

THE CATALYST

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE



ISSUE 14 // SPRING 2018
THE ISLA VISTA ISSUE

THE TEAM

MANAGING EDITORS

Ricky Barajas
Jasmine Benafghoul

LITERATURE EDITOR

Claire McMahon

ART EDITORS

Yadir Cruz
Christine Ho

FACULTY ADVISORS

Katie Adkison
Brian Donnelly

DESIGN TEAM

Ricky Barajas
Jasmine Benafghoul
Olivia Berriz
Yadir Cruz
Christine Ho
Claire McMahon
Madison Mead

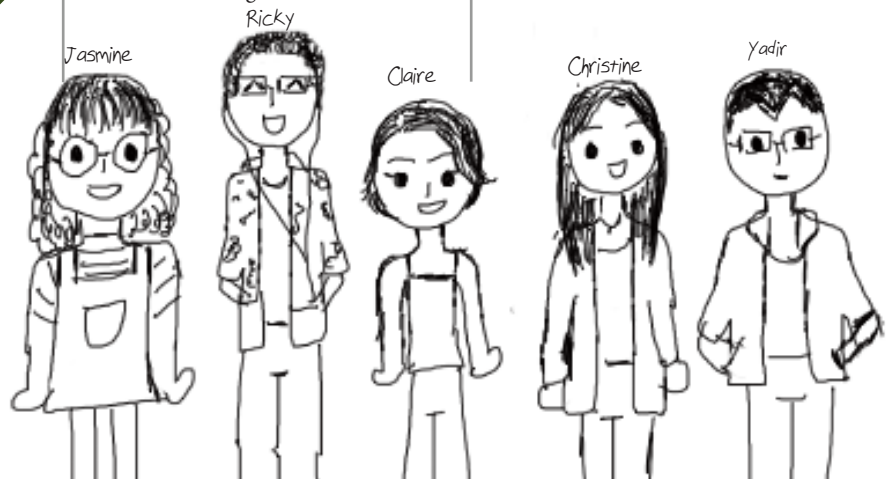
COVER ART //
LONI MARIE

WRITERS

Mishal Al-Asfour
Ricky Barajas
Carmiya Baskin
Justine Bennett
Darya Behroozi
Danny Chajon
Hugh Cook
Luke Dorsey
Lexxus Coffey Edison
Julia Goldstein
Katee Gustavson
Carmen Guzman
Jackie Kajisa
Davis Kelly
Nidhi Khanolkar
Paloma Lamb
Amanda Lawson
Jenna Lizerbram
Jeike Meijer
Skyler Melnick
Claire McMahon
Caitriona McTiernan
Miranda de Moraes
Andrew Nguyen
Rosie Nguyen
Nanna Schmidt Nordestgaard
Willie Roman
Kaylin Smith
Lilly Taylor
G.B Ulrich
Emil Tarp Vang
Ignacio Vargas
Juliet Way-Henthorne
Alexander Wehrung

ARTISTS

Karrah Bates
Darya Behroozi
Olivia Berriz
Daniel Blanco
Nathan Campos
Danny Chajon
Monica Collins
Yadir Cruz
Kylie George
Justice Dumlao
Carmen Guzman
Nidhi Khanolkar
Kristin Klitgaard
Tracy Kong
Jenna Lizerbram
Dylan Lyman
Madison Mead
Jeike Meijer
Dallin Mello
Jordan Metz
Casey Mix
Miranda de Moraes
Lianna Xiaokui Nakashima
Nanna Schmidt Nordestgaard
Joshua Snyder
Francesca Towers
Andrew Truong
Renee Wehkamp
Lauren Wicks
Sarah Wilson
Frances Woo



EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Reader(s),

I hope this message reaches you in high hopes and/or good spirits. We've got a really fun issue this quarter, and despite all of the stress, I had a great time making it. As graduation day creeps ever closer, I've been forced to reflect on my journey here at UCSB. Partly because I live in introspection, and partly because last week, I was described as "a naturally calm person." It's a little bit amazing to me how the university & Isla Vista experience changed me, but in particular, how they forced me to grow.

I hated writing when I was a kid. Made me think about myself too much. I didn't write, or draw, or do anything that could be considered "creative" until my friend Kiana (bless her heart) bullied me into joining The Catalyst, for which she was an editor at the time. She'd been one of my biggest sources of support first and second year, and it was my turn to support her and take her class. Bullied is probably too strong a word for how it all went down, but if Kiana wanted you to do something, it got done. I remember being so terrified on the first day. My hands were sweaty, and my heart beat so hard my glasses would rattle a little bit on my face. I'd never even tried writing something creative before, you know? And not only did we have to write things on the spot, we had to read them out loud. In front of strangers. Nerve-wracking, right? But something about being in the room there—being forced to create—changed something in me, and I had no idea how much so. I actually found my old notebook in my closet a few months ago. The writing made me cringe, but isn't it just wonderful to be able to tangibly examine how far you've come?

The Catalyst, for me, became exactly what a catalyst is—something that speeds up the process by which a reaction or a transformation happens. In addition to spurring my stunted creativity into action, it's done wonders for my self-image, too. I no longer tear up after answering questions in class. I don't have to practice my breathing exercises when I'm walking through the grocery store, and my voice doesn't shake when I talk to strangers. Speaking of voices—learning to project when I talk was one of the hardest lessons to learn. I still want to retreat within myself and run away and hide a lot. But fighting that urge has become easier. I haven't grown an inch since I graduated high school, but I like to think that I'm a much bigger person now. I've learned how to be the person I am instead of the person I want to be. I found myself in this city. I found my voice in The Catalyst. And for that, I will always be grateful.

So, reader, it is my final wish as an editor of The Catalyst that you grant yourself the same privilege I've been allowed in The Catalyst. I want for you to learn the joy in exploring your Self, whoever they may be. This may be a bit out of context—I haven't read the full poem in some time, but I'd like to share one of my favorite quotes with you: "listen: there's a hell

of a good universe next door; let's go" —e.e.cummings

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Literarily yours,

Ricky Barajas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CREATIVE PROSE

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 07 LAMENT OF THE DAMNED
Alexander Wehrung | 19 RUIN
Davis Kelly | 27 BRINE
Carmen Guzman |
| 09 THE RITUAL
Danny Chajon | 21 INK BLOT VISION
Miranda de Moraes | 29 SLEEPING BEAUTY
Juliet Way-Henthorne |
| 11 LIFE'S TRIVIALTIES
Carmiya Baskin | 22 LINDLAR CATALYST
Julia Goldstein | 31 SOAPSCUM
Ricky Barajas |
| 14 GHOST STORY
Rosie Nguyen | 23 IS THERE LIFE ON MARS?
Nidhi Khanolkar | |
| 17 NEW BEGINNINGS
Caitriona McTiernan | 25 ABOVE STORMY WATERS
Nanna Schmidt
Nordestgaard | |

POETRY

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 35 A FICKLE MIND
Kaylin Smith | 42 YOU BECOME IT
Mishal Al-Asfour | 54 YO TE APOYO
Willie Roman |
| 36 THE PORTRAIT OF DORIAN 'CAINE
Hugh Cook | 43 PLUNGE
Skyler Melnick | 55 A WARRIOR IN LOUIS VUITTON
Amanda Lawson |
| 37 A DRUNKEN FOOL
Luke Dorsey | 45 OUR LITTLE PLACE
Lilly Taylor | 55 UNTITLED
Amanda Lawson |
| 37 LAST K/NIGHT
Luke Dorsey | 47 J
Ignacio Vargas | 56 WALKING AT NIGHT
Darya Behroozi |
| 38 THINGS I WANT YOU TO KNOW, BUT DON'T WANT TO TELL YOU
Nidhi Khanolkar | 49 ARE YOU THERE?
Emil Tarp Vang | 59 WINTER WATER
Katee Gustavson |
| 39 SUNSCREEN, SWEAT, AND STRAWBERRIES
Paloma Lamb | 51 PALATINATE PURPLE
Jeike Meijer | 60 ORIGIN STORY
Lexus Coffey Edison |
| 41 CYCLES
Willie Roman | 52 UNCONDITIONAL COLOR
Jenna Lizerbram | 61 IN WHICH I DON'T LABEL MY FEELINGS "HYPERBOLE"
Jackie Kajisa |
| | 53 THE SOUTH
Justine Bennett | |

63 IF MY CRANIUM WERE

A DAISY

Andrew Nguyen

64 SCIENCE SENSE

G.B. Ulrich

05 WINDOW TO THE
VISION

Nathan Campos

07 LAMENT OF THE
DAMNED

Frances Woo

09 VOLCANUS, MY
MY FRIEND

Danny Chajon

11 INSOMNIA

Darya Behroozi

14 UNTITLED

Francesca Towers

17 WRITER'S BLOCK

Olivia Berriz

19 DARE SEIZE THE
FIRE

Sarah Wilson

21 CORPUS CENSURA

Miranda de Moraes

22 UNTITLED

Renee Wehkamp

23 WANDERING

Karraah Bates

25 UNTITLED

Nanna Schmidt

Nordestgaard

CAT-ALUM

65 SCATTERBRAINED

Roberto Castañeda Perez

ART

27 BOT-ART

Carmen Guzman

29 UNTITLED

Francesca Towers

31 HANDY

Dallin Mello

33 DRIED UP

Tracy Kong

35 UNTITLED

Tracy Kong

36 NEW BEGINNING

Daniel Blanco

37 UNTITLED

Francesca Towers

38 THINGS I WANT YOU
TO KNOW, BUT DON'T
WANT TO TELL YOU

Nidhi Khanolkar

39 SELF-TITLED

Dylan Lyman

41 PERRO 2

Yadir Cruz

42 RISE

Monica Collins

43 FLWR GRL

Madison Mead

45 NOOK

Kylie George

47 WHY THEY HURT

Andrew Truong

49 THROUGH THE WIRE

Joshua Snyder

51 SHATTERED

Jenna Lizerbram

52 IN A SIMPLE TOUCH

Jeike Meijer

53 UNTITLED

Francesca Towers

54 IN PRAYER, IN WONDER

Kristen Klitgaard

55 UNTITLED

Lauren Wicks

56 SHOES

Jordan Metz

57 BLOOD IS THICK

Justice Dumlao

59 UNTITLED

Renee Wehkamp

60 DOUBLE LADIES

Jordan Metz

61 UNTITLED

Casey Mix

63 HALF-GROUNDED

Frances Woo

64 UNTITLED

Madison Mead

65 ROCK FORMATIONS

Roberto Castañeda Perez

67 STRIPPED

Lianna Xiaokui

Nakashima



ART // NATHAN CAMPOS

PART I: PROSE

LAMENT OF THE DAMNED

// ALEXANDER WEHRUNG

THE RITUAL

// DANIEL CHAJON

LIFE'S TRIVIALITIES

// CARMiya BASKIN

GHOST STORY

// ROSIE NGUYEN

NEW BEGINNINGS

// CAITRIONA MCTIERNAN

RUIN

// DAVIS KELLY

INK BLOT VISION

// MIRANDA DE MORAES

LINDLAR CATALYST

// JULIA GOLDSTEIN

IS THERE LIFE ON MARS?

// NIDHI KHANOLKAR

ABOVE STORMY WATERS

// NANNA SCHMIDT NORDESTGAARD

BRINE

// CARMEN GUZMAN

SLEEPING BEAUTY

// JULIET WAY-HENTHORNE

SOAPSCUM

// RICKY BARAJAS

Lament of the Damped

By: Alexander Wehrung

ART // FRANCES WOO

Hodrick pushed the oversized helm up over his brow as he walked into the dark, abandoned manor, sword held aloft in his shaking hands. The Wraith of Solkar, the beast that had torn Princess Allara to shreds before eating the scraps, lurked somewhere within. All the young men from Hodrick's village who had come to kill it never returned, including Hodark, Hodrick's older brother.

But now that he was here, all he wanted to do was to go back to mistress Lorena's sewing shop and fix the embroidered yellow dress that had been vexing him for so long. "I shouldn't be here," he muttered, realizing too late that he was woefully unsuited for such a task. "I'm just a tailor. I hate swords. I don't want to die. I can't do this—"

Suddenly, a high-pitched, grating wail reverberated from deep within the manor, shaking dust free from the chandeliers, curling the fading wallpaper up the walls and scratching sharp nails against the surface of Hodrick's heart. After a few painful moments, the terrible wail settled, and the manor was silent again.

Hodrick's heart pounded against his ribcage. With a pained cry, he drove his blade—a rusted, chipped short-sword, barely appropriate for hunting a squirrel—into the floor and sobbed in terror.

"Damn it, damn it!" he cried. How could he possibly face down a creature that had been terrible enough to slay Hodark, who'd had arms like cannons, the strength of ten men, all their courage and more? "I don't know what to do," he whispered desperately. "I don't know..."

And then there came the singing.

A lament sighed through the decrepit hallways—a melancholic beauty, a requiem of profound sorrow. Hodrick felt his tears stall upon the shelves of his eyes. Slowly, he raised his head and strained to better hear the song. There were no lyrics he could discern, only relentless wailing. Unearthly, inhuman wailing, like a gust of wind at the bottom of a mineshaft.

The creature was sad. The creature was...sad?!

Furious, he traversed the labyrinthine corridors adorned with portraits concealed by great black drapes of cloth and illuminated only by thin shafts of watery yellow moonlight leaking in from the shattered windows. Gradually, the Wraith's song grew louder to the point of being deafening.

It fell silent when he reached the small door.

He pushed it open—slowly and carefully, for fear that the hinges would creak—and felt his heart leap into his chest at what he saw.

The Wraith itself, its back turned to him, stared out an open window towards the waning crescent moon. It was impossibly tall, standing at perhaps eight whole feet. Great tangles of black hair—so long that they draped over the floor, like a cape—concealed it.

When Hodrick took his first step forward, the floorboards creaked. He felt his heart skip a beat and froze, but the Wraith sighed at the same moment and didn't hear him. With a breath, he summoned the courage to charge, pointed the sword at the creature's back, and quietly planted one foot behind him.

Just as his grip on the hilt of his blade tightened, the creature sang. It was not a melancholy lament—but a lullaby, soft and yearning.

*Am I the one you see in the dark,
When you are wrapped in the robes of night?
Or am I the one whom your kisses mark,
Your stailight tears setting my soul alight?*

Hodrick froze, flabbergasted. Not only because the Wraith had suddenly adopted a beautiful voice—soothing, calm, and angelic, like silk made song—but because he *recognized* that lullaby. Every word, every pause, every question, as though his mother was singing for him once again. The Wraith continued, and he heard its voice tremble and begin to break as it struggled to finish the song:

*My child, my child, let your dreams run wild,
Fly away to the grasses of afar,
Where the game is plenty and the...the woods undefiled—*

Incomplete, the final line hung unspoken in the air between them, and before he could stop himself, Hodrick whispered the final line:

Where we will never be apart.

As the last word died on his lips, the Wraith whirled around with lightning speed and in an instant, it was on him.

pinning him against the wall. Hodrick screamed as his sword was wrenched from his hand. "Another one to join the rest!" Its breath was hot and rancid on his face. Its body was thin as a rail, gray leathery flesh pulled over protruding ribs. Pinpricks of red glowed from empty eye sockets, and mottled black skin stretched over a skeletal face. Its stick-thin arms were as long as its body and it wore little more than a few strips of shredded cloth.

"I'm sorry!" he cried, "please don't hurt me!" He shut his eyes and braced himself for the end that would surely come.

But no pain came—no spilling of guts or putting out of eyeballs, as he'd expected. Reluctantly, he opened them, realizing through his terror that the furious red orbs from deep within the Wraith's skull had turned a calm blue. Despite the meager skin afforded to it, its face looked...confused.

"You're...sorry?" it asked in the same voice it had been using to sing with: soft, and distinctly feminine.

Hodrick nodded vigorously. "Terribly! Awfully!" He spoke at a mile a minute, heavy beads of sweat pouring down his face. "I didn't mean to interrupt your singing! It was very good! Sublime! Perfect! Like embroidered wool! Beautiful—"

"QUIET!"

"Eeep!"

The Wraith released Hodrick, and he dropped to the floor in a trembling heap. The Wraith ponderously tapped its talons against the floor. "Wool, wool..." it whispered. Slowly, it turned its skeletal head to face him. Hodrick was taken aback when he realized the creature still had lips, albeit pale and cracked. "You are not like the others, boy."

The others. The ones who had fallen. He was too terrified to utter a cry in their name, to demand justice for them. "I...I hate swords. I hate violence. I just want to go home. Please don't kill me."

"Kill you?" the Wraith said with surprise. It huffed. "That would be a waste. Do you have a trade?"

"S-seamster...miss."

"Seamster?" She leaned towards him, bending forward until she was floating in the air. Hodrick dared not move as she examined him closely. "I can't say I've met a seamster before." She hissed softly. "Here's my deal for you. If you want to return home, sew me thirty suits, sixty dresses, and ten children's suits. Four for boys, six for girls. The material will be provided." She inched closer, her talons cutting the air beneath Hodrick's chin. "And if you even *think* about running away, you'll suffer the same fate as the rest. Speaking of which, you must be hungry."

