



# the anthem.

Fall 2018



# Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

The magazine before you is merely the latest edition of a publication grounded in a centuries old history of original Georgetown literature and art. It is a history rich in both tradition and evolution; while we continue to uphold the original mission of inspiring creativity in our community, we are ever changing. In only the past few years, we have transitioned from a yearly publication to a biannual one, we have updated our platform and appearance, and for a time we even considered changing our name. What is "the anthem," anyway?

The meaning of our name confounds us all, but over the course of my time here, from small freshman staff member to (still small) Editor-in-Chief, I have developed a newfound appreciation for its ambiguity and have come closer to finding an answer. It lies in the worn pages of past magazines aging in the dusty, forlorn boxes of our dear old Leavey office. It is passed down year after year with the arrival of a new staff and the graduation of the old. It lives in our voices, our expression, our ideas. And somewhere, beneath the hustle and bustle of Georgetown, it grows in the hearts of our student body and bridges the gap between our isolated lives and seemingly disparate social groups. I believe "the anthem," while forever a mystery, is the proud and enduring tradition of storytelling, without which our magazine could not exist.

Stories empower us to create meaning out of our experiences, to own our narrative, and shape how others see our world. Art then has the power to convey our stories in ways that transcend logic, reason, and plain speech, opening up new avenues for understanding and building connections. As you will discover in reading this magazine, some stories can only be told through creative forms, surfacing in between the broken lines of poetry, in the exposed light of a photograph, in the contours of a painting, in humor and horror, or even in the details of an online cheesecake recipe.

At the end of the day, *The Anthem* is our song, and this magazine, a celebration of our stories. I thank the authors and artists who have offered to share their stories here and everyone who has helped make this magazine possible. *The Anthem* is our gift to you.

Courtney Lee, Editor-in-Chief



*Sad Girl Eats Burger (Alone) /  
Christopher Stein*

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# Asteria

*Fiona Kennedy*

The one I love makes sense of empty space,  
Unfurling charts of light from east to west:  
While in my ship the cosmic line I trace,  
In airy currents, she maps out my quest.  
With skyward look, I wonder where to roam,  
So I might win the glory that I seek  
With fallen star she leads me far from home—  
In astral prophecy, I hear her speak.  
And when my bones are lost beneath the sea,  
Though Hades calls, I will not sink, but rise—  
I know there is an open place for me,  
A void between the stars that fill my eyes  
To join the one who, guiding me since birth,  
Casts constellated gaze upon the earth.



antiviral

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# Sardines

Don Dillon

*In here, said Tony. Now! My mouth bone dry. Keep rolling my tongue but nothing.*

That's Cindy Barrett's elbow pressed against my cheek. Never liked her much, 'stuck up Cindy' with her tight hair and the same boyfriend for the whole year, holding hands every damn time I saw them, like I got mine, where's yours?

*Can't see much, but smell the sweat, everybody's sweat. Locker room stink, worse. The air doesn't breathe.*

Laura Dowling didn't sweat, not ever. She just smiled the first time I met her and that was it, boom, be mine Laura, please be mine. Played tennis better than me, laughed first at my jokes and knew I stared at her all the time but it never bothered her. She had these amazing freckles, and she held my hand to show me a scar on her arm, and Jesus, she was holding my hand. She had a boyfriend after she went home in the winter, but last summer at the lake was my time. We were bobbing in the water by the sunfish, which I managed to get back upright by standing on the centerboard, then pulled her back on and her swimsuit was loose and I saw her pink nipple, right there. She was laughing and I was trying to, but I was faint with love. Late in the summer we kissed for the first time, outside her house right after the young-teen party at the clubhouse, when I walked her home in the dark. She really liked how I danced, and I was rad that night and I bet that got the

kiss. Three weeks and school's out. Back to the lake and Laura and maybe more than a kiss this summer.

*Foot's cramping, gotta straighten it, sorry Tony. He looks at me, finger on his lips. Gotcha bro, I'm gonna be cool like you, yeah, but I don't feel cool. I am shit scared. Light from the science lab winks through the door slats. Everyone texting, but hard cause my hands are shaking, hold it Jamie. Must be six of us in here, dark, hiding like we're sure we won't get found.*

Lightning Tony, fastest guy on the track team, big fro, super guy, smart as shit, got into Michigan and has just got to be valedictorian this year. I ran, too. Won our freshman class race on Field Day last month when I forgot my sneakers and ran barefoot and everybody else was slipping on the wet grass. Charlie and Dom couldn't believe it. The track coach came over and told me to try out for the team in the Fall. You're a big deal if you make the track team. My father was a runner in high school, and if I made the team, he'd come to a meet for sure.

*Shoulda called Dad and Mom, but no time, everything moving too fast. What did I tell them this morning? Can't remember. Now all I can text is I love you, Mom. I love you, Dad. I love you. I love you. Losing phone juice, shit. Cut the phones, says Tony, no light, no light.*

Played Sardines when I was a kid. Better than Kick-the-Can, better than those scavenger hunts. How are



you supposed to know if it's the biggest acorn? But Sardines was the best. Whoever was 'it' got to hide and whoever found you got in the hiding place with you till everyone was there together and the game wasn't over till the last person found everybody there. We boys loved it cause you're crowded in with the girls, and you could rub against them and nobody cared. And we were always found. Played with the Connorton family, six kids, house smelled like sour milk. We'd laugh like crazy when we got found.

*Mom knows about this now for sure, she's coming here, I bet. Everyone breathing hard. Cindy keeps texting, and Paula pushes Cindy's phone down, whispering stop. Paula's kinda chunky but a class leader, a listen-to chick, knows what's what. I'll get home Mom, I will.*

Mom texts me every day from the hospital, how you doing Jamie, your turn to take Barney out, love you. I'm Barney's favorite for sure, though my sister thinks it's only because of the treats. Not treats, Annie, admiration, I always say. Wouldn't mind being a dog, run like hell, big family to take care of you, go crazy in the park, get that frisbee. Took me a while to learn to throw that thing, but can zing it now like forever. Barney loves it, watches it fly and dip and hover, then a leap and grab—so, so cool. Coming home to you, Barney.

*That must be Chelsea Morgan whispering Hail Marys and I think Cindy is saying them with her, in a whimper, eyes squeezed shut. I mouth the words but still no voice, can't even remember the words. Save me, Mary, I'm a good boy, I am, I am.*

Our Lady, Notre Dame. My last exam tomorrow is French, my best subject and the two years I took it before I transferred here put me ahead of everybody. Charlie and Dom want to come to my place tonight to cram, and get a bit peeved when I say how easy it is, but I really help them out. If Dom could stop being a gamer for one freakin' day, he'd be a star. I'm a proud addict bro, he says, and if they make French a vid game, I'd nail it. Charlie owes me ten bucks, and I owe Dom. The three of us are our own gang, never stop with the jokes. Dom brought gin in a milk carton to Betsy Hillenbrand's party at Christmas, and I threw up for about three hours. He also nailed some weed which is a pretty good alternative to that liquor shit. Hip dude wannabe, reads a shitload of stuff, and quotes authors, which I could never do. Charlie just hangs, laughs like a hyena and goes on about his zits. Love his laugh. Three amigos we call each other, kinda barfy, but true. We're going to go to the pond the day school is out and jump

in with our clothes on, just like last year.

*The hall outside erupts, is that screaming? Someone grabbing my hand, hurting squeeze. Tony sits up. He tugs on the belt he wrapped around the door handles. Everybody breathing hard, gasping. Somebody has shit in their pants, can smell it. Chrissie, head of Theater Club, whispers quiet, then covers Tony's hands to help him pull. It's loud out there, so fucking loud, I smell firecrackers. Cindy starts to get up, says I gotta get out of here, Paula and I grab her, push her down, bang bang noises so close. Pull her close to me. She buries her head on my neck, tears dripping on my cheek. Sound keeps coming.*

We were coming back from the beach club and Dad was driving and the fireworks had been awesome and we're in the very back seat of the SUV and my brother has this bright idea to throw a firecracker out the car window and I light it and he throws it but the window is closed and it falls under the seat and goes BOOM! and Dad gets out of the car thinking the Poticelli kid threw it in and punches the kid and Mr. Poticelli takes a swing at Dad and Stuart tells Dad he did it, and it was really funny, and I still remember the sound of that firecracker.

*Jesus, the sound. I press on my ears, turn my face away from the doors. I want to be brave but lost in fear and I can hear myself moaning, everybody sobbing, my stomach hurts like hell and I should have called Mom, and we all squirm lower, closer to the wall, closer to each other, then sounds like a million firecrackers and the doors shatter apart, and there is nothing but light, got found, and screaming, got found, and pleading and whiteness and red. ♦*



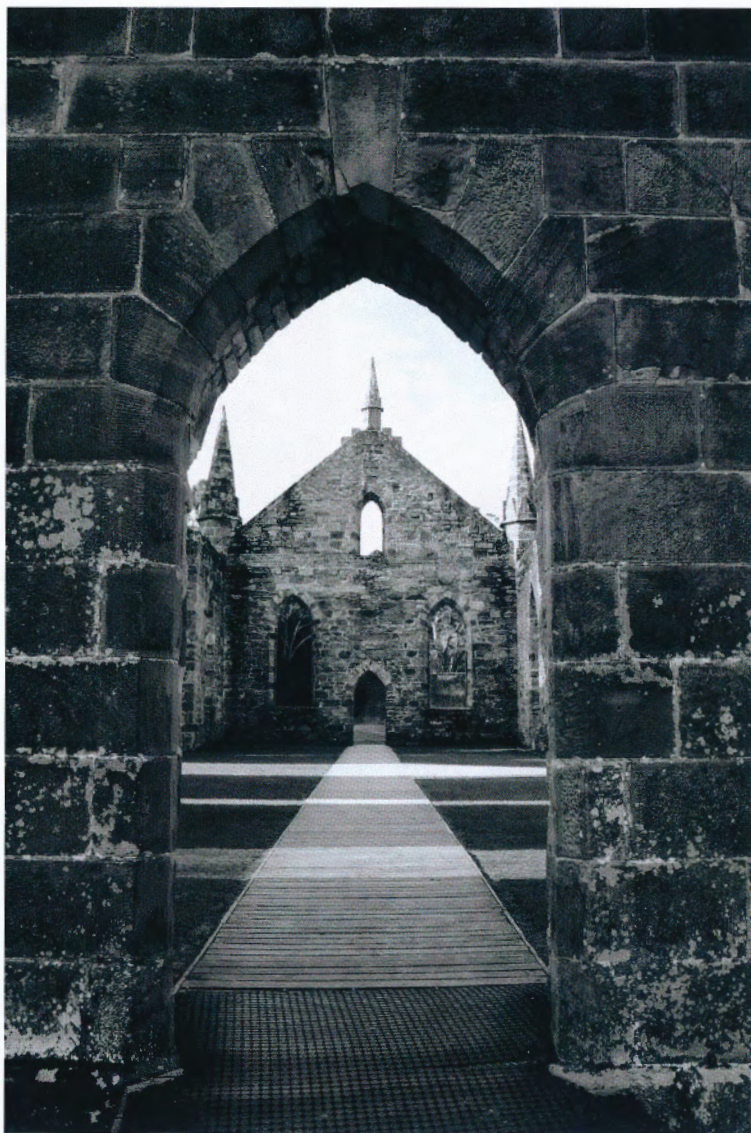


*Hands and Feet / Hannah Song*





*Reminder—Port Authority, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*



*Arches—Port Arthur, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*



# My Making

*Sasha Jovanovski*

When the hurricane came  
it was me all alone  
without walls or a kind  
word to spare,

till a fairy came by  
with a gleam in her eye  
and said, "Darling, it's lovely  
out there."



*Prairie Dog / Alexandra Bowman*



# "Icebreaker"

Christopher Cassidy

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - EVENING

A group of people sit around a table at a community center.

DENISE

Good evening, everyone! Welcome to the first-ever meeting of the Bucks County community service task force. Thank you for expressing interest in helping out your community. We hope to make some real progress here. Before we begin, I thought it would be useful if we did a quick icebreaker to introduce ourselves. How does 2 Truths, 1 Lie sound?

EVERYONE agrees, more or less.

DENISE

Excellent! I'll go first. Hello, my name is Denise. My three facts are: I have a cat named Benny, I played soccer in college, and I'm originally from Boston.

MARK, another attendee, raises his hand.

MARK

I don't think you were born in Boston. I could hear that South Philly accent from a mile away.

DENISE

Haha, you got me. Who wants to go next?

BILL

I'll go! Hi, my name is Bill. My facts are: My middle name is Gordon, I like to eat zoo animals, and I just came back from a trip to Brazil.

People shoot each other suspicious looks.

DENISE

Excuse me, Bill, what did you just say?



BILL

I'm sorry, I misspoke. I thought we were playing 1 Truth, 2 Two Lies. What I meant to say was: My middle name is Gordon, I like to eat zoo animals, and I've got a thing for cute zebras.

People are alarmed.

DENISE

Bill, I'm sorry but what is-

BILL

Oh my god, did I just say that? I didn't mean to come off that way. I'm a zoologist at Drexel. I've spent years studying sub-Saharan mammals. It's my thing. I hope you guys didn't get a bad impression. I guess I'm not thinking straight tonight. My bad.

DENISE

Whew, that makes much more sense. Moving on-

BILL

You know what though? I've never really been a fan of 2 Truths, 1 Lie. It's too complicated. Do you mind if we play High, Low, Surprise instead?

DENISE is surprised but doesn't interfere.

BILL

Great! How about you go first.

BILL looks at LAURA, who is startled.

LAURA

Oh, um, I guess my high this week was finally ordering a new sofa for the living room. My low was getting a parking ticket. And my surprise was hearing that a zebra was stolen today from the Philadelphia Zoo.

BILL

Wow, that's pretty wild. I guess I'll go now. My high was getting a good price on a new smart TV. My low, ironically, was paying the tax for the TV. And my surprise was discovering the rush of making out with a live zebra.

People are shocked.

BILL

Don't even get me started about that last one.



DENISE

Okay, Bill. We've had enough. I think it's time we moved on.

BILL

You're right. This game kinda sucks, now that I think about it. Let's switch again. It'll be the last time, I promise. Let's play Key Exchange. Everyone close their eyes and put their car keys in the middle of the table.

EVERYONE reluctantly agrees and puts their keys in the middle.

BILL

Great! Now let's go around the table and guess which key belongs to whom. Denise, you're up first. Does anyone have any guesses about Denise's keys?

LAURA

Uhh, I think Denise's keys are the ones with the soccer ball, because she played in college.

DENISE

You're right.

BILL

Nice work! My turn! What do you guys think about me?

JILL

Bill, do you own the Toyota keys?

BILL

No, good guess though. I drive a white Ford van. The trunk space is so big, you could fit a whole zebra back there if you really tried.

MARK pulls out his phone.

MARK

Hey Laura, I just got this emergency text message. I think it's related to that zebra you talked about earlier. It says to look out for a white Ford van. They say it was last seen driving around Bucks County.

EVERYONE looks at BILL.

BILL

That just reminded me I left something in my van. I'm gonna see if everything is alright. Be right back.

BILL exits.

--END--





*Lion's Den / Sajjad Alvee*



*Onward / Kirk Zieser*





*Snagged / Kirk Zieser*



*On Patrol / Kirk Zieser*



# Skin Under

## Gabriela Barrera

The summer before I started college I worked at a firm called Baker Engineering and Risk Consultants. I remember my exit interview to be unorthodox, uncomfortable, different.

