be?

...

Who cares if the stroke was so minor nobody had to do anything? Who cares if the lights haven't flashed since November? Who cares if I could write it off as, "Well, now I know how to write a real stroke?"

Fake shooter or minor stroke, it doesn't make a difference. The fear was real, even if the danger was not.

And no writer deserves to know that fear firsthand.

Alkaid Tsuki has been studying creative writing and dabbling in poetry and prose for over three years. Tsuki has been published in Metamorphose, a science fiction/fantasy magazine as well as The Salmon Creek Journal.

Shana Penta is an aspiring social media manager and copywriter who lives in Longview, WA, with her husband, five children, and two cats. Shana enjoys photography as a hobby. She will receive her B.A. Digital Technology & Culture from Washington State University Vancouver in 2020. "I have long believed that using art as a platform places a focus on social causes that will encourage connections and discussion around controversial subjects. In today's divided country, seeing signs of social togetherness are also signs of hope. Social identity promotes awareness, inclusivity, and can lead to higher self-esteem."

SIGNS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY



SHANA PENTA

HER

RENEE HOLLOPETER

Her brown hair was messy. It was the first thing I noticed about her. It was definitely brown, a warm, true brown, but its texture and type I couldn't figure out. I suppose the texture of her hair is a trivial thing, but it was the subject onto which I projected most of my mental energy for the first few months I knew her. Her hair was curly, but not curly curly. The kind of curly with ringlets in the back that slowly faded into waves in the front, with just a few ringleted wisps framing her face. A lot like mine, actually. But you could tell she didn't brush it, and that's what I think gave her that appeal. It suggested that she didn't care—or, at least, cared about more important things. Like playing the drums with strangers and leaving the national art gallery to make herself acquainted with interesting strangers. Sometimes, she would just throw it up into a bun. I thought it was cute how drips of water from her post-shower still-wet hair would run down from the back of her neck and leave dark spots on the back of her tee shirt. I remember the first day she came to work like this because it was the first day I noticed her freckles. Her messy brown hair made the freckles appear more of an afterthought, but that day it was like they wanted to be noticed. Like they wanted me to stare at them. Like they wanted me to watch the way their position on her face shifted as she laughed or smiled or squinted in confusion, instead of walking up to the customers in the front and asking if I could help them find anything,

or tuning that piano I had been half-heartedly working on for a little under an hour. The water marks on her shirt were fading, but if I really focused I could still notice the droplets gathered where her hair met the back of her neck, making the loose whips of dry hair glisten. For a second, I imagined what it would be like if those droplets were sweat instead of water, and if they were there because of me, late at night, when we were laying in my bed together, skin-to-skin and out of breath. But then I felt guilty about it and redirected my attention to tuning the piano.

The first time I felt that way about a girl was when I was a kid. I doubt I was any older than six or seven, but I was still old enough to recognize what I felt was a crush. Of course, not the kind of crush slightly more emotionally-evolved teenagers form when they're obsessive and idealistic, or even the ones adults form when they're reserved and aching for affection, but the kind little kids have that can't be characterized by anything other than admiration, fixation, and a fluttering, little heart. She was older than me, probably by three or four years, and we jumped on the trampoline together at our mutual friend's house. I knew she was older than me and cooler than me and more mature than me, but she was still so nice. She had short, messy blonde hair organized into a pixie cut. It felt wrong to feel that way about a girl, especially because somehow my young brain was able to recognize the feeling as the same feeling I had felt about a boy in my class at the beginning of the school year. I knew I was supposed to feel that way about boys my parents and aunts and girlfriends at school and favorite movies on TV told me so, but she was a girl, and although I had never been explicitly told so, I knew that wasn't supposed to happen. But she had short hair, and looked like this boy I had seen on TV before. That must be why I have a crush on a girl, I remember thinking. She just looks like a boy. But when I saw her messy brown hair and her freckles and the rest of her, I was acutely aware of her femininity. My attraction to her couldn't hide behind any masculine presentation on her part. Her messy brown hair was obvious and wasn't apologizing for its playfulness, its flirtatiousness. Her freckles had a blatant feminine charm that was girl-like and wonderful. I found

myself drawn to the way her hips reminded me of a violin, widening from her waist, followed by a slight concave and then followed again by the round curve of her outer thighs. I noticed her long, sleek legs, the round fullness of her breasts, the way she sat with her thighs tucked up to her chest, slumped over in her chair—everything about her appearance and mannerisms were without question, unmistakably feminine. *She's a girl*, I thought to myself over and over. *She doesn't look like a boy. She is a girl.*

It was initially all just physical attraction. I thought she was adorable, and then beautiful, and then so smashingly stunning that I couldn't even look at her without blushing or fearing my heart might fall out of my chest from beating so quickly, which was when I knew it wasn't just curiosity that drew me to her. It wasn't the allure of being with a woman that made me nervous.

I knew I was in love with her when I thought about what it would be like if I brought her home to meet my dad. It's funny, I never used to get nervous about bringing guys home to meet him because there was something so comfortable about masculine energy meeting masculine energy, security in knowing everything was the way it should be. I knew my dad might act a little tough, like fathers are supposed to, and my male love interest would act a little shy, but also a little cocky and self-assured. So my dad would act masculine in his protectiveness and the guy would act masculine in his underlying entitlement to my affection and that would be that—it might be awkward, but there would be nothing left to figure out. Their relationship would be written out for them. But I couldn't stop writing out this new scenario in my head, what it would be like if I took her home to meet him, if I even had the chance. In my head, my dad wouldn't know how to act at first, but she would be goofy and slightly ridiculous and unreserved, and how could he not love that? Before we would go back out for the night, probably to get ice cream, and my father would say you girls drive safe, we would eat dinner together and she would talk about tuning the string instruments at the shop. She would tell the story of how we first started talking while she noticed me half-assing my way through the sale of an upright bass, and how adorable she thought



"I DO"
SAMMANtha THACKER

it was that I had no clue what I was recommending but would never let that be known. My father and I would laugh, maybe I would make a comment about how that was so Pisces of me, and then she would talk about how much she hates astrology. When I think of it now, I'm sure she would have said something about how people get to decide who they are for themselves.

To get the chance for this to happen, I would have to talk to her about something more than just tuning and selling and telling people about instruments. We talked a lot at work about instruments, what she liked to play best, what I liked to play best, what we wished we could play.

We would even play for each other, or together. Sometimes it felt like exactly what coworkers at a music shop would do, but sometimes it felt like what two people who were deeply infatuated with each other but didn't have the guts to admit it would do. The first

time I brought up something besides work, I brought up Big Sur. I told her about the time I drove down from Berkley with my dad for his birthday weekend to go camping, and I told her about how the people there reminded me of her, which, in retrospect, was a pretty stupid thing to say. Nobody ever reminds me of her, and nobody before I met her ever did. There are people similar to her, with messy hair and long legs and a harmonious laugh, but nobody is ever the perfect combination of those things, along with all the other things like her vernacular that was specific to her and her happy cynicism and her ability to talk to strangers. But I think I was just referring to the effortless and the way people there always dress like they're hiking. Regardless, I told her that and she said she had never been. I told her about the way the rolling green mountains with rocky crags kiss the turquoise ocean, and how when you see Big Sur you're convinced it's the only place on the planet where that happens. This was about four months into the job, so given our already-blossoming friendship, she told me I would have to take her there. I liked the way she said I would have to take her there, like she was mine to take around and introduce things to. When I wasn't busy helping an elementary-aged boy pick out his first guitar or tuning the display pianos so that people could come in and play chopsticks or the right-hand melody of *Fur Elise* on them, I would think about taking her to Big Sur. I imagined she would tie her messy brown hair back into a bandana. I thought about how we would hike, go to the beach, and pull over to the side of the road to take pictures of each other and smell the wild sage, but I also thought about how Big Sur would finally be the time when I would get a sign from her. And if not a sign that she was also hopelessly in love with me and intoxicated by my very existence, at least a sign that I could kiss her outside of our tent before we went in for the night.

I got lots of signs in the weeks following our discussion about Big Sur. She would come up behind me and wrap her arms around my shoulders and ask

me about the kind of food they have in Big Sur. I would catch her staring at me while I was working and she wasn't, but instead of meeting me with a coquettish grin and smooth ocean eyes like almost-lovers might, she met me with a big goofy laugh that was confusingly flirtatious and platonic all at once. Eventually, a pretty big sign was when she started asking me about how much it would cost. For, say, a weekend trip? She said sure, for a weekend trip—two nights and three days. I thought about it and threw a number out there: \$100 for the two of us.

Berkley is 144 miles from Big Sur, so an entire tank of gas was enough; say, \$40 for gas. \$40 for a total of five hours with her in her Forester, during which we sang loudly all of Rumors by Fleetwood Mac—the only CD that was in the pocket behind the passenger seat. We joked about the folk songs people would come in and play on the fiddles. Some Irish, but mostly just American folk songs that we couldn't remember the lyrics to or the names of. Then there was the campground, which was \$10 per car per night, so \$20 for lodging. \$20 for two nights in the same tent, drunk off hard pear cider, laughing about the time she slept with some guy from the Berkley tennis team at a party just because her friend bet she couldn't pull it off, and that time in high school when I had sex in my dad's truck when it was broken down in our backyard and we just wanted somewhere to be alone. I didn't tell her about how I hoped someday I'd get to do that with her, but I wanted to. We stopped at Trader Joe's and bought some food for the weekend, which included their off-brand version of Swedish Fish that she claimed were much better than the real thing, plus the obvious meal foods and that pear cider. That bill came to \$50. \$50 to learn about how she won't eat hardly any carbohydrates aside from white potatoes and white bread.

\$50 to watch the small bites she takes when she tries something new she isn't entirely sure she'll like, like the tempeh I fried over the fire, since it wasn't something she grew up with her mom making for her. There were a few other expenses, too, like the cost to park the Forester at the state park. That was \$20 to watch the setting sun with her over the Pacific, to see the look on her face that everyone

gets when they witness the edge of the earth—the way the steep, welcomingly overbearing cliffs surrender to the deceptively gentle sweep of the ocean. The look reads pure wonder—you can't act like you've seen something like that before, like it's something you're used to. Every pair of eyes accepts it as something greater than they could ever understand or ration with, something beyond the false knowingness of human intellect. \$20 to fall even more in love with her in that moment. Her, the girl who genuinely believes she understands the ins and outs of human cloning just two years into her molecular biology major at Berkley, coming face to face with something she could not comprehend. It was something nature put in front of her, something that was there long before the two of us were and would remain there long after we returned north, irregardless of who acknowledges it or yields to it, and she was speechless. She didn't try to explain it or confront it with logic. She sat with it, submitted to the mystery and the forces at work, and watched the sun return to the Pacific. I watched the way her messy brown hair glowed in the twilight.

There were two other things, too, I guess. She bought a tee shirt from the general store that had a painted picture of the same view we watched that night at the state park. That shirt was \$25. She wore it by the fire that night and realized, as we were packing up to leave on Sunday morning, that it smelled too strong of smoke for her to tolerate. She asked if I would wash it for her and bring it in to work, since she probably didn't do laundry as often as I did. I guess she wanted to wear it sooner than her procrastination would allow her to. I told her I would, but I never brought it into work, nor did I wash it, and she never asked about it.

The only remaining thing was the bra I bought from a little Berkley boutique, the kind that's expensive without trying to be, right before the trip. It was ambitious of me to assume I would need a new longline cream lace bralette that was the perfect mix of feminine and minimal on our weekend together outside of work, but I saw the way she looked at me and smiled as I showed kids how to use a bow on a cello, and the way she snuck up on me from behind to

wrap her arms around my shoulders and tell me a joke. The bra was \$40. \$40 to nervously pack the bra into my backpack, running my fingers over the back where the delicate lace details stopped and the fasten began. I pictured her hands working on the fasten while I straddled her in the tent at night after a long night of talking and drinking in front of the fire. I could picture it in my head.

We would be sitting side-by-side on the blanket and I would say something about the sunset we saw, how nature does what it needs to do without question and how beautiful that is. I don't know how I expected her, the girl who despises poetry, to recognize that as an advance, but I did.

I said all those things, too. She just nodded. She talked a lot that night about how she wishes she could stop having such casual sex with guys and asked how I manage to get through life without succumbing to every hot, horny person. I said something about how it's hard because I really, truly, deeply want to, and she said maybe had something to learn from each other. But it never went any further than that.

I'm not sure why I expected it to just happen so naturally like that. I think I might rely too much on neo-spiritual stuff. I see too many parallels between humanity and nature and take advice from them, assuming everyone else does as well, and that they understand. I thought being in Big Sur would help her understand how I love her and how, to a certain degree, she loved me too. She never admitted it, maybe she never even recognized it as the kind of love I did, but I felt it. I thought she would be in Big Sur and be completely humbled by the sunset and the cliffs and the ocean and then look over at me with a kind of knowingness. Like, oh, now I understand. I'm in love with her. Every ounce of me hoped she would. I also trusted the stars, since I'm a Pisces and she's a Virgo, and the two are supposed to join for supremely emotional relationships. But maybe the comment she made in my imagination was true—maybe people decide what they do with themselves, and that's that.

So it was really \$195 for that weekend. A few weeks after that weekend she moved east to Massachusetts, where she transferred to from Berkley. We went out drinking one Saturday, between the trip and her last day in Berkley, and we were still friendly at work, but nothing escalated. The trip initially seemed like an investment in something that would perpetuate into something bigger like being girlfriends and holding hands at the Berkeley student farmer's market and sloppy, half-awake morning kisses. But it only ever turns into anything like that about half of the time. The other half of the time, it's just about exactly what it was. And when it's like that, the whole experience feels tangible. It's not some big-picture thing, it's more like a cardboard box that you hold in your arms and see everything inside it for what it is. Not an investment, not even a recognition of your life as being out of alignment or a radical new awareness of yourself and your identity. It was just about loving her. Everything about who she was, her quirks, her smile, her presence, I was in love with it. That was all there was. It was about one soul recognizing the beauty in another without question or shame.