His heart skipped a beat. Was she going to feed him the remains of his own brother and the other fallen warriors? "Hungry? No, I'm not hungry—"

"Nonsense, you're thin as a rail." Her hand crept towards his face. "They will feed you well enough." The whole room felt suddenly as frigid as a snowdrift. As the hand grew closer, Hodrick flinched. "But I'm not—"

▲▲▲

He awoke with a gasp in a warm, brightly lit kitchen. Approximately a dozen eyes were boring into him, and they all belonged to tiny men with long, braided white beards, dressed

in bright cooking aprons.

Dwarves. Dwarves? Weren't dwarves supposed to be smiths? What were dwarves doing here?

An awkward silence hung in the air as the staring continued. Utterly confused, Hodrick could hardly think of anything to say, apart from, "Oh dear. Ah...hello. Would any of you happen to know—"

"Hodrick?"

He froze at the sound of his name. A muscular dwarf—wearing only shorts, shoes and an onyx-black apron—emerged from the crowd, holding an aromatic pie in his hands. His eyes were huge with surprise. "What're you doing here?"

"How...how do you know my name?" Hodrick asked. He had never met a dwarf in his life...or any nonhuman creature until today. So how could this one possibly know him?

The dwarf stared at him for a while longer before a smirk formed on his face. "Well, I guess you wouldn't recognize me in my diminished stature, little brother. Or I guess it's big brother now. But don't let that be going to your head, you hear?"

Hodrick's jaw dropped. *Impossible*. "Hodark?"

"The same!" he exclaimed with a jovial grin. He held the pie aloft. "Now would you mind tasting this? I've added cream to the center, and I want to see if it changes the—"

Hodrick lunged forth, took his brother in his arms, and clutched him tightly, terrified of letting go. "I thought I lost you!" he cried, tears cascading down his cheeks.

"The pie! The pie!" Hodark shouted desperately.

"Oh!" Hodrick reluctantly released his brother and wiped at his eyes. "Sorry."

Hodark sighed in relief, clutching the pie. His smile returned. "It's good to see you too, little brother. Did you come to avenge us?"

"Us?" He looked around at all the other dwarves and understood. "So you're all—"

"Morons who should've brought bows instead of swords," said another dwarf.

"We're cursed to serve her highness and her subjects until the end of time," moaned a third. "All while three feet high and unable to shave. It's a woeful business, so it is. 'Least our heads are still attached."

"Her Highness?" asked Hodrick, confused. "Allara's alive? But the Wraith?!"

Hodark grinned. "C'mon, little brother. Do you really think a monster would spend day in and day out singing about how sad it is after eating the princess and taking her keep?"

Realization slowly dawned upon Hodrick. Scarcely daring to believe it, he pointed ceiling-ward. "You mean...the Wraith..." he whispered, hearing that soft lullaby in his mind again—soft, soothing and filled with regret—"...Allara?"

"Welcome to her royal highness's service, little brother," said Hodark. He thrust his pie towards him once more. "So hurry on, give us an opinion. The guards patrolling the hedge maze are impatient buggers when they haven't been fed. Although I suppose when you literally have a horse's appetite, that's a given."▲

'THE RITUAL

BY DANIEL CHAJON



ART // DANIEL CHAJON

He squirmed and struggled against the knotted ropes. His moans fed through the gold spun cloth hastily stuffed into his mouth, and the canoe rocked from side to side as he resisted his constraints. The Mechanical Ones, constructed beings whose sole purpose it was to bring sacrifices to the mountaintop, propelled the canoe with massive oars inscribed with the holy words. The keeper of the faith, the Messenger, kept company with the machines and escorted the sacrifice to his destiny.

The Messenger genuflected in the golden light of Xibalba wearing the robes of The Way. The holy vestments the old zealot wore had been passed down through endless generations of Messengers and were worn only once a year when the golden light of Xibalba crested the Holy Spire. Where the robes tattered, strips of clothing from the sacrifice were sewed in place, and so over the years, some part of each sacrifice was returned to the Holy Spire to be present at the offering.

"Why do you thrash about so, brother? Can you not see that the Holy Spire is before us?" The Messenger stared down quizzically at the struggling man. A boiling hatred filled the man's eyes, and the Messenger, drawing on the experience of a lifetime of this joyous work, knew better than to remove the gag from the man's mouth.

What followed went exactly as it always has. The Mechanical Ones docked the canoe at the foot of the mountain, stripped the sacrifice of his garments, and used them to strap the sacrifice to the oar. They then began the slow ascent to the peak with the Messenger close behind. In years past the Messenger sprinted ahead of the Mechanical Ones while singing the dirges of the mountain. But now it was all he could do to keep up with the Mechanical Ones who never altered their pace. They did not speak, nor did they even seem to notice when the Messenger fell behind. Once at the summit, the Mechanical Ones removed the sacrifice from the oar and impaled him on a conical rod at the apex of the mount. The sacrifice was pushed clean through the rod until only his skin held him in place. The bones of past sacrifices littered the floor beneath, covering the surface of the small clearing. The Mechanical Ones, satisfied with having fulfilled their duties, turned and descended the mountain, rowed across the waters, then marched into the center of the town, where they dropped into hibernation. Here they would rest, lowered onto their haunches, until the sacrifice of the following year was at hand, at which point they would awaken themselves, choose a sacrifice, and repeat the ritual.

The elderly Messenger, having exhausted himself from the climb, returned to the temple and fell into a soundless sleep, as peaceful as the machines who slept just outside the temple doors.

He awoke to screams and panic. The machines had risen and were in the process of binding a young woman for sacrifice. The Mechanical Ones were taking another

sacrifice to the mountain!

"What are you doing?!" The Messenger demanded of the machines, but they strode easily towards the ceremonial canoe with the woman carried over one shoulder.

"No! You can't!" Cried the elderly mother of the sequestered woman, "It isn't time for another..." Her words caught in her mouth as one of the two machines knocked her to the ground. The large foot of the machine crushed her body whole and left a fossil imprint of the woman molded into a three-clawed track. The Mechanical Ones lumbered towards the water with thundering steps, heads high above the pointed tops of the modest island homes.

The Messenger followed them onto the canoe and the yearly ritual took place again for the second day in a row.

By week's end, the death toll had risen to 33. Of them, 7 were sacrificed at the Golden Spire and the others were killed trying to stop the machines. The Messenger was also in danger, as it was generally believed that he controlled the Mechanical Ones. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Gods of the Sun who built the machines had departed this world long before. The Machines were left in their place to carry on the ritual which they demanded. Only myth survived. Myth and Machines.

No matter where the inhabitants of the island town fled, the Mechanical Ones found them. They collected sacrifices from caves, from underground shelters, from up in trees, and from out in the open sea. One by one, day by day, they were carried up to the mountain and impaled on the Golden Spire. In time, only the Messenger remained.

In the morning of his solitude, the Messenger exited the temple before sunrise, donned the sacred robes, and knelt before the Mechanical Ones. The morning turned to afternoon then evening, and the Mechanical Ones slept.

For years the old man lived with the slumbering machines. Never another word was spoken on that island.

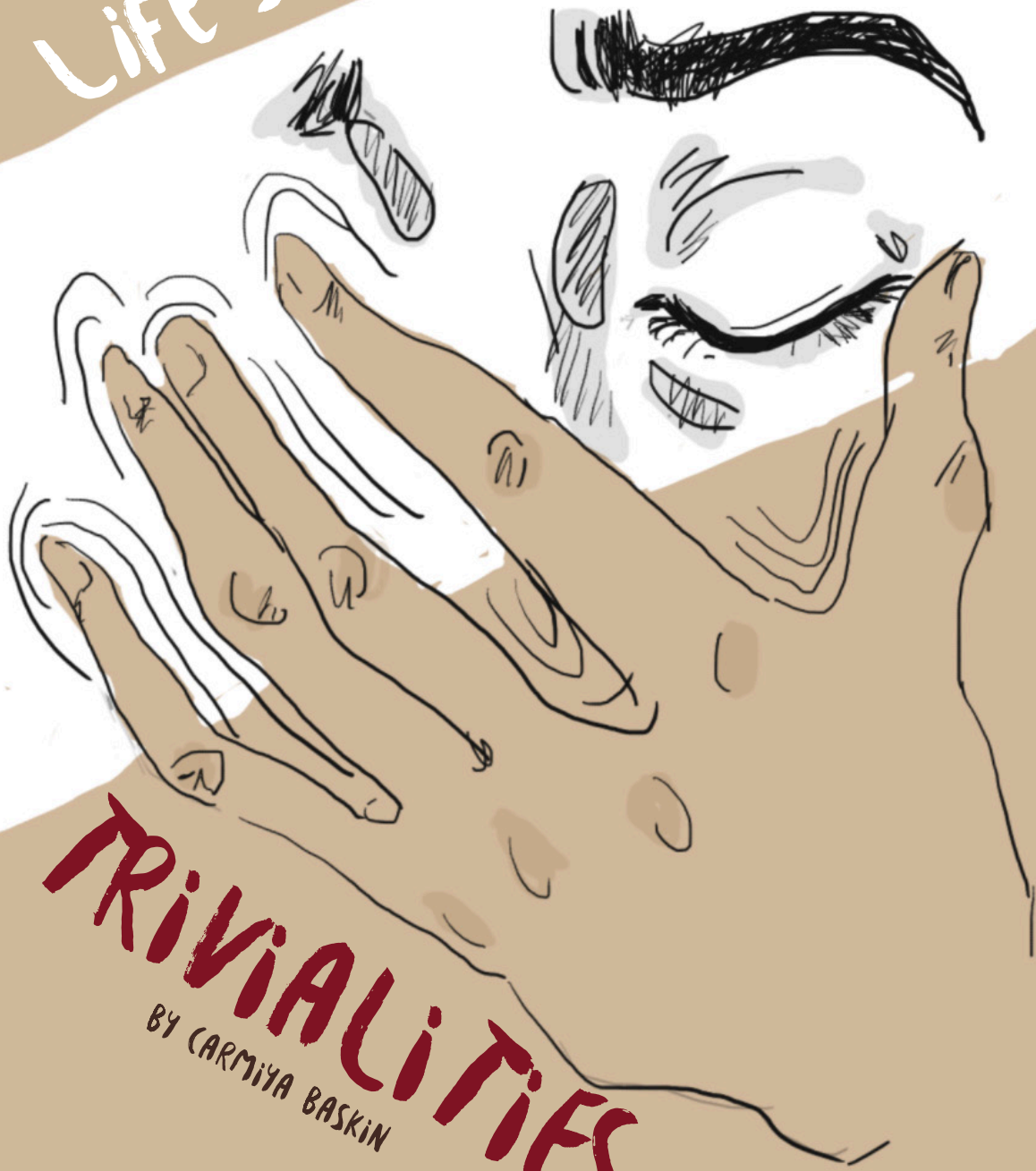
When Xibalba next crested the Golden Spire, the Messenger took a canoe across the waters, climbed the sacred mountain, sang the dirges, then dropped his full weight on to the sacrificing rod, impaling himself through the lower back and out through the abdomen.

His death was slow, and as the hours passed the emptiness of the ritual revealed itself to him. At last the old man had found a truth in his life. The spark of truth breathed and lived in him for a single fading moment as his world closed with his eyes.

The Mechanical Ones slept. They would sleep like this long after the bones of the Messenger turned to dust. They would sleep as the town folded into itself and the vegetation grew thick across the island. They would sleep, and together with the island, would sink to the bottom of the sea, forgotten. ▲

...The bones of past sacrifices littered the floor beneath, covering the surface of the small clearing...

LIFE'S



TRIVIALITIES

BY CARMiYA BASKIN

ART // DARYA BEHROOZI

“OH MY GOSH, THE BABY IS KICKING! HUGO GET IN HERE!”

My wife shouts from down the hall. Her voice bounces off the walls as I make my way towards the nursery room where she stands, gazing down at her belly, and rubbing it in amazement. She looks up as I enter the room and I notice shiny tears glistening on her rosy cheeks as her face breaks into a shaky smile. Her auburn hair hangs down in loose strands around her oval shaped face.

“Yes, I heard, dear. I reckon the neighbors did too.” I force a smile but it must come off as more of a grimace because her lips droop down and her brow furrows.

“What’s wrong, Hugo? This is a special moment!” I merely shrug in response and lower myself into the rocking chair by the window, gazing out at the street. It’s a bright afternoon and the sun casts golden rays of light on passersby, elongating their shadows on the sidewalk. I can see the sweat on the gardener’s brow slowly making its way down his cheek while he revs the engine on the lawn, slicing blades of grass. A few steps away, a young woman fans herself in the moist air, her flower lace dress rippling in the light breeze. The heat pounds in my temples from four stories up.

The kink in my back twists as my wife’s slender fingertips touch my shoulder. I look up. Her light blue eyes no longer glow with excitement and a dark cloud seems to have fallen over her soft features.

“Are you all right, Danita?” It’s a pointless question because, of course, one moment ago she was ablaze with happiness yet now she resembles a deflated balloon. Danita crosses the room without answering and sits down on the bed, crinkling the cotton duvet, while admiring the bump in her stomach again. I think about the baby for a moment and decide that it really is a waste of time to start a family. We were all children once who made mistakes and learned life lessons so what is more significant about this baby’s birth than Danita’s or mine or Jesus Christ’s?

As if sensing my thoughts, a low snuffle sounds behind me and I turn around to see Danita’s shoulders shaking slightly, her head bent towards her chest. I march back and perch beside her on the arm of the chair, observing the way her kneecaps stick out above her long, lean legs. The light blue veins run along the creases on her porcelain hands before branching off into her bony knuckles.

“I mean...if you don’t love me...then why did you m-marry me?” Her voice falters and breaks and she begins to sob as snot runs down her nose. A single tear hits her jaw

**WE WERE ALL CHILDREN ONCE WHO
MADE MISTAKES AND LEARNED LIFE
LESSONS SO WHAT IS MORE
SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THIS BABY’S
BIRTH THAN DANITA’S OR MINE OR
JESUS CHRIST’S?**

and then lands softly on the carpet—splat. I find that I don’t really know how to answer so I just stare at her until she finally wipes her nose and clears her vision.

I stand, stock-still in the middle of the room, slightly confused and annoyed. In remaining silent, my wife has supplied her own answer to the question by assuming that I no longer love her and never wished to marry her.

“Let’s go for a walk. The weather is nice and by the time we get back, it’ll be evening and we can go out to dinner.” I’m feeling particularly happy all of a sudden at the prospect of fresh air and warm sun. Danita simply stands up, quietly pads over to the closet, slips on her periwinkle sandals, and leaves the room. I silently follow.



The glare of the sun blinds me briefly as we step outside. A soft wind blows at our feet, rustling the freshly cut grass as we meander down the street towards Clover Park. It’s only a few blocks away and easy to spot due to the two large fir trees flanking the entrance and the cobblestone path leading into the garden. Gold candytuft sways in the calm breeze and anemone flowers surround the back area of the field. In the middle, a wooden bridge arcs over a flowing river and off to the right, an old swing set rests under a looming pear tree. A hawk soars overhead, its beady eyes scanning the perimeter of the park with talons outstretched; it skates into the clouds and disappears.

Danita strolls up to the pear tree and plucks one from a low branch. A tick scuttles out of the fruit as she takes a bite, the juice spraying from her mouth and dribbling down her chin. We sit down on an indigo-painted bench, the color peeling off in certain places. It gives me a kind of sick joy to realize that people find climbing steep mountains or reading famous novels rewarding yet they lack the time and patience to repaint a rickety, wooden structure. The color will no doubt fade within the next decade or the bench will be entirely rebuilt.

The swing oscillates back and forth in the wind like a pendulum while sapphires dance in the grass, hugging my hazel-colored loafers. A dove sails overhead, its pure white form prominent against the backdrop of the fading blue sky. I vaguely hear Danita chewing the green fruit, each crunch louder than the next; otherwise, nothing else attempts to disrupt the peacefulness of the moment.

As if sensing my thoughts, a heavy fog settles over the land, obscuring the sun from view. It hangs densely in the air and I can barely make out Danita’s face or the river stream through the mist.

I angle myself to the left and mutter, “Danita.” I hear a rustle as she rises and then a figure takes shape in front of me, extending one arm for my hand. I gently take it and we make our way back to the entrance, tripping occasionally over rotten apples strewn all over the ground. I begin to wonder if perhaps they had fallen from a hidden tree or if someone had purposefully chucked them in here because I hadn’t noticed them on the way in. We eventually emerge onto the main road and walk the rest of the way to the

restaurant, the sun still hiding behind the thick smog.