Michael, who wasn't the boss but did all of her work anyway, sat me down to talk about college. Specifically, college for women and the 14-day rule.

The 14-day rule or how

men, *upperclassman*, would normally

"go"

for women in the first two weeks of school. Freshman girls, he said, caught up in their new free life were "at risk."

Michael told me that I looked very unassuming. He told me to stop doing that.

10 days in to my new free life, the priest who administered my floor had us all meet in the common room. He sat in front of the window, framed by the Potomac's setting sun. I can't say I remember all of what he said—I got distracted a few minutes into his speech. Stacked on the third shelf over his right shoulder was an odd shaped stranger. Curious, innocuous. An Ouija board peered at me from between Parcheesi and the Game of Life.

I looked at the Father and then to the board and then back to him again and I wondered if a priest would purposefully put a tool of literal demonic summoning on a floor dedicated to living well.

By the time I decided not to bring it up, all that was left of him was a floating head supported by a thin slip of snow-white collar. His black button up had disappeared into the darkened sky, and the board was cast in shadow.

In my second week I attended the first ever information session for a new politics program on campus. The spectre of my mother, having told me to "make connections," pushed me to talk to one of the coordinators after the event. A boy, tall, with taller hair, also needed to ask a question. Afterwards, we left in the same direction, chatting about something while I thought about needing to get to class. Right before our paths parted, he asked me for my phone number, and right after I entered class, he texted me and said *I* wanted to study with him. I agreed. I really needed to catch up on readings.

In one of those half-open group study rooms in the HFSC study building, me and the tall-haired boy sat down to work. We chatted, and when we fell silent to do our homework, I thought, uncertain, that maybe it was awkward for me but not for him. At some point, I suppose he decided that the silence had stretched out for too long, and interrupted my work with the inexplicable sound of clinking glass.

The source?

A wine bottle.

A totally full, still yet unopened wine bottle,

complete with two glasses that had appeared from the previously submerged depths of his backpack.

In broad sight. In HFSC.

At some point he said something and I could only nod because *wow* he just straight-up brought a bottle of wine to a study session and I couldn't quite hear anything over the ridiculousness of it all.



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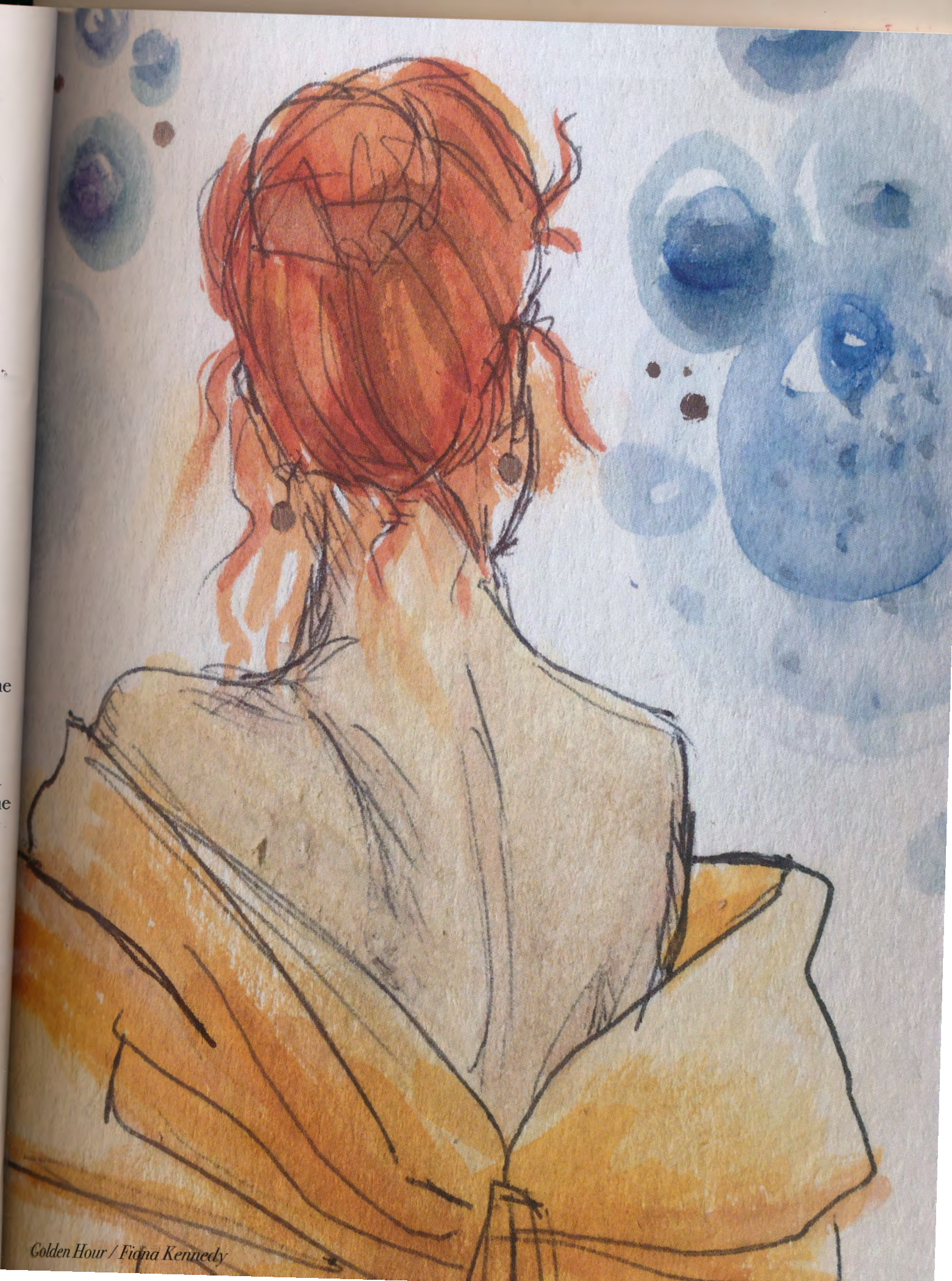
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So this boy pours two glasses and hands one to me and I wonder  
how I'm supposed to do my homework while I'm holding a glass of wine in an HFSC study room. (On a Tuesday.)

But then something else happens.

And I don't really know how to feel.

Because no boy has ever started touching me on the inside of my thigh.

So really the wine becomes pointless because I wasn't enjoying this boy touching me (palm on thigh, curling inwards) and that I wanted this stranger to stop.

I wish I could say that I stopped him there.

But for some reason I didn't think I could

so he kept saying soft words and I kept sitting there until suddenly his hand started traveling somewhere that wasn't just my thigh and that made me spring out of my seat in a wine-colored terror.

He said more words after that but

I can't say I remember any of them.

My own profuse apologies the only thing loud enough to drown out the embarrassed blood rush in my ears.

And more hands from him, long fingers over my arm to ask me to stay, the frantic

stuffing of papers into my backpack and the rush of tears because once I left the room and realized I'd left something behind but couldn't remember what.

When I got back to my dorm I tried to call my mom on a dead phone, my charger still plugged in an outlet on the other side of campus.

On Day 62 I felt like I could go to my first party. Somewhere in a house on 37th street, I filled my cup with plain orange juice and my friend, who had extended the invitation, toasted with me with her tool-shed drink.

I was nearing the end of my orange juice when I saw him, standing motionless in the middle of the noise. My friend — well she had noticed, too. Stumbling from the dance floor, arms windmilling wild onto my shoulders, she pulled me in close and drew my attention to the figure. She said something to me, a mere Day 62 friend, in a surge of words she could not keep from escaping. When she was done she leaned heavily against me, quiet, as if realizing what had been revealed: this terrible secret of her shame that wasn't hers to bear. Stricken, I didn't know what to do, left feeling cold from the bile of those truths.

It took me 8 more days to figure out how to pull it off. 10 after that to make it happen. Double-edge questions to various religious figures, the internet, and then a series of texts to reconnect with him (honestly too easy) and apologize for *freaking out lol I totally didn't mean to leave you in HFSC* and an ask to meet up for coffee. Another three days after that for a follow-up invite. The perfect autumn time when the stranger from the common room could step into the space of believable actability. A final text to say *let's test this thing I found* and my making sure that we met somewhere over a bunch of dead bodies because breaking the rules sometimes is the only way we can win.

I waited

at the cemetery

with an old friend tucked under my arm,

still peering, still silent,

and when I saw him jump the fence and ungainly

slide down the short slope, I knew he had no idea what was about to happen.

(Ouija board rules dictate two primary warnings. Don't use the board alone (check), and don't use it in a graveyard (decidedly uncheck). Something about accidental possession, or whatever.)

See, the thing is, people like him don't have demons. They don't think themselves wrong or capable of harm. He walks over people like he walks over the dead: careless: oblivious. That's why I knew when I purposefully skewed the rules of the board that it would be him taken and not me. Because I was less afraid of what might come out of the board than I was of people like him. Because I already had my demons. I already had things that had settled under my skin.

It's your turn, dickwad. ♦



# Confined

*Tyler M. Michaud*

On the island, we ran into opaque water, tripping over rocks, trash, and unafraid of the leeches that repelled our friends. You gave our possessions away in an attempt to escape the shackles on your bed – three bikes, my favorite cd, and your stereo – but still he didn't see the way that your heart lurched into your throat when he came around. Year by year, the welts on your wrist worsened from the friction of life upon a mattress. I watched as you threw yourself at every. single. open. door. and for a young, pretty girl that came in the form of a man with little money but gusto and too many drugs. I don't think you realize that you swapped one type of confinement for another: eggnog, brandy, and garbled words for an itchy fly and payments in Marlboros.





*Up-Hobart, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*



*Outlook-Townsville, Australia / Julia Hyacinthe*



# October Tilling *in five acts*

*Matt Phillips*

I

These are the long, rolling nights that  
stretch themselves out like cornfields,  
cruel enough & kind enough  
to be unforgettable —

II

Tonight, a band & a cigarette man.  
I bide my time.

& I recall that cornfield: that guardian:  
the night it wrapped me in safe,  
cul-de-sac arms & smiled as —  
throat mingling smoke & iced tea —  
I charted centaur & bow, lion & dipper,  
or the night it mocked me a stranger:  
100 deer leering with wanton, yellowed eyes  
& I an unwelcome guest at this ritual.



### III

Tonight, a band & a cigarette man.  
Build altars 'round this loneliness & launch us into song.

It's not that no one tells you these nights will come.  
It's that no one is able to chart for you the specifics  
of how a quiet kind of sorrow will descend into the  
crevices of your bedframe & make you long for the  
glow of McDonald's at two in the morning, the  
unimpressive food at the trailer-driver diner with  
the waitress who hasn't quite escaped her goth phase  
(but your friend pines nonetheless), the sharp,  
disorienting breeze that you could manufacture  
routinely going 100 on 76 at three.  
(Nothing could make us bold like that.)  
What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that things glow different  
when you're only vaguely conscious of their existence.

### IV

Tonight, a band & a cigarette man.  
Toot-toot, bap-bap, all's well & good.

& truthfully & honestly it's hard to even blame anybody.  
I've left graveyards behind anyway, & —  
though forgive me, I'm not an expert here —  
but I think there's something about it all coming back  
to us now, & if it is, then please, keep it coming;  
really, rocketship it, even;  
I figure I can use the baptism.

### V

Tonight, a band & a cigarette man.  
& if someone can explain how,  
older & no more judicious,  
I'm smaller now than ever before,  
please do. Consider this a posting.  
Kind of like a HELP WANTED.

& then talk me all the way back to a place where McFlurries were just beautiful, my love.



# Cosmogony

*Sasha Jovanovski*

The thing they don't tell you in driver's ed is that 94-east from Ann Arbor has no overhead lights, so when you're driving at night and there's no one behind you and you look out the back window it looks like you're driving out of the void into the dimension we live in, except the void is chasing you and eating up the real world like in one of those panic dreams and no matter how fast you go you can't outrun it, and it seeps into the car it seeps into the backseat the potted plant you're sharing the backseat with quivers and starts because the roads in Michigan suck ass, the void touches the plant and its shadow fingers reach out for you whenever you look away but there are lights up ahead so it can never quite get you, and your brother and his wife are in the front seat blissfully unaware of the chase, they don't know they're driving for their lives because their nightmares stay where they're supposed to they're arguing over songs your sister-in-law loves bad 90s pop but also loves opera because she went to music school, but your brother's in the passenger seat DJing so he picks Depeche Mode and that song by Joy Division that sounds upbeat but whose lyrics are really grim, it's 11 pm and 94 makes a tight right turn and the plant slides across the floor of the car and kisses your bare arm with a dry underwatered leaf, you look out the back window and there's still no one but the dark and the dark is still riding your bumper like one of those assholes on 696 who's really got to be somewhere at 2 in the afternoon or who sidles up next to you like your least favorite aunt on Thanksgiving and won't let you merge right, and you must have been the last person to get the memo that the dark was coming for you because you're stuck in last place in this race, your sister-in-law can't even pass the guy whose car sounds like a damn DVD player because she's not trying to and why would she and she and your brother had a couple drinks tonight anyways, she's a responsible motorist yes sir, and that Joy Division song is still playing somehow like the void has reached the radio and broken it because it's all it wants to hear, the void likes the happy music and the unhappy words, maybe because it's so unlike itself, the song is deceptive and pretty but the void is just ugly, the dark is empty and full of space because it can't even keep the things it's taken, it takes a houseplant with its shadow fingers and the plant dies, the leaves wither and the roots disintegrate and the dark is left with nothing but an empty terra cotta pot, *that's* what's in the void just garbage just things unwanted unprotected because it can never have friends, it's chasing you because it'll never learn that its touch is a killer and someone was stupid enough to build a highway without overhead lights and bet a 20 they were the first person the void took here, stolen by a nightmare they allowed to fester and if it weren't for you your brother and sister-in-law would be gone now too because you know the point of a panic dream isn't for bad things to happen but for bad things to *almost* happen, like the scratch on your arm where the plant touched you was supposed to be a caress a kind gesture but the void isn't meant for this world and if it had touched you any longer it might have even taken you too, dragged you behind a black velvet curtain like a marionette to lead on with its shadow fingers attached to its shadow hands attached to its shadow body attached to its ugly ugly shadow face and the thing they don't tell you in driver's ed is well just about anything useful at all.





*Rogue Empire / Sajjad Alvee*



# Analysis of Birdman at 3:36am

*Andrew Sedlack*

The drapes are bloody and I can't take them down.

I can't take the drapes down because then people would see that the walls and floor and the big squishy armchair and the sad springy couch are bloody, too.

I can't take the drapes down because I have a lot of bleach and a spray bottle of some other oxidizer that I can't actually remember the name of but neither of those is going to be useful because it's a bloodstain and it's not like I'm going to take the drapes down if I can't clean them off why would you take the drapes down if you couldn't clean them off I mean I understand that you might have other drapes but for God's sake are you just going to leave the dirty ones in a pile on the floor or in the closet just because they're out of sight doesn't mean that the blood is gone.