So I spent April through August working at the music shop near campus, and I spent \$195 dollars. I put that in, and I got an imaginary box in my arms filled with my love for her, a bra with the tag still attached, and a Big Sur tee shirt that smelled like campfire smoke. A few weeks ago, I took the shirt to consignment and found a few pieces of messy brown hair on it still. They didn't look as messy when they didn't belong to her.

Renee Hollopeter is a WSU Vancouver student from La Center, Washington studying English and Women's Studies. She writes predominantly short fiction and is currently working on a poetry chapbook. As a queer writer, much of Hollopeter's works explore queer identity in all of its complexity.



WEATHER THE STORM



HOLLY SLOCUM

Holly Slocum is an alum of WSU Vancouver's Digital Technology & Culture program. "Weddings always make me feel a little nostalgic, like I'm a little girl in awe of all the pretty dresses again, but this wedding was particularly special. The moment the bride started to walk down the aisle it started to rain, but the smiles never faded from their faces."

THE WHITTEDS



SARAH MARTINEZ

Sarah Martinez is a student at WSU Vancouver. "This is a nostalgic picture for me for a lot of reasons. One is because it meant the world that after 24 years of hearing their [her grandparents] stories and experiencing Europe through their knowledge of it. I got to see this part for myself, but I also got to do it with them which had been a dream of mine since I was a little girl".



HOSPITALS

EMILY LOZIER

What happens when seeing is not believing?

Eyes wide

Heart beating

Vision Fading

Why, I think I must be dying. But no – it was not me. The sickly sanitary scent of a hospital merely oppressed me. But no, it was not me.

Beeping

Rushing

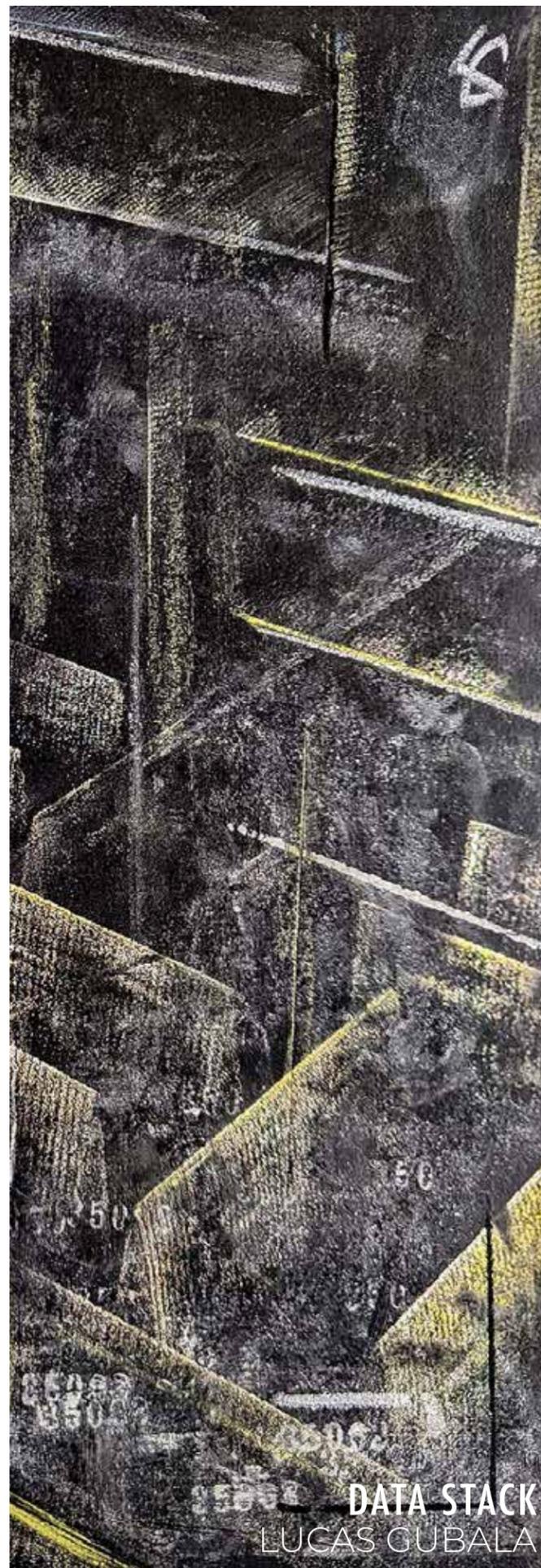
Scrambling

...

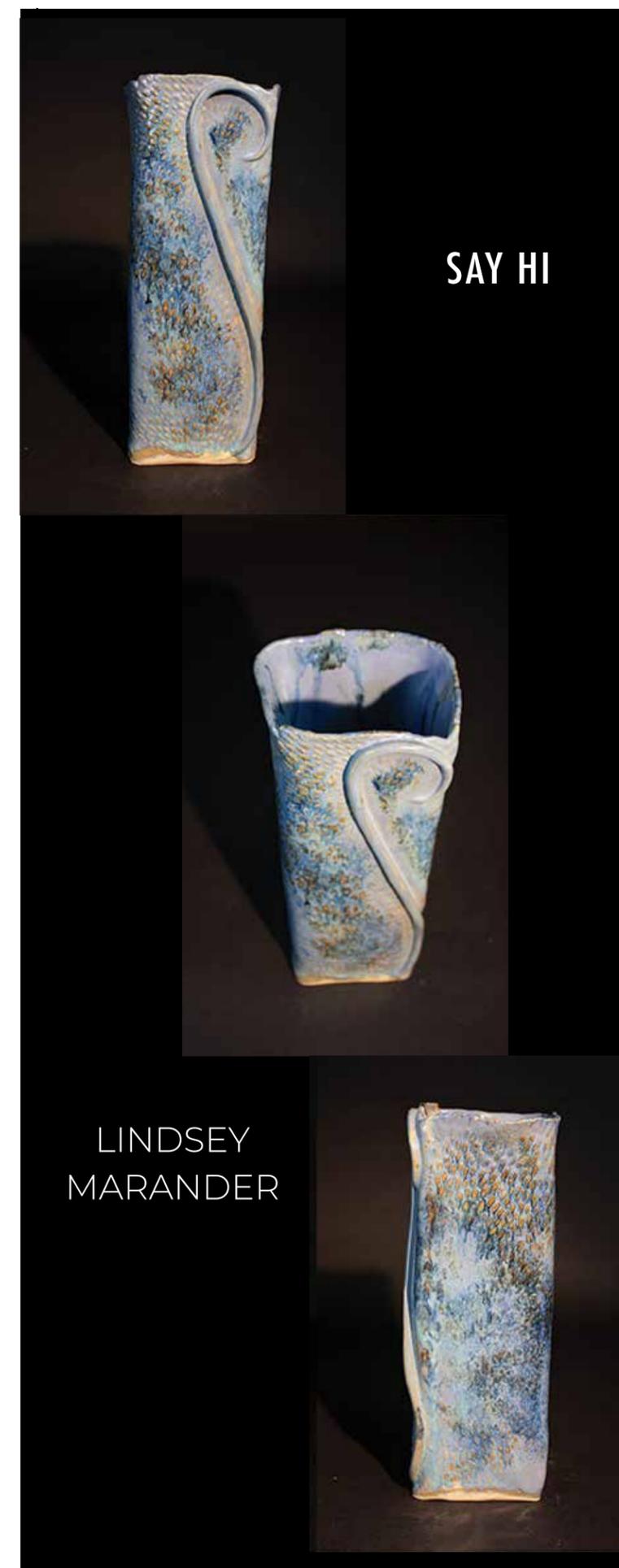
And then, hush.

The silence held me as somber faces looked around, unsure. My mother's eyes were no longer blue, but black like the piano keys in minor chords.

Emily Lozier is an English Literature major at WSU Vancouver. This is her senior year. "Hospitals" has to do with experiencing death and how it impacts both relationships afterward and the way I see hospitals in general."



DATA STACK
LUCAS GUBALA



SAY HI

LINDSEY
MARANDER

THE PATIENT HE HATCHED INTO

ROBERT CIESLA

I may be twenty-four or twenty-five years old. Either way, the knoll ahead of me is loaded with green luster. This is day seven without pills and their suppression. This is my first ever meaningful sunset.

Mass is thought. My thoughts may or may not be picked up by other beings. I could've dreamed up this sunset and this grassy mound in front of me. It would've existed then as it exists right now. To create life, too, takes only thought. I could picture anyone, any set of hair, eyes, and interests: such a person would already be found somewhere. Thought creates life; the simplicity of truth is so elevating. I have to meet no-one. I have to hold nobody. I can picture them to create them.

I, too, was thought up. It's no coincidence I share my first name with Erwin Schrödinger, father of quantum theory. The darker it gets the more light spirals I observe rising from the ground, all of them appearing in warm colors. I don't want them to be curious about me. I want them to be happy. I can think lifetimes worth of memories for them or for myself. There is no distance between any two points. Faraway street lights flicker out. The harmful effects of society disappear. No more mental wards, no more taxes or television.

There may come a time when everybody stops believing in you, someone said. Maybe it's for the best, another voice whispered. You were treated differently because you are different. You felt like a stranger because you are one. There are still an infinity of classrooms in every direction, decades after my graduation.

I wish I had known at the school counselor's office what I know now. If only I had believed in what I believe now, years before my medication. Hands tightly wrapped around cold steel chains, feet in the air, swinging higher and higher, a lightness finally dawns on me. It can't be ripped apart by rejection or death. I can and will create life with my thoughts far, far into the horizon.

Some meaningful beings exist in a living past, others become reality in the future. I create them all with an abundance of thought and nothing else. A nameless, ginger woman in the iron age. Instant mutual attraction, created tonight. Some highway at night in 1986. A woman in her early thirties with jet-black medium-length bangs. She gets hit by a truck, after a fight ended in tears. We could've had kids. Her remains may or may not be in some cemetery. The information she contained is elsewhere, altered, but not gone. The trauma of her transformation, from form to different form, is still present in these ever-ascending light spirals.

The future holds nothing. Time ends tonight. I have every conversation I had playing back on repeat, swinging ever higher in the cooling night air. The chains rattle as true excitement is building up.

Other shapes now begin to appear, changing into innumerable faces all glowing and vanishing, again and again. Many experiences unfold from many centuries. A few new planets appear in the sky. All is relatively well.

The day of the shooting is both here and everywhere. The actors, the acted-upon, the sights and sounds, the chaos. Those destroyed can be created again, in exact form if need be. Infinite lives do exist in the realm of thoughts and focus. So as I swing ever higher on the courtyard, I re-create those I killed. Ann, the quiet and edgy author-to-be who never became one. She had such beautiful eyes and a steadfast presence in the school corridors. I loved her very much, but she didn't see past my sentimentality and lack of athleticism.

Jonathan Abbott is a WSU student who entered his piece "Staring into the Void" into Salmon Creek Journal's Fall Photo Showcase. "To me, it speaks to Nostalgia more towards the definition rather than an experience. An individual when they go down memory lane can almost get lost in their thoughts and I feel this piece, as you stare into it can get lost as well."

All is forgiven, Ann, you are reborn.

The sadness of the foreign exchange student still hangs to me. He had no name, but everybody made him several: geek, loser, reject. He just got in the way, so he was removed. I didn't mean to do that. But I'll re-create him tonight, in all his melancholic splendor.

There're other figures I don't fully remember. Their names escape me as much as my high-school inner world did them. They are simply bodies and mass of heavy energy, now having been completely recycled.

The active shooter, too, is no more. The patient he hatched into is gone. He becomes one with the cold air and light spirals in a moment of creation. Erwin is no more, and who is thought up in his place will be vastly different. All thanks to a creator of unknown origin. Perhaps, that will be a gardener in Peru, a thousand years into the future. Or maybe a wolf in the middle-ages, about to eat his potential hunters alive.

Some noise from a past world remains. Psychiatric nurses call someone out, cordially at first, and less so some time later. There's running and laughter. I can no longer gauge the temperature. I have left the courtyard swings. I can, however, see the glittering faces disappear into new identities. I'm joining them soon, very soon.

