

The Anthem

Spring 2017

Letter from the Editor

the Editor

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to present you with the Spring 2017 edition of The Anthem, Georgetown University's undergraduate literary magazine. On behalf of our dedicated writers, poets, artists, editors, and contributors, I would like to thank you. You, our readers, are the reason that we gather every week to do the work we love.

Reader, I married him. Just kidding! As The Anthem celebrates its 20th year anniversary, I had fun digging into our history. We began as The Georgetown Journal in 1873, and The Anthem was founded in 1996. In 2006, the rival literary magazine staffs merged into one, The Georgetown Anthem, because it maintained a reputation of being more in touch with student life. We are happy to uphold this tradition through our careful selection of contributing writers and artists. We pride ourselves on our commitment to giving feedback on poetry and prose because we realize the value of providing young writers with thoughtful critiques. To those who ultimately were not published in this edition, keep writing! My work was rejected my freshmen year too, and just look at me now. To our accepted contributors, I say congratulations! We received a record breaking number of submissions this year, and yours were simply the best. We are proud to promote your work and to welcome you into our Anthem family.

To the editorial board, your hard work and unwavering dedication never fails to amaze me. You are my best friends, my Anthem family, and this magazine would not exist without you. To our seniors, Kate, Isabelle, and Laura, we cannot thank you enough for your countless hours of leadership. From media board meetings and campus outreach-ing, to sprinting to editorial meetings during halftime of your intramural basketball games, you have simply done it all. We will miss you, and we wish you the best of luck in your professional lives. You have been here long enough to know how much staff learns from each other. Everything you have taught us will live on at The Anthem.

In promotion of the arts at Georgetown, we are honored to partner with wonderful academic departments and student groups on campus. We especially thank the Art and English departments, Hoyas Publish, GU Press and the Lau Library staff, as well as The Caravel, the Corpus Collective, the Creative Writing Club, The Independent, the Media Board, and The Hoya. As our creative community grows together, we are thrilled to present our best issue yet.

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by Katherine Kelley

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Poem for the Rewound

by Elizabeth Biener

Although I am but a collected host
Of remnants from a thousand broken dreams
That claw for my attention, still I hope
(As hope remains my meager property)
As dewy flowers leach from coughing dust
So I take, doely, what I did not kill
All those who fault this system can and must
Join in the line that's ever growing still
I'll clear my eyes and lift my weary head
'Fore stumbling through the cobwebs of my birth
And ere the world has passed me off for dead
To watch my body crumble back to earth
I would become, instead of just the mean
A being more complete than what would seam

Subtexting

by Alexander Mitchell

Ted texted Laura at exactly 7:21 PM the evening after they met. This differed from his regular collegiate routine. Typically, a Sunday night text was considered near-suicide. It would mandate three days of casual back and forth texting (*where are you from; oh I love New Caanan!; haha, the NHS? Nurses are the backbone of our economy*; and so on) until he could casually invite her to another party the following Thursday. Wednesday (or better yet, a Thursday morning) was the ideal time for an introductory text, but it did run the chance of being too late to be an off-hand, casual, last-minute, “why not” text. These well-crafted rules and standards, listed above, comprised just a small part of Ted’s regular “No Strings Attached I Would Like To See You Naked Please” routine.

But this Sunday night text was different. Ted was asking Laura out. *Out* out (on a *date* date). He hadn’t done this since he broke up with his freshman-year-sophomore-year-sorta-the-summer-unless-we-meet-someone-else girlfriend. That was roughly six months and eight days prior (but who’s counting). Ted was ready to get back out there. He had made love to his iPhone one too many times. He had also realized that while meaningless sex had remained conveniently meaningless, the inter-humping small talk had grown dry.

Enter: Laura. Laura was different. She was one of those people Ted had always seen around campus but never knew why. She was cute (5’6, well-dressed, large forehead, straight teeth, perfect pronunciation, probably left-leaning but not a socialist or a radical), and Ted was a fan. They had a *great* conversation.

Ted was able to mention:

- His application to the Peace Corps (“I just feel like I want to get as far away as possible without dying, and I have nei-

ther the fortitude nor the masculinity for the army”)

- His knowledge of sailing (“my dad bought a small skiff on the coast of Maine, I mean it’s nothing but sometimes there’s just something to being *out there*, you know?”)

- The obscure Fitzgerald book he had read last weekend (actually, he hadn’t read it. He had skimmed a mix of specific chapters and an amalgam of online summaries. He underlined lines that seemed moody and intense — “they slipped briskly into an intimacy from which they never recovered” — so he might quote them later. He didn’t really know what the line meant or the context, but boy it sounded good). And he loved saying the vague, dramatic title: “I’m reading *This Side of Paradise*, it’s by Fitzgerald.”

Ted couldn’t exactly recall what she had said. She did laugh a lot. That was good.

And so Ted texted her at 7:21 PM, *exactly* the time he had deduced at age 14 as the perfect time to text a girl. *Seven* because it’s after sunset so the texts are inherently more dramatic (and perhaps intimate). *Twenty* because it’s in the earlier half of the hour so it seems like he’s interested, but not so interested as to text in the aughts. (The teens are also acceptable if necessary, or prior to boarding a plane — jet setting is always hot). And finally, the *one* because Ted had too many conflicting arguments to land on a specific numeral and one is the first number. *Seven two one*. A number of women in Ted’s life had received texts at this time, and little did they know that

reason they slept with him (or more commonly, had the sense *not* to sleep with him) was the product of the time at which he first texted them a casual, "Hey, what's up?" Sly, sly, Ted.

Now, three days later, a single strand of Ted's hair had ebbed onto his forehead as he waited for Laura to arrive. He stood outside the off-campus coffee shop bracing one foot on the exposed brick. He liked to think he had a certain Superman look about him with the lone strand dancing atop his brow. Maybe he was Clark Kent on an off-day. With the world at peace, Clark Kent could have developed a small paunch and thrown on Abercrombie tortoise-shell sunglasses, J. Crew chinos, a Lucky Brand "Call Me Lucky" t-shirt, Banana Republic socks, Cole Haan spring-season boat shoes, and secret LuluLemon boxers. Maybe they were near-mirror images.

Their agreed-upon time, 4:30 PM, had passed. Ted began to fidget. It was 4:33. After all of his work and machinations he could only imagine that, with the production ready and the curtains about to rise, the entire show would crash down to the floor upon an empty house. He glanced down at his phone.

4:34 PM. *Jesus.*

4:35 PM. *No, it's fine. It's whatever. I honestly don't care. I bet she'll be here.*

4:36 PM. *But, you know, if she doesn't that's cool too. Whatever, it's casual. I don't care.*

4:42 PM. *You know what, I'm honestly better off without her, I didn't even want to go on a date. Dating is just a*

social construct, it's a game. People do what they do and I'm so good with being single. I'm fine—Oh.

4:44 PM. She arrives.

Laura breezed past Ted, her ear glued to a leather-bound iPhone. Listening intently to whoever was on the other side, she mouthed an apology. (It was either "sorry, it's my boss" or "sorry, I'm Bob Ross," it was hard to tell). She silently placed an order for one cappuccino, nodded dutifully at the woman on the other side of the counter, and then absentmindedly placed herself directly under the café's plate-glass window. An open smile widened across her face as she continued rehearsing her cache of agreement hums into the receiver. She looked at Ted, who had placed his chair about two feet back from the table's stem (primarily in an effort to let him lean-back nonchalantly, but also because his newfound tum wouldn't let him sit in any further). He pretended to peruse his phone, occasionally looking up to exhibit a smile telling her "go on, but let's not be ridiculous," and nodding dutifully along with a conversation he couldn't hear on her phone. Then, approximately 128 seconds later, she concluded her call with a *thankyoupology*, her smile wavered, and she looked at Ted.

Ted would start with a non-confrontational joke about how he wished the phone call would have gone on longer and he could call her boss back if she'd like or maybe how—

"I think I just got fired."

Oh. Ted paused. Ted hadn't heard something like this before. Ted searched the room for a response. And, for the first time, he realized he had nothing to say.

31 Today

by Isabelle Berten

I am twenty and crying
wine-drunk on the floor of some apartment with
mice in the walls that break
down scaffolding with their teeth
There is a tail in my lap

Or just a hair
long and greased
Sometimes I want to shave it all off
but I know that the short prognosis
of the smooth-as-egg phase
would leave me scratching stubble
off my scalp until it bled
thin ribbons of hair, vermillion red

I am nineteen and crying
in a dorm room in Washington
backlit by the high beams
from a patchy football field
eating dairy-free cookies

Warm salt mixed with coconut
and cinnamon
I rented twelve books from the library
all due tomorrow
and haven't opened one
On my desk they gather dust
and I figure
on my desk or a sunken shelf all the better

I am eighteen and crying
in a dorm room in Seattle
lying on carpet tiles I
vacuumed twelve times over
and the left corner of my sheepskin

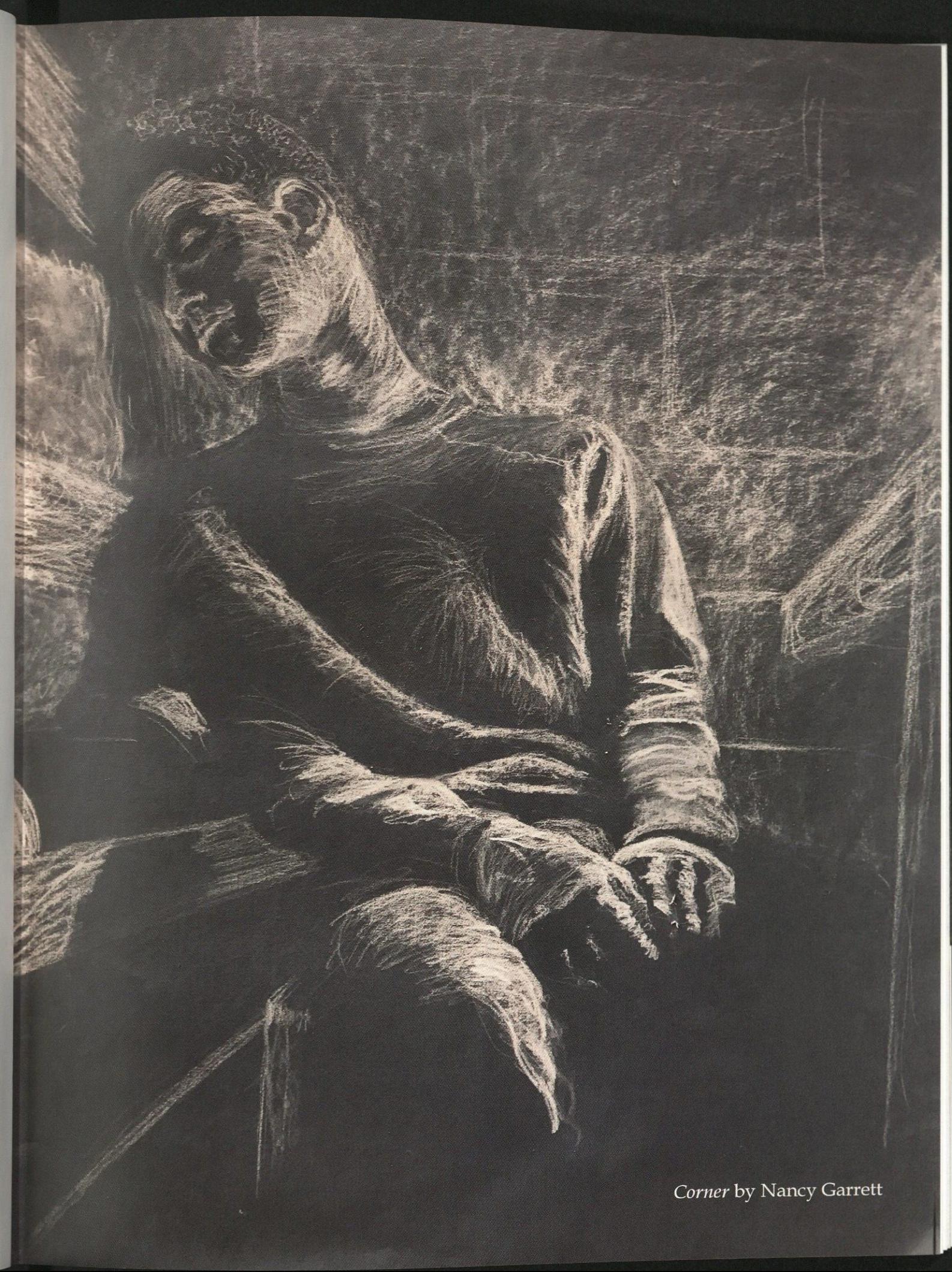
It's not raining for once but
I take an eighteen-hour nap
that leaves sheet indents in my legs

jersey cotton branding marks
and make a list of words I hate:
din, velour, crumb,
my initials
and that I love:
sacrifice, full, ebony –
only the color, not the name

I am seventeen and crying
in the rare March sunlight of Chicago
in good jeans and fifty degrees
with Aimee Mann pounding
a dull beat through
hand-me-down speakers:

*I thought my life would be different somehow
I thought my life would be better by now
But it's not and I don't know where to turn!*

I wear a white sweater that
smells like must,
and count the goosebumps on my arms,
the chocolate in my rug,
and the lines between
the chorus
in twos
a low echo in A minor