I can't take the drapes down because they're my favorite color and now they look artistic because they have red on them in random, splattered patterns, and I want people to think that I'm artistic, that I paint and get paint on myself and other things because that is what artistic people do and I know this because I have seen artistic people and it is far from uncommon for them to have paint or other such pigments spattered, splattered, or smeared against themselves. Smeared is the most uncommon because when an artist smears something against themselves it means that they didn't care about how it was already or wanted to change it: if the artist just spatters or splatters something it is most likely that their limb or other body part simply was in between where the artistic process was occurring and the media they were trying to apply the pigment to the media not onto their limb or other body part and it merely adhered to their limb or other body part on accident. For the pigment to become smeared upon the artist, their clothing, or any other such articles, requires that the artist first comes into contact with the pigment somewhere by accident and then chooses to consider allowing it to smear because even though it will change the state of the work it will change it into something more appropriately artistic. Obviously, if this occurred by some mechanism other than accident and the medium itself was not the artist, their clothing, or any other such articles, then the agent could not have really been an artist, because they were intentionally applying pigment to themselves, their clothing, or any other such articles, and no artist would ever do that.

The drapes are bloody and I can't take them down because of this.





451-Hobart, Australia (2018) / *Julia Hyacinthe*

# Hospital

*Amanda Nemecek*

Heavy hallways and heavier walls:  
One foot falls as the other lifts to carry you farther, farther,  
farther until you're slipping through cracks in the tile:  
Touch one, your mother suffers.  
Touch none, you suffer just the same.

You seek the simplicity of the dead.  
You are sick, but you know this,  
More so than the specters of these halls,  
Coated in white ego, careless of cracks.  
Their edges are greying.  
Yours have been washed in a faded mess of stress  
and anxiety and the needle's point on which  
you balance your whole heart.  
You're still skipping over cracks in heavy halls.  
You are about to tumble over.



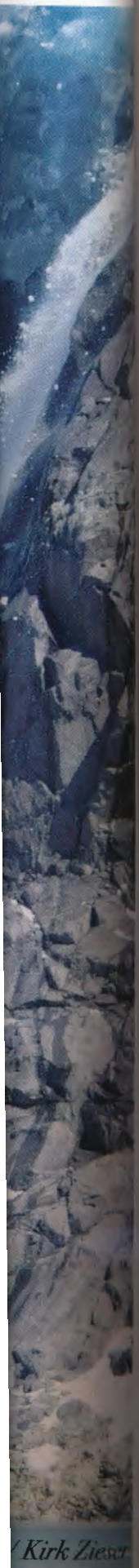
*Charge / Sajjad Alvee*





*Crumble / Kiri*





# Restoration

*Christopher Stein*

I paint my life *impasto*  
all too eager  
to find myself lost in lavender chasms  
gripping the edge of turquoise hillocks

someday far away  
distant as the glint of the blast  
on the next horizon

a man with an expressionist's heart  
will ease me off a stretcher  
under a microscope  
read the cracks in my face  
the wrinkles on my folded hands

tell me when I first bloomed  
spread me in an X-ray field  
to map my underpainting  
the flat-handed truth that makes me glow

he will perhaps  
chip away at the surface of my character  
my teeth falling away with the indignity of age

build me back up with horsehair brushes  
and the scrape of the pallet knife  
try to leave my soul unburdened undisturbed

I will not be quite the same  
again the laugh the mouth open always  
he will sew my teeth back to my gums

but the words coming out of my mouth  
who can say what they are or were

perhaps I paint my life a bit too *impasto* too impatient  
I wait for you to let me know



# Spot

*Bianca Berman*

It wasn't so much the spot itself that bothered him, but rather the thought of it. Even when he wasn't looking at it, he could almost feel its presence in the room. A black blot on pure white. He would lie in bed at night in complete silence and look at the ceiling, trying to discern the nature of the spot. Was it mold? A spider? A leak? The more he looked at it, the stranger it became. The more he looked, the larger it seemed to grow. On the rare occasion when he managed to close his eyes, it would still be there, as though it had been carved into his memory, never to be erased.

It was smaller than a penny in size. Miniscule, really. Most people probably wouldn't have noticed it. Yet at the same time, it's difficult not to notice something black in a house where almost everything is white and pristine: shiny, white floors (which he washed twice a week methodically), white walls with no pictures on them, one white Scandinavian chair (his mother had insisted that he have at least one stylish piece of furniture in his apartment), a white couch... Gregory Samson had a thing for white. Or maybe he was just too lazy to decorate. He lived alone (not surprisingly) on the top floor of an apartment building. He wasn't particularly close to any of his neighbors, most of whom were old and hard of hearing, so it was often a one-sided conversation. Although Gregory probably wouldn't have spent much time with his neighbors even if they hadn't been old and hard of hearing. He was like that. He kept to himself.

One day, after yet another night of tossing and turning and staring at the ceiling, there was a knock at the door. Gregory's ears were ringing and his head was throbbing. He set down his copy of Sartre's "No-Exit" and walked to the door. It was Mr. Peck with his wooden cane and old, moth-infested fedora.

"Gregory, old chap, I'm sorry for bothering you," he began with a loud, creaky voice that made Gregory cringe.

"You're no bother at all," he replied, and forced a smile.

"What?" Mr. Peck asked, bringing a hand to his ear.

"You're no bother at all!" Gregory repeated, raising his voice and making his ears ring even more.

"Oh, thank you, Gregory. You're a good lad."

The two of them stood in silence. The AC was running full blast in the background.

"So what can I help you with?"

"What? Oh, right, right. Could I borrow some of your milk, please?"

"Sure, Mr. Peck. Just a second."

Gregory walked into his kitchen and pulled the white carton of milk out of the fridge. He checked the expiration date (as he always did) and brought it to the elderly man.

"Thank you, son. I really appreciate it! As always, let me know if you need anything," Mr. Peck said and turned around to leave, but Gregory stopped him midstep. Something had come to mind.

"Actually, could I ask you to take a look at something?" Gregory asked.

"Of course, son!"

Gregory led the old man through his pale, cold apartment towards the bedroom. Towards *it*. Their shoes squeaked on the clean floors. They stopped in front of the bed. Gregory looked up and pointed at the ceiling. Mr. Peck looked up.

"What are we looking at exactly?" Mr. Peck asked loudly after a minute of staring at a white ceiling.

"Don't you see it?" Gregory asked.

"See what? Just a second," Mr. Peck took his crooked glasses out of his jacket pocket. In addition to having trouble hearing, he didn't have the best eyesight. He put the glasses on and looked up again. The two men — one lanky and the other a little plump — stood in the white room in





*Setting Hobart, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*

ence, waiting.

Gregory couldn't take his eyes off of the spot. There was a faint buzzing in the back of his mind. As he looked at it, everything around him disappeared: the bed, Mr. Peck, even the moth-fedora. His vision grew cloudy, then sharp, then cloudy again. The room started to close in on itself — getting smaller and smaller as the spot got larger and larger. The spot grew tentacles that stretched out like fast-growing vines. One made its way from the ceiling to the floor and started to make its way up Gregory's leg. He could feel it wrap around his knee. A bead of sweat formed on his forehead. He could hear his heartbeat quicken...

"Well, I think I'll get going," Mr. Peck said nonchalantly, shaking Gregory back to reality. The old man had forgotten why he was even standing in the room. He had already forgotten about the milk.

"Thank you, Mr. Peck," Gregory said quietly, but the old man was already gone.

\*

He woke up suddenly in the middle of the night drenched in sweat. It was quiet, but the air felt heavy...suffocating. What's more, he felt as though he weren't alone. He

looked around the dark room frantically: there was nobody there. He drew the blanket over his head and closed his eyes. He could hear himself breathing. No, he was hyperventilating. He tried to shut everything out: all the thoughts, all the images, *it*. But no matter what he did, it always crept back into his mind. The thought of it always found a way through the cracks and would attach itself to his consciousness like a tick, sucking the life and joy out of him until it was satisfied and dropped off plump, filled with blood.

Then the voices started. They crept through the sheets. First one, then two, then three. They terrorized him through the night:

*Look up, Gregory. Look up. Look up. Look up.*

\*

Gregory called the handyman the next day. He hadn't slept at all and his headache had grown noticeably worse. What bothered him most about the spot was that he couldn't remember how long it had been there for. Or maybe he just couldn't remember when he first started seeing it. What if it had been there all along? He'd lived in the apartment for five years. Could it have been there all that time? All he knew was that the past few weeks had felt like an eternity. As



time went by, the amount of sleep he was getting diminished greatly. If he kept this up any longer, he would simply drive himself mad.

There was a knock on the door.

"Thanks for coming over, Hank," Gregory said, and let the well-built gentleman into his apartment.

"Geez, you look awful. Not getting enough sleep?" Hank asked and set his tool bag on the floor with a thump.

"No," Gregory replied.

"You said you wanted me to take a look at something on your ceiling," Hank said.

"Yes, right through here."

Their shoes squeaked as they walked towards the bedroom. Gregory pointed at the spot.

"Is it mold?" he asked Hank.

"What, that little dot?" Hank asked, squinting.

"Yes."

"Could be mold."

"Can you do anything about it?"

Hank thought for a moment.

"I could paint over it. You'll never see it again."

"How much?"

"Fifty bucks."

Ten minutes, one paintbrush, and fifty bucks later, the spot was hidden. Gregory sat on his bed with a cup of chamomile tea relishing his restored peace. He closed his eyes and absorbed the silence. His mind was perfectly empty... perfectly quiet... perfectly clean and white. His eyes began to close as his body craved the sleep he had been missing.

He fell asleep with a smile on his face.

He woke up screaming.

The spot had returned.

\* \* \*

"Mr. Samson, did you pack your clothes?"

"Yes, Samantha. Thank you."

"And your medicines?"

"Yes, Samantha."

The nurse smiled and left the white, perfectly sanitized room. Gregory followed shortly after with his suitcase and coat. He was finally getting out. Behind him, he heard the doctors whispering.

"Do you think he'll come back?" a young nurse asked.

"Yes...you know how it is with these things. It comes and goes. The treatments only last for so long. And then, we never know whether or not the patient keeps taking their medicines..."

Gregory returned to find his home just as he had left it. The floor, however, needed some polishing. The medicine made him too tired to do anything about it though, so he simply crawled into his old bed without bothering to change and doze off.

He woke up feeling numb as he often did. As an old habit, he looked at the ceiling. The spot was there. *Great*, he thought, *I'm still seeing things*. He lay there for a while just looking at it, and was thankful that this time he wasn't taken over by his emotions. Perhaps the medicines really were helping him. *But if the medicines do work, he thought, how come I'm still seeing things?* What if the spot was actually there? Gregory approached the problem methodically without letting himself get out of hand. He walked to the closet, grabbed the ladder, and placed it near the foot of his bed. He climbed up and looked at the spot. This was the closest he had ever come. He lifted his hand and carefully ran his finger over it. He felt a gust of air coming through it. *A hole?* Suddenly he was filled with an overwhelming sense of fear. Fear which he hadn't felt since the last time he had been home.

He scraped at the edges of the hole to try to make it bigger. Dust from the drywall started to fall on him. As he scraped more frantically, his hair was covered with white dust within minutes. But the process was too slow. He felt that he was losing control, but he had no way of stopping himself. He ran around the apartment in search of something, anything, and then his eyes rested on the hammer.

Giant chunks of drywall fell onto his bed. Within moments, his work was done: he had made a hole big enough to squeeze through. His heart was racing. He couldn't tell if he was frightened or excited or both. Adrenaline was pumping through his veins.

*Look up, Gregory. Look up. Look up. Look up.*

He was standing on the highest step of the ladder. He took a deep breath and put his head through the hole.

He was looking into a small, dark crawlspace which he didn't even know existed. It was big enough for one person to crouch in.

When his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he saw it.

In the small space, there was a video camera pointing towards his room. Next to it was a cup of coffee.

It was still hot. ♦



# Re: the midnight game

Danielle Devillier & Karena Landler

**Subject: ATTENTION NEW STUDENTS: DO NOT DISREGARD**

**To: undisclosed-recipients**

**Reply-to: [announcements@georgetown.edu](mailto:announcements@georgetown.edu)**

**YOU ARE NOT SAFE ON CAMPUS.**

Every student at Georgetown, at some point, will play the midnight game.

Between the hours of midnight and sunrise, you will be compelled to take a walk, alone, in the dark. Your mind will create a pretense— *you're just worried about midterms*— but you will not have a destination. There is no destination.

You can't stop it. You can't control it. It's not your fault. But it will happen. This is the midnight game.

Some people win the game without even knowing they were playing. They return to their rooms, never knowing what they've risked. But they are the outliers. You need to know the rules.

You will hear whispering. If you look behind you, you will lose the midnight game. You will hear your name spoken aloud. If you follow the voice, you will lose the midnight game. It looks like a dark shape behind a pole. It looks like a stain on the pavement. It looks like the shadow of a rat running across the street. It's not. If you see it, you will lose the midnight game.

If you lose the midnight game, you will get back to your room

safely. Mostly unscathed. If you knew you were playing, you might think that you've won. But it starts with nightmares. Night terrors, really. They'll get worse, and worse, until you can't focus in class. The thing from your nightmares will be there: under your desk, just outside your vision. You'll see movement in the corners of your room that the lights don't reach. You'll sit there that night with the light on, waiting for something to happen. Almost wishing whatever it is would just come, because the dread is half killing you. That's the night you'll know you won't feel safe again.

You can't stay awake forever. You'll make it until midnight, and then you'll wake up in your bed. But your feet will be dirty and your arms will be scratched. You'll have no idea what you've done. And that's as much as we know.

Remember this when your roommate stirs in the night. Remember this when your friend leaves in running clothes. Remember this when you feel restless after a night of homework.

The administration won't help you. Telling them is pointless. If you ask, they will tell you it's a hoax. They will avoid your eyes. But it's not a hoax. You know someone who's played, more likely than not. We're all around you, in your classes and in your dorms. This is NOT a prank, and it's NOT a joke, though the administration will tell you so. We can't help you when it comes, so you have to help yourselves. Learn the rules; be careful. And don't try to cheat. If you cheat, you will lose the midnight game.

We know. We lost.



**Subject: Attention New Students: Please Disregard Previous Email**

**To: undisclosed-recipients**

**Reply-to: [announcements@georgetown.edu](mailto:announcements@georgetown.edu)**

Dear Members of the Georgetown University Community,

As this month continues, we know that many University students and staff will be celebrating traditions of the new season, including Halloween. This is a time to unwind and celebrate with friends, and we know our students do this in a respectful and appropriate fashion.

Earlier this evening it came to the attention of the administration, as well as the Georgetown University Police Department (GUPD) that the Georgetown Announcements email account had been hacked. From the account, a troubling email regarding student safety at Georgetown was circulated to the student body.

We deeply apologize for any concern this email has caused, and we want to assure the community that the contents were unequivocally false. This email was sent by the hacker as a cruel prank intended to frighten students and staff, and

GUPD assures us that the campus is secure, as it always is. The administration's first priority is the safety and well-being of our community.

GUPD is actively investigating the hacking, and we have made plans to increase cybersecurity in wake of the incident. GUPD is coordinating with the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and requests that anyone with information about the crime call (202) 687-4343 or email [police@georgetown.edu](mailto:police@georgetown.edu). We strongly encourage students with any knowledge of any other such attempts to disturb the peace on campus to file a report by calling GUPD or using the LiveSafe app.