SWEET TOBACCO

HALLEY WARE

Piling crystallized euphoria, heated

Dragged past the second crack. Electric

Remnant, grind and groan. Moistened

Bloom of smooth infusion

Emanating smoked sweat. Stirred,

Spooned textured exterior,

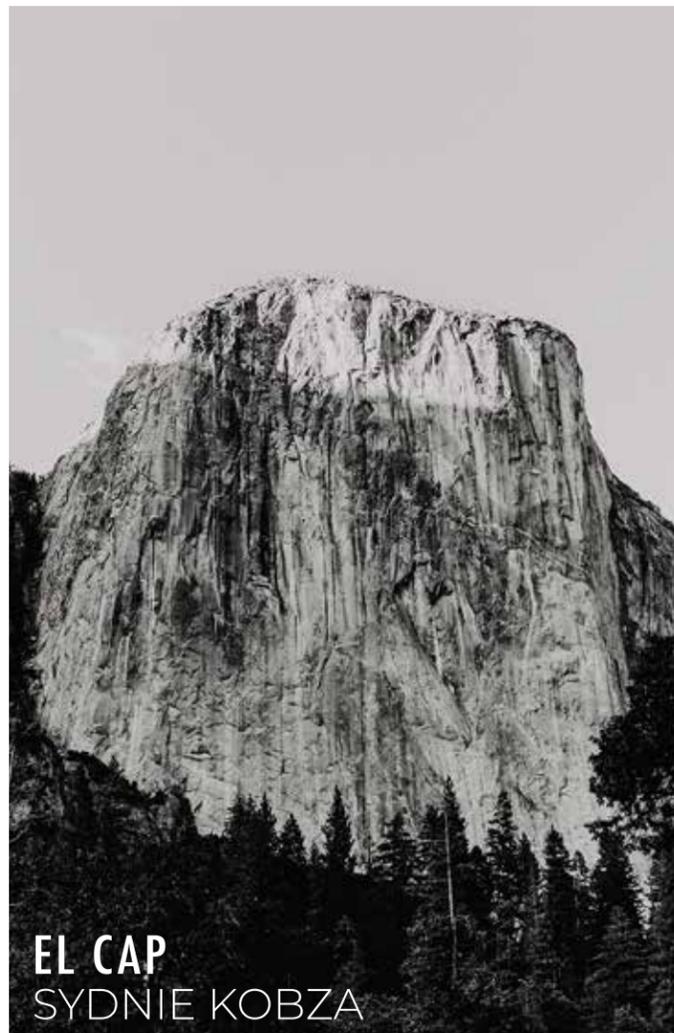
Slurped, pressed, and swirled across the palate.

Beans like sweet tobacco in the jungle's

Exploited depths and distinctive notes

Ravished by acidic tongues, tasting broken

History, sharp and fresh.

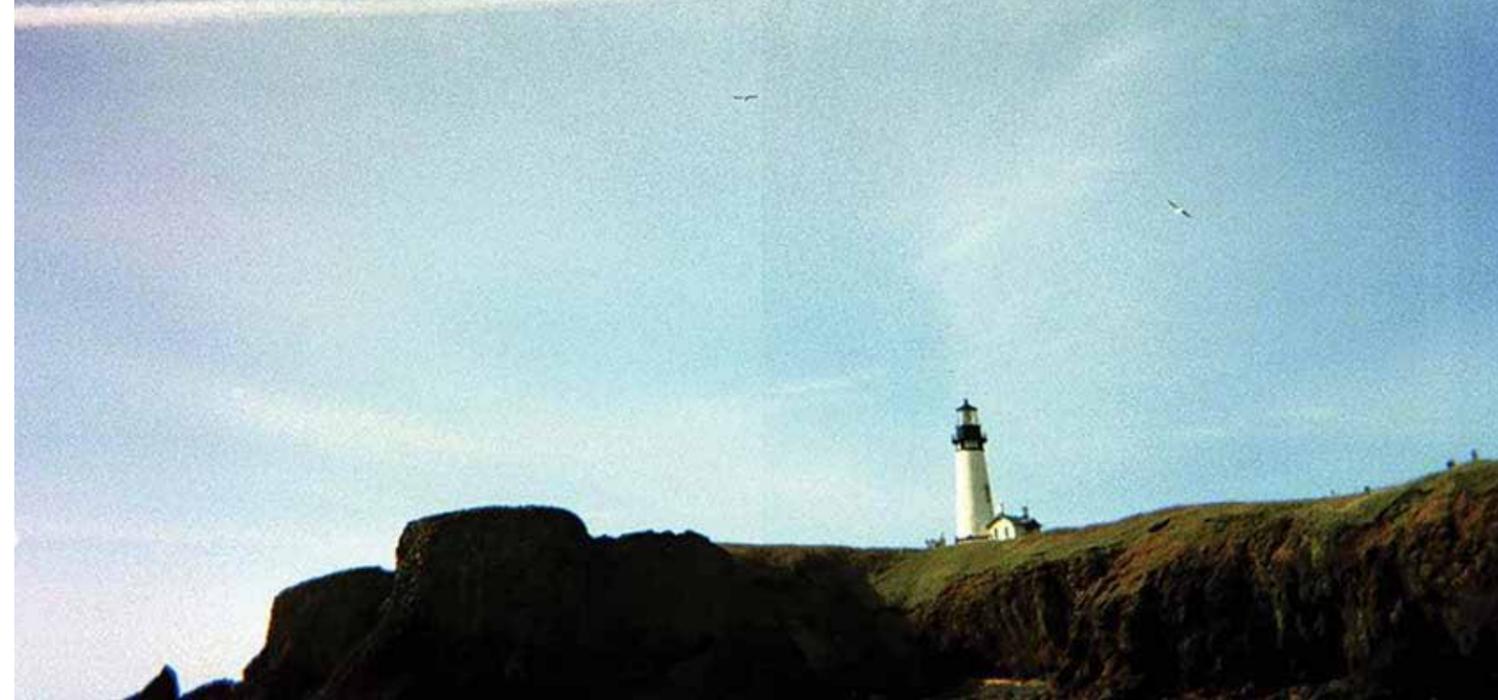


EL CAP
SYDNE KOBZA

YAQUINA HEAD

"Yaquina Head in Newport, OR is one of my favorite places to visit, ever since I was a little kid. This photo was taken on an old film camera, and these two aspects bring home the feeling of nostalgia for me. The muted, blue colors and mildly cloudy sky remind me of the atmosphere of the day I took the photo."

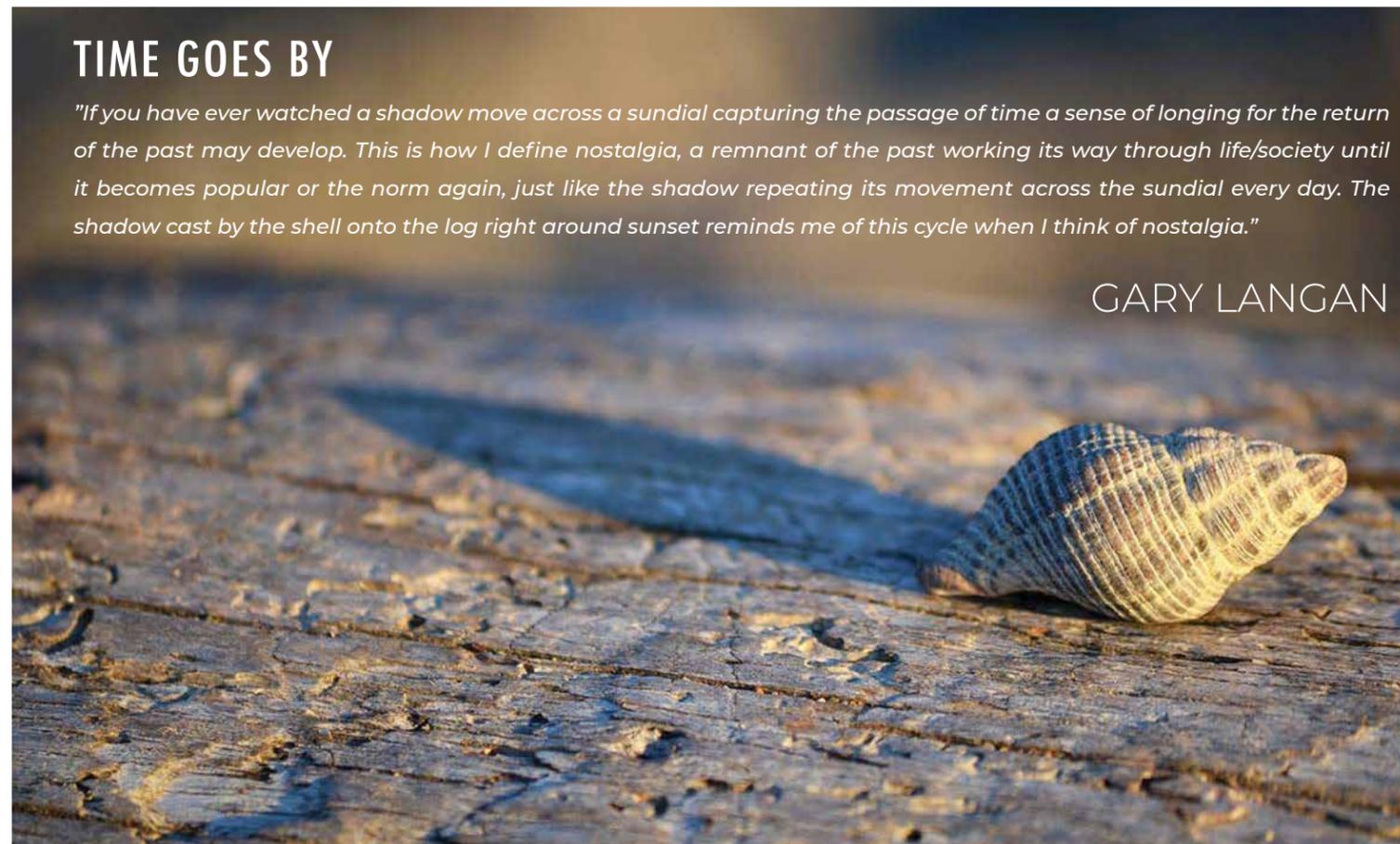
SARAH SUMMERHILL



TIME GOES BY

"If you have ever watched a shadow move across a sundial capturing the passage of time a sense of longing for the return of the past may develop. This is how I define nostalgia, a remnant of the past working its way through life/society until it becomes popular or the norm again, just like the shadow repeating its movement across the sundial every day. The shadow cast by the shell onto the log right around sunset reminds me of this cycle when I think of nostalgia."

GARY LANGAN



UNDERTOW

SARAH SUMMERHILL

On the last day of July, and the last day of our annual camping trip, Joey and I wandered off onto the beach to let the ocean water wash the sun's bake away from our skin as the cooler beach night began to set upon us for the evening. We'd been gone for maybe twenty minutes, leaving behind the celebration of summer's height and the people singing and cooking up s'mores in the campfire, to sit by ourselves still in the sand inches from the approaching tide. The atmosphere of evening pushed against my skin, slipped under the cracks of my sweater at my wrists and waist, and pulled, begging me to take off running along the sea and fade into the light colors of that night's sunset as nothing but a blur in the photograph. Instead, I sat feet from Joey, with Sparky, his golden retriever-Rottweiler mix between us, and hoped the new, unfamiliar air between us would shift away from our bodies and our hearts like the atmosphere of summer.

We were barely sixteen at the time, and on maybe our tenth or eleventh consecutive annual neighborhood camping trip; but in the past year, the air between us had grown rigid, and I began to think about my words before they left my mouth and the lengths of silences between us grew not only longer, but different; they weren't invited, but forced, awkward. At times, it felt as if the once unbreakable bond between us had split open, like an overripe fruit had invited flies in to mess things up and decompose us so we could become a

part of the ground, and eventually, grow again, but this time, apart.

That night at the water, I picked absentmindedly at my sweater, purple and burnt orange flaked with copper thread, the stitches piling from years of wear. My mom had made it for me when I was younger, and it was much too big for me then; now, it fit cozily.

He looked forward. His eyes were furrowed at the sea, and I didn't understand that was possible, to be angry with the sea. "Why are you still wearing that sweater?" He asked, first breaking the surface of our silence.

"I always wear this sweater," I responded.

"It's a girl's sweater," he replied.

"No, it's not," I answered. "I'm wearing it."

He leaned back on the sand, arms behind his head, eyes closed to the light, brows furrowed. "It's sparkly."

We used to spend this same last night of camp running along the beach, always followed by Sparky, beating in the sand while the ocean lapped at our feet each time we got just a bit too close. We ran until our lungs were licked with a gentle, satisfying fire and we collapsed onto the ground in a heap of boy and dog and waited until the constellations began to appear and we could spot the Baseball Cap, as we called it, in the sky.

I always called it the Big Bear until one day, Joey remarked that it didn't look anything like a bear after all, and I said, "well maybe bears looked different in Ancient Greece," and we looked in a book which said it's also called the Ursa Major, but that didn't make any sense to either of us, so then one day Joey pulled my favorite NASA hat from off my head and held it up to the sky and we connected the dots to see the Baseball Cap. That, and Orion, which you can't see in the summertime, were the only two constellations we could recognize, but we could stare at the stars for hours and hours just wondering about all the other things we didn't know yet.

"Is everything okay?" I asked. By this point, I wasn't scared to ask him these types of questions.

His eyes tightened, like the world was too much for him in this moment. I did that sometimes, to forget. Shut my eyes really tight and hummed.

"It's fine," he said.

"You're angry," I said, trying my best to sound matter of fact.

"I'm not angry."

"Yes, you are. That's why you're acting like this."

"Like what?" It pissed me off that he was able to look so relaxed, lying in the sand with his arms behind his head. I hated the way he could draw me in to ask him these sorts of questions, and then turn around on me. "I'm not acting like anything," he said.

For as long as I'd known him, Joey was filled with a kind of fire I didn't understand. He talked back to his parents, he spoke up when he was passionate about something, and he got into trouble a hell of a lot more than I did. He's also the smartest person I know; I may have preferred to spend my rainy days inside reading for hours and learning everything I could about the world and outer space and the universe, but Joey could pick things up from looking at them and observing them. He was always one step ahead of me, understanding things about how the world worked that I could only supply a name to. He figured things out by pushing boundaries, boundaries our parents would call dangerous, but they taught him about the world and how to move within it. But as we got older, that fire changed within him, made him a force of nature. Whatever I felt, he felt twice as hard, and his emotions made him an inferno to anyone who came close. He was warmer, physically, not like a fuzzy kitten or like Sparky, but more like a furnace, or a campfire, which is nice until it makes you cry.