Laughter and conversation fill the air when we arrive on Taylor Street and Danita pauses to chat every time she sees someone she knows. I nod every so often but continue walking until we reach Aniha's, a hole in the wall restaurant, tucked behind a bustling bookstore. I gently shove the unbalanced door forward, holding it open for Danita to squeeze through. Before my eyes can adjust to the dim glow, a heavysset man with a thick handlebar mustache rushes into view, gripping two menus under his arm. The waiter, Cardon, recognizes us and promptly leads us to our usual spot in the very back, near the window. His pot belly jiggles over the side of his apron and his thick arms swing so forcefully by his sides that I'm afraid he's going to hit the tray of food coming down the aisle. He sets the menus down once we reach the table and gestures with his hand as if to say, "**VOILA.**"

"Thank you," Danita says and I nod in acknowledgement as Cardon waddles away. We slide into our seats, Danita's stomach shoving the table forward a few inches. I glance out the window at the quiet area outside. Poplar trees and white roses surround the space, the parched grass stained with brown patches in a few places. The emptiness of the park suggests that it has been abandoned for a long time. Cardon returns, balancing two glasses of water on a round tray, the ice cubes clinking against each other in the cups.

"Do you already know what you would like or do you need another minute?" His words are nearly hidden behind a thick Ukranian accent. He produces a pad of paper and a black pen to write down our order, although I doubt he needs to as I get the same meal every time.

"I think we're ready. I'll have the Creamy Vegetable Bisque with the bread on the side, please." I close my menu and hand it to Cardon as he turns to Danita.

"Hmm...the Back On the Farm Omelet sounds amazing... What is your Chicken Pot Pie like?" Danita asks politely.

"The Chicken Pot Pie is very hearty and filling, but the Omelet is also excellent," Cardon responds, nodding as if agreeing with his own words.

"Ah, I see..." Danita hides behind the menu once more. "I think I'll have the Wild Salmon with squeezed lemon. Oh, and of course, the Sweet Potato Fries on the side. Thank you, Cardon."

"Absolutely." Cardon leaves once again. Danita gazes at her stomach and smiles happily, then stares at me expectantly as if I have something interesting to talk about. Instead, I turn away from her and stare out the window again. Why is it called "breakfast food" if people choose to eat it at other times in the day? Why ask how a certain meal is going to taste if you're just going to order something else entirely?

The knowledge of how an omelet or chicken pot pie tastes is useless in everyday life. And how is someone else to know

what another person's taste buds prefer? Is it really necessary to ask an employee how something tastes if he's going to say everything is "excellent, hearty, and filling"? I keep my expectations low by always ordering the same meal, thereby avoiding disappointment. I sigh outwardly; at times, I feel I am the only one thinking. A few minutes later, the food arrives and the steam from the bowl of soup wafts up into my nostrils.

"It looks so good," Danita exclaims, as though she has never seen this platter of food before. She squeezes the lemon's sour juices over the fish and we eat our dinner in silence. The soup tastes the same as I always anticipate: heavy and salty. Danita interrupts the quiet every now and then with pointless comments such as, "Mmmh," "Just the right amount of pepper," and "These fries are so sweet!" After precisely half an hour, I pay for the meal and we exit the restaurant.

Danita and I stroll through the neighborhood, guided by the light of the moon. After climbing the four flights of stairs, I find myself too tired to say anything—although the silence has lingered heavily in the air since dinner. Upon entering the bedroom, I notice how dark and cool it feels compared to the humidity of the night outside. After placing my wallet on the mahogany dresser, I crawl into bed and wait for Danita to join me. Soon, I feel a soft dip on the right side of the mattress, informing me of her presence. The bed sheets become tangled as she shifts to find a comfortable position and the bump in her belly protrudes, tugging half of the covers to her side, so I am left with hardly anything at all. As we fall into slumber, the moon seeps through the curtains and spills onto the floor, illuminating the clock on the wall.

HOW CAN EVERYONE BE SO
MESMERIZED BY A
COLD HUNK OF ROCK
IN THE SKY?

How can everyone be so mesmerized by a cold hunk of rock in the sky? Is it really that intriguing or is it the way everyone else finds it fascinating that invokes a desire to feel the same? The silvery glow it casts across the floor is no more special than the burn of the sun in the morning or the shapes of the clouds in the afternoon. The religious faith a child is raised to believe in remains insignificant. How one spends his days is unimportant. Then again, the way one passes his times these days is so trifling, all one can really do is stare at the moon all night long. ▲

WHY IS IT CALLED "BREAKFAST FOOD"
IF PEOPLE CHOOSE TO EAT IT
AT OTHER TIMES OF THE DAY?

GHOST STORY

BY ROSIE NGUYEN



about how things were going to get *infinitely better*, Emily. As it always did, her doe-eyed optimism rubbed off on me with time, and so we, as in my naive colleagues at the lab and I, went looking for more efficient means—a shortcut that would bridge great spatial distances—of transcending time and space. No more primitively launching ourselves into orbit. We were arrogant enough to tell ourselves that this project would not only be our redemption, but also the revival of the scientific world. The advent of the Second Enlightenment—*ha!* When we presented our abstract to our prospective patrons, we called the theory something long, pretentious, and technical—a title that I could not even bother to remember later, when the fog arrived and settled. My wife called it “closing the gaps”—*that’s a much more digestible term*, Emily—which seems so appropriately ironic, in retrospect. I would have laughed if I had known better then.

There is no telling or predicting when the fog will clear and there is no demanding or manipulating the fog into clearing. For the first time in a long time, we had to wait to get what we wanted from what was left of our planet. I cannot say whether or not this was good for us, or even if the fog had produced more patient, less self-serving people. It certainly did produce the most devout of religious fanatics, though. First, came the prayer circles; they were mostly secretive and inconspicuous in the beginning. Then, followed the chanting and the singing that echoed throughout the day, into the desolate alleyways and into the brittle corpses of fallen skyscrapers, and bled deep into the night. They—most likely because my wife had gone missing by the time that the Fog Societies multiplied and infiltrated the cities—didn’t bother me as much as they had bothered those who eventually attempted to silence their “disruptive nonsense” through violence. Their singing soothed me and helped me to drown out the sounds of regretful memories: dishes crashing against the kitchen floor, doors slamming in faces, empty curses shouted from across equally empty hallways. I didn’t like being told that I was being greedy; she didn’t like being told that she was being jealous. I was officially granted my own research space at the national lab; she was discharged from her position as editor-in-chief of the local paper.

Public distrust of science was rampant long before my team and I had even started our experimental trials, and rightfully so: our predecessors took advantage of science’s promise of absolute objectivity and absolute truth to justify eugenics—among other inhumane acts.

MY WIFE IS AS TRANSIENT TO ME NOW AS THE FOG IS TO EVERYONE ELSE. She comes when the fog draws back, like curtains, revealing the face that appears so familiar to me, yet not, at the same time—and she goes when the fog thickens, closing off my view of her and her world in all of their foreign familiarity.

Space travel had not been successful in the early years: it took longer than we could afford to wait amidst the famines and the riots, and the astronauts—“our pioneers of the future,” as the last of the grimy government officials liked to call them—went missing, often, much to the public’s horror. Those were the days when my wife was still writing for the papers and leading protests and coming home to talk to me

Scientists like me were scarce and poor, so naturally, the prize money was the objective of our project. The fog, of course, was the unintended, unnatural consequence—to some, a godly blessing—of our hasty curiosity and desperation.

What emerged from the tear that we made in the atmosphere was not expected. *I thought that you were closing the gaps.* There was no kaleidoscopic storm that threatened to devour the city and the oceans, there was no ominous black hole to rip us apart and pull us into the fabric of the universe and end all human life as we knew it. There was no loud, cinematic climax, only a potent, viscous slowness. The fog materialized in waves, ever so subtly, before it was everywhere and before it became everything. It clouded our vision as it snaked through the uprooted streets and penetrated the thin walls of our homes, lulling the city into a gradual hibernation: it dimmed the street lamps, it eclipsed the stars, and it silenced the birds and the children in the parks. The fog became the air that we breathed and it, too, seemed to move—to clot and to dissipate—with the rhythm of our lungs: the exhale, the clotting, was deep and

and cracked concrete. Grandma Kay's gilded antique music box disappeared from my wife's bookshelf and was never found.

"This is a cruel prank, Emily," my wife had assured me one morning before I left for work at the lab, her voice hoarse from last night's yelling match. She must have also found it cruel when people began disappearing, too, but she retreated to her room without a word when the first headliner showed up at our door: 25 Missing, No Leads. They were never found.

I spent the weeks leading up to my wife's disappearance tossing and turning in the bed sheets, only occasionally getting up for nutritional biscuits and water from the kitchen. It was difficult to cope with the immobility during the exhalations, they were such agonizingly long periods. You could not see the hand in front of you when you stepped foot outside, let alone travel, because the fog was so opaque when it thickened and descended upon everything. My wife liked to joke that we were living beneath a large fleece blanket, though I suppose it wasn't much of a joke given the bitterness in her tone. Ironically enough, we were safest in the darkness, when we were blind to everything outside of that large blanket. At least, people didn't go missing during the exhalations.

The city is mostly quiet now because people had given up on hypothesizing and rationalizing and instead, surrendered, shut up, and listened to the soft humming of the fog. You cannot sleep because the noise is so incessant, omnipotent, and it is usually at its loudest just before the fog lifts for the next inhalation. You can hear distorted, almost palpable voices muffled in the fog, some of them foreign, some of them so eerily familiar that they make you pause to stare at your reflection in the mirror at night, as my wife so often did. She said that she saw the ghosts of another family living inside of our house: one mother who goes to work—A scientist, Emily!—another mother who stays at home with the giggling baby. She witnessed the welcoming of the new family cat, reflected in the bathroom mirror. She was there for the baby's first birthday celebration. She watched them dancing around together in the window panes. It made her uneasy, at times, the voyeurism of it all, but she could not bring herself to look away.

It was not long before the rest of the city saw their own ghosts, too. Behind the fog, we saw glimpses of different versions of ourselves. Some of them were brilliant, others, not so much. We got to see the ones that never broke up with our first loves, the ones that pursued the internships that we had been too afraid to in college, and the ones that found solace in opium and lived in dingy spaces on the edges of town. The fog gave us new vision, new eyes: we saw life and we saw death, living and dying, all at once. For some, the gift was too overwhelmingly colorful, it drove them down the rooftops of skyscrapers and down the flights of apartment building staircases. For others, the gift seduced them into stagnancy. Sometimes, they formed new religions like the Fog Societies did in order to evoke more frequent inhalation periods. Sometimes, they

exaggerated, while the inhale, the dissipation, was brief and euphoric.

Strange, inexplicable things happened during the inhalations, during the fleeting moments when the fog cleared. There were miracles and there were tragedies, the two merged into one. My wife was the first to notice the differences that emerged from underneath the fog. At first, they were small, insignificant differences. The wedding album cover was royal blue instead of the seafoam green that my wife swore on her right hand that it was. Peach rose bushes bloomed in places where there should have been dirt





sat still in their living rooms, inhaling the sounds of their potential lives and choices. My wife sleepwalked through empty rooms and traced the spines of nonexistent books that she did not own, at least not in this life. Not here and not now. All of these things were ultimately just different forms of waiting and postponing action. People were tired of working and protesting to deaf ears. Waiting felt good.

One night, sometime after my wife went missing, a stranger joined me in bed. This was an inhalation. The woman resembled my wife in almost every way: she shared the same waist-length curls, same pointed nose that I used to teasingly poke, same bright, hazel eyes. I watched the panic grow and then plateau in those eyes at the realization that I was not at all who she thought I was.

“You’re not Cara. Where is she? Where is the baby?”

This wife-imposter did not stay for very long. She left just as quickly as she had arrived when the fog came back and swathed us in its great arms. I don’t think that I ever saw her again. There were other wife-imposters, certainly, but all slightly different. A minority of them recognized me—probably a different version of me, maybe a better me that didn’t abandon my wife when she needed me the most—and I pretended to recognize them too. Most of them reacted similarly to the way that the first one did, by bombarding me with questions, to which I answered as honestly as I could. The questions that I asked myself tortured me more so. Was my real wife starving somewhere on the side of

some nondescript road? Was she happier with whomever she wound up with than she was with me? Was she still alive? The first few times the women appeared were frustrating and disorienting. I just wanted to get past the formalities, past those shrill, hysterical questions, and find out for sure if this was indeed my wife from here, from now. My increasing loneliness and guilt softened me, however, and I found myself hopefully waiting for these awkward visits from these strange women that ghosted in and out of our house. I wanted for just anyone to distract me from that harrowing loneliness and guilt.

These days, I wait out on my flamingo pink lawn chair, half-heartedly pretending to sunbathe, but mostly I’m focused on my breathing. I’ve stopped going to the lab and I’ve stopped communicating with my colleagues altogether, not that either of those things would have mattered, anyway. Some of them don’t even remember my name or why they’re even working at the lab. I can’t blame them, though. My own memories feel more like distant childhood bedtime stories than they do reality. Perhaps we are all too intoxicated to tell the difference. Perhaps the fog has suffocated us all in our own daydreams—I don’t know. For now, I know that I am perfectly content waiting around for the fog to churn out the next dazed stranger. I know that she’ll have a lot of questions that I can’t answer, but maybe one day, she won’t have any. She’ll know exactly who I am and she’ll know that she is home. ▲

ART // FRANCESCA TOWERS

NEW BEGINNINGS

BY CAITRIONA MCTIERNAN

I HUGGED MY BOOK TIGHTLY AS I AWAITED MY SENTENCE IN THE LONG, NARROW CORRIDOR. The double doors were pushed open by swarms of kids rushing in and out of the school. I treaded lightly, my eyes and ears assailed with the foreign sights and sounds of older kids bustling to get to their lockers and to class.

I quivered and pushed my glasses up the ridge of my nose. Students pushed by, oblivious to the growing voices of panic in my head. Some turned to look at me, only to turn their head again. My palms sweated as I stumbled down to room NC3. I just wanted to read and write in the quietness of my own home. I got lost in a maze of classrooms before a girl leaned against the lockers in front of me, blocking my path.

“Are you okay?” she looked me up and down, her mouth pouting as she took in the pigtails and buttoned-up collar.

“Sure,” I said coyly, as I tried to inch my way around her. She raised her hand in a gesture to stop me.

“Hold up,” she grinned. She had long blonde hair scooped in a high ponytail and wore a tie-dye shirt and yoga pants that made her dangly knees more pronounced. She towered over me, her green eyes piercing me through thick-framed glasses.

“It’s my first day here,” I choked out, “I’m just trying to find my class.”

“Your first day? Well, that’s too bad.”

“Why’s that?”

She gave me a long, hard stare.

“I’ve had a very bad year here last year, I must say.”

“How come?”

“All the usual college stuff. Choosing the wrong classes. The teachers hate me, most of them. I used to be shy and nervous, you know. But high school changes that.”

“Did you just not find classes that you’re happy with?”

“Yes, my family want me to be a doctor so I’ve taken on a bunch of science subjects that I don’t like. What do you like to do?”

“I was considering being a doctor too,” I muffled. “But I really like drawing.”

“Drawing, I like it. There’s some pretty neat courses out there, but what about architecture? You look like you need to combine art with something intellectual. Now there’s a way to do it.”

I tilted my head to the side as I considered.

“That does sound interesting.”

“Doesn’t it,” she grinned.

We remained silent for a moment.

“So, is that what’s getting you down about this school, your classes?”

“Classes certainly don’t help.”

The bell rang to signal the beginning of the first class. Butterflies filled my stomach. I picked up my bag.

“I’ve got to get to class!”

She grabbed my hand as I tried to leave.

“Wait, just a few moments. I need to show you something.”

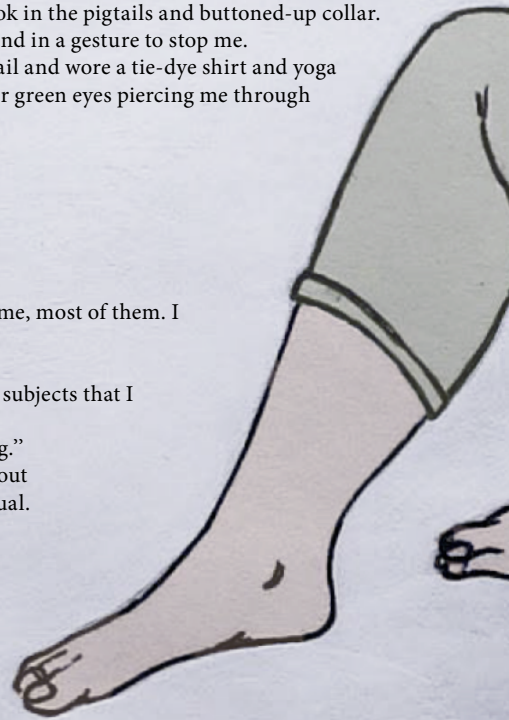
She fetched a flannelled shirt out of her locker and draped it across my shoulders.

“Do you have a boyfriend?” she asked.

“No.”

“This was my boyfriend’s. He was a great guy. I left him when he needed me and...”

“I’m so sorry,” I put an arm around her. “But it’s my first day here and I need to go to class. Let’s talk about this during



break.”

“Of course, of course,” she gushed and took my hand as I reluctantly staggered under her clutch. “My name’s Lee, by the way.”

“Emily.”

She brought me down a series of halls that led me to a corner which had only one classroom: NC3.