Unfortunately, it is likely that this crime came from within Georgetown itself. We hold our Hoya community to a high standard of integrity, and it pains us to know that a fellow Hoya would spread such untruth. The parties responsible for the hacking will be held fully accountable for their actions. We reject any and all attempts to terrorize, frighten, or otherwise harass the Georgetown Community.

You are always safe at Georgetown. ♦





# You Won't Find This in Leo's

*Anjali Britto*

Room inspections are in a week. And, my RA would not approve. I'm sure she wouldn't. Unless I can come up with something. But, I'll leave that as a last resort. Then, there's my roommate. She's back the same day. Anyway, there's nothing I can do right now. Right at this moment. So, I let it go.

I stare at my inbox. Then, the whiteboard. The professor is struggling with the projector. It's a losing battle and one that I have no intention of watching through to the end. So, I close my eyes. I've been trying to practice mindfulness. Apparently, it helps one cope. It hasn't so far, and I definitely would have gone crazy if I hadn't found other activities. But, now's as good a time as any. So, I meditate on it. I imagine the problem filling up my field of vision. It gets bigger and bigger and grows until I feel every atom in my body blinded by the sheer expanse of this magnificent inconvenience. Then, I crush it. It dissolves and swirls down the drain at the bottom left of the back of my eyelids, into nothingness. My mind is now blank, empty, and clean. I open my eyes. The projector won, and the cursor is nowhere to be found. All is lost.

\*

It's the next day, and the Problem is now under my bed. I would have left it where it was, but I felt like I had to do something. Whether this executive decision was

misinformed is yet to be seen. Although it's under my bed, it might as well be strung to my very person. I feel its presence weighing down on me at every moment. I think I've been good at hiding it. The same cannot be said about my bed. It's lofted far too high to be useful. I need to see to that at some point; it's ridiculous.

\*

I learn how to properly cite the Problem. Procrastination has never been so illuminating. Chicago is easy enough, but MLA still gives me trouble.

\*

I am now growing desperate. My bouts of meditation have yielded nothing. The Problem is staying put, immovable and irreducible. It is everywhere—it fills my thoughts on my way to class, my readings reference it, the chicken at Leo's tastes like it. It feels inescapable. Surely, there's a way out. With all the newfound quiet on my floor, I could definitely come up with something by next week. I must. I just have to put my head down and think. I will make it happen.

\*

A week later, I am yet to make it happen. It's the day of inspections, and I still have nothing. I need brain food, I decide. At Leo's, I'm greeted with an apology. Sorry, we're closed, but check online for a full list of



what's open! The direness of my circumstance is all that keeps me from a full-blown meltdown outside upstairs Leo's. I trudge downwards. Each step taking me further and further into this hell I have made for myself. I walk down the big steps, so my descent into condemnation is slower and more painstaking. I swipe in. Enjoy your meal! If only they knew. I stare at the salad bar. It stares back unblinking. I walk over to the vegan station. Plate in hand, outstretched, and head bowed in supplication, I pray to the Vegan Gods. They're old gods, born far before their time and forced to prove their usefulness. Global warming, I heard, is their doing.

I close my eyes and pray for nourishment and fortification, enough to carry me through this ordeal. I open them. The chickpeas stare back at me listlessly. Do I abandon all hope?

Right then, my phone buzzes alive with a cascade of notifications. The Office of Residential Living. Your room inspection has been completed. Do I open it? I couldn't. I feel sick. And, it might not even be the chickpeas. I feel like I'm pinned against my chair. I close my eyes. This seems to be my coping mechanism of choice this week. The room spirals away from me, tables and all. The chairs crash into the counters, and the salt shakers abscond. I open my eyes. The tables and chairs look disarrayed. Were they like this before? The salt shakers are missing. Were they ever here? I've never needed salt as much as I do now.

But then, the Vegan Gods come to me in a moment of revelation, and I'm pulled out of my mania by plant-protein fed arms. "What's done is done," they say, chanting in unison. I never knew there were so many of them. "And, all has been done. There is nothing you can do about it now." I thank the Vegan Gods for their infinite wisdom and offer my half-empty plate as sacrifice to the revolving trays.

I live on the second floor—just low enough that you can't justify using the lift. I bound up the stairs, two at a time. Energy coursing through my veins for the first time in months, I burst into the common room, accosted immediately by the sight, sound, and smell of people. There are people around the table, on the couches, standing by the doors. I recognise none of them. Behind all the smoke and clamouring is my roommate,

shouting over the pots and pans. "I'm so sorry this is all so last minute... I just got back from visiting home. I need to take a week every so often just to decompress, you know? I just thought, you know, I just got all this amazing steak; I just had to share it. Unfortunately, no one from our floor could make it tonight...." I pull her aside. "Our RA..." "Don't worry about it," she says and smiles. "It's all taken care of." I can't make out her expression; it is something between tranquillity and self-satisfaction. I can smell charred meat. I looked at the counter where she has flanks marinating in something spicy. It smells spicy. Enough spice to mask just about anything. Some fillets look fresher than others.

"Sit down and eat!" she says, and I do. The chair is cold and grounding, and only then do I realise I have been holding my breath. How long have I not been breathing? I should meditate in chairs more often. I should do wonders for my lung capacity. "I hope you're one's vegetarian!" She looks at me knowingly. I look back. I pick up my fork, apologise to the Vegan Gods, and dig in. ♦



*Sorbetto / Alexandra Bowman*



# Fried Chicken and Real Joy

*Jubilee Johnson*

Somehow, the fried chicken that Joy made was sweet. And it tasted good—was hot. It was exactly what I wanted at this odd hour of the night while Joy was at my kitchen stove, cooking barefoot in a long dress that reached her ankles. I'm sure it was a maternity dress, but she wore it regularly, like some household frock. That's why it fit her loosely, and swished from side to side every time Joy moved. The rest of the chicken kept popping in the skillet, which she tended to with a fork. I wanted her to cook with a pair of tongs, something not so flimsy, but Joy insisted she'd been making fried chicken this way since she was eleven, and so I guess that made it okay.

"I can't believe this is what you wanted to eat." She was talking without turning around. One hand was at her hip, and when I didn't speak back she turned around to see if I had heard her. "Yeah, well it must be good, huh?" She smiled and I nodded, chewing like I'd never tasted food. I had a juicy thigh in my hand. It was my second piece, and I still wanted more. As soon as we got home that's what I asked Joy to prepare, and she had whipped it up quickly, not really asking why fried chicken had been on my mind. She had kicked off her shoes, washed her hands, and turned on the stove.

"Are you going to have some?"

"It's for you. I'm not too hungry, anyway." She turned off the flame and set the extra pieces in front of me.

"Really?"

"Let me have a bite." I raised the thigh to her mouth, she bit down. "Mmmhmm."

"You're going to bed?" Joy was standing, wiping grease onto her hips.

"I'm gonna shower first."

"Tired?"

"I feel fine."

"Alright." I grabbed her by the waist and said thank you. She put her hand on my head, briefly, then walked out of the kitchen.

By the time I finished eating, I heard the shower turn on. I put aluminum foil over the plate of chicken I hadn't touched. After placing it in the refrigerator, I went to the bedroom and started undressing. I left everything on the floor and stepped into the shower. Joy was leaning against the wall, letting water run over her. She smiled so big: "Hi."

My favorite thing about the shower is its size. It's big, and has a window in it. There's also enough space for both of us to lean against the walls and face each other without touching. Joy is on her side, her shoulders relaxed, looking like this is the first time she's had a break all day. And at this point, the day is over.

"Hi." I tell her back. Her braids are tied on top of her head. The only thing that dangles from her body is the gold chain around her neck—the name plate she's had since she probably learned her name. It actually says



Destiny, but no one calls her that. Except her mother, who probably bought her the jewelry to remind everyone that Joy was really a Destiny.

But Joy, the name I recognized her by, glistened as resiliently as her chain. She shined the color of boiled yucca mixed with mahogany brown. That's Joy's complexion, smooth and perfect in the dimness of a lackadaisical moon. I loved seeing her naked, it always excited me and made me nervous. Simultaneously, I couldn't tell whether to react with action or resignation. Where to start? Touch her, or continue to stare like I'd never seen her body beneath clothes? But if I touched her, would I feel anything tangible? It's like being in the desert, trying to come to terms with if half the things you observed were real or mirages. I saw two dark areolas, or were they something else? I saw brown hips, stretch marks, dimples, bones, and lips parting.

"You full?" She reached out and felt my stomach. Taking one step forward, there was hardly any distance left between us.

"Yeah. I think I ate too much."

"It's good to feel that full sometimes."

We were embracing with cool water laving our bodies. Imagine if the water were viscous, something cohesive that could unite us. Sticky like nectar, we probably wouldn't have been able to peel apart. But I wouldn't have minded. I wouldn't have tried to strain against me absorbing Joy, and Joy absorbing me.

"How was your day?"

"Long."

"Tell me about it."

While we scrubbed one another, lathering with soap, exfoliating, rinsing, repeating, Joy told me about her day. I told her about mine. We kept laughing, bumping elbows, acting like this was a long time ago—when we had first gotten together. It really used to be like this—exactly like this. Only we were both shyer. We were uncertain if we could stare as openly, enchanted by the way we looked up close, what the texture of skin was like, how it tasted. Sweet.

Exiting the shower, I felt immaculately clean. We were purged of the smell of fried chicken. I wrapped Joy in a plush towel. We moisturized together, brushed our teeth, and rushed into our night clothes. Joy picked out a cotton nightgown, cool and diaphanous. It concealed nothing, her whole body greeting me from the other side of the distressed fabric.

I was in bed first, waiting for her to join me. Al-

ways, *always*, before sleeping Joy had to put on her fragrance, some essential oil blend that made her smell botanical. "Come on, girl." She turned away from the bureau, where she kept all her products in the top drawer.

In the dark, we felt for each other. Even if it wasn't as zealous, we always reached out with a sense of urgency, as if our lives depended on meeting when we couldn't see. Joy felt so warm, smelled so good, the euphoria I felt could have led to my perdition. And I would have accepted it with pure ignorance, only because this feeling remedied my fear of loneliness. Only because as I was squeezing her tightly, I already felt like I had to rejoice in my immediate pleasure that I could only define as real Joy. ♦



*My Frida / Fiona Kennedy*



# Hymn to Gluttony

*Karena Landler*

With my child-bearing hands,  
I imagine I could master that  
cruel pull of ribs, apart  
like fruit flesh stretching  
& crackling  
when those spindly rinds tear.  
Tell them it's *eloquent*,  
the way my body and its curtains  
would draw apart to stripes—  
& even more pungent fruits inside,  
so that I would see the waste of sweetness:  
I could take my stomach in my bare hands,  
drag it behind me down the main street real doglike & everyone  
(the sun and the moon and the concerned neighbors)  
can giggle at its pinkish sheen.  
My chemical lullaby of corrosives.  
My handbag full of all my pretty things.



# Caramel Cheesecake and Apple Rosettes

*Andrew Sedlack*

(1) Preheat the oven to 350° F. Open it. Let the warm air flush across your face like embarrassment. This is how good embarrassment is supposed to feel. Be embarrassed that you're sticking your face in an oven. Be happy that no one can see your face while it's in an oven. You know that there's no one else in the flat. You're embarrassed because you know you're powerless to stop yourself from making this cake. You said you would turn the oven on and then turn it off but you're going to make this cake and you're going to call him and invite him over and he's going to love it and he's going to spend the night. And you only want to make this cake to impress him. Spray a 9" springform pan with nonstick baking spray. Cover the outside of the pan with heavy duty aluminum foil (or 2 layers of regular aluminum foil). Although foil is better known for hiding thoughts from the government, it also hides shame from yourself. Like the oven did. Admit that this is happening to yourself. Admit that you hate this. Admit that you hate that you love him.

(2) In a large bowl, whisk together the graham crackers and sugar. Don't think about him wolfing it down as though it's a protein shake. Don't think about his abs. Pour over melted butter and combine until the mix is wet all the way through and clumps together to be easily packed. You're a little messy with the butter. You imagine yourself slipping in a few minutes. You imagine the puddle of liquid that you had hoped would become a cake seeming to hover in the air a second before it splatters out across the floor. You imagine the pain of the hard composite countertop cracking into your skull. You cannot decide whether the countertop or your skull would break first.

Imagine the puddle of liquid leaving your skull carrying all your feelings out with it. Imagine this

divine intervention all that you like. You will still bake this cake.

(3) Press the graham cracker mixture evenly into the bottom of the springform pan and up the sides about 1.5". You start to wonder about getting a ruler to see if you're close to 1.5". You realize you're clearly not there.

Wonder if it's too early in the process to panic. Probably not. Better to be safe and call her anyway. Bake for about 12 minutes, or until the crust is golden-brown. Maybe 15 minutes. You think graham crackers are normally golden-brown, so when are they golden-brown enough for a cake? They are starting to seem less golden.

The first thing you hear is her shouting about something burning. Remember that she has a key. Pull the crust out of the oven. She asks what it is.

You know it's better to let me have my way, she says.

You know that you have never been an immovable object.

(4) Scatter the peeled and chopped apple on top of the graham cracker crust. At least, you would. She's reminding you that you're an idiot. You haven't chopped it yet. You are now. You forgot to peel it, and she's laughing again. You're twice an idiot, a double-idiot. When you broke up, she called you an nth idiot. You assume that it's okay for it not to be peeled, then, since she's laughing.

You assumed wrong.

You try chopping off tiny bits of peel from each of the little chunks you've created. Once you get it (relatively) together, drizzle ½ to ¾ cup salted caramel sauce over the apple chunks. You want enough to flavor the apple and seep into the crust, but not so much as will soak it or



make it overly sticky.

Overly sticky, she says, reading over your shoulder. You share a knowing glance with the chopped and peeled apple, but then she takes it and starts drizzling. This stuff is weird, she says. Not like normal caramel. She tastes some on her finger. You added salt? It's consistency is weird. Like. . . I don't know. Cake batter that's been mixed too far? I can't think of anything like it.

Set aside, she says, Did you even read the instructions? At some point, the cake that you thought would kill you became your only ally in the room. It was when the rest of the room collapsed into her. This apartment was her choice. It has always seemed like it was more hers. And you've been aware of that only since you broke up. She treats you like you're a grown-up kid overstaying his welcome at his parents' home. But you pay the rent here. You've paid the rent for the last three months, at least. She doesn't even live here, anymore. Most nights. Most nights you believe that space is what you need.

- (5) In a large bowl, beat together the cream cheese, sugar, and flour until no clumps remain. You think powdered sugar should be fine. You let some of the caramel sauce smear across the printout so she can't see that it was supposed to be granulated. Better to forget about that for now. In your opinion, texture is secondary to taste. She puts a hand on your side to push you out of the way and you remember one of the nights when you missed her hand.

She beats in the eggs and vanilla extract, and tells you as she does it that it's important to be careful not to overmix. Overmixing, she says, is the bane of proper texture—the most important part of a cheesecake. It's little clumps like that, over sugar still in the granules, that melt into the rest of it and— you did put in the sugar, right? You didn't think that would turn into a question.

You mumble something about cupboards and make a show of looking through them. You know there isn't any granulated sugar. Your throat seizes around a lump. I used powdered, instead, you say. I've started seeing a guy. The cake is for him. Her face shows you actually said that last bit.