I turned back to the sea, where bits of stars strived to glow against the remaining light of sun, and searched for one I'd be able to remember. I kept getting distracted by my eyes unfocusing and wandering to some other spot in the sky. No color from the sunset was left in the Horizon. Now, everything was blue.

Sparky moved from beside me to come in between us, blocking Joey's view of me. I thanked the dog under my breath, but Joey scrambled up anyway to meet my eyes.

COASTAL SUNSET

ELENA MONTALTO

“Like what?” he said again.

“You’re all quiet. You won’t talk to me.”

“I’m talking to you now.”

“You know what I mean,” I exhaled.

“Do I?” He asked, a bit jokingly.

I laid back. Polaris had appeared above us in the sky.

I remembered that I did know about Polaris, how sailors looking at it could find their way by doing so.

“What’s wrong with my sweater?” I asked again, closing my eyes.

“I didn’t say anything was wrong with your sweater. I just said it was a girl’s sweater.”

“Who cares if I wear a girl’s sweater?”

“I don’t,” he replied. “I just asked why you were wearing it.”

“Why not?”

“Because, Charlie,” he said, irritated, “it’s weird.”

“See? Now you’re angry.”

“I’m not--.” He paused, sticking a hand into his oily hair, causing it to stand up on its ends, like Einstein. “I’m not angry.”

Sparky sniffed at my face, and at my throat, where I could feel my heart picking up the pace. I opened my eyes to the darkening skies. It was really starting to get dark now.

“Why do you care anyway?” Joey asked, plummeting back into the sand beside me. Sparky switched to sniffing him.

“I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.”

“It’s annoying. I’ll wear what I want.”

“Fine,” he said. “Wear what you want.”

I knew the game he played. That inferno Joey lived within had grown with me at the edges, within the first ring of fire, and though it had helped to close me out of his emotional circle, he hadn’t been able to wire me off from all I already knew about him. He tested people out, mixed up conversations to get the results he wanted, and I felt him doing it to me—always leaving me speechless, without a corner to back into, just out in the open and completely vulnerable to either turning the conversation

myself or letting cold silence in. In a way, it wasn’t my least favorite thing about him. Usually he took the conversation wherever I wanted it to go anyway, by pushing me to take it there.

“You think it’s weird. You don’t like my girly sweater. Or my long hair,” I said. Vulnerability washed over me. Suddenly, I realized how open the space around us was; no barriers blocked us from anyone’s view. I turned my head, but for the time being, we were alone.

He looked back up at the sky. “Look. It’s the Baseball Cap.”

I held my cap up to the sky.

“I like your long hair,” Joey said.

“What?”

“I said I like your long hair. And your sweater.”

“Then why do you care if I wear it?”

“Do you really think I’m angry?” He asked.

Sparky laid back down between us, forcing us both up on our elbows, squeezing our eyelids together to peer at each other in the darkness.

“I’m not angry. I’m frustrated,” he said.

“Why?”

“We’re changing.”

I laughed. “That’s stupid.”

A voice called for Sparky from up the beach. The dog scrambled up out of the sand and ran up the beach, and the voice of Joey’s mom sang over the hills with a warning to return to camp soon.

“In a good way?” I asked.

“What?”

“Are we changing in a good way?”

“Maybe. It’s different,” he said.

“I’m different?”

“Yeah. You’re more open. Not just with the clothes, and the hair, but...just in general.” He smiled. “It takes some getting used to.”

I knew I had changed in the past year, grown taller, let my hair grow out, shed some of the baby fat around my chin and on my limbs; and since joining the running team last spring, I’d formed some muscle on my legs and had begun to look like somewhat of

an actual human. I hadn’t realized or assumed that he would notice.

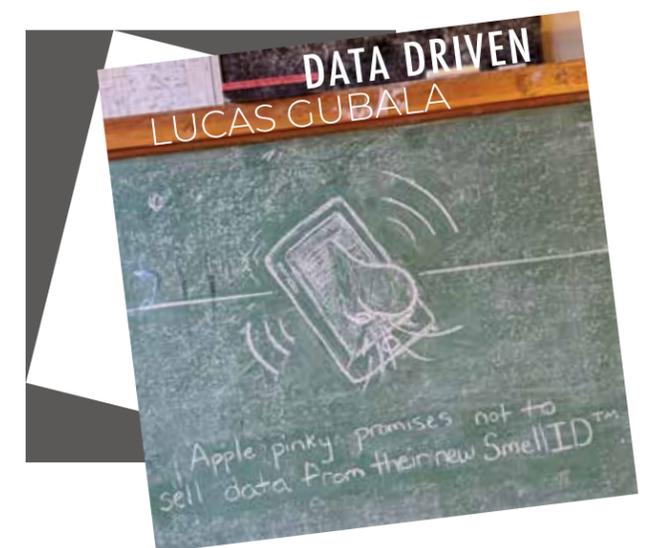
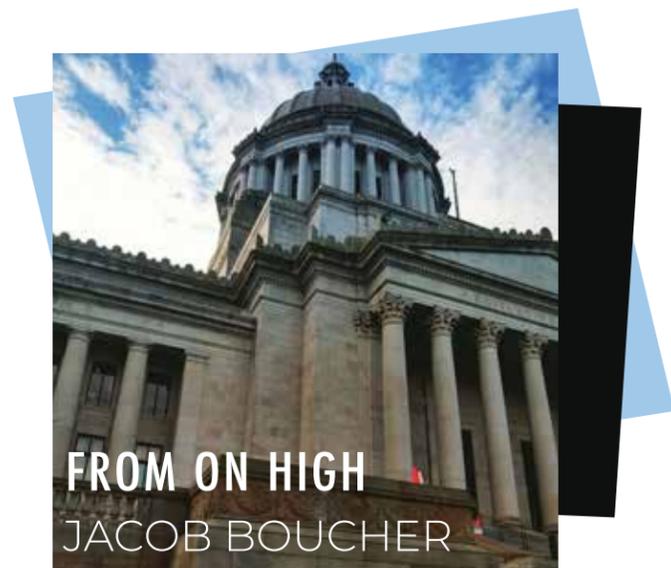
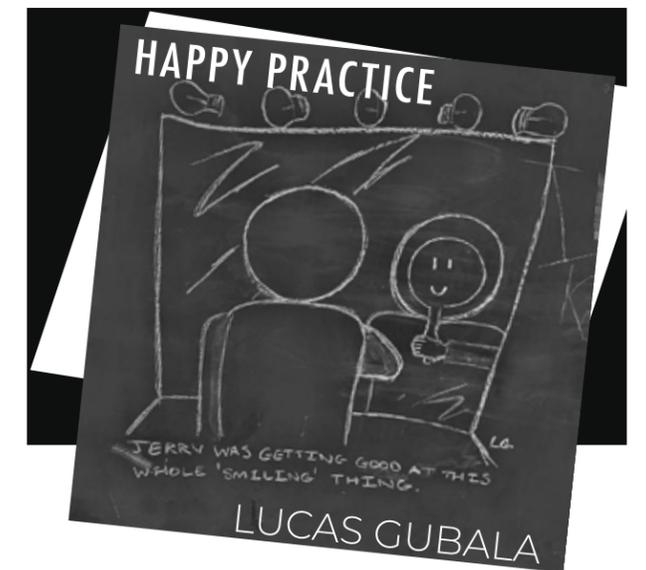
For a moment, silence filled the atmosphere around us again; this time, filled with potential. Joey shivered against the cooling wind of the evening that now settled upon us, having failed to bring a sweater with him when we first wandered off what seemed like so long ago. I reached for my nape and pulled sweater over my head with one hand, balled it up, and tossed it to him, though he was only a foot away from me.

“You’re cold,” I said, smiling. Joey slipped his arms through the sweater and put it on—if it was slightly too big for me, it fit perfectly on him. His hair mussed from the static I’d left in the fabric. I ran a hand through my own hair and unraveled the sleeves of my flannel button-up before falling back down in the sand.

I gazed at him under the nightfall, studied the sharp curves of his nose and compared them to my own, so much more feminine, and wondered if he liked that feature of myself in the same way he liked my long hair and my girly sweater.

Joey laid down beside me, and we left behind any old traditions of camp to play a new game: inching our fingers towards each other’s, waiting for the moment when the backs of our hands finally bumped into each other and we could decide who would be the one to roll their fingers backwards and latch onto the other’s, a sort of pinky-promise with the index finger.

We only had a few moments left in this spot, as the tide finally lapped at our toes in the sand and all light had disappeared for the evening. My wrist scratched against the wool of my sweater on Joey’s arm as I moved into his oddly soft, dainty, hand. Now, the stars bloomed in full above us, and I searched for familiar patterns that I hoped to one day be able to name.



ANXIETY VERSUS DISORDER

JASON VEDETTE
and NICOLÁS CARRIEDO
Member of the Vedette System

Hey,
It's anxiety
Back again to ruin your life
With reminders of your lack
of importance
How cute,
You thought I was gone.

Knock knock
It's anxiety
Oh, you thought strong words
could make me go away?
Ha ha!
Here I am again
And no amount of 'fuck off'
I am enough
I am talented
I am brave
I am beautiful
And you are wrong'
Will ever make me go away.

Hey,
Where do you think you're going?
You know that audience is laughing at you?
You know they hate every word?
You know your voice is stupid?
You know your body is gross?
Where do you think you're going?

Knock, knock
It's anxiety
Oh, you thought I went
away?
No way.
I'm here to stay.

**Hey,
You'll never be good enough
You're too fat
You're too skinny
You're too pale
You're too ugly
Ignore that compliment,
Ignore that flirting,
Because you will never be good
enough.**

Hey,
It's anxiety
I just took a quick nap
Did you like the break?
You better have,
Because I'm here to stay.

Knock knock,
I'm back again
I hate your stupid games
You can't make me go silent
You can't stop me
I am powerful!
You are weak.

Hey,
Stop that,
You can't outdo me
You can try to muzzle me
But I am here
And you are there
And I'll be waiting for my
chance to strike again.

Hey,
Stop doing that!
You are weak.
You are worthless.
You are stupid.
Your life's work is terrible.
That 'friend' just pities you.
You're a mess,
A fucking mess,
And you need me.

Hey!
I'm your guardian
I keep you safe from failure
I keep you safe from people
I keep you safe!
Where do you think you're going?
What do you think you're doing?
You can't outsmart me.

Hey!
I said stop that!
Come back here!
How are you doing that?
Why are you trying again?
Why are you getting back up?
Why do you keep saying
You're good enough?

Hey!
I am Anxiety
My big brother,
Anxiety Disorder,
Will never leave you alone.
He's a bully.
I'm sorry.

**Knock Knock,
It's Little Brother Anxiety!
I'll protect you,
I'll guide you,
I'll love you!
But don't listen to big brother
Disorder,
Because if you do,
You will never breathe
You will never believe
And you will never grow.**

WHY MONA, WHY?

JEFF HARVEY

With a swirl of cigarette smoke and the fragrance of Aquanet announcing her entrance, I looked up and saw Myrtle stomping her way into the dressing area, carrying a garment bag. Fresh from two hours at The Beauty Place, she sauntered in with a lacquered bouffant that added three inches to her height, making her almost six feet tall. And, without a word, she opened her bag and pulled out a muumuu, which resembled what a pilgrim might have worn to the first luau. She stopped in front of me, took a puff, and tossed that thing at me.

“Look at what I got you to wear for the talent portion of the pageant.”

I flung it right back at her. “I’m not going to wear that. It will make me look like every housewife in Baldwin.”

She scratched her eyebrow a few times. “Black won’t make you look as fat, plus this dress came from Goldsmith’s in Memphis. Elvis shops there.”

Leave it to Myrtle to remind me—again—that I wasn’t the ideal size for a beauty queen. I knew I could lose a few pounds, but I didn’t think I was that big. But the way she acted, you’d think I was the fattest woman in Tennessee.

“I’m in this pageant, not you, so I’m going to wear my lime-green formal with a white carnation over my left ear. I saw Ann-Margret in a magazine with this same look, and she was stunning.”

Myrtle thought she was being clever, but I caught her eye roll. She then took a deep breath and balled up her left hand into a fist. “I did win first runner-up in 1958. You need to listen to people more experienced than you. Big hair and a broad smile, that’s what you need to win a beauty pageant.”

“It’s 1972. Surprise, things have changed since Lee surrendered to Grant.” I looked up from my mirror and saw her place her hands on her hips. She looked like she wanted to say something, but all she did was sigh.

Myrtle proceeded to lift a few strands of my hair from my face and pushed them behind my ear. “You

gonna wear your hair down like that?”

“Yes, I’m wearing it just like it is.” Whenever Myrtle talked down to me, I could feel it in my stomach. I’d get sick and sometimes even throw up. She had this way of making me feel bad about myself, which made me feel like the whole world was falling in on top of me. But tonight, I wasn’t going to allow that to happen. I finally had my big chance to show this town my talent and I wasn’t going to screw up this opportunity.

“But you’re still singing... ‘Stand by Your Man’? Because, that’s your best song.”

“I’m doing that one especially for you.” I dabbed on some light blue eye shadow, and then tried to decide which lipstick shade to use—Scarlet Red or Bonita Pink? I held them both up to my face, but ultimately decided to go with Scarlet Red. It would stand out more under all the stage lighting.

Myrtle kept rattling on with advice. “When they interview you, keep your answers short and sweet. Nobody wants to listen to a loud-mouthed beauty queen.”

I rolled my eyes. “I’ll try to remember that.”

“Oh, and smile out there—judges like that.”

“You know what. I think I’m going to pick my nose and throw boogers at them.”