I stepped inside and was engulfed by a wave of hushed first years. A silence hung in the air, filled by spaces of quiet whispers and stifled introductions. All eyes averted their gaze to me as I stood noticeably late for class. Great.

“Emily Harper?” The teacher said, his arm outstretched with a welcoming smile. I smiled back. “We are just about to get started.”

I sat down in the middle row and everyone continued to introduce themselves.

When the bell rang for class to finish, I stood up and looked at the animated map to find where my second class was. I was still thinking about that mysterious girl, Lee, when I felt someone prod my back and I turned around.

“Hi, I’m sorry,” the brown eyes sucked me in immediately. “I was just wondering if that was your shirt.”

I looked down at the shirt tossed over my arm and laughed in disbelief. He stopped me.

“It’s just I was coming out of my first gym class earlier and it was gone. I left it by my locker. I thought that was it.”

“Oh no,” I began, “This is my friend’s...”

He looked at it for another moment.

“Really? I’m almost certain that’s my shirt.”

“Well, have a look at it then,” I muttered.

“Do you mind asking your friend? This is definitely mine.” He looked at me and convincingly put it over his gym shirt. “Hey, why do you look so terrified?”

“No—nothing,” I flustered. “Let me go find her.”

I hurried out of the classroom down the narrow hall and wondered where Lee was. I went back to her locker and waited as kids pushed by me, but no one came.

The bathroom faced opposite the locker so I decided to brush myself off. I cleaned my shirt at her locker. He was taking a book out of it for the next class before he stopped and realised I was there.

“Did you find your friend?”

“No,” I croaked. I was suddenly feeling very queasy.

“My name is Jake, by the way, and you’re...”

“Emily,” I whispered. “I should get to class.”

“Emily,” he paused. “Do you mind if I call you Lee?” ▲

ART // OLIVIA BERRIZ



RUN

BY DAVIS KELLY

The Bearer,

Having paid the sum of 2-gram gold 20-gallon clearwater, on account of the Mayor, signified by seal, is hereby licensed to use deadly force, and carry the armaments required, against Gorvy MacReady and only the aforementioned.

REGULATIONS TO BE OBSERVED BY THE BEARER.

1. Upon the death of the Bearer or of the aforementioned this license is made null and void, and additionally is non-transferable and any manner of death not caused by the Bearer will put the perpetrator to be exercised upon by the full extent of the law.

2. This license is to be carried on person at all times, to be produced whenever prompted by an officer of the peace, or other duly authorized persons.

3. Any complications that arise during the use or attempted use of this license are fully outside of the responsibilities of the Mayor.

In other words, I can spray MacReady's ugly face with buckshot the second I goddamned see it. Which I aim on doing as soon as I can—the shooting, not the seeing. And send my soul to Hell if he doesn't deserve every piece of lead in my shotgun and a thousand more. There's never been a more despicable son-of-a-bitch to set foot in this town, not in a hundred years since Gordon Waves dug the first well into sandstone and founded Shady Water. See, I don't even need a license to kill MacReady—I'd've already done it if I knew where he was. Just wanted the Mayor's double barrel, said he couldn't give me it without the license, and would only give it to me if I half-dried my well filling his. Doesn't matter anyway. I don't need the water anymore, on account of my leaving town. And maybe I won't even come back, maybe I'll pitch tent right on MacReady's goddamned grave so if his ghost comes back I can kill that too.

Anyway, like I said, I'm leaving town. I got what I need—my sawed-off, the ten shells the Mayor gave with

it, four camel skin water sacks, at least two pounds jerky, and my late Pa's old ivory tusk he used to wear 'round his neck. All I need now is to pick a direction. I reckon MacReady went out of town north on account of his coming in south. Course no one saw which way he went after he did what he'd done, but I figure it's a good place to start. Not many places one can go out here anyway, I'm bound to catch up sometime. Year's a few months in, and if I remember he left when it started. After the grieving was done back then I got to looking at some maps, and I reckon he made it at most a hundred miles from Shady Water. So he's at, probably, Dry-Spring, Montaciento, or one of those little towns they got out a ways west. Can't imagine he'd go out east, he ain't got the food for it. And so I'll be headed out to Dry-Spring first, shake things up a little, see if I can find any trace of him. If he's been there at least in the past month or so I reckon I'll find out. But getting to Dry-Spring from Shady Water isn't as easy as a walk to the well. There's at least sixty miles of sand between the two, and that sand ain't nothing like the sand we got here. Hotter than Hell at day, colder than a corpse come night. Anyway, I'm prepared as prepared gets.

Didn't face much trouble on the way out. Got a couple looks from some of the old-timers who knew what I was fixing to do, but they knew why I was fixing to do it and didn't object much. They knew my folks back when they were still around—before MacReady did what he done. They knew my folks for honest well workers, and in all their fifty some years at Shady Water my folks never denied not a single thirsty stranger a glass of water. Not one. And they died for it anyway.

I've made a good two or three-mile judging by the size of Shady Water in the distance behind me. I figure it's another four or five before it mixes with the sand behind me, and that'll be when I know I've gone for good. No direction home then, only that star in the north paving my vengeance. That's all I need. Just a sign that I'm headed for MacReady, that every footprint my leather leaves in

the sand makes a road from where he did what he done all the way to his corpse. I'm gonna make it come full circle. Show him he can't sin like he's sinned without wrath falling back on him. The judgement he'll get from me ain't nothing compared to what he'll get after. I only deal him lead. But he'll get fire where he's going. Nothing but fire, from the second I send him to Hell to the end of time and then some.

It'd been over two weeks on sand when I finally saw Dry-Spring cresting on the horizon. Thought my mind was playing tricks on me first. The sand and heat do unholy things to a mind. After days of seeing nothing but yellow and brown, spots start to appear in the eye as if they're closed shut. Give it a few more days and you'll swear you see the kingdom of God falling down to earth. But for all hallucinations, my mind conjured this one was real, and thank God for it. I'd run through over three and a half of my water sacks and hadn't drunk from the fourth one in a day for fear of it running out. But I reckon I'll get a refill for something I got, even if it means pawning off anything but my shotgun.

Had to sell my Pa's old ivory tusk to get the water, but I got it anyhow. Anything to keep me going. But giving me water's about all they can do for me. I've been asking about MacReady in every saloon, shack and adobe building I can find, using every description I know how to give. Still, I'm getting nothing. Even shoved my two barrels in a shop keep's face. Not sure why I did it. She just started stuttering about this and that, getting down on one knee making all sorts of promises. Even said she knew a "McRyan" and that he come here a few weeks back, but that was nothing but the fear of death speaking through her mouth. That whole scene shook up the town more than a little, and I found myself talking to the sheriff after a while. He wasn't doing anything but leading trouble away from his flock, so he wasn't too keen on starting a shoot-out. Eventually, I got around to bringing out my license, and he recognized it for what it is and inquired to how I came about getting it.

I told him one Gorvy MacReady had come into Shady Water three month or so back, as a traveler stopping on his way through. Shady Water ain't nothing more than nine or ten shanty houses with a few wells to go around, so his arrival wasn't overlooked. I told how he hung around for a few days. Told him what MacReady done.

How he slit my Ma's throat, made her gasp like a fish.

Killed my father when he came in.

Killed both of 'em in cold blood. For water.

For goddamned water.

Something he woulda got for free.

The Sheriff didn't know what to make of that. Told me he was mighty sorry but couldn't have me waving my shotgun all over town. So I'm headed out towards Montaciento now.

It'd been about three weeks since Dry-Spring when I stepped into Montaciento. Worked through all four of my water sacks. Nearly finished my dried camel too. My throat probably thought I was swallowing sand, couldn't make a mile without dry heaving.

Folks here been more helpful, probably on account of me showing up at death's door. They gave me water till I could talk, and as soon as I could I got to askin' around for MacReady. A few of 'em said they seen someone like who I was talking about, but that he never gave a name. Said he moved around with limp, cloaked in black with a ratty brown hat. I reckon they ain't lying. One of 'em who lives towards the edge of town, on the east side, said he saw a figure moving 'round his well before he scared him off. Said the man ran out further east, up and over the dunes.

So I'll be headed out east. Only problem is I ain't got the water for it, but I'll figure something out. Ain't no other way about it.

Had to leave town in a hurry, on account of the commotion that happened back there while getting my water. I was filling up my sacks when the owner came out headed for the outhouse. I showed him my license when he said he was fixing to call the Sheriff.

I showed him my sawed-off when that didn't persuade him.

And, well, my eyes met the six-shooter slung around his waist before his right hand did. I pulled both triggers. Blew him near seven feet back.

I'm ordained by God, my own hand, hell even by law. There wasn't any choice to be made really. I did what I had too. Wouldn't be fair to my folks, letting myself die before getting to MacReady. I did what I had to do. Wasn't no other way to go about it.

Flames are all I see anymore. Dancing in the dunes. Flashing glass in the sand. Must be my eyes playing tricks on me, but sure as Hell doesn't look like it. But I did see something my eyes knew to be real. I've been out in the sands going on two weeks now, and it was about a week back when I saw it.

Saw a tree that looked more like a branch stuck in the ground, and under it cooking in the sun was a corpse.

The corpse had on a black coat, with the brown ratty hat to match. Hell, the face on the corpse probably even looked like MacReady's before the sun took to it.

The son-of-a-bitch thinks it can fool me. Thinks I'll give up and head back to Shady Water, live in the house where he killed my folks while he's out there drinking himself drunk with their water. No, he's still out there. He has to be. My vengeance ain't getting away from me.

I reckon he headed out east after laying this poor dead bastard here as bait. So that's where I'm headed. I'm sending him straight to Hell for what he done. There's no escaping it. ▲

PHOTOS // SARAH WILSON



INK BLOT VISION

BY MIRANDA DE MORAES

A human gut has more foreign bacteria than body cells—100 trillion microbes. We carry more of our environment than of our raw selves. Internal intertwined with external, perhaps dominated by it. Or rather, our environment is just a caricature of us anyway. The splatters on a jaguar and the perimeter of the continents. The fingers of a palm and the extensions of a root.

Then, of course, we try to look like our environment. Chameleoning into our surroundings. Is it for survival or acceptance? Instinct or imitation? Instinct burgeons imitation. Survival entails acceptance.

We are programmed to categorize. Mental matching. Making units distinct and then organizing them. Naming. Like the word mouth. Mouth of a cave, mouth of a human, mouth of a spiral, mouth of cellophane. You probably haven't heard the last phrase before—not because it's untrue, it's just a metaphor. But what does it

matter if it makes sense or not? Why use distinct words or create language, when everything is ultimately the same? Derived from the same source, expressed the same, dressed in costume to human perception.

Pulse—pulse. Vibrating and humming along the tightly woven net. We seem to start and end on a continuum of growth. Big to small, small to big. Regardless, it all remains consistent. Not even a fiber of the net strung out. Nothing ever actually changing.

Yet as we furiously scratch and sketch the world we wish to witness, our environment seems to “unveil itself” to us humans. Ink blot vision. Insulated in our boxed-in brains, hinged by the force field called a face. We manifest our own misery and thrill. Wedged in a blankly synonymous, symmetrical universe.

So, given the overwhelming truth and power of these past words: be yourself. ▲

EVERYDAY CHANGES WITH THE BLINK OF AN EYE,
a new pair of shoes, a new friend made, or lost, too.

I can't say when it happened, but life became the driver and I was put on the passenger's side.

I could say that Jesus took the wheel but I'm kind of Jewish so we don't really care about him.

I could say that I hit puberty, but it hit back, too.

I mean to say that I still look like a child yet I've somehow gotten into the habit of being a mom.

I wanted to be a vet for a day until I realized that my own dog didn't like me back and I cried the first time I gave a speech in front of my peers.

I still tie my shoelaces with bunny ears and when I think about my mom, I try not to step on the cracks in the pavement.

As far as I'm concerned, I've always been this young and this old, too.

The settings vary, the people change, my hair grows long, and my skin grows pale but I'm not changing—not really. ▲

LINDLAR CATALYST

By Julia Goldstein



Is There Life On Mars?

*In the morning there is feeling.
In the evening there is meaning.
—after Gertrude Stein*

by Nidhi Khanolkar

That morning began with tears as always. Another year had rolled around and she was still stuck in the same old life, same old routine, same old monotony. The day rang with a cacophony of half-hearted “happy birthday,” each more jarring and upsetting than the last. She had come undone. The hopes and dreams and wishes of what she had fantasized turning 18 would be twirled away in the wind like dandelion tufts. So close and so beautiful, but so heartbreakingly out of reach. There was flesh-eating bacteria in her brain. But instead of flesh, it gnawed at her every thought. She had grown weary under the immense pressure of every emotion that was condemned to stay bottled in. It hurt to breathe. She felt everything too intensely, but she only felt; never showed. Perhaps that heightened the sentiment. She wandered the grim hallways of her psyche, hovering around corners, painfully aware of the ominous rooms that she must avoid. Like a child waiting outside their fighting parents’ bedroom, desperately trying to listen in despite knowing that those words will haunt their nightmares. The real nightmares are the one that begin after you leave the sweet embrace of your bed. The ones that commence with the fluttering of your eyelids at the sound of your alarm. There’s no waking up from those. Her bones weighed down and yearned to just lie still in bed. Eyes resting, brain peaceful, soul respite. But instead, she was in the park. Darkness swept the sky like a fisherman’s net, stretching to the horizon like a fitted sheet. She mustered up the energy to seem enthusiastic enough to please her parents. Quirky characters littered the baseball field with their high tech telescopes. Her parents had already wandered off and another pang of emptiness rolled over her. It was the worst kind of loneliness—she felt uncomfortable around herself.

*We’re all just
chemistry dancing
around and falling
in love, launching
through space, in the
middle of nowhere and
everywhere.*

Someone offered her a glimpse into their telescope and she reluctantly leaned into the eyepiece. Everything seemed dark with a vague blot of blurriness in the center. She stepped backwards slightly and all at once the spot cleared up. A smooth ball, glowing yet muted, tinted greyscale yellow—like the seashore on a foggy day. But something was blocking the view. A line divided the ball, curving at the edges. Not blocking; it was the view. It was Saturn. The real celestial being in all of its glory was so starkly visible. She whipped her head up and stared in the same direction. Nothing. The night sky looked like tired eyes after a wild night out—wrinkly and baggy with glitter sparsely sprinkled around. Twinkling only when you stare long enough. But there was not a planet to be seen, not even the moon. She stared back into the eyepiece.

Goosebumps lined the inside of her sweater sleeves as she tried to memorize the rings that she had only ever seen in textbooks before. She wanted to carve this illustration into the grooves of her memory. In that moment, all hopelessness fluttered away and all that remained was pure wonder. Wonder and gratitude. We’re all just atoms on a floating rock and we’re worried about pieces of paper with symbols on it. Tests, bills, degrees, marriage licenses, paychecks. None of it matters.


But everything matters so much, too. She was stardust staring at her origins. She was spiraling in space and the chances of her ever even existing were theoretically near-impossible. Yet, here she was. In this particular moment in the history of the universe. On this specific coordinate in an ever-expanding galaxy. That, was a miracle. To breathe, to complain, to fear, to love—it was the greatest gift of all and still, she had been miserable all day because she hadn’t gotten any. They had gotten it wrong when they wrote: “To err is human, to forgive divine.”

To be human *was* divine.

We jump up and down and clap our hands when we are excited and hold each other's hand to become one and feel less alone. We listen to arbitrary arrangements of sound and put meaning in it and sway to it in different ways for fun. We get drunk on old berries and we whisper secrets to a friend and we brush our lips against someone we adore. We pass down stories to teach and entertain and scare and humor people we'll never meet. We capture these everyday moments and put them in frames and sometimes we make something unique and call it art. We throw our arms around each other when we are leaving them and tiny dew drops emerge in our eyes and we bid them farewell. We're all just chemistry, dancing around and falling in love, launching through space, in the middle of nowhere and everywhere. She looked within and found the sublime, she looked without and saw the profound. There was so much to appreciate, the seams of her heart stretched to their extent and then burst open. Exhilaration swept her as the thought of all the things that made life worth living crossed her mind. The brushstrokes of sunset across the sky on an October night. The sound of children laughing. The smell of the earth after a summer storm. The taste of a crisp, cool glass of water after a hot shower. The feeling of butterflies in your soul as you laugh with a lover.

It was all just the chaos of a fraction of a second, however. She blinked away the tear of awe that was desperate to spill out. She heard her mother's voice in the distance and went back to the reality she was a part of. She felt like she had just witnessed the coding of the simulation she had been living and as punishment, she was condemned to know reality but continue to live disillusioned. But so much had changed, a seismic shift, in fact. She never wanted to forget that fleeting moment.

The telescope ripped through her, but it filled a gaping hole that had been there all along. Her moment of clarity satisfied the hunger her soul had felt for a long time. She thought she would be left with a hole but instead, she had become whole.