- (6) Pour the cheesecake filling into the springform pan, on top of the apples. Keep your eyes on the cake so they can't meet hers. You wonder if it's supposed to be so gloppy. Or is this how you messed up the texture? Or is that gonna show up at the end, all of the sudden bad when you take the first bite? None of this was supposed to be. Smooth

out the surface with a rubber spatula, and find that there are clumps which did survive, anyway. She leans over the now almost-smooth top of the cake, her face uncomfortably close to yours. She has always been a closetalker.

I wonder how the sugar will turn out, she says. Maybe it will be okay. It shouldn't be that bad. To be honest, she pauses, it might turn out better. I've never really thought about it.

You're not sure when your eyes left the cake but now they're looking into hers.

Pour about an inch of hot water into a large pan, she reads from the recipe. I'm glad, she says. Did you preheat the oven? Is it ready to go? she asks, looking at the recipe. Is he nice to you when you're not having sex? she asks, looking at you.

You nod.

So put the cheesecake on the middle rack and the hot water underneath it. The steam helps to keep it from cracking. I've been thinking we need to stop fucking, too. For a while actually.

She pauses so that you can spare her feelings.

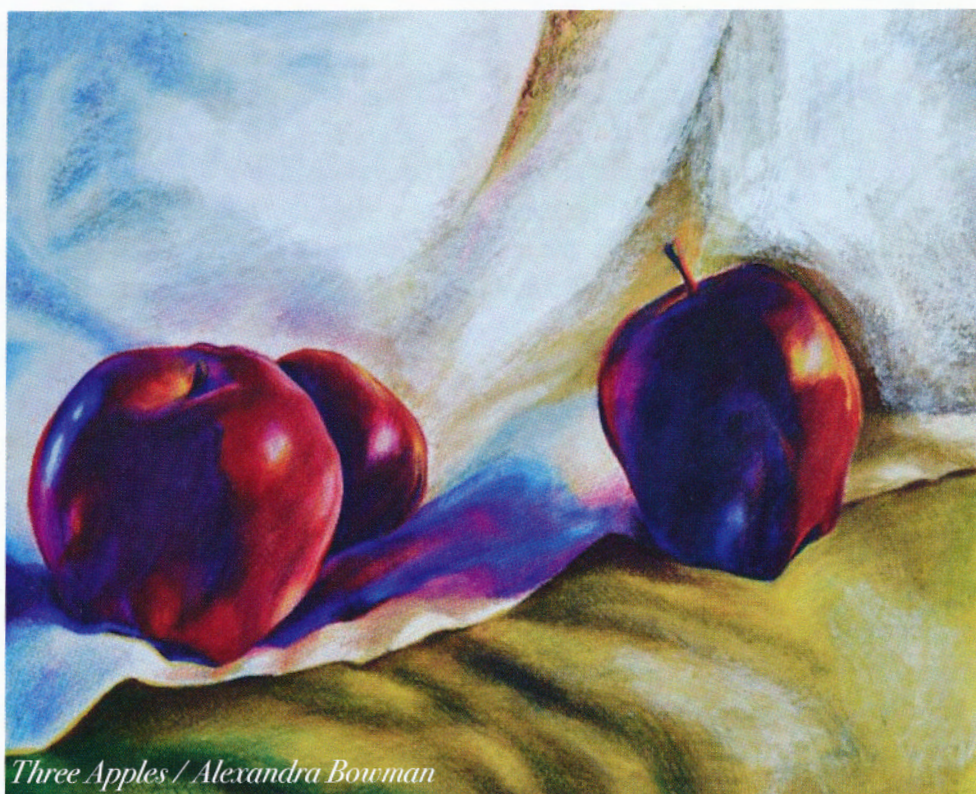
I don't think I'm good for you, she continues. Your finger brushes the oven rack as you set down the cake. Look at the angry red line it leaves. Close the oven.

Put that under cold water, she says, turning on the tap. She goes on: I worry, sometimes, that you would starve if I didn't keep showing up. So I'm glad. That there's someone else. I think. If it helps, I will miss you. If you need anything to help your feelings, anyway.

You wish she would tell you what you are suppose to feel right now.

- (7) Bake for 15 minutes, and then reduce heat to 325 °F. It's important not to leave the cake in very intense conditions for too long; it's easy to ruin a cake at this point. You do not say a word for 15 minutes. She is uncomfortable enough to get a glass of water and you wince. She finishes the water and changes the oven's setpoint. You do not ask if she got that off the recipe. Continue to bake for 5 minutes, until you open your mouth because you want to ask her why she is infantilizing you and she sees and she winces and you close your mouth. Continue to bake for 5 minutes, until you turn away to pick your nose. She smiles but is not smiling when you turn back around. Continue to bake for 5 minutes of silence. Continue to bake for 5 minutes; she stands up and goes to the bathroom. Continue to bake for 5 minutes; she walks back in. Continue to bake until her phone alarm goes off and you jump. Stand up, open the oven—





Wait!  
You freeze.  
Do not remove the cheesecake from the oven, she reads. Just crack the door. Put a . . . wood spoon, maybe? something in the door to keep it cracked.

Do as she says. Realize that you're just taking orders from her at this point.

She reads: Instead, turn off the heat and crack the door of the oven to let the cheesecake cool slowly. We don't want it to crack, right? We have to give it an hour like this before we can take it out.

She pulls out her phone. The silence is cutting into you. She's never silent; she hates pauses and gaps. You want her to act normal. The next thing is to run a sharp knife around the edge of the pan to separate the cheesecake from the pan. You get out the knife and look at it lying on the counter.

You going all axe-murderer now or something? she asks.

It's a knife, not an axe, is the joke you complete in your head and consciously cancel before it leaves your mouth. What are you thinking about? you ask.

Just how long it will take it to cool.

Oh.

I just think this time is important. That I need to get used to not talking to you when you're right here. Because I don't have the

self-control to keep away if we leave here normally. But if the silence starts now. . . I can stretch it out. This is my practice lap. If I can make it through this I'll be able to do what's best for you. For us. Her voice is clipped, like each sentence is being cleared for public release before she said it.

You walk out of the room and find a pillow and scream into it. You know the right volume so that she won't hear; and you know the right volume so that she will, just barely. You use the latter.

When the cheesecake is cooled all the way to room temperature, cover it and refrigerate overnight, or for at least 3 hours.

She has pulled a book out of her bag.

(8) When 3 hours have passed and the cheesecake is ready, she folds the book back up and into her bag. Now, start making the apple roses. You bring out the mandoline and she says, So what is he like?

In a medium saucepan, dissolve yet another bag of powdered sugar into the apple cider. Stir and stir and wonder if you should skim off all the little clumps that refuse to integrate into the rest of it.

You don't say anything; but she answers: So you just need to heat it. The powdered sugar is right. Not sure why it dissolves so much better. It just does.

As the pot heats up, the clumps all start to vanish,



Perfect, she says.  
She covers her mouth.

- (9) Take your 5 apples and thinly slice them using the mandoline.

Be mindful of your fingers, she says.

Do you mind that I didn't tell you this was for him until you started helping with it? you say. And then cut the apples in half, lengthwise, so you have long half-moon shapes.

She cocks her head for a moment before she speaks. Think it was pretty par for the course. Wouldn't have expected anything less of you, right?

You frown, and ask, Is that an insult?

It can be. Up to you Here. She holds out the pot, too near to your body for comfort. You're caught between the pot and counter and can't really move away. You drop in the apple slices handful by handful. With the last one, a few drops of boiling sugared cider smart against your skin. Worse than the rack. She doesn't notice, and you don't do anything.

Lower it to a simmer, she says, setting the pot back on the stove. Give them a nudge now and then, but, otherwise, just let them simmer for a bit Until they're soft but not falling apart.

You go to the bathroom. When you come back, she's taking a call on your phone. You regret leaving it out the way you always regret letting her do things that you know she's going to do. With her luck, he called and she picked it up in the only thirty seconds when you weren't in the room.

Yeah, you should come over ASAP! she says. You reach for the phone and she twists away with a smile, shaking her head. You glare at her. She glares at you. Neither of you makes eye contact.

I can't believe he's never mentioned me, she says into the phone. We were together for the last few years. Yeah. The last few months have been just a lot of hanging and, uh, making amends. Here and there. A lot is probably an exaggeration. Moving out made things very final and very, uh, clean. You know? You should really roll through, though. We would love to have you. Pamper you or something. Oh, come on, you can't be that much younger. Yeah, I'm looking at him right now, he's nodding. Oh, yeah, cool, I'll pass off the phone? Looking forward to meeting you soon. Here. She hands you the phone. As you wait for his greeting, she wraps herself back up into her coat, grabs her bag, and waves from the door. She shuts it

quietly. You keep talking.

- (10) Tell him that you have to hang up because of some thing urgent in the kitchen. Wait another 5 minutes in still silence till the apples are ready. You wonder how gay you are as you strain out the apples with a slotted spoon. Experimenting is safe, easy. But you don't think that you think you're gay, yet. Set them on a few layers paper towels to soak out the excess cider. You're not sure that the sex and your enjoyment of it is justification enough. And when the first of the slices cool down enough to not burn you, you decide that it's not. You probably need to fall in love with him to definitely be into men. Or with some other guy. Pour the salted caramel sauce over the cake's surface. It's viscous but it slowly fills in all the cracks your precautions failed to prevent. Let the caramel sauce cool and set slightly. The next part will be impressive. You think. If it goes well. If he sees you do it. You don't still love her.

- (11) Once the two of you leave the bedroom, take a small slice of apple and roll it tightly into a cylinder. You smile at him. You shrug and look uncertain. You try to make it seem like you didn't already practice making a rosette.

Regret the bedroom.

Your focus is only on the absence of his voice as you take another slice and roll it tightly around the first one. They twist and slip out of your hands and you mumble a swear.

How does that work, he says. He picks up a few slices and tries to get the same result. He shrugs, walks away. Eats them. You frown as he walks away and you find yourself watching his ass. If it's just the attraction part, you're sold on being gay.

And that's all it should be. You know that. But you know you don't want it to be supposed to be a little, simple thing. You want it to be big and grand. And if it isn't, and if it doesn't last, if he and he alone turns out to be a mistake, you want to be able to erase the whole thing as a silly little mistake.

Take another slice and begin rolling it about half-way over the last apple petal. Continue wrapping the apple petals concentrically until you have a nice-looking rose-ish shape.

Did you kick her out? he says.

What? From the apartment?

No, just now. Before I got here.



What? Oh. No.

She said she would be here.

Yeah. Sorry. I don't know why— she just walked out. While I was on the phone with you. Something weird. I don't know.

Sure.

Really.

He smirks. You sure you didn't just want to be able to drag me straight into there?

Drag?

He smirks.

No, really. I don't know what was up with her. I mean. I'm happy she was gone. Glad we had time. But sad that you didn't get to meet her.

BS.

Or. . . not really. Not psyched about her meeting you. Or vice-versa. It feels like a weird thing to have happened. But she really did just walk out. On her own. I didn't say anything. Indicate anything. Imply anything.

There's a long moment.

Being careful to hold the bottom, he reads from the printout.

Try to judge your first rosette carefully. Make sure that there is enough for each of the others.

Wonder if you should add another slice to this one. He sidles up behind you, breathing past your ear. You can't decide if this is a sixth of the slices or too few.

Beautiful, he says.

You smile. You let the rose fall apart on the counter as you kiss. You let him drag you back out of the kitchen again.

- (12) Rebuild the first flower from the pile of crumpled and soggy apple slices you left behind. You find making the rosette comfortably simple, now. Tricky, especially with how slippery they are. You drop a few slices. He watches you. And it feels fine. And you make sure the bottom of this one is tight, slide your fingers up it about halfway, and set it into the quarter-inch deep caramel sauce. The way that he looks at you makes you want him. You know he does it intentionally. Obviously. Everyone knows. He turns it off around other people. Sometimes.

Set some of the half pecans around the rosette to hold it in place. Wish that he would turn it off around you, sometimes. You don't want to wish that, though. Stumble a few more times in rolling up the second rosette, and then realize (too late) that the recipe has eight of them in the picture but you've

used too much and won't be able to make 8 more. They will be a bit more spaced out, and won't line up with the pieces of cake. Start the third rosette.

He starts kissing you.

Pull back away, and he pulls you forward and his breath is getting you high and that's not how secondhand smoke works but secondhand smoke doesn't explain why you're lightheaded and then you're working on the third rosette again.

Regret the 20 minute break you just took from the cake.

He calls the cake beautiful again. He calls you beautiful again.

Frown. Realize you're frowning.

You smile, you say, You too.

The caramel is thick and viscous but it's not really set like the recipe described. Like overmixed cake batter, is how she described it. Wonder if you managed to overmix caramel. She wasn't here to make it. But she did say it was good. At least, she didn't complain. She was probably lying. She lied so, so much. That was the nicest thing about her. For added security, place a few of the chopped pecans around each other apple rosette. If you'd done it immediately, like you did with the first one, they wouldn't be awkwardly half-unfolded.

Feel like something in your chest is unravelling, winding its way out. Feel like a climber falling without a rope. Feel like a constrictor uncoiling from its dead prey. Sprinkle the remaining chopped pecans on top of the cake, especially the empty middle. Drizzle over more salted caramel sauce, if desired. Serve immediately.

He holds out a bite for you on his fork from his piece. You take it. You hold out a bite for him on your fork, and he takes it, exaggerates licking his lips.