“You’re impossible.” After lighting a Chesterfield, she sorted through my jewelry. “We got to find something to hide that neck of yours.”

“You can go find your seat. I’ll finish getting ready by myself.”

Myrtle stood with hands on her hips. “Not on your life. Miss Lila let you in this pageant cause she loved your mother and cause you have a great voice. And if you think for one minute that I’m leaving you on your own, you are mistaken.”

I couldn’t believe that Myrtle was staying back here with me. I wasn’t sure how I’d get on stage with my talent costume, but I knew I’d find a way.

I had wanted to win Miss Crawford County since I was six and found out my momma had won the pageant back when she was fifteen. My momma grew

up winning beauty pageants, but at five-foot-two and one-hundred-fifty pounds with curly red hair, I was the class clown—not exactly the ideal image of a southern belle. Momma died when the shed she was hiding in from a tornado, crashed in and killed her. I spent the next two years crying. And when I wasn’t crying, I was eating, trying to forget about everything. Momma’s younger sister, Myrtle, took me in and raised me. She told me plenty of times that she wasn’t interested in being anybody’s mother and that when I graduated high school, I’d be on my own.

Only six more months to high school graduation and I could not wait. As soon as I got my diploma, I planned to go to California or New York or maybe Las Vegas, any place except Baldwin.

It was about an hour until the audience filled the high school auditorium to see Mr. Dub Buckhill, legendary pageant host and local funeral director, crown the next winner of Baldwin’s most prized contest. Mr. Buckhill was the only person I had ever seen with a handlebar moustache and one of the few men in town without a beer gut. He was considered a heartthrob for those ladies over sixty years old. His wife died a few years ago, so most Friday nights, he could be found at the VFW Hall, romancing lonely widows.

The Ladies Auxiliary prepped the place for the pageant with the smell of Pine-Sol lingering in the air. While Mr. Buckhill tested the audio equipment, a guy from The Posey Peddler delivered corsages for the girls and a bouquet of red roses for tonight’s winner.

The first contestant was Sarah Ruth Doyle. I’d always liked her even though she was overly emotional, which had gotten worse since her daddy passed away. Dressed in a yellow gown ordered from the Montgomery Ward catalogue, Sarah Ruth tiptoed onto the high school auditorium stage. As she looked at the audience, the lights reflected off of her glasses, causing her to stumble into Mr. Buckhill. The plastic daisy pinned to her beehive broke off, flying across the stage.

“You okay?” Mr. Buckhill helped Sarah Ruth steady herself.

She stood dazed as she looked out at the audience. Mr.

Buckhill continued to hold her arm to support her.

“Go ahead and introduce yourself to the audience.”

Unable to make eye contact with the audience due to all the lights, Sarah Ruth managed to muster a crooked smile. “Well...I’m Sarah...Sarah Ruth Doyle.”

Mr. Buckhill adjusted the microphone. “Speak up so everyone can hear you. Tell us about yourself, Sarah.”

Sarah Ruth bit her lower lip and took a deep breath. “I go to Freewill Baptist Church and I’m a member...uh...of the church choir.”

Mr. Buckhill nodded. “What kind of life do you want to live, young lady?”

Twisting her class ring, Sarah Ruth said, “Well, Lord willing, I...I would like to attend Southern Baptist Ladies College in Memphis and study home economics.”

Mr. Buckhill began clapping and turned toward the audience. “Ladies and gentlemen, here’s Miss Sarah Ruth Doyle performing her daddy’s favorite song.” He then exited the stage, and the spotlight shined on Sarah Ruth.

Before starting the song, she traced a heart on her chest with her index finger, then pointed upward toward heaven, as she mouthed Daddy, I love you.

With a shrill voice, she began singing. “Yes, we have no bananas. We have no bananas today. We have string beans and onions...”

Sarah continued to sing at the top of her lungs. “We have old fashioned tamaters and Long...Long Island pataters, but yes, we have no bana—”

She stopped singing and began to tremble. Sarah Ruth looked around the stage, acting like she didn’t know where she was anymore. With her eyes shut and her hands close to her chest she said, “Dear Lord, why did you have to take my daddy? He was still a young man.”

Mr. Buckhill watched from the side of the stage. He looked for the pageant director, Miss Lila, but she was nowhere around. After waiting a few more seconds, he shouted toward Sarah Ruth, “Hey, Sarah, are you okay?”

Sarah Ruth brought her shaky right hand to her forehead and rocked back and forth, her face as white as her patent leather shoes. “Daddy, Daddy, are you here

tonight? I can feel your presence. Momma says you went to heaven cause I wasn’t right with Jesus.”

Mr. Buckhill made his way toward Sarah Ruth, applauding, as he walked onstage. He placed his arm around Sarah Ruth’s waist, and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. “That was a fine job you did, young lady. A mighty fine job.”

The next-to-last contestant was Baldwin’s number-one bully Charlene Dunivan. As she waited, she looked at me and said, “Good luck, Blimp. You’ll need it.” I tightened my bathrobe.

Charlene adjusted the cross necklace hanging from her slender neck, making the diamonds on Jesus’ wounds point outward. Then Mr. Buckhill announced her name, and she made her way across the stage, her blonde hair bouncing like ocean waves.

Dressed in a midnight-blue gown that Myrtle said had cost her daddy a week’s salary, Charlene greeted Mr. Buckhill. “Evening, sir.”

“Good evening, Miss Dunivan. Tell us a little about yourself.”

Charlene snickered. “Well, I have a wonderful family, and I love Christ with all of my heart. And I plan to study Spanish in college next year, so I can travel to South America and spread Jesus’ teachings to all the heathens. I also want to find a good Christian husband, who’ll allow me to service him as I service the Lord.”

Thunderous applause erupted from the audience.

“Praise Jesus. Here’s Miss Charlene Dunivan performing Canyon in D by Packerbell.” Mr. Buckhill exited the stage.

After sitting on the piano bench of the Suzuki her daddy had rented for tonight’s pageant, Charlene threw her shoulders back, held her head high, and began to play. During her performance, the audience was as quiet as downtown Baldwin on a Sunday morning. I noticed several of the old ladies in the audience dabbing fake tears with those stiff tissues they always had in their purses. Once it was clear that Charlene had finished her piece, the audience stood

up and applauded for over two minutes. Waving like a newly-crowned Miss America, Charlene greeted her subjects.

I wasn’t impressed. I heard better at my eight-year-old neighbor’s first piano recital.

“She has my vote,” Judge Nicolas Edwards mumbled as he sat with the other two judges at the side of the stage. He then poured a shot of Jim Beam into his Dairy Queen cup and toasted Charlene.

“Time for you to get your formal on.” Myrtle held it up for me.

“Would you mind running down to the concession stand and getting me some Pepto-Bismol? My stomach is upset.”

Myrtle gave me a look like I’d just asked her to jump off the Empire State Building. But she didn’t argue, she grabbed her purse and headed out the back entrance.

As soon as left, I put on my costume. There really wasn’t much to it, just a plastic shower curtain that I covered my body with, and a towel wrapped around my hair. I was sure Myrtle would love my performance since it was a scene from Psycho, but she had to see me in action to fully appreciate it. When Mr. Buckhill saw me, his eyes bugged out of his head. “What in the devil are you wearing, Missy? You’re supposed to be in a formal dress. This ain’t allowed, young lady. This just ain’t allowed.” He shook his head and threw his hands in the air. “You better go change right now—and make it quick.”

Miss Lila was now backstage and scurried over. “Oh my. There’s no time to change. You both have to be on stage right now. And, Mona Harmony, this is the last time you’re going to be in any event I’m involved with.”

At that moment, Myrtle appeared, looking as if she had landed on Mars.

“Did you know about this?” Miss Lila said. “Your niece is a disgrace. I don’t know how you talked me into letting her be in this pageant, Myrtle Harmony.”

The curtain opened, and Mr. Buckhill trudged on stage with me right behind him. I wasn’t about to wait

to hear what Myrtle had to say. I couldn’t lie, I was a little overwhelmed, but I wasn’t going to give in to my fear—not tonight. I kept breathing, trying to stay as calm, as possible.

I could see Myrtle and Miss Lila out of the corner of my eye. They stood there as if they were department store mannequins.

“Ladies and gentlemen, our final contestant.” Mr. Buckhill cleared his throat. “Can you introduce yourself?”

I remained silent, thinking it would make my performance “mysterious.” But I was wrong. After several moments of uncomfortable laughter from the crowd, Mr. Buckhill snorted a nervous laugh.

“Well, I guess you’re ready to get started. Everyone, this is Mona Harmony.”

As Mr. Buckhill left the stage, I bent over and used my left hand to make a counterclockwise twisting motion. I reached in the air and adjusted the nonexistent showerhead, then I picked up a bucket of water I’d hidden by the stage and dumped it over my head.

“Is she trying to baptize herself?” I heard somebody yell from the front row.

I stepped forward, looked up for a few seconds, scanned the audience, and then uttered the first of many screams.

Doreen from The Beauty Place hollered out, “Mona Harmony’s always been a little nuts.” The audience broke out in laughter.

Did they think this was a comedy routine? I did my best to ignore the jeers and continued. “Who’s there? Is somebody there?”

Determined to finish my act, I pulled out a plastic knife hidden beneath the shower curtain and began stabbing myself. I prayed that the audience got that someone else was supposed to be stabbing me. I then fell to my knees and hissed, “I’m dying...help me...I’m dying.”

At that moment, I looked to the side of the stage and saw Myrtle. She was clutching my lime-green dress as if she were trying to hide behind it. Her eyes were dark and lifeless. When she realized I was looking at her, she diverted her eyes down to the ground then walked away so I could no longer see her.

Ketchup oozed down the outside of the shower curtain

from an oversized bottle hidden under it. I'd borrowed it from the high school cafeteria earlier in the day. Meanwhile, a puddle was forming near my knees, and after flopping around for two minutes spreading ketchup all over the stage, I lay down and shut my eyes.

After a second or two, I peeked out of one eye to see the audience's reaction. Nobody was clapping or doing anything. They were just sitting there as if they weren't sure what to do next. Mr. Buckhill came back on stage. "The judges will make their final decision shortly."

A few people clapped, and the curtain closed.

My performance didn't go exactly as I had planned, but I thought I outshined Charlene. As soon as I got backstage, Myrtle said, "Get out to the car now." She looked madder than the time I wore a mini-skirt to vacation Bible school.

At first, I ignored her until she started throwing all my make up in a paper bag. I did as she said and followed her, but not before I threw on my bathrobe and sneakers.

"We gonna wait to hear who won?"

She stopped walking and swung around to face me.

"You know dang sure it ain't gonna be you." She turned back around, stomping all the way.

I'd thought Myrtle would at least congratulate me on the effort. Instead, she kept yelling at me, walking a few steps, and then yelling at me some more. "You have embarrassed me for the last time." She walked several more feet then said, "I want to be the first one out of here, so I don't have to face anyone after what you've done."

Once in her El Camino, she put it in reverse and backed out. Every time she glared at me, her face turned redder. I was certain she wanted to hit me—several times.

Then, she exploded. "Jesus H. Christ. I can't believe that you did that on stage—and for the Miss Crawford County title, no less."

Tears welled up in the corners of my eyes. She could be cruel when she got mad. Made me afraid of her most of the time. "I was trying to perform a dramatic scene."

We stopped at a red light, and she turned toward me. Fire was shooting from her eyes. "You were god-awful. Don't know why you didn't sing like you was supposed to. You've got the best voice around, and I was trying to help

you with your confidence."

I crossed my arms. "Everyone sings. Good God."

"You begged me to get you into that pageant. And I pulled strings to make it happen, and you ruined it. You won't get many more chances like that in this life, if any." Myrtle turned on the radio and lit another Chesterfield. Some country star singing about beer and lost love serenaded us on our cheerless ride home.

...

"Sat. 11/11/72 Dear Momma,

"I did it. I performed at the Miss Crawford County Pageant. You always told me I could do anything if I set my mind to it and I did. I performed the shower scene from Psycho, your favorite movie. Only a few people applauded, and Myrtle was mad as could be. Said I embarrassed her. Also told me I'd have to buy her a new shower curtain.

"Big surprise, Charlene Dunivan won the title. Lynette told me that if I let Judge Edwards touch one of my breasts, he'd vote for me. I wasn't about to do that, he's way too old and creepy. I bet Charlene let him. Don't know why he'd want to. I saw them in the shower after P.E. last month, and they're only about the size of quail eggs and most of that is nipple.

"This hick town just doesn't know anything about talent. I got to find me a way out of here. I don't even know if I can make it to graduation in May. I'll be eighteen in a few weeks and I'll be able to leave on my own. All the other girls in my class are set on finding husbands, but not me. Nope, I want to entertain, make people laugh, earn enough money to buy a mansion with a swimming pool, and start my own line of wigs, no more bad hair days for me. I am going to have it all.

"I love you, Momma and I miss you every day. I could never do any of this without your love."

Jeff Harvey is a writer living in San Diego. Many of his stories are set in the Mid-south where he grew up in the 1970s. He's currently working on his first novel.

PAPER WASPS



FAUN SCURLOCK

Faun Scurlock is an alum of WSU Vancouver's Digital Technology & Culture program. Her work can be found through her business, Grumpy Bear Photos, and through various publications such as the Salmon Creek Journal. "Throwing together elements like the chaos of water collisions, man-made vs. natural, nature vs human, is something I enjoy in my photography. Water is an especially interesting and ever-changing subject, lending endless image possibilities. Combined with shooting almost exclusively in our beautiful Pacific Northwest and the possibilities become infinite."

