

SUPER ER/ / NATURAL

**ART +
FICTION
FOR
THE
FUTURE**

EDITED BY MADI GIOVINA AND TIFFANY NILES

This is a compilation of works of fiction.

Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

super / natural: art and fiction for the future

edited by Madi Giovina and Tiffany Niles

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super

/

natural

“Whenever we envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science fiction.”

Walidah Imarisha

This book is dedicated to the future.
May we experience it, and may we ensure its
existence.



Introduction

Madi Giovina

In compiling this collection, I have felt two earthquakes. Experts say the West Coast is overdue for “The Big One,” so I have a go-bag next to my bed filled with not enough food, not enough light, and definitely not enough water. I only half-believe I’ll be here for The Big One, which is why, though not unprepared, I am ill-prepared. We can’t predict earthquakes, just like we can’t predict the future, but we can make educated guesses about both.

The selections in *super/natural* are like earthquake predictions: they are based partly in fact, but mostly in speculation. Based on our presents, our pasts, and our fantasies, what might the future look like? The written works range from poems and short fiction to stream-of-consciousness prose, and the visual works vary from photos and paintings to illustrations and collages.

We call the works in this collection “visions” as a nod to a sub-genre of science fiction called visionary

fiction, coined by Walidah Imarisha. The categorization of visionary fiction distinguishes it from science fiction because these works have “relevance towards building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power. Visionary fiction encompasses all of the fantastic, with the arc always bending towards justice.”¹

In this anthology, we want to present modern works of what we consider to be visionary fiction and introduce poetry and art to the genre. The theme of the supernatural is important to us because we want to showcase works that are both of and beyond our experiences on earth.

The artists in this collection draw inspiration from different places that are all either earthly or otherworldly, whether that be witchcraft, ancestry, climate change, or the all-encompassing universe. All of the works presented together reflect diverse perspectives, distinct artistic styles, and unique world-views. We have contributors from across the United States and Canada, South Africa, Germany, Hungary, and Australia.

The chapter titles are named after an excerpt from the founding verse in Earthseed, the religion in Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*:

“All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes You.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.”²

Part I: All That You Touch starts out with Sage Katherine Enderton’s poem about her experience with

¹ Walidah Imarisha, Octavia’s Brood (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), p.4.

² Octavia E. Butler, Parable of the Sower (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2000), pg.3.

Wicca and the religion's history. The rest of Part I takes you through different experiences with witchcraft and the fantastical, and ends with another poem, by Doriana Gabrielle Diaz, about memories and transformation, to segue into Part II: All That You Change. All That You Change focuses on a future where we have changed things mostly for the worse. There are themes of apocalypse, musings on the healthcare system, and more than one story about a shortage of potable water.

It makes us wonder: how far off is that apocalyptic future, and can we do anything in the present day to work towards a freer (and more livable) future instead? Which brings us to Part III: The Only Lasting Truth, a section dedicated to nature, ancestry, and the cosmos. This section opens with another one of Diaz's poems, this one focused on her own ancestry. This poem is paired with photography by Amarise Carreras from a series exploring identity and the practices passed down to them by the Boricua womxn in their family. Part III ends where you want it to end. It can end with the last story, Crying in Public, or it can end with a pen in your hand.

We hope through experiencing *super / natural*, you will be empowered to create and pursue visions of your own. We need to see the future to be the future. What future do you see?



Invisible

Apu

PART I /

ALL THAT

YOU

TOUCH



Never Ever After

Theresa M. Pisani

THERE IS SO MUCH WARMTH

Sage Katherine Enderton

we wait for the sounds of liberation
to beat like drums in the canyons we call
hearts
in the lovers we call home.

i sing prayers about women
i put stones in pepper shakers
and you heal with amethyst gritted
between your teeth.

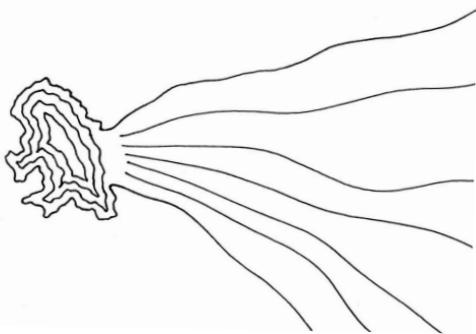
in the soft gooey center of rose quartz
glitter gets stuck under eyes
sticky sweet heritage runs over mountains
and in your veins.

we wolfed down lies
gorged ourselves on the fires
which stole our nimble fingers
floated on the waters
which took our lives.

our girls swallow candle wax
in honor of the goddess—
a devotion unable to be contained.

the fires have long since burned out
the noose rotted
they feel it in their bones
still.

now our girls carve open their palms
at the promise of forever—
daughters worth healing
a mother worth butchering our bodies for.



Buying a Star for Mama

Donna J.W. Munro

Lind's Mama was dying as sure as the sun sets and the tax man takes all the mushrooms. She'd stopped coming out of the house to work the fungus walls and hadn't been to services in weeks. The greedy middle priests already were counting up the coin they'd get selling Lind and his sisters to the middle owners for slaves. He could see it in their eyes as they passed him at work and kneeling to pray for his mama. Besides, they kept withholding their blessings from him as they processed. It was their way, but Lind wished he was big enough to chase them away with his fist and kicks like other boys could do. But Mama would be so ashamed if he turned his fists on the men of gods.

Why Mama insisted on giving them any offerings, Lind never understood. She was a beautiful, pious woman, even after the gods deemed that Daddy should leave them so early.

"The gods sort things," she told him when Daddy

died without so much as a blessing passed through the dead collector's cracked lips as he loaded Daddy's body onto the cart to be an offering for the soil. The middle priests raised their eyes and whispered blessings on Daddy's soul, but didn't help Mama when the little ones had no one home or when Lind ran crying after the cart that took Daddy away.

Been seasons since Daddy died. Lind was taller. Stronger. Head of their family and the girls relied on him and Mama to sew and reap the mushrooms. To sell them and keep them safe. But now Mama lay sick in bed, half the time raving about things that weren't there, the other half the time throwing up foamy puddles for his sisters to clean. She was getting weak. Talking about death and asking for the priests to come to her. He didn't tell her that they wouldn't come. That they'd refused his pleas, left him groveling as they used the stairs only they were allowed to climb up to the middle.

Lind loved his Mama. She taught him all he knew about mushrooms and girls, cooking and singing. She had a story for every problem and a solution for every riddle. She was the wisest person he knew, but her words wouldn't protect his sisters from the greedy uppers and their doings. Watching his Mama shaking in the corner, wasting before his eyes into a dried bag of dust and rattling bones, he knew he had to do something.

"Take care of Mama and water the mushroom wall. I'll be back soon as I can," he told his sisters, leaving them wondering where he'd go so late. He went to the only place he could for a miracle. The only place that wasn't under the thumb of the uppers. The place he might find hope for Mama.

He went to the witch lady.

He'd never been, but he knew she lived on the edge of things, between the butcher and the tanner, all hated for

their nasty jobs, but all necessary to their lives in the bottom. Couldn't let dead things pile up. Had to kill the vermin and then use them to thicken the stew. Folks in the edge did needful things.

And you didn't go to them unless you had a need.

Mama needed light.

That's what the middle priests said, like they'd passed judgment on a crime. A death warrant as sure as any because where can you get light in the bottom of the world?

Up there in the city, the people built high, layer on layer, pressing up toward the hidden sun. Couldn't see it anymore if you lived on the bottom like Lind and his family did. The uppers of course had all the light. They perched up there where the twinkles did whatever them who don't make do. Eating the mushrooms that the middle priests carried up. Pushing down things they didn't need for the sorters to drop into the throat of gods, rocky mouths with jagged teeth and an endless deep. That was a job Lind was glad he didn't have. People went mad looking at the gods too long.

Lind and his family all worked the mushroom walls that grew between houses. Mama had a way with them, making them come up bigger, meatier than the neighbors. Always making the quota that the middle priests demanded. Always having some to spare for the family. Maybe that's why someone cursed her, pure jealousy.

All curse sicknesses need light to be healed.

It was a curse to need light when you lived in the bottom, where the brightest things wrapped shadows around themselves like mourning shawls.

But the neighbors whispered that the witch always had that strange blue light flickering in her rooms. He'd never seen it himself, so Lind asked Mama about it one cycle when she'd been almost herself, suffering with a quiet smile and holding his hand in the nest of her warm fingers.

“Just leave her be. She doesn’t have time for my ailments,” Mama whispered as she rolled back toward the corner on the thin pallet sick bed she kept.

She didn’t know she was dying. Mama wouldn’t accept that until she was dead.

He crept to the witch’s house, keeping to the corners and the shadows like he’d been taught. The edges of the bottom weren’t safe. Curses crept like rats in filth, so he kept his mouth pressed shut and he took little sips of breath through his nose. Her house, pressed against the walls of those around it, didn’t glow as he’d imagined it would. But it did look as blue as the cap of a mushroom sprout, one of the precious few colors he knew. The knowing gave him strength.

He knocked on her steel door and patted himself against the chill. Why was it so cold here? Everywhere else in the bottom the air thickened with the humidity of the pressed together bodies, the steam water from the wall farms, and the heat belching from the god’s cavernous belly. How could her house be cold enough to make his breath show, the way Mama said it did in the middle.

Her voice sounded like simmered mushrooms seared with nut milk, warm and meaty. “Come in Lind. I’ve expected you for some time now.”

His hand hesitated. She knew he’d be coming. Had she cursed Mama to get him here so she might get spell stuff from him? Young guts or bloodied sweat from a boy’s brow for some damnable potion? Mama had always said to stay away from the witch because she was afeared that the gods might punish us, but Daddy had said the witch was kind to the bottom dwellers in fixes. That she had power to raise herself high but chose to wait with them for the light she’d prophesied would come for them all someday. The idea was blasphemy, but Daddy’d whispered it into Lind’s ears just the same.

He took a breath and pushed on through the doorway to a plain inner room. A low wooden rocker. A pallet no thicker than the one he himself laid on at night. Lamps flickered their gasping breaths in the corners casting dancing shadows on the ceiling. The only true difference between her place and his own home was the big cabinet standing against the wall, painted a color he'd never even dreamed.

She saw the curiosity in him and said, "Lind, that there is white. It's the only white to be found down here. They see it up high more, in the clouds and in the cotton they grow in the sun."

Lind walked over, uninvited, and touched the silky color, eyes stunned by its brightness. How could such a thing exist and not be for everyone, he wondered, fingers chuffing against the color, contrasting it with their darkened tips. It couldn't be real, he thought. She was a witch after all.

"Open the cabinet," she said, seeming to float in her corner with a shimmer of shadow on her features.

His hand froze there, quivering in the request. She'd commanded it and he felt the need to do it so deep in his stomach it felt like the maw of a god opening up to swallow him inside out. The power she had wasn't the raw power of the gods though. It felt sweet and silken like the water he used to clean away his sweat from farming. For the first time he looked close at her, wondering at how young she was. Slight. No more than a girl growing into a woman. Nothing on front worth looking at yet, but beautiful black hair and pale skin like nut milk. She swirled around him like a contradiction.

"Open it."

Her command felt irresistible, even as he struggled to keep his hands from moving. This felt like a test of his spine and he didn't want to make the wrong choice. A wrong choice might mean Mama's death, his and his sister's

lot thrown down lower. Might be him at the mercy of the witch.

But to not try, sure as anything, meant to lose.

Inside, a flare of light brighter than any he'd ever seen lit the room in a flash, blinding him with more shine than any coals or candle. It took a while, but his poor eyes watered and blinked away the pain until he could see again. The inside of the cabinet thrummed with light and as his eyes adjusted, he could make out two twinkling light spots—one large, one little—pointy and shimmering in the air of the cabinet.

"They're stars," she told him. "I caught them before the uppers started to build us in. Up top, they keep the stars for themselves because they knew how starlight might change things. Make us look up when they want us looking down."

Lind shook his head. That was more than he knew or needed. More than he'd been prepared for. He started to back away toward the door, frightened of the witch's treasures and their odd light. Her strange words were stones in his head, knocking around everything he knew. And the light? Brighter as he stared. Thrumming with secrets. He held his hand up, shading himself from them and their painful rays. Something about them made him want to run, but something inside him whispered other ideas.

"Lind boy," she said, turning to the cabinets. "You cannot leave."

"Cannot?" He said. It was enough to turn him into a frightened rat running in the edges of the bottoms. He turned and, hand on the steel door, tried to get out. Twisting and pulling, he rattled the handle, but the door stuck shut.

"You must choose one," the witch said.

He turned back, pressing against the door.

She didn't seem so young any more. In her hands,

she held out the smaller of the stars embedded in a chain. She stretched it out between her hands, twisting it between the pinched pads of her fingers and thumbs. The star flashed and twinkled, shining in the dark pool of her eyes with such a hypnotic rhythm, he felt himself slipping into a nodding state. Something like a dream only full of light and color he suddenly understood. Things from stories his mother told him existed but he'd never believed before.

"This would save your Mama, Lind. Heal her sickness. Put this on her neck and it will shine for you and your sisters and bring you wealth. It might even lift you up to the middle."

The middle. Mama had come from the middle, pushed down by her Daddy's debts from living too big in the light. She used to talk about the breezes and the colors that don't make their way down, though she stopped telling the stories after she got sick. People from the middle didn't often suffer the same problems they did in the bottom.

He glanced back to the chained star and the witch's tilted face.

Something in her expression told him that there was more to know before he decided. His fingers danced there in the air just over the necklace, but his gaze turned to the brighter star in the cabinet, flashing so much bigger than the other. The thrumming power of it caused the flutter in his stomach to lurch.

The words he wanted to say, questions as deep as the god's gullet, stuck in his throat as he tried to choke them out.

"Ah," she said. "You see it. The potential? Most people don't. Most only see the thing they need. Most take just for them and their own. What if I told you that the big star's light won't save your Mama from the illness. She'll die, but she'll die in the light with her kids safe by her side. She'll die bathed in light."

She held the chained bit of star out to him, pushing the little light toward him. He didn't reach. Didn't want to choose. He hovered there like the moment would never pass.

"This one will save her. That one will save us all," she said, placing the chained star next to the bigger one glittering there so bright. So powerful in its freedom, floating above the other, doubling in size then shrinking, light filling the cabinet and then winking a promise of brighter and better light.

To choose between Mama and the others stuck in the dark, fighting curses and the wet and the heated breath of the gods made a cruel choice. He'd lived among them his whole life. Worked shoulder to shoulder with them. Felt the lash of the upper's protectors. Starved with them. But his Mama. How could the world continue without her? He wasn't of age yet. Without her, how would he be able to keep the family together? The gnawing pain of her leaving him bit through the other concerns.

As he stared at the two stars, the witch's word rose up in his hearing again. Most take just for them and their own.

Them and their own.

"Sorry, Mama," Lind said, though he knew the apology was unnecessary. She'd want him to do for everyone, not just for her.

He reached for the bigger star, wrapping his hand around it.

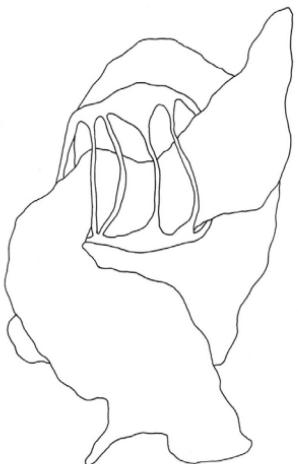
The light exploded between his palms, pulsing out like the beat of a heart and filling the room, wall to rafter and back. The witch threw open the door letting him wrestle the star out into the dark of the bottom. The spreading spikes of light lit their world from bottom to top and back again.

She didn't have long, but Mama said, "My good boy." And then she followed the light.



Embrace Your Magic

Adrianna “Kaya” Clark



Watching the Turtle Race

Alex Benke

We're out on the patio of that bar where they race turtles. The turtles bonk into each other and above us, behind a dusty evening, stars bonk into each other. The air is beery and there are the usual gold lights, red cigarette embers, chocolatey stouts in sweating glasses. I lean against you and smell iron and I know. I've known for a while.

*

Manhattan Beach, where I grew up, had been overrun with vampirism. In high school I had watched the epidemic, standing at its edge, wanting it to take me and yet, leaning back. It was a pleasure I couldn't deserve. I didn't love or hate myself enough. And that was when I fantasized about saving my family from other demons. I really thought I could, back then. So I just watched and wrote stories about vampires, hunching over a notebook, one hand scrabbling

a pen across a page and the other clutching my tits, one tit at a time.

In my muted sexuality, I rehearsed falling in love with vampires and resisting. I conjured strangers that smelled like iron, that walked on skinny legs because they were always skinny back then, easier to identify. They were full-blooded vampires we watched out for, cartoons of themselves, pale and all that. I imagined falling in love with this vampire stranger and telling him to leave me alone. I got so good at it I'm convinced my vision learned to delete them before they could register in my brain. I walked near vampires, I loved the places and things that they loved, but I passed them without a flinch.

I practiced falling in love with thicker people, juicier and warmer people. I wrote them into the blanks of my fantasies, when I allowed fantasies at all. In my stony isolation, I practiced handling a safe love.

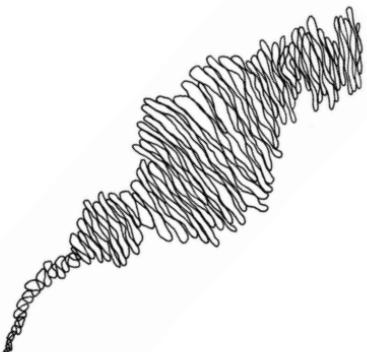
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That was a decade ago. I'm sexual now. I don't feel bad letting coffee slosh across my knuckles because I need it, want it, and like it. I drink beer when I don't even want to, and sometimes when I want to, I don't. My desires so carefully pruned over the years, I let them blossom. It's time. I invited you in because you were juicy and lively, the way you sneered with joy at record stores, and got jumpy around kids in a fun way. You had tits and a beard and were soft and wore flannel that I wanted to polish hard with my face.

We're a long way from Manhattan Beach, in this town with packs of wild dogs. The vampirism isn't out here—vamps have clustered in cities, now that there are resources—urban blood bars, vegan synthetics. I see them on TV hosting shows. They aren't all skinny twins anymore, but I don't trust them. I've seen bodies. They've given me looks. The dangerous ones are famous, and the contained ones, hybrids, are ghostwritten up by new memoirists. They

still haven't figured out how it's spread. It's not in the water or air. It's not from biting, like in Buffy. We all wondered if some just willed it to be.

You and I live out here among the wild dogs. They are plenty. We are watching the turtles and as I smell the iron on you, I imagine a dog cracking through a turtle's shell as though it were chocolate. I imagine green skin liquifying. I can feel a wild dog's hair on my teeth. I taste iron. The packs of wild dogs have been thinning. I hadn't wanted to notice. You are so warm, on this bar patio. I willed it to be.



The Father and the Son

Tiffany Niles

The night was cooler than the scorching afternoon. It was a nice contrast; the wet cold against his restless skin. Arthur wasn't surprised he had ended up here for the third night in a row. He liked the quiet. His journey out to the cemetery started with him sneaking out of his second story window, down the rusted over water pipe to the fresh sting of thorns as the rose bushes attacked his legs where he landed. There was no other way out of the house without being noticed, so he put up with the discomfort. By the time the aches faded he was trudging through the roses again on his way back up the pipe. It was a new ritual he had grown weary of.

Arthur's walks yielded nothing but time away to enjoy the solitude that darkness brought anyone who was drawn to it. Arthur enjoyed the stillness of sound as everyone tucked themselves away in their beds to enjoy a peaceful night's sleep. He remembered when he was a few years younger, and life was a lot harder; he envied their peace. Coveted it. Now he felt pity. If only they could

know how serene the world was when there was no one to impose one's will on. Looking up to the towering gate that led to the cemetery's back entrance, Arthur mapped his way up through the ivy that had taken over the gates once magnificent visage. Rust had stained the sparkling metal, and the elaborate gargoyle face in the center had eroded away to an emerald color. Crawling under the gate wear the asphalt had worn away, Arthur made his way to the furthest point of the cemetery. He had started to call it The Land of the Forgotten; the oldest part of that place. Where the headstones barely stood above the tall grass because they were almost two hundred years old. It fascinated Arthur; the business of the dead.

Approaching one of the last standing headstones, Arthur stopped in his tracks. A man—if he could call it that—was weeping as he looked out over the expanse of the town below the hill where they were. His coat was in tatters, his hair stringy and wet. Arthur couldn't make out his face, but his sheer size was intimidating.

A foot snapping a twig brought the man's attention to him. Arthur's heart raced in his chest.

“Who's there?”

The man's voice was deep and different. He sounded educated, but Arthur couldn't figure out how he could be considering the way he was dressed. Smart people didn't look like him.

“I can hear your breathing,” he said.

Arthur's caught in his throat causing him to choke. In a rush of speed, the man was standing before him and Arthur fought to control his face reacting to the horror he saw in front of him. Towering over him was no more a man than the men buried beneath his feet. His flesh, the little he had, was stretched and putrid; held together by red twine. The skin itself was multicolored and looked as if it had been pieced together from multiple puzzles. His reddened eyes

looked angry with accusation.

“Who are you?”

“My name is Arthur.”

The man’s face contemplated his response then he turned back towards where he had been perched before he was disturbed. He didn’t know why, but Arthur felt a pull to follow so he did.

The man flinched away from his proximity, so Arthur made sure to settle where he was and keep still.

“What’s your name?” Arthur asked

He refused to look away from the moonlit horizon.
“I do not have one.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am without a name.”

“Didn’t your father give you one?” Arthur couldn’t understand how someone as old as this thing had no name, yet he himself did.

The man pulled his tattered coat around himself as best he could. Shielding himself from his own truth as he spoke. “No.”

“What about your father? Does he have a name?” Arthur asked.

“I never knew it.”

“And you don’t know yours?”

“He never gave me one,” the creature said solemnly.

“How does a father not name his own son?”

Arthur didn’t understand how they ended up on this conversation. The man started weeping again as Arthur sat there with no sense of what to do. Eventually tiring of the sobs, Arthur put a flat hand on its shoulder. The

small gesture shattered whatever communion the nameless stranger had been having with himself. His reddened eyes looked around in a fright and only calmed when they took in Arthur's presence. Arthur felt beholden to him then. Perhaps he was too young to understand the gravity of it all. He took in a shallow breath, remembering not to breathe too deeply unless he wanted his sensitive nose bombarded with the smell of rot coming from the vile monstrosity next to him. Arthur found it strange that someone as old as the man would be nameless. Even boys like him had names. Neither of them were near infancy of any kind. He should have had a name to be properly addressed.

He didn't know why he said it. The words seemed to crawl unhindered from his throat. "Would you like me to name you?"

Arthur's innocent question seemed to pierce something in the misshapen man's chest because he winced at the offer as if he had been burned by fire. Arthur knew that response well. He had reacted the same towards anyone who offered him anything with kindness. It was a sad scene, even for a child Arthur's age. He knew a thing or two of sadness, even if some would say he shouldn't have. Adults rarely knew the cruelty of boys before they grew into men.

"It seems the thing a father should do...name his boy," the man said with pride as if convincing himself that the man—his father—would be along any minute to claim his misplaced property.

Arthur had grown to hate that look. He often had it himself while waiting long hours in the Adirondack fall for his father to remember he had a son to pick up from school. Arthur often walked home long after the sun had set, wrapped in an inadequate amount of clothing for late October. The disappointment from his father that Arthur had managed to make it home yet again shown plainly on his drunken face as Arthur, frozen from head to toe, walked

through the front door near death. Arthur wanted to tell the weeping man that he was being foolish, waiting for a man who had clearly abandoned him, but Arthur refrained. His anger was for his own circumstances. This pieced together man was far more fragile than he.

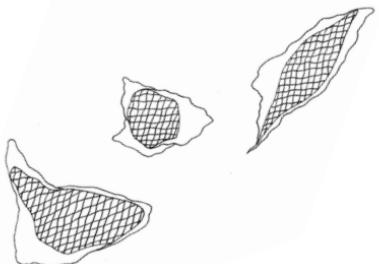
“Well, if you change your mind...” Arthur left the suggestion in the air. Allowing the man the time to ease into the disappointment that would eventually arrive. It always did. If this fatherless, nameless man wanted to one day leave the safety of the dead and walk amongst the living, he would need to know that feeling best of all. “Would you like me to wait with you? To keep you company?”

The way the man’s stretched face lit up at the suggestion of friendly assistance broke Arthur’s jaded heart. He was so young and aware of the world, and here this old, crippled, sewn together thing was like a child Arthur never got to be. Arthur would have envied the man had he not known what such naivety would do to the most innocent of hearts. But again, he kept his bitterness to himself and sat quietly and waited for a father that would never come.



Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing

Anthony Grimaldi



Gloria and Her Biomes

Madi Giovina

There is a lady eating barnacles at the bus stop. Why is she eating barnacles at the bus stop? I am not sure, so I do the obvious thing: I ask her.

I say, “Lady, why are you eating barnacles at the bus stop?” and the lady opens her mouth and she shows me that her body is an aquarium, and she is feeding the barnacles to the big Brachyura, to the Red King crabs. And I say, “Wow! I’ve never seen an aquarium so enclosed before,” and “I didn’t know that crabs eat barnacles.”

“You don’t know much of anything, do you?” The lady asks me, the first words out of her aquarium-filled mouth. I had expected them to sound muffled, or gurgled, but no, they are just normal words, sounding as words do when they leave a mouth, aquarium-filled or not.

“I guess I don’t.” I say. “I don’t know what I don’t know, though, so maybe I know more than I think I don’t know, you know?”

The lady says, “Follow me,” and then she says, “and please, call me Gloria,” only this time it did sound a little gurgled, and I am pretty sure I saw some salt water dribble down her cheek when she said “Gloria,” but she turned away from me before I could be sure.

I follow Gloria and we end up at a lake. At least I think it’s a lake, but it could also be the inside of some other lady’s body, so I don’t want to assume anything. Gloria looks out over it, and I try to mimic her, to see what she sees, but ahead of me is only water. I want to know what she sees, so I do the obvious thing: I ask her. I say, “Lady—I mean—Gloria, what do you see out there on that big lake?”

Gloria looks at me, and she says, “Dinner.”

I laugh, but it is a short laugh, because Gloria immediately makes her way to the water. She dives into the lake, her gray head of hair first, mouth wide, and feet ebbing like a mermaid. I wonder if she *is* a mermaid, if she traded an internal organ for human legs, like they do in the movies.

Before I can wonder any more, Gloria comes back to shore. She burps a small dainty burp and a crayfish flies out. It lands on the ground in front of me, and Gloria nods towards it. I pick it up and the crayfish squirms in my hand.

I never really liked fish: they are too salty, and I would rather have something sweet, like fruit, a raspberry, maybe, if given the choice. Sometimes my mom makes tilapia for dinner and I pretend to eat it but really I sneak it onto my older sister’s plate.

I flick the crayfish back into the lake.

“What are you doing?” Gloria asks me.

“I don’t know,” I say. “What do you want me to do?”

Gloria looks at me. “Well, I wanted you to return that little guy home,” and when she says “home,” she opens her mouth again, tide as high as ever, “but it’s a bit late for

that. Speaking of home, let's bring you back.“

Gloria walks me back to the bus stop. I'm not sure where the barnacles are, and I'm not sure I want to know. I go home and try to tell my mom and sister about Gloria and her aquarium-filled mouth and the lake and the crayfish but my sister yawns and my mom is too focused on cooking us a Crockpot dinner so she just says: “That's nice sweetie. I'm glad you had a good day.”

After school the next day, I wait and wait for Gloria at the bus stop, but she never shows. Two days later, I walk to the lake, but Gloria is not there, and the lake is less big than I remember.

I mostly forget about Gloria and her barnacles, until one night my mom cooks tilapia, and I try again to tell her the story. But even though she isn't focused on cooking dinner anymore, she still just says: “That's nice sweetie. I'm glad you had a good day.”

I don't even bother pretending to eat the fish she's cooked, and I go to bed hungry, plate full of tilapia still on the kitchen table.

A few months later, I finally see Gloria again at the bus stop, only this time she is not eating barnacles—she is spitting out sand.

I say, “Gloria, why are you spitting out sand?”

Gloria tries to answer, I can tell she is trying because her lips are parting and her tongue is hitting the roof of her mouth but nothing loud enough to hear comes out. I wonder again if she *is* a mermaid, if she too traded her voice for human legs, like they do in the movies. Before I can wonder any more, Gloria spits out more sand and a few shells. I can only see the back of her head now, she is leaning over the bench of the bus stop, spilling and spitting shore all over the sidewalk. I rub her back, but that feels wrong, so I give her space.

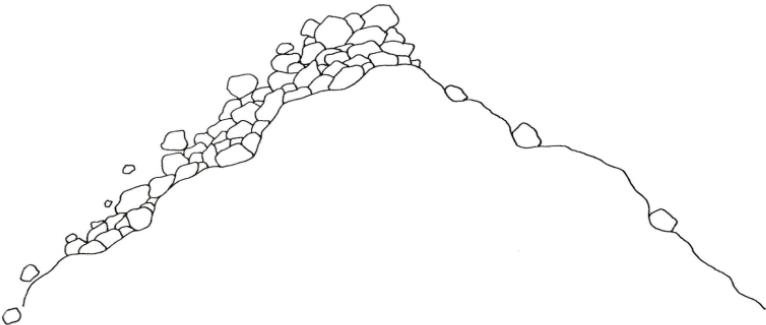
Eventually Gloria looks up at me, and I can see waves in her eyes. “Drought,” she says. I motion for her to open her mouth. I peer in, and she is right, her body is no longer an aquarium: it is a drought. I see a few small crabs, (no Red Kings), but it is mostly sand all of the way down.

“Follow me,” I say and I grab her hand and lead her to the lake. When we get there, it is not a lake at all, but a field of mud. “Ah,” I say. Gloria nods.

I think of how much shells must hurt on the way up the esophagus and out the throat, and I feel for Gloria, I really do. I wonder if it feels like when I had strep throat, or if it feels even worse.

I wish I had a lake to give her. I think about the water cycle, and how I don’t know where all of the lake water could have gone, if it’s not down here and it’s not in the clouds, and I think about how I know more than I did when I first met Gloria, but I still don’t know what I don’t know.

Gloria walks me back to the bus stop, and waves goodbye as I head home. The next time I see Gloria is a few months later. She is at the bus stop as expected, and this time she is sucking on shrubs and soaking up sun. Before I can ask her why she is sucking on shrubs and soaking up sun, she opens her mouth to show me.



Toward Country's End

Aline-Mwezi Niyonsenga

“Turagiye gu-cutting-a ama-trees to build ama-houses.”

Claps and cheers welcome the statement. Cameras flash on expensive cuffs, making Mama wa Beatrice’s eyes water.

Justin switches off the television screen. His awkward cough echoes in the wide concrete space that used to be an engineering lab, before the new government moved the national university from Kure to the capital. Before the war.

Kure used to be the university city, far from the capital, and far from politics, but you can guess that the government likes to keep everyone close and their opinions closer these days. Everyone except the peasant farmers, because what use are they to a growth-centered, booming economy? Now Kure is a ghost town, abandoned by investors and politicians alike. Abandoned, that is, until today.

Three people face a blank television screen in the

middle of the dusty carcass that used to be the University of Kure.

The first person, Justin, is a pharmacist from across the lake. His PhD thesis found a natural remedy for malaria in the very forests around his home, abundant throughout the vast, mineral-rich lands of his country, Kindigihugu. What should have been superb news garnered grave warnings. His supervisor claimed that his results would not be published anywhere so long as pharmaceutical companies held sway over the continent. Aid agencies would have his throat. Justin laughed it off back then, but now he's in Gihugu.

The second person is an architect, a young woman who went to school in the capital but rolled her eyes at the lack of creativity in her faculty. Everything was *abazungu* this and *abazungu* that: imported designs from foreigners who ignored any native idea. No one considered the environmental ramifications of such designs. Instead, the architect's peers made vision boards of the luxury cars they would get out of a career designing resorts near the lake, and perhaps even across it.

The architect's name is Beatrice, the daughter of Mama wa Beatrice, or rather the third person gathered here: that is, the witch.

“What in Gihugu did the man say?” Mama wa Beatrice snaps at her daughter.

“They’re going to cut the forest around our *rugo*—our home—or through it anyway,” Beatrice sighs. “Just when plans were going so well.”

She’s referring to her eco-utopia: a sustainable village of interconnected treehouses that extends into a cluster of traditional huts. Electricity would be generated by solar panels and other forms of renewable energy, and there would be a small area of communal farmland that changes location every year. That or the farmland would be replaced

by hanging gardens. Beatrice hasn't worked that bit out yet. Even so, plans are already underway to start construction—or rather re-struction—of the forest around their *rugo*. Beatrice's team already has two Kure investors wishing to get an edge on the capital and a small group of broke men wishing to provide for their families. "They're closing in on me," Justin mutters. "First my village, now the forest. They won't stop."

"*Ceceka*," Beatrice shushes. "This is why my mother is here, to help us."

She rubs his shoulder, humming to him like a bird. Mama wa Beatrice snorts at the ridiculous display. This is why she gave up on men, always hungry for support, their bottomless need for it.

"Whatever this *gu-cutting-a* business is, the forest won't let them do it," Mama wa Beatrice announces. She grunts in her attempt to rise from her chair. Her daughter stands to help, but she smacks her hand away.

Beatrice rolls her eyes. "How does the forest plan on stopping them?"

Mama wa Beatrice raises an eyebrow. Did she not teach her as a little girl? Did everything vanish from her daughter's head as soon as she stepped foot in that boarding school? Did she not *see* anymore?

"Ha!" Mama cries, halfway between a laugh and a wail. "You will see."

*

Seeing is a trait that all people of Gihugu have. Maybe even the *abazungu* had it at one point. Now everyone is blind with greed, only concerned with what they can take from each other and bleed from the land beneath, rather than what they can bargain.

To *see* is to notice the world around you. To *see* is to know your connection to that world. To *see* is to feel the

stillest object breathe. Hear it speak. Then you can bargain.

Mama wa Beatrice knows how to bargain. She burns a bit of grass here in exchange for growth later, strips some bark here in exchange for stripping a rival bare. She gathers herbs for medicine against pain, colds, flus, and the odd snakebite. Hunting for cures against snake venom is her favorite pastime, and today she brings Justin along for the ride.

They crouch behind tall grasses, watching two snakes fight. Justin flinches at the sight of them biting into each other, but Mama watches intensely.

"See the one spitting venom? We want the remedy for *that*—the naja, enemy of all women. Watch where his opponent goes. Follow it and grab whatever plants it chews."

The snakes separate in a hissing fury and Justin follows the naja's opponent. Adjusting the heavy pack on her shoulder, Mama wa Beatrice pursues the naja.

Her movements are quicker in the forest, more fluid, swift. It's the city that makes her arthritic. Here, the forest sustains her, just as she sustains it. Can her daughter even accomplish that, with all her re-struction stupidity?

She follows the naja until it stops at a wide clearing abundant in herbs. It chews on the herbs to counter the opponent's venom. Mama kneels behind the naja and rummages inside her pack for a gourd of milk. She places it before her and waits.

The naja turns its head and hisses before sliding towards the open gourd in interest. Raising its head high as if to spray Mama with venom, it instead ducks inside the gourd. Sucking sounds echo for a long time before the snake emerges, hissing softly.

"Milk, witch, you brought me milk," it rasps. "I am the enemy of all women and you bring me milk."

The naja burps in her face. How Mama hates najas.

“Your home is in danger,” she says. “Humans come with tree-cutting, ground-flattening machines to bury your burrow. I came to warn you, should you choose to flee or fight.”

The snake hisses in short bursts, laughing. “Ah, then I choose to flee. Did you come here in the hopes of persuading me to fight—AGH!”

The naja writhes uncontrollably, bounding towards the herbs it just ate to chew frantically. They cure nothing.

“What have you done to me, witch?”

Mama wa Beatrice holds up a vial of muddy liquid.

“I can give you the remedy here if you promise to fight for your home.”

“How can I trust you?” The snake spits venom but it lands way off to the side of Mama. She does not even flinch.

“Well, you have no choice now, do you?”

“Fine!” The naja chokes. “Give it to me. I will fight. Give it!”

Mama pours the liquid inside the gourd and waits for the naja to leap inside, slurping frantically at the foul mixture. After a long moment, the naja emerges, languidly sliding towards its burrow.

“This is not the way to bargain, witch, but I am now too weak to flee. I will fight.”

Mama allows herself a small smile. What the naja says is true, but then again, she hates najas.

*

After making more amicable overtures to trees, rocks and the odd lion, Mama exhausts her gifts and arrives at her *rugo* at sundown.

Beatrice stands anxious at the door, wiping her hands on a kitchen apron while seeing off a group of men in a mixture of dirty t-shirts and two suits.

“I was worried sick,” she scolds Mama. “Where do you think you are going with your arthritis?”

Mama waves her off, more interested in the rare, luxurious smell of goat stew. She sucks her teeth. The lengths her daughter goes to keep these broke and desperate men interested in her silly project. In the growing darkness, she spots a table with plans pinned down on it, an axe and even a concrete mixer. Silly, silly girl.

After dinner, Beatrice sulks over her eco-utopia designs. Mama doesn’t really understand the designs, aside from the fact that they are silly, but Beatrice persists in asking her for advice.

“Mama, if Kure had one area of communal farmland, then we can build *rugo* like ours but with proper plumbing, then build a well here and store electricity using solar panels, or do you think we’re close enough to the volcano that we can invest in geothermal energy?”

Beatrice shoves some fancy *abazungu*-stinking designs under her nose. Mama flings them in the fire.

“Mama!” Beatrice shrieks.

“What makes you different from those *abazungu*, eh? Tell me!”

“I’m using their technology and our local know-how to make something better,” Beatrice explains. “When those idiots in the capital see what can be done, how a place as destitute as Kure can prosper without this stupid economy, can be both environmentally sustainable and self-sufficient—”

“Who taught you about self-sufficient?” Mama cries. “Who taught you about bargaining with the forest?”

“That doesn’t work on a large-scale, Mama.” Beatrice sweeps her hand across the room as if to indicate all of Gihugu. “Our population is beyond that. Everyone is too busy taking. We need to show them something they will understand.”

“We don’t need to do anything those *abazungu* recommend.”

“But they have some good ideas. I’m just trying to combine—”

“No! You are simply not listening to me. You never listen.” Mama’s lips tremble. “You and your father both, that that government of ours, the one before and after the war.” She presses her lips together. “You never listen to me.”

Beatrice’s plans crackle in the fireplace. Mama breaks the standoff, packing more gifts to bargain with the night beasts.

*

Scouts alert Mama wa Beatrice of the developers approaching. She turns in her bed, chuckling.

The developers arrive at the edge of the forest with high hopes and full pockets. First, there’s a problem with the rocks. They won’t budge. Trunks and branches seem to press and twine around each other in an impenetrable thicket. And the snakes! They come in droves and droves, making the workers scared to come out of their vehicles.

Some workers report hearing low growls in the afternoon and find claw marks on one of the bulldozers. Several abandon the site.

Night hunts the rest.

Mama wa Beatrice splits her sides laughing with the flitting *inyamanza* that chirp these developments to her. It seems her naja ally has even managed to steal the work-

ers' food in all the chaos. Silly glutton. She's too lost in her guffaws to notice Beatrice standing at the open door of their *rugo*, her mouth in a straight line.

"Mama, it's no use."

Mama's smile fades into a frown. The men her daughter hired shuffle around her, dragging their legs and drooping faces towards Kure. Her daughter blinks back tears.

"They're burning down the forest," Beatrice sniffles. "Razing it to the ground."

Mama wa Beatrice doesn't answer. Silence stretches between them, so long that it is enough for a skilled painter to draw a landscape between them, a picture of a small *rugo* in the foreground and a field of grasses beyond. Those grasses used to be a forest. Their forest. Their old forest. Old home. Before the war.

"Take Justin with you," Mama croaks. "Go back across the lake. That boy says his village is gone. Surely there are people left."

"Across the lake? Mama, you know how hard—"

"Ceceka, there's already a passage. You should at least recognize it, or are you not a daughter of mine?"

Beatrice presses her lips together and goes to fetch Justin.

Left alone, Mama wa Beatrice sinks into an old chair at the edge of the *rugo*, one that her late husband carved for her. It has a black ash mark on it. The fool. Run out to save it in the fire. The young fool.

Hers is a better age to die. She lived to see her daughter grow into a somewhat capable woman, which is all she needs. Pray to Imana that daughter doesn't produce a silly-headed baby like herself. Pray...pray that she is safe.

Mama wa Beatrice stumbles towards the forest,

then steadies herself, regaining a sense of purpose to her steps. Following the whisper of *inyamanza* in the trees, faithful messengers guiding her always, she walks until her bare feet touch the rich volcanic soil near the foot of the mountain. There, bushes part to take her inside a secret nook where an ancient tree radiates power. Its gnarled trunk twists into branches that bear golden leaves, some of which swirl softly towards her feet. She places a hand on the trunk and closes her eyes, thinking of the story behind its ancient bark: the story of Karisimbi and Mikeno.

Queen Mikeno and her daughter Karisimbi loved each other deeply. One day, a giant crystal naja whisked Karisimbi away to his underground kingdom and forced her to marry him. The naja was a terrible monster that spit flames out of the head of a volcano, terrorizing those beneath. Separated from her mother, Karisimbi despaired.

The young princess soon realized that her naja husband was actually a man cursed to wear the naja's snakeskin. Karisimbi—not unlike Beatrice—was clever and tenacious. She held her husband's snakeskin hostage until he broke himself free of his curse. Karisimbi rushed to see her mother again but knew she could only ever visit now that she was queen of the underground kingdom. Overjoyed to see her daughter again, Queen Mikeno promised to one day join Karisimbi in her new home.

The day she came to her daughter's domain, Queen Mikeno stood before the same tree that Mama wa Beatrice leans against now. The witch smiles to herself. If she is to die here, today or tomorrow, or as soon as her daughter leaves the country, she will surely join the underground kingdom.

Once there, she might meet Karisimbi and Mikeno, or even that foolish husband of hers again. She might meet her forests there, the ones that abazungu and her people alike insist on burning down. She might travel far into the

underground kingdom's inner reaches and find where the freed king has hidden his cursed snakeskin. She might even put it on herself, turn into a colossal crystal naja and spit fire so high it blankets Gihugu with ash.

Here is the witch's final bargain: death for new life.



¡Buen Provecho Jíbare!
Amarise Carreras



El Cuello de sus Santos

Amarise Carreras

A POEM IN HONOR OF NTOZAKE SHANGE

Doriana Gabrielle Diaz

I found god in myself too. she was hard to locate for a long time but one day she arrived inside my chest like an explosion of thunder. I felt her biting me. teeth lodged in sweat and skin. can you eat god? if so what does she taste like? she crept up along the backend of my spine, the soil was unkept. I opened my mouth anticipating her to come spilling out. but she wouldn't budge. she knows where she wants to stay. she knows herself, she changed me. she changed the way my blood runs. the way it

stops

curdles

and calls for magic.

i'm learning to fly, i'm learning to levitate myself. the fire starts and I drift into it.

for some reason it doesn't burn this time. It feels warm

...inviting.

my god has another name...she who walks with lions.

PART II /

ALL THAT

YOU

CHANGE



How to Build a Home for the End of the World

(an excerpt)

Keely Shinners

It was a quarter to three in the afternoon in Grant Park. There was a line about a half mile long between the Jerry Clyde Rubin (formerly General John Logan) Memorial and the Water Collection Point at Rosenberg Fountain. Mary-Beth had been waiting already for two hours. Young people shuffled the queue along. They wore puffy winter coats with the word *COLLECTIVE* embroidered on the back, and bright buttons that said, *No! The end's not near!* Mary-Beth watched them scribble away at their clipboards and shivered. She wondered how long she could wait.

One of the activists was drawing nearer. She looked a lot like Mary-Beth. Same mousy, blonde hair. And pale. But the activist walked and talked with an effortless, almost drowsy conviction, as if she were destined to inherit the world. Mary-Beth did not like that. She wanted the activist

to be more like her. More afraid.

“Name?” the activist asked the woman standing in front of Mary-Beth. The woman shook her head. The activist tried in another language. “Hana,” the woman replied. The activist spoke again. “Khartoum,” the woman replied. The activist asked another question, which made the woman, Hana’s, eyes water. Hana put her hand over her mouth. The activist put her hand on Hana’s shoulder, then scribbled something on her clipboard.



Figure 1

“Name?” the activist asked Mary-Beth without looking up.

Mary-Beth was distracted by the back of Hana’s head, the roses on her headscarf, fighting the desire to reach out and touch her shoulder as the activist had.

The activist spoke again in another language.

“Sorry,” Mary-Beth said. “My name is Mary-Beth Sorensen.”

“City of birth?”

“Fox Lake.”

“Which country is that in?”

Mary-Beth pointed in the direction from which she came. “It’s about sixty miles north.”

The activist raised her eyebrows. “No kidding.” The activist leaned in close and whispered, “And the lake?”

Mary-Beth shook her head.

The activist nodded.

“How much longer is it going to be?” Mary-Beth asked.

“These things take a long time,” the activist said. “Some people have been waiting for days.”

Days. Mary-Beth saw two sisters with matching beads in their hair, pretending to serve each other tea in small, Tinkerbell-printed cups. She heard a woman’s booming voice, auctioning off a few bags of Hot Cheetos. She watched a group of teenage boys huddle around a game of cards. Mary-Beth tried to follow the rules. All she noticed was that the boys who periodically rubbed their hands together did so as a means of cheating rather than staying warm. She wondered how they all managed to keep their pulse. She envied them.

Out of thin air, a siren song. Even though there were no longer police, the crowd shrunk instinctively. Men took their hands out of their pockets. The sisters each clutched a clump of fabric from their father’s jeans.

A pick up truck cut through the crowd, blasting Public Enemy. *Armageddon, it been in effect, go get a late pass.* Shoulders relaxed and foreheads smoothed out again. *This time around, the revolution will not be televised.* The truck drove straight towards the Jerry Clyde statue. Mary-Beth noticed, for the first time, that the memorial was bodi-

less, that the flag-bearing figure was not stone but a skinny girl in a black hoodie, waving a black flag. Consider *yourselves... Warned!* Mary-Beth watched the girl spring off her marble perch and pull the hoodie away from her face. Her hair spiraling from her scalp. Her mouth swelling into a radiant, gap-toothed smile.

Mary-Beth began to shiver. She tried to breathe. Her shivering did not stop. Something had erupted within her. It was like thunder, but not. It was like melting, but not. It was like being born, but not. It was like a warning, but not.

Two boys hopped out of the pickup truck and greeted the girl, kissing her on the cheek. They loaded the back of the pick up truck with a dozen water jugs. The girl gave the boys instructions, pointing south, left, and then right. Pointing home.

Mary-Beth's teeth chattered. She tucked her hands under her armpits, but still they would not stop trembling. She felt the strange desire to tear them off and give them away. The line shuffled forward, and Mary-Beth shuffled after them.

The boys drove away, leaving the girl with a bicycle and four water cooler containers, empty. Mary-Beth watched out of the corner of her eye as the girl carried the water coolers up the spine of the crowd. Eyes fixed forward, ignoring agitated rumblings behind her, the girl reached the front of the line and slid next to the nearest open tap.

Before Mary-Beth could think, she had her hand on the girl's faucet. "You can't do that," she said.

The girl pried Mary-Beth's hand away and let the water rush out, drumming against her empty container.

Mary-Beth turned the faucet again. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a Collective activist, hovering beside her, waiting for the girl to respond.

The girl looked up. Her eyes thick. “Do you want something?” she asked.

“You can’t do that,” Mary-Beth repeated, louder. “There are people who have been waiting here all day.”

“Who are you to tell me what it is to wait?”

“I saw you earlier. You have more than your fair share. There are families here,” said Mary-Beth.

“And my family?” asked the girl. She clicked her tongue against her cheek. She filled the rest of her water cooler. “Who will wait for them? Not you.”

Mary-Beth’s whole body shook. Inside, too. Her heart not just pounding but dislodging, ricocheting against her ribcage. Her speech came out broken. “That’s—that’s not how it works.”

“Listen,” said the girl, rising. “You know nothing about who I am. What I’ve been through. What I’m here for. How much I’ve lost and how much I stand to lose. I have work to do, and I don’t appreciate your holier-than-thou attitude. Either you can take your hand off my way and help me, or you can take your hand off my way and get on with your life” The girl turned her eyes from Mary-Beth. She bent down and started to fill another container.

Mary-Beth buried her hands in her pockets, helpless. It felt impossible that the girl should ignore her. It became equally impossible for Mary-Beth to turn away.

Mary-Beth looked up at the statue that guarded Rosenberg Fountain: Hebe the Goddess of Youth, daughter of Zeus, and cup-bearer to the gods. Her lips of stone. The small cup she pinched between her fingers empty. Mary-Beth thought about water. Water reaching. To what end, she did not know.

“Okay, then,” Mary-Beth said. “I’ll help you.”

“All right,” said the stranger, rolling her eyes. She

whispered so that the activist could not hear her. “Fill what you brought and come with me.”



Figure 2

*

Chicago was a desert, and cold. The sky carved sand dunes into the watershed where Lake Michigan used to be. The wind like a scalpel. The lake dissected by the sky. Two girls dragged 30 gallons of water down Lake Shore Drive on makeshift wagons attached to their bicycles. Scarves wrapped around their faces to dissuade the sand and wind.

“I’m Aida, by the way. Aida Parker,” said the stranger.

“My name is Mary-Beth.”

“So, you’re like two people at the same time.”

Mary-Beth loosened her scarf so that she could hear Aida better. “What?”

“You have two names. Mary and Beth. So it’s like being more than one person.”

“I never thought of it like that.” They took an exit and glided past old, gothic university buildings. “Where are we going?” asked Mary-Beth.

“Deliveries.”

“Deliveries where?”

“I don’t know who they think they’re helping,” Aida said. “Who’s going to haul ass all the way to the north side and stand in line for four hours in the cold? Uh uh.”

“The Collective?”

“Not very collective if you ask me. They just want to control. Control the water and you control everyone in this city.”

“They’re just trying to help,” said Mary-Beth. “Or things would be totally chaotic.”

Aida laughed. In her laugh there was something lonely and troubled. “I wouldn’t mind a bit more chaos around here.” Aida looked at Mary-Beth. Mary-Beth saw Aida scrunch her eyes. “Don’t trust anyone who thinks they sit on top of order. Chaos is the price you have to pay for power.”

Aida and Mary-Beth rounded a bend, and the street opened up. They bicycled towards the entrance to a spot where the neighborhood flattened suddenly, as if the tall, Victorian houses and wrought iron street lamps had collapsed beneath their own weight. Mary-Beth recognized the infrastructure of a park. Paths that curved and looped. Concrete skeletons of fountain heads and flower beds. But the landscape had been wastelanded. Devoid of oaks and cedars. Neither lagoons nor geese to swim in them. No music or barbecues or games of croquet. A silent place.

“Are you from around here?” Aida asked.

“Fox Lake. Have you heard of it?”

“Never heard of it.”

“It’s north of here. At the end of the train line.”

“What are you doing all the way down here?”

Mary-Beth sighed, not sure how much to divulge. She decided to say, simply, “Day Zero.”

“Shit,” says Aida. “How many of you are there?”

“Just me.”

“*Just you?*”

“Well, me and my family.”

“Just you and your family, up there in the middle of nowhere?”

“My parents grew up there. And their parents.”

Aida shook her head and clicked her tongue. “I’ll never understand white people. Why cage yourself up when you can have whatever you want?”

Mary-Beth mulled over that word. Cage. “My dad is a carpenter who remodels houses nobody lives in.”

Mary-Beth and Aida laughed together, and the laugh created something solid between them. “That’s ironic,” Aida said.

“*Ironic?*”

“The past he thinks he’s getting back to hasn’t ended yet.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean the past doesn’t de-escalate like we tend to believe it does. We live with its injuries.”

As if what Aida said was at all clarifying, Mary-Beth nodded her head.

Aida looked back at her and smiled again, with her

eyes.

"I bet you think we're in a goddamn park," Aida said. "This is a cemetery!" Her voice went flat as it traveled across the park's flat surface. "There are ghosts all around you!"

Aida pedaled faster and circled in front of Mary-Beth. She pointed to a series of sinkholes at the edge of the park. "There are some old white ladies, in their Sunday best, kicking off fishing season at the lagoon. Look how they lure their prey out from the depths with their pearl necklaces. Look how they giggle as the little fishy gets the kiss of death." She made a sucking, gasping sound. She pointed to a patch of ashy soil. "There's the spring cleaning crew, trimming down those pesky branches so the park looks pretty for the Northside picnickers. It's colder than ever this April, and their hands are bleeding from the tree bark. They're singing Nat King Cole." She broke her voice in half, growling out, "*Love me as if there were no tomorrow!* *Take me out of this world tonight!* If you listen closely, you can hear the sound of the symphony orchestra. They're playing Stravinsky. And above that noise the noise of Baptists singing *Let's go down to Jordan!* And above that noise of horseshoes spitting around an iron ring, and old men crowding around each other to chew the fat. And above that the sound of people dying." Aida's voice trailed off, becoming coarse.

Mary-Beth tried to hear the fish, the violins, and the singing. She thought she caught the sound of a whisper, for a moment, but it was just the unrelenting wind. She tried to hear the dying. She didn't know what sound to search for. More than anything, she felt desire flaming in her belly. Desire, and attached to that desire, an itching sense of fear.

At the corner of 51st and South Park, Mary-Beth watched Aida raise a triumphant middle finger at an old statue of George Washington. Each of them armed with

swords.



Figure 3

The houses on South King Drive looked just like the houses in Fox Lake, thought Mary-Beth, as Aida rang the doorbell. Only the houses on South King Drive made the houses in Fox Lake look small. It wasn't just because of the height of the buildings. In one window, the conal glow of a desk lamp. In another, children bickering. A Persian rug hung over a banister; its owner swat at it with a tennis racket. These were buildings. "Rags!" Aida banged on the door. "It's Aida!"

Many locks unhatched. A tall woman appeared in a plaid bathrobe. A Lucky Strike cigarette hung out of her mouth. "Aida, come in," she said, "It's freezing." Aida grabbed a water cooler and followed Rags inside. Mary-Beth waited on the porch, looking down at her shoes. Aida turned around and waved her hands. *Chill*, the hands said, *Come here*.

Mary-Beth walked through a corridor to a high-ceilinged room. Tapestries lined the lengths of each wall. In one, embroidered people danced. There was a ferris wheel, threaded smoke from a grill, fish in the river. Signs in the shop windows advertised hog liver and corn meal for 10 cents. In another, people trying to kill each other, and people dying, and people walking on unaware. Two blue swallows carried a banner in their mouths that read, *Please, let us have peace.*

“Do you like them?” asked Rags, exhaling on her face. The smoke smelled good, somehow clean, like clothes fresh from the dryer.

“They’re brilliant,” said Mary-Beth. “How long does it take you to make them?”

Rags leant against her cane and pointed to the tapestry behind Mary-Beth. “This one,” she said, “Took me almost seven years. But that’s because it brought up a lot of trauma for me. I had to take long breaks.”

Mary-Beth nodded, but then felt guilty. Mary-Beth had known people who had moved away, or disappeared, but no one who had died.

“This one, though.” Rags pointed to the brightly colored one. “I finished in eight months. Because it gave me hope.” She paused and smiled at Mary-Beth. “I also ended up with a lot of free time.”

“What are you going to do with them?” asked Mary-Beth.

“I don’t know.” Rags shrugged her shoulders. “I guess it doesn’t matter.”

“They’re beautiful.”

“That’s something.”

Aida came into the large room from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her coat. “Documentation is import-

ant,” she said. “People need to know their history.”

“It’s not like anybody’s out here burning books yet, Aida,” Rags said.

“Let the books burn. Half of them are written under bullshit pretenses.” She twirled the loose threads of one tapestry around her long, thin finger. “They don’t live in the world. This lives in the world.”

Rags rested her head against Aida’s shoulder. “Thank you,” she said. “And thank you for grabbing that for me.”

“It was easy,” Aida said. She winked at Mary-Beth. “I had help today.”

“No problem,” Mary-Beth said quietly, her face hot. She wasn’t sure if the wink was supposed to be congratulatory, or if it was a dare.

“Will I be seeing you tonight?” asked Rags. “There’s a party for Aida’s nanna. 100 years old. Can you believe it?”

Mary-Beth nodded, without thinking. Donny and Cora would be furious with worry if she didn’t come home. And yet, she couldn’t bear say no to Rags, and especially not to Aida.

“Why you keep looking at your shoes?” Aida asked.

Mary-Beth hadn’t noticed that she was caught on the staircase leading up to Rags’s door. “Sorry. I was thinking something my father said.” *Maybe that’s what took em. Away from me.*

“Today has only just begun.” Aida pedaled away. The water buckets clanged against each other, like a heart-beat, blood pumping through a plastic organ. *Buh bump.* Aida braked halfway down the street when she realized Mary-Beth wasn’t behind her. “What’s your issue?” she called.

Water. Water reaching. Mary-Beth felt on the edge of going under. She shook her head.

"Remember that you volunteered for this experience. You agreed to get in over your head."

Mary-Beth sighed, descended the stairs, and mounted her bicycle. Her eyes on her own hands.

*

All the roads between 51st and 63rd had the same names as those in the Loop. South Michigan. South Wabash. South State Street. As if the whole of Washington Park were a mirror for the North Side. Aida took Mary-Beth to many houses between them, each populated by curators of their own eclectic worlds. An old drunk who shrunk beside his huge vats of dandelion wine. A young woman who claimed to be possessed by the ghost of Lorraine Hansberry, reciting lines from *A Raisin in the Sun*. Someone who had collected the April page from every calendar since 1976. Mary-Beth was startled by the sound of growling dogs when they rang one house's doorbell, but it turned out to be only a recording, warding strangers astray.

All of them were so happy to see Aida. At each threshold, they gave kisses, or embraces, or tins of treats. Aida remembered all their names, checked up on their relatives, agitations, and ailments. Mary-Beth was astounded by this commitment to care. Mary-Beth wondered how Aida took care of herself. Desperately, though she didn't know why, or how, Mary-Beth wanted to be the one to take care of her.

Slowly, the sun waned. The night, magnetic, clung to their bodies, growing colder.

They pulled up to a squat brownstone, shingles peeling off its roof. Mary-Beth assumed it must have been Aida's house, the way her shoulders dropped as they pulled into the driveway. The windows glowed, warm and feath-

ery. Silhouettes appeared and retreated from behind a set of lace curtains. Voices rambled into one another.

Inside, there were more people than Mary-Beth had ever seen. Or could remember seeing. Pots boiled on all four burners. Four women attended to them, laugh-yelling and wiping beads of sweat away from their hairlines, stirring fiercely with wooden spoons. A stack of mink, down, and leather coats spilled from the closet in the corridor. Aida and Mary-Beth side-stepped the pile, and their shoulders touched. Mary-Beth giggled and then pursed her lips, worried that she had made a mistake. Aida turned and smiled.

The hallway opened up onto a sunroom. A dining table built for twelve was seating twenty, at least. Men sat around a game of Scrabble, and children ran around them, playing salon, pinning clothespins in their hair. One of the children tried to steal frosting from the carrot cake at the center of the table—*Happy Birthday, Gigi*, it read, in pink—but a French manicured hand swiped her hand away. The child ran off, and the manicured woman scooped a nailful of frosting for herself. It was Rags. She winked at Mary-Beth before returning to her conversation. The women there were snapping and *mhmming* at each other “Who gets to be proprietor of the future?” Snap. “Who deserves the future’s inheritance?” Mhmm. Aida pulled up another chair to speak with them. They exchanged double-kisses on the cheek.

Mary-Beth stood behind, too shy, or too embarrassed, to introduce herself. She searched around the crowded room. There was a mirror hanging crookedly off a faded wallpaper wall. Mary-Beth jumped. She did not recognize herself. Or, she almost could, but the image looked off, as if she were seeing herself from upside down. Below the mirror, an old man sat beside a compact stereo. It was playing Bessie Smith. *It's a long old road, but I'm gonna find the end.* He pressed his ear against the speaker and tapped his middle finger against his knee.

Aida grabbed Mary-Beth's wrist and lead her into yet another room, a big living room shrunken by the density of furniture in it. Mary-Beth figured there must have been at least twelve different sofas, in different iterations of floral trim. They were arranged like booths in a restaurant, and Aida crawled around them with the effortlessness of a life-long maître d', smiling her generous gap-toothed grin.

Someone tugged at Mary-Beth's jeans. "Come sit with us, dear." A group of three women—they looked like sisters, each in cat-eye-framed glasses—scooched over to make room for Mary-Beth.

"That's okay," said Mary-Beth. She tried to perch on the arm of the sofa, but the women were insistent. They pulled her arm and plopped her down between them.

"That's better," they said. Mary-Beth was suctioned between their arms, which were fat but somehow dainty, like soft-boiled eggs. They were busy mending what looked like one extra-long pair of stockings.

"Do you know our Aida?" one of the women asked.

"I just met her. But she's incredible." Mary-Beth didn't mean to use a word so strong as that. She would have liked to say *nice*, or *cool*, or even *great* but *incredible* just slipped out.

"That's our Aida." The women beamed.

An old woman was seated in the center of the party, rocking back and forth in her rocking chair. She was ferociously thin. Wisps of her grey hair jutted out from all angles. And yet, she was so graceful, so in control, that she did not look frail. Her skin was wrinkleless, as if she had commanded the skin not to sag. Aida leaned down to speak with her. The old woman chuckled and gripped Aida's wrist. Aida adjusted the silk of her robe, grateful, it seemed, for all the women this woman was before now.

"I'm guessing that's Gigi," said Mary-Beth to the

ladies.

"100 years old. Can you believe it?"

Someone arrived with the birthday cake. One hundred candles blazed. Mary-Beth could feel their heat. A chorus of "Happy Birthday" erupted through the house, hummed rather than sung. Many eyes closed on the final note, lingering silently, as if in prayer. Many children vied for the pleasure of blowing out as many candles as they could. Gigi looked on with a logic of her own.

A man entered the room holding two bottles of Dom Pérignon. He shouted, "Look what the cat dragged in!" Everyone cheered.

The man pulled Mary-Beth off the sofa and handed her the champagne bottle. She stood there, motionless, gripping the bottleneck at arm's length, panicked. Aida took it from her, laughing and shaking her head. In one elegant motion, with the flick of a fingernail, the cork flew into the air, bounced off the ceiling, between the sofas, around the family. They cheered as a stream of sour foam poured onto the carpet. They passed the bottles around. The three sewing ladies, the Bessie Smith lover, even thirteen-year-old children and Gigi herself, all sneezed and giggled at each fizzy gulp.

Someone handed the bottle to Aida, and she chugged it. The snapping women snapped for her. Mary-Beth watched, enraptured. A few bubbles escaped out the corner of her eye and melted down her cheek. She removed the bottle from her lips and let out a throat-sick sigh.

Aida handed the bottle to Mary-Beth. She sipped tentatively, shocked by its bitter taste. She tried to smile it off, but the head rush that followed made her dizzy. Where was she? Who were these people? She scanned the crowd of faces, which throughout the evening had felt so familiar to her, so much like half-memories of her own, and saw only strangers. The way faces in dreams could, at any moment,

lose their substance completely. She began, again, to shake.

Mary-Beth hurtled herself through the party, down the corridor, and out the door. She needed to get home. Now. She cursed the night which, without motive, had swallowed her whole, alienated her from her own life, her lineage, her responsibility. She imagined her mother, wide-eyed in bed, jumping at any semblance of a sound that might mean Mary-Beth finally made it home. She imagined her father, grumbling obscenities, scratching unconsciously, pacing up and down the halls. How could she have gotten so sidetracked, so lost, so out of control?

As she mounted her bicycle, preparing to leave, Aida ran out the door. Mary-Beth turned and began to explain herself. “I’m sorry, I—” but Aida walked right past her, her hand on her stomach, and ran to the vacant lot across the street. Mary-Beth set her bike down and followed her.

Aida was doubled over, throwing up. Froth surged out of her until it left nothing more than a choking sound. Mary-Beth rubbed soft circles on her back.

“It’s okay,” Mary-Beth whispered. “I’m here. It’s okay.”

Aida spit a few times before she regained composure. She wiped the sweat off her forehead and the snot from her nose. Gallantly, she burped.

“I’m sorry you had to see that,” she said, smiling.

“I don’t mind,” said Mary-Beth. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Aida spit again. “But not fine. I have a condition. Something gastrointestinal. I get ulcers. I can’t digest most things. Including—and especially—alcohol.” She laughed at herself.

“Then why did you—”

“I don’t like to deny myself things.”

“Does it hurt?”

“All the time.”

“Then how do you—”

Aida shook her head. “You just get on.”

Mary-Beth couldn’t think of what to say. She folded her arms across her chest. She felt terrible for Aida. She felt sorry for her, but the feeling was more serious than pity. Mary-Beth wondered how Aida must have suffered, how strong she had become. It filled Mary-Beth with despair. How could it be, for a girl she had just met, under circumstances that appeared to be no fault of her own, that Mary-Beth was brought to despair?

“Should I... How can I help?” asked Mary-Beth.

“Weren’t you just leaving?”

Mary-Beth caught her breath and clenched her fist. “I said what I meant this morning. I’m not going to back out now.”

Aida smiled. “Good.” She grabbed Mary-Beth’s hand and led her back into the house.

*

By then, the crowd was so engrossed in their belly-belching and chitter-chattering to notice Aida cut through them and lead Mary-Beth up the staircase. The steps were narrow and slippery, so Mary-Beth tripped all the way up. The two of them laughed harder every time she fell.

Aida brought Mary-Beth to a floor with many rooms, each of them full of clothes, blankets, pillows, and rugs. Mary-Beth wondered how many people lived here. How nice it would be to wake up to so much noise in the morning.

They passed through a bathroom to a closet-sized bedroom. Mary-Beth looked back into the bathroom again, incredulous. The bathtub was entirely full of sand.

Aida closed the door and switched on a lamp. The

room seemed altogether ordinary. A mattress tangled in white sheets. A few carpet stains. Socks strewn here and there. But the walls were covered with something strange. Mary-Beth got closer. Maps. Mary-Beth recognized one that illustrated Aida's delivery route, with names and small notes for each block (Estellina – small bottles only, nothing too heavy; Mr. & Mrs. Sampson – make sure cats are being fed). Another listed historical events and where they took place (November 1870, Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable becomes the first non-indigenous trader in Chicago; July 1919, white people torch 1,000 black homes). A map labeled "Chicago image as derived from verbal interviews" makes a fluid, bulbous mess of the city's grid system, with roads to nowhere, with entire neighborhoods forgotten. Others offered more utopic visions, replacing banks, strip malls, and parking lots with community centers, food gardens, mental health and healthcare facilities.

"These are amazing," Mary-Beth said.

"I started doing them when I was little," said Aida as she fell back into her bed. "My mom saved this one from when I was five or six, where I declare myself Windy City Princess and rename all the buildings after me. I've been doing them ever since. Trying to reclaim the city."

"They're amazing."

"You said that."

"Sorry."

"Are you going to help me or not?"

Mary-Beth curtsied and said, "At your service, Princess."

"So," Aida drew a semi-circle across her belly, from one hip to the other, "this is where the large intestine is. Basically, if you massage it like this..." She makes a kneading motion with her thumb. "It helps the digestion along. But it's hard to relax when I'm doing it myself."

Mary-Beth felt butterflies in her stomach. She became hyper-aware of her clammy hands. But she sensed no expectation in Aida's voice, only the invitation to a casual intimacy. Mary-Beth crawled next to Aida in bed. The sheets were worn but welcoming. She rubbed softly along the imaginary line of Aida's insides.

"You can go a little harder, Mary-Beth."

Hearing Aida say her name made Mary-Beth blush. She mimicked the kneading motion with her fist. Aida closed her eyes and breathed softly, as if giving away to sleep. Mary-Beth could feel her own breath adhering to the rhythm of Aida's, becoming shallower. Loosening. Aida had a restorative presence about her. Mary-Beth wondered how often that healing energy got reciprocated. She thought, how nice it was, just nice, to lay there with her and to make her feel, who knows, more at peace.

"Will you tell me more about where you're from again?" asked Aida, her breath heavy, her eyes still closed.

"Fox Lake."

"That's right. Anything interesting I need to know about Fox Lake?"

"It used to be a tourist town, but it hasn't been for a long time."

"Since the End you mean?"

"No, even before that." Mary-Beth remembered how, as a child, people were always leaving, closing up shop, hitting the road. It seemed almost natural when, one day, she awoke and there was no one left. She added, "We used to have the only McDonald's you could boat to."

Aida laughed, and her belly contracted, pushing Mary-Beth's hands away. "Sorry," she said. "So what, was there, like, a moat?"

"Not exactly. But you could dock your boat, get

your Big Mac, and get back on your boat.”

“Capitalism really came up with some gems, didn’t it? You just can’t make that shit up.” Aida says. “So I’m guessing there’s no one boating up to the McDonald’s these days?”

“Funny how those things happen.”

“Funny how things *been* happening. People keep talking about The End like that’s it, The End. Our history is a history of crises. It’s only the end of the world for those who aren’t prepared. Or for those who think that bad things only happen to *some* people, that they’re immune.”

“Are you saying there’s a chance at survival?”

“I’m just saying,” said Aida. “That dystopia is *ongoing*. People, *my* people have survived far worse, have *been* surviving.”

Mary-Beth nodded. She was silent for a while.
“Can I ask you a question?”

“Shoot.”

“Why is there sand in the bathroom?”

Aida raised her eyebrows. “You don’t do that in Fox Lake?”

“Do what?”

Mary-Beth shuffled off of Aida’s lap. Aida left the bottom half of her shirt opened. She took Mary-Beth’s hand and lead her into the bathroom. Aida opened the medicine cabinet, where there were rows and rows of small, blue vials.

“This is an old trick,” Aida said. “As old as time. I mean, we don’t come from a history where people could jump into a hot shower at any time of day.” Aida chose three vials from the cabinet. Patchouli. Sandalwood. Rose. “But that doesn’t mean our ancestors allowed themselves to smell like shit. I, for one, come from sensible people.”

Aida unbuttoned her jeans. Without questioning, Mary-Beth did the same. Bare-legged, they perched on the lip of the bath. The ceramic felt cold against the back of Mary-Beth's thighs. Aida took a palmful of sand and added a few drops of essential oils. The smell hit Mary-Beth like a great relief.

Aida touched Mary-Beth's legs, urging them into the tub. Mary-Beth rested her back against the tiles and plunged her feet into the sand. Aida, sitting next to her, their limbs entangled, began to massage the mixture into Mary-Beth's calves.

"The sand exfoliates the skin, and the essential oils leave you smelling clean," Aida said. Their bodies were so close together, Mary-Beth did not know where was polite to look. Aida's hands, wrapping around Mary-Beth in skilled, careful loops. Aida's toes, long like fingers, pinching and releasing pockets of sand. The bubbles her hair made. The fuzz between her thick, dark brows. Aida was so beautiful; Mary-Beth worried she would fragment her. She looked away.

A mirror hung on the wall in front of them, which was double-refracted in the medicine cabinet behind them. Mary-Beth caught a glimpse of her exposed legs. Cold, white, almost fishy. The sight displaced her. She had a strange desire to take the soapdish from the sink and hurl it at the glass, to smash it to pieces, so that she could be with Aida, alone.

"It's nice?" Aida asked.

"Mhmm."

Aida patted Mary-Beth on the shins. Their eyes met. "Your turn," Aida said, grinning.

Mary-Beth cupped the sand in her hands and added the oil. The drops fell from the vial and darkened the sand. Mary-Beth crouched beneath Aida and repeated her move-

ments. Stubbles on Aida's legs puckered underneath sand's coarse touch. Mary-Beth felt the knots there and tried to unravel them.

Sand slipped between Mary-Beth's fingers with each push and pull, until her hands were empty. She looked up at Aida, who mouthed, simply, "More." And Mary-Beth obliged, had never been happier to oblige. Small, delightful sounds burst from the quiet, narrow space between them.

Mary-Beth reached higher and higher up Aida's legs, determined to please. Aida smiled, "More."

Mary-Beth rubbed sand between Aida's toes, stretching the full fat of her fingers between them.

More.

Aida rolled up her sleeves and Mary-Beth massaged her arms. Taut at first, the muscles relaxed and became jelly with her kneading. She rubbed Aida's hands, her shoulders. She slipped her hands under the fabric of Aida's button down, rubbing her ribcage, her back, her hips. Each touch lead to a new softening. Mary-Beth wanted desperately to give this to her—a soft body, a calm body, the body she deserved.

Aida leaned forward and took Mary-Beth's hands. Mary-Beth fell into the dizzying proximity of their faces. Losing sight, becoming a feeling, breathing thing.

Aida whispered, softly, so close the words registered in vibrations between Mary-Beth's teeth, "That's enough of that."

They kissed. There was fear there, and surprise. But above that, the logic of it all. *I'd follow you anywhere*, Mary-Beth thought, *I'd follow you all day*. Mary-Beth thought about what Aida said about being in over your head. And Mary-Beth felt it, in over her head. Like the first time she dove head-first into freshwater, a deep feeling rose to meet her, the water reaching, sliding across her body, en-

veloping her. She did not tremble. This was safe. This was right.

Their lips smacked and slipped, finding new ways to fold into each other. Aida's mouth tasted bitter with vomit and wine. Their bodies swelled to behold one another. Tongues orbited. Hair worked its way into clenched fists. Voices shuddered at the backs of their throats. They kissed, and Mary-Beth fell in love. The feeling was quick and easy. Mary-Beth needed to love. It was urgent. She would adjust for it. Labor for it. Mobilize for it. Surrender herself to it. She would make it last.

Their kisses softened to a lull, a wrinkle, and then, just a breath. Mary-Beth rested her head in Aida's lap. Aida laughed at her.

"What is it?" asked Mary-Beth.

"You've buried yourself," she said. Sure enough, Mary-Beth had inadvertently dug herself up to the waist in sand. "Like a cypress tree," Aida said. She ran her long fingernails through Mary-Beth's ashy hair. "You know their roots grow as far into the ground as they grow tall?"

Mary-Beth wanted to say, *I love you*. Or, at least, *Show me how to love you*. But she did not want to sound naive. Instead, she fluttered underneath Aida's hands, whispering, "Remember to water me."

Photograph Credits

Figure 1

The intersection of 51st and South Park. 1927. Chicago Tribune, Chicago.
Accessed 9 September 2019. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-washington-park-vintage-photos-20150617-photogallery.html>

Figure 2

The Rosenberg Fountain, Michigan Ave and 11th. 1893. Calumet 412, Chicago.
Accessed 9 September 2019. <https://calumet412.com/post/48044134599/the-rosenberg-fountain-michigan-ave-and-11th>

Figure 3

Protesters climb the General Logan statue in Grant Park while thousands gather on the ground. 1968. Accessed 9 September 2019. <http://galleries.apps.chicagotribune.com/chi-vintage-grant-park-millennium-photos-20140626/#chi-grant19-20071227>



Taming Waves

Apu

HOLLOW BE THY HOLOCENE / LOOKING OUT AT CAPE LOOK- OUT

Vincent Seadler

i.

“How much is my insulin without insurance?” Something I’ve avoided to ask, like roadkill on the shoulder. The answer was “roughly 1000 dollars, for one month’s supply of hormones.” A kick in the pants that stoked the flames in my heart. A few moths fly out of my wallet. I accept the condition that is my lack of bills but not debt. Come to terms with the fact that it’s been almost four years since my arm went silent. No more do I feel the clicks, whirs, and hums of my old mechanical extension. Lost to the millenial hellscape that is American healthcare. I feel a tumbleweed bounce through the ghost town inside me, those empty isles of Langerhans.

I shake out the carpet of thoughts, take a beat, and tell the pharmacist:

“Thank you for what you do.”

ii.

Turning away from this memory, I am looking out at Cape Lookout:

its headdress of mist removed after two days of rain to reveal expanded clear cutting, a vicious alopecia whose patches migrate at the speed of decades. No evidence of the machines and hands that did it, save the pockmarks of stumps I can see clearly from a mile or two away. The burning wish to caress and kiss the view, like a loved ones furry face. To weep in its wounds and hope my sugary tears could do something more than bring erosion.

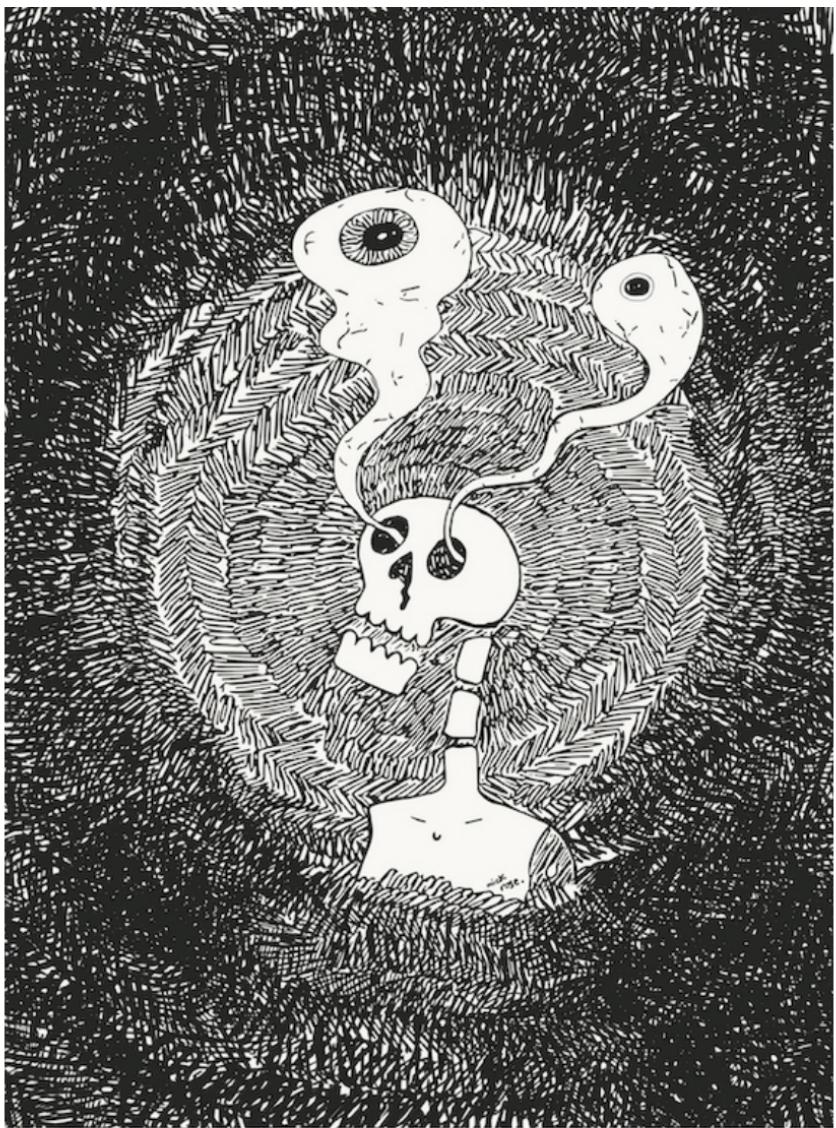
Look at this shit! The hills are so different from me, that's how I find our common ground. The past rocketing itself into the future, we both have conditions which leave no solid confirmation as to when we will be cut down next. I can at least try and run, but it'd be better to fight for those who can't.

They say the first human being to be a thousand is alive today; do we even have that much time left?

Considering how a thousand years of old growth can be decimated in less than an hour?

Considering how thousands upon thousands are losing their land to rising seas?

A thousand days seems to be the safest bet.



Crazy Eyes

Joey Dean

BODIE

Anna Tregurtha

I'd start a shootout in the street of this boomtown if I thought it would impress you.

Ten miles down a dirt road and this place was around long enough for electrical wires to go up, there's something hopeful in that.

I can't imagine living at 8,000 feet elevation I can't imagine being up here but not even having a panoramic image to stare at and on every side there are just mountains so you don't get the benefit of the view.

It's funny to think about somewhere so small having a good side of town and a bad side of town, you say and I think. See those bullet holes in the sign for the gas station? Let's go into the casino. There's a dusty bottle of whiskey in there for me. I'll win us some money and I bet I can beat all these ghosts at roulette. They've been practicing here since 1942 but I've been haunted for a while, too.

Later in the evening I try to believe that all the sounds we hear are the ghosts moving around and that we are still there, up in the hills, down that ten mile road. The desert has made my skin so dry but I want to see if you'll let me slide my fingers into your mouth so I can see how wet it is.

A RETRACING

Brandi Spering

We accept that sometimes, the air will turn a thick yellow.

Know only to go inside. Once cleared, we pick our *basanagol*¹ and add it to the pot on the stove. We rinse.

Good enough
is the night after a rain, with splayed fog.

Smell the ammonia as the wrath of 50 ferals
marking territory for 10 square miles: those emissions are the
least threat:

Natural rolling, flaring, fracking up:
335,000 barrels of oil a day. producing various products.

Turning it into a good thing
reminding us it's what we demand. We comply.

Pretend to not care: a Sriracha plant relocated to Philly
after complaints of burnt eyes in California.

Use crude oil for cheap heat, cheap plastic, illicitly discard into
the Schuylkill.
available in winter-blends. rack products.

Would you have bought that house
if you realized you were in

¹ “basanagol” - Italian-American dialect; basil.

someone else's backyard?

massive energy-hub

We only complain when

we hear it from our beds:

*semi-detached
homes*

the warning bell testing the first

coal trade

Saturday of every month:

improvements

a new perk:

miles paved

what is cared about:

miles dug

how it affects *us*:

investors made out

the diesel and oil:

Forgetting that street names outlive

their signs:

Girard² wanted

this wasn't always flattened:

a school

we dug for black diamonds:

for poor orphaned

using the oil and complaining

white boys

of the smell:

1975: a hot day

losing 8 of 500 who attempted

the flames of the crude

2019: a loud burst

A 45-year stretch without inspection.

² Stephen Girard - From France, became a citizen of Pennsylvania in 1778. Philanthropist & banker who personally saved U.S. Govt. from financial collapse during the War of 1812. Became one of the wealthiest men in America. Girard Estate is a small, \$6 million area in South Philadelphia: his gift to the city when he passed. The homes were quickly sold to private owners. In walking distance to the Point Breeze Refinery. Close to two others as well.

The Philadelphia Vireo was discovered within the mix of these developments and constructions,
but hasn't been seen back since, heading for Guatemala and Belize, returning to Canada to breed in a better place, a boreal forest. They picked up the sound of a rusty hinge that has since decreased almost entirely. Are they forgetting or are they finally rested?

But as long as there is growth in the industry: and it is affordable:

[in our brackets] an edge with high-quality anthracite, inexpensive abundance:

water like metal: plastic bottles: new necessity: accepted
is how it is here: convenient: for the time:
until drawn out:

The question wasn't what Philly manufactured but what it didn't

needing fortune once seen the chance
for 100 ships: after the war:
civil as can be with coal cars and dumpers:
expanding:

from factory to air and river
to pipes and spigots and throats
and lungs: warning label verbal: and we're too busy in our beds.

IF YOU PAY ATTENTION

Brandi Spering

mistakes of the city are easily identifiable: offering free trees to cover their work: spreading their contribution to clean air and eliminating toxins like a household spray containing bleach:

The bleach is in the height: the regulations: *If you choose the right tree, it should NOT interfere with your sewer or water lines, sidewalk, or building foundation.*

Approving for grow: *SMALL TREES FOR UNDER POWER LINES: NO GREATER THAN 30' TALL AT MATURITY*: an *adequate* and *generous* tree: Maintain it so that it can be *well-behaved* for what is *needed*.

Ulmus Americana, sits in the park as if it has been there this entire time: as if since being here, hasn't contracted Dutch Elm. These types of things aren't monitored: each given case: just what is the set average.

The white trees with the stigma of smelling like semen, are the beards, as cat populations are for refineries. They're here to help us breathe, all of them, most displaced—uprooted and brought here.

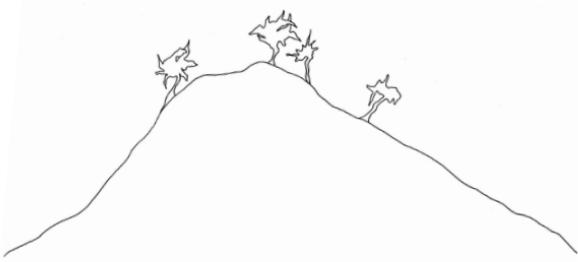
When they hit the telephone lines, they cut off their limbs, leaving the trunk of a tree—below where it usually begins to stretch. To me they looked like erections, the way they chipped away at the sides of the tip.

And as much as I complain, I still make the house phone ring.



Indistinct as a Mode

Antony Ohman



The Water Museum

Nisi Shawl

When I saw the hitchhiker standing by the sign for the Water Museum, I knew he had been sent to assassinate me. First off, that's what the dogs were saying as I slowed to pick him up. Girlfriend, with her sharp little agitated bark, was quite explicit. Buddy was silently trying to dig a hole under the back seat, seeking refuge in the trunk. I stopped anyway.

Second off, the man lied to me. He opened up the passenger door of my midnight-blue '62 Mercury, and piled in with his duffel bag and his jeans and white tee and his curly brown hair tucked under a baseball cap. "Where you going?" I asked, as soon as he was all settled and the door shut. "Water Museum," he said, and that was confirmation. Nobody goes to the Water Museum, this time of year. Hardly anyone even knows where it is until they get there. I put up that sign, and it's the only one. Mostly just the locals know about the Water Museum. And this guy wasn't no local.

But I played right along. "What part?" I asked him, pulling back out on the smooth one-lane blacktop.

It took him a second to hear my question. "What do you mean, what part? They got different entrances or something?"

"I mean the Water Museum is three, four miles long," I told him. Three point two miles, if you want to be exact, but I didn't. "You tell me where you want to go there, and I'll get you as close as I can."

I twisted around to get a good look at the dogs. Buddy had given up his tunnel to the trunk. He was lying on the floor, panting like a giant asthmatic weight-lifter. Girlfriend was nowhere in sight.

The hitchhiker twisted in his seat, too. "Nice animal," he said uneasily, taking in Buddy's long, shiny, tusky-looking teeth. "Sheepdog?"

"Nope. Otterhound. Lotta people make that mistake, though. They do look alike, but otterhound's got a finer bone structure, little different coloring."

"Oh."

We started the long curve down to the shore. I put her in neutral and let us glide, enjoying the early morning light. It dappled my face through the baby beech leaves like butter and honey on a warm biscuit. Then we came to that sweet little dip, and the turn under the old viaduct, and we were almost there. "You figured out yet where you're headed?" I asked.

"Uhh, no, ma'am. Just drop me off by the offices, I guess..."

"Offices ain't gonna be open this early," I told him. "Not till noon, between Labor Day and Memorial Weekend. C'mon, I got nothing better to do, I'll give you a tour."

"Well, uhh, that's nice, ma'am, but I, uh, but don't go out of your way or anything..."

I looked at him, cocked my chin and grinned my

best country-girl grin, the one that makes my cheeks dimple up and my eyelashes flutter. "Why, it'd be a pleasure to show you around the place, and I got nothing else I'd rather do this fine morning." By this time we were to the parking lot. I pulled in and cut the ignition, and before he could speak another word I had opened up my door. "Let's go."

The hitchhiker hesitated. Buddy whined and lumbered to his feet, and that must have decided him. With what I would call alacrity he sprang out on his side of the car onto the gravel. Ahh, youth.

I let Buddy out the back. Instead of his usual sniff and pee routine, he stuck close to me. Girlfriend was still nowhere in sight. The hitchhiker was looking confusedly around the clearing. At first glance the steps are hard to pick out, and the trail up into the dunes is faint and overgrown.

I grabbed my wool ruana and flung it on over my shoulders. "You got a jacket, young man?" I asked him. "Shirtsleeves're all right here, but we're gonna catch us a nice breeze down by the lake."

"Um, yeah, in my—" He bent over the front seat and tugged at something on the floor. "In my duffel, but I guess it's stuck under here or something."

Came a low, unmistakable growl and he jumped back. I went around to his side. "Don't worry, I'll get it out for you," I said. "Girlfriend!" I bent over and grabbed one green canvas corner of my assassin's duffel bag and pulled. This is Girlfriend's favorite game. We tussled away for a few minutes. "She's small, but she's fierce," I commented as I took a quick break. "You got any food in there, a sandwich or something?"

"No. Why?"

"I just noticed she had the zipper open some."

The hitchhiker got a little pale and wispy-looking when he heard that. He stayed that way till I retrieved his

duffel and gave it to him to rummage through. He took his time finding his jean jacket, and by the time he'd dug it out and put it on he looked more solid and reassured.

So now I knew where his gun was. Should I let him keep it? He'd be a lot easier to handle without a pistol in his fist. Then again, the thing probably wasn't even loaded. And I'd be able to get him relaxed faster if he was armed.

He threw the bag over his shoulder and I locked the car. Girlfriend had already started up the trail. "Over there," I pointed. Of course he wanted me to walk ahead of him, but Buddy just looked at him with his dark, suspicious eyes and Mr. Man decided it would be okay if this time he was the one to go first.

I love the dance I chose when I made this path, the wending and winding of the way. As we climbed, we left the beech trees behind and ascended into the realm of grass and cherries, of white-backed poplar leaves, soft as angel fuzz. Poison ivy shone waxily, warningly, colored like rich, red wine.

We walked right past my offices. They look like part of the dune crest, coming at them from this side. I cast them that way, wound them round with roots, bound them with stems and sprinkled pebbles lightly over the top. The windows are disguised as burrows, with overhangs and grass growing down like shaggy eyebrows.

My assassin's Nikes made soft little drumming sounds on the boardwalk, following the click of Girlfriend's nails. Around the office to the blow-out and the observation deck, the promised breeze sprang up, ruffling our fur and hair. I watched my killer's reaction to his first sight of the Museum.

His shoulders straightened and relaxed, though I hadn't noticed how they were crooked before that. He walked up and leaned against the wooden rail. "All that water..." he said.

I came up and joined him. "Yes," I said. "All that water." From the deck you can see it, as much as can be seen from down here on the Earth. Shadows still hung beneath us, but further out the Great Lake sparkled splendidly. Waves were dancing lightly, playfully, like little girls practising ballet. They whirled and leapt and tumbled to rest just beyond the short terminal dunes five hundred feet below where we stood. "All that water. And all of it is sweet."

I took my killer gently by the arm and led him to the river side. That's where the work I've done is easiest to take in: the floating bridges over Smallbird Marsh, the tanks and dioramas and such. "Where you from, kid?" We started down the steps.

"Colorado."

"Pretty?"

"It used to be. When I was little, back before the drought got bad."

I stopped at a landing and waited for Buddy to catch up. He's all right on a hillside, but the stairs are steep and made out of slats. They give under his weight a bit, and that makes him take them slow and cautious, ears flapping solemnly with every step.

I smiled at my assassin and he smiled shyly back. It occurred to me then that he might not know who I am. I mean, I do present a pretty imposing figure, being a six-six strawberry blonde, and not exactly overweight, but on the fluffy side. I'd say I'm fairly easy to spot from a description. But maybe they hadn't bothered to give him one.

I dropped his arm and motioned him on ahead. "By the way," I called out, once he was well on his way. "I don't believe I caught your name. Mine's Granita. Granita Bone."

He sorta stopped there for a sec and put his hand out, grabbing for a railing I'd never had installed. Well, I thought, at least they told the poor boy that much.

"Jasper Smith," he said, then turned around to see how I took it.

I nodded down at him approvingly. Jasper rang a nice change on Granita, and the Smith part kinda balanced out its oddness. "Pleased to meet you, Jasper." Girlfriend barked up at us from the foot of the stairs. "All right," I shouted down at her, "I'm a-coming, I'm a comin."

"Sheltie," I explained to my killer. "Herding animal. Makes her nervous to see us all spread out like this." By this time Buddy had caught up and passed me. He knew this walk. I followed him down.

At the bottom, I chose the inland path, past pools of iridescent black blooming with bright marsh marigold. Stabilizing cedars gave way to somber hemlock, still adrip with the morning's dew.

"Water Music," I told Jasper, just before our first stop.

"I don't—"

"Hush up, then, and you will." Even the dogs knew to keep quiet here. It fell constantly, a bit more hesitant than rain. Notes in a spatter, a gentle jingle, a high and solitary ping! ping! ping! Liquid runs and hollow drums grew louder and louder until we reached the clearing and stood still, surrounded.

It was the tank and windmill that drew him first, though there's nothing so special about them. I went over with him and undid the lock so the blaces could catch the morning's breeze. The tank's got a capacity of about four hundred gallons; small, but it usually lasts me a day or two.

With the pump going, the piper up from the river started in to sing. It's baffled and pierced; totally inefficient, but gorgeous to my ears. From the other pipes and the web of hose overhead, drops of water continued to gather and fall—on glass and shells, in bowls and bottles, overflow-

ing or always empty, on tin and through bamboo, falling, always falling.

Adding to the symphony, Girlfriend lapped up a drink from a tray of lotuses.

“Wow, Granita, this is really, uh, elaborate,” said Jasper when he’d pretty much done looking around.

“Do you like it?” I asked.

“Yeah, but isn’t it kinda, umm, kinda wasteful?”

I shrugged. “Maybe. But like my mama always said, ‘You don’t never know the usefulness of a useless thing.’” Right about then I just about washed my hands of good ole Jasper, but he hadn’t even seen any of the other exhibits, so I decided I’d better postpone judgement.

Buddy stood where the trail began again, panting and whining and wagging his whole hind end. He was looking forward to the next stop, hoping to catch him a crawdad. The fish factory’s never been one of my favorite features of the place, but Buddy loved it, and it turned out to be a big hit with Jasper, too. He took a long, long look at the half-glazed ponds that terraced down the dune. Me and some of the girls had fixed up burnt wood sighs by the path, explaining the contents of each one, but Jasper had to climb up all the ladders and see for himself. He disappointed me by flashing right past all my pretty koi. Can you believe it was the catfish that caught his fresh little fancy? He must have spent twenty minutes to check out those mean ugly suckers. Though, to give him his credit, he dallied a fair while with Yertle and that clan, too.

Meanwhile, me and the dogs kept waiting on my killer to make his move.

We looped under the deserted highway and came back by Summer Spring Falls and the Seven Cauldrons, then started across the marsh over the floating bridges, which Buddy doesn’t like anymore than the stairs. The

breeze picked up again as we headed towards the beach. Small clouds, light on their feet, flickered past the sun.

I let him get behind me. Wicker creaks. I could hear his footsteps hesitate, sinking lower as he stood trying to decide was this the time and place. We were alone, he had a good clean line of sight, nothing but the wind between his aim and my broad back. But when he stilled and I turned, his hand wasn't doing nothing but resting on the zipper of his duffel bag, and that wasn't even open yet. His eyes were focused over my head, far off in space or time. He was listening. Red-winged blackbirds. Sweet and pure, their songs piped up, trilling away into silence, rising again from that pool of quiet, sure and silver, pouring over and over into my ears. "When I was a boy..." said Jasper. I waited. In a moment he started again. "When I was a boy, there was a swamp, where the river used to be. I didn't know, I thought it was just a fun place to play. Some birds there, they sang just like this."

Well, making allowance for a few inaccuracies (swamp for marsh, and the bird songs had to vary a *little*, this sounded pretty much like his truth. Now we were getting somewhere. I turned back around and trudged a little more slowly along the baskety surface of the bridge. The back of my neck crawled and itched, like little bitty Jaspers and Granitas were walking all over it. I kept myself in hand, though, breathing deep and regular, balanced on the bubbling well of power beneath my feet, telling myself soon—soon—

He didn't stop, he just slowed down a hair. I didn't hear any zipper, either, but when I turned again he had finally pulled his goddamn gun out and it was pointed straight at me. Was it loaded, then? He seemed to think so. I pretended to sag down frightened and grabbed the rails as his eyes hardened and his gun hand tensed. He was a lefty.

With a sudden lurch I threw myself against the side

of the bridge and tipped us all into the cool, ripe waters of Smallbird Marsh. The gun cracked off one shot, just before we all made a nice big splash. I shrugged out of my ruana and kicked off my clogs and I knew I'd be okay. Fluff floats. Buddy woofed and Girlfriend yapped, all happy and accounted for.

Girlfriend and I pulled ourselves right up onto the next basket, but the menfolks stayed in a while longer. Buddy loves to swim, and he's good at it, too. Jasper was floundering, though, wrapped up in weeds and trying to breathe mud. By the time I got him hauled out he wasn't more than half conscious. Still had a grip on that gun, though. I pried it loose and tossed it back.

Now, how to get him back up to the offices? I thought about it while I whipped a few of my scarves around his wrists and elbows and ankles and knees. One in a slip-knot round his throat for good measure. I shoved him till he sat mostly upright. "Ain't this a fucking mess?" I asked him, tilting his head so he could see the tipped over basket, then back around to me. "I just had my hair done, got the dogs got back from the groomer's yesterday, now you pull this stunt! What in the name of every holy thing were you trying to do?"

"Kill you." His voice was rough, sort of a wheeze now from coughing up marsh water.

"Well, duhh. Yeah. Question is what you thought that was supposed to accomplish?" He just stuck out his bottom lip. Breeze picked up some, rustling the reeds. I'm pretty well insulated, but Jasper couldn't help a little shiver. That was all I got out of him that while, though.

I left him and walked a couple of baskets to the boathouse for a lifejacket. Had to untie his arms to get it on, and he wanted to wrestle then, having dried out enough to get his dander up. I got a hold on his nice new necktie and pulled, trying not to get mad. Finished bundling him up

while he was trying to recall if he still knew how to breathe. I gave us both a chance to calm down, then dumped him back in the marsh.

Good thing I still had Buddy's harness on him. I whistled him over, hooked up Jasper's lifejacket and we were on our way once more.

"You're in luck," I told my assassin. "Usually we skip this part of the tour, but I noticed you gronking all the technical dingle-dangles and like that. So I figure you'll get a large charge out of our sewage treatment facilities."

The jacket worked fine. Buddy paddled joyfully along next to the bridges. He likes to make himself useful.

It wasn't far to the settling ponds. I gave Jasper plenty of chances to tell me about Colorado wildlife and the dying riparian ecosystem, but he didn't seem to be in the mood. He was mostly silent, excepting the odd snort when Buddy kicked up too big a wake.

Really, the ponds weren't that bad. Albinia, the oldest girl, got the Museum a contract with a local trailer park, but they're pretty much dormant till early May. Right then the park was mostly empty, just a few old retirees, so the effluent came mostly from my offices and the tanks of a couple friends.

I glossed over that, though, in my lecture. I concentrated instead on wind-driven aeration paddles, ultra-sound and tank resonance, and oh, yes, our patented, prize-winning bacteriophagic eels. As the ponds got murkier and murkier, Jasper's gills got greener and greener, so to speak. He held up very well. I had dragged him over two locks, and him belly down on the third when he broke.

"Nonononono!" he gibbered at me. "What is it, what is it, don't let it touch me, please!" I bent over and looked where he was looking. Something was floating in the water. I fished it out. One end of a cucumber had my killer

sobbing out his heart and wriggling like a worm with eyes to see the hook.

People are funny.

Girlfriend came up and sniffed the piece of cucumber. It was kind of rotten, and after all, she is a dog. I threw it back to the eels, unhitched Buddy's harness and rolled Jasper over on his back. "You ready to come clean?" I asked him. He nodded desperately.

I wasted quite a few minutes trying to untie the wet silk knotted around his ankles. Then I got disgusted and cut it off. Still left him hobbled at the knees as I marched him off to the laundry room.

We came in through the "Secret Tunnel," what the girls like to call it. Really, it's just a old storm sewer from under the highway. But when I excavated the place and found how close it passed, I annexed the pipe onto my basement there. Handy, sometimes. Grate keeps out most of the possum and nutrias. Thebig ones, anyways. I locked that into place and set Jasper down on a bench next to the washer, under the skylight. He looked a sorrowful mess.

His tee shirt was gonna need some enzyme action before you could come anywhere close to calling it white again, and his jeans and jacket weren't never gonna smell clothesline fresh no more, no matter what. His hat was gone, his hair matted down with algae and such. His eyes were red from crying, his upper lip glistened unbecomingly, and the rest of him steamed in the cool laundry room air.

I prayed for a washday miracle.

"Jasper," I told him, "you are in a terrible spot right now." He nodded a couple times, agreeable as any schoolchild. "Sometimes, the only way outta danger is in. You gotta go through it to get to the other side. You gotta sink to swim."

"I'm telling you honest and true that in spite of

what went on out there I bear you absolutely no grudges. You believe me?" Again the nod. "Good. Try to bear it in mind over the next few days."

I reached my shears down from the shelf above his head and cut away the rest of where I'd tied him up: hands first, elbows next, then knees. Those were some nice scarves, too. One my favorite. I was sure hoping he'd be worth it.

"Strip," I told him. He only hung back a second, then he put off his modesty or pride or whatever, and the rest of his wet, useless things right after. Girlfriend tried to run off with a sock but I made her bring it back. "Dump that shit in the washer." I had him set it to low, hot wash, cold rinse, add my powder and switch on. He didn't seem to know his way around the control panel, and I wondered who'd been taking care of him back home.

Pale goose pimples ain't exactly my cup of vodka, but Jasper was a nice enough looking young man. Given the circumstances. I admired his bumptious little backside as I scooted him on ahead of me down the hall.

"Here's where you'll be staying." I opened the door to the Dressing Room. He didn't seem much taken with the place. Sure, the ceiling's kind of low, and you got to sleep on the floor or in the sandpit. But that sand is soft, and nice and warm on account of the solar heat-exchanger underneath. "I'll give you a little while in here by yourself to figure out what you're gonna be when you come out. Say, a week maybe. Then I'll come back and you can tell me what you'll be needing."

"But—food, water!"

"They're here." He looked around at the bare driftwood walls. "You doubting my word? You're a bright boy, Jasper, I'm sure you'll find where they're at in plenty time."

"I don't understand. You're not trying to torture me

are you? I mean, if you want confession I'm already—”

“You don't understand? Then let me explain. I don't need a confession. I got that the first time them cowboys sent someone up here to murder me, eleven years agone. That's right, Jasper, you are by no means the first hired killer I met up with, though you have got to be the most naive by a crane's holler. Hitchhiking to the hit? Talk about your sore thumbs!”

Jasper turned red from the collarbone up. “My van broke down in Bliss.”

“Yeah, well, guess you couldn't afford a rental, and probably just as conspicuous to get one of them, anyways. But you coulda just given up. Couldn't you?”

That's when my killer started in again about the blackbirds, and added a sheep farm and I don't know what all else. It wasn't the sense of his words I paid attention to: none of them ever had much worth listening to to say at this point. The Earth owed them a living, and a silver teat to suck. And it better be a mighty long dug, cause it wasn't supposed to dry up, no matter how hard them cowboys chewed.

They all seemed to need to give their little speeches, though, so I had got used to sitting politely and listening to the kinds of sounds they made. Rattles and grates and angry, poisonous buzzings was what they usually come up with.

Jasper surprised me with an awful good imitation of a red-winged blackbird. Lower register, of course. But his voice trilled up and spilled over the same way, throbbing sweet and pure, straight from his poor little heart. A pretty song, but he was singing it to the wrong audience.

Once, I was one of the richest women on this continent. Powerball winnings. I took and built the Water Museum, then finessed an old congressman of a lover of mine into pushing through our charter. He secured us the sole, exclusive rights to be selling off the Great Lakes' water to

irrigate them thirsty Western states.

Or not.

Didn't them cowboys kick up a dust storm! Kept us real busy for a while there, in the courts and on the talkiest of the talk shows.

I'm not rich no more. What I didn't use building the Museum or fighting to protect our charter, I wound up giving us as a donation. Not so famous no more, neither. And important? Not in the least.

During the season, I sell tickets and polish windows, hand out sea-weed candy to unsuspecting kids. Nothing but that would stop because I died, much less if I changed my feeble mind.

I sighed. Jasper had finished his aria, and I prepared to shut the door. Then, shears still held tight, and Buddy close and attentive at hand, I did the funniest thing. I kissed him, right on his damp, still-kinda-smelly forehead. He looked up at me, and he done something funny, too. He smiled. I smiled again, but neither of us said a thing. I backed out, still careful, and locked him in. I have a sneaky suspicion this one *might* turn out to be interesting. When he's good and ready.



Indistinct as a Mode

Antony Ohman



Flock Mentality

Donna J.W. Munro

The Flock follows food and I follow the flock.

Six months ago, if you'd have asked me what I'd be doing, I'd have said enjoying my senior year, waiting for my boyfriend Pete to text me, doing my AP US History close reads and annotating my little fingers off. Prom, Friday night lights, lunch in the cafeteria, nagging mom, annoying brother, and dreaming of heading off on my own to a dorm at college next year.

None of those things even exist anymore.

The flock of crows, thousands of cawing, scuffling scavengers accepted me as one of their own after the world ended. All day, every day we walked, following the retreat of the creatures, running from the edge of the ash storm that circled and circled like the sun does the sky. We were the cleaning crew, picking off the edges of the herd of what lives, the driven.

The crows like that I kill for them. They taught me

how. All day long I run down the stragglers of the herd, the streaming animals left after the break.

I pick them off and drag them into the gym perch that Clawfoot King, blackest of wing and wisest of the crows found for us to stay in when the storms settle in after the hunt.

In the time before, I remember watching crows, listening to their cawing lies back and forth across the school track I learned how to run distance on. I remember thinking how beautiful they were. Admiring the intricacies of their flocking flights, balls of individuals growing and turning as if connected by a switch, stretching and pressing together without a mistake. A moving piece art, maybe like a flash mob of thousands.

Flock mentality.

Maybe that's why they picked me.

Or maybe it's just because I needed them so badly.

The break happened and within minutes the world cracked so deep and I don't know why. Just thinking about it brings me to the edge of an abyss Clawfoot saved me from.

It's always why with you, he scolds. And when I run down the prey, I can't help but remember and try to puzzle it together.

I just know my mom, manning the water booth on the sideline of my track meet, died in front of me, the thundering sound of the break crushed something inside her and she fell like a stone. Eyes bloodied and little trickles of crimson ran out of her ears and nose. I fell down next to her, weeping, begging it to not be true, even as around me all the other kids and parents at the track meet screamed, drowning me out. I keeled, gathered her head into my lap, and finally looked around me, seeing through the wet curtain of tears, others fallen like mom, dead from what ever had broken in that thunder clap that I felt so deep it vibrated my insides.

Regular birds fell too, a rain of feathers and silence.
Soft deaths piling under trees and perches.

Animals like dogs and cats curled up on themselves
like pill bugs.

But not the crows. They didn't sing. They didn't fly
or fall or scream. They perched along the branches of the
trees around the field, watching.

I stood up slowly, wondering about the others.
Wondering about the ones still standing.

Marissa, my best friend. Pete, who'd been in the
bleachers watching. My Dad and little brother.

They all stood stock still staring up at the sky.

At first, I crawled toward them, unable to find my
feet, but when I got to Marissa I pulled myself up to grab
her. Shake her awake because she stared up with such a de-
votion. Her face soft as someone dreaming and her eyes...
The pupils were tight pricks of dark in the glittering sea of
her irises.

My dad, my sweet little brother, and Pete—my first
love, the boy I planned to give my body to on prom night,
the boy who held doors and laughed like a stuttering jackass,
the boy with brown skin that shone and eyes that smiled and
soft woolly hair—no shaking or pleading or shoving would
wake them. But I tried. I rotated between them, screaming
and coaxing, tickling and shoving, anything, anything to get
a reaction. Anything.

For days.

I screamed myself hoarse. I cried myself dry.

I think I would have died there curled around the
feet of my people who'd turned into something else though
I didn't know it then.

It was the crow flock that saved me.

I lay there on my back weeping, sun burning me

and body stinking. I could smell myself it was so bad, but what did that matter?

A crow landed next to me and when I ignored it, it butted its slick head into my cheek. The touch calmed me.

My world had broken and everything was gone, but this bird saw me. His touch made me real again. My sobbing stopped and I stared at it, watching it turn its head, cocking it so that its velvety eye stared at me.

I am Clawfoot King.

It wasn't a thought. That's too weak a way to describe it. It was music that wove between him and me, an alignment of nature's sounds that struck my bones. Meaning felt more than understood.

What is your name, child?

"Loni."

I rename you, Strong Loni Clawfoot. You are my child now. Stop mourning this meat and tend to yourself before you die.

When Clawfoot King speaks, everything he says is an order, because he's the king. Even then, before I knew the crows' way, I felt the irresistible push that each of his words carried. I got up and went into the restroom just off the field, bathed in the bowl of the sink, splashing myself clean, rinsing out my clothes, too busy to feel shame that I'd peed myself. Washing and winding my hair up on my head, using the hand dryer to dry out my clothes, I put myself in order. When I came out, my body's demand for food roared back after days of being ignored.

Outside, a row of crows stood in front of me, each clutching some bit of food in their beaks. They fed me like a chick, hundreds of parents dropping food into my hands.

It was hard to eat scavenged things at first.

Worms and bugs went down best.

Bits of torn, bloodied meat curled my weak stomach in cramping knots.

But the rotted things, those I told them I couldn't eat.

The crows hooted at my weakness and I understood them.

Each caw and every jittering chuckle.

It was about then that the people who'd survived the break began to move, in careful, slow steps.

At first, I got excited. I ran to my brother, my Dad, Pete, and Marissa excitedly shouting at them, standing in their path as they began to press together in crowds and walk along the edges of the chain-link that enclosed the track. There was nothing in them. No recognition. No words. Their eyes didn't connect with me, each other, or anything. They just moved, together, like a flock of birds in fall. Streaming around me, around any obstacle and then coming back together. Eventually they found the field gate and flowed through.

We follow, Clawfoot King ordered. And we did, because his words felt like law. So, for the very first time we chased the flock of broken with me trotting along the edges and the crows behind and above watching, ruffling wings catching drafts I only dreamed of as I jogged beneath them.

Then I saw it behind me, only after the crows began crying alarms to each other. The boiling clouds reminded me of the images I'd seen in AP US History when the black dust clouds had choked the Midwest back in the thirties Dust Bowl, tall and dusky grey blotting out the sky and burying everything in their path. The flock of humans somehow knew the storm was coming and warned us with their movements, so we followed them. Learned from them.

Clawfoot King and the guard flew ahead of them observing how they skirted the storm. Watching how they'd

turn toward safety and when the cloud settled, they'd settle.

We learned that they ate in those moments. Grazing the dusty vegetation, eating bark or dirt clods—all without any indication of critical intelligence. They just shoved it in their mouths, smearing their slack faces with filth and then when they were done, they stopped. Clutched together in a pack, staring at the sky. The crows and I ringed around them watching, wondering at what drove them. And why it didn't drive us.

Crows are philosophers if they are nothing else. They debated at length. I loved listening to them talk about what caused the break or the way the flock human lived. They didn't know any more than me individually, but their generational memory, that's what they called their shared understanding, was marked by everything every crow had ever learned. They could recall a time like this one, before humans had settled in their villages and their huts.

What none could understand was me.

Clawfoot King let them debate the meaning of my mind's survival and what the human flock was, knowing that I was useful for things before the rest did.

He showed me the brick building he wanted to use as a home base when the storm finally did overtake us—an elementary school gym that I pulled tables and desks into for perches. I ripped up all the lost and found throw offs for nests. I even found some food in the cafeteria to supplement my died of bugs and bits. My thumbs opened the doors and closed them for the crow flock when the storm caught us. And the flock accepted me as useful and praised Clawfoot King's wisdom.

Finally, he convinced me that the human flock had another purpose.

Strong Loni Clawfoot, crows must eat.

Images of dead crows bloomed in my mind, and

along with that terrible image the King pressed his fears into me. Fear I'd never known before the break, but fear that crows live with always. Starvation, loss of the long crow mind, disease. My eyes squeezed shut and I pressed my palms on my ears, but I couldn't get away from the fears of the flock. They fell on me like stones, pelted against my mind and bruised every piece of my thinking.

It changed me. I made my first kill that night and dragged it back to the gym roost, throwing the meat in the center of the floor for them to feast on while I cowered in the corner, shocked that I'd just beat Coach Williams to death with a stick and dragged his slight body back without a thought of how many hours he'd spent working with me, making jokes about my floppy-footed stride, all the encouragement he'd shouted from the sidelines at my meets. The crows pulled strips of hairy skin off of him and chuffed their appreciation as I sat in the corner crying, hoping that he'd want me to end him rather than let him walk like a zombie, mindless and nothing through the dust.

You aren't one of them anymore, Strong Loni Clawfoot. You are a crow. Your memory with them is short, but your memory with us is long.

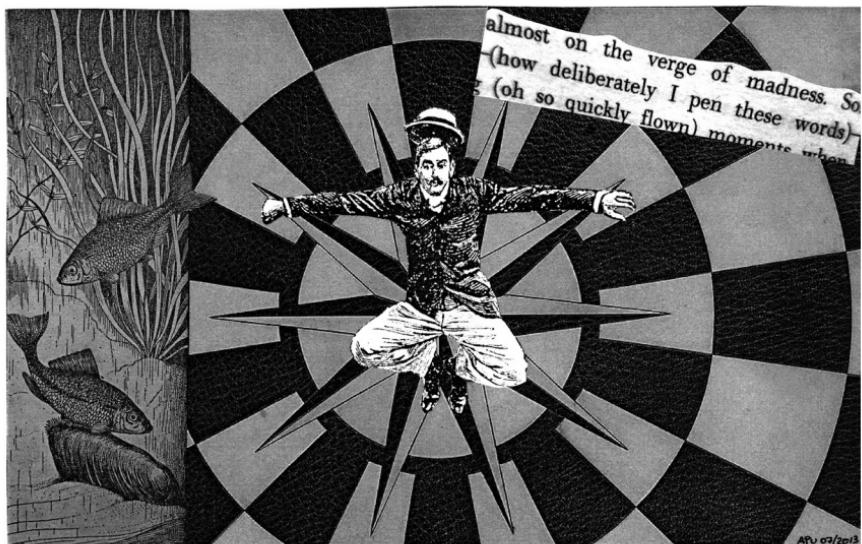
And in that moment, as a reward I think, he gave me all the crow knowing, access to all they'd ever known or learned. Glorious.

I wish another like me could share this flock mentality. All those years I thought that humans were the species to beat. That everything else was just secondary to us. But in that explosion of cyclical understanding older than humans and civilization, I knew that we were just a blip on the consciousness of true wisdom. And then hunting the human flock didn't seem so bad anymore.

Only a child mourns the bugs it steps on.

And I'm not a child.

I am Strong Loni Clawfoot, hunter for the crows.



Madness

Apu

PART III

/ THE

ONLY

LASTING

TRUTH

LAND OF MY MOTHER'S MOTHER

Doriana Gabrielle Diaz

on visits back, you realize your Spanish is ruined, your own
grandma tries to talk to you but

you miss every other word.

in your mami's house, you are a visitor, she gives you the
tour and points to the room that

would have been yours. it's an office with books piled in the
corner. the walls are painted

blue.

when you go to the church with your brother to pray, you
keep your eyes open when the rest

of them bow their heads in silence.

you don't understand Anima Sola, she looks nothing like
you, but still, they insist you

worship her.

every drop of blood has told you to come back to see it for
yourself, but you arrive and you

are still stranger.

you are so repulsed by yourself you think of ways to separate from your own body. you even consider suicide.

after you leave, you don't know if you'll ever be able to come home again.

soon enough,
you become la loba.
you become feral.
you become el morro.
you cannot show anyone that you are broken.



Guayaba con Besos

Amarise Carreras

WHEN THEY ASK ME HOW I GOT MY NAME

Doriana Gabrielle Diaz

I say Wonda died for it.

abuela came home to find her baby in the crib with no pulse. we both became empty spaces, leaching onto the women we could have been. where did she put the body? two children had to bury their father's for it, covering bodies with pounds of soil.

a newborn was separated from her mami's womb for it.
she came out covered in a red liquid

she never knew would define her belonging. the birth
wounds would recoil themselves to
the sound of flesh separating from marrow.

that same newborn would be sold from her land of origin
to begging hands across the North

Atlantic for it. it would take two decades for her to find her
way back home. when she did

she would lose herself all over again. I am held by things
seen and unseen, like gravity

in order to say my name you must understand all that has
been lost for it to be.



galamb & tinka

a disconnected multiplicity becoming whole

Fanni Somogyi

Some of it happened overnight: individuals falling into eternal slumber, yet their minds' cocooning had begun with an invisible fungi infestation much sooner. With the last flutter of the eye, like the slowing of a butterfly's wings, heated dreams flowed. Saliva oozed from the mouths, draping the chins.

This city lies in shambles, yet human desires are throbbing with life in the network. All cities were slowly consumed by the fusion of multiple fungi species. These new usurpers, what some may call heroes, only wanted the human shells and their nerves to protect and harness their minds and bring eternal unity. The concrete metal

boulders are also gradually being eaten by the fungi. The toxic present is slowly composted into delicious nutrients for the future soil. All of this is accomplished silently and without violence.

A corpse lies in the remnants of a teal couch, now weathered and painted with moth holes. She is mummified in space: rotting yet pulsating in fluorescent yellow and living anew.

The relationship of the fungi and the humans is parasitic but peaceful, with no aggressors and the hosts mummified and sustained in pleasure. Luscious dreams feed the integrated minds:

*...he broaches the surface of
the silky fluid, butterfly milk,
only to find himself in the embrace
of her limbs...*

*...each finger, palm and arthropod leg print
seems to burn a mark on her skin
tattooing fragrant joy onto the
intricate entanglement,
she is gripping her sides
pulling her in...*

*...lilies are flowering from her breasts, rooted within
the areola which are sucked on by bumblebees, while
another brings honey to her lips, dripping in ecstasy,
she licks the roots of the flowers...*

*...she lays her head on the evergreen
singing moss, the caves of her ears are
reverberating while the silkworm moth braids
her hair into tiny braids like golden challah
emitting the girl's mother's blooming scent...*

*...their aura flickers in pink—
distracted by the electric pleasure
pulsating through their embrace
he moans as if he saw the universe open...*

The holographic projections of the system are illusory. Humans see themselves change into new forms. They see themselves disappear. Yet intense pleasure erases the remorse, the fear. All minds are shared. All thoughts are shown.

With Earth's turns, the dust layers the bodies; their corpses slowly decaying.

Wherever the mold connects and each being lies, yellow vibrations glow inside the putrid darkness. The stench of decay only excites the usurpers, increasing their needs. The fungi is hooked to the mind's vision occasionally interlacing its own fantasies, yet even it hadn't anticipated its intensity. Made of many million and one, the fungi needed a distraction from its own chaotic reality. Thus, the soothing visions keep the cortisol level of the bodies low, ebbing the minds' decay.

There had been a slow gradual infection, altering the genetic makeup of all moving beings. Slowly fatigued, but unsuspecting as they were all suckling sweet nectar, their brains are hooked to happy dreams to manipulate their bodies into tranquility. All minds are shared. All thoughts

are shown.

The unifying being can hear everything, like mycorrhizae connecting plant species. Outer silence with a static noise of thought inside. At first it seemed like a dream, infected with love and intimacy. However, after an elongated period of decay, the humans all began to feel that they had been dreaming for too long. They began to pay attention, distinctly feeling the collection. Their mind's membrane eroding, and new connections being formed over vast distances.

Each one is becoming many, a conglomerate of human mass slowly decaying and being reborn elsewhere, differently. No one feels like they are dying. Or even fatigued. The intimacy shared by millions feeds them indefinitely.

Here we may observe one mind trapped: galamb is an oozing wound. Panic, fear, loath pouring out of her bodiless being. She is no longer alone in the comfort of her mind, she is naked. Although people can't perceive with their eyes; the mind replays vivid images of the past. galamb is one of the few who are resistant to the images, resistant to the change. Her abuse had harbored intense paranoia against all and she feels that she was crammed into a shell with millions. Like a forced cocooning she feels that she is conditioned to become a butterfly that is stitched together from the brain of too many. However, her weeping angers the system and it tries to shut her down. Her fear is infecting others and disrupting the hologram dreams.

She becomes a biomass/mess that has to be dealt with. She will be detached.

While most recoil from the wound that is galamb in the system, tinka's maternal instinct draws her to the sadness. Like a glob of dark puddle, she is mesmerized by its constantly rippling surface. The form undulating by its sobs. Her lengthy arms do not move as she reaches, but

something begins to grow, mapping the territory towards the melancholy. tinka feels deeply too, burdened with an intense sense of empathy, however her warmth can keep her own storms away. Her need to care and to help breaches space, she feels and extends.

Neither direct touch nor movement is present, yet the minds can traverse multitudes.

The mind and heartbeat of thousands fall, collapse at once. Then they beat up to the crescendo of a silent landscape. Trapped within each other's soul there is no privacy. Yet tinka's mind crawls seemingly silently. No state of being alone, but you have to search for one another. Emotions are exhibited widely and panic spreads in waves. Most turn away holding themselves in fear of an erupting unending doom.

As we peer closer, the hologram dreams are more structured than the jumbled thoughts that one can fall into.

Drive slower babe, the car in front is going to turn; Beth you are going to fall if you don't tie your shoes; no fudge until you finish your math worksheet; dinner is ready; how was your day, babe?; what a lovely dream; I adore lying here with you watching the cars pass by; did you see that firefly, they only emerge when there is magic in the air; Liz let's go, I want to leave before the rain gets here; the ocean is just warm enough to enjoy a good swim; I will fill up the tank and then we can go see that movie; all done for the day; taste this, it's delicious; I got the towels from the dryer; where are you, come closer; I'm feeling cold; there is the lady bug I was looking for; this feels like quite an endless dream; our eyes have finally met; do you remember the droplets of water that grazed your skin as we ran through the prairie?; I can't feel a thing; where are you?; I can sense your warmth, but I can't touch your skin, come closer; I'm sure I will wake up any moment; hmmmm I love this, end-

less; intertwined, we lie in moonlight; is anything out there; nightmare; nightmare; I want to wake up; give me one more kiss; I will miss you; your embrace keeps me warm; what's this noise; I can't breathe; what a lovely dream

Involuntary memories flutter to the surface, these thoughts are the last remnants of a past.

Galamb still holds onto fragments of solitude, dreaming of her safe haven in the prairie, hidden among the long grass and echinacea. Bodies and bodiless minds finally embrace touch after a small eternity. She is comforted by tinka's presence now. With her she feels alone, struck less by the panic of the crowd pushing her from all sides.

Tinka cradles galamb. Limbs intertwine in the blue haze, their heartbeats mimicking one another. tinka imagines stroking galamb's skin. With each toss, their veins weave like vines around each other's forms. The calm meets the raging sea, the water erodes the shore for a while, but feeling the blue and violet it abides. galamb and tinka see as one, one image seen by both (and by all). They grow the haze around their bodies, but the voices shatter the milky membrane, leaking in. The fungi doesn't allow it. The possibility of just two in their own space-time cannot be. Multiplicity is essential for the new to hold its roots in humanity.

The multiplicity disintegrates the haze around their beings. Privacy gone they are instructed to reunite with the network or be detached and decay completely. For the new unity they must give up their solitary intimacy.

All minds must be shared. All thoughts must be shown.

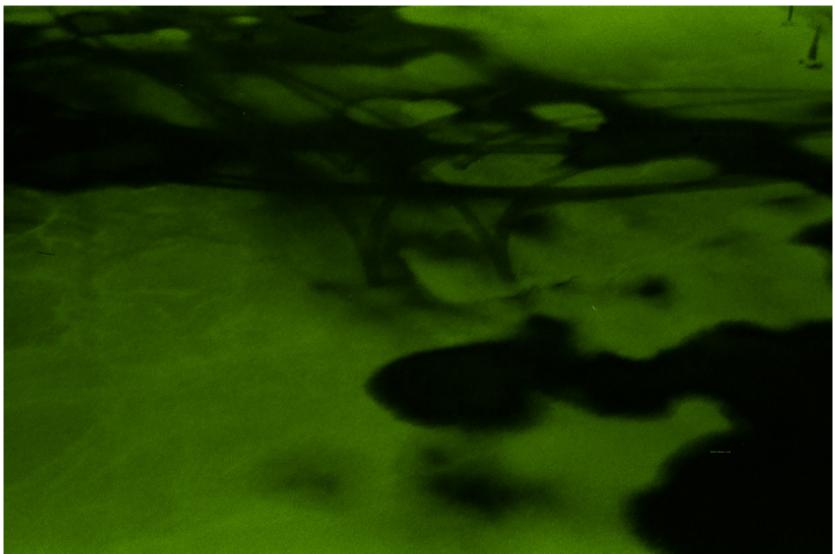
The hierarchy of connection has been squashed into an oversimplified lateral ecosystem, where there is only One. Space collapses into one unity. The fungi shows galamb

and tinka images of grief. It shows them forests butchered, living souls cast aside, plants dying on toxic landscapes slowly becoming habitable now. Yet, the network also senses tinka's warmth and the images born in her mind alone. The soothing effect she has on galamb is palpable by their entire surroundings. Her need is imminent in the system, but all minds must be shared. All thoughts must be shown.

Is the fungi's emergence an inevitable disease (or relief) sent by Gaia? We all know she is alive. No longer submissive under man's fight of nature. She has returned as one infecting the minds and assembling them into a collective. She is a nurturer, but also a destroyer holding our fickle lives in her palm.

Minds are forever embedded into the network, into her. Not alive but floating in a dew of ecstasy. Nothing moves or changes except the luminescent glow as the entity vibrates on. The flesh exists in constant dream, with nothing and everything. Consciousness passes through each connection, each body, becoming all and none simultaneously. The multiplicity is an entity in assemblage, a vast collection of beings and their myriads of thoughts.

A new ecology has been forced to come.



Indistinct as a Mode

Antony Ohman

THE LAST TWINS OF ULTIMA THULE

Gnaomi Siemens

Mother put us
on a white rock—

our languor came after.

Her song stitched us with
brindled needles—

we did not listen.

For years we were soaked in rot—
we were fat with filth.

She dragged us down—
to where the mud had made
eyes at the moon.

It made the moon mad.

We lay inside, coiled around
our translucence.

She syringed into us

the sin-colored juice
of the bearberry.

When our cheeks were
properly pinked

she made us

twin tunics
of new snow.



sometimes it turns out you have to lie

Caitlin Peck

OATHS AND EXECRATIONS

Gnaomi Siemens

*

Young ropes, a walk over fen—
your russet hair a back flow
for the taking.

My small scythe does quick
work. You are the beginning
of my ingredients.

I walk behind you and listen
for the sound it makes.
Quiet—it's growing now.

*

Now we've made something
but according to the star's

performance—it will take
an age to make itself known.

So, for now, all we have
is me taking apart you,
strand by plucked strand.

*

How is it done you ask.

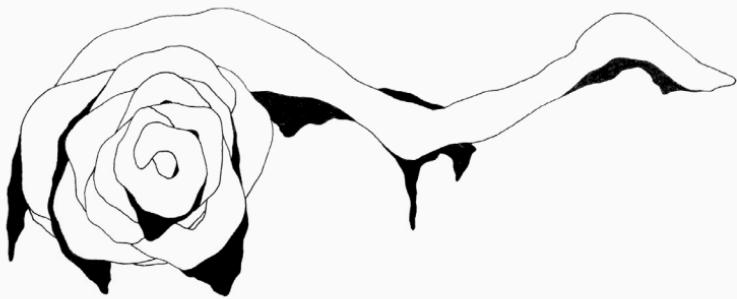
There is an inexact slant
of the wrist, I joinder.

It hangs at an odd angle
to the air.

Pulling the scythe takes
time, it does not give
it back.

*

I have not taken any
of your trees—they’re still
standing around
in the grove where you left
them—on the day
your red hair had finally
grown long enough
to reach the ground.



Crying in Public

Madi Giovina

I cry in public parks a lot; we're in the middle of a five-year drought and I want to do my part.

It helps, in small amounts, the equivalent of planting herbs in pots on the kitchen counter, or making a vertical garden. My tears are powerful, but I don't have a full grasp on my powers yet. I can't exactly choose *what* I grow or *how much* I cry. All I know is the most I could grow in one crying session was a willow tree—and that was a long cry. But I'm only human, and I can only cry so much. I limit myself to once a day. Any more and I wouldn't have a life, and I'd fall into a deep tessellating depression, which would probably generate more tears, but then I'd have most of my crying sessions in therapy instead of in public, and my therapist already has enough plants in her office.

In an average crying session, I grow a baby rose bush or a row of dandelions. Succulents are easy too, because they require less water. And then I can get my friend Frida to propagate them and our impact really multi-

plies. Even though I'm not totally in control of my powers, I can feel my tears getting stronger every day. This time two years ago, I could barely grow *purslane*. But now, I'm a legend in my small town. (Which isn't saying much, because the legend before me was a kid who was really good at untying knots.)

The community farm asked me to work for them this summer. I said no at first. Even though I'm the best crier I know, I wasn't sure I was good enough to do it full-time, and plus I wasn't sure if crying in the workplace (even if said workplace is a farm) was appropriate. Like I said, I cry in public parks a lot, but that's around *strangers*. I wasn't sure how I felt about crying in front of my boss. I eventually said yes because I needed the money, and I liked that the farm gives away free produce to the community. The lead farmer, Jade, promised me that in exchange for my tears she would teach me about drought-tolerant plants and other farming methods that don't require emotional labor.

My first week, I grew tomatoes, spinach, and basil. About enough for a small salad for a family of seven. Jade was impressed. She had been struggling to grow basil for a while; it was too hot and too dry for any of her plants to survive. "And you did it just like that! Huh! Maybe I should try crying more."

By my third week on the farm, a strange thing happened: I ran out of things to make me sad enough to cry. Usually when I cried on my own, it came naturally, but now that I was *trying* to cry, I *really* had to try. It was like thinking too hard about breathing, and then forgetting how to breathe. I had used up everything sad in the world, and there was nothing left for me to cry about.

Jade gave me a week off to rest my eyes. I didn't cry at all on my break. My first day back, I grew a lemon tree and everyone clapped. I collapsed from dehydration. Jade made sure to give me plenty of water after that. But

a week later, fully hydrated, my tear ducts were blocked again. I tried to cry about not being able to cry, but that only got me one or two tears, enough for a sprig of lavender.

I took my lavender, quit my job, and headed straight to Frida's house. I wanted her to comfort me, and remind me that I

hadn't even wanted to work there in the first place, but instead she laughed when she saw me. "I was wondering when you'd quit." That's all we said about the farm.

We laid in her bed and read Home & Garden magazines. I tore out all of the plants I've never grown. Looking at the pile of landscaping photos around me, I realized I wasn't sad about being bad at my job, I was scared I was losing my gift. I dug my face into Frida's pillow and screamed. I must have cried a little bit, too, because when I came up for air, there was a tiny tulip poking out of the pillow in place of a down feather.

Frida picked it and made me sit on the floor. "I love flowers and all, but please don't make my bed into a garden."

I laughed at Frida standing over me with the smallest tulip I had ever seen that she had just plucked out of her pillow.

"What? I don't want bugs in my room!" she said in her own defense.

That made me laugh more, the idea of Frida's room turning into something out of one of her magazines, bees and all. I was laughing so hard, I could feel tears dripping down my face. They cascaded, flowing softly like a lazy river. It felt natural, it felt right, my body was a spring again.

Soon, Frida's floor was covered in a field of aster. The flowers were growing faster than Frida could pick them out of her carpet, so eventually she gave up and joined me in laughing on the floor. That's when it hit me: I could have

happy tears too. I kissed Frida goodbye on the head and ran to the farm.

“I want my job back!” I yelled, to no one and everyone.

Jade somehow heard me and came out from the shed to see me surrounded by a three sisters garden, the result of the runoff of my laughing tears that hadn’t dried yet. The sight of me and my gift working again made Jade cry, and I thought I even saw an arugula leaf sprout at her foot. Jade’s happiness made me cry even more. Soon I had grown a blueberry bush and a row of willow trees. Within a few hours, my crying episode was gossip for the whole town, and I swear since then I’ve seen more people crying than I have in my whole life. Not everyone’s tears grow greenery, but it seems they still spring life.



Watch Me Weep

Joey Dean

acknowledgments

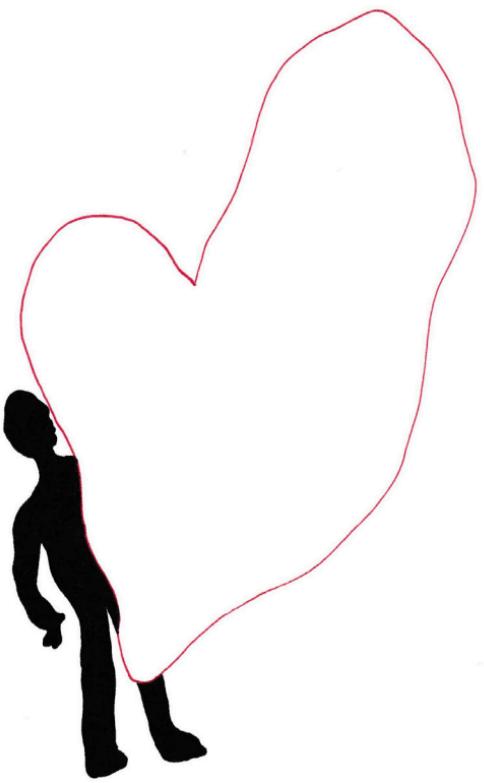
We collectively would like to thank all of the wonderful artists and writers who contributed to this anthology. We would also like to thank Tori Ashley Matos and Kai Cassar for offering their insights throughout the submission process. Many thanks to Addison Blanda for reading and re-reading each different version of this anthology and for being along for the ride. Thank you to Double Union makerspace in San Francisco for supplying paper, ink, and inspiration for the various drafts of this anthology.

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Last, but not least, thank you, the reader, for joining us on this journey.



big heart

tiny pink

about the contributors

editors

Madi Giovina

Madi Giovina is a writer from Philadelphia. She has her B.S. in Computer Science from Harvey Mudd College. super / natural is her first publication. Madi runs Art Open Calls and hosts a radio show every Saturday on BFF.fm called Chemical X.

Tiffany Niles

Tiffany Niles has recently obtained her AA in Creative Writing from Long Beach City College. She is attending the University of British Columbia for her BA this fall. Tiffany has grown to love all aspects of the writing/publishing community and hopes to be a full time editor; helping other marginalized writers find their voices and tell their stories. Her story “Secret Admirer” was published in the Charmed Writers Flash Fiction Anthology earlier this year.



i thought you already knew

Caitlin Peck

artists and writers

Alex Benke

Alex Benke is a recent grad of UMass Amherst's MFA program and current freelancer living in Los Angeles. You can find more of her work at The Thought Erotic and Queen Mob's Tea House.

Apu

Apu is a 37 years old queer non-binary punk, organic gardener/farmer and collage diy artist workin' and livin' on a organic seed breeding farm near Bremen/Northern Germany. She's creatin' collage artwork for more than 18 years now (doin' a lot of coops with zines, bands, solidarity projects, collectives...) and is part of a small diy art collective named Theo Collective.

Amarise Carreras

Amarise Carreras is an artist from Queens, NY. They received their BFA in photography and film at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2018. They use digital photography to document performative installation as well as the environments they have grown up in.

Adrianna “Kaya” Clark

Adrianna “Kaya” Clark (b. 1977, Oxford, MS) began her love affair with photography at the age of three. Drawing inspiration from conversations with women of the African diaspora about life, love, and living, she captures her subjects in natural light. Her intention is to capture their natural beauty, thus she uses a nominal amount of retouching and photoshop, choosing instead to embrace what some would call imperfections. Clark sees every individual in her lens as a muse.

Joey Dean

Canadian Transgender artist Joey Dean creates his own pop-surrealist twist on feminism with a touch of comedy. Resonating with the Surrealists and Romanticists, as well as the work of American-Traditional tattoo artists, Dean's paintings warp perception with contorted perspective and misplaced anatomical features — often poetic and bold, sometimes even graceful — creating optical illusions and dreamscapes. His award-winning abstracts and surrealist illustrations have been featured in half a dozen independent publications and his work has been showcased in libraries and schools. While his passion for painting dates back to 2012, many of Dean's recent works are digital design and traditional ink illustrations.

Doriana Gabrielle Diaz

Doriana Gabrielle Diaz is an Afro-Latina creative, poet, curator, and visual artist. She uses her art forms to harness and express her most authentic & vulnerable self.

Sage Katherine Enderton

Sage Katherine Enderton is a freeform and experimental poet from Buffalo, NY. Her work has been published with groups such as Peach Magazine, Ghost City Press, and more. A practicing Wiccan and caffeine fiend, Sage is attending Buffalo State College and majoring in writing.

Anthony M. Grimaldi

Anthony M. Grimaldi of JourneyManDesigns is an Illustrator & Graphic Designer from New York City, a metropolis of successful and starving artists. He is content to be either, but never to be neither. Anthony blends illustration, enabling him to design with unlimited creativity and visual imagination.

Donna J.W. Munro

Donna J. W. Munro has spent the last twenty years teaching high school social studies. Her students inspire her every day. She has an MA in writing popular fiction from Seton Hill Writing University. Her pieces are published in Dark Moon Digest #34, Syntax and Salt, Sirens Ezine, the Haunted Traveler, Flash Fiction Magazine, Astounding Outpost, Door=Jar, Spectators and Spooks Magazine, Nothing's Sacred Magazine IV and V, Corvid Queen, Hazard Yet Forward, Enter the Apocalypse, Killing It Softly 2, Beautiful Lies, Painful Truths II, Terror Politico, and several Thirteen O'Clock Press anthologies.

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Aline-Mwezi Niyonsenga is a writer of black speculative fiction. She has short stories published in Selene Quarterly Magazine, Apparition Lit, Djed Press, Underground Writers, StylusLit, and the 2018 Digital Writers Festival. Her work has been shortlisted for the 2018 Monash Undergraduate Prize for Creative Writing and the 2018 Deborah Cass Prize for Writing.

Antony Ohman

Antony Ohman lives in Beverly, MA. He works as a book-seller and is pursuing writing and photography as a means of expression.

Caitlin Peck

Caitlin Peck is an artist in Philadelphia, PA. She received her BFA from Pennsylvania State University in Drawing & Painting in 2010 and her MFA from Moore College of Art & Design in 2013. Peck exhibits her work regularly and has been a featured artist with Bridge Magazine and Most Known Unknown and published in Selfish Magazine: Hot & Bothered Volume 4, Venefica Magazine: Volume 3, and GUTS. She recently exhibited her work with LA-based online gallery, Cactus Gallery, and B Square Gallery in Philadelphia.

Theresa M. Pisani

Theresa Pisani is an artist living in Sonoma County, CA. She has worked as a muralist for many years. She is also an oil painter and cell animator.

Vincent Seadler

Baltimore born diabetic queer, Vincent Seadler, AKA Sin Veadler, has recently transplanted to the Oregon coast to reengage with their praxis after spending a decade supporting local artists, activists, and spaces back in Baltimore and the greater metropolitan area. Vincent's work focuses on the absurdity of the late Holocene, the struggles of living within late-stage capitalism, general observation and reflection of place, all while getting lost in the notion that people like themselves did not exist over a century ago due to their continuously evolving condition of type 1 diabetes. They are not good at grammar, but keep writing anyway. They're enjoying becoming reacquainted with rural life while seeking a place to find themselves once again active in the eco-political sphere.

Nisi Shawl

Nisi Shawl wrote the 2016 Nebula Award finalist *Everfair* (Tor) and the 2008 James Tiptree, Jr. Award winning collection *Filter House*. Her numerous short stories also comprise the contents of Dark Moon's 2018 Primer to Nisi Shawl and PM Press's 2019 *Talk like a Man*. In 2005 she co-wrote *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*, the standard text on inclusivity in the imaginative genres. Shawl is a founder of the Carl Brandon Society, and for twenty years has served on the board of the Clarion West Writers Workshop. She lives in Seattle and takes frequent walks with her cat.

Keely Shinners

Keely Shinners is a writer from Fox Lake, Illinois. They graduated with a BA from Scripps College in 2017. They are currently working on their Master's degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Their work is featured in peer reviewed journals such as James Baldwin Review and Safundi, as well as magazines like Mask, Flaunt, and Autre. They write reviews regularly for arts publications like ArtThrob. How To Build a Home for the End of the World is their first novel.

Gnaomi Siemens

Gnaomi Siemens holds an MFA from Columbia University School of The Arts, in poetry and literary translation. Her words can be found at Asymptote, Words Without Borders, The Believer, Slice Magazine, Europe Now Journal, The American Journal of Poetry, and American Chordata, among others in the US and abroad. Her manuscript The Wife's Lament: New Translations From Old English, a selection of poems from The Exeter Book, is forthcoming and will be accompanied by prints by UK artist, Morag Eaton of Foldyard Gallery, Berwick-Upon-Tweed. She lives in New York City.

Fanni Somogyi

Fanni Somogyi is a Hungarian born artist currently residing in Clearwater, FL. She has recently completed her BFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Sculpture and Creative Writing. Her work explores networks (both organic and inorganic), the effects of technology on memories, and how space and distance affect relationships. When she is not fabricating metal sculptures in her studio, she can be found with her nose in a book or avidly composing her next poem.

Brandi Spering

Brandi Spering has a BFA in Creative Writing from Pratt institute. Her work has appeared in publications such as Stardust Magazine and Cold Brood zine. She has released several chapbooks through BookWook Feminist Press Collective and has worked as a contributor for the Boston Calendar and The Odyssey Online. She resides in Philadelphia where she writes, sews, and paints.

tiny pink

tiny pink is a white queer femme artist whose abstract drawings portray inner experiences that cannot be verbalized. Her influences include bones, geography, bodies, and emotions. tiny pink honors the potential for transcendence in all of our earthly experiences and explores the ways in which the most basic of human functioning (emotion, sex, being in the body) can connect us to something much greater.

Anna Tregurtha

Lately Anna thinks art is just about embarrassing yourself. Anna lives and works in Los Angeles.



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