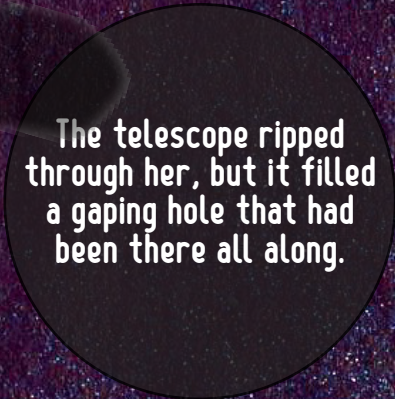


She was stardust
staring at
her origins.

Don't fool yourself. Just because it's a literary magazine doesn't mean it's fiction. This is real life and simplicity is unfeasible. One moment can change your perspective, but it won't change your life. Fear of the unknown doesn't fluidly morph into curiosity. She didn't wake up the next day fancy free and footloose.

The moment didn't turn her nightmare into a daydream. That moment was her fresh gulp of air as she was drowning. The pull of the tide going in was strong still and she anticipated another wave soon to pull her deep into the depths that she was so familiar with. But she was rejuvenated. It was as though she had woken up from the bad dream and been hit with instant relief. "None of it was real." Words that caress a thrilled heart after a terror. Filled to the brim with hope for the potential she had. Perhaps feeling too intensely wasn't so bad if the feeling was something beautiful. Maybe someday her heart would explode again and love would rain from the heavens and tiny daisies of pure joy would sprout from her chest. And even the darkest depths would be luminescent in the warm glow of ecstasy.

Months later as she sat by the beach and stared at the stars, she felt a lingering nostalgia of the pure divinity she had once, just for a second, basked in. She believed in some life out there far away and she wondered if they, in a sense, believed in her too. She touched the tattoo of Saturn on the back of her neck and all the needless worries melted away. She hummed along to the tune playing softly in her headphones, "Look at those cavemen go, it's the freakiest show..." ▲




The telescope ripped
through her, but it filled
a gaping hole that had
been there all along.



above stormy waters

By Nanna Schmidt Nordestgaard

She could make hard men soft
with pure words.



Listening to her voice they found their words come out, an almost involuntary eruption, relief and the lightness afterwards, she could create the urge inside of them to let them go so they could feel the world within their reach once again, like that one time at the bar, the man telling her about his back injury and how it prevented him from playing outside and she felt how she created space inside her for his words, received them and cherished them and took pride in them and sorted them into small boxes with causes and reasons and means and not necessarily ends, only hushing the pained and praising the disappointed, the men responding to her voice calling to them and to their words, she wanted them because it was in her power.

Only this man gave her nothing, he gave her nothing, she felt how he holding the words did not would only in small pieces at the time, but never the words she wanted, never the words to the small boxes, he didn't let her do that to him, so she gave him her words and let them sort themselves out on his forehead, piled them high and let them rest there. ▲

Brine

by Carmen Guzman

Me?
I know why?
Peter Steele,
Type O Negative.

There is always a song stuck in my head. Always. Walking to class? Judas Priest's "Painkiller." Exercising? Cardi B's "Bartier Cardi." Crying? Toto's "Africa." Music takes up 60 percent of my brain and 100 percent of my heart.

Why is it that when we are hurting in our hearts we turn against the body? What did your body do to you? It confronts the real world for us but maybe that's why we get so angry when it fails to protect us. How could you say this? Look like this? Act like this? You're supposed to be on my side! Some people choose not to feed their bodies, some decide to harm their bodies, others alter their body with substances, food, PLASTIC SURGERY (shout out to my mom) etc., but who is still there with you through it all?

I used to watch Naruto AMVs on YouTube back in the day. (For those of you uncultured swine who do not know what AMVs are, they are videos with anime scenes of a horrendous quality and a cheesy song in the background). I always returned to the same one: Naruto's battle with Haku as Haku's childhood unfolded to the tune of "Somewhere I Belong" by Linkin Park. I technically listened to J-Rock first, but it was Linkin Park that sealed the deal. So there I would sit, with my MP3 player against my ear, rocking out to "Somewhere I Belong" as Haku's death flashed against my skin. Spoiler alert. That song stirred something deep within me, with my MP3 player I guess I relate to this." My aunt changed my life. From nurturing the hopeless dreamer in me to planting the seeds of my life's passion, she always tried to show me the bigger picture: the panoramic sight of our minds, bodies, and lives being in perfect harmony with each other despite how bleak our realities could seem at times.

One time we were driving to Bakersfield and she happened to have System of a Down's "Mesmerize" playing.
What delicious

(her husband) filled it with an array of metal. To this day I think it's strange that my bourgeoisie tíos are fans of metal, but they're "weirdos," as my tía says, like me. Though, they may not appreciate baby heartbreak. Infant was in the 6th grade Annihilator with my internet the way I boyfriend from Texas. do.

CrazyEmoAnimeFanGirl: Am lettin u go. U hav 2 b with YaoiEmo.
canthinkofagoodname3000: Wut.

CrazyEmoAnimeFanGirl: U hav histery wit each other.

canthinkofagoodname3000: *teardrop rolls down cheek as I close my eyes and smile* thank u karmen.

I was working back then helping my grandma clean the laundry room where we lived and I was making a sweet 50 dollars a month. I felt so rich and I imagined all the things I could do if I could only save it. I blew it on chips and CDs. Next I "met" Aaron, some ugly guy from Missouri who introduced me to Slipknot. I saw "All Hope is Gone" and the aforementioned "Mesmerize" (my aunt discovered the missing CD) at Walmart and all hope was gone for me to ever like anything other than metal. There seems to be a lot of stigma

melodies these were! I made us listen to it all the way through at least 3 times. "Why don't we listen to the radio now," she finally said, clearly regretting that she had played it in the first place. It was too late. The CD was already in my backpack. In addition to this, she bought my first iPod and my uncle

around Slipknot for being a baby metal band, but they're such a formative part of people's entry to metal that I give them a pass. I cried to "Snuff" after breaking up with my internet boyfriend and frequently return to it when feeling particularly emo, like right now. Speaking of "Snuff," when I was 13 and Corey Taylor said "If you still care don't ever let me know," I felt that. I knew a kid in elementary school who always

wore KoRn shirts, had long hair, and a bit of black eyeliner around his eyes. It was very subtle to the point of not even being

music that speaks directly to me. People can offer you words of consolation, but I find that there's a point where words aren't enough. "You'll get through this—" well thanks, but I'm still here, miserable in the moment. In the depths of my melancholy—when I loath the body that carries my spirit and cannot always protect it—it's music that expresses all that I cannot quite say. To think that someone else has felt what I feel and that there are millions of other people who have felt the songs deeper than I have, in situations that are worse than mine? That humbles me and warms my heart. From one body to another, I offer you a hug. I won't say or not say if I've contemplated taking my life in the past, but I will say that I could never go to another show again in my life and that's enough sometimes for me to continue. Well that, and graduating from college. Ben the drummer (ah, the one who got away) was an important catalyst in my musical stream of life and probably doesn't even realize it. He showed me some basic heavy stuff in high school and from there I found everything else beyond. If I were to pick one band to listen to for the rest of my life, it would be Death—the only band that has moved me to tears both lyrically and music-wise. I think he would approve even though he's deeply religious since meeting his current partner and all traces of his former headbanging glory have vanished. Not that Randy (that's right bitch, I used your name) could appreciate Death, that barbarian. I was at a show once and he was there with his new girlfriend, seconds after he had disrespected me as a

significant other in one of the worst ways possible. I had turned back to see how the crowd behind me was dealing with the rowdy pit and froze at sighting the tall brown lump and his short, frumpy sidekick. They laughed and pointed at me. Now, I had two choices. I could let this bother me and miss Abysmal Dawn and Cannibal Corpse, or I could ignore the degenerates. As Charles Elliott growled "Capacity for love now dissipates," I turned around and jumped into the pit where I finally found myself. It still remains one of the best shows I have ever been to. The universe has given me many hints throughout my life from preventing me from meeting someone at a Mastodon show to "Toes to Toes" (by the same band) playing when I was finally in the presence of that person. Can you, universe, be any more of a contradictory bitch?

When we turn against our bodies it's easy to turn against music too. Stop that, self. You are doing the best

you can and nothing feels better than purging those negative emotions from the body. Easier said than done I know; I am still struggling to separate the things I enjoy from the intimate relationships I have with people. However, I never thought I could listen to Pink Floyd again and there I was in Mexico writing about sad, lost goldfish in the sea.

there, but I knew. He never said much of anything. To this day I wonder if he was angry too and knew turmoil deeper than mine if he liked KoRn as much as he did at such a young age. However, I also recognize now how much cooler he was than the rest of us plebs. Devil horns to you, my guy. It took me a while to fall in love with the genre. What was nice about it was that I could keep coming back to it and find better bands that I connected with, better lyrics, better melodies. It has always been there for me in my saddest moments, the happiest ones (cue: Mastodon), and the angriest ones (cue: Cannibal Corpse). When I'm sad though, it's

I have watched the bus leave as I'm desperately waiting across the street for the light to change, I've been rejected from literally everything, and I have to wipe my own tears and pull myself up from the bootstraps. Someday I'll look back and wipe those tears with Benjamins as Current 93's "Love's Young Dream" plays and I share another bottle of Jägermeister with a kindred soul, but until then, I'll march to the beat of my own drum and hope that each time I listen to Mastodon, my heart stings a little less. ▲

"Life is like a mystery with many clues, but with few answers to tell us what it is that we can do to look for the truth."
-Chuck Schuldiner, Death.

SLEEPING BEAUTY

JULIET WAY-HENTHORNE

It was around that time that I started to sleep at men's houses. Just sleep. My body ached when I was alone. They weren't strangers; so, though they wanted more, they knew they wouldn't get it—not even one single caress. I know it was selfish, and I don't care.

You see, grief does funny things to a person. I became ravenous for a particular form of love—not sex, not flirtation, not even romance—just a physical body near me. Hearing the deep breaths, the inhales and exhales, of someone else's sleep reminded me that I was alive. But the rhythm of another's sleep still couldn't stop me from checking my pulse every hour as I woke from restless, sweaty dreams. And in those dreams, dad was always just out of reach, behind a gauzy veil, looking at me with sad eyes. I still wonder what he wanted to say, but there is another story for that.

Loss made me reject other kinds of love too. The live-in boyfriend—the one who slept in the hospital chair for three nights after I'd hollered into the phone that I was breaking, crumbling from within—wanted to be intimate, and I couldn't. I just wanted to sleep next to him, to feel the warmth of a body near me. But his support had a price, and a hefty one at that. It meant that I had to allow the wet, sloppy kisses and his invasive, urgent desire for intimacy when he sprang from sleep in the middle of the night. I should have said something, but it felt like a fair trade then. See what I mean about grief doing funny things to a person?

By now, three years have passed, and I thought my crazy nightly routine of a small nightlight, rain sounds, and a movie playing as I slept was enough to make me feel comforted, to muffle the night's silence that I still cannot bear. But then—suddenly, serendipitously, magically—the dark-eyed boy was there. He was so beautiful; he seemed to be lit from within. There was pain in his face too, and his eyes, those eyes, they are as deep as wells stretching into the earth. My heart still flickers at the memory of locking eyes with him; I never dared blink first.

The dark-eyed boy made me feel all those other kinds of love again—lust, romance, passion. We could talk casually or seriously; we could watch game shows or have heated debates about literary theories. And this beautiful, kind boy let me into his bed, in the exact way that I needed. No expectations, no urgent kisses in the night, just the gentle sound of his breathing—in, out, in, out. A moment of my feet intertwined with his was more thrilling than any lust I'd ever experienced before. The beautiful dark-eyed boy relit the fire inside of me, woke the sleeping beauty who was afraid of love. With gentleness and an aura that glows softly from simply possessing a good heart, the dark-eyed boy stirred in me emotions that I thought were long gone.

I credit myself for beginning to heal, for becoming something of myself again, but this boy revived my sense of desire. If I breathe in deeply enough, I can invoke the smell of his hair in the breeze; sweet, and such a stark contrast to the cigarette smoke he puffed out like air, though even this never made his breath any less tempting. Maybe someday I'll thank him for breathing life back into that part of me. But for now, the memories of his sleeping sounds, the steadiness and comfort of his presence—even only in remembrance—are enough to get me through most nights, sometimes even without a nightlight. That is how brightly he glows. ▲



There's a knot in your throat. You know the feeling when there's so much left that you had to say, so much fight left in you, but there's no place for it anymore? So, instead, it sits inside of you and festers. The infection spreads through your body, moving from your throat to your chest—your heart begins to pound, slowly but still too hard—from your chest to your hands—god, your palms are sweaty—from your hands down your spine—sweat beads on your back and makes your shirt stick to your skin while chills run laps up and down—from your spine down to your knees—they're pretty shaky right now—from your knees down to your toes—your feet feel like bricks at the end of your leg—they're heavy and cold. There's so much pressure inside of you begging for a release, a soothing of this unbearable tension that for some reason, you don't know how to deal with. You try deep breaths but your lungs never feel full, and you suddenly need to be clean.

You traipse your way into the bathroom and do not flip the light switch. You don't want your eyes to ache any more than they do already and you don't want to see yourself in the light—you no longer want to be known. Both hands on the counter, you look in the mirror. You pull your cheeks, mash them together. Hold your eyelids apart so you can get stare into your own eye. The shadows on your face sink your eyes into your skull; you note with an unsettling sense of satisfaction that you do not recognize yourself.

You walk to the shower and turn the knob for hot water on. You begin to strip. Layers of your clothing drop to the floor, and you eventually stand there, naked and exposed. A draft from the bathroom window pushes the whispers of steam against you. Cool droplets of water form and cling to your skin. You shudder as one slides down the length of your body.

You hope that somewhere in between getting in and getting out, you will begin to feel clean again. The smell of his skin lingers in your mind. Your fingers still remember the trails of his body and the way your fingers tingled as you traced them. You can taste the sickly sweet remnants of tobacco smoke from his kisses on your tongue. You want them to be gone. But you do not want to want. Not from him. Not about him. Not anymore. But you're stuck in a fixed loop, a never-ending cycle, a broken record. You don't have a name for it, but you recognize this feeling. Your thoughts run in circles trying to suppress—to escape each other—but they always end up right back where they started. It's so easy for you to hate yourself. No. Stop. Calm down.

You slowly pull back the curtain. The showerhead is sending water cascading down into the tub, down into the drain. The water spirals before sinking, and something about the sight feels very familiar. Stepping into the shower with your face turned away from the stream, you wince as the water hits your skin; your back contorts in pain, and your feet feel like every square inch of them has been stung and is on fire. But you stand there bearing the brunt of the situation because you can't help but feel like you deserve it. You want to scream, but your throat is still too tight. You can't tell if your face is wet from tears or the spray. *This hurts less than your heart does right now anyway*, you note wryly. Tired of the effort that standing requires, you sit, clutching your knees to your chest and hoping that the burn from too hot water that races down your back would overpower the tingle that his fingers left behind. Wow, does the water hurt, you think; but god, not finding those golden brown eyes waiting for you behind your eyelids for once felt nice.

You grab your washcloth from where it hangs on the shower curtain rod and your soap from the corner of the tub where it sits. After lathering the cloth, you begin to scrub yourself raw, trying to eradicate every cell of skin that yearns for another touch. You can't tell if the washcloth has always felt this rough or if you're just pressing that hard, but either way, the scratching feels good. There's a streetlamp just close enough to the window that one tiny rectangle of light shines into the shower. In the lamplight, you watch the soap melt off of your arm—your skin is revealed once more. You picture his face in the bubbles that slide down your chest. You stand and turn to face the stream. A gasp darts free from your mouth as the water beats down on your heart. The water stings but at least he is gone.

You stand there beneath the shower head trying to feel more than think; you notice you've gotten used to the heat. There's a split-second moment of hesitation before you turn the knob again, raising the temperature of the water. Your craving for the burn is satiated again, and you slowly rotate yourself in the streams when the heat becomes unbearable. Adding more soap to your cloth, you scrub yourself again—gently this time.

The shower has been on for a while now. You hadn't been keeping track of the time. The pitter-patter of the shower stream on your head stirs up a tune—one that you have not sung in some time. Since better times. The knot in your throat has loosened its hold on your voice. Softly, you start crooning the words. Your voice cracks. You continue singing anyway.

The water does not burn so bad anymore. ▲

SOAP SCUM

By Ricky Barajas



ART // TRACY KONG

PART II: POETRY

A FICKLE MIND

// KAYLIN SMITH

THE PORTRAIT OF DORIAN 'CAINE

// HUGH COOK

A DRUNKEN FOOL

// LUKE DORSEY

LAST K/NIGHT

// LUKE DORSEY

THINGS I WANT YOU TO KNOW,
BUT DON'T WANT TO TELL YOU

// NIDHI KHANOLKAR

SUNSCREEN, SWEAT, AND
STRAWBERRIES

// PALOMA LAMB

CYCLES

// WILLIE ROMAN

YOU BECOME IT

// MISHAL AL-ASFUR

PLUNGE

// SKYLER MELNICK

OUR LITTLE PLACE

// LILY TAYLOR

J

// IGNACIO VARGAS

ARE YOU THERE?