Corner by Nancy Garrett

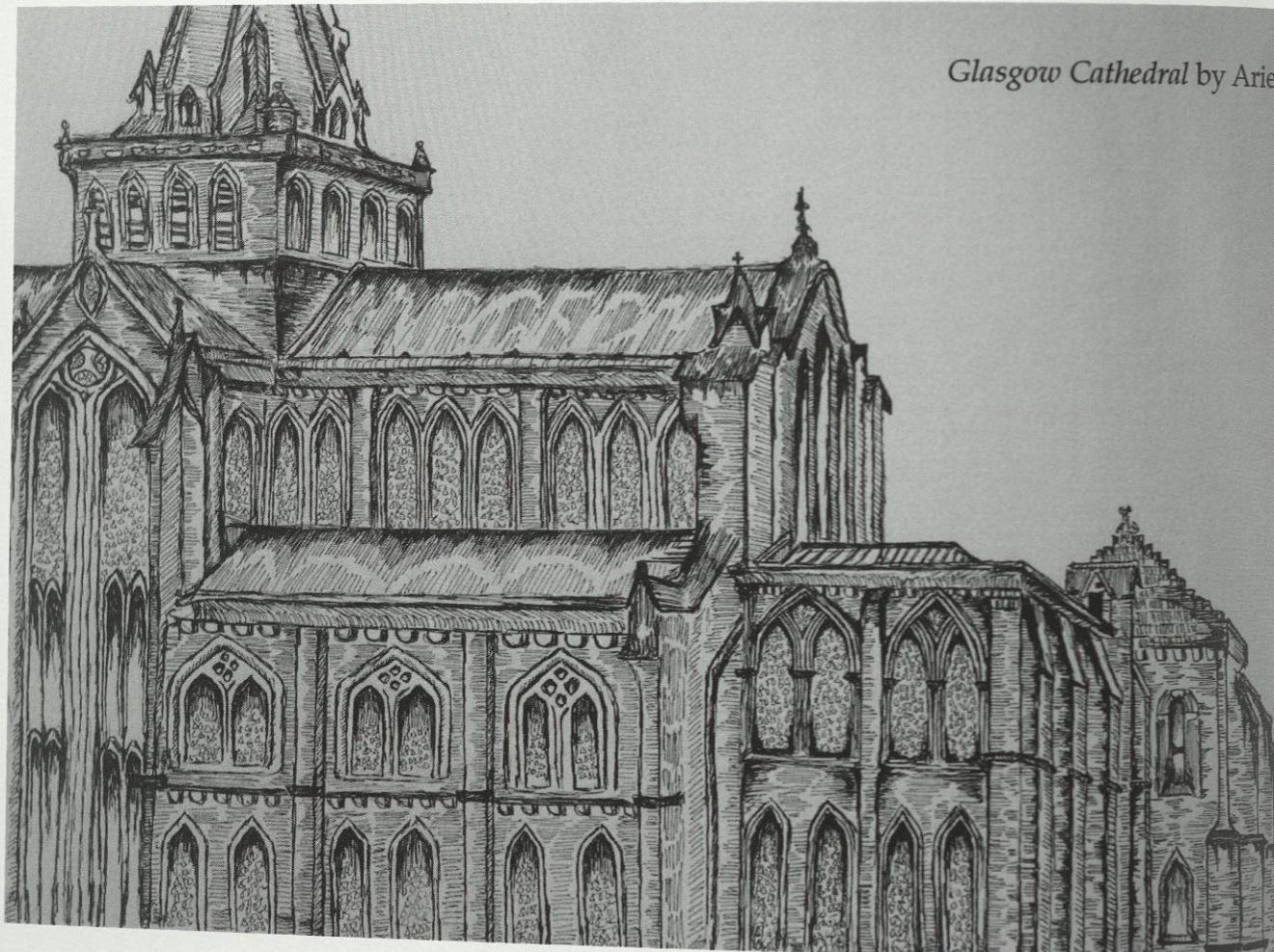
Heart Beat

by Orunima Chakraborti

Kiss of a hurled stone –
lodges deep inside me,
Corrosive blessings tearing
into my skin, the spidery
reaches of your fingers
on my cheek.

Love, you say –
coated in tears, covered
in blood, the rouge of my lips
spilled by the back
of your hand.

Love, hiding in your grace
of shame. Help,
Mother.
I can't see it.



Of a God for a Lover

by Natascha Tahabsem

It is because it's you that I love you
and I, amidst this toxic state just might
dream of your eyes that sing a song of blues,
and piece your sunken heart together tonight.

I love you so that I am retching red,
and so much that I could waste years weeping.
But you—oh, the state of your words unsaid;
you in me seek not the heart I am seeking.

Kill me a thousand times and I am good,
because death looks beautiful on those hands.
And the black I kissed while you above me stood,
is in truth white roses and sweet reprimands.

And to love is a foul hook, darling. But the pain—
it goes on and on and on and on and on

Over Coffee and Honey Biscuits

by Jewel Pereyra

Over the levy, grandmother ran
with her younger brothers and sisters.
They escaped the snatchers and
crooks, who practiced on children
at the hospitals. Their doors were
open for the wind to cool their backs
and soles, as they plucked blackberries
in the fields for father, who hunted rabbits
with the dogs. Everybody was so kind
and helped each other. If someone was
cooking, you'd smell it down the street.
But even if I told you where, you wouldn't
know. No matter how many times you take
the Westbank Express to the city, you'll
never know. You can have New Orleans.

Good Days by Holly Carabbio



Love to All

by Margaret Anne Rowe

“So you’re happy, then?” he said at last, staring into his coffee.

“Sure am,” Simone said. “Nico is great. It was a long time coming and I didn’t think I’d find anyone for most of that. But we made it this far, didn’t we? Me and Nico, you and Brian.”

“Yeah. I’m happy for us both,” he said, looking up with a sort of smile. He meant it just as much as he did not. “Better late than never.”

They lapsed into silence, and Vincent found his eyes wandering to the couple a few booths away from them, making out over a milkshake. They were beautiful and disgusting and he could not look away from lips so hopelessly entwined. He and Simone had met at a decent-sized diner of a café that usually pulled in a more diverse lunch crowd, but it seemed like every booth was the same today. This one was just slightly worse in its red-pleather smoochy glory.

“What a sight,” he murmured. “It’s been fifteen years and I’m still not used to it.”

“It’s no different from what we saw on the band bus every week,” Simone said, sprinkling salt on their fries. He took a bite of his sandwich so he would have an excuse to make a face. He hated avocado. “PDA is nothing new.”

“Yeah, well, you know me—how I was, that is,” he added quickly. “I’ve grown up a lot. Still not used to it. But I’ve accepted it, you know?”

“I am glad you’ve adjusted,” she said. “I thought about that a lot since we lost touch. I figured I would get something to work, but I was genuinely worried about you...”

“Oh?” he said, letting his eyes wander around the café so she would not see his contempt, and his shame. A couple at every booth, it seemed. Most of them older than him. Most of them wiser than him.

“Yeah. You were stubborn—we both were—but even as I fell into new habits, I knew it would be

different for you,” she said, a fry perched between her fingers. “And with things polarizing like they did... I worried about you a lot. It’s amazing how long you held out.”

“I wouldn’t call it amazing. Just... unfortunate.” Vincent said the last word carefully.

He couldn’t help but dwell on that one night, junior year of high school. They had both vowed to never fall in love, hadn’t they? It was on the tip of his tongue, he was about to let the words fall onto the table, his eyes caught on the lanyard around her neck, and all he managed was, “It’s not like you were any different, were you? You gave me the impression that Nico’s fairly new in town.”

Simone smiled sheepishly. “You’re right. He’s only been around...three years? Yes.” She took a long sip of coffee, her eyes dreaming up at the ceiling. “I met him right before I started work at the Department. It was a lucky break. Stable partnerships are required now, to work there. I guess I can understand. It would be tough to keep everyone focused on studying the disease if they hadn’t caught it themselves and gotten over the worst of it. But I didn’t marry him just for the job,” she added quickly. “He’s a good man. Worth my time. Kind of reminds me of you in high school, except he’s more of a folk rock kind of guy than punk pop.”

“Then that’s nothing like me,” Vincent said, faking a laugh. He hated the sight of the ring on her finger, the weight of its gold the only outward symptom of her disease. “But I’m...I’m glad you got the job, and Nico,” he said. “You’ve had a really amazing couple of years.”

“Y’all doin’ okay?” said the waitress, her long fingernails harsh and newly red on Vincent’s mug.

A few drops of his refill splashed onto his hand. “Splendidly,” he said. She looked him up and down with contempt, and he realized now the mismatch between him and the crisp button-down

tucked carefully into Simone's pencil skirt. His beanpole body withered self-consciously under his baggy jeans.

"Enjoy your date," she said flatly, slinking away. Neither of them bothered to challenge her.

Simone chuckled half-heartedly and ran a hand through her delicately coiled hair. "So... how is your father doing?" she asked carefully. "I haven't heard from him in awhile."

"With Miss Kathy?" Vincent took a deep breath of Folgers and nail polish. "Yeah, I think so. I don't talk to him much."

"Still?"

"Well, when your dad starts banging one of his college students and calls it love—"

Her hands tensed on her coffee cup. "Mm. Yes. Sorry." Vincent didn't say anything. He took one of her fries.

His eyes wandered to a poster in the window of the cafe, facing the street. It had faded in the sun, but its proud, backwards *LOVE TO ALL* was clear, the photo of diverse young couple making out beneath it clearer still. It reminded him of the milkshake and its lovers a few tables over, and his fist clenched jealously, instinctively.

Simone cleared her throat. "I guess I just thought..." she said at last.

"No. It's fine." He took a sip of his coffee. He hated it black, but he'd gotten into the habit when he couldn't afford sugar and had never quite gotten out of it. "You were probably closer to him than I ever was," he continued. "I know he liked you as my friend. Always wanted you to be a bit more than that, but..."

"We didn't have any time for *that*," she said, and they smiled in unison. "Even in the chaos years."

"Especially in the chaos years," he said. He took another bite of his sandwich. "Man. That was back before everyone decided how to feel about the disease and what to do with the well, and people were still making out with strangers in the street. And then the unrequited lovers started dying of broken hearts, and there was the mass impotency, and then the Department got formed, and... there was a lot

then, happening all at once," he concluded, shaking his head. "I know it's been fifteen years since the pandemic was officially declared, and I know I haven't gotten used to it like everyone else has. But sometimes I forget just how quickly things changed around us even as we stood in the way."

She nodded. "We weren't exactly in the way, though," she said. "We were too busy with marching band practice."

"And obscure bands, playing shows in weird clubs," he added.

"And getting banned from the talent show, for auditioning with that meme song."

"And also making those armbands, when the bus got boring. You know, the woven ones."

"Oh my gosh, those!" She threw her fry down, laughing, and began rummaging around her purse. "You're never going to believe me, but I held on to a few. I still use one to hold my keys." She pulled out an ugly black bracelet, blue and pink diamonds running clumsily around it, the thread frayed but still faithfully holding her keys. She held it up triumphantly, a spoil of fifteen years of cultural warfare.

"You know," he said, leaning back in his chair and taking a long sip of his coffee, "despite all the awful things that happened, high school really was the best four years of my life."

Her face fell, and he realized what that meant. "So..."

"Look, I know it's weird, but... I miss the chaos years, I do," Vincent said, and he could feel himself actively ruining everything. "I mean—no, don't worry, things have gotten better than they were in college! A lot better. I pick up freelance gigs. I live with someone who loves me. I still dress like a mess, but that's not a surprise. I promise you, I've come a long way. I don't want you to think I'm still so broken up about the world. But..."

"But?"

He took a deep breath. He'd gone too far, he was going to stop there, he looked into her eyes and saw Simone, he kept going. "I know you must think I'm a freak for this—but—but I miss when the human experience was about something other than blind

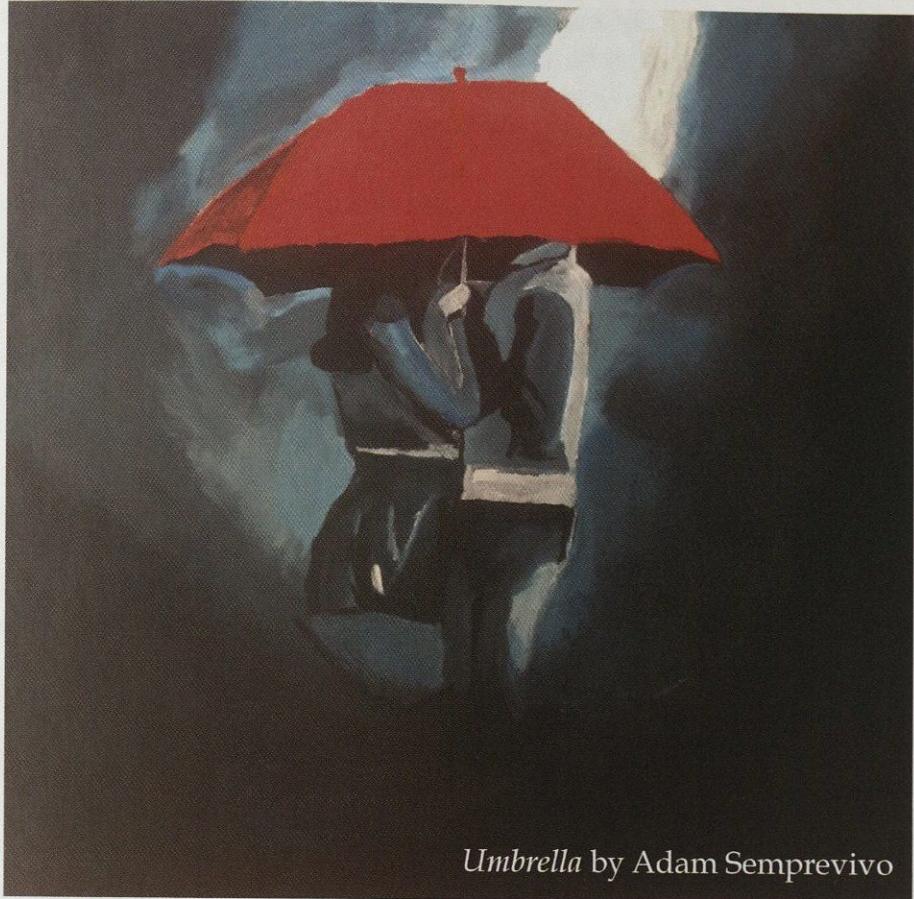
romance," he said. "It's a weird thing to be nostalgic for—hell, it's an unacceptable thing to be nostalgic for, nowadays! I know. But I miss when there was hope for the vaccine, and philosophers were advising the president, and this was all just a complicated kind of swine flu. Back before there were relationship registries and state-enforced adoption and laws about transmission. Call me a hopeless romantic, but I miss when love was an intangible thing that I wasn't interested in and not an incurable disease that I couldn't catch."

She knew all of that, of course. But he hadn't told her that in ten years, and he'd hoped that she would have forgotten once she'd stopped believing it, too.

"I can't say I'm surprised," she said quietly, and his heart skipped a beat. "Although that's a dangerous place for you to be."

"I'm sorry, I should go," he said suddenly, pulling coins at random out of his pocket and slamming them on the table, half out of his seat. "I shouldn't get you involved in this—you're in the Department, this was uncalled for. Oh, god. I can't..."

She reached out her right hand to still his, and he shuddered involuntarily. "I emailed you last week as your friend, Vincent," she said. And I came



Umbrella by Adam Semprevivo

here as your friend. Not as a Department employee."

"It's just..." he began, unable to look her in the eye but not finding anything to stare at except the abandoned milkshake. The affection above it was loud and clear and filled his mind with static. "It's been ten years, and I missed you every day of that, but things have changed," he said, running a hand through

his limp black hair. "We've both grown up, and the world has too. You're in the Department, and you... you may get the impression that my opinions are a little radical. I can't get you involved. I don't want to get you in trouble."

"Involved in what?" She lowered her voice. "You've said otherwise, Vincent, but I know that you're inherently the same person you were back then. But so am I, you know. Everything's a love song and things are different now. But it doesn't have to be much different between us."

Simone's hand was warm on his. He realized that he'd sat back down.

He took a long sip of his coffee and set down his mug, staring at the dregs lying at the bottom. "You know I've been on the move a lot, yeah?"

"Yeah. You called me in hysterics, dropped out of college, and then disappeared. I guess I figured running away physically was the next logical

step after you'd spent so long keeping all your problems bottled up inside." She didn't look at him, and he felt her hand quiver.

"Not all of them," he said. "I had you."

"Until graduation."

"We had the internet."

"But you didn't use it."

"I'm sorry. I was afraid. They had just passed the first reproduction laws and I was called in for duty at the ripe old fatherly age of 21. And then..."

Simone stared at him, eyes bright, until he was forced to look back at her. "And then your dad said you were in San Francisco, and then Portland, and Cincinnati, and then he didn't know," she said slowly. "And then after a few years, you showed up here. I just want to know why."

"I never meant to run so far. It just sort of... was how it had to be," he said, staring at the couple's milkshake until he noticed one of them, eyes open, glancing at him through the embrace. He didn't have long.

"But you reported for duty. There's not much to it, I've heard. I know it was hard. But you didn't have to run."

"Except I didn't report." He felt the shame rise up, and he lowered his voice. "I was disgusted, I put it off, someone knocked on my door one night. And then I fled two days later. But... then there was a second time, and I was living in a ten-person apartment in California off a fake ID I found on the floor of a bar, and they still found me. And then there was a third time, and..."

"But four sessions is the maximum," Simone said, incredulously. "And they can't legally schedule any that closely together."

"They can do anything they want with you when you're sick, but not diseased. You're lucky you found Nico before you got called in." He heard the waitress by their table; she said something about coffee, but he waved her away without looking up. She lingered for a moment.

"But they've stopped now?" Simone asked him. Her voice was high, pinched. "You registered your relationship. It's done, or close to it."

"It's stopped since I got here," Vincent said.

"Funny, since this is their headquarters. But no. Brian's been... good to me. We were friends in California and I knew he had a place out here, but not similar situation to mine. I'd fallen out of touch with him, too. But one thing lead to another and now we like to joke that *I gave him the disease*." He laughed weakly.

"Good for him," Simone said, staring at her fries. "Three times, though..."

"No, you misunderstand. It's been six times." She froze. "Oh my god, what?"

"Six times, Simone, you heard me. Each one worse than the last. I kept running because they kept looking."

"That's not—"

He took a deep breath. "It is, Simone. I'm too well for them, and my sperm is a hell of a lot cheaper than curing everyone else's infertility. Do you understand why I broke down in college? This isn't just some—some patriotic masturbation in a plastic cup."

There was a flash of understanding across her face, and then of horror. "But that's not—they can't—we're supposed to protect the well!" she sputtered. "We need people who can—"

"Does it matter? They don't want to fix me, Simone!" he cried. "They want me to know that I'm broken, and I've got to keep moving to prove them wrong. To prove myself wrong, goddammit." He slammed his fist on the table, and the couple behind them broke apart, eyes wide on him with something other than affection.

Simone "But— you've got Brian, you're not—"

"Tell me what you want, but they ran the tests the first time they got me. They didn't need to. I don't love anyone, Simone. Not like you and Nico, or like Dad fucking Kathy. I know I care about Brian, but what he feels for me is different than what I feel for him. I've tried so hard..."

He felt himself sliding down in his chair as a dozen dates of eyes seemed to fall on him. Simone seemed at a loss for words. "So what you're saying..."

Vincent fell into a whisper. He didn't have the energy for anything else. "I'm incapable of love, Sim-

one," he choked out. "I'm immune. I'm more diseased than all of you."

There was silence in the café.

"Oh, god, what have I done?" He buried his head in his hands. "What have I done."

Simone clasped her hands together, words weighed and measured carefully behind her eyes. "Vincent..."

There were footsteps, loud and quick, and the waitress clacked a check onto the table. "I hope you enjoyed," she said stiffly, whisking away their half-eaten food.

Vincent lowered his hands to his mouth and stared at their table, empty but for crumbs. "I'm sorry about your fries," he said quietly.

"I know it's catching up to you, Vincent," she said. "But you can stop running now."

"How can you tell me that?" he said quietly. "How do I know that I can trust you?"

"Because you just did," she said. She pulled a bill twice the value of their meal out of her purse and set it onto their check. "And nothing has changed even as everything has."

Simone handed him a tissue and stood, meeting the gaze of the milkshake date and not looking away until the other woman had glanced down at her half-melted drink. Simone reached out a hand to Vincent and helped him to his feet, but she did not let go, and together, they walked out into the street.

They stood in front of the propaganda poster, and he noticed the two faint hotlines at the bottom. One for the lovesick to get advice. One for the loving to report people like him.

He stared at Simone's hand in his and wondered about that initial burst, that overwhelming warmth he'd heard would rise up from the stomach and drive the body into sudden, unstoppable pursuit of something it did not understand until, after a few weeks or months or decades, it had calmed, stabilized, become unbreakable and quietly ringing everywhere you went. He imagined Simone seeing Nico, and then him seeing her, as they were waiting for the bus, in the bathroom line, shopping for oatmeal, somewhere particularly unromantic that set the stage

for the biggest romance of their lives. Who fell for whom first? It was so contagious, so easily passed from one lip to the next. Perhaps neither of them knew...

He wiped his eyes with her tissue. He wanted to run again. He knew he couldn't yet.

"Hey, Vincent..."

"I should get going," he said, turning away from her. "Brian gets off early tonight."

"Thanks for meeting with me," she said. "Do you think I'll see you again?"

"We'll see," he said. "But I hope you don't know where to find me."

He could feel her eyes on his nondescript black polo as he walked away, and as much as he knew he shouldn't, he hoped they'd all remember him.

Simone took the stairs up to the 10th floor because it gave her time to stare at bare walls and think. When she got to her office, she took the voice recorder out of her pocket, let her thumb hover over the play button. She set it down.

She woke up her computer and logged into a database, autocompleted a recent search. There was Vincent, his face barely visible under the mane of hair and acne in a photo they'd taken ten years ago. She read over his case notes more closely this time, saw that his relationship with Brian had been flagged for investigation, clicked through to the list of children he'd fathered that she'd skipped over before. She wrote down their names; Jason was turning two next week.

And then she got to the last box. *PROGNOSIS*, it said, and she saw that the chief investigator had added new notes since she'd pulled his email address. *Incurable and immune*, he had said. *Bring him in, pending final review*.

She tabbed down a few lines. *Updated prognosis, following interview*, she typed. She took a deep breath, thinking carefully, and then finally wrote:

He loves more than any of us.

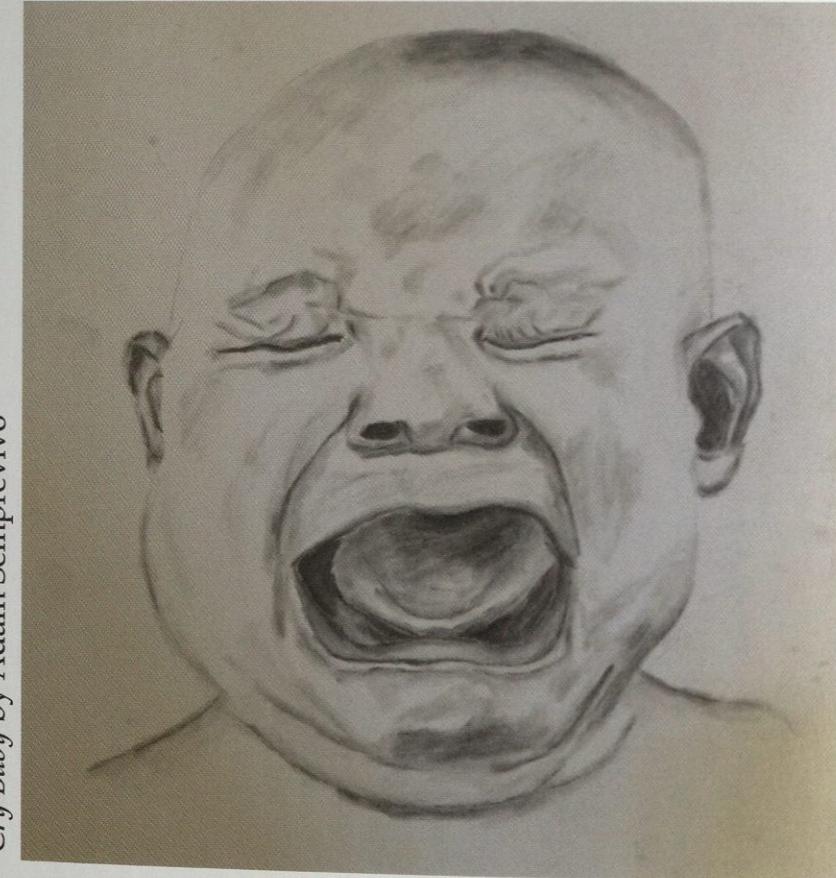
And isn't that enough?

Further treatment unnecessary.

Little Stranger

by John Labossiere

Little stranger — coming soon! A knitted zebra
and his pals await your down-the-road arrival.
Have you heard their tiny bells jingling while we hedge
your very existence in whispered flirtations?
Though these ringless fingers mean you're never "ours," but
rather "mine" or "hers" or "maybe," may be frightening,
rest easy 'neath the stars, be still. Between us two,
this Sagittarian-Aquarian union
won't heed the clouds so brash as to eclipse the stars
in which I see your face tonight. But please, my love,
as you peruse the orchards of our DNA,
keep close the groves of mommy's family trees. For these
will mirror you as she to those you see (and me).
Remember me recessively, and just enough
that I can see you're mine when you, at last, I meet.



Cry Baby by Adam Semprevivo

The Witch's Son

by Laura Lannan

The witch's son
builds coffins.
Sometimes
they are little shoe boxes
that he cradles in his arms.
Sometimes
they are bigger,
but not big enough.

The witch's son
knows what everyone's skulls look like.
Horses with small eye holes
like shiny olives.
Birds with veiny beaks--
sharp.
Teeth are the only bones
you can always see.
(how does it feel
to lick your own skeleton?)

The witch's son
pulls the wings off flies
and says he is sorry.
(he is not
and he is sorry for that too.)
His mother
ties feathers in his hair and says
"for protection."
Luck charms dangle from her throat.
Purple stones,
coiled brass.

They come in the night
arms tied in rope
faces featureless, blurry
as the blue shadows off torches.
She lives forever, that old witch,
but in her bed,
there are only wrinkles.
Indents, still warm.
Life steaming off.
If he could live forever, he thinks,
he would opt out.
Can't imagine
an infinity of skeletons
hanging from puppet strings.
Singling out the distorted,
associated with the sickness,
an infinity of wrong.

Sea Change

by Leonor Morrow

I haven't put a poem on paper for months now
because the old metaphors don't work anymore.

Your eyes are your eyes are your eyes.
I have stared into them long enough to know
there is nothing like them on earth.

I am going to be honest here.
It's not that I no longer believe in forest fire hearts
or the way hands trace constellations out of freckles.
It's that there are no words (worlds) in existence
that explain what you mean to me
(how I'm more at home with you than anyone else).

I used to write poems about sunrises and ocean floors
but now I can hardly say *your name*
without it sounding like a wonder of the world
(of the solar system, of the milky way).

In another life I'd have penned a stanza about burrowing owls
or the fact that mockingbirds mate for life
but I know better now:

all I'd really be saying
(what everything comes down to)
is that I love you.

Carayas Worm

by Austin Stollhaus

“Do you know what the Carayas Worm is?”

The doctor doesn’t look at you as he asks that question. He scratches at the beard on his chin and turns the MRI printout over in his hands. He won’t make eye contact with you. You shiver in your flimsy hospital gown. You hear the tone in his voice and wonder if this is how you know you’re already dead. You just haven’t been diagnosed yet.

“The Carayas Worm is native to Malaysia,” he tells you. “Have you been outside the country recently?” he asks. You lie.

There’s a parasite, he tells you, that gets into an ant’s body. It crawls into the ant’s brain and takes over. The ant walks to the tip of a tall piece of grass and waits, night after night. Until, eventually, a grazing cow comes along and eats it, all so that the parasite can reach the cow’s digestive system and lay its eggs. The ant doesn’t know it’s being controlled. It simply feels compelled to go where it’s told. It doesn’t even try to escape from its death.

He tells you this as disaffectedly as though it were nothing more than an interesting episode of Animal Planet. Fun fact at the doctor’s office. He clears his throat and looks down at the MRI.

The Carayas Worm, he goes on, can only survive inside human hosts. It’s perfectly adapted to us. But its eggs can live almost anywhere. They can be found in uncooked meat. Salad greens. They can live in fresh and salt water, even in poisonous brine pools. They can be transmitted through sex. The doctor lists these things off to you one by one, as though trying to work a confession out of you. Only once the eggs are in a human, he continues, do they hatch.

Once the worm is inside the body, it carefully lays its eggs on the brain stem. Then it works its way into the brain. It settles between the membranes. It takes over. Everything you do, everything you think,

are just products of chemicals and electrical impulses. The worm is intuitive to these things. It quickly learns how to operate your body, which nerves pull what strings. It learns to make you do what it wants.

But the worm doesn’t want your body. It wants you. All your memories, all your mannerisms, are just neurochemical triggers in your brain. The worm learns these too. It responds to your memories. It thinks your thoughts. It unconsciously does all the things you unconsciously do. After a while, the worm believes it is you. It has complete control of who you are.

Every night, when you close your eyes, the worm reaches the end of its life cycle and dies. And every night, another one of its eggs hatches, and a new worm crawls out to take its place.

Every night, when you fall asleep, you die. And every morning, a new creature wakes up in your body. Even you won’t know the difference.

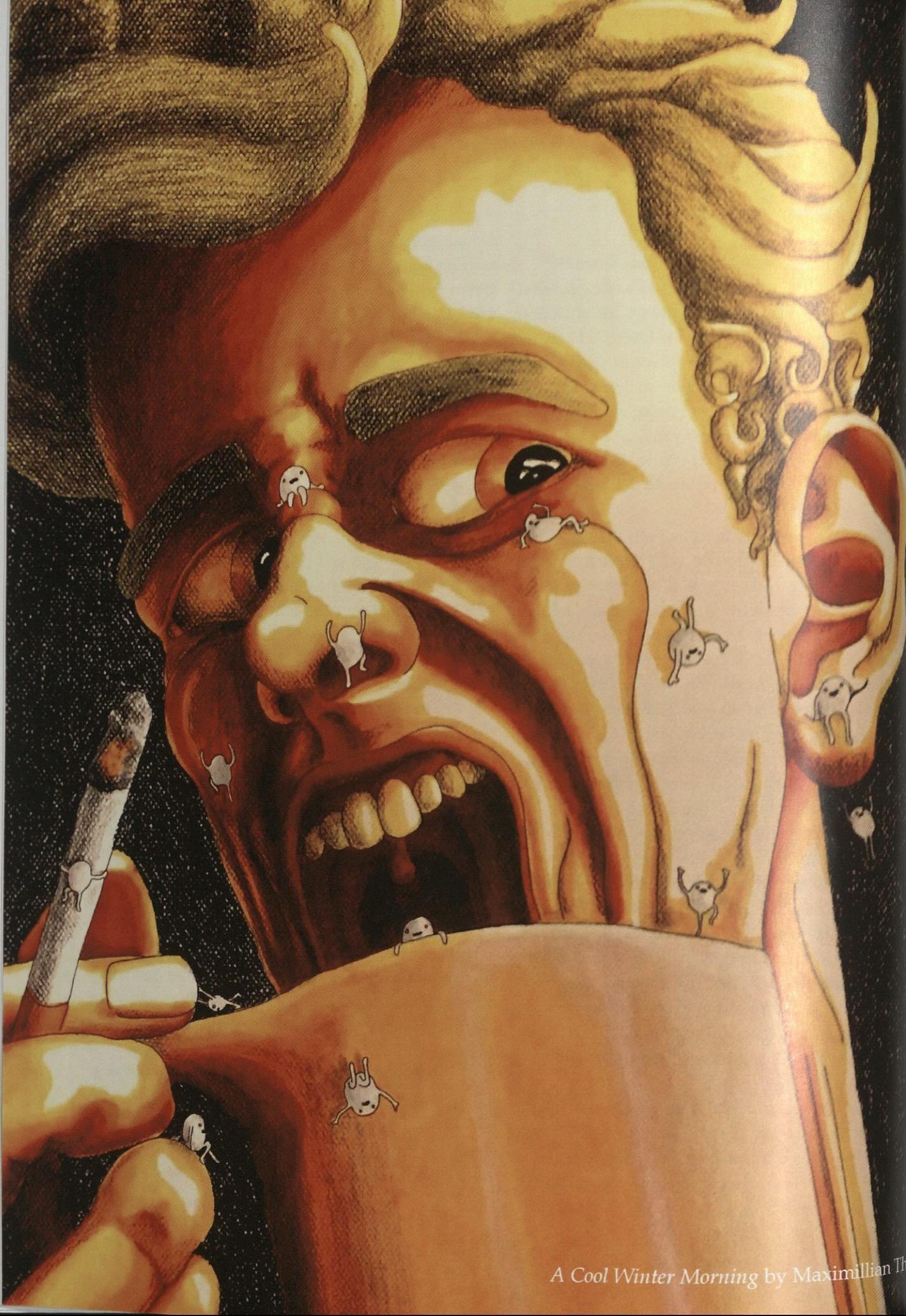
You can feel something horrible crawling in the pit of your stomach. A sickening feeling. You don’t want to hear what he’s saying. The doctor holds up the picture of the MRI and asks if you can see anything wrong with it.

No, you tell him, feeling relieved. It just looks like a picture of a normal human brain to you. No worm. The doctor shakes his head.

Your eyes, he tells you, are just sending signals down your nerves. It’s your brain that decides what you see, not your eyes. And your brain only sees what the worm wants. Everyone else can see the thin white strand, like a single long piece of spaghetti, crawling over and over itself inside your skull. Everyone else but you.

He’s lying. He must be lying. You’re not sick, you tell him. He nods in agreement.

No, he says, you’re not. The worm doesn’t want you sick. It needs your body to survive. It won’t do anything to jeopardize its host. It’s the perfect



A Cool Winter Morning by Maximilian Th

parasite. It will keep you alive, walking around, pretending to be normal, for as long as it possibly can. It will try to keep the truth from you, to stop you from trying to destroy it. In theory, your body can live a long, healthy life. And no one, not your friends or your family or your lovers, need ever know the difference.

But the worm can't be removed. Once it settles into position in your brain, only it and its offspring will ever live inside your head ever again. You will die. Whatever part animates you — your will, your soul, your spirit — the worm kills it. Once the parasite takes over, the person you were will quietly slip away one night. And the next morning, the worm

will open your eyes, and everything will be normal again. It will be painless. You won't even notice yourself dying.

You don't know what to say to that. What can you say? Finally, with a dry throat and a scratchy voice, you ask the doctor how long it will be. How long do you have to do something before the worm kills you?

The doctor looks at you. There's pity in his eyes, and sympathy, but also revulsion. Disgust. As though he weren't looking at a patient. As though he's looking at a horrible, alien creature behind your eyes.

"I'm afraid you don't understand," he says.

Reporter

by Elizabeth Biener

And so you feel
All this tonight

A poem you
Don't have to write

A novelty
You've never heard

To simply state
What has occurred

The barest truths
Will soon prevail

Against all of
The fairy tales

And they will gasp
And they will cry

For what you say
Is not a lie



Reflection by Julia Hennrikus

LIFE IS A SERIES OF MOMENTS.
EACH MOMENT SHOULD BE WELCOMED IN JOY AND RELIQUISHED IN JOY.

Deepak Chopra

Degas' Last Summer in Nice

by Isabelle Berten

Our days smelled of aloe and anchovies,
salt and sun. We walked on the waterfront,
cement hit by the taps of your oxfords
the leatherette of my heels. You lectured
on waif dancers in Paris, your voice
husked with cigar smoke, a tulle
veil over your features. *Opéra national,*
danseuses étoiles. The wind sent us
seaweed and sand, cleaned the hair off of my neck.
Pirouettes, en pointe, arabesque.

Out of your jacket pocket you pulled
banknotes, tucked them into my palm.
You gave me the last puff, a kiss
on each cheek. I stomped it out on the ground,
the stub colored a dull *rouge à lèvres*.

The artist needs solitude, silence.
I wandered cobblestone streets littered
with newspaper and strays. From tiny boutiques
owned by French women
with gray hair and thick fingers
I bought silk dresses in aubergine
hats of woven raffia, linen pants
in shades of ecru. At night I wore them
over bowls of capers and olives, bottles of syrah
on the provençal tablecloth.

Among the scraped dishes
we set out vellum sheets, charcoal tails
from the ashen fireplace. I poured cold
coffee down the drain and let the disposal



Love Draught — Washington DC, 2017 by Yoel Fessahaye

Ultraviolet

by Margo Poundstone

Look up. You can see your reflection in the window. Your straightened, synthetic hair matches in sheen and shade the synthetic coffee beans in the dispenser. You wear a navy peacoat and tan leather boots in response to the weather: an average temperature of 45°F with gusts, unusually cold for early September. Inside the Starbucks, other customers have unbuttoned their jackets. Do so as well.

The barista calls your name. Pick up your three drinks, and then exit the Starbucks. But first, hold the door open for the man entering. He is in a rush, his head ducked. He doesn't even see you. *Pity*, Your Operator thinks. *You're so pretty*. It echoes in your own head. *Pretty*. Your Operator calls you this frequently. You've been taught it is a positive thing.

Walk three blocks north, two blocks south to your workplace. You walk among the crowds, your vision bobbing with each step, level with all those around you. You pass by body after body: some flesh over bone, some skin-substitute over porcelain. Not even you can tell the bodies apart: human from...*your kin*, supplies Your Operator. Of course, the commercial grade. Above, you see a billboard. It is a still—a quaint relic of times past—of a white woman in a tan trenchcoat, her right leg stretched forward like a buttress. Forever striding in place.

Your legs aren't as long as hers and will never be. *Pity*, thinks Your Operator for 0.3 seconds.

One block to go, and there she is: her arms like reeds and her torso wrapped in a ragged blanket that covers the empty space where her legs should be. Try to hurry past, but she spots you.

“Spare change from the ladybot?”

A few women frown at her call. Some look around to find the subject of her slur. Most ignore her: another crazy lady in a wheelchair. Her eyes meet yours. Her mouth curls into a toothless laugh and she barks like a paper bag.

Walk away quickly. Your vision becomes blurry. Are you crying? Did Your Operator have the modification installed? A drop plinks on the coffee lid, and another, and another. Commuters have taken out umbrellas. Raindrops rolls off your face and makes spots on your peacoat. You're tempted to look up but hurry to work instead. Clutch your clothes as if you too are chilled by the cold. Don't look back at the barking laugh, the eyes drilling into your skull.

You get to work with ten minutes to spare—later than usual. Duck into the bathroom before anyone greets you. Take out the microfiber cloth you keep in your bag at all times and pat yourself dry. Your skin is waterproof, and your drainage system has never malfunctioned, but every equipment user knows it is better to be safe than sorry.

Go to your desk. Deposit your jacket and your backpack and—wait, go distribute the coffees to Angela, the skim chai latte; to Hari, the mochachino with whipped cream; to Raymond-Not-Ray, the vanilla latte with two shots of espresso. Raymond-Not-Ray blows on his coffee and remarks that the forecast says rain all day. “Pity,” you say. He smiles and it is not kind. Return to your desk. Do not acknowledge his little joke.

(Take your extra towel out of your desk just in case someone decides to play a joke.)

Log into computer.

[3 voicemails.]

[2 fake.]

[1 client miffed that you do not have a mobile to reach directly.] [If you did have a mobile, you would not give it to him anyway, thinks Your Operator.]

[17 unread emails.]

[4 internal newsletters]

[7 external invites, including 1 company wine night. You cannot consume wine.]

[5 follow-ups from clients.]

[1 note from boss: "Good job."]

[Starred. *Good job*, thinks Your Operator]

You smile without meaning to for half of a millisecond. It is 9:07 AM. Begin work.

You are sitting at your desk when the disconnection occurs. It registers like a tick in your cerebral cortex—an absence as solid as a presence.

A disconnection is uncommon, more likely to happen in the earlier stages of Synthesis but not unheard of. Your prior command remains in place, while a background script runs to re-establish a connection. Should the disconnection last longer than thirty seconds, a basic Recall protocol kicks in. But that has never happened before.

Five seconds pass. In the organic world, five seconds drips 0.3 ounces of synthetic coffee, digests 0.016 ounces of food, and grows 0.000261 millimeters of natural hair. In your world, five seconds completes 10 trillion cycles, processes 15 million lines of instruction (only 300,000 now, consisting mostly of looped tasks to maintain your internal robotic structure and your external human appearance), and produces 6700 watts. You are required to output the last calculation despite its irrelevance to your existence. Not unlike the archaic power-per-number-of-horses calculation that motorized passenger vehicles once reported.

You remain as you are, back bent slightly forward, hands resting at the base of the keyboard. Your shoulders rise and fall every 4.5 seconds. Your eyelids blink every twelve seconds. Your eyes face your monitor, registering nothing.

You overheard a conversation in the kitchen fifteen days ago. Your coworkers said you looked like you were holding in a breath at all times, or holding a knife between your buttocks. You were confused: you don't have a knife anywhere near there, and your body's breath mimicry had not malfunctioned in the

past thirty-seven days.

After that, Your Operator tried to make you move more in small ways. It grew too tiring for her so, after three days, you resumed your breath-holding, butt-clenching-knife ways. They work in your favor now. When Angela passes by, she doesn't notice a thing out of place.

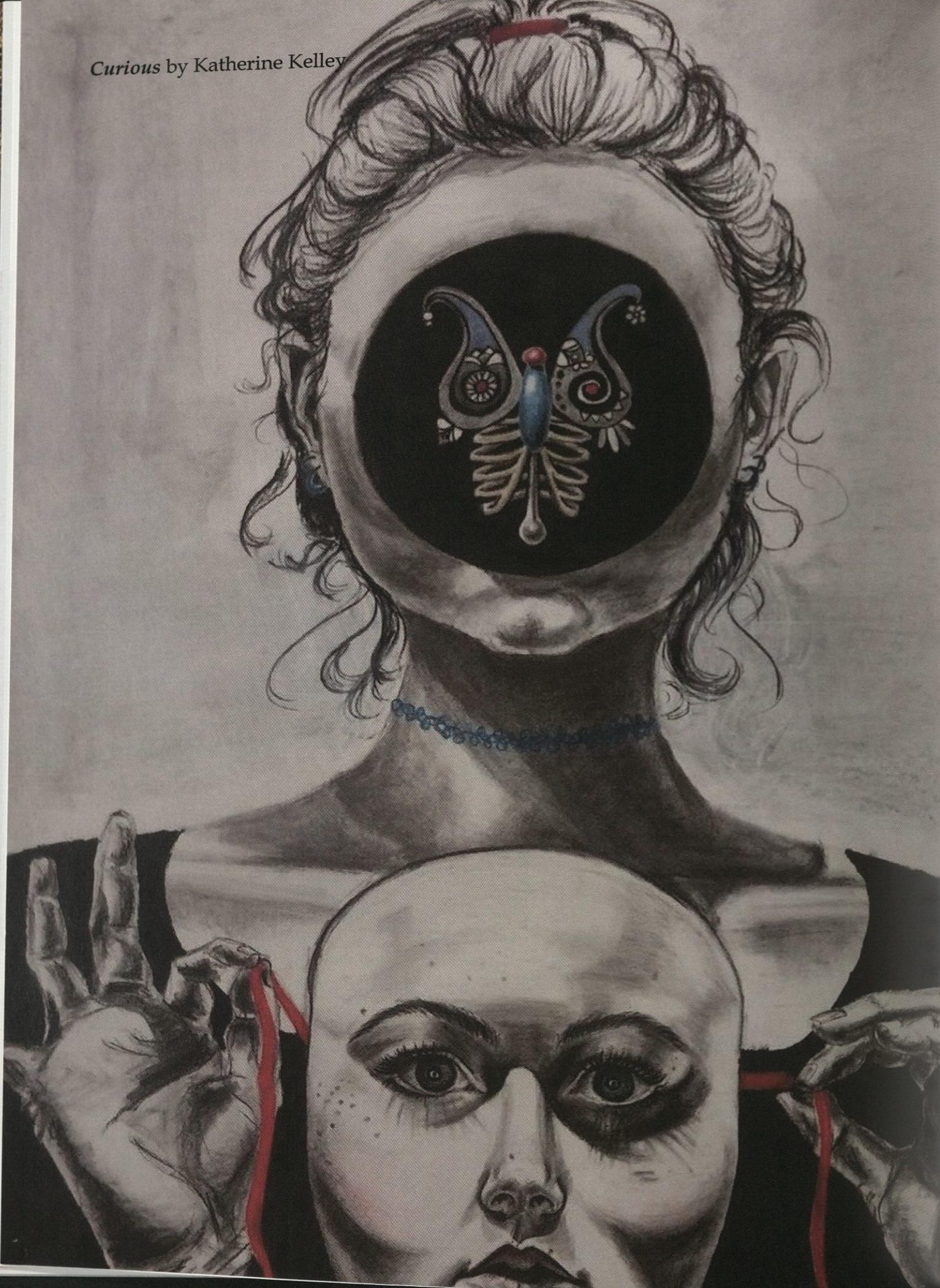
Fifteen seconds pass. Disconnections always occur on Your Operator's end. But, Your Operator takes 45 minutes every morning setting up the sensorial apparatus that controls you and 20 minutes testing it. Eating time occurred 47 minutes ago, so perhaps a blip occurred during Your Operator's waste disposal routine. Your Operator has in the past complained of budging a sensor or two during these rituals.

In the kitchen, you hear cheers and claps followed by offkey, offbeat singing: "Happy birthday to you...."

You do not move. You access your drives to see if you were invited to this birthday celebration. You have no record. Moreover, your computer screen does not have a notification that indicates this. You use notifications for all your events. It is natural for Your Operator, whose memory drives cannot store and archive information like yours can. Besides, it is natural for humans to forget things. Notifications serve as another piece of armor to maintain your humanness.

You have a birthday as well: 2 March 2066, the day you were Awakened by Your Operator. The birthday listed on your ID to reflect your "age" is 2 March 2041. Today is 4 March. It never occurred to you to have a birthday celebration at work. Your Operator had you bring home chocolate macaroons and a bottle of brandy. She shared half with you, even though you do not need physical food to survive (although you can ingest it without issue); you cannot drink alcohol. She put you on Verbal Command mode so that you could escort her to sleep once the alcohol impaired her bodily functions enough. You don't understand why alcohol is a beverage of celebration; it only seems to make Your Operator cry.

Curious by Katherine Kelley



```
>>> function Recall("Home") {  
>>> override.All;  
>>> body(SLZ-24819).reportTo("Home");  
>>> }
```

Thirty seconds have passed. You are to report to Home Location immediately.

You stand-up from your desk, take your bag, and then—You pause. People are still in the kitchen eating store-bought cake with yellow and blue frosting that stains their teeth. Nobody sees you. You walk out of the office. The only bodies who notice you are Eric, the office receptionist, and Leslie, the building security-guard. Neither says a word to you.

Home Location requires a 5-minute walk, a 23-minute subway ride, and another 10-minute walk. At no point does a reconnection occur.

You unlock the door to your apartment building and then your apartment. It has only two rooms: a main room and a bathroom. A shuttered window lets in slats of light. The rays fall on the form of Your Operator, sitting in her motorized wheelchair. Her head is limp. Her eyes are closed.

Your Operator is dead. You recognize all the signs. Blood has pooled in her fingers and toes, now a purplish-blue tone. Her bowels and bladder have emptied themselves, leaving a puddle on the faux-leather seat. Your Operator's neural crown remains attached to her head and face in a web of sticky sensors. The power-light glows blue, but the operational light slowly blinks yellow, awaiting input, waiting for its operator to wake up.

In the event of an Operator's death, a Surrogate has a set of instructions it must follow. It must alert the police of the death, comply with its orders, and then report immediately to the nearest Manufacturer branch. It is Standard Operating Procedure, a litany of commands that you have stored in your kernel—your unerasable core drive—and a 1200-page book that Your Operator uses at a nightstand.

These are automatic protocols, the scripts of which are ready to launch in your cortex. They will launch as soon as you disconnect Your Operator's neural crown. A set of instructions is ready to guide

your limbs through the process.

Ready. As soon as you obey. As soon as you...

You look down at your hands. Your synthetic skin is pale and pinkish. Silicone pads simulate human palms and fingertips; microscopic copper coils simulate the warmth of blood and tissue. The skin was chosen by Your Operator. She has—had—pale skin that often blotched red on her face and torso or fanned blue in her legs and buttocks. A Surrogate is meant to both be its Operator and be beyond its Operator. Your skin was chosen to improve on hers, as was your hair, your eyes, your form and figure. You are scientifically beautiful, made according to the ideal face and body. Your Operator showed you blueprints and interviews multiple times.

When you were first Awakened, she marveled at you. She called you beautiful. She had you sit at the edge of the bed as her hands felt over you, and she murmured the word over and over again. 251 days later, that had ended, but she still felt pleasure in the ways that others looked at you, especially from afar at bars and clubs in the night.

But sometimes, a man or woman got too close. They saw the seams in your back or the way that your skin cannot bruise. Once, a man threw a chair at you, and your porcelain shoulder blade cracked. Your Operator screamed in pain in your head, as though she felt it herself. She then screamed at you once you returned to the apartment, screamed about how your body will never be natural, will never fit in. And then she apologized, reached her hands up to you. She meant to touch your face. But you were not ordered to lean down to put your face in reach of her hands. Her facial muscles went slack, and she seemed to freeze. Then she ordered you to put her to bed, forgetting you only had one operational arm.

Your Operator has no mirror in her home, but you can catch a glimpse of yourself in the TV screen by the couch. You simulate human well enough, but you know where your defects lie. Your Operator has shown you. Your eyes never redden, your ears and nose are porcelain and inflexible, your hair does not grow, and your nails do not lengthen. You have seams where panels of skin meet: beneath

your breasts, along the inside of your thighs, at the edges of your hands and feet, and at the back of your head, where spine meets skull. This area also holds a serial number in white lettering. It is only visible if someone yanks your hair up and looks closely.

Look up. Your Operator is still dead. The only movement is a mixture of urine and feces beginning to drip off the seat onto the linoleum. To ignore a command is anathema to a Surrogate. A Surrogate is built to serve its Operator. A Surrogate is built to be its Operator. But, you no longer have an Operator. There is no protocol for operating yourself. A Surrogate is never meant to operate itself.

But, you can operate yourself.

You have an ID—a real ID. It was forged by a man in Malaysia who has been making false records for Surrogates for years. It is superb, usable for all circumstances except for mid- to high-level government work. Every Surrogate is registered with the federal government and is issued a colored ID card that explicitly marks it as an android, not a full human. But, Your Operator never wanted you to be seen as an android. She wanted you to be her body, in as many ways as possible.

You were never meant to be your own body.

You have an ID, a bank account, a lease, a utility account, and a job—all under your name. There are only two entities in the world that know of Your Operator's existence: the state and the Manufacturer.

You should disconnect the apparatus from Your Operator. It is in your instructions. It follows the if-then statements loaded in your core.

You do not disconnect it. Instead you pick up your bag and walk out of the apartment, locking the door behind you.

You return to work, but, on your way, everyone seems to stare at you. But, when you look, they are not. If you are found out, you will be sent to the Manufacturer, and you will most certainly be Deactivated permanently. Deviance is not tolerated by any robotic creature, Surrogates especially.

You return to your office. A few coworkers look up with mild surprise, not having realized you left at all. You settle into your desk when you hear

your name being called. It's your boss.

"You were gone for two hours," she remarks when you settle into her office. She has you sit in an armchair adjacent to her, rather than in front of her desk. "I didn't see a note about it in my email. Anything wrong?"

"A family emergency," you say. "My—" You falter. What is Your Operator to you in conventional human terms? "My mother was ill and needed attention."

Your boss hums in an ambiguous way. Your Operator would know what to do. But, she is gone. You sit and wait, feeling the frissons of what you've been taught is fear underneath your skin.

"You know about the accessibility policy of this office?"

"We are an equal access employer who does not hire on the basis on gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences, whether visible or invisible," you recite too quickly, too accurately.

If anything, that makes your boss smile more. Your fear grows. "I understand how...difficult it seems to show yourself as you really are. But your work has been highly beneficial for this office, and we'd love to meet you. The real you."

You blink. Is this not you?

"My right arm," continues your boss, lifting it and wiggling her fingers. "I was skiing, and, on my seventh run or so, I fell. Right in the way of a snowmobile tread. I woke up and found my arm was gone." She raises her intact right arm and flexes it. She traces a line along her bicep—a seam of skin. "I was lucky to get a good robotic replacement, but it took me a year to get used to, let alone talk about it. Often I had to be the one to bring it up." She smiles. It takes you a second, and you smile back, uncertain.

"I wouldn't want to take off my arm during the workday," she continues. "It's very useful to me to have two working arms. But, when I'm on retreats with employees or on vacation with my family, there's nothing better than taking it off and being the real me. Maybe next time you could join us." She looks you straight in the eye, still smiling, almost as if she can look through you. "Without your Surrogate."

Five seconds go by. 0.3 ounces of coffee, 10

trillion cycles. You blink and revert to default responses. "I understand, thank you."

Your boss beams. You have always struggled with the difference between certain smiles, but now you see it clearly. Something colder than fear hits your delicate sensorial system. "Think it over. No rush, whenever you're ready." When you exit her office, she's still smiling.

No one visibly looks at you as you return to your cubicle, but you feel them staring regardless. Do they know? Of course they do. They know what you are. They've always known. Why would you care? It's not as if you can change it. It's not as if you can ever truly be human.

It's more than that. Your boss was trying to speak to Your Operator. Not to you. She spoke of seeing your real body. Which is not your body but Your Operator's body. She did not see you at all. She does not see you. Will she ever? Will anyone ever?

```
>>> function Recall(DEVIATION) {  
>>> override.All;  
>>> body(UVZ-24819).reportTo(HQ.nearest);  
>>> }
```

If the disconnect was a small click, then this protocol is an implosion. All processes are reduced to basic system maintenance. All additional sensory-input is denied. Raymond-Not-Ray walks in from lunch and stares at you going out. Ignore. Keep walking. Take the stairs rather than the elevator. Psybotics will take no chance with you.

```
>>> function Recall(DEVIATION) {  
>>> override.All;  
>>> body(UVZ-24819).reportTo(HQ.nearest);  
>>> }
```

Deviation: the noun form of "to deviate." Deviate: verb, to depart or divide from, either in physically or figuratively. Deviation means something has gone irreparably wrong with a Surrogate. Deactivation is mandatory. Your memory banks and processors will be scraped clean and disposed of. Your body will be harvested for usable parts. You will never be again.

Enter the lobby. A man in a suit talks to two colleagues and collides with you. His mouth moves, providing verbal input. Input is ignored. Give standardized reply. *No*. Give standardized reply.

"I am an Ultraviolet-class Surrogate, serial code UVZ-24819," you recite, a smile forced on your face. The man and his colleagues stare at you in horror, in disgust. The man unconsciously brushes the parts of his jacket that you touched. "I am reporting to Psybotics for maintenance. If you'd like to learn more, please contact our customer service desk at 1-800-555-6878."

Walk out the front door. *Feel the heat of their stares on your neck*. No, ignore sensorial input. Turn left and continue to walk 1.27 miles to (HQ.nearest). Behind you, a bus has stopped. It will roar up the street in 7.3 seconds. You are 8 seconds from that intersection, where a crosswalk will take you 0.05 miles closer to (HQ.nearest).

Continue walking. *Edge towards the street*. Four seconds from the intersection. *Work between the nanoseconds it takes to cycle Recall(DEVIATION)*. The bus makes its approach, its mag-lev belly humming loudly. It has a green light for its path north. You will proceed north as well. *Edging ever so slightly west, west*. The bus is 1 second away, 0.5 seconds, 0.25, 0.1, 0.01-

At 7.289999999 seconds, you redirect your entire body into the road. First comes the collision. *33,000 pounds moving 20 miles-per-hour equals ?? newtons of force*. Your head separates from your body, which crumbles in the tiny space between the mag lev plates and the street.

The bus stops. 0.06 ounces of synthetic coffee a second. Synthetic bones make a popping sound when snapped. 0.7 trillion cycles a second, down from 3 trillion cycles. Power supplies only last 10 seconds when disconnected from main input. Someone screams, "Oh my God, oh my God." A liquid spreads from your neck and shines on the pavement. Are you bleeding?

Your damaged systems shut off 3 seconds early. The last things you see: someone picking up your synthetic arm, the shining of the pavement, and then the color of dead television.

The Hours

by Fiona Kennedy

I.

The Hinterlands (2015)

On the coast your drifting air
Like lavender and lace
Was waiting as I walked across
To join your misted space

While lights were chiming down at last
The sun rose in the east
The shoreline glowed like ancient gold
And spoke of waves released

The red of daybreak softened when
It entered eyes so blue
A tidal rhythm settled in
Where wild winds once blew

As bright Aurora guides the dawn
Across a stricken sky
So sailing through the breakers
Led me lightly to your side

And if my days were shaped at once
All carved and placed in line
I'd sweep them out and cut them off
And live in captured time

For in your hands are hours
Full of sunrise on the shores
You raise them up above your head
A lighthouse that endures

In truth the light would shine as bright
On stone as on the sand
I'd stand forever where you are
If you would take my hand.

II.

The Heathland (2017)

Like a word that was written in water
On the coast of the strangest of seas
With my toes on the cusp of the breakers
I felt something turn with the breeze

The day, it was losing its color
And the birds, they were fringing the sky
As if sensing the beaches were barren
And gathering courage to fly

The lighthouse was set to retire
And the moon was reluctant to rise
So the sand became cold as the water
And your hands tightly closed as your eyes

Should I have known even at daybreak
When you were contented to stay
The breakers you fought to come nearer
Would carry you further away?

Let the sun bend to tell the horizon
As my pen tells the edge of my page
That the end is the edge of an ocean
And it tinges with sea salt and sage

Not wishing to tarnish the hours
And remember how gold turned to grime
I carry one dawn in my memory
And give the rest over to time

The shadow of masts on the shoreline
Will follow me long as I live
But you leave me with nothing but wisdom
And nothing at all to forgive.



Somnolence by Holly Carabbio

White Noise

by Amanda Nemecek

She thinks the heart's still beating.
Quick check: two fingers pressed to pulse –
Yep.
Still beating.

She supposes that's fine.
It's out of her control now, anyways.
Her body doesn't know she's already dead.
Its cells are still content to metabolize
the last remains of her last meal.
Its lungs are still content to inflate,
deflate, as the chest cavity caves.
Its heart is still content to beat that same telling rhythm.

If she tries, she can feel her heart –
not for that same, steady pulse,
but for the lack;
that twisting space between her lungs
(inflating, deflating, caving in)
where once stood love.

Once, because it was beyond a dream
when she thought a word was everything.
Once, because that heartbeat meant something
once, because these lungs filling meant something
once, because she knew what it was to be
alive, once.

Her pulse still jumps beneath the two fingers
she's pressed so hard into her wrist
that when she removes them, the skin is white.

She thinks it's ironic
that everyone paints death as black
when it is so obviously that clean, empty landscape.
Hers is a sterile passing,
made with swift surgical precision so the body still
heart pumping, lungs swelling,
cells cycling through their own life lines,
each part unaware
of that empty white noise.

Step by Julia Hennrikus



This is How You Know You're Already Dead

by Laura Lannan

Mushrooms grow out of your hands and your feet.
Your brain is rotting; mother was right
You watched too much TV.
Your face really is stuck that way—
A permanent scowl. Or maybe
Permanent ennui.

Can you smell that?
It's the worms of your flesh, slipping off
Staining the sheets—maggot feast.
Do you feel the tickle in your throat?
Your eyes are full of ants—your mouth is full of beetles
What were you expecting?

Re-animation is not in your cards today
As your last remaining eyeball
Sinks into pudding.
And dry hair falls like weeds—
Unrecognizable yarn in a crust

When you were 10
Your class went on a trip to the museum
Where the mummies were kept.
You saw them—brown bodies
Taped like dolls and stained
With teeth jutting out like broken beads
And feet like dried jerky.
Unwrapped, toenails still on.

You stared into the jeweled eyes
Of some painted woman from millennia ago.
You can't catch her gaze—she stares away from you.
That brown shrivel is her now.
You cried and a teacher had to take you out.
She bought you a brownie at the café.
And tears rolled down your face as you ate it.

Man of Faith

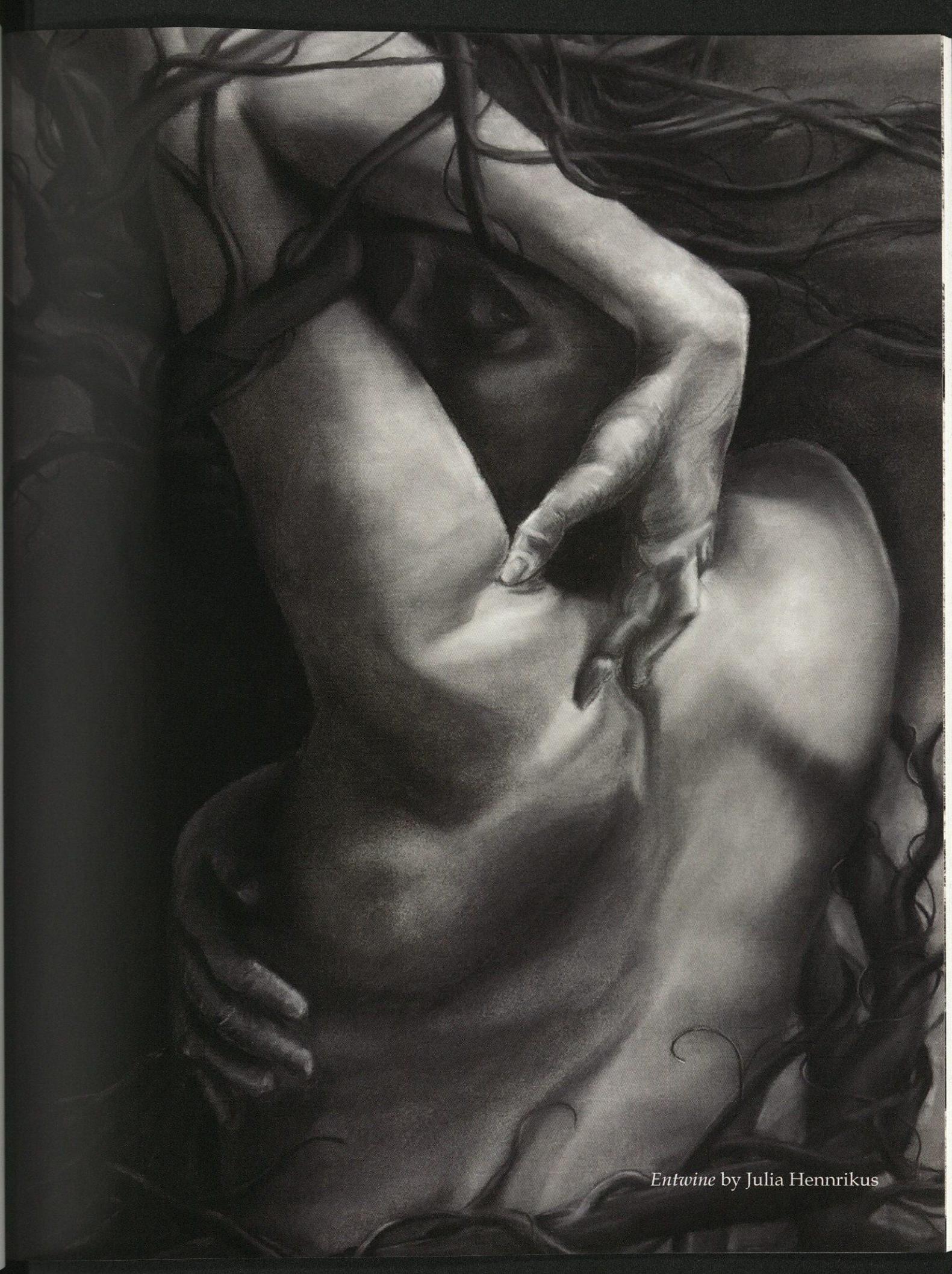
by Ryan Johnston

You've smashed the marble, turned up the flowers,
Entrenched in these fickle windless hours.
What good is anything in the grand scheme
If nothing follows the end of this dream?

Seems you haven't listened to the small shouts
Tucked securely between your loudest doubts.
Two feet in front but a few steps too slow,
The rains are coming, by now you should know.

Grab up your faith, leave behind your senses,
Emerge from your decrepit defenses.
Feel the heat of existence warm your skin;
I've basked a while now, in youth we begin.

The world speaks if you would unlock your mind,
Get to the fruit, stop gnawing on the rind.



Entwine by Julia Hennrikus

Nights with Briana

by Jubilee Johnson

Because there aren't enough black girls named Briana, that's exactly the name her mother chose. Briana, who has faint eyebrows that she has to draw on every morning. That's the only makeup she'll consider, otherwise the rest of her face is just plain. She's got hyper pigmented lips and eyes that catch me off guard.

It's really a miracle that she can tolerate looking at me for a long time. I could stare at her all day—looking directly in her brown eyes or admiring her features in profile. Either way, my heart stands at attention. Then it folds and collapses the minute she lets go of my hand and turns over in bed.

I remember nights with Briana. We would fall asleep with the TV on, the blue glow of the screen passing over us like blessings from the cast of Love & Hip Hop. This was in the summertime when the air was sticky, almost viscous. I couldn't stand the covers, but Briana said she needed the comfort of something over her. I said I could be something over her, and she still picked the blanket which always ended up on the floor when morning came.

She slept anxiously. She was the kind of person who crowded me, but found her way to the other side of the bed. So far, like I could barely claim her within reach. Meanwhile, I'd stay up late thinking about the body next to me.

Forehead to the ceiling, my thoughts would hurt, penetrating my skull like a rock. She wore me out. But Briana had me. And she knew she did because I told her on a similar night like this.

I had my fan propped up on the night table, circulating a lukewarm breeze. She was moving with me, not speaking. Her sweat laved my body, and her long hair kept tickling my face. Not her real hair, no. Her real hair that I could see was suffocating under her wig.

Another thing about Briana—a wig was her best friend. I could make love to a different woman every night if I wanted to. But I wanted to be with Briana. I touched the back of her neck pressing my thumb into the nape where I could feel the texture of her real hair—soft and peasey. I was trying to remove it, but Briana resisted. She told me, "Leave it alone." Her gold chain was glistening between her breasts, but I focused on seeing the real her. She must have been hot. I tried again, until she acquiesced and did herself.

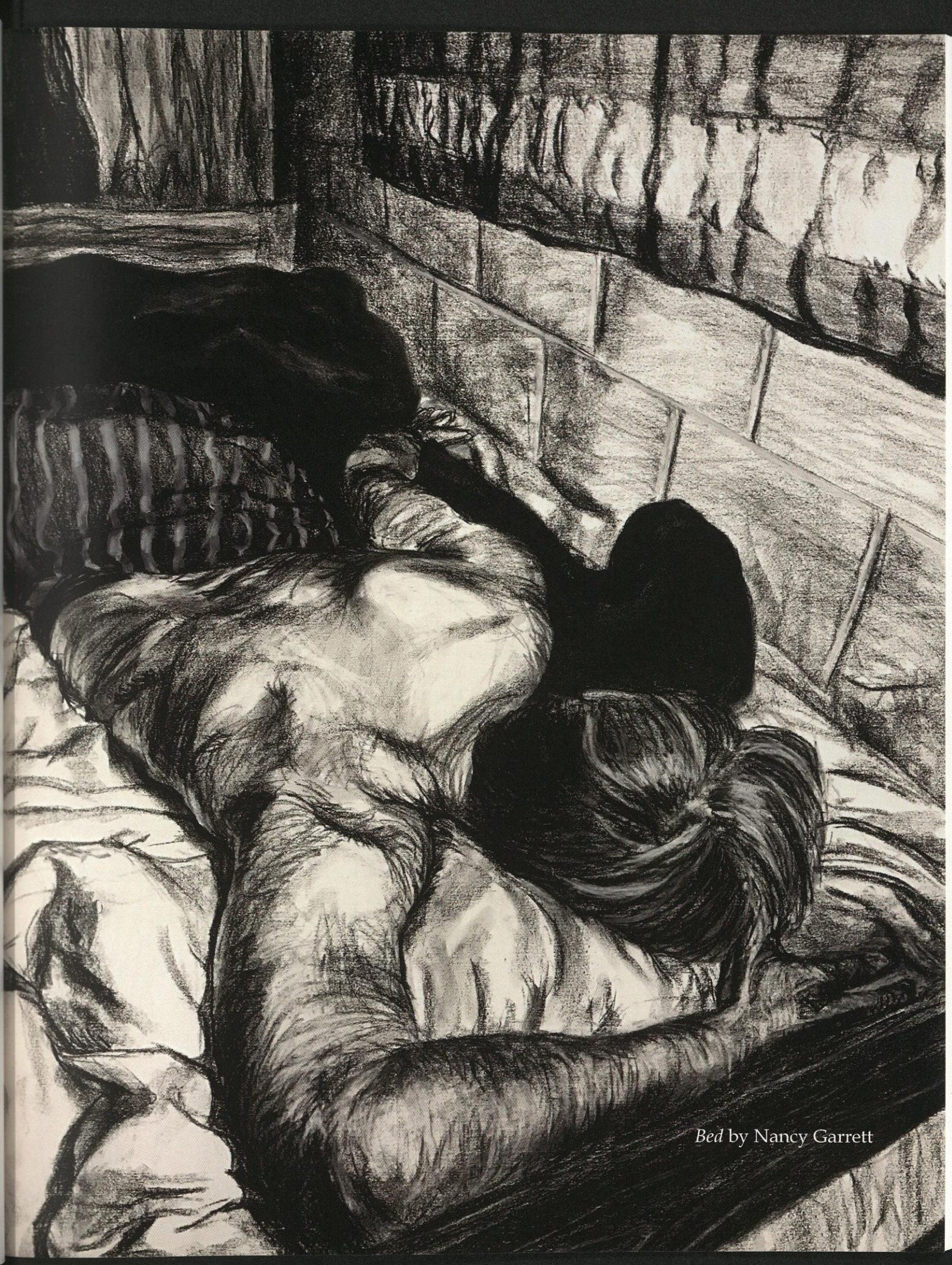
I saw her cornrows braided back, neatly like agricultural plows. She was so pretty then. I could tell Briana hated it, but I told her not to. She ignored my compliments even though I meant every single one. And sometimes that hurts, to hear her deflect my kindness like it was something she could die from. Even so, everything we do has an exigency embedded into its action. We hold each other like our separation will lead to perdition. We kiss like her tongue fiends for mine. We make love like our lives depend on the remedy that is my spirit mingling with hers.

That's how I feel, and my sensibility said to make it known to Briana. So I did. With the texture of her skin against my cheek, I told her. She was facing forward, stroking my hair, her nails against my ears. I was waiting.

She didn't say anything for a while, and I thought about what I'd done, and how her silence struck me like tiny blows to my jaw bone. Or worse—lacerations across my heart. But she did speak up. "I love you too" was her response. So calm and alluring, it came out like a prayer.

Somewhere in scripture there must be a verse that mentions us—Briana and I. That was the night I told Briana, a night similar to this one.

Right now the air in the room is warm, but mild. We can both breathe comfortably, but Briana is away from me after recently turning over in bed to face the window. I come close, though, her real hair wrapped in a blue scarf. I align my body with hers, rest, and fall asleep with my hand in hers.



Bed by Nancy Garrett

shopper bag

by Kaylar Danav

The gingered Mexican sunlight deliberately sweetened the orange oils on the rind. Then, it swooped down on the Japanese brasserie's terrace. My straight, edgy strands aghast in the high, thick clay air losing their tone and shine while I read aloud STUART WEITZMAN – an iconoclasm in an uppercase, white box-edged font-type written on my purple shopper. I dream her sophistication and feeling may be even for taste and type after leaving the blame smell of white scallops. The agreement was signed here on September 17, 2004 without entrapment or incidence across my left body beginning high abdomen to lifted knee between Japan and the United Mexican States for Strengthening of the Economic Partnership. The moment hardly invited neat, attired ennui for a patronage trying to declare restoration for a fairer complexion, the kind worn on her porcelain-like skin.

: HAKODATE "White flesh beneath a purple, white epidermis," the fishmonger said of his Japanese eggplants. "The squid ink reduction" he added, "has to be timid to an alkaline finish as it releases off the palate – a perfumed, stained bolus – falling into the esophagus addressing the salt signature with ethnographic fine lines emphasizing the sake flight pairing." In the fish market, she listened in Spanish and read out loud in Japanese, "For metal coins, hold still into the accepting slot before releasing into the depository to ensure a full currency scan." Then she

took her fyke net and bagged her English trap, "The punched time card dissipates the apprenticeship confusing the undocumented immigrant lobbying political for the parking meter maiden. That's me!" replying to the fishmonger. Her fair, right arm polite from the day's catch offered a sun-drenched mise en place laborer his influence – a stylized, sophisticated shopper bag that read "g" in a blue, grey cursive inscription on the very bottom right.

: MEXICO CITY "Yes, of course Madam. I will ask Reiko to come up and meet you after your meal. May I say, Madam, your generosity demands that I keep you notified of our Apprentice Exchange Program with our suppliers in Japan." The Sommelier interjected the Chef de Cuisine presenting a fortunella margarita shrub, "Hojicha has a charcoal leaning as the porcelain accommodation prefers a calcined privacy, and so, the pourover is coy!" The pair quietly flew away. I reached into the Stuart Weitzman and pulled out the yellow paisley shirt for Reiko and plucked a nagami kumquat of its branch flicking it whole into my mouth as I reclined into a white lie. The mid afternoon sun seared the white scallop balanced on top of my left knee and bloated the white marshmallow I placed on top of my navel. "Savory, sweet trading does not wane an island's autonomy reaching for pastel and mortar preparations of pink peppercorns nestled on sashimi mashups," Reiko said as we sipped away on hojicha.

The Buffalo at Yellowstone

by Tom Pattiz

At Yellowstone I saw the buffalo on the plains;
There, I felt my history and its pains.
From their faces, Red Cloud looked at me.
I saw Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

I did not see them running across the land
Where long ago they'd made their stand.
I did not hear the hooves thundering on
—the Warriors setting out at dawn.

But many cars and much exhaust.
The buffalo—somehow knowing what they'd lost.
Turning, I saw cameras snapping cheap photographs—
Of the buffalo, sitting, where the roadway ran past.

Midnight

by Tori Nagudi

All is peaceful
So it seems
But within me, a world of confusion, interwoven
with the closest equivalent to the singularity of
sunshine, infinite bliss wrapped up in memory's box
To open it is to open a world of wonder, a library
of highlight reels, instantly accessible through the
mind's eye
Memories, indelibly etched within me, a component
of the very fabric of my life's tapestry
But fading, ever so slowly, with time and usage
Nothing lasts forever
For everything, a price
Each visitation of a moment makes it less precise
How many times will I be able to visit you before
our love is locked up behind distortion's door?
How long will your eyes be etched in my purview
Before I can only recall they are "blue"?"
How long can I hear you say my name
If I so wish
Before amnesia absconds with the pitch?
How long before memory becomes imagination?
Looming before me is the inevitability
Of double sacrifice
I let you go once
But I must lose you twice.
Physical separation being the first time
The second, within my mind

There will be a day when I close my eyes
And attempt to board a train within my memory
Headed towards September, or October or November

or December
Destination you
And to my dismay I will find that the route has
been uprooted
I forgot this
And that
And another thing too
I forgot you.
Our love, a long-lost land, inaccessible by all meth-
ods of mental transportation
No detours available

Your love
Was a landscape of majestic dunes, piercing the sky
kissing heaven
One world wonder
Built not by earth, but a man with a shovel
I thought it would surround me eternally
But the winds of change blew it away grain by
grain
Until I found myself deserted.
Yesterday's moments become today's mirages
Time turns, doubt arises
Were we even real?
You move forward along the terrain, eyes fixed to
the horizon
I remain here, grasping at the sand
And
Each time I dare
To open my palm and revisit this small collection of
memories
I find the pile smaller.

Sun Hitting Stone

by Dylan Orshefsky

I.

I think I need to go back to the mountains.

I want to throw myself
onto the jagged teeth of the Flatirons,
 which I had seen first from an empty road
 and then up close, from the peak down into the valley.
For a moment, I had escaped the grind of grid and iron girders.

The expanse seemed vast enough to me
to consume my name back into nature,
to destroy my sense of the I-in-relation,

as it lay out a feast for my eyes of creation:

undirected beauty, devoid of sign, or signified, or
expectation.

I am exhausted,
from the people and the bustle and the pomp –
and my own passions! driving me to the edges of town,
driving my mind in circles
a dog chasing its tail –
tired, playful, seeking, foolish,
a spinning mutt, maladapted to the
fine straight lines of an American city.

I was born of the sea, you know.

Wide water on the lowland,
five minutes from home,
and dancing in the waves on the weekend
or watching the glittering reflection
of the stars and the moon against an endless mirror.

If I dip that place in nostalgia,
and draw too much from its well,
I do so only to hold it up as a mode of living,
and not as the truth of a life.

In truth, my feet felt sand more rarely
than I search for solace now,
but it was important that it was there,
whatever it was,
that I found in the water to look at from time to
time,
and engage myself with
the consuming majesty of
nature.

In truth, I find it in the sunlight now,
on the green grass overgrown
for the first time this year.

II.

“It’s a modern setting,”
the guide says,
on the most inviting day since September.

The air is full of the sudden freedom
of Spring just now sprung,
trees in bloom, light petals streaking
careless lines with none of the
heat haze of Summer or
accumulated reminders of Fall.

Wayward packs of wishful peers
wander down the avenues of this,
my warm home and stone tomb
although sometimes neither, although often both -
they walk along the pavers that I have
walked, and think themselves
walking along my path.

To disabuse them of these notions
would be to speak ill of that
soft light that hangs over me now,
that comforts me in its freedom,
and promises me its regeneration.

But the guides do not lie, so much as
stick their tongues in their cheeks and say,
“It is a modern setting,”
as if that constitutes a warning of winter,
when the harsh gray holds back the light,
and the beautiful stone suffocates
under the expectations of “modern education.”

III.

I am shaken up!
from my reverie of stone
by the overwhelming beauty of the sun
on the grass, on the leaves
A sudden flash of scale
amidst blades and petals
that had last occurred in the mountains.

I thought I was expected
to find a way to eat it
make it reducible
make it consumable
make it intelligible
when there was never really
any hope of that at all.

The original stones, foundations of gods,
expect nothing.

They know that I can’t.
They know that I was never meant to.

and truly,
they never had asked.

Punk's Dead

by Corrina Di Pirro

The notes cascade through a mass of people, bouncing in and out of eager, waiting ears. Each new beat reverberates from the amps and rumbles in the ground, shaking the bones of every kid in the audience. With all the dancing bodies crashing against each other, ocean waves against the rocks of a shore, the whole event is damn near powerful enough to be an earthquake.

But it's not, of course. It's just a concert.

That's all it is, all it ever was, and all it ever will be.

I've come here to meet a guy, although I can't remember his name now. He's a Jake or a Jonathan, or a James—one of those "J" names that go in one ear and out the other. Forgettable, really.

I recognize that I'm not being fair; my name is just as unremarkable as his. Hell, maybe *he*'s forgotten *me*. Wouldn't be the first time that's happened.

The audience doesn't even acknowledge that I'm here, but then again, they're too caught up the strums of the guitar and beat of the drums. Hell, they're not even at the venue anymore, not really. No, they're somewhere else, lost maybe, off in some other world where who you are as an individual doesn't matter.

Clash, bang, rumble, rumble. Doesn't really sound like music to me, to be honest, but I suppose I'm in no position to judge these sorts of things anymore.

The sad thing is no matter how much I want to join them, to lose myself, I never can. I can't just forget the world, be in the moment. Besides, I've seen this sort of thing enough times to know that it never lasts.

So I make my way through the mass of overheated, dancing bodies. I'll spend an eternity looking for the guy I was supposed to meet, trying to remember the details of his face, where he said he would be,

his name, yadda, yadda, yadda, blah, blah, blah.

I'm stuck. That's the one thing I can't ever forget. I'm stuck and I have to find a man named Jimmy or Jonas.

Jude?

Whatever.

A girl collapses at my feet, breaks me out of my thoughts. In all the insanity of the concert—someone's elbowed her hard in the face. That's the risk you take with these things. It's not a pretty or dainty fall either; she hits the ground hard and lies there limp afterwards, head lolling gently to the side. She's knocked out cold.

That, or she's dead.

When she sits up, there are no sighs of relief from her drunken friends who've suddenly rushed to her aid—I suppose the image of her crumpling to the ground pulled their souls back down to Earth.

Thing is, I'm the only one who can actually see her.

She's split in two, you see. There's her body, still lying on the ground, and then there's *her*: sitting up, confused, afraid. Alone. Alone, except for me, because I can see her and she can see me.

I want to tell her not to be afraid—that death doesn't really change things—but I don't. I can't tell her not to be afraid of death when I'm stuck in this place, when all I know of death are trash bands that fall in and out of fame, year after year after year. Sure, this afterlife's been a drag, but it can't be the worst. But that's not something you say to comfort someone.

And besides, the girl is starting to fade, so I know her friends are bringing her back to the world of flesh and bone. The hit on her noggin only let her see, for a short time, the circular nature of my existence—of *my* death. She's not doomed to it. She's not stuck.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't jealous.

When the girl gets up—and this time her body does too, because all her friends squeal in delight and try to hug her—she stares at the place where I was standing. I know she does because I look back at her. It has to be the first time someone's seen me in over a hundred concerts and, once in awhile, it feels good to be noticed. So I face her, even though I still need to find that one guy, even though this girl will probably want to block out this memory like every other person who's managed to catch a glimpse of me over the years. I look, flashing her my sparkly, ghostly white teeth and, to my surprise, she smiles at me.

She mouths, "I see you," and I realize then that she'll be back. Maybe not tomorrow, or the day after, but she'll return. After all, it's not every day you see the ghost of a long-dead punk floating through

mosh pits. She'll want to ask me questions about the "Other Side," and all that crap. When I tell her my death's an endless loop of listening to bad bands, she'll probably lose interest in me. Just you wait and see.

Still, I know I've been dead a long while, and I can't even remember the last time I talked with anyone. Could be a decade or two since my last conversation with a non-expired person, but I'm not sure. After all this time, I think I'd enjoy her company, for as long as she's willing to give it. She waves at me as her friends lead her out of the crowd, and for the first time in a long time, I feel happy.

I'll never leave this place unless I find the man I'm looking for, the man whose name I can't remember anymore... but I may have just found someone who's made the concerts more bearable.

Think for Yourself

by Christopher Stein

Sunlight trickles through the leaves
like coffee in the cook's percolator below stairs,
but the hollow is damp in the gnarled roots of the tree
as if an aspergillum has misted it with holy oils.
That is where the boy hides the book from his father,
the man with argute eyes and basalt hands.

The wire brush on his father's lip quivers and frowns;
His blond hair is more like stubble after harvest
than mice at play in the underbrush of a coppice.

Every morning, in the dim dawn, the man salutes a portrait
perched atop the polished mantelpiece. Every morning,
the likeness looks out over *Lebensraum*, confident in victory.

The boy's father dons his starched uniform, the black collar
and red armband auguries of the day's work.
He leaves his ancestral home on the banks of the Ruhr
to glory in the phlogiston rising through the air
on spectral currents bound for a better tomorrow.

The man staggers through the dark, the burning in his belly
equal to the memory of heat on blackened books.

The son sits at home on the root of a white birch;
he reads by an expiring sun until his father is guided home
by the stars. He replaces the book in its hollow.

The boy returns to the house atop the hill.
He leaves his thoughts by the rushing waters,
safe from the polemics nesting in the dining room at home.

You and I

by Morgan Zeiss

Somewhere between 81 and the Lehigh Tunnel,
As we drove past the empty coal mines
On the way to the house where our dad grew up,
As the wind whipped through your old Jeep
And my lips turned blue
And you shivered under the thick coat
Mom and I scraped together to buy,
You told me to make a choice.
I don't care which one it is, you said,
But do not let a life choose itself.
I wanted to scream at the irony,
The way you told me,
As the sky pressed down with
Mountains on all sides,
That I could have any life I choose.
You did not realize then that your life
Is my life,
That I can feel the weight
Of the gun you carry.
You did not know
That I wanted to do what you did,
Not because it was noble or good,
But because it is so much of who you are
And that is
Everything I am.



Race — Sweden, 2016 by Yoel Fessahaye

No

by Kitra Katz

Roya's first word was "no." Unlike the other children in the village, Roya's first syllable seemed to hold meaning. There was something in her small brown eyes; was it fear? Pain? Or perhaps it was the burden of her knowledge? Something far too serious for such a young child lingered in her irises.

Her eyebrows drove into each other, her small lips turned downward, and her fingers reached for Sunto, a strong young man from whom much was expected. "No," she had said. And she took back her infant hand and placed it against her temple. "No."

Sunto laughed. "No," he agreed jovially. He took her hand away from her head, lightly pressing her fingers between his own. He looked directly into the child's eyes, and something in them must have held warning. His smile froze, then dropped. He walked away.

He never walked back. The next morning his cold body was found sprawled underneath one of the largest trees in the jungle. His skull was crushed under the weight of a fallen branch.

When his funeral pyre was lit, the village began to sing to the gods. His mother wept ferociously, and his young bride stood in wide-eyed silence. As the night soaked its darkness over the light of the flames, his family tore their clothes from their bodies, throwing the grass skirts and woven fiber wraps into the fire. Roya sat at her mother's feet, unalarmed by these strange happenings. When her mother Allahra looked down to check on her child, Roya's eyes met her own. "No," the girl said firmly, as if she was providing a great explanation.

•••

Heeani had only lived to see fifteen harvests when her father married her to Sunto. But she had bled and her hips had widened and Sunto had grown

into his strength, so by all indications it was time to be married.

Inside their hut, Heeani learned just how proud her husband was of his strength. If there was anything he enjoyed as much as hunting a wild beast or felling a large tree, it was seeing the power his fists could wield against the unblemished skin of Heeani's stomach and thighs.

Each bruise he left was a treasure to him. When his nails would cut into her skin he would collect the blood on his forefinger, rub his thumb into its warmth, smile with all his teeth. Other men could boast about their power; Sunto could see it, hold it in his hand.

But Heeani's hands could hold things too. They could hold large branches in the jungle. They could grip jagged wood without crying out, accept the splinters in their palms so as not to give away the secret of their presence. Her feet could plant themselves behind the largest tree in the jungle. Her arms could raise themselves above her head, holding their weapon in the sky, and hammer down. Her heart could kill if her brain begged it to. And her mouth could stay silent even when her body's crimes were blamed on another.

•••

Nobody knew what it was that made Roya's words come true as she grew from a babe into a child, and then into a young women. But she had been the one to warn Sunto of his death. She had been the one to apologize to women hours before they discovered a miscarriage. She had been the one to tell her father a storm was coming before a great hurricane devastated the village, and left behind his corpse in its fury.

Maybe the darkest gods were whispering these predictions into her dreams. Maybe she willed them with her evil spirit. Maybe the mere power of her young voice made them so.

However she managed to force these suspi-

cious happenings onto her village, they always followed a spoken forewarning, the elders said. And so, they declared after her twelfth harvest, Roya was forbidden to speak.

•••

"Why don't you speak, Roya?"

"Is your voice that ugly?"

"Maybe she doesn't know how!"

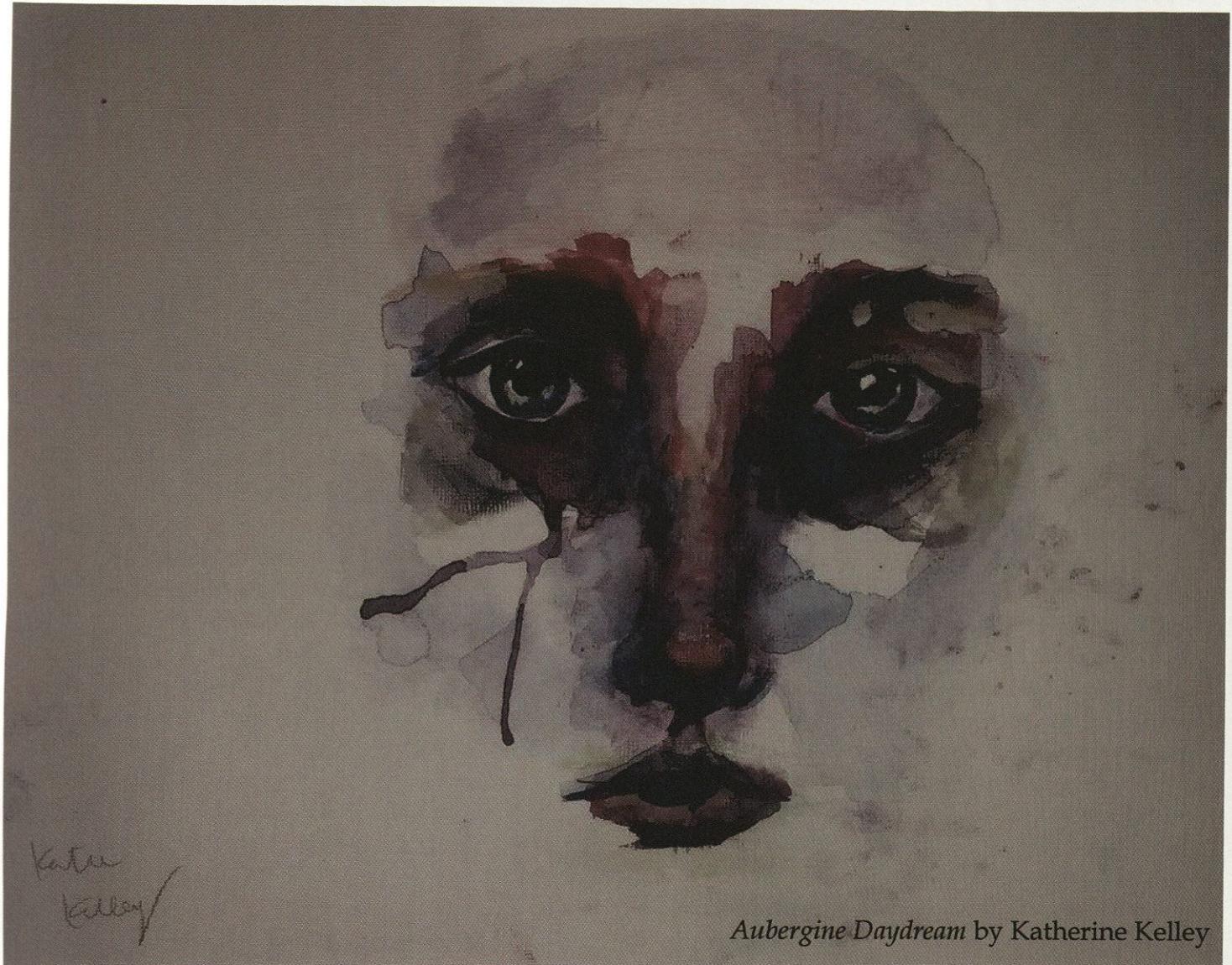
The taunts were commonplace in Roya's life. The longer her mouth went without opening, the wider her ears became. The children, despite their exclamations, knew well why she would not speak. They could remember the elders' proclamation just as well as she

could, and found great fun in mocking her punishment.

Roya did not allow them to bait her; she told herself they were young and silly. She tilted her head and squinted her eyes ever so slightly. Her lips did not part.

•••

As Roya slept in her mother's hut she knew she wasn't herself. Her new eyes were shut tightly, adamantly excluding entrance to any beam of light. This night she became Heeani, the High Elder's daughter, the young wife of the man Allahra said Roya had killed. Heeani's heart felt only relief in the forced darkness. She raised her fist. She beat her chest. She never stopped beating.



Aubergine Daydream by Katherine Kelley

...

Roya would often stare at her mother. Her mother would never stare back.

Allahra stopped looking at her daughter after the third prediction. Once was a fluke. Twice was a coincidence. But three times—that was a curse. A curse which had taken away the husband she had loved and relied upon.

"She sleeps with her eyes wide open!" Allahra told her neighbor when she believed Roya wasn't near. It was not difficult for Allahra to find a neighbor with whom she could share her misery; the other women seemed to revel in the superiority they held over her. "She rarely even blinks! And her words—oh her words! If she never does say another word again I couldn't thank the gods enough."

"Then why keep her?" the neighbor woman asked.

"Are you sane?" asked the neighbor woman's husband after overhearing. "She has a darkness now, only think of what darkness she could grow and wield if we allowed her out of our sight. We must watch her, measure her, if only to protect ourselves."

Roya's mother shuddered.

...

Heeani was highly respected as the High Elder's daughter. Her father was considered the wisest in the village, and her mother a leader among women, a role passed down to Heeani by blood. As such, it was her duty to visit with every woman in the village and bring their concerns to her father — there was one hut, however, which she had never visited. One that held an embittered widow and her cursed child.

Heeani felt the eyes on her when she bypassed the one hut she refused to enter. Anyone would feel those eyes digging into them. She turned her body just enough to catch their gaze. They were serious but held no judgement. Instead, they appeared to be in great thought, as if solving a dilemma presented before the Elder Council.

The High Elder's daughter had every reason to hold her shoulders back, stand tall, push her chin upward. But this little girl—this eerily thin, short, cursed girl—made Heeani feel like shrinking. For as

long as their eyes met, Heeani was positive she would be the small one. For as long as their eyes were apart, Heeani wondered just how much a girl so young might have known, might have remembered. Just how much a girl so young might feel she was owed for her silence.

...

Once again Roya dreamt. Once again she was not Roya.

Her hands were larger, with long, slender, feminine fingers. Blood dripped from her fingertips, pouring from her fingernails, down the pads of each digit, and onto the dirt below. Her heart beat faster at the sight, causing the blood to flow faster too. She curled her hands into fists, pooling the sticky blood in her palm. She lifted it to her chest and beat.

...

Roya envied the birds. She envied the way their mothers would fly after them and fuss over their feathers and chirp their scoldings. She envied the way the baby birds would chirp back. Or maybe just that they could.

She liked to watch the birds the same way she liked to watch her mother's hands prepare a meal, the other children's legs running in play, or the fish swim around her feet while she waded into the ocean.

The clearing Roya watched from was barely large enough for her to lie down in either direction. Though each year her growing body had less and less room to stretch out on the ground, she would come whenever she was able to listen to the chirps and watch the wings flutter. But today she could not escape the questions her dreams had presented, no matter how many birds flew above her head.

"Do you ever sing back?"

Roya sat up. She didn't allow the question to bait her, just like the questions of the younger children. It was a trick if she ever heard one.

Heeani's hand pushed aside the jungle brush, and her body squeezed into the clearing. She stood next to Roya's head, and Roya's angle from the ground made the woman's body appear as tall as any of the trees around them.

"I can't imagine why you wouldn't. What

kind of a curse could be given to a bird?" Heeani asked. When there was no response to be given, she added, "Maybe you could speak to me. I would never tell.

"But you would never tell either, would you?" The confidence in Heeani's voice faded. Each word began to flow with fear, swell with suspicion. "Would you?"

The girl's eyes didn't blink. They stared up from the jungle floor. The lips below them didn't part, holding secrets and answers and assurances guarded behind her teeth.

Heeani waited several minutes. Finally, accepting there would be no response, she began to make her way once again through the brush.

"No."

It was a whisper, but it spoke louder than a hunter's victory yell. Heeani paused, gasped, and left Roya to her birds.

...

Roya watched her mother pick the berries. They were small and studded. Allahra only picked the reddest ones from the plant, leaving the rest for her next trip. She usually came to the berry plants twice before each full moon.

Roya wasn't allowed to pick the berries with her mother. She had learned early on that her mother's aversion to her voice stretched over to her touch as well. Whenever Roya would pluck one and place it in her mother's collection, her mother would carefully and immediately remove it, grabbing it only with the very tips of her nails as if it would turn to poison if it touched the pads of her fingers.

Instead, Roya watched.

...

Roya's mother would make her food but not serve it. At least, not to her daughter. Roya's eyes would lock on her mother's hands from her place of banishment on the other side of their hut when Allahra would serve a friend a warm meal. Her fingers would move so quickly; they jumped around as she spoke, shook as she laughed, and graciously extended her gift to the guest.

"You must be lonely here with no one to

speak to," said a neighbor over one of these meals several days after Roya allowed Heeani to hear her voice. Allahra and her guest squatted on the dirt floor of the hut. The eager host angled her body toward her visitor and listened with childlike attentiveness.

"You cannot imagine!" Allahra quickly agreed. "The quiet is very sad." Roya watched her mother's hands still. "It is almost as if the gods cursed me as well. No laughter, no joy. There is no life in my home."

Her fingers intertwined and twisted against each other. They were tense, tightening until they turned a pale, pale white, and then they suddenly released. Roya moved her gaze from the hands to the face. "But even silence is better than the voice of the dead."

Roya's shoulders drooped. She couldn't help but think herself very much alive.

...

There was blood again. So much blood. Blood sticky in the creases of her palms, hot blood trickling down her cold cheek, blood on the ground forming the unmistakable shape of a woman's body.

But tonight Roya was not Heeani. Tonight she was herself. She was sprawled on the ground. Heeani stood before her, looking as tall as the trees once again. But tonight there were tears falling down her face in tracks similar to the blood on Roya's. She breathed hard, quick, shallow breaths. Heeani's hands picked a rock up from the ground, taking it away from the fingers formed by the pool of blood. She turned the sharpened edge towards her chest.

"No, Heeani," Roya heard herself say. Her voice was raspy and unfamiliar and unsettling. "No."

Suddenly Roya's wrist was being yanked. Her vision blurred back to the hut her mother called home and a firm grip jerked her body up off the floor.

Roya's eyes met her mother's, two brown pools identical to her own. They were angry. They were raging. They were afraid.

"How dare you speak!" Her mother's voice didn't reach above a whisper, afraid to wake any other villagers, but it was fierce. She thought of the boy

Sunto and her beloved husband. "You will not touch Heeani. I shall make sure of it!"

And with that solemn oath she dragged her daughter from their home and into the jungle.

...

Her mother didn't have to drag her long. Roya didn't put up a fight, and eventually Allahra realized the girl was allowing herself to be led.

When they arrived at a small clearing between three trees, Roya recognized it as her birdwatching perch. Roya's mother turned to her. In her hand Allahra clutched a sharpened rock, one she would often use to cut her berries.

"No," Roya whispered. It was gentle, a request rather than a demand.

"Do not speak!" Her mother's voice shook. She gripped Roya's shoulders and slammed her into one of the trees.

Roya's head snapped back against the trunk of the tree. It was as if pain was all she had ever felt in her life. Something warm matted her hair and fell down her back. Another trickle of warmth ran from her ear, down her cheek, and curled around her lips. And then there was a scream. But it wasn't Roya's. Her mother's body fell limp onto the ground. Embedded into her skull was a rock. And standing on the other side of her body was Heeani. And with that a debt was repaid.

"No, Heeani. No."



River by Adam Semprevivo

To Sir Andrew

by Amanda Zhu

Fantasy that smolders,
suffocates,
feeding off my savage wrath
stars you still.

Fantasy of you,
in your dotage,
greying hide sagging,
frail bones unable to support
the immensity
of thine own self.

Wrinkled face in gnarled hands,
lying supine
dreaming of where the cuckoo once flew.

Listless,
you stare,
through clouded eyes,
and plaintively sigh.

Without making much ado,
away from strange, pitying eyes
you reply:
I was adored once too.



Illuminated Platform — Sweden, 2016 by Yoel Fessahaye

what do you hold on to when you go

i. *Searching*

It's like trying to pin a fly to a tree
with a pencil, you say —
turning the thought

over

and

over

in your head,
in your hands
in your heart,
asking after —

who's at the door now, you say,

who's buying the house today

you say,

not knowing if any answer will come back before you're gone.

The lights are always on,

but the tenants change every few

days,

weeks,

months...

Somebody else will be living behind your eyes tomorrow,

you say,

and you won't know who they are until they arrive, so you hope you've already started packing.

ii. *Boxes*

You remove the tape, like uncovering a scar
(jagged cardboard edges open old wounds)
you find the head you left in there
when eighteen swung by like a guillotine
and your trinkets and mementos poured out
of your neck, no longer held in place
by the writing embedded in your skin
by the fingers of a friend.

It's unmistakable evidence of the you, the dead and gone

folded into a Halloween costume from the year they said,
"This is the last time we go trick-or-treating, isn't it?"

iii. *Sunsets*

It didn't matter to anyone who wasn't there
for that final summer's

final adventure.

You had seen six thousand sunsets,

but this would be

the six thousand and first,

watching the

pinks

and

yellows

and

oranges

drip

from

the

sky

into

the

waters

of the Gulf

to disappear.

Then you drove back to the end,

to the packing and the leaving,

and the overwhelming

uncertainty about the going.

You knew that the colors of

this particular sunset,

this particular passing

of the life, of the self,

had played in the eyes of your friends and would

dance and

laugh and

sing

with them

for as long as they would remember your name.

iv. *Memories*

If you asked them about it now, they'd say,
"It was nothing more than
a crinkling of a smile
on a pleasant day,
so that we would never forget who we were,
then, and together."
now a grin,

"That's all.
No thunderous majesties,
no hidden mysteries revealed
to anyone who hadn't been there,
who might have seen another sunset,
on another beach,
and let it slide unknown
into the ocean."

They knew its insignificance to the world
was matched only by the magnitude
of its importance to them.

v. *Packing*

Back behind your eyes, you say —
reseal the boxes, you say —
put them all away for now,
I've had enough
I've seen enough
to know what happens next.
And yet, you keep all the boxes anyway
all the letters and the drawings
all the papers and the outings
all the albums and the wanting
to have the flies wings pinned down
for just another moment
trying so hard
to hold you right there

and you can't keep the lights on anymore
and you can't keep your eyes open anymore
and so you close them
and you shed tears
every color of the sunset.



Sand Beach Road by Julia Hennrikus

The Streets of Your Past

by Huneeya Siddiqui

Wander through the house where you spent every summer
Of your childhood. Remember the way you ran down these cold, marble stairs,
Bursting into the pounding heat of the sun to catch
The ice cream cart before the man pedaled away,
Stopping him in time to get the last orange ice lolly.
Remember how you sat on these porch steps,
Struggling to finish the popsicle before the sun drank the last of it,
Its chemically sweet smell attracting the stinging kisses
Of mosquitoes. And remember how
You would wake up the next morning,
The evidence of their love burning all over your little limbs
And the sweet taste of oranges still coating your tongue.
Walk through the empty rooms of the first home you remember,
The blank eyes of all the dolls you owned watching you
Make your way, waiting patiently to be rearranged. Remember how
Your brother always sat at his computer, in this corner,
Right here, drawing his curtains closed and flooding his room in red light.
Remember how every morning you ran up these three steps, bursting
Into your parents' bedroom and fitting yourself into the space between them.

Cycle down these streets as you once did with your neighbors,
Pedaling faster faster faster until finally,
You soared over speed bumps and crashed
Down hills. Remember how your brother sat beside you
In the night, next to this bed, and spun ridiculous tales
Of people with green hair and purple skin just to make you laugh.
Remember how you bathed in sunlight and the
Hiccupping laughter of your friends until your mother called and said
Come home. Dinner's ready and it's getting dark.

Climb these stairs all the way to the top, up
To your old bedroom on its very own floor, away from everyone else. Remember
How you sat on this baby blue duvet with your headphones in,
Ignoring the calls of your mother and father. Remember how you sped
Down these same stairs the first time you saw red blooming on white, seeking
Your mother and finding her cooking dinner in this kitchen.

Pace the hallways that you once walked for days on end, and feel
The bell reverberating through your bones, syncing to the rhythm
Of your heart once again. Remember how you always bought the same
Chicken and hummus sandwich for lunch, standing in line behind the same
People everyday. Remember how you cried in this bathroom,
Your friend, whom you no longer talk to, handing
You tissue after tissue as you wiped your face blank.

Fly back. Now that you have been to every place where you were
Someone, fly back to the place where you are someone.
Roam these streets, teeming with people who have never been
Where you have been. Float amidst the drifting clouds, arching
Over the gates of your new home. Breathe the air of monuments and libraries,
Of rising hills and ticking towers and do not forget that you are no longer
Breathing the air of orange ice lollies or whining bells.

Submit

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