Talk about banal things. Feel ill. Feel like you need to vomit. Feel like he is filling up the room, choking you. Tell him you need to finish something for work. He knows you don't need to finish anything for work. Brush off his questions, whisk him out the door. You thank him. You kiss him in the doorway. Close the door. Lock the door. You text him goodbye. Run to the bathroom. Vomit. Wonder where all of this stuff inside you came from. Block him on your phone. Dry heave now. Try not to think about him. Try not to think about her instead of him. Try to think about her in a bitter sweet way not a good way. Retch. Go to the site where you found the recipe. Review it. Boyfriend loved it. Make sure to use normal sugar. Retch. Five stars. ♦





*Bloom / Bushra Shaikh*



*Let Us Reach / Jean-Claude Kradin*



# Rockslide

*Fiona Kennedy*

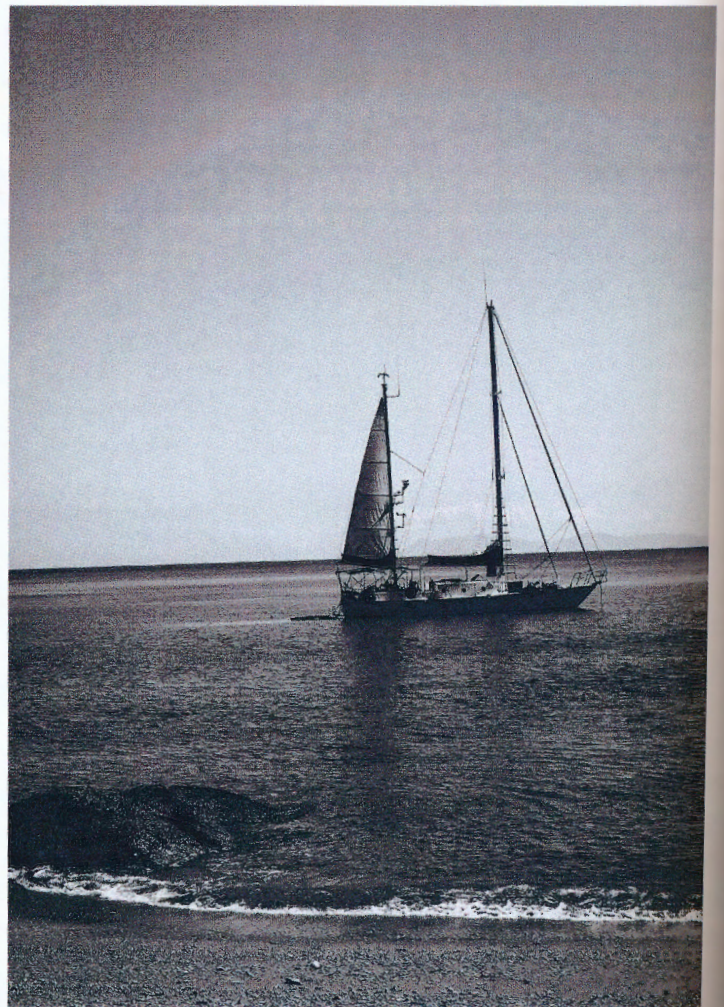
Through rolling rush I dive as if to drown  
Where once, as children, we were strong and sure  
Recalling how I swore without a thought  
To run with you a thousand years and more

If I were strong enough to turn the tide back,  
I'd know you from the cradle to the grave  
But I can only wander and remember  
As drops of you return to me in waves

I cannot mark you down in facts or figures,  
Or teach another soul to read your signs  
You marked the cliffs with steps from home to highland  
And colored me with dandelion wine

So now I hold the heather like an anchor,  
Still moored here like a ship not built to sail  
We tethered two, through memory and miles,  
Can cast one shadow here, beyond the pale

But stun me, move me, rock me off my footing  
Break anything dividing you from me  
Make oceans rise and mountains fall beneath them  
And storm me 'til the earth is lost at sea



*Anchored—Magnetic Island, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*





# Atlas

Christopher Stein

The higher you are, the closer you are  
to the gods enthroned in alabaster;  
but the closer you are to the gods,  
*the farther afield you must flee to find yourself.*

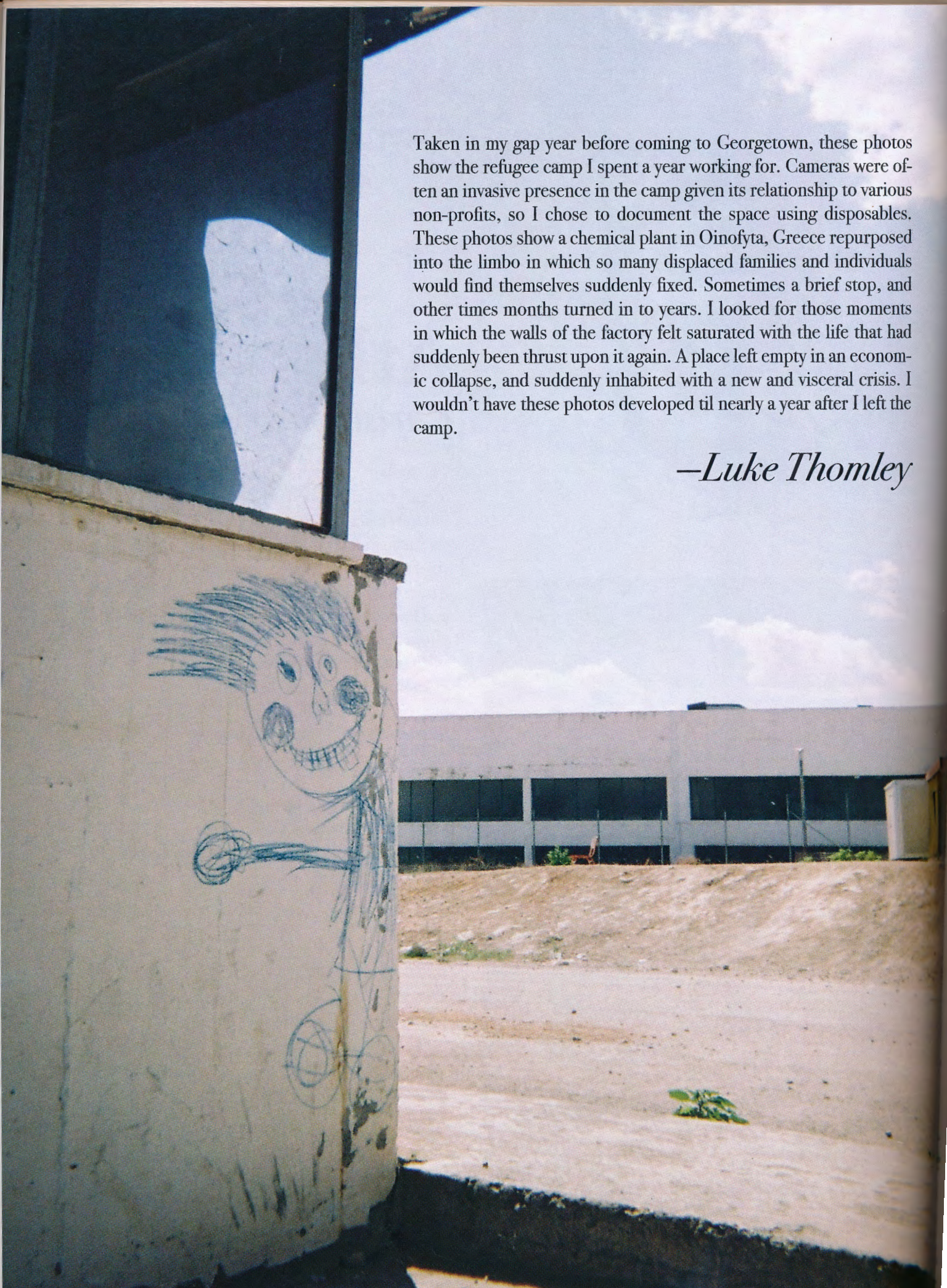
*At the edge of the earth, your knees give out,*  
and the stars give out, fall out of their candelabra  
plunk into the sea, someone needs to paste  
them back against the dome, stop the stutter  
of tesserae as they tumble toward Tartarus.

Lightning scrawls my fate across the sky,  
and I gather my ragged cocoon about me.

Grunt and curl your shoulders to fit the curve  
of earth and heaven as they meet at  
the flushing, gasping chamber of your heart.



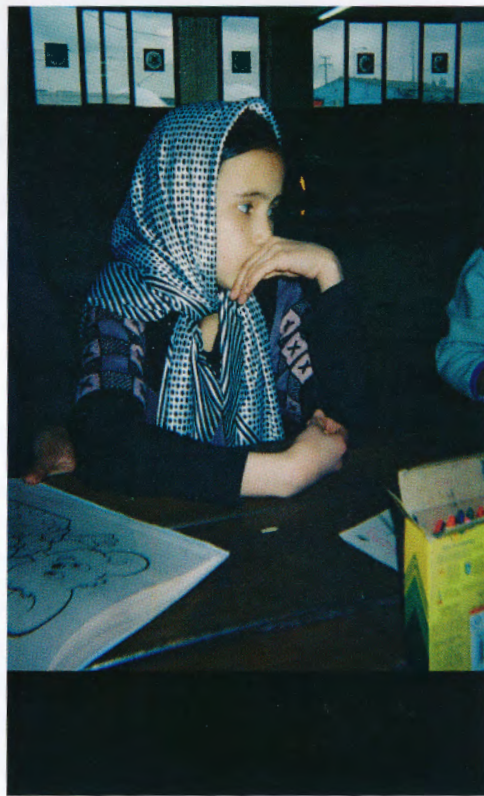
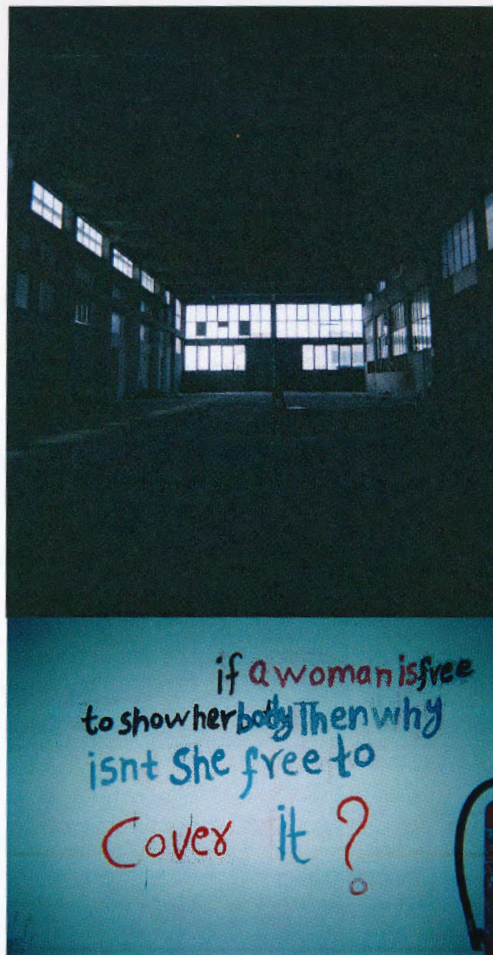




Taken in my gap year before coming to Georgetown, these photos show the refugee camp I spent a year working for. Cameras were often an invasive presence in the camp given its relationship to various non-profits, so I chose to document the space using disposables. These photos show a chemical plant in Oinofyta, Greece repurposed into the limbo in which so many displaced families and individuals would find themselves suddenly fixed. Sometimes a brief stop, and other times months turned in to years. I looked for those moments in which the walls of the factory felt saturated with the life that had suddenly been thrust upon it again. A place left empty in an economic collapse, and suddenly inhabited with a new and visceral crisis. I wouldn't have these photos developed til nearly a year after I left the camp.

*—Luke Thomley*







# A Happy Guy

*Juliana Albuquerque*

We meet at a party at Henle, as is the case with most modern Hoya romances. Unbeknownst to us, said party is about to be broken up by SNAPS. In fact, we only have ten minutes of party left, and they scurry by like the mice I've seen scurrying outside, time slipping through nooks and crannies, in between one song and the other.

We don't know that yet, though. I'm fanning some overheated girl who gave her blood, sweat and tears to the dancefloor when, accidentally, our eyes meet.

In the past hour, I have done almost everything I was told not to do by the AlcoholEdu course I had to complete during the summer: my tongue lolls heavy inside my mouth, my limbs feel too light—it's harder to dance. I'm pretty sure my blood concentration is 60% jungle juice. I am not, however, about to die. At least that's what I'm thinking as I sweep my eyes through the room—wow, this is really college!—and land them on him.

Pale and clean-shaven, he looks a little like a Disney prince, if a Disney prince had gone off the rails and rebelled against his dead mother and cold father, attending college parties to stand by the beer pong table and watch as the little white ball bounces off the cups, as aims worsen by the second. He was looking at me first, I realize, because when our gazes do meet, he smiles.

It may be the drink, but under the cheap neon lights, flashing green and blue and red, his teeth look almost... fluorescent. Like he's holding a glow stick in his mouth, the radiation rubbing into his gums. It's probably the drink.

SNAPS comes. We leave. Later, back at the dorm, me and Cathy hold some girl's hair as she pukes into the toilet. I don't think she's on our floor. I don't think she's in this dorm. I'm not sure she's a freshman.

"Did you see Prince Charming?" I ask her. I'm sobering up, but my words are still slurred—the syllables meshing together. My eyelids are weighted down with mascara, and I just want to sleep.

Cathy frowns, a strand of long blonde hair forming an upside-down question mark on her shoulder. "Who?"

I forget what I asked. I shrug and pat the girl's back as she sobs and tells me she loves me.

\*

The second time we meet, it's at another Henle party.

This time, though, me and Cathy have come prepared; we arrive earlier, determined to make the most of it. We're a little buzzed from the pregame, but we have promised ourselves not to get drunk tonight. I'm almost caving and about to go for a shot when he comes over.

"Pretty necklace," he says, his smile just as white as I remembered it.

I tug on it automatically. The moon pendant hangs in the dip between my collarbones, a tiny silver thing. It's not something people usually notice at a first glance, and despite myself, I'm flattered.

"Thanks."

"Do you want me to get you a drink?"

I smile, and go with him, but make my own—Coke and vodka, or vodka and Coke. I haven't forgotten all of the AlcoholEdu. If he notices my hesitation, he says nothing, just bumps the rim of his cup against mine, the wet plastic scraping together.



"I'm Theo." He's smiling again. It seems he's always smiling. I decide to tell him that, and now he laughs, an airy, light sound. "I'm a happy guy," he says.

I'm expecting a line, one of the bad ones, to come next. Maybe I'm standing next to you, after all.

But Theo says nothing. He just stands, and looks at me, and smiles. I clear my throat.

"Should we sit down?"

Legs kicked up on the ratty couch, we go through the basics. He tells me he's a junior, that he's studying Econ, that his family is very big and very old. He likes cats. He inches closer to me with every fact he drops, his long fingers splayed spiderlike on my thigh. His thumb presses light against my kneecap as he turns me around gently.

I feel like people are staring, because the little hairs on my nape stand on end, because my stomach twists as he brings a hand up to push my hair behind my shoulder. Still. He's smiling as he leans in. I'm smiling as I let him.

\*

I don't expect anything to come out of it. After all, I tell my sister over the phone, good things rarely come out of fifteen-minute couch makeout sessions right before parties get broken up and die.

Still, when I get back from class, I see he's texted me. I vaguely remember giving him my number, kiss-drunk and vodka-drunk and swaying lightly on my feet. I remember him walking me out the party and pressing his lips to mine quickly, his lilting voice in my ear telling me goodnight.

I text him back.

\*

We have a picnic on the grass on a Wednesday, after the Farmers' Market. He rests his head in my lap and I run my fingers through his hair, thick and brown and Disney-prince soft. I squint my eyes up at the sky, past the shade of the tree we're under. I'm worried about how I'm presenting myself. I'm worried he'll see that I've never done this before, that I've never sat underneath a tree with a pretty boy's head in my lap, letting the sun's rays crawl across my face, hide in the hollows of my cheeks, make long sooty shadows of my eyelashes. I imagine how I must look like to him.

I picture myself in his mind, wonder if I look good from this

angle, if I look good from any angle. His eyes are closed, but still, if he were to open them, he'd have to look past my chin to see my face, and that's not a flattering view for anyone, and I'm suddenly too hot. The sun is too bright. I'm too worried about everything.

"Why did you stop?" Theo asks drowsily.

I hadn't noticed I had.

My fingers take up the motion again, scratching lightly at his head, hoping he doesn't open his eyes. I stop looking at the sky and stare straight ahead, watching a girl race to White Gravenor. If she wasn't in a hurry, I think, would she notice me? Would the boy in the white shirt listening to music beside us? Why am I worried about this, why do I want to be seen? How do I want to be seen?

Suddenly exhausted, I want to go back to my room. I shift, but Theo doesn't move. He looks fast asleep, his face calm and pale. I consider waking him up, but a slow smile spreads on his lips, pleased and satisfied. He looks like some ancient solar god, favored by the golden light of early afternoon, and it's almost like power ripples beneath his skin. I can't bring myself to bother him.

\*

By the second week, it's a little too much.

Theo's texts are constant and abundant; he wants to meet me every other day; when I tell him I'm having dinner with my friends or going out with my floor, he becomes snippy and irritable.

I see the signs from a mile away, but I don't want to acknowledge it. In short, I am getting bored.

My answers get less and less enthusiastic. I don't double the amounts of "y"s in "okay", "hey", or "party". When I'm with him, I'm fine. I feel happy. I feel desired, and wanted, and my ego is healthily boosted. When I'm alone, though.

When I'm alone, it's like the life is sucked out of me. I can't stand replying his messages, I can't stand having to make excuses when I'm tired and just don't want to see his face, when my jaw still aches from the long, uninterrupted kisses he gives me, stealing my breath and swallowing it down as his own. Cathy says I should dump him.

Cathy is probably right.



I don't dump him.

He texts me again.

I sigh, picking up my phone and debating whether or not I should let him know I'm online.

I sigh, and text him back.

\*

I tell Theo I can't go out because I'm studying. It's my first Italian test, and I want to ace it, because I want to ace everything. I turn off my phone. I lose myself in the textbook, in long exercises provided by shady websites that have "Learn Italian!" as a heading, right above "Meet Russian Bride Free!"

My eyes are swimming when Cathy finally convinces me to get dinner.

"You need human interaction," she says, and I agree, so I slip on my beat-up sneakers, shove my GoCard into my pocket, and think nothing of it as we walk to Leo's.

A couple of other friends from my floor have joined us, and we sit at a high table after we get our food.

My muscles finally relax after a whole day of hunching over notes, and this is okay. This is nice, hanging out, forgetting my troubles, poking at some crunchy mac 'n cheese. I'm laughing at George's quest to meet Bradley Cooper when I feel cold fingers resting against my back.

"I thought you weren't going out today," Theo says, thumbing at my cheek. I stop laughing.

"I just came out for dinner with my friends," I say. I hate how defensive I sound. I have done nothing wrong, I tell myself indignantly. Still. It doesn't seem like I was laughing just a few seconds ago. Now I just feel empty and worried, watching as my friends share an incredulous look.

I shrug Theo's hand off my back and go back to my food. I stuff a piece of bread in my mouth so he doesn't have to kiss me.

He leans an elbow against the table, trying to make conversation.

"What are you eating?" he demands. He's still smiling, though. Still smiling, but this one is odd. Hooked and twist-

ed, the corners of his mouth twitching with effort. Maybe all of his smiles have always looked like that.

I pause. Blink. Chew. Swallow.

"Garlic bread?" I try.

He nods, and stares at me expectantly. Then he stares some more. He wants me to bring him into the conversation, to pull something out of thin air which he can latch on to, which he can grasp at with his long fingers, tearing at the bubble I had miraculously, momentarily shrouded myself in.

I can think of nothing to say. I don't want to say anything. At this point, I just want him to go.

The silence eats at me, at us, at the table. I half-expect the chairs to snap and crumble, the food to start running and dripping off the plates. It's a surreal thing, to be caught in his expectant gaze—a peculiar feeling, like I'm already existing in an odd dreamscape or in a memory, locked away in some hazy recollection of his golden college days.

It's gotten awkward by now, and he can tell. He can tell, and he narrows his eyes at me, at the other people sitting beside me, like they're personally responsible for my change in attitude. He can feel that, too. I know he can.

"I'll see you later," he says, and leaves. The sterile white light of Leo's catches in his slicked hair, threads of it weaving through thick darkness. It makes him look like one of the Ken dolls my sisters play with. The ones whose heads always pop off.

"Dump him," Cathy says.

I say nothing, but push my plate away. Suddenly I'm not hungry anymore.

\*

Sometimes he sets his teeth to my ribs and his hungry eyes fall upon my stuttered breathing, the pads of his fingers brushing against the blue veins on the inside of my wrist. He says he wants my heart all to himself. I think he wants to eat it.

\*

There is something wrong with his chin, I discover one day while staring at his profile.



It's... not quite right. Sloped and jilted a little to the side, as though he'd gotten into a fight when he was a kid and refused to let the doctors set it back to its rightful place. It shows when he smiles.

He's always smiling. He turns his head and smiles at me right now, with all his teeth.

Sometimes it looks like he has rows and rows of teeth; perfectly straight, blindingly white. The pride and joy of every self-respecting dentist. His canines, though, are rounded. Like they've been filed down too often.

"Why are you smiling?" I whisper.

Theo leans in, licks a hot stripe up the column of my neck, tugs at the skin at the hollow of my throat with some of his several teeth, sucks his mark there, brands me. I worry I look cow-eyed as I stare back at him, his sharp shoulders rolling like waves beneath my palms.

"I'm a happy guy," he says. His grin has grown larger where it rests against my neck, canines bumping and clacking against my jugular. I feel sick to my stomach.

\*

"Why are you even with him?" my sister asks through Skype, and I shrug a shoulder. I wear a turtleneck so she doesn't see the mess Theo has made on the skin stretched over my throat—this is now a common occurrence. I think my sister suspects it.

I fiddle with the collar of my sweater and shrug again.

I like the attention, I could say. Or, no one has ever felt this for me before. I could say, my ego is better fed than ever, I'm living the life I could only see in movies, he thinks I'm beautiful and I don't, and if I let him go, how will I know I am?

Instead, I pick up my phone. Shrug for the third time. "He's nice."

I show her a meme through the laptop screen. I successfully change the subject.

\*

A month in, we're on the grass again, but this time, there's no picnic, and my backpack lies on my lap instead of his head. I'm looking down at my History reading. He's looking at me.

"You used to smile more," he points out.

I hum absently, flipping the page. It's true. I still smile with my friends—laugh at their jokes, grin at their awful puns, giggle when we go to the movies—but he seems to do all the smiling for me when we're together. It's not the first time he's commented on it, either. No, he gets nervous when I get serious. I try not to think about it.

"You should smile more again," he continues, but his voice is wavering, his tone slipping deeper before ending on a quiet high-pitched whine.

Frowning, I finally look up at him. His cheeks shake with the effort of keeping the smile on, and his eyes are too-shiny, desperate and needy, impossibly wide. He looks deranged, unhinged as his fingers flex around nothing before grasping at tufts of grass, ripping them out of the ground and making a pile at my feet.

Bile rises up my throat. I'm still frowning, but maybe my expression has melted into a horrified one, because his eyes widen even further as he reaches a hand out to smooth the crease between my eyebrows. His index fingers poke at my cheeks, stretching my lips, twisting them upwards.

"Smile," he says, and though his voice is as calm as ever, it has the same weird cadence as before. It sounds a lot like an order, and I wrench back.

Anger washes over me, engulfs me like a tropical storm, a torrential flood of rage that has me seeing red. In a sick rush of clarity, I tell myself to pull my shit together. Enough is enough.

"I need some time," I say through gritted teeth.

"Time? For what?"

"Time. Away from this. From you. It's just—I don't think this is working for me, Theo."

Theo just looks confused, his head cocked to one side. "But I thought you liked being with me."

"I did," I say. My unspoken verdict hangs in the air—sad, dejected ghosts of word, hovering between us. Not anymore. Theo nods. His smile drops from his face. He looks older than he did five seconds ago; maybe it's the smile lines, deep reddish cracked crevasses that mar his face in a way I hadn't



noticed before. Have I ever seen him without a smile? Now I have, and I hate it. He's glaring. He's glaring, and his eyes are shining black again, and I am terrified.

I am uncomfortably hyper-conscious of my existence as a human being; I can feel my blood pushing through my arteries and throbbing at my temples. I can feel my ribs bruising as my heart thumps against them, beating a red mess inside me. I count and catalog each breath I draw in, as if I might forget how to otherwise—the tips of my fingers tingle with hyper-sensitivity, hyper-electricity, and my tongue, woolen and heavy, can't seem to find a comfortable place inside my dry mouth.

This is what he does to me. This is what I have allowed him to do to me.

Shockingly alive and shockingly worried that state might change anytime, despite the broad daylight, I stand up shakily, swinging my backpack over one shoulder. It's only then I realize how empty Copley Lawn is. Theo is still glaring at me.

I turn my back and run. When I get back to my room, the wooden door safe and solid at my back, my knees give out and I fall to the ground, shaking. I don't realize I'm crying until I taste salt on my lips.

\*

Life goes on.

I throw myself into routine, let the pleasure of following the mundane and the boring take over. I go to class, do my homework, go to meetings, go to Epi, hang out with my friends, go to sleep and then I do it all over again the next day.

I feel strange sometimes, yes, a little isolated, like I'm camping out on this deserted island that's close enough to the mainland so I can see its movement in the horizon—the racing cars, the blinking lights— but not close enough to swim away from. Just out of reach.

But then again, that's college. I look it up and see that the majority of students at university feel lonely at some point or the other, so I'm not worried.

My parents say that I look tired when I FaceTime them. I say midterms are getting to me, but I haven't had midterms yet. It'll pass soon, I tell myself. I'm optimistic.

\*

I'm hanging out with George as he watches a BuzzFeed Unsolved episode on YouTube. They explain they're going after a mythological demon who feeds on smiles, and George pauses the video.

"That sounds like Theo," he says, sniggering.

I don't laugh.

George stares at me expectantly. He usually understands if I don't laugh at his jokes, but I also usually have some form of reaction, a smile or a grin.

I do nothing of the sort. George shrugs and puts the video back on.

They are now hunting the demon, and Ryan Bergara says something funny, and George laughs. I want to laugh, too, but I don't.

I don't think I can.

\*

I tell myself I'm imagining it. Surely I'm just having a string of bad days. Surely I don't believe Theo, my ex-boyfriend, is a demon who preys on general happiness.

I still Google it, though. Repeatedly. At 3 in the morning. I read one occult article after another, not knowing what to trust, half-certain I'm losing my mind.

I watch comedy specials on Netflix. I hang out with the funniest people I know. I see a guy proposing to his girlfriend in the street, getting his jeans dirty in the ground but not caring, eyes sparkling as she says yes. I'm unable to muster up a single smile.

Conclusions are drawn, and I don't like them one bit. Cold dread settles permanently in my guts, boiling and brewing into something horrible, into something great, until I feel it expanding inside me, my chest close to bursting.

Multiple times a day, I find my breathing is shallow and ragged, my pulse rabbiting, cold sweat beading at my nape. I can't sleep. I'm not failing any classes, but I'm worried I'll get to that point soon. Sleep-deprived, over-exhausted, I try to force myself to smile.

I wake at five in the morning and trudge to the bathroom.



stomach sinking at the sight of myself in the mirror: the dark circles beneath my eyes pressed deep into my skin, the unhealthy pallor of my face. I glare at my reflection, tears burning behind my eyelids, and tell myself to laugh.

My mouth will not obey me; its corners will not lift, my lips do not pull back from my teeth and gums. I give in and do what Theo had tried to do, the last day we had together. I put my fingers to my jaw, try manually tugging at my lips. They're too heavy, weighted down with some invisible force.

I swallow down the tears. It's useless to cry. I imagine what Theo would say if he saw me like this. Imagine him saying, "Smile," the taunt sending a brutal cascade of shudders down my spine.

I stare at myself, dead-eyed in the mirror, and start thinking of a plan.

\*

I go about my day as normal, periodically rubbing sleep away from my eyes, assuring my friends I'm alright even if I haven't smiled in two weeks. When I get back to my room, I pull out my phone. For the first time since the beginning of this mess, I text him first.

what did you do to me

No question marks at the end of the sentence. He doesn't deserve my doubt. I know I'm not crazy. If there's room for doubt, there's room for comfort and consolation, and he just might convince him to go running back to him. No question marks.

He reads the message almost immediately, but takes his time typing out his response. He takes a long time. I'm so busy glaring at the mocking three dots on his side of the screen I barely notice Cathy leaving for volleyball practice. Almost on cue, though, as soon as she's out the door, I get my answer.

I can't tell you this over the phone.

I know it's a bad idea even as I send it, but I've had enough. I'm frustrated and angry and afraid and sad and I just want this, all of this, to be over.

just tell me. i don't care how

The three dots appear again, bouncing demonically. I

squeeze my eyes shut, praying and begging for—something, anything.

The three dots disappear. Three words take their place.

I'm coming over.

It occurs to me he's never been to my dorm. When we were dating, I'd always go around to his, with his permanently absent roommate, with his single room. Now I'm wondering where, exactly, his roommate is. Did Theo do the same thing to him? Is he dead? Will I—

There's a knock on my door. I freeze, throat burning like I swallowed ice.

Dizzily, I stand up and hesitate, my hand on the doorknob. I don't remember ever telling him where I lived.

Maybe Cathy forgot her kneepads, I think, my brain desperately trying to provide a non-disturbing explanation.

Courage washes through me again, that same moment of clarity in the grass, and I take a deep breath and open the door.

Theo stands before me with his hands in his pockets. Behind him, the common room is empty. Funny. I could have sworn I heard laughter coming from there a few minutes ago.

"Well?" I demand, thanking whoever is willing to listen for the fact my voice is stronger, firmer than I feel.

"Can I come in?"

I step aside, raise an eyebrow.

"I'd rather have your consent." There goes his voice again, odd and lilting. I don't have time for this, for his trying to cover his ass so he has a plausible excuse if I call GUPD on him.

"Just come in," I snap.

I open the door wider, step back inside my room.

The door shuts behind him.

He smiles. Painfully, so do I. ♦



# social (me)dia

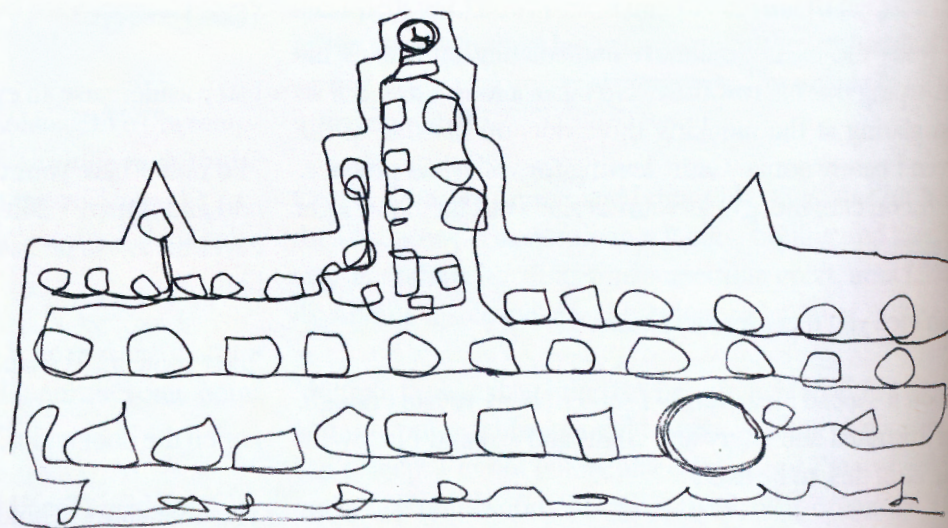
*Daanial Iqbal*

georgetown classes.  
i sit but  
i do not rest, i hear but  
i do not listen.  
how can i pay so  
much yet learn so  
little

snap awake  
snap a chat;  
face my fears,  
face a book;  
human cloning  
instant gram(ma)

i read of more amore  
and want nothing  
less, a heart not for its  
sound, but for its soundness

- creaki dour





# Excerpts from Yesterday, The Tea Was Stronger

Kyle Singh

1.

*I never really understood what it meant to walk around my town until I left it.*

My shoes seemed to grip the ground more when I came back than they had ever before.