// EMIL TARP VANG

PALATINATE PURPLE

// JEIKE MEIJER

UNCONDITIONAL COLOR

// JENNA LIZERBRAM

THE SOUTH

// JUSTINE BENNET

YO TE APOYO

// WILLIE ROMAN

A WARRIOR IN LOUIS VUITTON

// AMANDA LAWSON

UNTITLED

// AMANDA LAWSON

WALKING AT NIGHT

// DARYA BEHROOZI

WINTER WATER

// KATEE GUSTAVSON

ORIGIN STORY


// LEXXUS COFFEY EDISON

IN WHICH I DON'T LABEL MY
FEELINGS "HYPERBOLE"

// JACKIE KAJISA

A FICKLE MIND

BY KAYLIN SMITH



Floating effortlessly,
I am not joyful or restless, my emotions at bay
I am neutral
And everything is gray.

Suddenly,
I am overcome with a deep sense of unease
Submerged in a sea of blue
An uncontrollable disease.

I turn the corner
And feel a relieving sense of calm
My emotions sing of yellow
No sight of yesterday's internal qualm.

An epidemic of brown
Or an inspired evergreen
I am vibrant one moment
The next I am unseen.

Always a step behind,
I surrender to the hands of time
Feeling unimpressed or electrified
Relenting to some celestial design.

My mentality shifts and changes
So often like the seasons
Controlled by my own color palette
Without rhyme or reason.

ART // TRACY KONG

An abstract painting with a vibrant, multi-colored background of reds, yellows, blues, and greens. Overlaid on this are numerous white, brushstroke-like lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling a portrait or a complex pattern.

THE PORTRAIT OF DORIAN 'CAINE

BY HUGH COOK

Gabe, looking at his portrait,
Pouring cocaine onto my youthful lip,
Curled in fear, or disgust at the world
it thought it knew.

“Look, a mustache.”
Two white lines of violent powder
Fight my swarthy visage.

“So long I’ve wanted
To take lines off
This portrait.”
It is your best work.

You put your pain into art then.
You poured lines in all colors,
Instead of blankest, numbing white.



A DRUNKEN FOOL

BY LUKE DORSEY

Existential minds
The bane of mankind
You can run, you can jump
But pray you can hide
It cowers and quivers
Its shoulders sway from side to side
But, when contact connects
You feel the feeling of glide
A man is a friend
A woman a lover
But when you unearth the cover of the skin
There is a different world to discover
So come beggars and fools
Come to my table, there are no rules
But one, and that is do not speak down to me
Or I'll throw you over the setting sun
Into a stumbling eternity.

LAST K/NIGHT

BY LUKE DORSEY

Beneath lights I shine
Laugh when I feel dread
Crave what I can't taste
Reach what I can't feel
Run through flames with a paper shield
It's all a game they say
The fox and the hound?
The old cherry tree?
Banana peel on the ground?
Exit, I'm finished
You couldn't pay me to play it again.

ART // FRANCESCA TOWERS

Things I Want You To Know, But Don't Want to Tell You.

You didn't steal my heart,
just the key.

by **Nidhi Khanolkar**

And now I'm locked inside
with no-one else but me.

This isolation is disillusioning
so much so, that I've forgotten,
of the boundless blue existing beyond the ceiling.

You didn't steal my sight,
just all the colors when you left.

I mean I can still see,
but doesn't mean it isn't theft.

Everyday passes by,
that they're all the fucking same-

Dull.
Monotonous.

You didn't steal the light with your dark words,
just the goddamn switch.

Now there's still sunlight and shine and bliss
but forever a constant, nagging fear:

At any given moment.

~~And~~ I might just turn into a bitch.

You didn't steal away my life,
just my options on how to live it.

Of course, you didn't B R E A K me,

You just won't me in such a way

So that no one may ever fix it.

allend



SUNSCREEN,
SWEAT,
AND STRAWBERRIES

It was hot that day
And you smelled like
Sunscreen, sweat, and strawberries.

I could see the drops
On your forehead,
On your skin,
On your shirt,
And I wanted to soak in it,
Dissolve into it;
Until my fingers were pruned
And my skin was purple
And it seemed that I would turn to liquid too.

There we would be
A pool of you,
And a pool of me
Indistinguishable where you started
And where I ended
Ebbing
And flowing
Into one another
Unsure if we would evaporate
Into this summer heat.

BY PALOMA LAMB

Cycles

BY WILLIE ROMAN

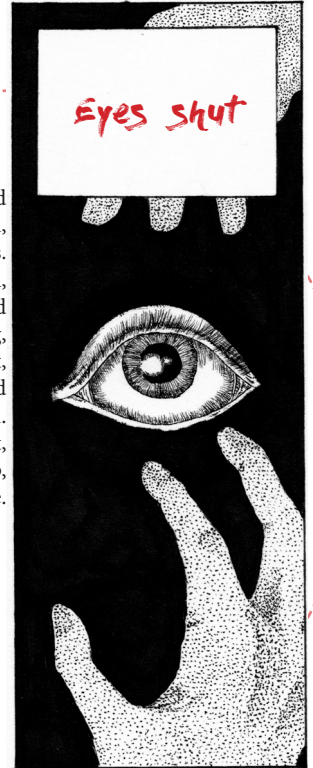
Eyes
watching

The house was always quiet and loud.
You could hear every footstep as though
it were right next to you,
the same way you felt
Eyes watching every step even when
you were alone.
Floor panels would creak in symphony
with the doors
as the heater sputtered out
ash
in the early hours.

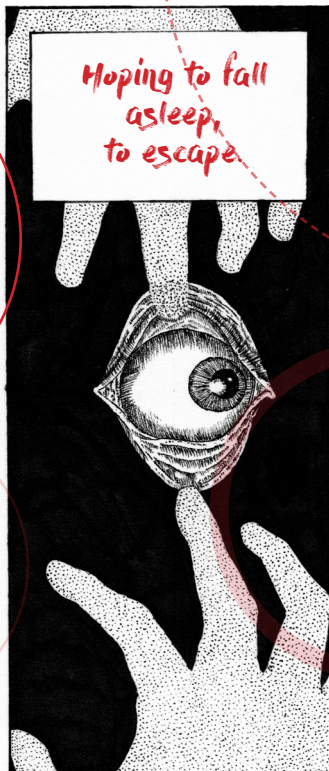


I rose when the coos of my mother reverberated
from the walls of my brother's room into my own,
and landed gently upon my ears.
Those same ears listened and waited for the signal,
to send the message to my fingers that remained
wrapped around my phone ready and waiting,
every night,
to call for help the moment I heard
hand meet flesh.
Eyes shut,
cowardly hoping to fall asleep,
to escape.

Eyes shut



Hoping to fall
asleep,
to escape.



Anger born from misunderstanding
shook the foundation
of our home.

Pleas drowned in the narrow passages
where only hate and broken trust and pain
could pass through.

ART // YADIR CRUZ

YOU BECOME IT

BY MISHAL AL-ASFOUR

Nothing else matters.

Nothing else exists.

This moment is so intense, so alive, so buzzing, so busy, so hot.

These other human beings,

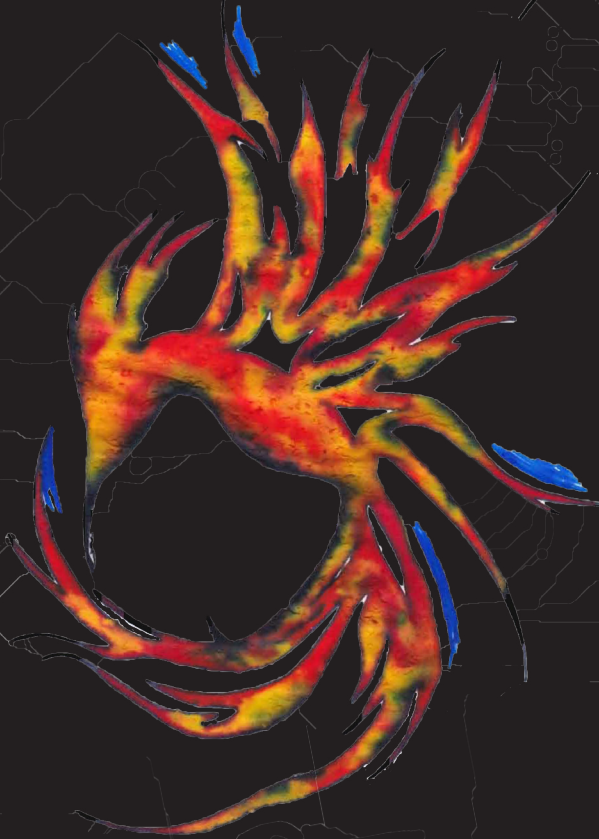
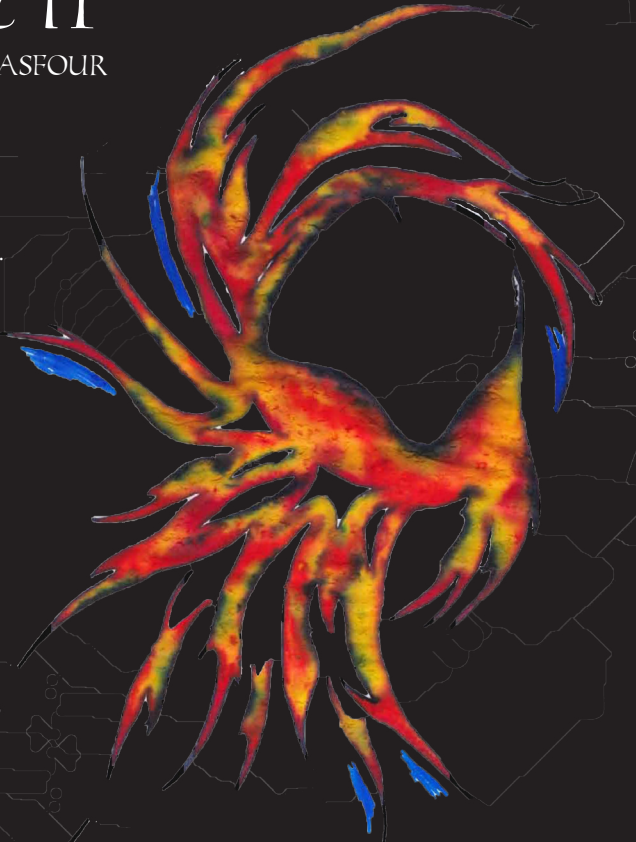
this job that I'm doing and the way I'm doing it,

the pulsation in my chest,

the blood just pounding through my face, my neck, my hands.

The deep, booming voice that surprises me,

deep, sharp, and deliberate.



I speak with 100% confidence in my words,

like I know them.

No inflections, softness, hesitance,
stammering, studdering, mumbling under the breath...

No one has to say "What's that?"

"Speak up, louder son!"

Nope. Not necessary.

It's not an egoic thing. Or maybe it is.

ART // MONICA COLLINS

PLUNGE

BY SKYLER MELNICK

The enveloping blackness consumes
All those who dare to bloom.

But there is a light, a twinkling light,
Surrounded by the darkness of night.
Flowers form a halo atop her head,
She seems to rise above a people half-dead.

A beacon of beauty and hope,
The delicate light treads on tightrope.

Every step threatens the plunge
Into the black hole below,
Is it enough to merely glow?

Palms pressed against her eyelids,
She wishes to feel the feelings of kids.
Struggling to fight off the monsters
That dance around in her darkness,
Where once there was delight,
Now there is only starkness.

A twinkling light that is fading,
Succumbing to a darkness
That is pervading.
Palms pressed against her eyelids,
She slips into a stream of black,
Ending her poem,
To which she can never go back.



ART // MADISON MEAD

OUR LITTLE PLACE

BY LILLY TAYLOR



When you feel lost
and have no where to run,
go to where the ground
touches the sky.
Where we used to sit on
the edge of the world
breathing in the lofty air,
whispering about a future
we both shared.

Go
back

to a time where we held
a youthful glow
in our love-gazed eyes
and a hope for completeness
wasn't hard to grasp.

I'll be waiting.

PHOTO // KYLIE GEORGE
ART // LILLY TAYLOR

Metaphors are the
combustion engine of the universe,
creating flames
visible to you and I.

J,
when I looked at you,
endorphins
mobilized and freefallen
down my spine.
They scattered
through my veins,
scratched off my rust
and engulfed me.

J,
your smile, oh
your smile! was
a sun rising behind
a mountain,
peeking
from behind the crestline,
then,
erupting into a brilliant
grin,
coating your teeth
in gold.

J,
when we laid under the stars
and picked apart
the muscle of our minds,
whispering
our truths
into the air,
I could close my eyes
without fearing my dark.

In that moment,
we did not have to look
at one another.
I gave myself up but
gained a part of you.

And yet....
when the last ray of your smile
slipped into the blue horizon
after that damn disclosure,
your ocean
pulled back from my shore.

Slowly,
time rose to a high tide each day,
eyes missed calls,
“I forgot to...”
“I am sorry about...”
and apology after apology
lead to your love reeking
of abandoned honesty.
With plans to study on the west coast
and you, to work for your family,
time sharpened into a blade
that inched closer
and closer

to our hands.
Before time could cut
through our fingers—
stain us—
you grabbed the blade.

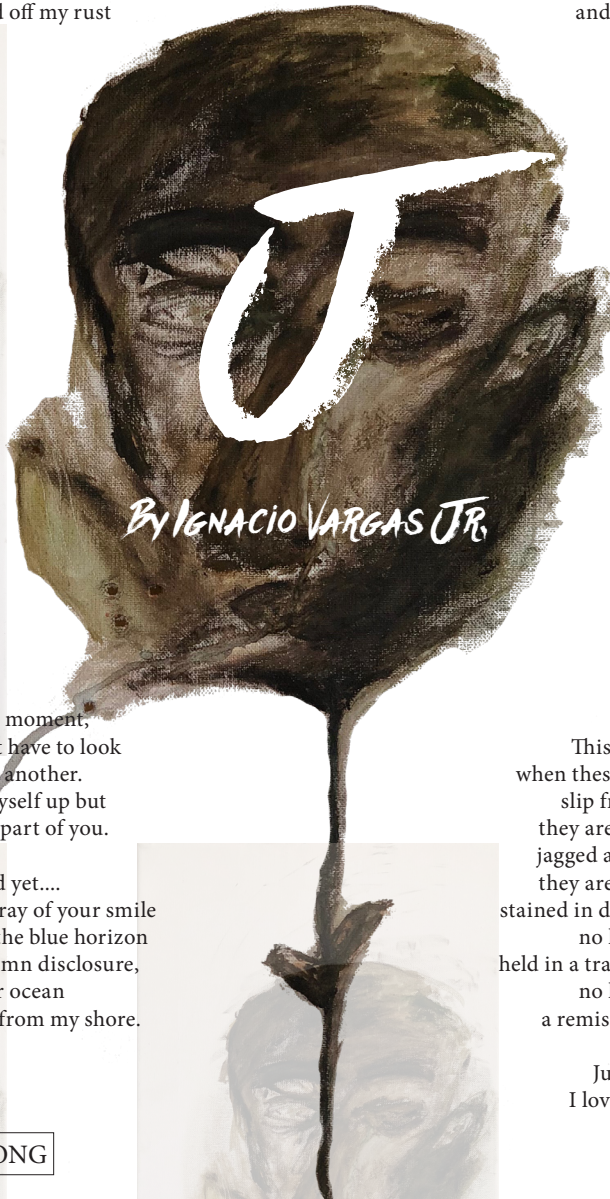
Your blood spit
on our wrists,
yet
I was the only
one who screamed.