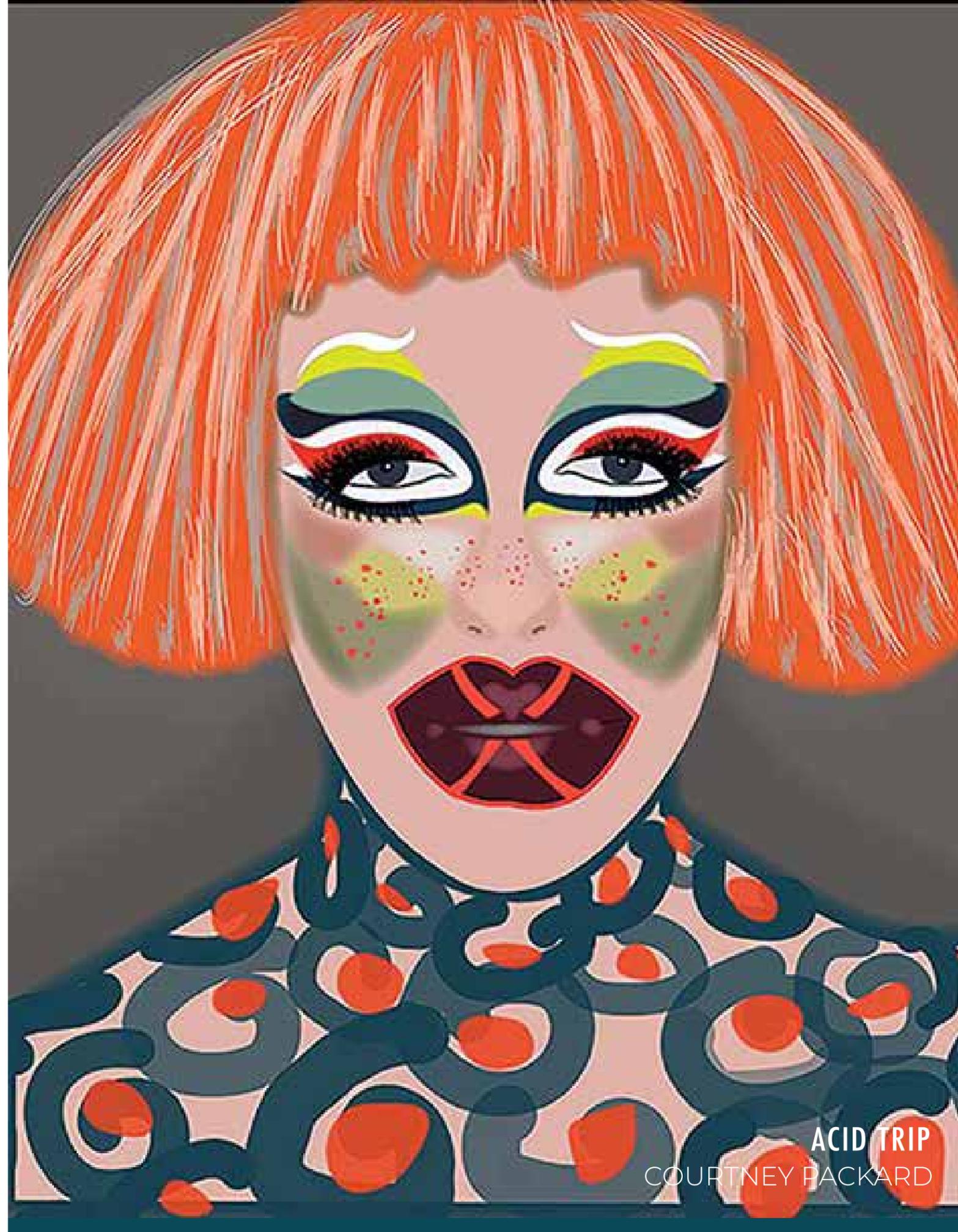
DATE IN THE WATER CITY

ALEXANDER ORTIZ



ANNIE AND THE LICHES

ALEXANDER ORTIZ



GHOST

ALKAID TSUKI

Broken alarm flashes furiously over the door, screaming about
The ghostly shooter crossing campus, revolver rotating in his palm.

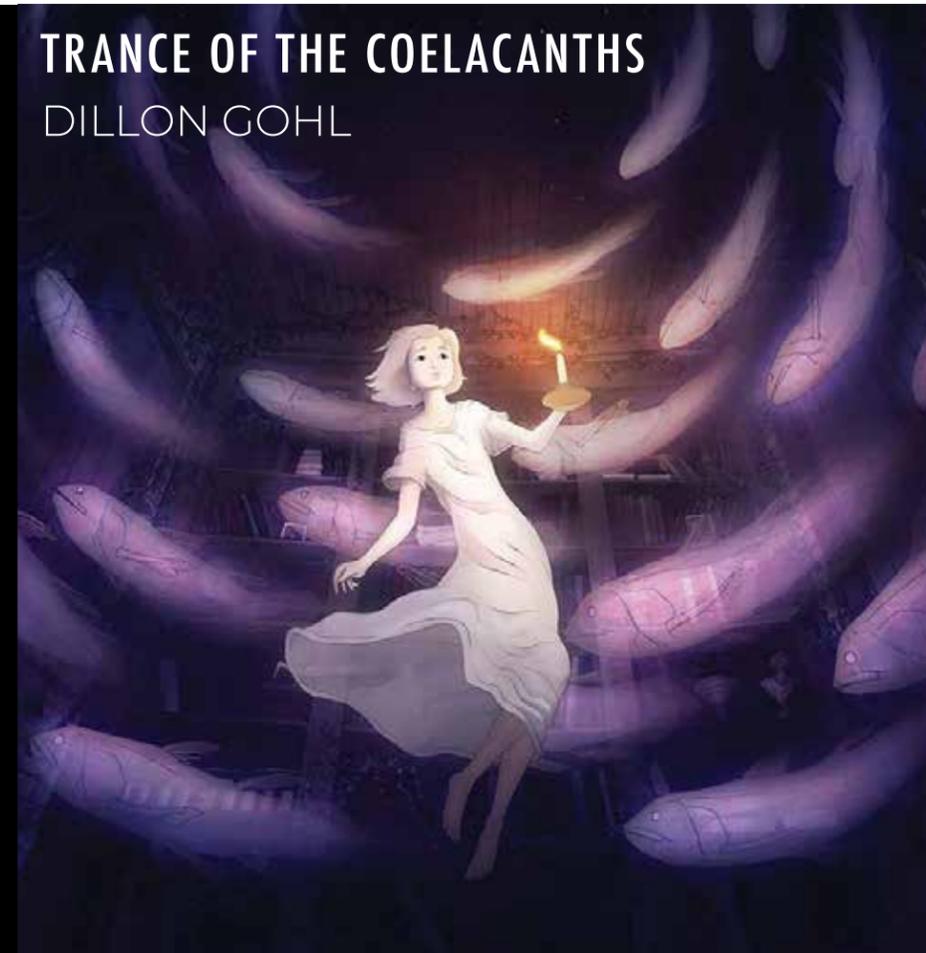
Doors locked tightly, false sunlight shutting
Off as we offer school desks as unleaded corpses,
We scurry underneath tables like mice,
Wheezing and trembling, waiting for
The ghost to take flesh and break down the door.

Two minutes are a month of Sundays when
Finally – *finally* – the window leaves peel back, and the soft
Frigid, lifeless voice from on high echoes words of consolation.
Our bones shake in a near death rattle, river of salt spilling over
Red, bloodless cheekbones. Schoolrooms empty in prematurity

As we discover that the ghost
Was but a shadow on the wall, a whisper
Born from a palm crashing against
The shooter alarm.

TRANCE OF THE COELACANTHS

DILLON GOHL



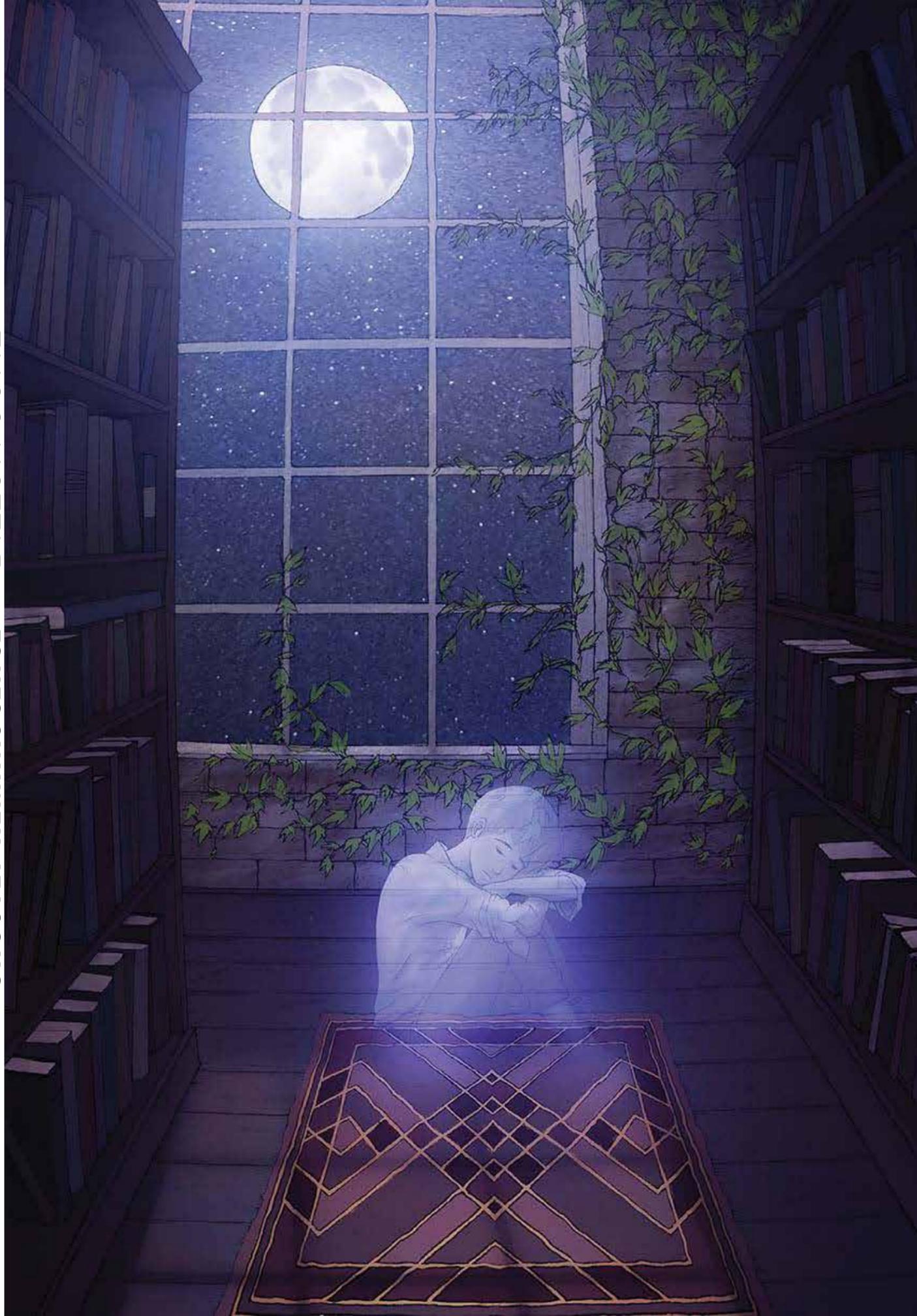
Dillon Gohl is a young painter and draftsman who works in both digital and traditional media. His featured work, Amongst the Space Jellies, Ghostly Reminiscence, and Trance of the Coelacanths is a series of digital paintings entitled- "Childlike Wonder"—

AMONGST THE SPACE JELLIES

DILLON GOHL



which seeks to represent childhood identity by capturing the unbridled wonder and imagination that thrives during this precious period of our lives. Gohl is a Digital Technology and Culture major attending WSU Vancouver.



TO THE BOY

CATHERINE
HANSEL

To the boy whom she had never met:

It was a strange boy who looked something like River Phoenix that she saw – who also saw her – passing by on some days; sporting a true ‘90s cut, round prescription glasses, and vintage-style clothing. He would look, almost glare at her, and she would return a curious glance trying carefully not to come across as being too interested.

To the boy whom she had talked to once:

Their eyes casually met, only for a brief moment, but not entirely fast and not at all awkwardly. His soft, sweet, glowing eyes seemed to be full of unspoken knowledge just waiting to overflow and be told. She glanced back again a few moments later. He always sat so casually; arms crossed, a nonchalant, relaxed, almost bored look, but always listening to the lecturer, often smiling. A swish of wavy dark-chocolate-colored hair came over one of his eyebrows. Then someone spoke. He looked up, eyes to the side, eyebrows gently propped, and that same slight innocent smile that he often wore. Turning to look at the clock, a subtly surprised expression came across his face; she was not sure whether this was because he was surprised at how slow or how fast the time had gone by. He stared at the clock for what seemed like an especially extended amount of time, and just when she thought his eyebrows couldn’t go any higher than they already were, they did. Trying not to smile wildly, but failing miserably, she turned away.

To the boy whom she once knew well:

Upon arrival, she did not see him and was disappointed. She sent him a message telling him where she was at: his workplace. A few moments later, she saw



TEEN ANGST
KATIE BABB

him sit down a couple of tables away from the one she had seated herself at and they made eye contact immediately. He beckoned her to come over, and with a joyous smile she went.

“Hey!”

“I’m on my thirty right now.” The timing was marvelous. “I usually stay in the back, but when I got your message I came out here to see you,” he said in the most flattering way.

He was as lively and as subtly seductive as she had remembered him to be, only much older looking. He had gone from the young and immature boy that she had known to a slim-faced, unsettled, and lost young man with much the same personality and foul mouth that he had had four years before. He could go on for hours about what he had been up to – which was absolutely nothing at all – and that he had been bored and mulling over school and career options; in fact, he dictated most of their time together with such conversation. But she loved the brief visit with him nonetheless. She was amazed at how much someone could talk about such mundane things and actually make them somewhat interesting to listen to. He was his good old charming self, after all.

They talked and they laughed much too loud, and when it came to an end all too soon he gave her a hug and went back to work. In the end, the whole thing was the highlight of her evening.

ROWAN LEVI

It was well past his bedtime. He knew that, and so did his mother, but neither of them said anything. Tonight just wasn't that sort of night. No, tonight was the sort of night for hushed silences, cupped hands, for whole conversations carried on inside a void of silence. Or, so his mother said while stroking his hair, without ever actually saying a word.

"He fell asleep on the couch. Should be out for a while," She whispered, lips kept close to his ear.

A sleepy nod.

"And I promise, when we wake up tomorrow it's gonna be like nothing ever happened.

He doesn't have a memory that lasts the night. Just... next time, try not to provoke him like you did this time, okay?"

"Yeah."

"I know it's hard, honey. I know you're angry. And you have every right to be, but... you can't let that consume you. Being mad is fine. But staying mad, that's like holding your hands in front of your eyes. And when you have your hands in front of your eyes..."

"You'll miss all the magic that's hiding right in front of you. I know,"

"There's my little Sunnyboy. Now try and get some sleep, okay? Tomorrow's another day. I love you,"

"Love you too," It was bitter and muttered, but still-sincere.

His mother responded with a soft kiss and a hug. As she wrapped her arms around Sunnyboy's bony, sharp frame,

she noticed something that her eyes had missed in the dark. His body had turned stiff, tense. He was holding his breath.

He was trying not to cry.

Of course, Sunnyboy didn't realize that his mother knew this, as children often don't. He was too busy filling his mind with thoughts that he needed to be stronger, needed to be a man.

All they did was make him want to cry even harder, for neither of those things were true at the present moment. His mother knew that too, but still said nothing. She simply hugged him tighter. Sometimes there is nothing else to say.

And with that, his mother was gone, leaving a trail of creaking footsteps in her wake. The door shut and left him in his own little world, one of impenetrable blackness broken only by a yellow right angle- but still, even the light underneath the door scarcely felt real deep in this world which was quickly engulfing him.

He waited, breath still baited: thirty seconds of waiting at the door, then one footstep on the floor, five on the carpet (it was quite the long carpet), three more on the floor and then slowly, down the stairs, creaking on the fourth step, getting quieter and quieter and quieter...

In total, one minute until she was really, truly gone.

Sunnyboy sprang from the bed, all tears forgotten. Wobbly footsteps and an ear up to the door, just in case, then, once he deemed the silence satisfactory, over to the old, boxy television that was pushed up against the wall.

The buttons were dirty, dusty, practically worn away, just like the floor, the room, and the boy, but Sunnyboy knew exactly where to guide his hands to get the screen to flood with white and static electricity to tickle his fingertips. Keeping his eyes on the light, he fumbled around to where he had been keeping the VHS case, and slid it into the television with trembling fingers.

The white fuzz bloomed into a rapid succession of images. Men and women with eyes wide and piercing, crooked, gas lamp-lined streets, phantoms and carnivals

and slumbering villages.

He didn't need to worry about keeping the volume low- the movie was silent. Sunnyboy settled only a couple feet away from the screen and held his knees up to his chest. There were no longer any thoughts of being cold or angry or tired or lonely. In the light of the television, he just was. Nothing more, nothing less.

It was strange, though- the absence of sound from the television wasn't quite absolute.

There was something else. The warm tones of a city at night, sure, that was expected, but there was something else too. Something colder, older. A buzzing of sorts, lying just underneath the base of his skull.

It reverberated around him, poking and prodding in all corners of his mind, rendering him quite ticklish (though he would never admit it). He felt as if he had just missed a step on the stairs, but Sunnyboy wasn't afraid of falling. The feeling grew sharper and faster and louder and he suddenly realized that the comforting noises from outside had stopped completely. He was alone with the buzzing.

The entire city had become nothing more than a ghost. *He was in the realm of the watchers now*, he thought, eyes wandering away from the screen and down to the street four stories below. Cars and lights echoed up to him, though they faded away long before they reached the window, as Sunnyboy was much further than usual tonight. Much further than five stories could ever dream of being. He was free to wander, to float, to observe everything without a care or investment in the world, like it all just a movie. *Wouldn't that be nice*, he mused, *being free to watch people as much as you wanted without having to worry about other people watching you*. Sunnyboy shivered, feeling the lightest touch of eyes on the back of his neck. The buzzing grew louder, harder, sharper, until it was no longer just inside his head and the television with all its magic and wonder burst into a shower of fireworks.

A power surge.

Then everything was dark.

At least, a power surge was what he assumed it

was. He knew that they were loud, and bright, and occur for only a fraction of a second, though this fraction of a second felt an awful lot longer than fractions of seconds were supposed to be.

An awful lot can happen in a fraction of a second. It sent his heart leaping, sent his hair on its end, sent every gallon of blood rushing to the surface of his skin, stroking and caressing him in an effort to comfort. It sent him scrambling backward, head snapping to the side- about ninety degrees, to the side of the room with the window.

Simultaneously, the television along with all of the lights on the street outside grew as hot and bright as the surface of the sun, illuminating everything in their path, if only for a moment. And in that moment, in that fraction of a second, Sunnyboy saw something: a figure in the window.

Only a silhouette, but still. Then it was gone.

...

At his age, the strange little paranoid thoughts that children living in apartments often have, of creatures that would scale entire skyscrapers just to get the taste of a sleeping child had just begun to leave Sunnyboy alone. But now, unconsciously and undesired, all those thoughts were creeping right back to the forefront of his mind. But he couldn't let them, no, Sunnyboy was too old for that sort of nonsense. Fear was suppressed with clenched teeth and a shaking jaw. As was routine.

Simple, stupid, silly little boy.

The voice wasn't his own, but it was one he was familiar with. *You really shouldn't let your imagination run wild like that. Because boys- boys like you like to hop along highway lane dividers and explore both parts of the forest, but someday, you idiot, you'll get run over or get hopelessly lost and it'll be your fault, because you wanted this, wanted to jump at shadows in the dark, but you couldn't, not in a room with hardly any furniture. You're going to have to try very hard to kill that delusional instinct inside of you. And spend your entire life trying, trying to be normal, trying to be realistic, trying to hide, trying to hide the fact that- you've been crying, haven't you?*

"I have not been crying!"

Good boy.

Nothing to see but a skinny little boy, with exposed, sensitive skin and shaggy hair.

Nothing to hear but his deep, ragged gasps. He. Was not. Crying.

It would seem that the room had grown quite hot. For the first time in months, he opened the window. The little boy's muscles shook as he grasped the wood, which had grown sticky and stubborn through rain and disuse. Until suddenly it released, snapping upwards with a bang. There was a chill in the air, alive and breathing.

Under the presence of the world, Sunnyboy felt awfully, terribly small. Despite all that, there was nothing outside. Not that he should have expected there to be. The chill in the air moved inside, moved through him, past him, and into the room. It stared at his back. Though he was shivering, he left the window open.

When he turned, moving back inside, the chill moved too. It was no longer where his back had been just moments ago. And then, he could've sworn he saw something sitting on his bed, but when he turned his head to look: there too, was nothing. But- no, that wasn't true.

There was... something, it just wasn't something he could see. Something behind him, every time he turned his head. Just out of the corner of his eye.

Sunnyboy was beginning to get dizzy.

"Hello?"

He waited.

"Hello?" The voice came from everywhere and nowhere. It was unsteady, hoarse, like the speaker had not spoken in a very long time.

When he turned his head for the last time, the chill did not move with him. It just sat there, staring, and slowly, it coalesced into a more recognizable shape. It was the figure that he had seen before. It was really here. It was... Sunnyboy wasn't entirely sure what it was.

It was simultaneously a presence of things and an absence of things all at once. The deep blackness of shadow and space mixed with the silvery-white of constellations into something which only possessed the vague outline of a human. Two white stars had positioned themselves in the approximate spot where eyes should be.

They both sat there, watching each other, until it felt like the fabric of time itself surely must have collapsed under

the weight of this thing's... "eyes".

Or maybe it already had, and Sunnyboy was just too stupid to notice. He decided to move. Just a little bit and not for any particular reason, but when he moved, it did too. When he sat up, it did too. When he waved, it did too.

And as they moved, Sunnyboy noticed that the creature began to change. At first it was slow, almost unnoticeable. The white in its eyes moved and dispersed. The outline clarified itself. But then he moved closer, and it did too.

Black ink slowly dripped away to reveal a face, paper-white and blank.

He moved his arm up, and it did too.

The arm was long, skinny, and pale, too - almost too long, too skinny, and too pale. Slowly and deliberately, a perfect mirror of one another, they reached out and touched fingers. It was as if he had touched a live wire.

He was so quickly assaulted by everything- every memory, every emotion, every sensation, everything and nothing all at once at such a fever pitch and intensity that the poor boy could scarcely hope to understand what was going on. Then again, the thing that was sitting across from him didn't understand it either. Only that it was sharp and it was cold and it tickled, just a little bit, right over the left side of the chest.

The boy's neck jerked, the boy's jaw clenched, the boy's eyes opened, the boy's legs stiffened, the boy's chest spasmed, the boy's legs relaxed, the boy's eyes closed.

Human beings weren't supposed to move like that. They were supposed to move naturally and gracefully, guests of honor in the world which had birthed them. But perhaps this word was not the one which had birthed this boy.

Regardless, it seemed that he was only graceful when he was asleep.

When Sunnyboy opened his eyes, the strange silhouette that he saw in the window was no longer there. In its place was a small child, the same age as

him. Or, almost a child, anyway. Sunnyboy almost believed it- after all, a small child was much easier to believe in that whatever he had seen before, but there were a couple things just slightly... off, that stopped it just short of looking like a real person:

It was completely colorless, for one. Everything was black, white, or a varying shade of grey. All the black had bled into the centers of its body, where it became a mass of dark, oversized clothing. Some of the black had moved up to the top of its head, where it had turned into a mop of wild, unruly hair. There were still some spots where it lingered, though- especially around the fingertips, like it had frostbite.

There was also a ring of the dark stuff around its eyes, almost like war paint. The eyes were still almost completely white, now (though at least they were the right shape) with just the tiniest black fleck in the middle, like ink in a well. The contrast between ink and paper made the thing's eyes look shell-shocked, piercing. Like one of the people from his silent movie.

It simply watched him with fascination- but Sunnyboy did the same.

"Can you talk?" His heart was still fluttering, but it was pleasant now, almost making him want to giggle. He was reminded of the time he went to the dentist to get a cavity removed.

"Can you... can I talk... yes," It cocked its head, drawing out the last syllable. Dark lips twitched upwards into a malformed smile.

"I can talk..." In that moment, this ancient, ageless thing was scarcely but a toddler, basking in the wonder of the world and the pure, unreplicable ecstasy that comes with doing something so fundamentally human for the very first time. Then there was another noise- sharp, grating, breathy, and wild, running down a hill and not knowing how to stop as it gained momentum, ricocheting off every available surface. At first, it seemed like it was emanating from the walls themselves, but the creature's mouth was moving- albeit stiffly, up and down and up and down...

After a moment, Sunnyboy realized that it was

laughing. It was a little frightening, sure (it was very frightening), but Sunnyboy had never heard a sound so pure, clear, and filled with joy. He couldn't help it. Maybe it was empathy, maybe just nervous energy, maybe conformity, maybe sorcery. But Sunnyboy started laughing too. And he just couldn't seem to stop. Perhaps it was just his imagination (though really, he wasn't even sure if he cared anymore), but it felt as if he was slowly losing the need to breathe.

"Who are you?" he asked.

It cocked its head, "Nobody,"

"What do you mean? Everybody's somebody,"

It did not appear to know how to answer. So Sunnyboy, as it was what was familiar with him, decided to fill the silence with more words. Not that they meant much to his ears anyway.

Not any form of communication or intended message, just the verbalization of the thoughts and associations fluttering through his head that he paid no conscious attention to. A tuneless elevator music. He got it from his father.

"You can't be nobody, you're right here, I'm talking to you! Besides, even if you were nobody, nothing is still something, right? Like the number Zero. We learned about it in math. It's nothing, but it's also something, because it's Zero!"

Pause. The thing stared at him, holding onto every word. It said nothing.

"Actually- I like that. It suits you. I'm gonna call you Zero,"

"...Zero? I... I like that too," Zero smiled, more sure of itself this time.

Sunnyboy smiled back.

"Okay, so we've figured out that that you aren't nobody. So if you're not nobody, then who are you?" Though the boy's voice was firmer this time, there was no frustration or accusation to be found. The question was one of genuine curiosity and concern.

"I... I don't know..."

"How can you not know who you are?" He didn't realize until after the words came out how sharply they

moved through the air. He sounded like his father. He was his father. He was asking this question to his son. Sunnyboy felt bile begin to crawl up the back of his throat.

Zero seized up and scrambled backwards.

“Wait- no! I’m sorry. I’m not gonna hurt you, I promise,”

It stopped.

“I promise,” He repeated.

It reversed course- slowly, haltingly. This creature was not of the sort that was used to making consequential decisions. Then again, neither was Sunnyboy. He lifted his hands up in a gesture of surrender- that was what you were supposed to do, right?

Was it? Zero responded by putting its own hands up. It didn’t have any nails.

“No, you don’t have to do that- I’m the one who did something bad,”

Down again. Sunnyboy followed suit, though the gesture was (hopefully) adequately replaced by a welcoming smile. Though admittedly- he had never been particularly good at finding his bearings or navigating his way around the confusing landscape that was his own face, so it was a bit of a leap of faith. He prayed that he hadn’t overshot it.

It seemed to drink in every little detail on his face with a practiced kind of fascination, attentive and studious. No, more than that, it really was drinking, Sunnyboy could practically feel the shift in the room, the way invisible hands seemed to wrap around his face, recalibrating the gravity to slowly ooze towards the being sitting opposite him. And with each new piece of information that flowed its way, Zero seemed to become incrementally more real, more human.

It almost felt like an honor to Sunnyboy, he’d never had anyone or anything look at him with such reverence and intensity before, as if he was special. He let Zero continue to do whatever he was doing.

The boy shivered.

“Where’d you come from?” He asked as the thing continued to inch its way towards him, leaving the thick layer of dust on the floor completely undisturbed. At this point, he didn’t really expect a proper answer, but there was no shame in trying.

“The waystation outside fourth and fifth. Surely you’ve been there, I... I know you have. I saw you there once,” It didn’t break its gaze, not even once, though eye contact wasn’t really the right way to describe it. This was something much more voyeuristic- a watcher.

“You mean the old highway underpass?” He didn’t know what a waystation was.

It moved closer.

“Sure. But if you go down there and get lost, over and around and through the bushes you’ll find there’s a void in there, big and dark and beautiful.

That’s where I’m from,”

Closer still. Sunnyboy started sliding along the floor too. They would meet in the middle. *But someday, you idiot, you’ll get run over or get hopelessly lost and it’ll be your fault* - Sunnyboy ignored the warning.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen something like that down there,”

“You can’t find it if it’s something you’re looking for.”

“Oh,”

“But I could take you there sometime... if you’d like.” The last part was tacked on hastily, as if Zero hadn’t considered the boy’s consent in the matter until that very moment.

It cocked its head, waiting, hesitant, wondering if it had overstepped a boundary. Humans had so many of those.

But the boy just nodded eagerly. He was still, in spite of everything, overflowing with that insatiable, childish thirst for adventure. Zero was glad. Most children had lost it by that age.

There was a quiet (though not disagreeable) moment. Sunnyboy took that moment to look really look at this strange, incredible thing that had somehow managed to find its way into his room.

It stared back with something that could only be described as fondness.

He took a deep breath.

“Zero, can I be your friend?” The question came quickly, pushed out by an avalanche of building

pressure that had built around his head.

There’s something about light nights when you’re young, something forbidden and entrancing, that allows the truth to slip uninhibited from tiny mouths.

“My friend? Why?”

“I don’t know, I just... thought that might be nice.”

“Don’t you already have friends?”

He gave Zero a conspiratorially-tinged smile.

“Yeah, but they aren’t... magic,” He whispered.

Zero didn’t seem like it completely understood what he meant by that- but it was fine, because it didn’t seem to care, either. It was lost in its own, odd thoughts. Thoughts that were completely foreign to the concept of friends as anything but an observable, third-person phenomenon, he realized.

“Friends take care of each other,” He hoped it didn’t sound too condescending, “They can... if you want to be, we can be together forever and ever, and we can help each other find out who we are,”

“Do you promise?” It was still cautious. Sunnyboy understood.

“I promise,”

The promise wouldn’t keep, of course. Childhood promises never do. But how were either of them supposed to know that? Sunnyboy reached out and squeezed Zero’s hands, cold, and lanky as they were. It was something his mother used to do.

“Thank you,” It whispered, close and cold and scary and comforting.

“For what?”

“For being my friend, and for giving me my name,”

It had been a very long time since anyone had thanked Sunnyboy for anything, much less something so important as a name.

“But you never gave me yours,” It continued.

“I’m... uh...” He wanted to tell Zero his name, he really did. It was the least he could do, giving something in return. But as he tried to take in a breath, the words simply wouldn’t come. He couldn’t. It wasn’t right. Nothing was right, not for this tiny little boy in a tiny little apartment and a tiny little world.

In Zero’s word of impossible things, of stars, ink, and statically-infused touches, a world where every whim that was true had the right to just... be, it felt wrong to go by a name that wasn’t. It was what people generally called him by, sure, it was what was on his birth certificate, but still, that barely felt like enough to call it his name. After all, names were important. Names were supposed to be the very essence of your identity, compacted into a few short words, something you could answer with when someone asked “Who are you?” His name was none of those things. Except-

This little boy had two very different names, given to him by two very different people. And here, in this upstairs bedroom filled with impossible things, it didn’t matter what he had been given, but what he would take.

He took the name that shiny, golden frame in his mind where it was supposed to be hanging and crumpled it into the trash. He replaced it with a new name - childishly scrawled in crayon, sure, but it was truly, wholly his. Hardly the strangest thing which happened that night.

“Sunnyboy”

Rowan Levi is a current student living in the Los Angeles area with no formalized writing experience outside of school and independent projects. Levi plans to study and pursue writing as a career in the coming years.

FALL PHOTO SHOWCASE 2019

(Formerly Travel Café)

The Travel Café has been a staple on our campus for many years. The original goal was for people to submit photos of their travels, hence the name, but this can be limiting, so the name was changed to the *Fall Photo Showcase*. This name speaks more to the heart and goal of the event: for students to submit their best work and have it displayed for their peers to view.

But what about a theme? Themes can also be limiting, especially when they are unclear or too specific. The theme that was chosen for the 2019 Fall Photo Showcase was *nostalgia*.

3RD PLACE
WINNER

ANGLER'S SHED
LAURA DUTELLE



2ND PLACE
WINNER

CAT NAP
JAASON WILSON



Laura Dutelle shared the inspiration behind her featured photograph "Angler's Shed" My dad bought a cabin in Maine years ago, and it came with a shed on the edge of the lake nearby. The previous owner was an avid fly fisherman and had left decades of his fishing licenses tacked on the wall along with shelves of old gear. My dad left everything in its place, undisturbed.

"Much like nostalgia, these images are something I can feel. I can feel the coziness of a sweatshirt pulled up past my wrists. I can feel the slow breath of a cat cuddled up beside me. I can feel my head laying on a shag rug as a slowly drift off to sleep."

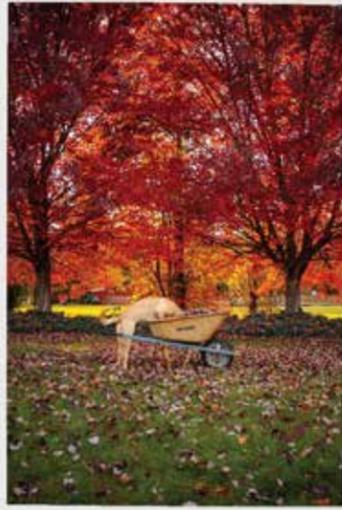
1ST PLACE WINNER

BLACK HEAVENS, WHITE LIGHTNING

JESSE JANIER



FALL PHOTO SHOWCASE



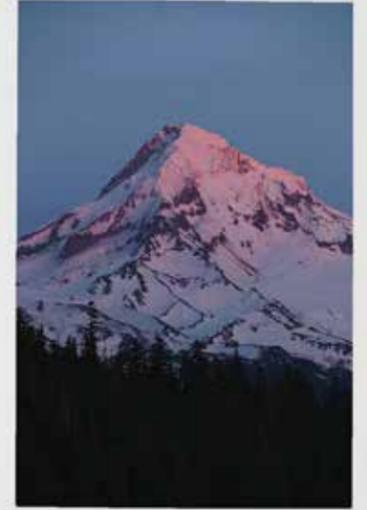
Fall Playground
Jason Wilson



Cabin In The Alps
Sarah Anderson



Traditional Ryukyuu
Island Bullfight
Kassai Inelaru



Alpenglow
Emily Shirron



For My Children
Sierra Swearingen



A Bridge You Already
Crossed
Sierra Swearingen



In Our Own Backyard
Abdi Vicencio del Moral



Two Places, One Missing
Michelle Man



Childhood
Marial Guin



Bloom Where You
Are Planted
Jessica McKee



Slip Sliding Away
Tracy Nelson



Calm Before
The Storm
Lydia Kofya



Yata House
Jeane Davien



Sunsets In Rome
Leed Mann

TWICE MY HOME

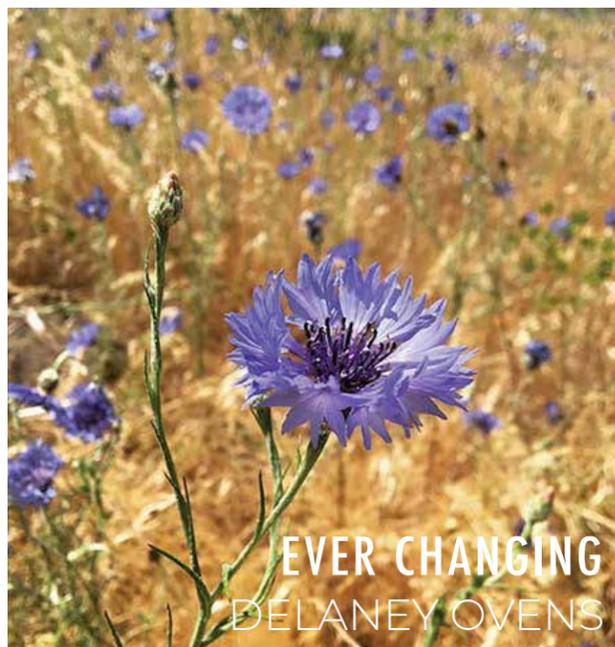
CATHERINE
HANSEL

I feel at conflict; which is my home?
The trees in the forest, or the city I've well known?
Both own the Columbia, both own the Cascades
Yet I can't chose one, is that so strange?

Oregon and its Portland, Washington and its Rainier
Both seem like distant dreams, yet both are so very near
In the winter a cold majesty, in the summer a sunlit paradise
The Pacific Northwest is my home not once, but forever twice

PORTRAIT OF JEWISH LIFE IN MINIATURE

SOPHIE CARDIN



I.

I imagine my mother's hands
As I have known them

Braiding challah dough
Risen all morning in the old
Kitchen bowl the color
Of shabbos candles

II.

Challah
In my mama's hands
Turned sweet defiance
Painted in eggwash

III.

Dad's kippah
Frays at the edges
Like a history
Deep in the bones
Surfacing slowly

MISS HIM (I'M SO TIRED)

HALLEY WARE

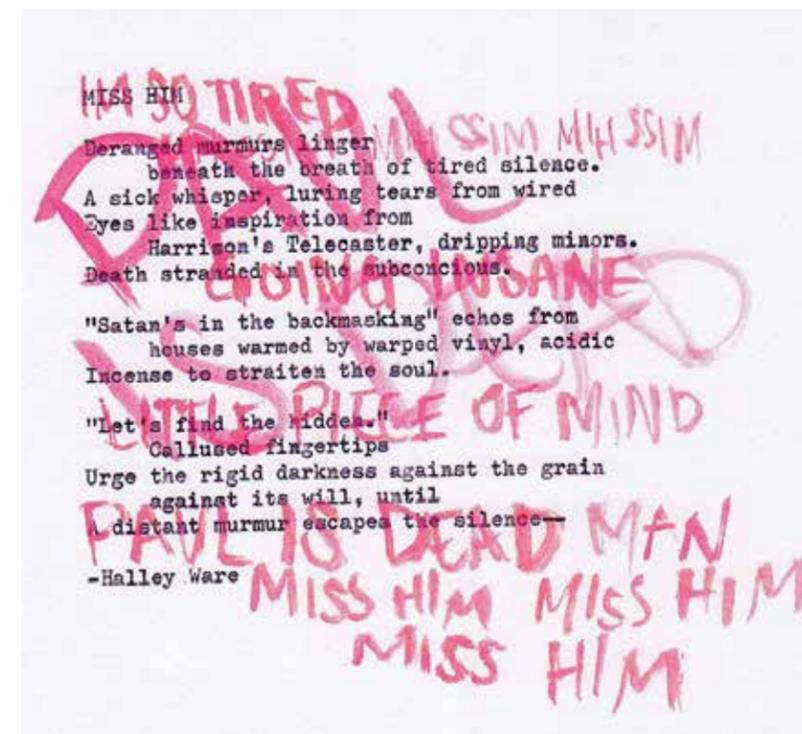
Deranged murmurs *mih ssim, mih ssim, mih ssim* lingers
beneath the breath of tired silence.
A sick whisper, luring tears from wired
Eyes like inspiration from
Harrison's Telecaster, dripping minors.
Death stranded in the subconscious. *going insane*

"Satan's in the backmasking" echoes from
houses warmed by warped vinyl, acidic
Incense to straiten the soul.

"Let's find the hidden." *a little piece of mind*
Callused fingertips

Urge the rigid darkness against the grain
against its will, until

A distant murmur escapes the silence—
Paul is dead man. Miss him, Miss him, Miss him.



Halley Ware is an English major/Creative Writing minor at WSU Vancouver. "Miss Him (I'm So Tired)" is an acrostic poem about the conspiracy theory that assumes Paul McCartney died in 1966 and was replaced. This poem refers to the song 'I'm so Tired,' by the Beatles, in which back masking at the end says 'Paul is dead man. Miss him, miss him, miss him. The red letters in the picture (italicized in poem) are quoted from the song"

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