Hometown alignment.

The road bent at the right angle and sided with the chance for someone to get to where they were going. Desolate rows of houses sat comatose. Lawns gazed at passersby, helped define the people that lived there. Deep senses of satisfaction overtook me when I picked unknown berries off of park side trees. Indigo stains smudged fingertips and my introduction back home was complete.

Elementary playground for desperate teens. K-5 in the morning, 13-18 at night. U-shaped rubber tied to rusted links of chains heading up to metal poles. Designed to ignite the smiles lost for no reason except when we had to walk back home again. Driving was something everyone did because things were too far to walk to. Fall entangled itself in peoples' hair. The pavement was cracked and paw prints were everlasting.

You could hear music blaring on their headphones as they walked by. It was nice to see mouths moving with no sound escaping them. Somehow you could imagine what people were saying and use it to your advantage.

Hometown alignment.

The striped, upholstered lawn chair featured the dirt from outside forces; to have these forces cling to the back of my jeans; to be outside again looking at the shadow when the sun hits the sewage drain at the right angle; to spot the overhanging arches of cable lines lined up with raindrops;

to breathe through summer hazes; to graze upon cupcakes from scratch with vanilla frosting in the spring dew; to spot old timers walking old dogs.

Hometown alignment.

My vision became focused when I squinted into space. The dead space. It didn't take too long to stop. My eyes hurt; my brain did, too. I had not yet mastered the art of stillness. Color washed cycles, bleeding color, imaged together, swirling water, puddles on puddles, all in one. I had leaned back into the chair, allowing it to take my figure.

My bent spine sank in as if it had felt straight. I thought for a second that it didn't ache, but then again I was only 17. It wasn't supposed to.

Why was it that all of a sudden I could sit for so long? Why was it that it made sense to think about these things? It hadn't made sense to me up until then.

You spend your whole world imagining that moment. You spend all of your time, violent times, quick times, engulfed in the idea of actions.

The actions of leaving home. The actions of saying hello to new faces. The action of taking note of new things. This made life in that summer before I had made the move to Washington, D.C. exciting. It was supposed to be that thing that got me out of a loop. Instead, I found myself back after my first month sitting on the same lawn chair. This was not the way things were supposed to be. I wasn't supposed to be thinking about the past. I was only 17 going on 18. The past was not supposed to exist. I was living in the future. That's what being young is supposed to be about.

Hometown alignment.

I sank into the lawn chair.

Somehow it seemed unfair that it was customary to move out at 18. Maybe that was just the American way, I told myself.



But what was the point of moving so fast? What was the reverence that I felt with a comfy back. I might have been sedated, ready to take a nap. It might have been the way the lawn chair triggered sleep as my back sank in. But it made sense to feel this way, I told myself. It made sense to want to remember. To sit back and look out.

But I decided I needed to get back up again.

But at this point the lawn chair became a lawn bed. I was lounging in my space. The space staged a sedation; although I do not know to this day what that was.

A dream sedative.

Washed pixels. Colors and pictures, ragged movements, intimate whispers. I think it meant I was seeing things other people were not. The sedative was doing its job, whatever it was.

But, it was time for dinner. I abandoned the supernatural; opened the screen door; took off my Asics tennis sneakers; and proceeded to the red kitchen chairs.

The lazy susan spilt some food, but a Lab named Hoover cleaned it up.

Everything was in order.

Everything made sense.

It was okay to make mistakes again.

## 2.

I have enjoyed these memories many times before but sometimes I wasn't awake to live the moments which made them. When I'm home, small annoyances carry happiness. Temporarily, they make me smile. The expiration of time involves my happiness attached to it.

Memories fade out. Tap out. Tap in again.

You expect them to speak out and become friends with you. You expect them to come to life again and remind you of the things that you see sitting on the striped bulky lawn chair.

When we have the chance to bring them back to life we try to.

I have that chance to make up for all the times I was asleep. Somehow I know I do not want to fall back into the cycle; of a failed revival of memories.

I knew that happiness could not be fleeting forever; But I expected those days to last forever; I expected my life to sing that song till the day I died.

But at least I have the chance to bring them back again.

It feels good knowing the sounds of a place again.

People age, and so do places, I understand this now.

In certain ways you see the way it looks now, and it looks exactly the same. But fabrics wear, and old cars that have never been driven are still old. Sleep dwindles and time passes.

Time doesn't give up. Sometimes I feel it passing but other times I do not. It takes me time to see it moving. Barely moving, but it passes.

And trends pass, movement happens, people change.

People move on to what they need to move on to.

A new town, a new job, new things make people laugh.

People are born over and over, many more than just one time. But I see people as I know them.

I see them in that span of moments before it had to end. People are sweet in those moments. When we change we try to stay the same. And we understand soon enough that it's the natural way our world is organized. Organization is something I struggle with. It hurts my head. The files keep opening again. The world splits, I guess. But it's good now. I get to open up the files again. Even though they won't be quite the same. Time passes. People change. The images understood what I was trying to say. They told me it would be just fine. They told me to open the files back up again. They told me to do it, so many people don't take the time to stop. But, time passes; but, I can stop it and fast forward when I feel comfortable again.

When I feel whole again.

Moments spill, and it was time to get back into the lawn chair again.

## 6.

On certain days, on days in which there isn't a single cloud in the sky, when we look up, the sky exudes a certain blueness. A blueness which is unreal. A blueness which makes it seem like the sky was painted. A color so intense that I always close my eyes and open them again, only to put this color more in focus. I couldn't believe that I had never taken note of this before.

I found myself blinking obsessively trying to make the color clearer, more alive.

When we look at things that are perfectly designed, our own defects don't allow us to fully grasp what we are seeing.

It was a shame I hadn't taken note of it in my earlier years.

That's probably why the weather always happened to be like this when I decided to walk the dog.

That's probably why the weather always happened to be like this when we decided to play at the park.

That's probably why the weather always happened to be like this during any event of importance to me at the time.

Clouds seemed to clear up.

The unreal became real.

*"How could the sky be so damn blue?" ♦*





*Direction - Magnetic Island, Australia (2018) / Julia Hyacinthe*



# To Dance is to Remember

*Christopher Stein*

To dance in the gardens at Topkapı  
is to stir up the breeze on the Dardanelles,  
and send the shepherds singing to the sea.

You can taste *antemurale christianitatis* crumbling;  
the gasp it gives out as it gives way rocks  
history like a glass of hemlock or an asp's kiss.

The chain of time like the chain of Golden Horn  
does not break, bobs gently in the swells of emotion.

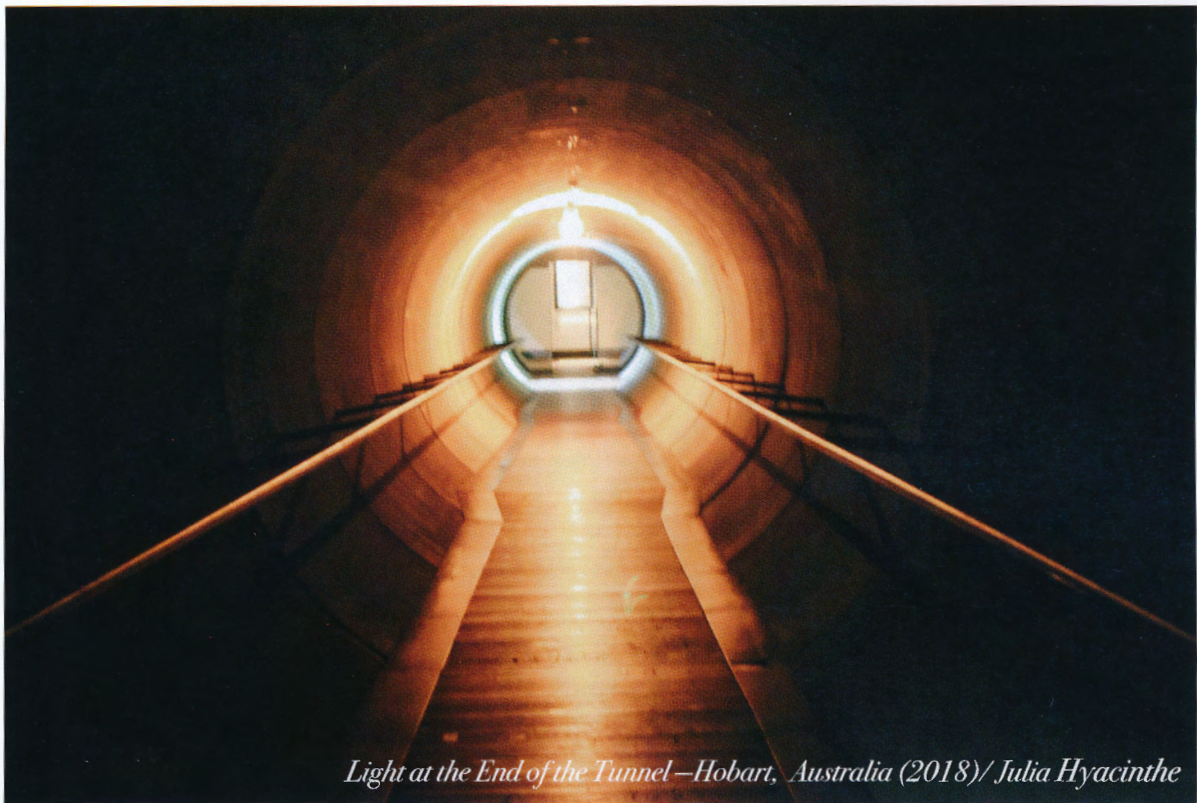
Burnished silver by the moon and alternately  
gilded by the glare of flame, great sheets of it  
flapping through the night, oddly silent.

To dance in the gardens at Topkapı  
is to remember the night they spun fire  
like wool and laid it around the city, a bier.



*Cello / Alexandra Bowman*





*Light at the End of the Tunnel—Hobart, Australia (2018)/ Julia Hyacinthe*

# Light

*Andrew Sedlack*

my grandfather died while I was at a party, so naturally,  
we toasted ourselves to forget others' lost lives  
they only linger for as many minutes as you hold the fee  
the face, recalled less in focus as each minute arrives:  
lasting 780 minutes of relived memories I never knew,

I would revel in it til there's nothing left to feel,  
my open book desiccated to dust that I still renew—  
although blue sunlight has bleached colors beyond real  
into what is left when remembrance is complete. forgotten  
in peaceful night. that the pain is over is eerie like  
the sky scattering light out of blue as it grows rotten  
enough that dusk and dawn blur into mud with light  
tragedy that burns so bright and fast, but the other way  
it echoes through my head on each of its own birthdays

my dog died minutes into my best friend's birthday  
and I looked at a few pictures of him to preempt any thoughts  
that could have sunk in grief's blades without delay  
time's passing is all that can keep me twisted to knots,  
780 inches of film tangled past comprehension  
barely letting red light bleed past consciousness to  
faded memory. a single flame enough to see images run  
without full exposure neither light nor pain shines through  
moments keep leaking, images of him like light polluting  
a redlit darkroom where film of new histories spoils  
with ash that is gone for a moment but will return, diluting  
rain that does not wash clean but instead grays and oils.  
there is a cycle as immutable as water's. endlessly, equally  
like this constant pain is how we're meant to live naturally



# Conjecture

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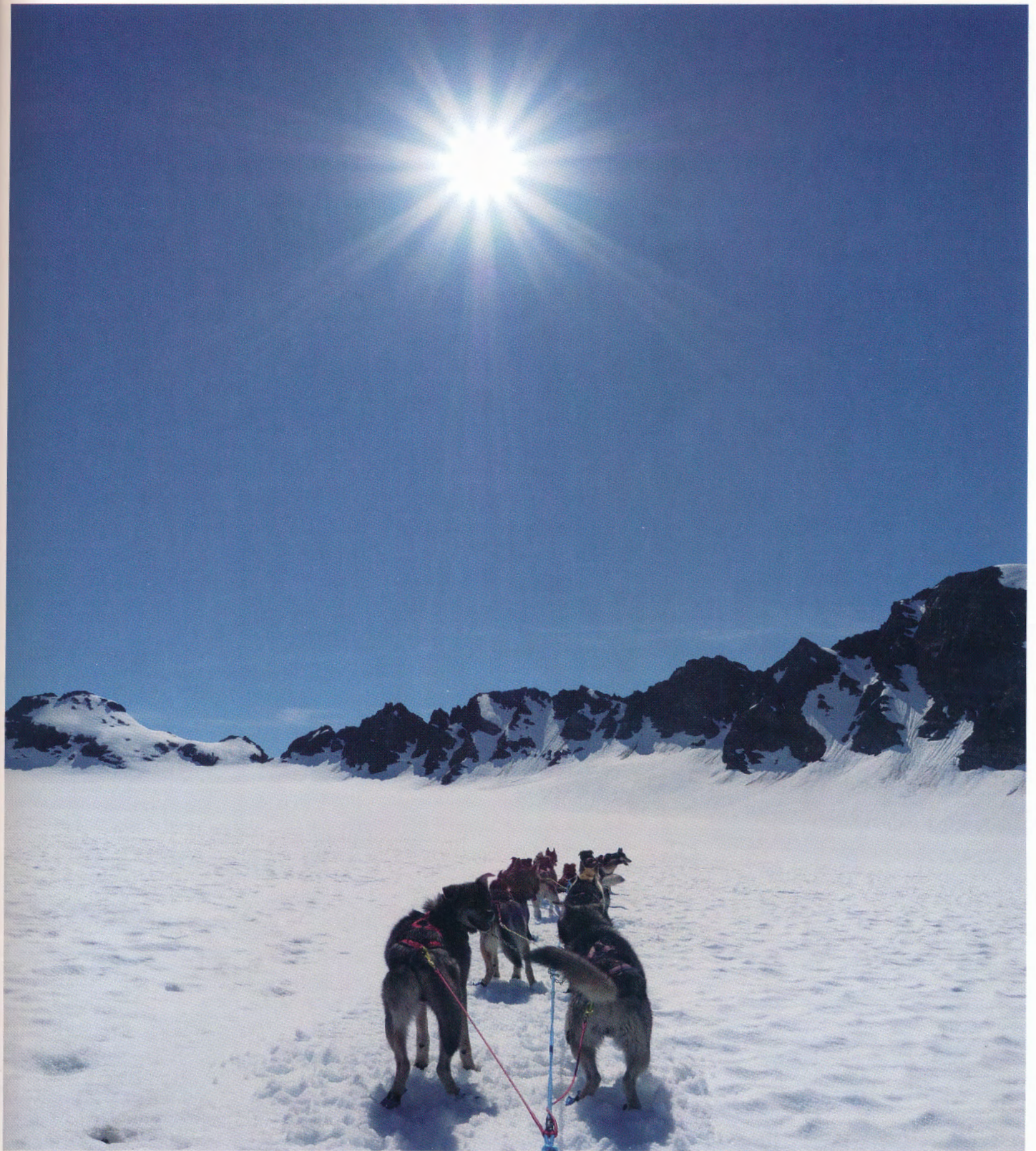
*Matt Phillips*

In this place,  
which somersaults & crushes & loop-de-loops & (maybe)  
((so I'm told)) bows --  
in the glow of this place,  
in the glow of the sun on the grass on the lawn beneath the  
steeple,  
I will find  
a home.



*Sea of Green / Kirk Zieser*





*Geel / Kirk Zieser*