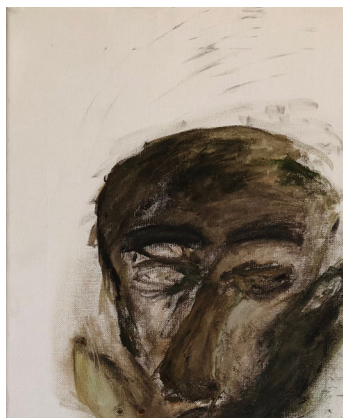
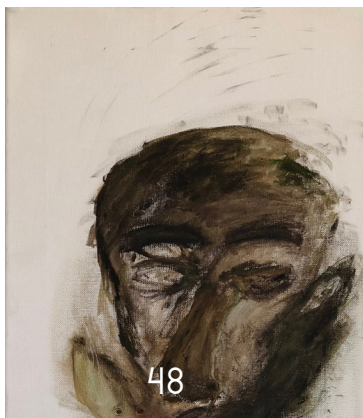
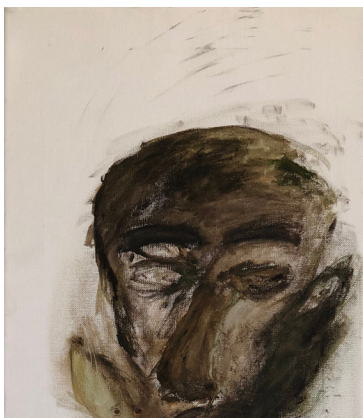
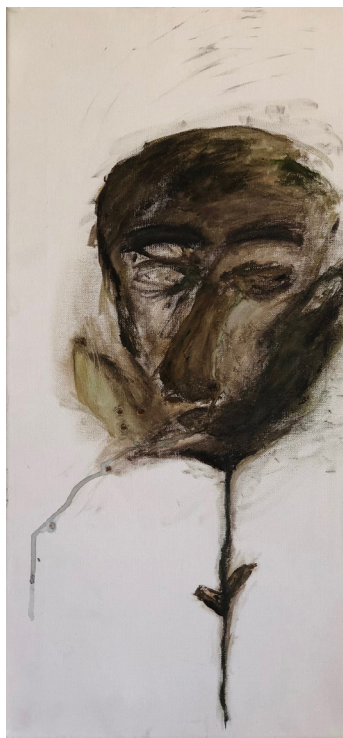
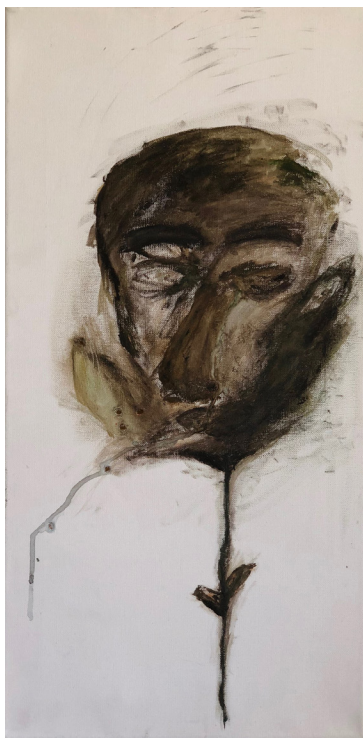
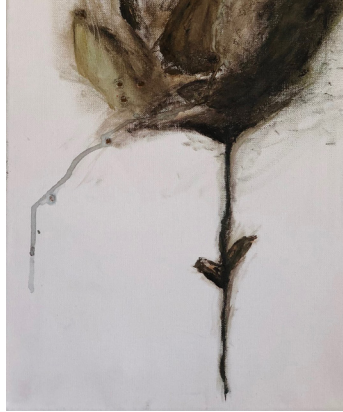
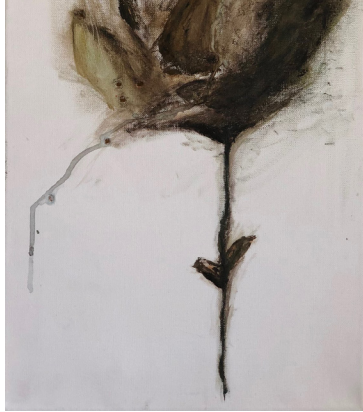
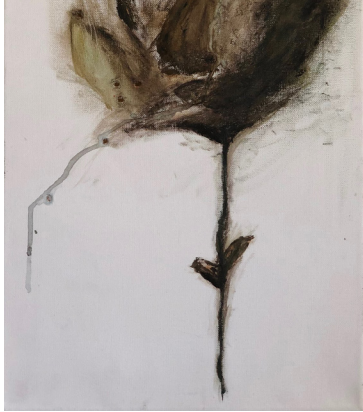
Memory is a flame,
strengthening or charring
the chains we hold in our
hands.
The smoke from these chains
lingers in my lungs.

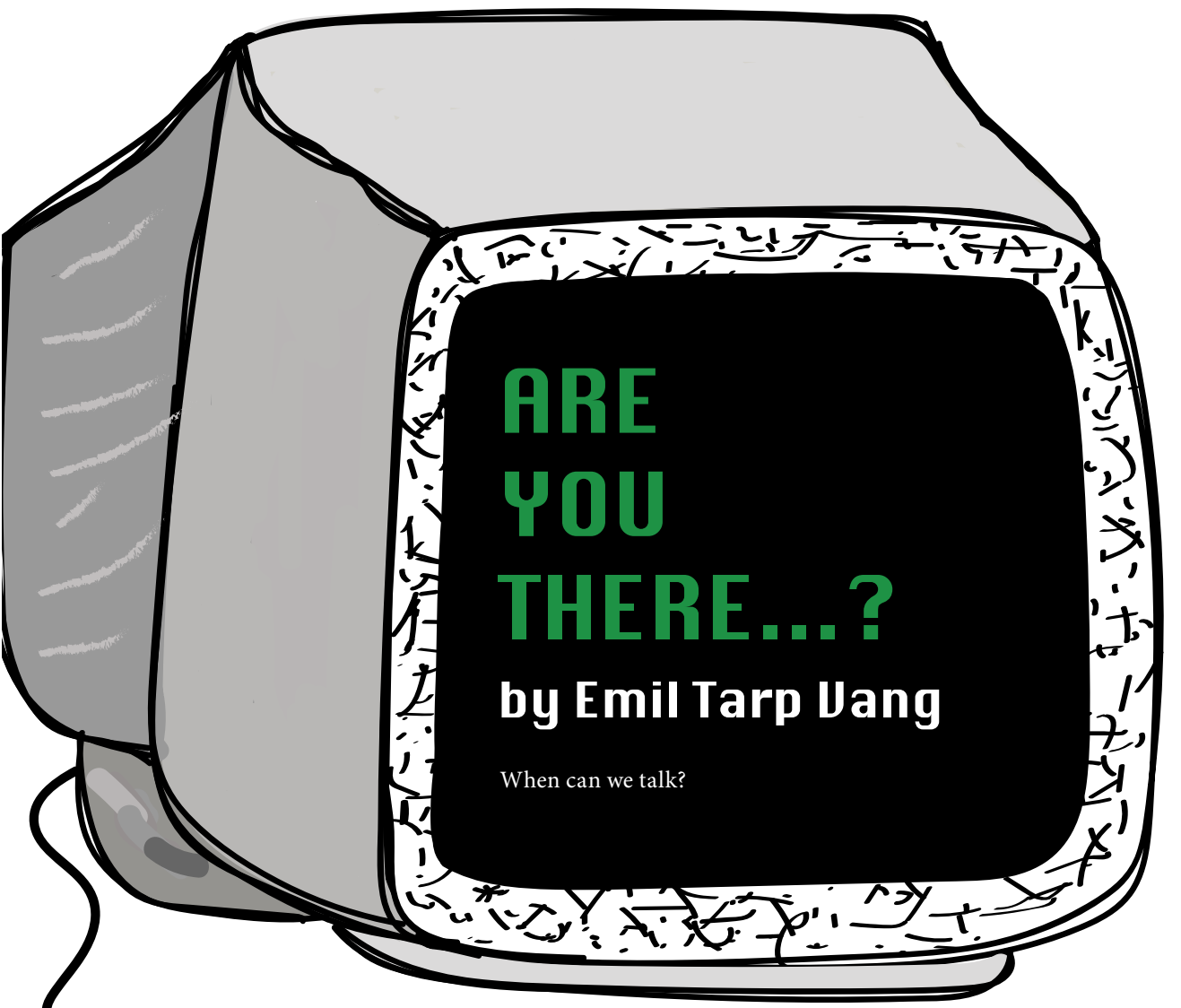
Sometimes,
all I want
is to smoke cigarettes,
hoping to feel you
in the burn.

This is why
when these final words
slip from me,
they are no longer
jagged at the edge,
they are no longer
stained in dilapidated red,
no longer
held in a travailing breath,
no longer
a remission to us.

Justin,
I loved you.







ARE YOU THERE...?

by Emil Tarp Dang

When can we talk?

9000 miles
is a long walk

Your sun goes up
as mine goes down

I lay awake
waiting
for the
sound

Of
your
whisper in
my
ear

50 more and I'll
be home

A day and begins
a day and is gone

But you're not
and you won't be for long

Telling me
you're here

I wait
won't for long

you're not
here

you're
gone

Until then I'll be by the phone





darling delicate pearls
bleeding beads of palatinate purple
squeezed

d
r
i
p
p
i
n
g

into

webs

woven

b e t w e e n

stained fingertips,
dyed
after blackberry picking,
remnants
of reflective
laughter,
sweetness of
summer air,
creating mosaics
upon gentle
skin

That won't scrub off.

ART // JENNA LIZERBRAM

BY JEIKE MEIJER

PALATINATE PURPLE

UNCONDITIONAL COLOR

BY JENNA LIZERBRAM

The slightest touch, fingers interlock.
I feel color
radiating between the spaces of our
embrace
as golden sunrays at the first glow of
dawn.

A sensation, vibrancy, synergy,
connected through our eyes
as I lie beside you
and feel the reflection
of my green
in your blue.
Color is what you
give me.

A sublime spark
of intensity,
lust.

You give me color
through somber smiles,
through worry and repentance,
illuminating the shadows
that follow under the moonlit sky.
When I miss you
I am washed out,
as the fading photos
that hang upon my wall
of our memories,
yet keep hold of a remnant of
brightness.

With you
I feel luminosity
entangling
desolation waning.
Color
is what you bring me.
When is the next full moon?
I miss your
unconditional color.

ART // JEIKE MEIJER

The South

by Justine Bennet

It's in the soil—confederate soldiers, plantations, civil rights—
tangible landmarks of institutionalized racism.
The blueprints to the south—it isn't all pretty.
Beneath the cobble stone roads and willow trees is a history of human brutality,
A demonizing of the other,
and a gun culture eminent in its lifestyle.

My flesh, my brother,
he a fully identifying redneck,
selfhood of a southern mechanic
dip filled lip and garage oil smell
driveway full of two old trucks
his projects
Tool boxes and towels
And his confederate license plate
stone cold
And the American flag hanging from my family's front porch.

Bobby brings me to the gun range.
Buying his first gun on his 18th birthday—
his right, his identity.
I quiver with gun in hand
All its uses in the history of man
Present in my hand
on its southern soil.
The southern draw of the man handing me a gun
The stare of other men filling the range—
the watch of my faulty handling.
Complicated, yet white male domination of a culture of gun shooting,
Our paternalistic right to bear arms
Manifest Destiny.

Equipping a sport of domineering activity,
Bearing arms with a reality of gun violence
police brutality
institution founded on a discrimination of color
Institutionalized racism—southern history
Bearing arms with my southern identity, my southern home.

Out of place—but home so far as home goes.

My brother bearing southern music—
Trying to block out the country racism in its lines.
Bearing arms with my family and what is my own.

Living on a border of wrong humanity,
Pale freckled face and deep blue eyes,
In the shadow of our statues,
A southern-bred daughter, Sweetheart, honey,
Being aware of whole histories
And not just one—a southern girl,
Discovering, confronting, their way.

Be who you dare not to be,
Speak up, listen, remember.
Never stop confronting,
Rectify the present.

Yo Te Apoyo

By Willie Roman

Evening glides into the early hours of the morning
I would stir and guide my feet to the kitchen table
where I left my work,
steps away from where you sleep
wrapped in ancient covers, battling the aches
riddling your bones.
Your voice of oak reverberating
within these walls
talking,
laughing,
teaching.

"Si no quieres ser como yo,
cansado y quebrado
mantenga tus estudios, hijo.
por favor."

Knee cracking from
years of silent toil.
You remain
sitting
in that same silence,
that gloomy corner,
a soft blue glow,
arms crossed over a tired heart.



ART//KRISTEN KLITGAARD

A **WARRIOR** in *Louis Vuitton*

BY AMANDA LAWSON

"I'm an entrepreneur"
She says *really did know you*
Like it is the truest statement
That has ever been said
And it very well might be
It's important to appear more than okay
When you're not okay
She fluffs the pillows *es to stand*
On the edge of cliffs and **TO SURROUND HERSELF**
Pretend she has
The courage
To jump
Off
You like to talk about swerving
Into oncoming traffic
"It would be so easy"
He looks over
I don't like
Driving
Alone

TO SURROUND HERSELF

with beautiful things

When life is ugly
A Missoni pillow
Can solve nearly any problem
A manicured hand
Throws a better punch
When your opponent
Is poverty
Systematic oppression
Misogyny
And a good fur vest
Will protect you far better
Than any suit of armor
For the enemy is no longer
The fire-breathing dragon

But now?
I want to live
I deserve to live.
"I'm an entrepreneur,"

She says
And it is the truest statement
That has ever been said.

It's important to appear more than okay
When you're not okay
She fluffs the pillows

UNTITLED
BY AMANDA LAWSON

I never really did know you
You like to hide behind
Talk of suicide
But then again
So do
I
I'm just a girl who likes to stand
On the edge of cliffs and
Pretend she has
The courage
To jump
Off
You like to talk about swerving
Into oncoming traffic
"It would be so easy"
He looks over
I don't like
Driving
ALONE

When life is ugly
A Missoni pillow
Can solve nearly any problem
A manicured hand
Throws a better punch
When your opponent
Is poverty
Systematic oppression
Misogyny
And a good fur vest
Will protect you far better
Than any suit of armor
For the enemy is no longer
The fire-breathing dragon

It's other people
I survived my childhood
But now?
I want to live
I deserve to live.
"I'm an entrepreneur,"
She says

And it is the truest statement

PHOTOS // LAUREN WICKS

I used to love the moon like a Romantic poet,
But now I can't help but loathe it.
Stupid, weak moon, luminous in its languor,
Not even a constellation lighting up Her path of danger.

Nature does not blink at a man walking in the night,
So we wait in darkness until their sins disappear in sunlight.
Passive and apathetic, yet she follows often,
Her silence reverberates like nails in a coffin.

Nonchalant, uncaring moon washing evil until it is baptized,
Guiding lustful men while entrapping girls to be chastised.

I used to love the moon in Her maternal glow
Until her complacency dealt my eternal blow.

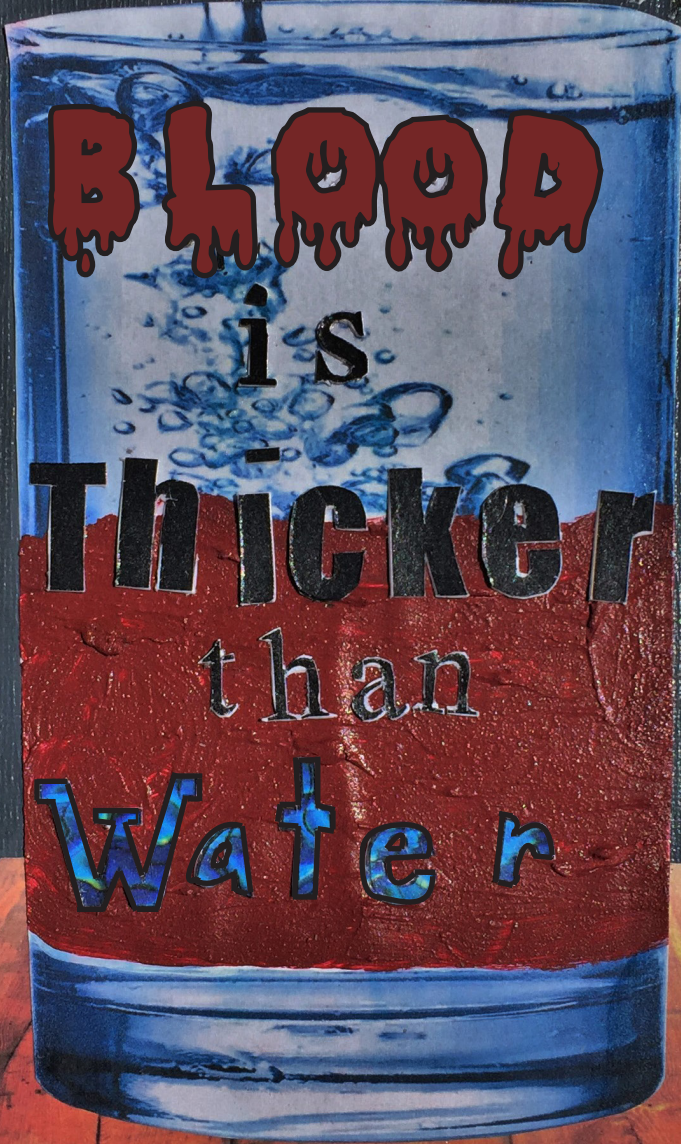
by Darya Behroozi

WALKING AT NIGHT



ART // JORDAN METZ

You know



BLOOD

is

Thicker

than

Water

Which

is

what

makes

it so

hard

to

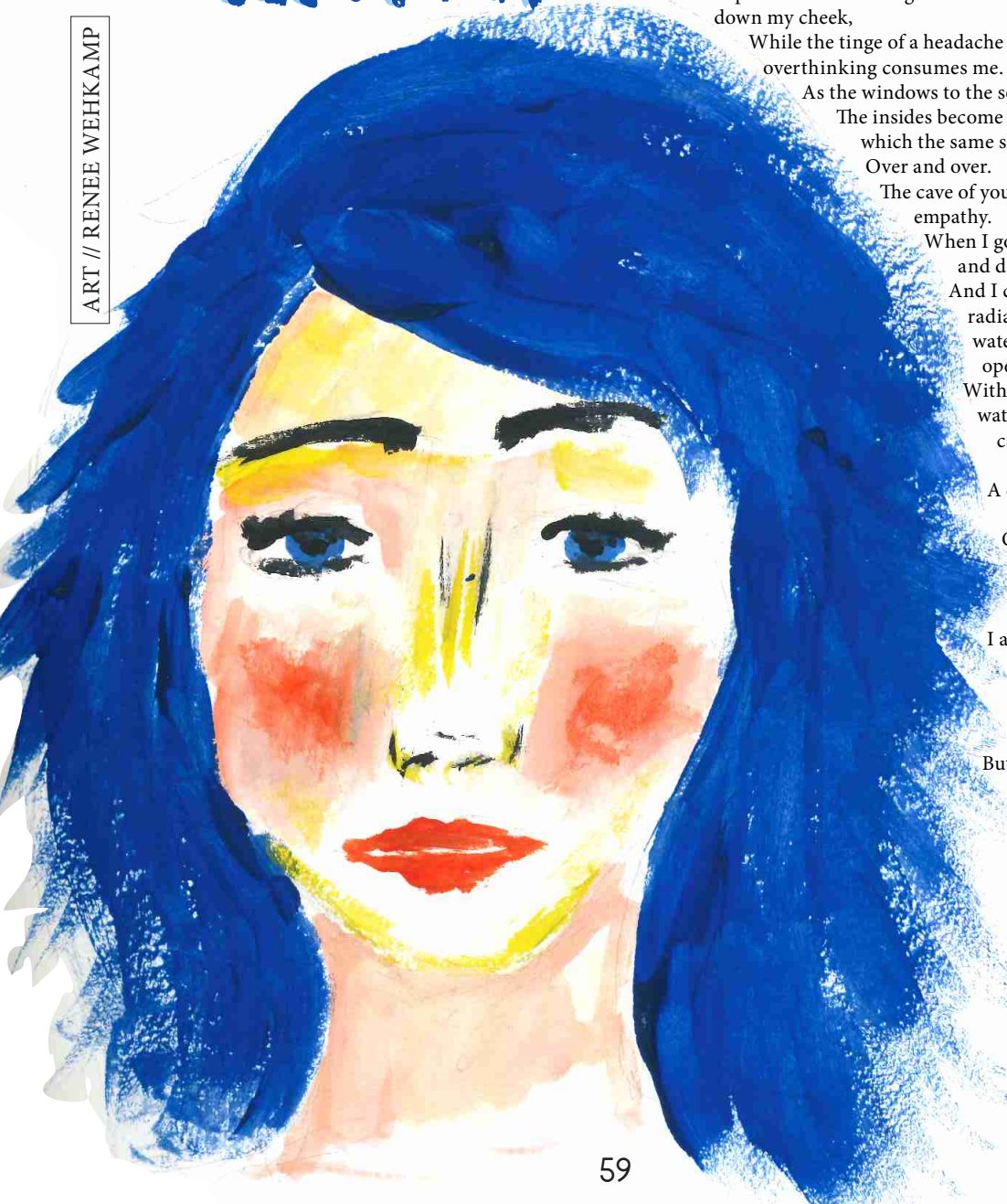
S
T
O
M
A
C
H

ART // JUSTICE DUMLAO

WINTER WATER

BY KATEE GUSTAVSON

ART // RENEE WEHKAMP



Dew drops from the morning after it rains still trickle
down my cheek,

While the tinge of a headache from
overthinking consumes me.

As the windows to the soul close,

The insides become a screen onto
which the same show is projected
Over and over.

The cave of your heart feels no
empathy.

When I go inside it is cold
and dark,

And I can see light
radiating off the
water just past the
opening.

With each drop of
water that taps the
canvas above my
head,

A drop of serenity
taps my mind,
Only to be

popped by the
bubble that
we live in.

I always wanted
to draw your
body—Draw
you near, draw
you closer—

But you ripped
up the page
before I could
lay down my
pencil.

Good thing I
brought my
sketchbook
full of blank
pages.

ORIGIN STORY

BY LEXXUS COFFEY EDISON



ART // JORDAN METZ

I have never bathed in the river, Euphrates, or the Nile.
I have never been to Rwanda or Haiti,
Never witnessed my ancestors being captured
By the colonizer going 'cross rivers
To get us by the boatload.
I never witnessed a single soul being sold
Or a mass of my people preferrin' to die
Than to live
In a land not meant for us/me/you/we.

But I do remember this: I was told I could not be the
President of the United States.
We had limits.
That if I went to school and played with the Genesis'
There was a difference
Dos morenas pero uno negrita
Although I appear to be a Cubana/Domincana/Puerto
Riquena
That my voice is the beat of a drum
loud, obnoxious, head-rolling, an eye-rolling convulsion of
a thing
Reminding you that I come from the mad black woman
ring
That my coil-y curly hair doesn't get straight enough to fit
in
That vaseline was put on me like an extra layer of skin
To protect me from my own melanin.
What I remember the most was wanting to fit in:

mastering the rrrr's
Concentrando en Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Marquez
Rolling my tongue
perfecting the sound
/erasing the drum that beat from within
Replacing it with maracas and Selena verses
/resembling a Mesican
Practicing my secret language with only my friends—
We thought that we was making history back then.

So no I never bathed in the Niger River or the Peace River

I have never been to a place like Zimbabwe or Cameroon,
Never witnessed my ancestors being captured
By the colonizer going 'cross rivers
To get us by the boatload.
I never witnessed a single soul being sold
Or a mass of my people jumping off the ship
Preferrin' to die than to be stripped off unalienable rights
/than to try swimming
In a land not meant for us/me/you/we.
Because back then I was too busy making history, searching
a language that might have been my native tongue.
So no I have never witnessed my ancestors past/acknowl-
edged their pain/understood how one would prefer to die
than to be deemed a sin
Till I too entered a place that was not for me.
In a land not meant for us/me/you/we.

the morning comes
and i can see my motivation staring back at me
from across the room
like a stranger
which is to say
i turn off the sound of responsibility ringing in my ear
the alarm
reminding me to wake
to live
survive
for another day

i DON'T

i stay in bed
for a couple extra minutes
which is to say
i procrastinate on the living part
cling to the idea of never resurrecting
convince myself it's better than giving up entirely

MY

i hear monotony screaming at me once again
my phone sending sound waves through the room
and i wonder how long i have been sleeping underwater
just trying to enjoy the quiet
the heavy
at what point my body forgot how to come up for air

i open my eyes
try to want to get out of bed
which is to say
attempt at restarting an engine that
has the propensity to die
the battery drained
lights and radio left on all night because maybe
i'm still afraid of the dark
of a silence no part of me is willing to break
or maybe it's just easier to feel drained
when you know you have an explanation as to why

the car resentful
spits the key back at me
starts itself up out of spite
walks to the kitchen for breakfast
but decides against it
which is to say
succeeds at starving itself for at least a meal
and i wish to say i do not find pride in this
that it is not a victory
but i take what i can get
add another trophy to the mantel
place it beside the ribbons for participation
even those are hard for me to get some days

i bike to class in the rain
compare the volume of water flowing beneath me
to the amount i have let pour from my body over the years
call myself waterfall

IN WHICH

which is to say
powerful
and destructive
and unapologetic
And for a second
more than an endless stream of apologies
or guilt

i sit in the middle of the isle
and the class does its best to claim its importance
but i do not fall for it
instead i draw
write
scroll on my phone
until i hear the rustling of papers
that tell me it is time to leave
which is to say
i can not leave until i have someone else's footsteps to follow
out the door
do not have the resolve to be more than cattle
than an animal tricked into moving forward

LABEL

i can not leave until i have someone else's footsteps to follow
out the door
do not have the resolve to be more than cattle
than an animal tricked into moving forward

FEELINGS

i leave
without having said a word
or made a noise
it's almost
like i was never there
never got out of bed
i think maybe i shouldn't have

"HYPERBOLE"

so i go back home
or what may serve as one for now
watch a poem on youtube
about suicide
about how they call it a permanent solution to a temporary
problem
and i wonder
what their definition of temporary is
how they can call a pain they do not understand
anything but infinite
which is to say
that if you cannot give this an expiration date
i may as well give myself one
tattoo it on the inside of my mouth
mask the taste of this rotting body
with more blood,
it has died too many times already

BY

JACKIE
KAJISA

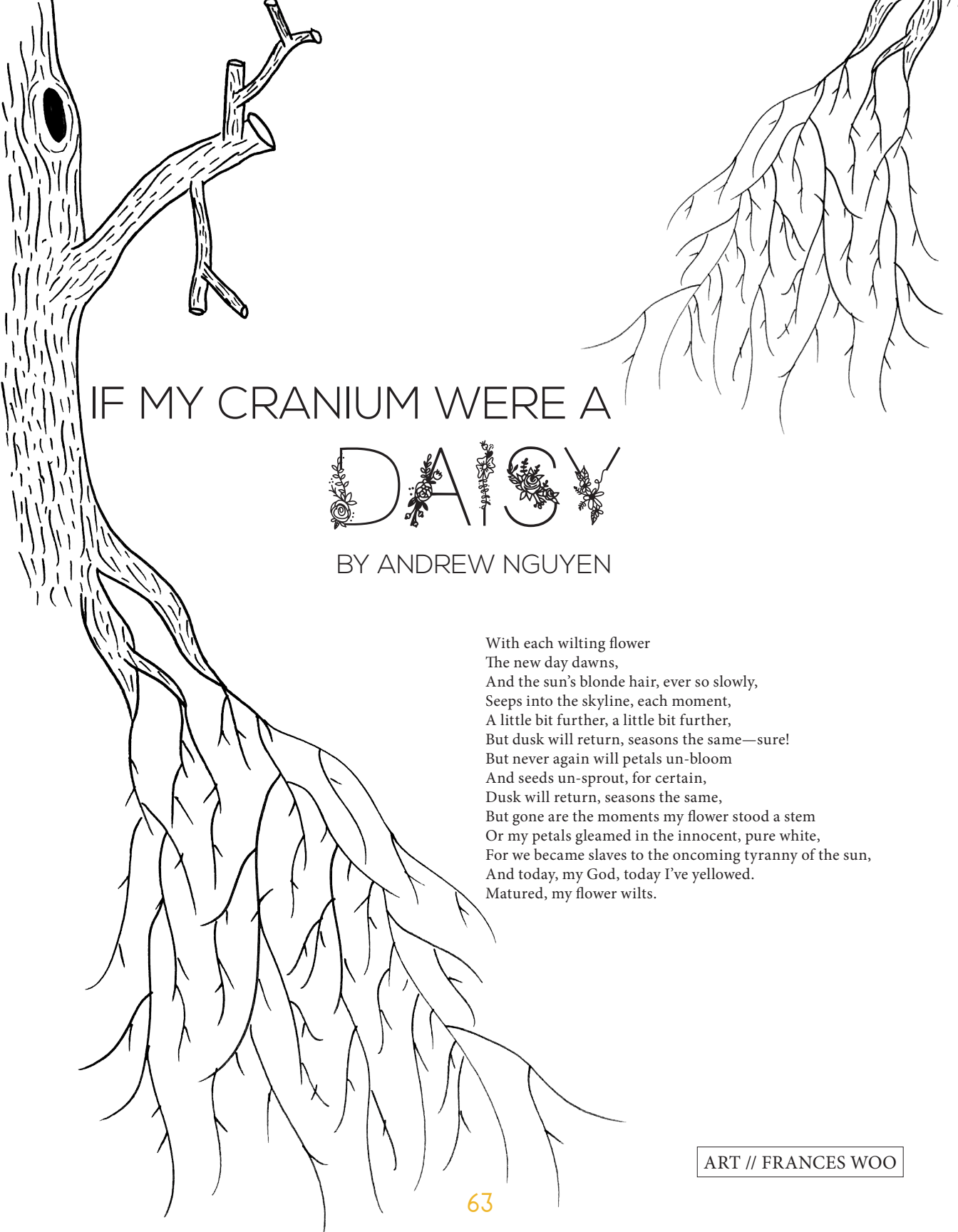
realize
that i have mourned the living more than any body beneath
the earth
and i think the movies got it wrong
that the zombie apocalypse is already among us
that it has been for years
that we are not scared of the undead
which is to say

we do not fear ourselves
just everything else
and sharks
and being alone
and admitting that more
than anything
we crave human flesh
we wish that it fit us
better
felt more comfortable
stretched across our
bones
which is to say
the dead walk the earth
and pretend to be alive

i crawl into bed
try not to label myself
“metaphor”

or “hyperbole”
wrap myself tightly in
the covers
try to fall asleep
because it is dark
because i am safe
because i’ve been
exhausted for the past
couple
of years
because the room is
quiet
and there is nothing left
to say

of years
because the room is
quiet
and there is nothing left
to say



IF MY CRANIUM WERE A

D A I S Y

BY ANDREW NGUYEN

With each wilting flower
The new day dawns,
And the sun's blonde hair, ever so slowly,
Seeps into the skyline, each moment,
A little bit further, a little bit further,
But dusk will return, seasons the same—sure!
But never again will petals un-bloom
And seeds un-sprout, for certain,
Dusk will return, seasons the same,
But gone are the moments my flower stood a stem
Or my petals gleamed in the innocent, pure white,
For we became slaves to the oncoming tyranny of the sun,
And today, my God, today I've yellowed.
Matured, my flower wilts.

ART // FRANCES WOO

SCIENCE SENSE

The Hooplaw-s of Physics

Part I: Columbus Spins

Many erroneous theories abound,
‘Cause people say the world is round.
I find their facts empirical,
The Earth ain't round—it's spherical.
(If you think that's great, here's one greater:
It flattens out towards the equator!)

Part II: Newton Falls

As Isaac sat beneath a tree,
Dreaming of pornography,
An apple knocked him with a clunk,
Upsetting those high thoughts he'd thunk.
Dismissing his depravity,
He set to work on gravity.

Part III: Franklin Flies

Poor Benjamin was pure heart-broke,
His gal went with some other bloke.
So sad was he that stormy night,
He tried a suicide by kite.
And so she'd know who caused this thing,
He tied her key upon the string.
And just when things got frightening,
Old Ben had harnessed lightning!

Part IV: Marie Glows

Young Madam Marie and her husband Pierre
Noticed something in pitchblende that shouldn't be there.
The Uranium ore had something else in its brew,
And so they found Radium (and Polonium too!)
It was quite the achievement and no small surprise,
She became the first woman to win the great Nobel Prize.
And if you think she quit there, then you don't know Our Hen.
Less than one decade later she won the damn thing again!


All Things Bio-Logical

Part I: Charlie Churns

Good Mr. Darwin after much introspection,
Decided that creatures survive through selection.
Where the fittest prevail through the direst of traits,
Allowing their offspring to retain those good traits.
And just when the gene pool seems thoroughly tapped,
Mutations pop up to help species adapt!

by G.B. Ulrich





CAT-ALUM: ROBERTO CASTAÑEDA PEREZ

Post-college life has been time for me to “come home to roost.” I haven’t lived at home since I was 13; my previous high school was a Catholic boarding school in the Bay Area near Stanford University. It has been a year of adjustment to rediscover my hometown with my family and rekindle old and new friendships, along with non-stop work. I’ve had an internship at Clars Auction Gallery where I handled contemporary/modern and Californian artworks sold to museums and private collectors. As of late I work between jobs at the Apple Store and the Asian Art Museum located in San Francisco. Happy to say I am looking forward to the next step in my academic endeavors, whether that be to return to school in a graduate program or advance my career-oriented skill sets in other ways.

SCATTERBRAINED

3...6...5 – What a time to be alive!

The waking days are money, waste no time!

It's hard to find a job with a purpose when you're still nervous, your friends are dispersing, the world is reversing and you're still working on your verbage (if that's even a word, that is)

You'll be surfing through LinkedIn, finding a button-up you still fit in, wondering:

Will you fit in? In this "work environment" culture, can you pick bones with the vultures

While avoiding to speak vulgar and tell your 21-year old self to act older?

Feel bolder, but don't get stressed;

Remember the feeling you got from a phone number given to you by a girl/guy you impressed

Every interview is a lap, a trial or a bench press

Exercise your mind while you remember to let it rest

Every closed door is a test, but work towards what's next

Expect the twists, turns and plot holes

Opportunity is a sport; your next move could be your shot at the goal

SPECIAL THANKS

UCSB DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH

JOHN ARNHOLD

DEPARTMENT CHAIR
ENDA DUFFY

HFA DEAN JOHN MAJEWSKI

KERR HALL DIGITAL EDITING LAB

IVCRC

ASSOCIATED STUDENTS

HAAGEN PRINTING TYPECRAFT

BIKO HOUSE

INTERDISCIPLINARY
HUMANITIES CENTER



CONTACT US

EMAIL // ucsbactivist@gmail.com
FACEBOOK // [The Catalyst UCSB](#)
INSTAGRAM // [@thecatalystucsb](#)

WANT TO GET PUBLISHED?

SUBMIT!

POETRY

PROSE

FICTION

NONFICTION

CREATIVE RESEARCH

PHOTOGRAPHY

PAINTINGS

DRAWINGS

SENIOR THESIS

COMIC STRIPS

GRAPHICS

SCRIPTS

COLLAGE

EKPHRASIS

PHOTO // LIANNA XIAOKUI NAKASHIMA



THE CATALYST
CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE