



Eleven and a Half

2024



Eleven and a Half
Issue 12, 2024

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College of Liberal Arts

MASHEAD

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Printed in New York City

Table of Contents

nonfiction

Les-Bionic , Celia Shanley	11
The Ground is Still Hollow, but the Soil's Still Wet , Amaya Branch	16
Tragicomedienne , Stella Hofferman	18
The Almost End of the World , 'Imiloa Borland	21
Aysmmetrical Conclusions , Isabel Hall	26
Neighbors , Sara Magnuson	32
As It Is In Dreams , Ashley Iorio	35
Returning Home: A Departure for the Margin , Lananh Chu	42
Ode to Odelay , Becca Moore	46
it comes in three , Kiera Renteria	50
On writing in the modern day , Annelies Stealey	56

poetry

Writers Block , Gretchen Donnelly	67
joyfreak? , Ian Powers	68
Synesthesia , Soph Lajnef	70
Car Altar , Alyne Padilla Robles	71
Findings , Camila Pernisco	73
PARTICIPATION POINTS , L.A. Ritchie	74
"TRIBE MIGRATION/VENICE" , Galacia	76
my birth , Ana Krent	77
My Nature , Sofia Rangel	78
199 problems and guns ain't one , Avery Camp	81
After Vieeve Francis , Ollie Davis	82
Up close , Calia Fernandez	84
After "Jazz Stories: Mama Can Sing, Papa Can Blow,"	85
Nadja Anderson-Oberman	
on space , Radha Peacock	87
The Ecstasy of our Suffering , Kiera Renteria	94
Coup at Quest Diagnostics , Zoe Hussain	98
babadook summer , Avery Camp	99

fiction

The Prologue to Elementary , Scott Soth	121
Cliffs , Ethan Glazar	129
(Nothing But) Pain and Good Intentions , Gil Ferguson	134
Diversion , Olivia Callender	142
Haunted , Zora Gandhi	143
Infractions , Rowan Leonard	147
Yesterday's Digging , Amy Sihler	151
The Corpse , Emma Finley	156
Summer of Citrus , Kat Yoakum	160
Philia , Ana Mohammad Zadeh	164

features

Courtyard Epigram , Lang College contributors	62
Bang! , Amy Sihler	104
Hoorah For The New School! , Eugene Long	116

featured artworks

Undies, Bra Set , Isabella Anand	15
Dad's Eating Alone Again, #3 , Kyle Cheng	20
Images on Connection, #12 , Madeline Early	25
Eyesolation , Milo Evashchen	34
Images on Connection, #10 , Madeline Early	45
thumbnails , Ally Frans-Kohn	49
Untitled , Sarah Tonra	55
Sketchbook Spread , Joe Glynn	66
Undies , Isabella Anand	72
Animation Key Frames , Chris Gentile	75
my birth , Ana Krent	77
Looking In , Lara Agrawal	83
Fervor Motion , Sarah Tonra	86
All Eyes on Me , Bridie O'Loughlin	93
Motel Photograph , Isabella Anand	96
Park , Josephine Racz	120

Sheep Bag , Charlie Kreidler	133
A Cup of Tea for You and Me , Char Gossage	142
Hey Daddy-o, #3 , Kyle Cheng	150
An Anatomy of Death , Larkin Lin	158
Raven Usher, #3 , Larkin Lin	163
The Mayor of Sixth St , Char Gossage	179

Letter from the Editor

After another tumultuous and momentous last year, we are thrilled to present you with a collection of provocative, immersive, and striking works from your classmates and peers. Through unearthing photos from The New School's archives and collaging student-created art, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, we strive to invoke a sense of the Eugene Lang identity--one that irrevocably comprises the past, present, and future, and cements us as a uniquely crucial piece of the New York liberal arts scene and of the entire New School. Throughout this issue you will find meditations on love, loss, what was and what will be, observations of the world around us as it turns, the intrinsic connection between literature/art and the self, and the self as a single facet of a community. While these concepts and identities may ebb and flow, the evolution of the Eugene Lang community is itself an archive of reflection and progress.



nonfiction

Les-Bionic
Celia Shanley

“Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself.”

Judith Butler

“Guys are all douchebags and I hate them all. They don’t know how to deal with women and I feel this is why the lesbian rate is going up in this country.”

Nicole “Snooki” Polizzi

Astute as Snooki’s hypothesis may sound, I know firsthand that most straight girls that get mad at their boyfriends, renounce all men, and declare that they are “becoming” or “turning” lesbian don’t put their money where their mouth is. Snooki is no different. She quickly renews her search for a “gorilla juice-head” of a man.

Jersey Shore became popular for its depictions of hedonistic debauchery and anthropological insights into guido culture (think macho Italian-American; emphasis on the American). The show follows Snooki, JWOWW, Sammi, Ronnie, Angelina, Deena, Vinny, DJ Pauly D, and Mike “The Situation.” Every summer they share a house and work (or at least pretend to work) during the day so they can party at night. I love observing this small group of guidos and guidettes (the guido’s big haired, ditzy counterpart) and learning about their unique lexicon and mating rituals. “Creeping” for example, is the homosocial act of prowling for women to hookup with (fluid term for sexual contact), or, if they’re lucky, smush (sex). The guys often hookup or smush at the same time, in the same room. “Creeping” is preceded by GTL (gym, tan, laundry). The guys spend all day primping, but take the most care right before hitting the club. They run fingers through their stiff, spiked hair and liberally apply clear lip gloss.

Season 4, filmed in Italy, is my favorite to rewatch. What I remember most isn’t the car crash or Mike’s roid rage induced injury and subsequent neck brace, it’s the show’s clumsy exploration of queerness. Obviously Jersey Shore isn’t winning any GLAAD awards, but it’s not the worst thing to watch. At least it’s not that depressing and no one dies. I’d take it over *Blue is the Warmest Color* any day.

It all starts with Mike trying to arrange what he calls a “menage-a-twin” with a pair of blondes. Deena swoops in and commits a “robbery” by hooking up with Erica, one of the twins.

“When you’re drunk sometimes you kiss girls,” she says.

When they arrive at the house, Snooki announces in a sing-song voice that, “Deena is gonna be les-bionic tonight.” Or at least that’s what the close captions on my TV said. I hope that’s it. Les-bionic; drunken slurring birthing such a beautiful new word. I try to imagine what it means. I imagine a new race of biologically superior lesbians; cyborgian Amazons.

I return to reality; or at least to reality TV. Deena says that “It’s not the worst thing on earth like bringing home a girl. It’s just not something I normally do. I wouldn’t say I’m a lesbian, but I guess bicurious. I don’t think I’d ever date a girl cause’ I really, really love penis. But I have fun.”

There’s that word, it wouldn’t be the 2010s without it; bicurious. Girls hooking up with girls was well and good as long as it was just part of them going wild. As long as it was just to try it. They could taste sweet, forbidden fruit in their cherry chapstick, so long as boyfriends didn’t mind. Bisexuality was supposed to be sexy and rebellious; so wrong even when it felt so right. Even though I loved the song, the passage of time has allowed me to listen to “I Kissed a Girl” with a more critical ear.

As Deena reiterated, she’s just having fun. She is only satisfying a curiosity, not a desire. It’s an experiment. A conclusion must be drawn.

“So I’m hooking up Erica. I’m into it. Having a blast. Then I get freaked out. This is not me. This is not what I do. I like penis.”

Deena has professed her love for penis twice now. We seem to have our answer, but the saga isn’t over yet.

When discussing the next day, the boys aren’t sure what to make of this new, les-bionic woman. Should they worry that she is better, faster, and stronger? Should they worry they will be replaced? They decide that Deena is racking up quite the criminal record (from the robberies). They convict her of cock blocking. They claim that they see nothing wrong with girls kissing girls, but Deena took it too far. It’s the competition they have qualms with. Her transgression is violating their claim to women.

Deena decides she is ready to put her bi-curiosity behind her. But when she and Snooki get blackout drunk two episodes later, she changes her tune. Deena and Snooki hookup. Housemates express disgust and

suspicion. This is Deena’s second offense.

“This isn’t an ordinary girl make-out session,” JWOWW observes. “This is like they are really going to fuck each other when we get back to the hotel, and I have to share a room with them.”

“Does that turn you on?” Vinny asks.

“No!” Pauly yells in reply.

That is the function of “ordinary” girl makeout sessions; to turn guys on. It is the function of women’s bodies. “Lesbian” is the most popular porn search in most states, but that’s not who they’re making it for. A display of actual desire between two women is unimaginable and apparently more abhorrent than the act of incest Mike was trying to initiate with the twins.

Queer women represent an escape from heterosexuality for both straight men and straight women, but in vastly different ways. For straight men it is a break in the monotony of monogamy; the promise of a threesome if he puts up with his old ball and chain. For straight women it is the fantasy of freedom from men. But that’s all it is. A Fantasy. In relationships between queer women men are absent, but their gaze is not. Male centric media and culture feeds the myth that relationships between women serve as sites of voyeurism instead of independent love and pleasure. In a culture where heterosexuality is the norm, queer relationships are made into mirror images; mere reflections that are distortions even when they are idealized.

I remember one time I was hanging out with this girl and she suddenly asked “Are you straight?”

When I said “No,” she immediately replied with “I wish I wasn’t!”

Her voice was full of desperation.

What did she expect? Was I supposed to save her from her fate? Some straight people seem weirdly embarrassed by their straightness nowadays. Heterosexuality is not only burdensome, but boring. Bisexuality still has a little bit of an edge. Girls who like girls are “sooo lucky.” The grass is gayer on the other side.

Straight women know men are the problem, but they don’t see a sustainable solution. Straight men and straight sex feel inevitable. For all the pain they cause, they also hold the promise of validation. If it really was a choice, if straight women could amputate their hetero-appendages in favor of new, les-bionic ones, I don’t think they would. To sever ties

with straightness is to abandon the comfort and security of “normalcy.” Straight women are often victims of men and misogyny in their own heterosexual relationships, but this does not absolve them of trivializing the experiences of queer women.

Expressions of embarrassment or regret in regard to heterosexuality and the preformative distancing of oneself from it can be classified as heteropessimism. One of its main tenets is that men are beyond hope. The men of *Jersey Shore* present plenty of evidence to back this statement. Despite spending so much of their time pursuing women, the men of *Jersey Shore* don’t seem to like them that much. When women call multiple times or, god forbid, show up to the house during the day, they are deemed stalkers. The show’s contentious, on-again, off-again couple Ron and Sam displays some of the worst heterosexual men have to offer. Ron is a serial cheater and abusive in their relationship. The show documents Ron getting angry and destroying Sammi’s belongings. He was arrested on allegations of domestic violence in April of 2021.

While heteropessimism may feel cathartic to the heteropessimist, in actuality it’s a concession to the patriarchy. It’s not productive. It’s an “if you can’t beat em, join em” attitude. Heteropessimistic women view men as a monolith, which, in a way, they are. They are the way they are because they are part of the patriarchy. This is an explanation for their behavior, not an excuse. Recently more feminist discussions have made their way into the mainstream. Consciousnesses have been raised, but not standards. While public discussions have evolved, there seems to be an interpersonal lag. If straight women really commit to raising their standards, there may not be many men left. They may be left alone, but it’s the same patriarchy that they’re fed up with that told them that was a bad thing.

For now a les-bionic utopia is just a dream, but maybe it’s not all doom and gloom. Maybe heterosexuality is like a cockroach. It’s always been around. It’s a nuisance. We can’t kill it, but maybe we can force it to adapt.

Undies, Bra Set, Isabella Anand



The Ground is Still Hollow, but the Soil's Still Wet

Amaya Branche

change is meant to be good; a death, a crucial one. but lately i feel as if i've only shifted into a humbling mix of new problems. but on my walks i learn how often the neighbors cut their grass (once a week feels a bit excessive), count the acorns, still unripe in this unusual october warmth, and think of ways i can decorate the house for this season, the way Nana used to; They tell me i look just like her.

~

the leaves are dying again.

maybe i count the mushrooms in the yards to time out the next death. they eat up the roots of the tree outside of my bedroom window. one day, i left my fester to feed them leaves that they didn't need, the ones you go out of your way to crunch beneath your feet when you need to feel something. i needed to serve a purpose, form a relationship, someone to get me out of the house...

anticipating the day that i go out
on my own,
without "rational" rhyme or reason,
no pretending that this house is still as warm as it was
really, it is a kettle
slowly boiling,
and i am the only one who uses the mugs now.

~

women hold water for all: their tears run sparse, and slow, like molasses. preserved for the mixing and baking of men in the warmth of their bodies and sensitive influence. some boys drop acid and finally gain access to their empathy. some start listening to their girlfriends, mothers. some after having a daughter. and sometimes, not even then.

the pit in my stomach grows with every dish i rewash every time they speak. they have these booming voices, and they stomp so hard on the

floors above me when the task is to simply walk. but, such is the mass of a man with a heavy heart, grown out of a boy with clipped wings. the creaks of weary steps and carefully uncreased Foamposites bleed through linoleum tile, stained gray carpet. creaks that gnaw, and remind me of when Nana could still walk.

her steps were delicate, yet announced her still. her voice did not boom, it rang; i always knew when she was home. she would start buying halloween candy in august, refresh her collection of ornaments in october. i associate this virginia fall breeze with her martian zest, her mercurial grace. the leaves are dying again.

~

things have not been normal for a long time. what i do not know now is where i fall into all of what i've left, and now return to. i think of what can be salvaged, and what i may need to recreate. what of old comforts and rituals can i take in to my own shape, for not everything must be purged in order for us to heal. the trunk has been cut, but there are still deep roots.

i think i'll take my little bit of something, and buy a pumpkin for our porch. maybe dad will feel like a kid again, for just a few seconds, when he comes in from his 12 hour shifts. maybe on his smoke breaks my uncle will take one less drag. it could remind them too much of what was lost. they could pay it no mind at all.

but to me, it's an expression of my ailing spirit. one that heals through reminders of what went right.

the leaves are dying again. but not every death must mean destruction. weight can also be shifted. the winds will cool and dust the detritus.

this season of grief need not be so empty.

Tragicomedienne

Stella Hofferman

Growing up, adults used to always call me spunky. I remember—after a playdate, when I was nine or ten—asking my friend if her mom had liked me. (I know, I’ve always been like this.) My friend responded that yes, her mother did like me. “She says you’re spunky.” The girl said that word—“spunky”—with the condescending yet cheery inflection of a Kindergarten teacher or a Spirit Leader at a pep rally, complete with jazz hands and everything. Truthfully, I had no idea what spunky meant (nor the words condescending and inflection, for that matter), but I assumed I should take offense to it, and I cried.

It sounded like a curse word, and up until fifth grade—when my friends asked me to say a word that starts with eff and ends with uck, the correct answer being “firetruck”—I’d have a very visceral reaction to swear words; I wouldn’t dare say one (until the “firetruck-incident”), and if you said one around me, there’d be hell to pay. I have a vivid memory from around that time: I was with my gay family watching a gay documentary that their gay friend had made, and I stormed out of the room crying after Lady Bunny said the word “fuck.”

No, I was not a bigoted child—I was actually quite educated for my age, thank you very much. I’m only telling this story to convey to you how anti-swearling I really was. Tears would well up in my eyes and my heart would drop to my stomach and I’d cradle my poor little ears as if they’d been cut by the abrupt sharpness elocuted in the suffixes of words like shit-fuck-bitch-dick.

I’d expressed a similar reaction to spunky. Maybe, the “unk” reminded me of “uck”; or, maybe I’d preemptively known that “spunk” was another word for jizz, meaning that my friend’s mother had called me “cummy,” (a completely deplorable and disgusting thing for an adult woman to say about a child—for shame!) and while jizz isn’t technically a swear word, I definitely wouldn’t say it in front of my grandma, if ever presented with the opportunity to talk about ejaculation with my Bubbie.

I’d later come to realize that “spunky” meant sassy, or aloof, which was not something I particularly wanted to hear. I wanted to hear that this brat’s Mumu-wearing, wannabe-Buddhist mother found me charming and clever and wise beyond my years. Then again, I had also spilled the beans to her daughter about the legitimacy of Santa Claus (a long-lasting tradition and rite of passage for the young Jew), so perhaps I’d deserved it. That’s what I always wanted people to think; but she had been right, I was just strange and silly.

This part of myself I didn’t come to embrace until I was sixteen or so, and it had become cool to be different. I’m only twenty now, so this wasn’t too long ago, and all of the “Bella-Swan-Harry-Styles-Fanfic” discourse had come and gone; meaning, I absolutely could *NOT* say that “I wasn’t like other girls,” but, I could think it. I became exactly what I criticized: A beautiful girl in a push-up bra boasting about not knowing any of the songs on the Top 100 radio station, and instead only listening to “underground artists” like Radiohead or Kanye West. She’s so unique...so effortlessly cool and clever—and wow! Look at her perfect perky “big-but-not-intimidatingly-big” tits!

I got exactly what I wanted from this—attention, or more specifically—a boyfriend. This was when I learned that no matter how “different” you act—how unassuming, how offbeat, how pseudo-intellectual you are—if you masquerade around as a sex object, you are going to get treated like one. I’d wanted to be unattainable—one of those girls you always wanted but couldn’t have. A tease, maybe.

I know what you’re asking yourself, “Is she really blaming herself for her sexual trauma?” And to that I say, I’m trying to keep this pretty light, so allow me to seamlessly segue into the point I’m trying to make, which is that I don’t—in almost any capacity—wish to be taken seriously; not by you, or your parents, or the perverts in my sophomore year Spanish class. Thus, my once “spunky” (or “cummy,” or whatever they called me) character mutated into somewhat of a self-hating royal jester. I exploit my own insecurities and repurpose them into self-deprecating jokes. Every argument I make or stance I take will always be followed up with “but I’m probably wrong” or “but that’s just me.” You know me! I’m less of a girl and more of one of those freaky blow-up guys they have outside of

used-car dealerships that you only pass when you're trying to get to the highway. My spineless body will be tossed about by the wind while my feet are cemented to the ground. It looks like I'm dancing, doesn't it?

Dad's Eating Alone Again, #3, Kyle Cheng



The Almost End of the World

'Imiloa Borland

I was fifteen when I thought the world would end.

That lazy Mānoa morning yawned a golden dawn into the clear sky, chasing the sacred shadows of night to tuck themselves away in the nooks and crannies of the earth. Myna birds ruffled their feathers as they emerged from their nests to begin their endless daily caws, soon to be joined by cooing zebra doves to form the background chorus of a Hawai‘i day. Saturdays on Punahou School campus were quieter than schooldays, but not completely silent: the rolling green lawns and lush landscaping were attended to by groundskeepers chattering in Ilocano, the main gymnasium rumbled with the sounds of a girl’s wrestling meet, and the crisp pounding of *ipu* echoed from the open doors of Forest Hall.

During the weekday, First Hall housed any and every sport that needed space when the gymnasium was being used: the tower of stacked mats that took up the far end of the room was for the wrestlers on days when there weren’t any meets, the supply closet was crowded with yoga equipment, and twice a semester the hall was surrendered to administering the dreaded required fitness tests. But on spring Saturdays, that hot mirrored hall belonged to us, hula dancers.

From January to the end of April, Saturdays were dedicated to rehearsals for Punahou’s annual *Holokū* pageant. For those of us faithful to the perpetuation of *hula kahiko*, we would arrive in trickles as the last remnants of night melted under the morning sun, arranging ourselves in front of the mirrors in various states of awakeness, compelled to perfection under the never-pleased gaze of Aunty Doreen. It was brutal work of dehydration and aching knees, our tangy sweat joining the decades of sweat before ours to polish the floors, but nothing beat the feeling of being tied into a *pa‘u* and adorned in *lā‘i* and *pua*, blessed by *pule* and the guidance of generations of *kumu* and *olapa* that came before us. To dance *kahiko*, for us, was to be unstoppable, to come alive, to remember.

It was our first Saturday back from winter break and despite the marrow of our bones remembering the footwork taught to use before the holiday break, Aunty Lau insisted on drilling the footwork for the first verse over and over again, trapping us for a near hour in a cyclical search

manifested by Aunty Trish's endless repetition of *auhea wale 'oe e ka 'ō'ō?* We forced precision and purpose into our feet, propelled the muscles of our legs to lift us up over the *pā*, and when Aunty Lau finally permitted our hands to accompany our feet we moved our hands with strength and grace. We had been dancing for 40 minutes with no water break when all of our phones erupted with the unpleasant, incessant bleating of an emergency alert.

The spell of hula was broken with the abrupt silence of the *ipu* and we were released to collapse over ourselves in shuddering gasps. There was no strength left in us to process much of anything beyond our need for water; so we stumbled to the not-so-neat pile of our bags, exhausted hands scrambled amongst the mess for our water bottles like crabs scuttling along the rocky shoreline. As we found relief in the mouths of our Hydro Flasks, we missed the urgency that settled over our hula Aunties. It wasn't until the first of us managed the simultaneous task of drinking water and grabbing phones that we remembered our phones were shrieking for a reason. As I grabbed my own phone to swipe away the notification, I nearly dropped my water.

BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

The words on my screen ceased to make sense, my dripping sweat distorted the text. For a few moments, the only sound in Forest Hall was our labored breathing and the screeching of the last few phones not cradled by their owners. There was no doubt amongst us.

It was 2018, and Donald Trump had grown comfortable in weaponizing his blue-checked POTUS account to goad Kim Jung-Un to test the Department of Defense's patience for challengers in the Asia-Pacific region. In the endless chatter of MSNBC and CNN that my mom filled our home with, pundits bemoaned the President's tactlessness in provoking a man who had the power to deploy a missile that could destroy Guam in eighteen minutes, Hawai'i in twenty. This was our patriotic duty: to serve as the Kevlar vest, the bomb-proof barrier, to protect the precious, vulnerable organs of the Mainland.

Aunty Lau ordered us to leave our things and follow her to shelter. Our exhausted legs, conditioned to follow her command, animated themselves and carried us after her. We brought only our phones and

our water bottles—some of us forgot to slide our feet into our slippers. Clumped together like a nervous school of fish aware of a predator's presence but unsure of where they lurk amongst the reef, we were herded across the track and towards the only underground structure we knew of: the locker room. As the situation began to hit us in the way of brutal winter swells, girls started to fumble on their phones to call whichever of their family members were most likely to be awake at this time on a Saturday morning. It wasn't until we were halfway across the track that I realized that I held in my hands the means of contacting my mom.

It took extra effort to open my phone when my sweaty thumbprint failed to be recognized. Even worse, my calls kept dropping as 1.4 million people across the islands frantically tried to contact everyone they knew: to ask *what's going on?* to figure out if there was even anywhere that could shelter them from a nuclear blast, to say goodbye. Only a handful of girls managed to reach anyone, and they spluttered out sobbing farewells as we were guided down into the concrete belly of the locker room where cell service was guaranteed to vanish. I sent out one last text of *I love you* before I settled myself on the concrete floor of the locker room to await whatever was hurtling at us.

In the post-war years, the US military turned freshly liberated Micronesia into a testing site for atomic bombs. One could drive the rickety, unpaved cane haul roads that connected the plantations of Central O'ahu to the highways, park up on Kunia Ridge, and sit amongst the swaying pineapple and sugar cane to watch the sun explode from over 2,600 miles away on Bikini Atoll. It would be night in Hawai'i, and where the sun had set just hours ago to the West, a poisonous imitator would punch its way into the atmosphere, turning the world as red as blood.

I wouldn't learn about Bikini Atoll and its people for another year when my English teacher would have us read Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *History Project and Anointed*. I would sit in that classroom and watch the footage of the explosion at Bikini while remembering sitting on the cold concrete of the locker room, sweaty and exhausted and terrified as I imagined which part of the island the missile would destroy, vaporizing people and homes, fishes and birds, mountains and valleys; leaving the rest of us to slowly die in the minutes and hours and days and years of nuclear fallout.

There was a lot of crying in the locker room that morning. One of my classmates, a dominating force at ILH wrestling meets, was cradling

a girl from another school who couldn't stop sobbing, hiccuping, and choking in the embrace of her arms. One of the locker room Aunties knelt at the girl's back, rubbing circles in the hope it would soothe her lungs into regaining their function. The rest of my hula sisters had tucked themselves into different corners of the locker room, contorting their limbs into the smallest versions of themselves.

I was fifteen when I sat in the locker room, thinking that my world was about to end.

My grandma was fifteen when hers did.

It was 1945 in Tokyo, and she had been appointed as the leader of her neighborhood's evacuation procedure because in times of war no child was too young to exercise their filial duty to the nation. She had been directing neighbors and friends to the bomb shelter when the US firebombing of Tokyo reached them, burning all of her sister's hair, killing her mother, youngest sister, and only brother.

I wondered if the fear I felt was the same fear she felt every time the air raid sirens blared and she knelt amongst her community in a bomb shelter. I wondered if she imagined emerging from the underground to a world unrecognizable like I did. I wondered how she managed to crawl her way from under the charred wreckage of her home to find her world destroyed, a fate I feared I would repeat if the locker room did not collapse atop us all, if we were not vaporized in the instant the missile impacted the island I called home.

And then one of the locker room Aunties announced that it had been a false alert, confirmed by our Governor via Tweet. We were free to return to our previously scheduled activities.

I don't remember much of the journey back to Forest Hall, just all of us reunited fish muttering how we better not return to dancing, an almost hysterical feeling of disbelief replacing our terror and annoyance when Aunty Doreen ordered us back into our formations. When practice ended, Aunty Trisha offered us words of comfort. It wasn't until I was met with the miracle of greeting my mom's car, burrowed in the safety of her arms, that I finally cried, tears washing the sweat from my face.

After showering and curling up in my mom's bed to be witness to the infinite MSNBC and CNN reporting on the false alert that disrupted paradise in America's favorite vacation destination, I let myself cry and cry again, relieved that I was alive, relieved to be encircled in the protection of my mom.

And then when all the reporters flew back to the Mainland, when the school week began, and when there were more pressing concerns to deal with, no one ever really talked about the Almost End Of The World again.

Images on Connection, #12, Madeline Early



Asymmetrical Conclusions

Isabel Hall

From a young age—a good estimation would be about five years old—we’re taught in school how to make the perfect heart.

1. Take a piece of construction paper, preferably pink or red.
2. Fold the paper so the edges of it line up, touching one another.
3. Starting towards the bottom of the side of the paper that is creased, begin the cutting process.
4. Cut a shape that cannot be easily described as anything other than half a stereotypical cartoon heart.
5. Unfold the paper.
6. Let the scraps of the paper fall away—which could be either side of the heart that has been cut—depending on whether you want it to be full or empty.

This process is conducted using a term we also learn from a young age, usually in math class, called symmetry. The creased side of the paper is the line of symmetry, dividing the two halves. It is the “perfect heart” because both sides of it are symmetrical. They are the same. Balanced.

Perfect.

Approximately three years ago I discovered my line of symmetry had curved. I don’t mean this in a metaphorical way. I found out I had scoliosis.

My best friend and I were sitting on the couch, I can’t remember exactly what we were doing (she was probably braiding my hair) when all of the sudden she said, laughing: “Why are your shoulders so imbalanced? You look like you have scoliosis!”

I didn’t know what that word meant at the time, in fact I immediately assumed it was some kind of infectious disease. I wasn’t on TikTok enough to know that scoliosis was a viral trend going around, which was why she had brought it up.

For years I had been repeatedly telling my friends in P.E. that one of my legs was longer than the other. I was convinced of it, because when I ran it felt like one of my hips was jutting upwards. It didn’t exactly hurt, more like mild discomfort driven by my obsessiveness, insecurity and anxiety.

When my best friend told me this, I pretended I knew exactly what she was talking about and covered up my deepening fear. I told my dad the situation later that day and he laughed, saying that scoliosis was something only old people were diagnosed with when they have a bad back. I was relieved, until a few months later when I told my doctor during an annual checkup about the discomfort in my legs, and more recently my shoulders which also felt imbalanced. She told me to bend over and studied my spine.

“Looks like you might have some mild scoliosis,” she said.

She assured me it was nothing to be worried about (though of course I was imploding on the inside) and referred me to get an x-ray. After many months of struggling to find the right doctors, transferring x-rays, (you know how it is with our reliable healthcare system) receiving an MRI and googling images of curved spines, my dad finally saw the official x-ray and instantaneously believed everything I had been telling him over the past few years. There it was, an unsatisfying curve in the lumbar section of my back. The doctor informed me that this was not mild scoliosis, but moderate. I might as well be dead, I thought.

As a child raised by artsy hipster parents, I grew up watching *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. The first R-rated movie I watched as a kid all the way through was *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. I have seen every Wes Anderson movie several times. Despite what people have been saying lately about him being a tad bit overrated—that his films are all style and no heart—I must respectfully disagree. Every Wes Anderson movie is meticulously crafted, frame by frame, to reflect the atmosphere of the film which reflects the themes which are simultaneously universal and personal and often a commentary on the creative process of storytelling and film itself. The dialogue is brilliantly witty. The sets are extravagantly detailed. Everything is perfectly

composed to satisfy my neurosis.

The most unique feature of his filmmaking style is his use of symmetry. Anderson makes sure that every frame is perfectly balanced, therefore every frame has a line of symmetry. My favorite shots are when the camera is directly facing a character, and they are in the very center of the frame, facing forward as if they are looking right at you in the audience. It's even better when it's just a headshot featuring a character speaking to someone supposedly on the other side of the camera, but it looks like they're speaking to you. In these moments I am filled with enough dopamine to last me a week.

I grew up seeing the world similarly to how Anderson does: as if we are all in a storybook, telling ourselves our own stories. I would often narrate average, everyday things I was doing in my head. They'd always have a beginning, middle, and end.

At five years old:

Isabel went to the bathroom. She always made sure to wash her hands on the way out, because her grandma told her she could get very sick if she didn't. She forgot to use soap and would feel guilty about it later on.

At twelve years old:

Isabel saw her friend eating an Oreo by pulling it apart and licking off the cream from the inside. It made her deeply uncomfortable, but she tried it anyway. It almost made her never want to eat Oreos again.

At eighteen years old:

Isabel walked down the middle of the hallway of her high school. She was feeling confident because nearly everyone around her was younger than her. Then she saw someone from her childhood who used to make her very insecure. She ignored them but couldn't stop thinking about them for the rest of the day.

If the x-ray of my spine was a vertical story plot diagram, it would begin from the top,

right by my neck,
and the climax would be
where the curve was.

Then it would end
at the same level it started,
right by my ass.

When I was two years old, I supposedly fell on my face and broke my nose, or at least this is what my dad tells me, and I believe it. Supposedly it happened again about a year later. I grew up to have a crooked nose. I have no reason to think these are correlated, but I like to believe it anyway.

Most people, when they see my nose, don't notice that it's crooked. They notice how big it is compared to the rest of my small face, or at least that's what I like to think people think.

I used to touch my nose a lot when I was younger (no, not the inside of my nose, that's what you were thinking, weren't you?). I'd push my finger against the side that was crooked, in an impractical attempt to make it straighter. I remember in fifth grade someone pointed this out, and eventually I was able to stop touching my nose, realizing I had been caught.

My senior year of high school I struggled against a jam packed schedule of eight classes, three AP's, one honors, a journalism class where I was editor-in-chief, an extracurricular online spanish class, plus the school musical, plus guitar lessons, plus physical therapy for my spine. I was determined to excel in all of my subjects, but as my anxiety increased, I found myself growing exceptionally exhausted and angry when I came home from school. I don't consider myself a very angry person, as I take special care to be calm and collected whenever I leave my home. But I was furious, and needed an outlet.

My dad played me plenty of punk music growing up, but I wasn't really interested until that year. I heard a song, "Mannequin" by Wire, which sparked this new flame of frustration. I would later understand that all of this frustration was actually aimed at myself, but that wasn't what I wanted to believe at the time.

In the second verse, Colin Newman sings:

Well, you're an energy void
A black hole to avoid
No style, no heart
You don't even start
To interest me

As I taught myself more about the movement of classic punk, along with an unnecessary amount of research about scoliosis, I learned that punk idol Johnny Rotten had a curvature in his spine. Iggy Pop did as well. You can kind of see how one side of his torso is straighter than the other on the cover of *Raw Power* by The Stooges. If you didn't already know, Kurt Cobain famously had scoliosis; you can even find his x-ray online, which I think is incredibly creepy.

I have not read anything John Lydon has written about his life, but I came across a quote from him online a while ago. He says, "You're made to feel ugly, and I made ugly beautiful. Just by sheer persistence."

Wes Anderson is known for his use of symmetry. He is known for making everything fit nicely together, just perfectly in place. But, in the process of becoming absorbed in Wes Anderson's magical signature style, it's easy to forget the concept of contrast.

He contrasts the fake with the real in one of his most underrated films, *Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, portraying "real" people with some very real emotions next to stop motion animated sea creatures and fake underwater worlds.

He uses brightly contrasting colors between different scenes. For example, in the *The Royal Tenenbaums* when Richie is on a boat in the beginning of the film, warm colors are used to create a warm atmosphere and a warmhearted feeling. When he is in the bathroom before his suicide attempt, colors are bluer and cooler.

Anderson's films may be symmetrical, but the characters in his movies are not; both metaphorically and literally. They contrast the worlds we see them in. Each of them has emotional baggage. Most of them are outcasts to society, like the kids in *Moonrise Kingdom*. Almost all of them are at least a little neurotic, but they live in glamorous, bold, perfectly designed grand hotels or boats or trees or trains or schools.

When the camera gets really close to a character's face, the audience can see all of their imperfections. Their shoulders are often tilted one way or another, their noses maybe a little crooked. Owen Wilson's character Francis' face in *The Darjeeling Limited* is totally destroyed, and there is so much heart in the scene where he takes off all his bandages and shows the audience his injuries.

It's a known fact that the asymmetrical stand out amongst the symmetrical.

I don't think I believe in the perfect heart.
Hearts can come in many different shapes, sizes and colors. I respect those who will cut out their own hearts from the construction paper they're given, whether or not it's lopsided. Maybe they'll use the full heart to tape onto a Valentine's Day card.

Or maybe they'll take the empty one, and press it down onto something else so they can expose what's underneath.

Neighbors

Sara Magnuson

Icicles would cling to the gutter of the portico, melting by April. On Knox Street, socks would grow wet in the doorway as puddles seeped through the welcome mat, and frostbitten string lights dripped spittle from overhead. In fall, winter, and spring, there was the house on Knox Street, in the neighborhood of Linden Hills. On Knox Street, I would see my neighbors and nod. In the summer, at the cottages in Hayward, I would see my neighbors, and embrace them.

Socks were not worn in Hayward to feel the moss, the splinters, the gravel, and the sand. Barefoot past old fence posts, logs, and thatched roofs, cottages, wooden ducks, and statues of the cross. I didn't believe in God, and I never would, but my grandmother did, and her mother before that. People in Hayward believed in God. The lady cashiers at the Walmart would smoke cigarettes and recite the Lord's word when I paid for my Oreos and beer with cash. Their God spoke to them through miracles, like a rainbow after a storm or a penny on the pavement. On Knox Street, in the city, three hours south, God was an inconvenience. The winters were cold enough to be thought of as divine tests, and slips on driveway ice patches were to punish the sinners and the unbaptized. Men and women dressed themselves in coats, cleated boots, hats, mittens, and scarves. Barely anything could be seen beneath the bundles of knit and cloth.

In Hayward in the summertime, there were tree forts, makeshift zip lines, and wooden rafts tied to the dock. I would pick scabs from my knees, and they would get stuck under my fingernails. I would bleed. Our limbs were thin, and we drank expired beer from the summer before. We would get drunk on the beach with filth crusting our mouths from our beer cans tipping into the sand. We had bruises on our knees from tree climbing and cracks in our lips from kissing, and when it was time for dinner, the girls and I put on long skirts, and the boys smothered their lips with Vaseline so our families wouldn't think we were masochists.

We liked to dance, and oh, how we danced. Barefoot on wooden floors, to our parents' old records. Singing along to Elvis, and waving our arms. Hidden in the trees, no one could see our thin bodies sway. We would lounge on wicker chairs and sing to the Moon, and when the air

got thick, we would dip our toes into the pond. We laughed at things that couldn't have been funny, and we told stories of things that we couldn't have done. Such simple things were never seen on Knox Street, summer, spring, winter, or fall. Summertime in Hayward would end when August came. Neighbors would say their goodbyes and head south.

In Linden Hills in the wintertime, there was the Minikahda Club. At the edge of a golf course on a cobblestone promenade, a path would be cleared through the snow to make way for our strides. Neighbors stepped out of Cadillac cars. They always looked different. *Hey, you look different.* Pinned-up hair, strawberry lips, lace and frills—we must be elegant in this neighborhood; people are watching. I would hold my grandmother's hand as we walked under the eaves. It was warm inside the Minikahda Club, and my coat would be taken by a man dressed in white. He would say *bienvenue* and nod his head, and my grandmother would hand him a crisp dollar bill. One after another, men and women in white would rush to our sides, nodding and taking our money. They had just hung evergreen wreaths and canaan fir tinsel from crown molded walls, and green and gold flecks still clung to their dress shirts.

In Linden Hills in the wintertime, the lights were dimmed, and the fire was lit, and wool socks would itch at our ankles. The girls and I wore dresses, and the boys wore cashmere sweaters and pointed shoes. *Hey, you look different.* The windows were frosted. The wait staff would bring platters of chocolate-covered fruits, jams, pretzels, and brie. Dull conversations, blemish-free knees. We would wait for the red wine stupors to take hold, for our families to grow giddy and agreeable. For my grandmother to fall asleep on the chaise. We would sneak away, down the hall, quiet steps to the parlor. A chest of vinyls next to the coat rack, and a lock on the door. No more socks and shoes on the girls and boys.

And oh, how we danced. Elvis on the record player. To feel the piled carpet beneath our calloused toes, to talk to God in the only way we knew how. I kissed a neighbor I hadn't seen since summertime, and his cheeks reddened like plums. He melted into my arms. I could see his breath, and he could see mine. He felt for bruises on my knees, and he admired the softness of my skin. In the parlor, nobody could see us. Left and right, left and right, left and right, Caleb and I swayed. Left and right, left and right, and he touched the bruises on my knees.



Eyesolation, Milo Evashchen

As It Is In Dreams

Ashley Iorio

My diary sits dusted over on the windowsill. Its pages face 16th street and its spine stares at me, longingly, as if begging me to pick it up. The frost has penetrated the glass and turned the front cover cold to the touch, but as I glance over the lines of what looks like doctor's cursive, each print letter dissolving into the next, I can feel the warm embrace of someone I used to be. Her hand extends itself to me from the page, and I can feel her touch; it is one of a fifteen year old girl, lovelorn, solitary. With some embarrassment, I read her private entries believing I could find that girl, return to that place of confession. I cannot. As it is in dreams, I am running to her, turning the corner, almost there and yet not any closer.

While in the throws of it, I obsessed over every detail. I cataloged all of the little things: The paleness of his eyes under moonlight; his crooked front tooth that I noticed for the first time in Walmart when he reached for a box of cookies; the scar on his left elbow; the predictability of his words; the way we brushed knees discreetly at my kitchen table when nobody was looking; his hand on my leg in the backseat of his car as his friend drove us to IHOP on New Year's Eve; him carrying me up the hill to the car because my heels were too high; the comfort of his weight as he leaned over me to throw an empty beer can out the window; how safe I felt when he was driving my car; the night he and his friends swam at my house and he hid in a bush when my dad came outside. Most memorably, there was the suspense of not knowing if he would ever love me, the anticipation of him.

To capture the way it felt seems nearly impossible, but it has been done by bands like Mazzy Star, Cigarettes After Sex, The Cure. Then there are the artists that I can only listen to in relation to him—Slowdive, Salvia Palth, Petal. I remember when D and his friends came over for the first time and he played the demo version of Cyberbully Mom Club's *I'm Tired and I Hate This Song* on my laptop. That became the only acceptable version of the record in my eyes. The polished, clean, official version was obsolete. D represented everything messy about the world, but it was the most beautiful mess I had ever laid eyes on—one that I had no desire to clean up or fix. I only wanted, desperately, to bask in his

untidiness, to callus my fingertips on his rough edges.

My parents hated D—my mom especially. They hated that he chose not to go to college, that he didn't have a job, that he was such a fleeting presence in my life. They thought that I could do better. And maybe I could have, but I didn't care because it wasn't about that. What they thought was never of any particular significance to me. I wanted him and nothing else mattered—what I deserved and what I desired were two different things entirely. Two parallels, stretching along the continuum, never to intersect.

D was a fierce protector of the ones he cared about, myself included, and that must be why I thought he could've loved me. I remember the night my best friend Liz and I met the boys at the skatepark, deep into the rough part of town, and we went to Cookout for milkshakes and fries. As we waited for our order at the walk-up window, Liz and I in our signature late-summer jean shorts and tank top outfits, a man approached us. We talked with him for a little while. I regretted it. He was annoyingly persistent. The man asked D if he was my boyfriend, and he said, with an especially serious face that I hadn't seen on him before, that I was his sister. Not recognizing the threat, I laughed and asked, "Do we look alike?" It was only after I got back in the car with Liz, D and his friends following behind us, that I understood. The butterflies grew inside my chest and a soft smile formed on my lips. A blood bond, the strongest of all.

While I loved D, I was in a constant state of grief. He was never mine, but I was entirely his. I had never wanted anything so much in my life, and I am not sure I have wanted anything more since. The desire for something intangible, something completely out of your control—it could kill you. And I was convinced it was going to. I would have done anything to push him off the same ledge that I had fallen from. I would have cut myself open and extracted my own heart and then presented it to him neatly wrapped and tied with a bow. And in a sense, I guess I did.

When you are in love, the world is small. There is a distance between all of the things that are meant to matter and the things that do. While I still cared about other things, I had somehow managed to connect them all to D. Everything that I did was for or because of him. Locked into maladaptive daydreams while mesmerized by the most beautiful shades of blue in the sky, I nearly failed AP World. On rainy days, I could feel my bottom lip begin to wobble as the tears gathered. It was divine:

the gray-blue tinted atmosphere peeking out from behind the overcast, perfectly matching his eyes.

My affinity for sad music developed in response to him (it is difficult to differentiate between the cause and effect in this case) and I wrote countless songs about him. I remember when I posted the first one. He and his friends sent me videos of them listening to it—I was mortified.

"Not everything is about you, you know." I lied.

"I think it's cute," he reassured me.

Not long after that, Liz and I had driven to D's friend's house an hour away. Five of us were in my car, Liz driving and D in the passenger seat. I was in the back, squeezed between two of our tallest friends, their feet crammed in the floorboards and their knees pushed against the seats in front of them. The one to my right decided to play the song I had written. He thought it would be funny and harmless. Color rushed to my face. I grabbed a hoodie from the floorboard and put it over my head, hiding my face behind the bunched up fabric. Everybody sang along and laughed—my song was the joke and I was the punchline. I was mortified all over again, my vulnerability stupidly exposed again. After an intense backseat wrestling match, I got ahold of the phone and turned off the music.

We got out at Starbucks, and Liz and D trailed behind. We sat down inside after ordering and D came over to where I was. It was as if he was trying to alleviate my humiliation by interacting with me. He sat across from me and ate half of my cheese danish, studying me with an intensity I had never felt before. Did he feel sorry for me? Did he think it was cute how embarrassed I was? Did he get it? I was only able to maintain eye contact for a second. I felt small and exposed, like a naked child.

As soon as we could get alone, Liz told me that when they got out of the car, D whispered to her, "I don't know why he would do that. That was really shitty. I feel so bad." His empathy comforted me. He knew that it was about more than the song — I was embarrassed for feeling the way I did about him. I was his fool. Everybody knew how much I liked him, but we weren't dating. I don't even know how to name what we were. These songs better describe what I can't: *Heaven Sent* by Trophy Eyes; *3am At A Party* by Soccer Mommy; *Drunk Text Romance* by Cyberbully Mom Club; *Warned You* by Good Morning; *We'll Never Have Sex* by Leith Ross; *I Was All Over Her* by Salvia Palth; *Shiver* by Lucy Rose;

Sad Boy by Laila; *Destroy You* by Flatsound; *Sorry I Was Sorry* by Adult Mom; *You're So Cool* by Nicole Dollanganger.

My feelings for him caused me physical pain. I could feel my heart swelling at the thought of him and shattering at the sight of him. I was an addict and he was high-potency poison coursing through my veins. He kept me at arm's length and himself just far enough out of reach that I missed him even when he was next to me. My entire world was colored blue, so much so that I even tattooed the word on my finger—my first stick-and-poke. D and his friends all had stick-and-pokes, and I thought it was cool. I now have eleven more, but “blue” is still my favorite.

I remember when six of us went to my beach house in July 2018 and I pointed out his tattoos to my mom. He then let word of mine slip. My jaw dropped and my lips formed an *oh-my-god* kind of open smile, shocked that he had just exposed my secret. With an *oh shit* kind of disposition, he laughed. We laughed together. This trip was our own version of *The Breakfast Club*, or maybe *The Big Chill*. It was cathartic, special. We were so together, all of us.

He kissed me on that trip, after months of being far away in more ways than one, and after days of being in the same house, making subtle moves and flirting with me only for it to add up to nothing. He had a way of making me feel wanted, making his feelings known, all while not really doing anything at all. I now wonder if it was some kind of grand gaslighting scheme. Was I imagining it, exaggerating my own naïveté? Could be. At the very least, was he going about it in a way that made it appear as such? Maybe. And maybe I knew that and maybe I didn't care because I was caught up in the unrequitedness of it all. A romantic, certainly not a realist (a literary distinction I apply retroactively to give this picaresque some cachet). I was utterly consumed and I loved it and I couldn't be bothered with technicalities.

There is no real ending to our story, which makes it harder to write about. The lines were incredibly blurred the whole time, and with nothing to look back on as being the specific point of destruction, I find it difficult to reflect on. Usually, after things end and people part, we come to appreciate the shape of a shifty narrative as loose strands of memory drop into a superfluous pile. My pile got big, but I never could quite make out the shape or purpose of what was left standing. There is an impressionistic figure of myself in there and, for now, that is enough.

We saw each other a few times here and there in the years

after, and he texts me out of the blue sometimes, always keeping our interactions sporadic and provisional. My heart has not forgotten; it still races when I see his name, or rather it sinks into my stomach and then explodes, rendering me incapacitated. I thought I would love him for the rest of my life. And I think I still believe that. Although my thoughts of him no longer sting, and my feelings for him no longer stand between me and the rest of the world, I do still think of him fondly. I still reminisce about the way that it all felt so unreal, so much like a movie or a song, the ultimate transience of it all and the overwhelming grief that I feel for the loss of it. I think I grieve less for the loss of him than for the loss of the way it felt. I have found myself unable to replicate the feeling, and I am unsure if I want to. I think that it would break my heart.

To be able to look back so nostalgically on what was essentially a toxic cycle of hurt is probably a reflection of my damage more than anything else. Yet I cannot seem to hate him and I cannot seem to conjure up any feelings of dislike or anger or anything other than affection when I think of him. It was like a really long dream, and the day I woke up, everything was just different. It's like that feeling when you wake from a sweet dream, and you try to force your eyes shut and turn your mind off in hopes of returning to it, but you can't. And it hurts—missing the world you were part of for a little while, one that was never really yours to keep but that was entirely yours all the same.

I still hold parts of him, of that time, close to me. I still shuffle across the ashes of our fire. I see it in my songs, in the way I understand the world, in the beautifully messy things that I find myself drawn to. I made space for him inside my already-too-small body, and he still lives there, rent-free. I don't mind.

On July 3rd, 2020, Liz called me sounding frantic. She told me that one of D's friends, with whom she'd had a whirlwind fling (which began on our beach trip and the effects of which had lingered), just called her crying. He told her that D had tried to kill himself. His mom had known that something was wrong, and when she couldn't find or get in touch with him, she called his closest friends in town.

He had gone over to the quarry at Grant Park and was standing at the edge of a cliff when one of his friends found him. He intended to jump off the ledge after all, like I had once hoped he would, but a different one entirely—I had wanted him to fall for me, not for his demons. I was broken. The thought alone of living in a world in which he didn't exist

could have killed me. I wanted nothing more than to save him, to hold him. To tell him that I understood him. I saw him.

I reached out to him in the weeks following. He shut me down. He said that he was going through something and didn't want to be around anybody, assuring me that it was nothing against me. I let him be. I saw him at a party a few months later, and he looked different. He was drunk and empty. His eyes had lost their light — they were always a bit dead-looking, but never was I unable to see him inside of them until that night. He had lost himself, and I had lost him too.

Life changed. I moved on and had let go of the dream that was D. I decided to go to college across the country. Then, I decided that I hated it. My dad came back to pick me up about three weeks after I moved in. While packing me up, we detoured to a surf shop in Santa Monica, where I pointed out the Baker skateboards on the wall. I was telling my dad about one of D's friends having his own line of Baker boards, and the guy working behind the counter asked if I knew him. I said yes, and that my friends from back home were close with him. I asked if he knew who D was, and he said yes in a way that sounded like "every skater around here knows D." Evidently, they used to skate together when D lived in Los Angeles a few years before. My dad looked surprised, as if all of the things I had been telling my parents about him were finally proving to be more than just my fan-girling over the boy I liked.

On the ride back to campus, in a state of intense remembering, I played a few songs for my dad and told him how D had introduced them to me, and how they were some of my favorites. He dropped me off at my dorm because my friends and I were planning one last hoorah before I left for good. As we were getting ready for the night, my phone lit up. D's name was bright and big across the screen. My heart dropped. I thought, *no way*. We hadn't talked in over a year, and just two hours earlier I had run into someone who knew him. He said that he was at a party in my neighborhood. Random, considering that he lived in the next city over and everyone in my neighborhood is old. I told him that I was at college in LA, but that I was actually moving back home the next day.

Later in the fall, I drove to his house one night. We got drunk in his room and watched movies. His hair was long. I had never seen him with his hair long, only in pictures. I used to hate how he would always shave it off right before I got the chance to see him. I took hold of his long, black waves and twirled them in between my fingers. Looking into

his eyes, I found myself lost in their light. It had returned. I felt a warm rush of relief wash over me, a sort of maternal tenderness. *There you are*, I thought. He told me he liked my curls. "You're so cute," he said. I was trying to keep my cool—a far cry from the girl he used to know. I never was able to come to terms with the fact that I couldn't really show him who I am, the real me. I felt like a little girl in his presence, always overcome with love, obsession, emotion, sadness, blue. He brought out the clumsiest, most awkward version of me. I wanted so badly to be unaffected. To show him that I was older now. That he no longer had the ability to consume me, to hold my heart in his pale, scarred-up hands, to break me. When he kissed me, I held in a shutter. When I left in the morning, I tried to hide how I missed him already, how I had never stopped missing him.

He knew.

Returning home: a departure for the margin

Lananh Chu

"We had always to return to the margin, to beyond the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town" (bell hooks xvii).

The more I know the center, the more I belong and should belong to the margin. Going far away from home leads me back to my roots. Like a poem, I take a departure. But where is the margin? In America, I may stand on the periphery—a Vietnamese woman. In my country, I am not. I am educated, not in the working class, and haven't gone through wars. My queerness is implicit, so I rarely face discrimination, though sometimes I hesitate to talk about it in Vietnamese. I am in the majority and speak the national language, while my friends in ethnic minority groups were not taught their languages at school. From which position should I state, "I advocate feminism"? The oppressed here is the oppressor elsewhere.

An American sister was my inspiration to write this stanza: "Someone said my voice was soft/ "A masculine country," they explained/ I am muted if you cut my tongue."² Being a "sister outsider"³ means listening to what 'white' sisters (white mind, style, vision, regardless of skin color) illuminate and teach her about her situation. On her, they impose their ready-made theory and analysis. In Vietnam, March 08 is an annual festival of two leading schools of 'feminism.' The Vietnam Women's Union lectures on women's responsibilities to serve the country and their families. At the same time, 'white' feminists preach their moral lessons on "Freedom of choices." The two ostensibly conflicting messages are not essentially different. If choices are plenty and choosing is easy, then one seems to have much freedom. "Being oppressed means the absence of choices" (bell hooks 5).

"As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual

¹ bell hooks suggests the shift from "I am a feminist" to "I advocate feminism" (32).

² "From miệng to mouth" was published in *Eleven and a Half* and another version of the poem, "There is: a poem," was published on Ú or project.

³ The title of Audre Lorde's book - "Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches" (1984).

freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself..." (Audre Lorde 120).

"But, could you please stop identifying as either woman or queer? We are all human beings," another sister raises their voice. As if when one is a woman and/or queer, they cease to be a human. To praise her 'sacrifice' as a wife and mother, they laud her as "a Vietnamese woman"; to debase her as something inferior, they say "just a woman." She cannot be a self-definition; she is defined.

"But I didn't leave all the parts of me: I kept the ground of my own being. On it I walked away, taking with me the land..." (Gloria Anzaldúa 16).

I am staying here and returning there to remember that the oppressed here can be the oppressor elsewhere. My "masculine country," as they put it, paradoxically, is oft personified as a feminine character. She is a gorgeous young woman the French and American men want to possess in *The Quiet American* (1955). She is adopted and raised by a French mother in *Indochine* (1992). In the eyes of foreigners, Vietnam is a woman; to Vietnamese women, the country could be a man. "Young woman, are you married yet?"—"Yes, I am with husband, his surname is Viet and his given name is Nam"⁴ (Trinh T. Minh-ha). My "masculine country," yes, he is. The oppressed there is the oppressor elsewhere.

"We find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen." (Audre Lorde 117).

I am listening to my grandmother's lullabies. To return is to leave the white light so that I could negate the sight, learn to listen, and sense the world. They regard "white" as a superb color. In the West, the white color goes hand in hand with light. White and light suggest the Enlightenment, transcendence, elevation, transparency, purity, innocence, chastity. White on my tongue could be sorrowful—white hairs of the old, funerals, death, ghosts. They call us "yellow perils." They may not know sunlight, moonlight, ripe fields, autumn, leopard trees near my balcony,

⁴ Excerpted from the film script of "Surname Viet given name Nam" (1989) by Trinh T. Minh-ha.

"Viet" means 'Vietnamese,' and "Nam" means 'the South' but also 'male/man.' The filmmaker wordplays with the country's name to raise questions about the relationship between nationalism and gender oppression.

ginger, cumin, saffron, our skins glow and warm this earth.

“The reason that the body has so much presence in the West is that the world is primarily perceived by sight” (Oyèrónké’ Oyéwùmí 2).

The Cartesian mind-body dualism separates body and mind; embodied women and disembodied men. Vietnamese has “thân” (身), “thê” (體), and “thân thê” (身體) to say “body”. Nonetheless, these words are more complex and nuanced than “body.” “Thân” (身) also refers to life and virtues; for example, “tiên/ hậu/ hiện thân” means previous/ next/ present life, and “tu thân” means to cultivate virtues. “Thê” (體) is even more sophisticated because the word embraces metaphysical connotations. That is to say, my “thân” and/or “thê” are more than my “body,” and the body is not detached from or not less important than the mind. Everybody has to be embodied in my mother tongue, and no “walking mind”⁵ is more transcendent.

In my language, I have a “world-sense”⁶ when I “thấy,” which means to sense (although sometimes it is translated as “see” in English). “Thấy” involves all sensory organs of the body: “nhìn thấy” - to see; “nghe thấy” - to hear; “ngửi thấy” - to smell; “sờ thấy” - to touch; “cảm thấy” - to feel; “nhận thấy” - to aware or to know. I can “thấy” even when I do not see. When I “thấy,” I not only view the world but also sense the world.

I am staying here and returning there—my home ground, to find the ground from where I can say, “I advocate feminism,” on this tongue, on that tongue, to cite my grandmother’s stories, to write poetry. The more I know the center, the more I belong and should belong to the margin.

I am returning.

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Notes:

Authors are intentionally cited by their full names.

Images on Connection, #10, Madeline Early



⁵ Oyèrónké’ Oyéwùmí criticizes European thought considering men as walking minds (6).

⁶ The term is coined by Oyèrónké’ Oyéwùmí

Ode to Odelay

Becca Moore

If you are looking for an album that will take you back into the classic sounds of the ‘90s, first, it would be difficult to pinpoint which “classic sounds” you might be looking for. Countless genres blossomed in the 1990s, some of them overlapping, like grunge and riot grrrl, and some of them sitting quite far from each other, like pop country and the remnants of glam metal. It is next to impossible for any one person to decide which of these genres is the most genuine reflection of the ‘90s, so I won’t try to.

Secondly, I am not the ideal candidate to ask. I was raised by parents whose formative years were in the ‘90s, and my taste is heavily influenced by the pervasiveness of many different pre-Y2K music scenes, but I am a true early aughts baby. I was not alive for 9/11. I am too young to remember Obama’s inauguration. To ask me about 90’s music is the same as asking me about the Kennedy Assassination: I could spend some time reading into it and watch footage from the day to manufacture a feeling. I am knowledgeable about it, but I will never know how it authentically felt. All I can tell you is how it feels to me now.

For my case study, I present to you Beck’s fifth, and most successful studio album. *Odelay* is about an hour in length and covers a wide range of genres all culminating into a sect of music that I am calling “white guys saying shit” (think the Red Hot Chili Peppers or LCD Soundsystem). I must admit, I am a sucker for this category of music, specifically when I am looking for something easy. It goes in and out with little participation on my end.

Beck doesn’t really sing his lyrics on *Odelay*, he speaks them. Most of them feel disjointed or random even if they are telling a story as if he wrote them using magnetic poetry words on his fridge. He is cynical, a theme consistent with other artists of the 90’s rock scenes. But Beck is no Eddie Vedder. He is not aggressive, he is not begging for your attention, and he certainly isn’t taking himself seriously. In fact, most of the time the lyrics are of little importance to the enjoyment of the music. Sure, the lyric “take me home with my elevator bones,”¹ could be analyzed, but it

¹ Beck, “Where It’s At,” track #8 on *Odelay*, DCG Records, 1996, <https://open.spotify.com/album/1Pus5h1qGedCn4CtOuPVtp?si=I1kTKd7LQ0qisAAsCW-W2Xw>.

doesn’t need to be. You probably wouldn’t have noticed it on first listen. I know I didn’t. And Beck doesn’t care if you pay attention to every lyric, if you relate to the songs of *Odelay*, or even if you understand. He knows it will do well either way.

The second track, “Hotwax,” is a slew of incomplete metaphors, messy symbolism, and crude imagery that adds up to tell a story about Beck’s life on tour as a “backwash”² man. What is interesting about the song is not the story, but the sound. It begins with a guitar riff that pangs in a manner reminiscent of Lead Belly, a folk-blues sound that takes the listener out of the otherwise experimental, electronic, garage rock experience. Towards the middle of the song, Beck sings the lyrics “I get down, I get down, I get down all the way” to the tune of jingle bells, leading us, now, in a completely different direction.

This isn’t to say that the album is incohesive. It’s quite the opposite, a well-sequenced album proving Beck’s understanding of pacing. It is effectively experimental, not excessively. The opening track, “Devils Haircut,” is one of the more commercial songs on the album. It is simple and digestible, calling back to the short and repetitive nature of beach rock of the 60’s. It’s not a masterpiece by any means, but it is a song that anyone could listen to without objection. Towards the middle of *Odelay*, we get a more abrupt song “Novacane,” one with hip-hop and soul influences, rather than folk rock. It feels like being in a high-speed chase: loud, fast, and tense. It reminds me of the motorcycle simulators in arcades, the ones that made you feel like you could drive as a 5-year-old but were programmed to jolt at specific parts of the course. The song is a statement, and it is tiring. He knows this about the track, and every song after “Novacane,” even if upbeat, works to slow us back down. He gives us a final release at the end of the album with the song “Ramshackle.” It is the closest Beck gets to a ballad, intimate but still in his usual dry fashion. Each song is tied to one another with lyrics that are complex and somewhat incoherent, grunge flair, and his trademark monotony. Even within the experiment we are eased in and out of *Odelay* with precision.

Beck knew that he was creating something that hadn’t quite been done before. He created an amalgamation of genre and voice, keeping listeners on their toes all while staying consistent with his brand of ‘90s self-deprecation. I’m listening to this album nearly 30 years after it was

² Beck, “Hotwax,” track #2 on *Odelay*.

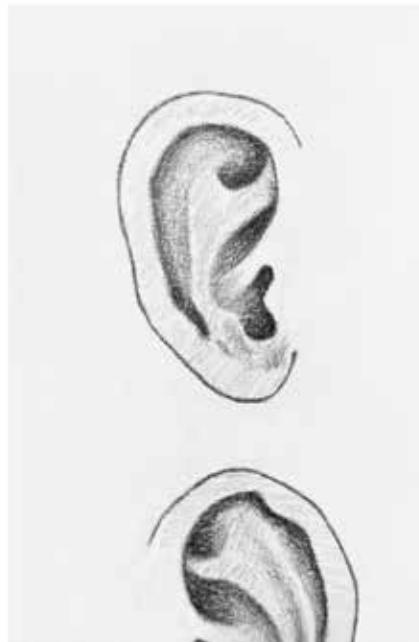
released. It has since been remastered and written about repeatedly. It is an incredibly important album for rock, its sound influencing bands of the early 2000s indie rock scene. It is persistent, perhaps for how experimental it was at its release. It is, however, no longer a singularity or an exception to the rock scene. Blues, folk, hip-hop, and soul often influence rock and roll. Artists often experiment with noise and abstract imagery. Blending elements of music from different decades has become common.

“Ramshackle” proves that Beck knows *Odelay* will be one of many. It leaves space to sit with the act of artistry, to make something new of it. It feels like he is talking directly to me as I listen to it. He invites me in, says “take off your coat,”³ and lets me relax. It is my favorite track on the album, simply for its reflection of Beck as a creative person. Whether you like him or not, he has a recognizable dedication to creating something. He spends time making sure to have the exact sound that he wants. He is playful, fun, bouncy, and devoted. He makes music for himself, but he knows that it resonates with a larger audience.

His image as a playful musician and performer opposes his life as a private individual. When asked about Beck, Stephen Malkmus (lead singer of Pavement, king of “white guy saying shit”) said that Beck was a “pretty private guy,”⁴ and couldn’t really call him his friend but his ally. Making music and having listeners is a responsibility, and he takes it seriously. He is working a job, and there isn’t room for friendship in his line of work. There is, however, room for collaboration. He supported Stephen Malkmus by inviting Pavement on tour with him (and the Beastie Boys!) in the 90’s. He works with artists who have been influenced by him to this day, like being featured on Cage the Elephant’s 2019 album *Social Cues*. Beck makes an effort to make sure he isn’t the only person experimenting. He makes an effort to make sure people have the room to make the music they want to make, just as he could. “Ramshackle” is not a song of friendship, but of allyship. He doesn’t invite me to take off my coat because we are good friends, he does it because we experienced something together. It is Beck recognizing the duty of creating music. It is the balance between Beck and us.

³ Beck, “Ramshackle,” track #13 on *Odelay*.

⁴ William Goodman. “Q&A: Stephen Malkmus on New LP, Beck + More.” *SPIN*, March 31, 2015. <https://www.spin.com/2011/07/qa-stephen-malkmus-new-lp-beck-more/>.



it comes in three

Kiara Renteria

A single, white candle-lit flame in my *Mamá*'s room attempted to warm the cold traces of Lady Sandy's attack and bring back a sense of normalcy. The same non-scented candle was present during our nightly prayers but was now used to keep the four of us (*Mamá*, Georgie, *Papá*, and me) out of unforgiving darkness. The nimble flame illuminated *La Virgen de Guadalupe* statue that I won in a class raffle, a month before Lady Sandy appeared out of the horizon, and I handed it to *Mamá* in hopes to see her crack a weary smile. The glow-in-the-dark statue was encased in a plain hexagon wooden structure that was filled with millions of tiny grains of red sand and wrapped in itchy plastic. This statue would accompany my *Mamá* during her coughing spells that expelled all of her energy into the white walls of the room and rendered her body dormant. When *Mamá* went away to a scary and unknown hospital, I would often stare at *La Virgen de Guadalupe* statue, silently plead for it to come to life, promise me that *Mamá* would come back home and that everything would return back to how it was- before the storm, before *Mamá*'s illness, and before I turned ten years old.

Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
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Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!
Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade! Enjoy your first decade!

I would have never known that four little words strung together could incite such a beastly, ferocious storm within me. The four words were initially met as a maternal offering of wisdom and love, a token of time, and a physical manifestation of aging. The turning of a babbling child to a stoic, fortified, and frozen statue. The severance between *Mamá* and I. The blurring boundaries between the caregiver and the object of delicate, tender care.

the slice between past and present.

between between pain and duty
between life and hardship

of life before and after Lady Sandy waltzed in and danced with Mr. Misery

On the morning of my tenth birthday, *Mamá* gifted me a silver-colored photo frame with the words, "Enjoy your first decade!" etched on the bottom of the opaque frame. My stubby finger followed and traced each letter. Stopping harshly at the ends of letters and gently landing my finger on top of each new letter. With my index finger, I tried to summon a marble pillar into my room that I could tether myself to and tighten my arms around. An artificial mother. I craved my own personal buoy and life jacket that would prevent me from succumbing to the waves of noise, chaos, and droning thoughts that were buzzing around my head. Artificial salvation.

I could not see my freshly anointed ten-year-old face through the murkiness of the picture frame or picture a carefree, jubilant future self encapsulated within those four borders. After the havoc of the storm, I patiently waited for a miraculous sign that would disprove the unpredictable nature of life. In the landscapes of my mind, I dreamt of *Mamá* kissing my forehead, tucking me into bed, and driving away the gray clouds in our blue skies with her illuminating hugs. Instead, I gently hugged *Mamá* through mounds of blankets that were incubating her helpless, childlike state. The very same blankets my younger brother and I carefully draped and layered over her figure during the coldest nights that Lady Sandy left us without heat, power, or electric light. Still, autumn nights turned frightening. The healing, regenerating, and pregnant powers of light were out of our reach. The six of us (physically united under one roof and divided through the walls of our minds) turned mercilessly to the bowels of mother nature.

*"With the suffering of the whole world etched on her face, she carries and assuages the burden of human misery on behalf of everyone."*¹ My fears, trepidations, and hidden anguish were absorbed through *Mamá*'s unrecognizable, frail, and disintegrating body. I could not express my internal well of suffering because my unsure and mixed emotions could not pail to the life or death battle waging within *Mamá*'s bodily systems. The failure of the human body. The destined collapse of motherhood. The

1 Rose, Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty, 24.

inability to protect or shelter. Ripped out of the womb.

To proceed on with life as a freshly crowned ten-year-old, I allowed the withering and burial of my worries. Eclipsing my emotional longings was the first, unconscious step in accepting *Mamá*'s possible and growing earthly demise. My childhood slipped away, receded into the November waves of the New Jersey coast, and fluttered into the brave and untamable winds. The death of innocence. I understood the weight of mortality while I stepped into and secured the velcro straps of my navy blue Mary Jane shoes. Placing my familiar shoes on my feet was the last step before I exited the shredded cocoon and headed to school. Guarding my feet against touching unforgiving terrain (the cold hardwood floor, the crackled asphalt, and lifted dirt) was my attempt at conjuring up a physical buffer between mother nature and myself. The once-discriminable barrier ruptured when the flooding and elevated waters of the hurricane poured into the abandoned streets and rushed into our blinded house. The realization set in of how artificial the separation of man and nature exists. A rude awakening of how easily and quickly objects, people, and lands can be torn apart. I found myself struggling to reattach and reorient myself to my physical and emotional surroundings. I had difficulty freely conjuring the connectors (the invisible strings tying not only me to myself but to the concept of a home and a finicky, shaky shawl of protection). The mystical umbilical cord that could no longer support and sustain my body and mind.

I tried not to buckle underneath or be swallowed up by the heaviness of decay. My weary, shock-glazed eyes tried to focus on the red, green, or blue streaks of numbers and words that were smudged onto the whiteboard. I could not cradle my head in between my knees and freefall onto the cold white and blue checked tile floor in a fetal position.

My sorrows drowned
and
plummeted to

the bottom
of the
ocean floor

Mamá , a curved glass bottle
adrift in

a sea of pain
floating further and further away from

me
stuck
on the
eroding shoreline
unable to reach out
and clutch
her bony hand

Mamá was prescribed a sentence of untranslatable pain. She suffered for all. A continuous looming line of martyrdom traced from seven hours of childbirth pangs. The extended throes of pushing and sustaining life. The proof of existence lies within muffled sobs, rushed exhales, and wails. The fragility of conceptions and terminations waxing and waning in the winds from the North. Brewing the next turbulent storm (adulthood // separation of mother and child). Twisted ecstasy. A tedious, unhinged balance between prey and predator is suspended between each inhale and exhale (held in before the anticipation of the storm and let go during the eye of the storm).

Virgin Mary. Her visible pain. Shuttered emotions. The entombment of unattainable tomorrows. Neither she nor I could write or imagine our future as a joint, shared unit of mother and daughter.

During school, stories of Mary, Jesus, and their shared suffering were drilled into my head as examples of the unquantifiable extent of maternal love and the unconditional love between mother and child. The bloody retelling of Jesus's crucifixion and illustrations of a crying Mary silently watching from the crowd disrupted my notion of the channels and flows of hurt. Pain is not a bubble that shields and opacifies its chosen prisoner, but rather an invisible wave that reverberates from its host, spills all over, and affects all of those caught in its path. My misery was not contained and isolated within myself neither was *Mamá*'s misery. Our suffering bled into each other even if we were not situated within the same vicinity. The invisible umbilical cord that jerked and restricted our ability to display and feel each other's love.

A mother could witness the death of her own child and be completely defenseless to prevent harm to the very being that she nurtured. Her child could not be shielded, protected, or sheltered from outside of her womb.

L i f e i s c r e a t e d

a n d d e s t r o y e d w i t h
e a c h p a s s i n g m o m e n t .

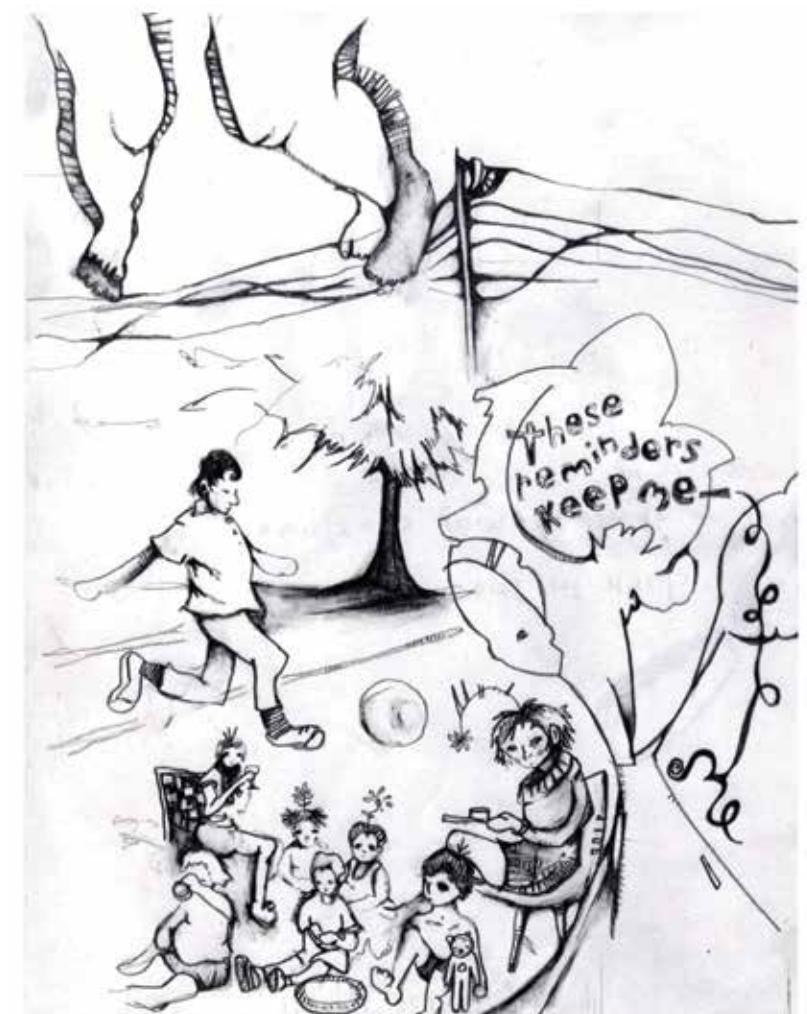
Blessed art thou among woman and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.
Through the calamity littered with unpredictable circumstances drenched in fear, *Mamá* and I had birthed each other. The process of creation is instinctively entwined with absence. I was the blessed fruit that developed and sprouted from within her heavenly garden. Being twenty years old, I am able to understand the impact of this line from the Hail Mary prayer. Sacrifice, loss, renewal, and unpredictability emit from this phrase (a humbling and coruscating mediation on the conception of life). These words no longer pass through me and are lodged within my corporal flesh and spiritual gloriole.

Motherhood is a blessing wrapped with ribbons of loaded responsibility especially considering the heavy and tricky weight of a child's dependence on their mother. The battle between dependence, independence, closeted and displayed love, strictness, guidance, smothering, and protection takes place in the actions of mother and child. A constant state of flux floating with misplaced, mixed emotions.

I wonder if there were warning signs set in place as meteorologists were able to detect Lady Sandy and determine her flowing destructive movements. The forming of unforeseen surges and the unexpected withering of *Mamá*. If I was able to detect the incoming signs of *Mamá*'s bout with death, would the scary experience of silently watching *Mamá* fade away and almost disappear be less cruel, harsh, and not as jarring? Would I have a better and tighter grasp at consoling both her and me? If I knew of her health problems, could I be in control and help fix the situation? With the prophetic knowledge, I could make sure that I was not just a bystander to a tragic, unfolding, and catastrophic event, but rather the bandaid that soothes and heals the divide. The desire to obtain control and absorb divine information is an effect that most individuals carry on with themselves as a result of being in a traumatic event.

"I didn't know" were the exact words that *Mamá* uttered when I shared with her my side of the event that happened over ten years ago. When she was taken away and delivered to some unknown hospital, no one in our house ever mentioned how *Mamá*'s condition was progressing or shared any updates of her hospitalization with my younger brother and me. Nobody out of the three individuals, who included my dad, dared to speak

of the ghost. As a result of simply not knowing and being devoid of concrete details that I could cling to, I began forming a frenzy of speculations in my head. The most prominent and fearful of these concocted fantasies was that *Mamá*'s condition was worsening exponentially to the point where she had succumbed to her mysterious and unknown ailment. The birth of this morose fantasy fostered a strange acceptance in myself, which was the acceptance that *Mamá* was lost and was never coming back. Out of this understanding, I matured rapidly through the tides of adolescence. My relationship with *Mamá*, the world, and myself fractured and would never revert back to those sunny, cheerful, and stormless days.



Untitled, Sarah Tonra

On writing in the modern day

Annelies Stealey

I was never baptized, and thus instead bathed in the unknowable landscape of turquoise, a phenomenological impasse, of swelling and nondescript buzzings that must have been coming from behind a door --concealed behind exposed brick--that impossible oxymoron, feeling that I was one myself, feeling that tryptamines were indeed hell and my heresy was being punished in the inhibition of neurotransmitter recycling.

Praying the Hail Mary over a pissed-on stick and waiting for a second line to develop. Lines are cut across skin, cut across glass, transposed into English then to Latin then to Greek then to English, lines can twist and bend themselves back, torn ligaments revealing something that was either there or not all along. Translation, neuroscience, literature, conception... wherever the lines present themselves there is always blank space. Between line and line, between said and written, between said and thought, between thought and unthought. Perhaps it is Lacan's unreachable lack, or the nothingness of after, or proof of intellectual inadequacy, or anything that can be perceived and transposed onto a nothing that is given to us. They (we) can be contorted, manipulated manually, but will always return--perhaps having insight into some other form of being, but nonetheless occupying the same space as before.

That is to say that anything new to be written is occupying an unreachable space, appearing blank, prohibiting any material reach. Everything yours will always be someone else's. There is no new perspective to draw, no new philosophy to construct, no new field to study. That nothing can be done without consulting upon the words or thoughts or works of others is the great hell of modern material being.

So why write?

There is plenty of evidence as to what one should or could write today, in an economic sense. There is a strategic choice to be made, niches to be filled or disregarded in favor of (hopefully) profitable audiences.

BookTok romances. Insta-micro-poetry. MFA-esque highbrow fiction. Ghostwritten high-profile memoirs. YA (at least in spirit and style) eroto-fantasy. One must spend more time marketing than writing. A recognizable name will do the trick.

There is also my belief that we write in another way: a primal, animalistic way, without regard for financial success, name recognition, or even publication in the first place. Although any of the above genres (except, perhaps, the ghostwritten memoir) can be written in this manner, the action itself takes primary importance over and before any consideration for market-based distinctions such as genre, audience, content, or legibility. If humans didn't *need* to create literature, if it weren't vital for our continuous being, it wouldn't have arisen and continued to exist at all.

If history was wiped out, if we were starting all over from the archaic days, we would still discover zero, pi, velocity, math, physics. But would anything akin to *Hamlet* be written? Would poetry come to be? Literature is not *set* in the nature of being in the same way that mathematics are. But it is in our set nature to create, to speak, to record, to symbolize. Because of that, I believe literature would exist--even if we had to do it all over again. It may take different forms--who knows what a play or a poem or a lyric essay would look like in this alternate timeline.

Everything that can be communicated cannot possibly be spoken. There is only so much the tongue can handle--fingertips must carry the weight of the rest. Tapping across the keyboard, that rhythm of uncontrollable transmission, words that look different against white space than they do floating invisible between mouths. We write notes for what we cannot say aloud. We journal our innermost secrets because it is unbearable to leave them swelling in the mind. These modes of writing are simple, personal, they are not meant to be "art" in the sense of curation, of intention of sharing, of releasing something to anyone other than the self. But the medium develops; it moves autonomously away from us as individuals. Journaling becomes poetry, memoir, autotheory, lyric essay. Notes become fiction, odes, collections of correspondence. These genres that infiltrate publishing, showing up on the shelves of the communally-

owned bookseller or Barnes & Noble, become marketable and shareable forms of the necessary act of writing that originates in the personal.

We will always do this.

To return to historical hypotheticals: the wheel. While most aside from engineers and historians don't need to spend much time considering the impact that the invention of the wheel has had on our ability to survive and thrive as a civilization, it is nonetheless an important reality--the fact that we don't think about how much the wheel as an object does for us is testament to its pure impact. If a button were pressed and all wheels in the world suddenly vanished, faded from reality, pure chaos would ensue --ensuring the collapse of civilization as we know it. Goods and people would no longer be able to be moved long distances. Almost all modern technology relies on the wheel in some way. Anything that still functioned in this wheelless world would be rendered immovable past a certain radius. Suddenly thrust into a world so restricted, having been spoiled by the luxury that wheels afford us, we would certainly struggle to survive at all--let alone maintain some semblance of human development.

Consider another scenario: A button is pressed and all methods of writing for personal and creative purposes (technical and impersonal reasons for writing, such as records, history, manuals, and advertisements remain) vanish. We can still record and look back on our history, read a math textbook, put a piece of Ikea furniture together, and write grant proposals for our newest business venture. But we can no longer journal, pass notes to one another, write poetry, or invent stories. It is hard to know for certain whether society would collapse immediately in this case. For those who see literature and creative writing as frivolous and unnecessary for practical life, the answer may be thought to be *no*. But let's consider the ramifications of this literatureless world--first from a historical perspective. No more Shakespeare. No more Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. No more Homer. No more *1984*. The ways in which we view and critique our society would be irrevocably altered and broken. Certain words, inventions, and political developments would not have come to fruition without their invention or popularization through creative literature. Our ability to understand romance, economics, and politics would be so undeveloped that abuse, poverty, and authoritarianism may flourish.

Historical record and political texts would not impact our ability to speak for ourselves and understand the world around us without the stories and narratives that speak to us and allow us to contextualize more complex ideas.

And, of course, this speaks to the importance of pre-existing literature that came about from the act of writing. But, in this hypothetical world, what would come about from the loss of new creative writing, of the action itself?

We would no longer be able to express the underlying, unconscious, metaphorical ideas that are too painful, too secretive, too unknown to release through discourse. We would no longer be able to relieve pain through journaling and memoir. We would no longer be able to reveal our innermost thoughts and secrets through poetry. We would no longer be able to contextualize and hold autonomy over our reality through the creation of fiction.

Simply put, we would lose our minds.

Despite the fact that creative writing and literature may not benefit our modern, capitalistic society--it is usually not the foundation that keeps these institutions running--literature allows us to bear it, if only for a moment. It allows us to lay out ways in which to change it. If we were constantly straining under the weight of our internal thoughts and feelings, no change would come about. Nothing productive could be done. Slowly our suffering and neurosis would take over; we would no longer be capable of understanding or bearing our lives. And when we aren't capable of understanding or bearing our lives, we simply stop. Mentally stop, physically stop. Death, in other words.

Every idea that can be written has perhaps already been written. But that doesn't keep it out of our minds. So we keep writing.

And trains derail, and pages are torn, and grocery bags break on the street, sending frozen vegetables and lemon curd tumbling toward the concrete. And no matter how badly things break, we find a way to put it all to paper.

Exquisite Corpse

At the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester, the Eleven and a Half poetry team invited The New School community to submit unique words and phrases for a collaborative project. More than 40 responses from the student and staff body were collected over the course of four weeks, and the submissions were later assembled into a freeform poem.

Amongst the submissions were questions, vows, wishes, punchlines, individual words, and sections of prose. Themes of nature, reflection, and jest emerged. A community within our community was born.

Courtyard Epigram, as the poem was later titled, debuted at Eleven and a Half's Open Mic on October 12th, 2023.

Many thanks to Aditi, Aidan, Aletheia, Amy-Grace, Ana, Char, EK, Ethan, Fari, Gil, Mia, Nory, Sylvia, and 30 anonymous writers for their contributions.

Love,
Sara, Celia, and Avery

Courtyard Epigram

Vagabond
October is doing strange things to my head
Rough brushes
Serendipitous
Center of lacking and draining
Trim what is not you
Luminate
Swan
Why does looking at the stars (if you can see them) mean so much?
Fancy pants
Emerald rose
A game of friendly fire-of human indulgence- made foreign to me
Fairy
We need to beautify this courtyard!!!!
Gasoline
Lilies
Nightfall approaches
I saw a vagabond over yonder!
Indubitably
A thimble the height of a skyscraper
Elephant ears know no silence
And I held my cup. Like an infant, tender and smooth. It made me think of you.
What should I write about?
Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
Posture
Cheese
Orange tree
Fresh
Lottery winner
Flawed
Surrender
Aching bones and dulcet tones carry me to sleep
Figment, riotfire, academic dreamscape
You can't boil oil
You can't cheat death, or love
We're all chained to the rhythm to the beat of democracy
Organs and eyes, organize the mirror's slaughter, standing over an infinite well, dark with no water
Communal isolation knows me too well
The mirror does not see me. I have not seen myself like I have seen you.
Whistles stop the heads from talking
He contemplated amongst his flamboyant colleagues
The hamster hid away her delicate fears
There is so much everything I want for nothing





poetry

Writers Block
Gretchen Donnelly



Sketchbook Spread, Joe Glynn

I haven't
written in
weeks
Because
I can't
pick up the
pen I
physically
cannot
pick it up
I see it there
Sitting there
Silently
insulting me ...
But I just ignore it
I like it sitting
so I sit too
And I worry if it's
ok and I worry if it
even wants me to
write with it anymore
Because the last time
I wrote it was
Bad
It was so bad
wasn't it?
Yeah so so bad

Because
I had
written about

the

pen

And

Uh

oh

joyfreak?

after autofictive asphyxiation

Ian Powers

in this moment most
of my atoms can be traced
back to my grandmother's
cigarettes

each cylinder fissuring
and leaking
every last synapse
succumbing to perfumed
laughter a childlike pareidolia
the omnipresence of uncertainty

and when we are oaks
the mycelial tethers will
be clogged with our bullshit
i'll ask if you remember
how as humans we'd melt
into each other until
we smelled



Synthesia

Soph Lajnef

this memory smells like a blue collared shirt and this taste feels like a headache

and the smell of jasmine is a portal to a home that was never mine

and the tight waistband on my once baggy pants distances me from the memory of the taste of black coffee and nachos and the smell of an old friend's pool

and grape soda is a boy who never loved me

and the smell of hospitals keeps my 17 year old self immortalized, trapped in the sterile odor of stagnancy

and after turning 20, i wake up every morning with the tasteless filmy breath of a tired 18 year old alone in a new city

and when i eat watermelon jolly ranchers i can remember all the french i forgot years ago

and the thinner my arms get, the more compelled i am to go to a church and pretend to pray, even if the familiar and stale smell callously reminds me that i'm the only being that will listen

and nausea is a child begging for a love that was right in front of them

and runny noses taste like adderall and feels like a pill stuck in my chest

and when i gag while brushing my tongue i throw up all the alcohol i've ever stolen from my parents

and my body hears the creases of my tight shirt rub against my arms

and today is one of those days where everything smells like tide but nothing is clean

Car Altar

Alyne Padilla Robles

petals from our first rose
orange peels at midnight
hibiscus leaves forgotten in California
each of these bodies

stiff with death
in deliberate time
turned into itself
i've carried

dense with darkness
glazed in lightbulb hue
before the candles
to rest

where my molcajete should be
to taste purposeful death
where purposeful life must be
as a mercy to myself
and a prayer to anything else

because faith grows in scavenged memories
and Earth
in my mother's superstitions
and my father's car altar
where we've kissed the dead
hummingbird tethered
to the rearview mirror
before the engine started
and pecked finger-crosses
for the father, son, and holy spirit
each time a church was passed

so when
i set a bowl of water by the door
to filter away murky intentions
or when

i seal mirrors in cloth before bed
to lock the door from the other side

i carry the frail bodies of ancestry

stiff with death
in deliberate time
turned into itself
before the candles
to taste purposeful death



Undies, Isabella Anand

Findings

Camila Pernisco

My gynecologist called early yesterday,
while I was at the pub with dad, watching
Inter Miami, Philadelphia, 4-1,
left me a voicemail, said,
“Give me a call back”
in her wicked, soft tone
curved her words, like she
curved her letters on my
birth control prescription
“All doctors call back even if the results are good, right?”
“Yeah of course, always”
I went back to my beer and burger.

Stared at myself, naked,
full-length mirror, in the bathroom
wishing for those vending machines,
the ones with dirty gimmicks,
“Sexy Little Surprises”
like 9-inch measuring tapes and
off-brand viagra, packaged like those
neon, Magic Grow Capsules
mom refused to buy from 99 Cents

I feel myself refusing
and my phone buzzes
in my pant’s pocket, tossed on the tile
besides me, I feel my toes scrunch
feel like one of those capsules.
you’ve dunked me in water,
and everything sounds like a shell-phone,
Aquamarine phone call, bubbled and blurred,
she curves her words
I feel my joints soften
“Do you have any questions?”
a lump materializes in my throat, and
my pelvis curls, soured.

PARTICIPATION POINTS

L.A. Ritchie

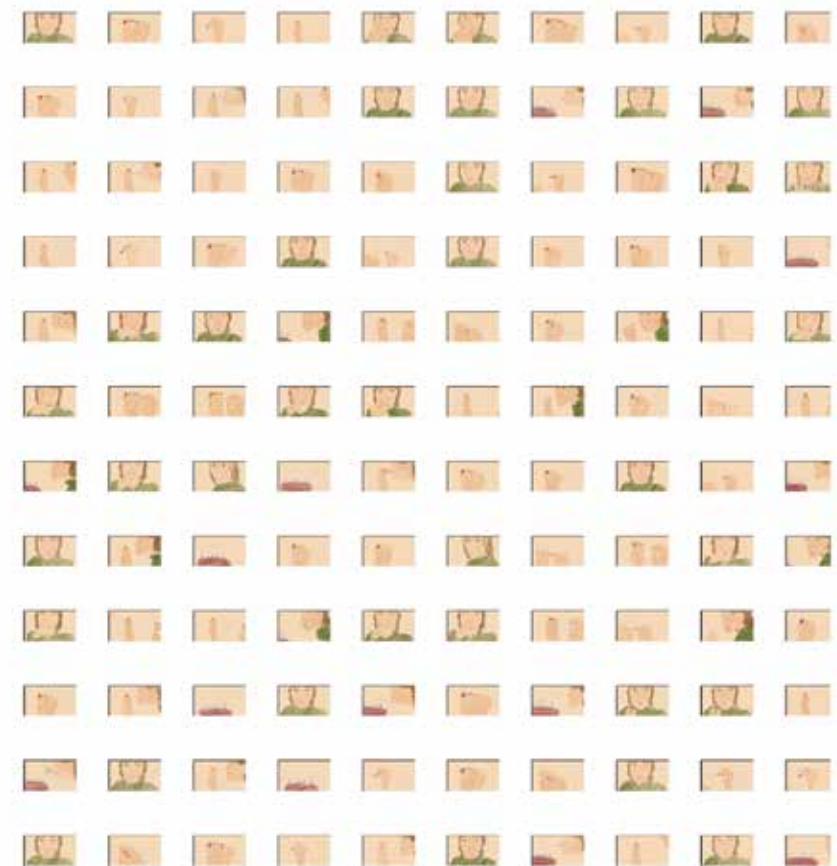
Shame. That's what I felt walking home in the light rain. Contributions to the discussion occurred to me which I could have made but did not, due to my own negligence, nervousness, and what I perceived to be my overall slow-wittedness in regular social situations. I should have said this, or I could have said that; why didn't I? For instance, after the person—oh no, I can't remember their name now—concluded an astute psychoanalytic comment drawing on the theories of Deleuze and Derrida, applied to the postmodernist Hungarian novel we were presently reading for our seminar, I could have then raised my hand and articulated something, anything whatever.

"Sorry I don't remember your name, but to your great point, now that you mention it, I think I can clearly see how the characters in this novel, including: The Gatekeeper, The Colonel, The Librarian, and The Dreamreader do, indeed, each appear to represent a certain characteristic becoming-archetype, suspended in a state of constant material deconstruction; though, the extent to which these personages attain self-integration within the world of the novel remains as yet vague and fully indeterminate at this point in the narrative. Therefore, I think it resists such compartmentalizing interpretation. Style is the main object here, I think—and above all, a style of imagery."

But no, I faltered and remained silent, bouncing my leg, wavering eyes that don't track or know where to look at the right moment. Moreover, people don't really speak like that, do they? I have never in my life spoken such a coherent sentence as I am able to put down in writing. So then, I'll make up for my lack of speech on the midterm paper, I say to myself. I still believed in my potential as a writer, despite my noted tendencies to overwrite and say nothing of substance or meaning; also to not write anything at all for extended periods.

I ate a chocolate chip protein bar, mealy and flavorless like nothing that is good or real. My metabolism was wrecked. In my backpack jostled a pair of debut novels I had requested through interlibrary loan, one by John Barth and the other by Gerald Murnane, two alive and still-breathing authors whose work I had not yet read a word of, but of whom I wished I could say that I had already read their entire oeuvre—and so, I was setting out to do exactly that. I was terribly ambitious.

"Yes! I loved them," I said later.



Animation Key Frames, Chris Gentile

“TRIBE MIGRATION/VENICE”

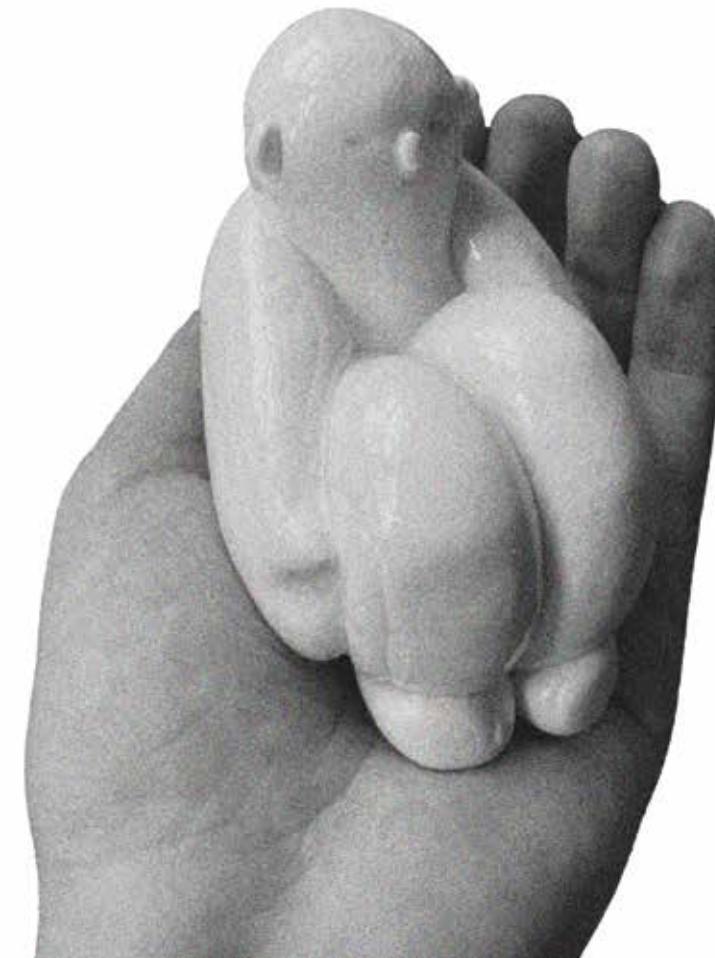
Galacia

NEXT TIME I COME HOME IM FORCING MY COUSINS TO STAND
WITH ME FOR A PICTURE
A PROPER PICTURE.
NOT A “CROWD AROUND AN EXTENDED ARM” TYPE
BUT A “STAND AROUND MOM AND POPS AND LOLO AND LOLA”
TYPE, LIKE OLD WHITE FOLKS HAVE.
IT’LL JUST BE US WITH THE FUTURE IN THE CENTER.
THE HARD PART IS WRANGLIN THEM ALL UP.
THEY ARE ALL SCATTERED AND DEAD.
ME TOO.
I THOUGHT FEDS DID ENOUGH DAMAGE TO THE MOUNTAINS
YET HERE WE ARE,,,
ABUSED AND SCHIZOPHRENIC.
SCATTERED.
WE USED TO HUNT HEADS TOGETHER,
BUT WHEN WE GOT OUR NUMBERS WE MADE THEM LONGER
I SUPPOSE. MISDEMEANORS TURN INTO FELONIES.
GOT CAUGHT UP WITH A CASE CAUSE MY SCALE AND YOU? I
HEAR TALES OF YOU RAISING HELL AND BEING UNWELL.
AND YOUR MOMMA WANTS TO TAKE YOU BACK UP THE
MOUNTAINS. EVEN THERE, YOUR BLOOD STINGS.
THE MINES ARE EMPTY, THE CAVES ARE BRIGHT WITH MOMMA,
AND OUR HISTORIES ARE GONE (almost).
THEY STOLE OUR POPS’ PAST AND WERE SO CLOSE TO
LOCKING IT AWAY.
NOW, WE ARE ALL HERE.
BUILDING OUR PLANE WHILE IT FLIES.
PLEASE TAKE THIS FUCKING PICTURE WITH ME.

my birth

Ana Krent

She was born from a delicate shell,
like a little clam in the sea.
She was soft
and she smelled of sweet cherry blossoms
and milk.
It was the first of May, and
as she came into the light of springtime
she could feel the warmth of the sun
on her translucent skin
as she kissed the earth for the very first time.



My Nature

Sofia Rangel

See, I could write about my childhood,
the smell of fresh roasted coffee that embraced me every morning and the
landfills I'd walk through after school.
Thing is I fucking hated coffee,
I would always get a rash whenever I would let my bare legs come in contact
with grass,
also, the iguanas would pop out of nowhere and scare the shit out of me.

So I moved out of home very happily (I got rejected from my dream college) to
follow the american dream (I don't like thanksgiving and quite frankly there are
too many people who claim to be different here like you have eyeliner on, like you
wear a tote bag, like you talk about Plath and Taylor Swift in the same sentence
because they are both great lyricists and Pico was wrong, like you kiss girls, like
you smoke cigarettes, like uh-oh- I am describing myself.)

Was that home?

I mean, it had the screams and the crying and drinking and all the lovely
dysfunctionalities that make any house a home.
But it never did feel like home.

"You were the biggest fish in the pond here, princesa." My dad told me the other
day.

Papi, now I am a miserable, uneventful goldfish in an ocean filled with sharks
who do crypto and say the word bitcoin and don't believe me when I tell them
I'm a lesbian and very sexy dolphins who work at Starbucks and then go to photo
shoots after 6pm and octopuses with purple hair and eccentric taste in music and
quirky seahorses who wear big, round glasses and talk to me about Nietzsche and
Freud. But I do not miss the pond, papi. It was very lonely in the pond.

I run around sixteen hours a day on bagels and coffee that I hate but that I have
now built a dependence on (I have built a dependence on a lot of things.) And
I feel like such a princess whenever I have to ask friends to make calls for me
because I do it solely out of laziness and not at all because whenever I call the
bank they will treat me very differently than my friend Nora from Long Island.
I could be Nora from Long Island. I just need to practice the placement of my
tongue a little more. You will see.

Everyone must think I'm so mysterious, since I keep my mouth so damn shut the
entire time. Writing is easier because I get to erase mistakes and nobody

gets to notice, nobody hears a word mispronounced or a stutter and I relish in
their obliviousness. *Sometimes I mess up the tenses when I'm talking.* Sometimes
I just mess up when I'm talking.

Yes, they think I am very, very mysterious.

They don't think I have nothing to say.

They just think I keep it to myself,
yes, yes that is exactly what they think.

I learned English from watching Lea Michele deliver out of pocket lines on Glee
and Meredith Grey fall over a guy who wasn't even that cute on a show about
doctors who have sex and cut people open, and reading all the teenage trope
books and then reading some actual decent books that my dad then regretted
buying for me because I suddenly went "Papi, I want to be a writer and move to
New York City."

It is very frustrating to have a lot to say and to be unable to articulate it. You
should see how smart I sound in Spanish, it's a shame they don't have a good
literary studies program at the one (1) college in my town (or self-checkout
registers or Whole Foods or Barnes and Noble or Gay Bars that I am definitely
old enough to get into or a plethora of lonely intellectuals in black peacoats)

It is nice being accompanied in the loneliness until the lonely room gets so
crowded I can't breathe. I burnt my hand making a *salad* the other day, I think
that perfectly encapsulates my life. I now carry a very disgusting open wound on
my left hand and when people ask me about it I half-jokingly state that I got in a
fight.

I told my sister I sometimes sink my head underwater in the bathtub (I HAVE A
BATHTUBBBBB!!!) to see how long I can go without coming up. She did not
laugh, the boring bitch.

Sometimes I don't recognize myself, I have been doing stuff I never did back
home. Wait no—that wasn't home. "But you don't even own a place here
howcanthisbehome?" says otherme. I tell otherme to go fuck herself. I call
my mom to tell her about all the things I've done here and she doesn't judge
because she gave me a bunch of trauma from ages zero to fourteen but we are
actually kindacoolnow and so I tell her all about my "adventures" as she calls
them. (Insert very thick Colombian accent that I try really hard to avoid because
the level of niceness of that one lady at Brandy Melville will decrease if she
notices it): "Yes but that isn't your nature. You're just exploring because you
couldn't do it here." She tells me.

I have no idea whether she's right or wrong.

I have no clue whether this is a break from the person I was (am) or the mere discovery of it.

It is a loaded thing, to have to figure out who you are,
I'm not sure I'll ever quite get it.

199 problems and guns ain't one
Avery Camp

THE HILL

1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500
1-800-GUN-NRA1

Friday, 05/09/2023 11:36 AM

2023 Mass Shootings.....199.00

Discounts..... 25% off any AR-15* for reaching 200.00

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TENDER: Gun Rights Lobby

PAID: \$59,758,473

CHANGE: 0

**Exclusions Apply: 25% cannot be used retroactively, new gun purchase only. If 200 mass shootings have already occurred, coupon is invalid. Check back for future sweepstakes.*

No Returns, All Deaths Final

After Vievee Francis

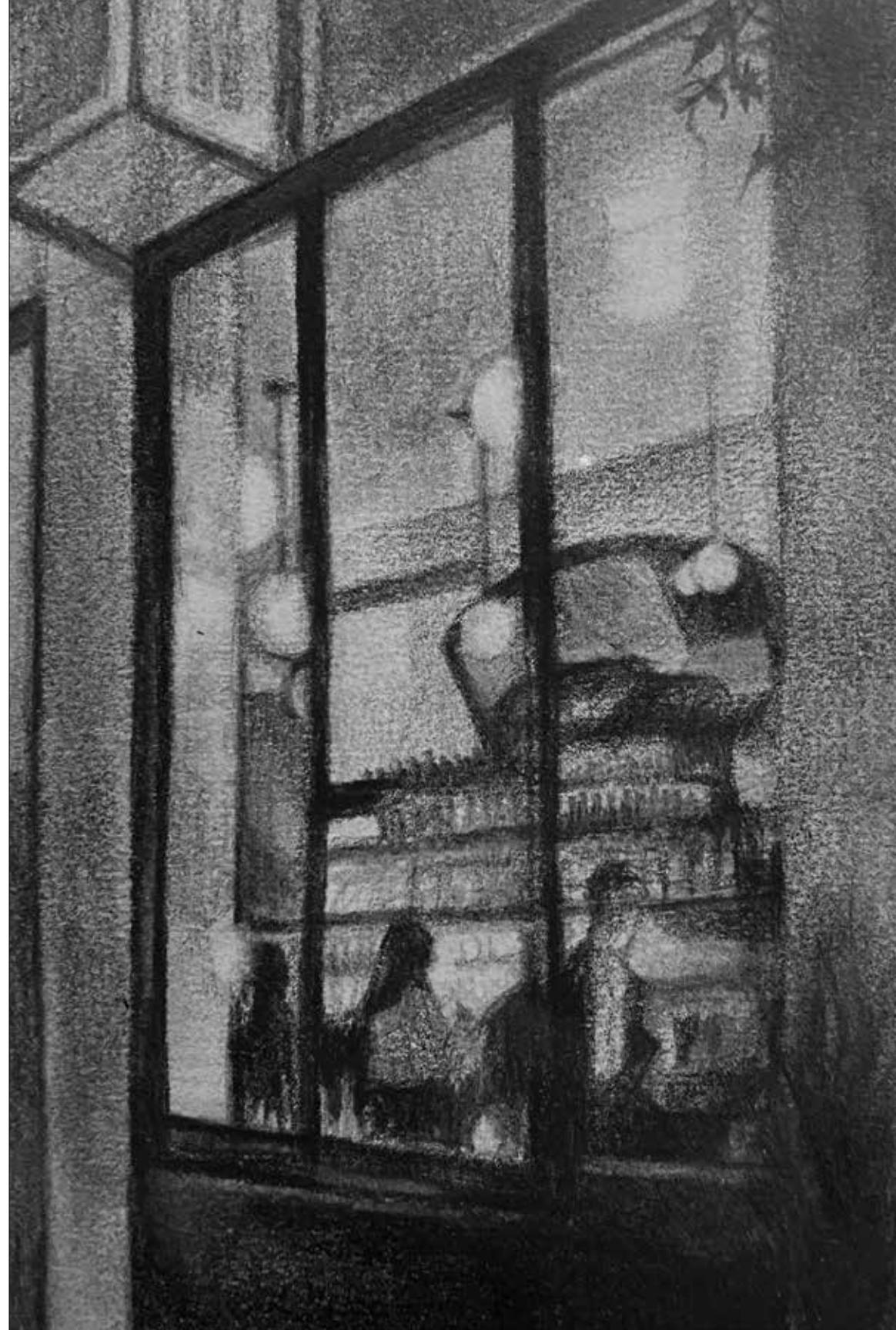
Ollie Davis

New Years, 1928

The two lovers. Figures masked. Chest to chest in a room that seems to open into sky. An eternal kiss. Kept like a promise. Red shirt blending her burning desire. The woman who brushed them beside each other pronounced their mated souls. White sheets over their heads like children disguised as ghosts for Halloween. I was still dressed up. Two bottles of cider in hand, feigning toxicity. We too were playing make believe. Matching our clothes, planning our arrival like adults wed. My boyfriend was in a suit and tie foreshadowing his formal irony. We didn't know he was sick until that day, unveiled the contagious. And as lovers do we were destined to fall in tandem. Anything we have is ours to share. That night was our last childish chance. I walked out into the cold. Moonlight cascaded down the front porch steps from the top of the sky, minutes before it began falling to the horizon. Windswept candles and juice that sparkled in our wine glasses. Neither of our parents drink. From a few feet away I could see his face, inches apart I must recall it from memory. A kiss covered in cloth. Blind celebration for a future that cannot be predicted. She did not need to look at him to know he was the one.

*

We are now chest deep into the year we celebrated the beginning of, longing to be as close as we were at the start. We tell ourselves every week will be the one that paints us beside each other. I no longer let hope infiltrate my irregular beating heart. There are many things about him I no longer remember, each day a bigger piece of him is lost to the changing autumn air. He always lent me his jacket, discarded the fabric like a tree with its leaves to keep my naive flame from fading in the breeze. Perhaps it's time to buy my own. And that ghost still lives inside me, I still feel a chill when a part of him sweeps by. The feeling of his lips against mine was the first to go. The taste of apple cider will be the last. I wonder if the cloth over their heads connect at the ends, like a butterfly's wings are tied to tomorrow.



Up close

Calia Fernandez

Fingertips touched by magenta moons,
Cerulean blues and the faint gestures
Of two bodily wisps, torqued into one another.
Shadows of trees at the stem blush
Like bruised cushions and coral.

The sky, a pale yellow cheek embalmed
In grapefruit pulp and
Underripe berry, the atmosphere,
Bathed in myth over material.
Strokes lipped thickly across the surface,
Minute gures dipped against the
Stalk of rhythmic trees
And fairytale pastel.
The scene croaks a lowly mystique,
A mesmer in
Bodies wrestling,
mortal and divine faces thrusted in musical reflexion,
Heaven to dwell on earth and the earth,
To dwell in clouds of creamy fire.
Man and angel,
Angel and man,
So faintly traced the quarrel
Appears as an embrace.

— Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (ca. 1905-1910), Odilon Redon

After “*Jazz Stories: Mama Can Sing, Papa Can Blow*”
Nadja Anderson-Oberman

I hear myself in their melodies
and I wonder if they’re playing for me.
Papa can blow, and he does.
And so does his Papa,
and the Papa before—
brass is birthright,
it seems to me,
sewn into sonatas for safekeeping.

With mouth to mouthpiece,
even a scream makes music.
Papa can blow and plead and wail,
but all they’ll hear are eighth notes,
singing legacies of life as three-fifths.
When he wraps his hands around the
neck of the bass, I want to know whose
he imagines it to be.

The vibrations of drumsticks
grazing gilded cymbals
threaten to swallow me whole
and I can’t tell if I’ll want to
scream or sing
from the stomach.
Or maybe my plea will be music too.

Maybe I’ll feel the wind breeze through my afro,
while singing the strain that struggle stitched into me,
and throw my arms and mouth wide,
offering an embrace to my Mama who sang,
and hers who did, too—
to those who will hear themselves in my melodies
and wonder if I’m singing for them.
Sonically, we all make a symphony,
quilted into the jive of jazz beats.



Fervor Motion, Sarah Tonra

on space

Radha Peacock

i am going to adopt a dog
and name her
“orbital sunrise”

i am going to dance in your kitchen
and then i am going to
steal something from your fruit bowl.

i am going to write you a note that says:
“actually, life is very beautiful and very
important and i am
glad we are alive.”

i am going to ride to the end of the line.

i am going to kiss a friend at a party
and not feel bad about it after.

i am going to rent an apartment
way up town
with the same kitchen it had 40 years ago
and i am going to look out the window
with orbital sunrise
and watch the
non-orbital sunrise.

“did you know the first art
made in space was
a sketch of an orbital sunrise?”
i will ask her
and she will sit there, and drool
and i will pray she doesn’t
bark too much for the neighbors

i am going to
bake them bread to try to win them over.

i think sourdough
but maybe cornbread.
i am from the south and
sometimes
i miss it.

i need an iron skillet first.
you need one to
do it right.

i am going to leave the house
without makeup on
and i am not going to regret it
every time i see
someone looking at me.

(god, i could've been so much *better* today. fuck.)

i am going to bring a lighter from home
in my suitcase
and, like a real southern belle,
the next time a man
yells at me on the street
i am going to set his hair on fire.

i am going to light a candle.

i am going to lay on top of clean sheets.
arch into flutter light,
and thank whatever deity granted me
this flicker flacker dance of solitude pleasure.

i am going to eat pasta for breakfast.

i am going to buy myself a single flower.

i am going to break something expensive with my fist
or maybe my skull
and i am going to cry-laugh as it shatters.

“why is happiness aloneness and destruction?”
you, my precious audience, asks.

“have you ever been a woman?” i question-answer.

i edit the question-answer with another question:
“have you ever heard
romeo and juliet
by indigo girls.”

it is
the rageful anthem on being less preferable than a boy who
stands under a window.
i get it.
do you get it?

i recommend
being 14 and falling in love with a straight girl
if you want to get it.

maybe you are too old?
whatever.
time machines are hard to figure out but
the song will be soooo worth it.

oh! that sounds like too much work?
do you not even want to understand me?

i know i sound like a needy straight boy
but, god, they have it good.
sometimes i
want to get lazy and
become one.

but i do not think i am
good enough at
groveling and
suckling and
emotional dependence
for that.

i lack qualifications.
i am much more qualified for womanhood.

i have the necessary experience in:
eye twitching,
looking behind myself stealthily to see if
i am being followed,
performing the unlock-car-door-check-back-seat-get-into-car-look-door
ritual
in less than 4 seconds,
laughing when i am uncomfortable,
braiding hair,
washing other people's dishes,
crying when my mother cries,
wanting to be my cat,
and smiling at strangers.
i am not good enough at
complicated handshakes
or saying no
to be a man.

does this poem work as resume?
fuck, art school in nyc has messed me up.

"does this poem work as a resume?"
bitch!
shut the fuck up.

but
just out of curiosity
do you think it works?

yeah, of course *you would*.

sorry,
fuck.
i shouldn't be so mean.
i've never needed you more
than I need you now.

it's syrupy desperation,
overflowing plate,
dripping down table legs,
soaking into my socks.

the needy straight boy thing was
supposed to be a joke,
but I feel
sky high with all your
ears perked.

i used to
think I could never be understood
my mother hates
not being listened to
(she is an aquarius too)
now, i don't worry about it
instead i

spill terrible sticky demanding words across
entire restaurant dining rooms.

"who's on the floor right now?"

"funny you should phrase it like that!
actually, no one!
everyone is standing on their chairs and
my own personal cacophony is
rising exponentially."

ha
you thought this was a
pancake breakfast,
didn't you?
you thought you'd get to
order off the menu?

funny.

do you feel like a victim now?

i loooove feeling like a victim.

agency feels good until you fuck up.
then you wish you
didn't have to take responsibility.

this is nice,
isn't it?

drowning is better than floating in space.

there is not
an orbital sunrise
but at least there is sugar
and an absence of nothingness.

so i'll tell you for the last time,
relax,
give in,
see if you float.

life *is* beautiful
and still
you have nothing to lose
that is not lost already.



The Ecstasy of our Suffering

Kiara Renteria

i. bed of repetition, now i lay myself to sleep

<i>rib</i>	B	<i>schism</i>
	A	
<i>idolatry</i>		<i>clay</i>
	D	
<i>pain</i>		

ii. blue, escapism, desire

pale blue
porcelain roses
at the golden tabernacle
of
our bed
stuffed
with dirt
you and i
rub
dandelions
together

coils of
dizzy euphoria
and
bloody heaven
engulf
my body
of sin
and blossoming
heart of
pleasure

iii. plastic garden of eden

let me tend to (ur)
g a r d e n
ppppppppplant



flowersssssss

baby's b r e a t h

pink porcelain roses

////pppppppppppussyyyyyyyyyyyyyywillows////

a meadow
of

OUR

<3

--//--- swallow --//--

(me

u)

i n t o

i'll dive head first into the heaven of our luv

i'lldiveheadfirstintoth heavenofourluv

I'LLDIVEHEADFIR
STINTOTHEHEAV
ENOFOURLUV

Coup at Quest Diagnostics

Zoe Hussain

Copper Ms. Liberty
has varicose veins
hiding like beacons
that my family bled to enter.

Mine are blue and braided.

Knotty, I turn them over
and brush them out.

Bratty, they make my boyfriends
think of me young.

The nurse at Quest Diagnostics slips me a Sour Patch Kid.
For a second I remember
what it feels like to be a soldier,
losing limbs.

I walk into the waiting room with a limp wrist.

A man asks me how to reach someone who blocked his number,
so I enlist him in my service.

We start a bloody coup at Quest Diagnostics.

Though all the gauze to
patch us up
is square
and small.

babadook summer

Avery Camp

where does your resentment lie?
point at it
where does the body keep the despondency chilled?
where did you stop loving me first?

puddles coalesced into streams
later: a river you're never planning on crossing

transgender
transexual
transplant?
be sure to check snopes
we can't handle another babadook
summer
in the fire of hell's kitchen
sculpted gays and frenchies,
hollowed nightclubs
serve rectory
ass the only tithe
keeps the lights on

under the pertinence of hating
the right person

the saliency of loving the right person
dwindles

when HRC equal signs tattooed your bodies
and years of conservative backlash to gay marriage
coagulated into
blood laws at the expense of trans *children*
don't disrupt your life -- style
remember *that* word

you called your partner your friend
the taste in your mouth metallic as you bite your own tongue
to all of your coworkers,

your family, and that guy that sells you weed
even when your silence is violence

I want to,

I don't,

hate your ass

you should see that we're both digging(dug)
graves of our youth
in our city alone AIDS has taken
42 times more of us than the towers

your partner, friend, lover, acquaintance, bodega man, coworker, artist, now
this

braces still on teeth

gender:

still unknown

name:

still unknown

pronouns:

still unknown

gender creative children:

unknown

where do you want to start loving first?
the curving of our bodies
become rivers to our softest parts
abundant bends of earlobes and elbows
a dance, a ritual we haven't remembered to share yet

hell, I burned skin leaning into your hot red fiat

here

pier's horizon mirages river/sky/sea

get in

(we) can't always think of ghosts
when we go to the Hudson



archive feature

Bang!

A note from the editor, Amy Sihler, a proud Langie

Eugene Lang College in some ways, is the runt of the New School litter. Many students I encountered in my early days spoke about being a Langie in a tone of agonizing self-hatred. Most every student has some sort of gripe, most often with the bureaucratic nightmare of the administration, and yet so many of us stay and enjoy our time here. I think the reality, which many of these self-hating Langies will probably scoff at, is that our flaws are not all that different from any other Liberal Arts college's flaws. The heartening difference is that generally, we seem to care a great deal more about these flaws than most college students do. I think a large reason for this is that we don't have the splendor of an interconnected, built-in community like other colleges have. We find community through mutual rage. Our lack of visual identity is just one facet of our disconnection. Our school merch is underwhelming, the facade of Lang exceptionally gray, and the typeface of our logo in an impersonal Sans Serif font, printed in Parsons red.

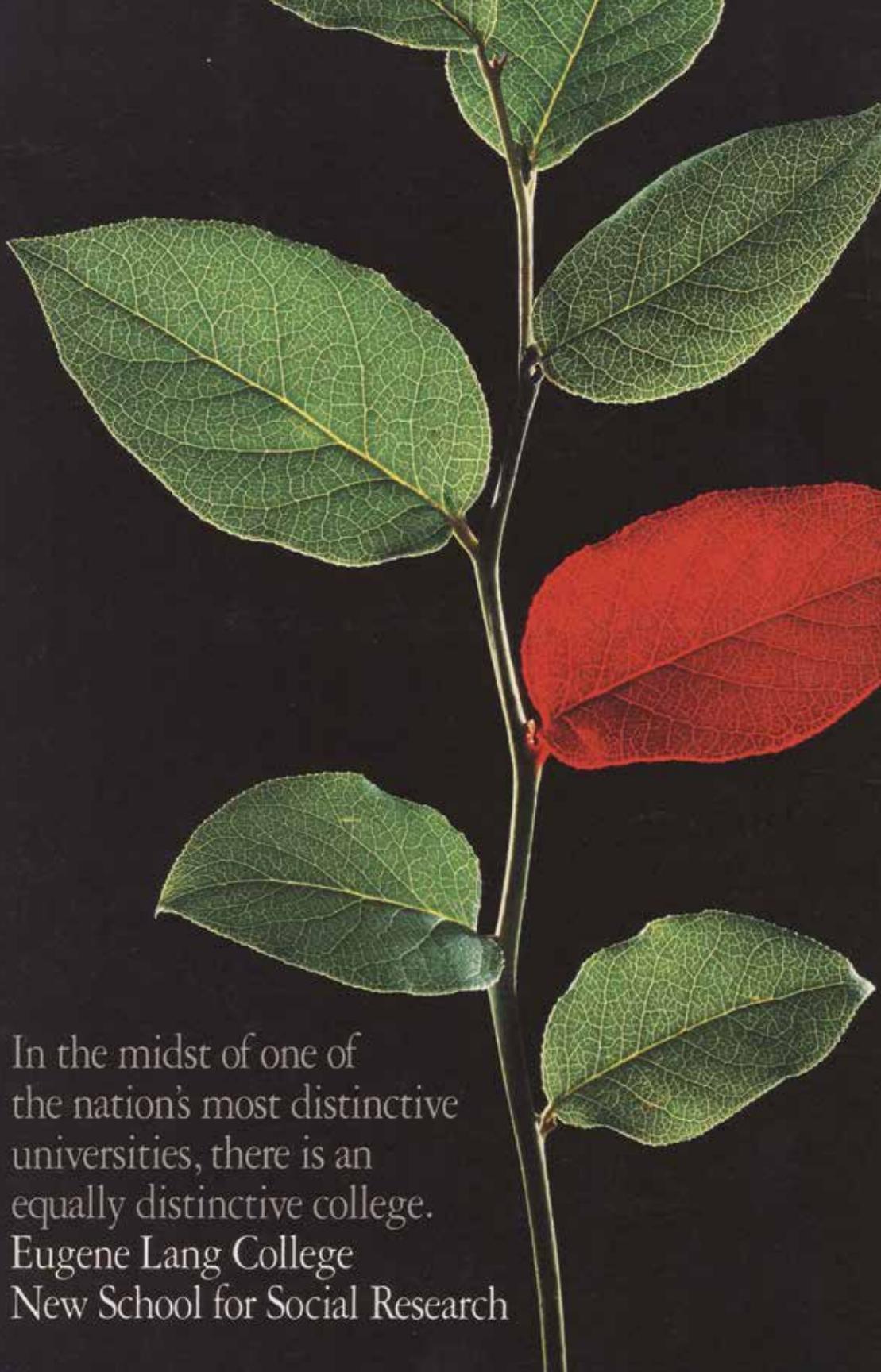
In this issue we've pulled a plethora of things from the archives of Eugene Lang College: the photos that were taken back in the day of students on campus, promotional materials touting Lang's uniqueness as a seminar-based college, and student-led papers such as Bang! Or The Language which had plenty of poignant and funny critiques to dole out to the student body of the eighties and nineties. References to the students themselves often make use of the phrase "Langie" something I have decided to pick up myself. Upon looking at these images and blurbs a strange sense of belonging came over me. "My god!" I thought, "We haven't changed one bit!" In viewing these photographs and seeing these students of Lang's past we experience a simultaneously horrifying and comforting realization – things aren't all that different from how they were a couple of decades ago.

Questions about our post-grad hireability and our lack of sexual promiscuity become vaguely less depressing as we view them as simply a part of Lang's character and personality as a college. Comics were drawn about the lack of friendliness of other students, one drawing proposes a potential fraternity t-shirt that reads, "I pledged Lang! Alpha Beta Apathy." One blurb lists various "overused words" at Lang including but not limited to: problematic, hierarchy, essentialist, and construct. I'd like to add

temporality to that list. Pleas for a reckoning about our school's lack of diversity from three decades ago are certainly the most disheartening ones to read. In 30 years, what students are asking for has not changed a lick. Unresolved yet often acknowledged issues like this breed a sense of apathy in all of us. We know exactly what is wrong with us– we take enough psychoanalysis courses that it'd be troubling if we didn't– yet no matter what we can only change things in the slow degrading process required of a bureaucracy that defies the original intentions of The New School's creation in the first place.

This is to say that the importance of our little college's history is inherent to understanding our identity. When we look at these photos of decades gone by, of some students lingering for a moment on the sunlight-dappled sky bridge or gesticulating in one of the second-floor classrooms at the 11th Street building, or sitting on a stoop all smiling and scrunched together on 12th, or two students discussing Derrida in a dorm room forty years ago with posters of Malcolm X and Steve Jobs on the wall, it's hard to feel alone here. It becomes a comfortable and prideful thing to call yourself a Langie—a member of a continuum, rather than one lonely person on the outskirts of the courtyard.

In a way, including these archival knick-knacks in the magazine allows us to see ourselves for who we really are: a begrudgingly friendly, mildly apathetic, cigarette-smoking, pretentiously overspoken, politically active, bitingly satirical, and mostly well-dressed bunch. But more than all that it seems that for decades now we have all been earnestly searching for community and connection with each other. We are anxiously attached to Eugene Lang, wanting the college to love us so that we might love it. I'm not so optimistic as to think some vintage photographs will do the trick, and a stronger community will emerge from the ashes of a well-hosted open mic, but I think at the minimum it will offer us Langies a sense of continuity. Through the temporality of these images, we create community with the Langies of decades past.



In the midst of one of
the nation's most distinctive
universities, there is an
equally distinctive college.
Eugene Lang College
New School for Social Research



living in a cool way, we are very popular here at school. We are used to flexibility of choice (in terms of classes and concentrations), we are surrounded by people who have the same concerns (i.e. the environment, equality, ending the oppression of the poor, etc.) And most of us would like to find work places where people share the same interests, where the office or organization treats its employees with decency and respect and where we can make enough money to live in this very expensive city. These are all things I took into serious consideration before sending out my resumes. I discovered that there are places where all these conditions are met. So, in this article and in my article for the next issue I am going to give you the benefit of some of my research about the

coolness of P&W. Poets and Writers, Inc., but there are a variety of different options for different interests.

It just so happens that P&W is one of the best places I have encountered in my job search. P&W was established as a non-profit organization which serves as a national network of writers of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Annually, they publish a directory of writers nation-wide which lists their names, addresses and publications. They also publish a variety of other books on such topics as the writer's marketplace, how to set up readings and workshops and where one can attend those already existing, literary bookstores, and many other crucial issues. P&W is also an information center. From 11 A.M. to 3 P.M.

is when it is required to wear office attire. The staff is diverse in race and in sexual preference and the overall atmosphere is friendly and accepting. There are parties every holiday and everybody's birthday is an office-wide occasion.

"One of the things I like best about my job is the independence I have," says Brian, one employee of P&W, "No one tells me how or when to do my job as long it gets done and is done well."

"And the work we do is appreciated. In a small office hard work doesn't go unnoticed," added Nori, another employee. But both Brian and Nori agree that there are some draw backs to working in a non - profit company.

I don't like that we are not paid all that well for the work that we do. But that's non-profit," says Brian.

"And sometimes it feels as if we need more personal and sick days. And the work load varies. Sometimes we are totally hectic and other times we are extremely slow," adds Nori.

My experience at Poets and Writers, Inc. was exceptionally positive. I felt surrounded by people with the same interests that I have. It is an environmentally conscious office (i.e. recycling bins in the kitchen, organic dishwashing fluid, paper conservation). And I enjoyed the work I did there. And Christine Cassidy, my supervisor, was always available to answer questions or to give praise for a job well done. Most importantly, being at Poets and Writers gave me hope that humane offices and organizations actually exist. And I started to believe that there really is life after Lang.

In the next issue, I will explore other options for graduating seniors. ...

Pssst!

HORNY?

...then submit to THE LANGUAGE!

it's cool!
it's fun!
and most importantly,
CHICKS DIG IT.

Cool Internships Worth Checking Out

by Sarah McGovern

Why not make this summer productive for a change. Besides the sweaty day-drill grind, it's always good to keep the ever present resume in the back of your mind. I know, I know, you worked hard all semester and now it's time to relax. But doing an internship usually only has to consist of working a couple of days a week, and generally only for small periods of time. While it's true that many don't pay, the people that you meet are often in the long run more valuable than any paycheck. Take for example my friend Melanie who interned at MTV's 120 minutes and not only got hired on there for good, but has met and is known by several important magazine editors.

one being Mark Blackwell of Spin. Everybody wants to be your friend when you've got connections like that. Anyways, even if the work is office related, as it usually is, there's a good chance you can move up through the ranks if you've got a reputation as a hard worker, you can get hired. Even if you don't, it looks good on paper and allows you to learn/see how stuff gets done. A couple of places that take interns are:

M.T.V.
Miramax Films
Spin
Rolling Stone
Details
Spy Magazine
Paper
Downtown
Love and Rage
Lies of Our Times
The New York Post (and many other papers).
Indigo Design (212) 226 1272
The Pasanella Company
If you are not able to get one this summer, you can do one for credit for fall semester. Any questions and for any more ideas see Eleanor Bader.

REMEMBERING KING from page 3

To forget the unfair treatments their races and communities face every day but maybe it's time that people stop getting angry and doing irrational things and start getting angry and doing constructive things. No one should give into or fall back into stereotypes. Everyone is deserving of the good life and should try to go out and get it and not be criticized or patronized when they do.

Two role models (who were also harassed by police) for our generation and the generation before us, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who practiced the message of peace and Malcolm X whose "By any means necessary" ideal is more popular with young adults today. Many young men feel that violence is a way to prove their manhood and to express themselves. This violence won't stop if higher authorities like the police use violence as a way to get their points across as well. There is not a high level of respect for the police department, and many young adults try to test cops to see how much they can get away with and how far a cop will go.

On the issue of racism itself, I'm glad to say that as a black Hispanic women living in New York all my life I have not been face with any ignorant or closed minded racism here at Lang. Maybe it's because we all have encountered some sort of prejudice or maybe it's just because we here are all above that.



Page 8



the Holocaust has given Isaac principles of iron. His stubbornness stems out of this and, if his children cannot grasp the feeling that there is nothing left to lose once everything has been taken from you, then perhaps it is better that they no longer have any contact with one another.

Despite all of its high-minded ideals and themes of death and loss, "The Substance of Fire" doesn't manage to end on an upbeat note. It is a play to be excited about because, unlike so many mindless bits of entertainment these days, it is really about people and feelings that are completely believable if not always likable. Ron Rifkin, a long-time veteran of television and theatre, shows his amazing range as an actor in the part of Isaac, making this man who's trapped in the past a lively, engaging character. In fact, with the exception of Cordelia Roberts (Sarah Jessica Parker's understudy in the role of Sarah), all the acting is first rate.

Buy a ticket to this play. Sit back, relax, and let yourself become absorbed in these all-too-real characters. It won't be hard to do.

Exhibits

Christian Vincent

Dyansen Gallery

Opening March 5, 1992

Reviewed by Beth Dulin

For some reason, all of a sudden, Christian

good salespeople.

Night Shades & New Gluts

Robert Rauschenberg

February 1 - 29, 1992

Knoedler & Company

Reviewed by Beth Dulin

As a painter myself, I use color and texture as the focus of my work. Therefore, I was a

forms, like flowers and trees. The blending of these two opposite kinds of images are what makes the work so appealing. For instance, one of my favorites, "Dog-On," depicts dogs, a boxer and two others, wandering through cold, empty night time streets.

For over twenty years, Robert Rauschenberg has been one of the greatest contemporary artists around. He started as part of the Pop Movement which came into full swing in the sixties, along with Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol. The consistency of his style has made an enormous contribution to abstract art. It just keeps coming. This collection is proof of that.

GET STUDS.

That's right, girls.

**Submitting to *The Language* will bring
guys with nice butts to your door.**

MEN CAN'T RESIST A WOMAN

**WHO WRITES FOR HER
SCHOOL PAPER.**



Hoorah For The New School!

Eugene Long

To some extent, every college and university lives in the past. Ivy Leagues can reminisce about the presidents, Rhodes scholars, and powerful men once in attendance. Rural Liberal Arts colleges, built in the image of pastoral monasteries, call to mind both the ascetic nobility of the life of the mind and the semiotic potency of the premodern college experience: that of wealthy teenagers being sent to some picturesque cloisters to build their character. It's a tradition that lives on in the wealth disparity of elite college undergrads.

Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts is made in the image of the American small liberal arts college. It was something of a concession to the origins of the New School for Social Research, whose founders were quite clear that they felt the burden of educating undergrads impeded their research. It just so happened that about 60 years after Beard, Dewey, and Robinson wrote that down, they realized that undergrads brought with them a lot more money than the abstruse theory heads NSSR was intended for. In comparison to the spate of college bankruptcies, hundreds in the past two decades, Eugene Lang survives, buoyed by a value proposition to students: it has a loose curriculum, a student body of artsy, lefty, creative pupils, and a changing lineup of public intellectuals, topic specialists, and overlooked academics to teach.

The New School was the first university in the world to offer a media studies program, and it was where the first women's studies class was taught. Few other places could offer such a varied course catalog: grad-level continental philosophy, traditional psychoanalysis, and seminars on recent interventions in media theory. We have noted and respected scholars in gender studies, media theory, economics, anthropology, and political science to name only a few. We have freakish filmmakers teaching classes on modernist novels and the great-granddaughter of Nikita Khrushchev teaching international affairs.

However, despite all this, there's a prevailing sense of inferiority that permeates the Eugene Lang student body. It's not as prestigious, not as rich, and not as delusionally arrogant as other colleges in its class. It doesn't have the grandeur of Oberlin, Swarthmore, Bates, or Wesleyan. No ivy lines the walls of its small urban campus and no billionaire alumni sit on its board.

The purpose of this little note then, is to argue for a sense of confidence, of purpose, of assurance. This is a spectacular school with a community that needs to find strength in itself, and pride in its organizing institution. We need that aura of collegiate magic usually conferred on a place by old stone buildings and similarly old men walking around in tweed. Prestige and college pride are arbitrary; commensurate with nothing meaningful, just as the equally empty appellation "excellence." This means we should reject the framing of the college prestige hierarchy, but it also means we can adopt the chummy pride of a Dartmouth student on their first day at an internship for Perdue Pharma (Fuck Dartmouth). If you're reading this, you're a New Schooler, and you should be proud of that fact. At the very least, I am.

To use, then, what sounds like an old college cheer: Hurrah for the New School! Hurrah for Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts! Realize that this place is great not because it's exclusive, rich, or has a hands-off approach to trimming ivy but because you, reader, chose to be here. We all did.



fiction



The Prologue to Elemenopy

Scott Soth

Is there a difference between a prologue and a first chapter? I used to skip the prologue in the chapter books from grade school because I thought it didn't count as part of the actual book. *Magic Tree House* books shouldn't have had prologues anyway. Prologues are for writers who remain too timid to just start their damn book. A good book shouldn't have an introduction other than the first chapter.

Some books have a random page in the beginning, for people to figure out whether they'll like reading the book later. I never understood why people needed a page to figure out whether they'll like a book. Do some odd folks really read those random excerpts before picking a book? Is Barnes & Noble just the new pseudo-intellectual's Costco, with sample pages instead of single-serving sample sriracha snap peas that taste inevitably worse after one ends up purchasing multiple boxes in bulk? The workers manning the Costco sample tables never let me try their pretzel thins or graham crackers unless my parents were right next to me. Allergy concerns, they said... but I was already twelve years old at the time, fully aware of my absentee allergies.

Wait, where was I?

Oh yeah... thankfully there isn't as much of a distinction of a prologue in the cinematic medium. I've had professors swear on their guinea pig's lives that a film can have a prologue. Some called it a cold open, others kept saying it had to involve *saving a cat*, but my screenplay didn't revolve around feline-focused firefighters.

I had signed up for a screenwriting workshop. Without thinking, I offered to share my writing after the first week. Originally planning to cut out one of my best scenes and submit as an excerpt, I realized the conundrum. If I sent the best scene, I would rob myself the chance to improve my lesser scenes, yet if I sent a bad scene, the others in the workshop might have such a bad time engaging with the piece that they lose interest and give half-hearted feedback. I decided to write a new scene, an introductory one, something that would establish exactly what I intended to say with my script.

What did I intend to say with my script? I knew it was about New York. I could start there... maybe some voice-over,

"It was a quiet, somber summer, the summer they assisted Godard in his suicide, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid

about celebrity suicides. The concept of someone's suicide getting to be so publicized makes me sick, yet his own was barely mentioned on the news—pixelated, online headlines staring up at me on occasional websites and their side borders and out the putrid, gossip-spreading mouth of every story. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering why some celebrity deaths cause a surge in their respective catalog sales while others get a short reference along the stream of headlines, being reduced to fading chatter on the digital sphere.¹

1 I thought it must be a sign we are in one of the worst eras of history.

New York was exciting enough. By ten every morning, I already would have had a start on my day, a feat never accomplished before I moved here. The city had this bustle and chaoticism that kept me from the usual sloth and slumber of a college freshman. Snapchat stories from friends at secret shows by Steve Lacy, and selfies with Olivia Rodrigo at nearby record stores, all kept me racing to keep up in the competition for fame and glory.

I never heard about Godard's suicide from any major publication's front page or even the likes of any niche film Twitter meme but I couldn't get it out of my mind. It was like the time years back when I heard of Robin Williams' suicide. For months afterward, his jolly face—or the smiling mask of a face he would hide behind—wafted past every joke I would tell at the dinner table or to the ones sitting near my desk in the fourth grade, especially the jokes I told HER. Pretty soon I felt as though every joke I uttered was a step closer to whatever the blue genie felt when no one was watching him in his lamp, like some vast, empty abyss, aromatic of ash. The silence after the laughter dies down. When all one has to show for the laughs is their internal self-reflection.

I felt something building within myself as I got closer to moving to New York because all I could think about was that damned blue genie again and how stupid I was to move here for the minuscule chance at artistic prestige and cinematic glory, such a shallow concept, and how all the high test scores and academic achievements I had garnered in my Midwestern high school seemed to evaporate away with only a few pretentious yet half-finished short film screenplays as well as an inflated sense of intellectual ego.

I was supposed to be having the time of my life.

I was supposed to be the envy of all the other kids from my high school. Those others back home who wanted nothing more than the chance to galavant freely across the piss-stained streets of Greenwich Village with those same white earbuds I, myself would use each time I walked to class playing whatever new album touted by Anthony Fantano as the next great contemporary record. And when my vaguely distinct silhouette appeared on RapTV's Instagram post for JID's streetside album release party previewing The Forever Story—with that gold Pontiac G6 parked on the curb playing his new project a day early, even though I had merely stumbled upon the event on my walk back to the dorms, and the famed listening party only made it halfway through the album before NYPD officers shut down the event for noise complaints, leaving me unimpressed as I walked back to my dorm room—everybody would think I must be having a real whirl.

Look what can happen in this country, they'd say. A boy has lived in some out-of-

No... not that. The story is set in New York but that just sounds like Sylvia Plath if she wrote for *Pop Crave*. This is a story about a girl and a boy. A story about a boy that fell for a girl. A seven-year infatuation ending in tragedy. An analysis towards relationship. The Mobius Strip of unrequited love. It was a story as old as time: Boy meets girl on the first day of third grade. Boy immaturely yet naively falls in love, waiting till the end of middle school to confess his feelings for the girl. Girl doesn't feel the same, and dates the boy's best friend instead. They date for the next five years. Boy selfishly and insecurely writes a screenplay based on the events that transpired. Boy writes without self-awareness as if he is the first to ever conceive of such a concept.

This is why prologues don't work. How can you synthesize a whole story's importance into a few pages of context? It would be less ambitious to just chop down each scene into little summaries, *SparkNotes* style.

A Film About a Life, Interspersed with the Effects of La Douleur Exquise -ABRIDGED

Scene 1:

Age: 8

you weren't here yesterday?

yeah, i threw up so my mom made me stay home
are you feeling better?

the-way town for eighteen years, so irrelevant that he doesn't appear on a Google search, and then he gets a scholarship to a private film school and gets into an event here and a party there, steering New York City like his own private car.

Only I wasn't on the verge of some big break, not even some short virality. I just hopped from my dorm to school and to whatever looked flashy and then back from these flashy events to my dorm and back to school like some shallow clout-obsessed fish out of water. I was more excited than the other freshmen were when I would catch a famous actor walking down the street, but I couldn't just play it cool, instead, I remained very anxious and very attracted to their carefree attitude and nonchalant coolness, the way a housefly must feel, fluttering zombie-like towards a bright blue light that will only be their downfall.

yeah...
she smiles

we walk longer in silence but in tandem
passing the kids playing tag at the bottom of the hill

i'm glad you feel better.

| **she** looks over

i didn't have anyone to play *poptropica* with.

she laughs

yeah i had to play it on my dad's computer

we walk a bit further

i have this odd feeling i'll remember this conversation forever

Scene 2:

Age: 12

as i stand at my locker, **she** looks at me
with a face akin to a question mark yet
also, the cat killed by curiosity.

what did you want to tell me, scott?

i want to tell **her** how every shitty rom-com
that i watch reminds me of **her**, i want to tell
her that i had a crush on **her** the first time i
saw **her** and fell in love with **her** the first time
she spoke to me about **her** theories on *harry potter*
i want to tell **her** that my days are worsened when **she**
isn't at school and that

earth to scott...

what did you want to tell me

she looks annoyed now rather than curious

i smile and fake a chuckle

what.

i totally forgot, let's just go to lunch,
you know how long the pizza line can get

| okay, let's go

let me know if you remember though

Scene 3:

Age: 18

i
reload

my
instagram
feed.
her
post
appears

at
the
top.
it
is
her
college
announcement
post.

she
is
staying
in
state.
did
she
think
to
text
me?
why
should
i
expect
her
to
tell
me
though?

i didn't even tell **her**

we don't talk anymore, it's my fault, **she** was my best friend

How can someone pontificate like that? To think of one's life as fictive speculation. Maybe a joint would help me write.

"What happened, though, was that I woke up late (nearly seven-thirty by my watch) and, as it turned out, that was not so clever. You can catch sight that everything in this wicked world counts. You can also appreciate that one thing often has a way of leading straight on to another. Yes yes yes. My fruit phone alarm was no longer going on about the wit and eccentricities of the famed Madvillain album singular, so some rotten alarm had dealt it the ringtone, and that would be *You Suffer* by Napalm Death, with all one second of its audio quite annoyishly reverberating through my Venetian ear canals and, from the muffling chowder through the thinly dried-wall walls, from a neighbor kerfuffled and dis-sturbed, I smashed the snooze button. The poor adjacency. The pitiable periphery. I grabbed my book-bag and stretched the blinds to an open decency, visual heat soaring in,"

Well that won't work either. How can someone's ears be Venetian if they aren't a person born or residing in Venice... hell, I've never even been near the Mediterranean boot except for on *GeoGuesser*.

Maybe I'll try going to an open mic, get some writing experience from the pros. New York is the city of the standup comic's virtuous rise or fall.

"After a few grunts and yells to start things off, the host growls, "Thank you all so much, and holy shit, welcome to Wednesday night open mic," a brief pause, and then, "How's everybody feeling... good... cold and stale..? Just like my ex." He goes on with a long opening set that starts with crowdwork. He points at newcomers while practicing his improvised ridicule. He calls me Incan Jeffrey Dahmer, oddly enough, and refers to one younger woman as Woke-ahontas. Eventually, he gets into his set, a vulgar yet comical riff against modern New York compared to the New York he grew up in. He describes his father as a hellish man who once owned a franchise of East Coast strip clubs, which he grew up in and around. "Before the subway had this many stops, Times Square used to be covered in a layer of cum... if you needed to go downtown, they just pushed you and you'd glide across the semen-coated streets till you hit a hippie," he croaked out. His set continued with bits about his much younger wife and how when he was at his lowest moments in life, she was in middle school. Somehow he found a way to make the audience think these jokes sounded endearing despite their clear problematic nature and creepfactor,"

I'll go to a party. I can set my prologue at a party. The older you get, parties just get more awkward and less comfortable. As a kid, most parties that one attends are of the birthday sort. This saves much of the fearful entry into a party as the kid can direct themselves towards finding the birthday host to give them their gift. If the kid is smart, they will scope out and map the party as they venture through, determined to find the host. Though I still use this method of averting awkwardness, to get rid of the silence after the saloon doors swing open; most adult parties revolve

around other subjects than simply birthday gifts and laser tag.

There is also the dilemma of the early arrival. I used to fall for this social faux pas constantly before realizing the appeal of arriving slightly late. When a guest is the first to arrive, the host has to entertain them, subtly convince them that this party is worth wasting their night, while also awkwardly waiting for more guests to filter in. This makes the first conversation of a party, the one between the early bird and their host, one of truly unavoidable anxiousness. This awkwardness can compound further if the second guest is not friends or even acquaintances with the early bird. The host will feel awkward leaving them alone, them not knowing each other and all, while the two guests will feel the host's tension and end up being pressured to try and turn the attention away from this odd pairing; sometimes resulting in the first two birds having to help with party setup finalities. They wouldn't want to look awkward.

This unified balance of anxiety is common at nearly every house or apartment or even dormitory party. The host/s will spend most of the party keeping the living space undisturbed, worrying about noise complaints, cleaning spills, and maintaining a happy face. This heavy platter of duties causes them to enjoy the party least of all, despite their being the ones to throw it. They worry about everyone enjoying themselves yet they themselves are having the least enjoyment. This constant host-born worry of whether the guests are enjoying themselves is futile, as most guests are not here to rate and review the party, in fact, any judgment of the party, good or bad, is hardly ever placed on the host's fault. Most party guests are too worried about whether or not they look like they are having fun, if the girl they wanted to talk to has left already, or whether now is a good time to slip away from a comfortable conversation for a much-needed piss. Still, maybe this was something that only I worried about. Maybe I am the only anxious partier.

The pre-party ritual known as the outfit-choosing stage is one of necessity yet one of miraculous uniqueness across stories. Though some of the told stories could spend neverending lightyears on the valiant efforts and overdone Venn diagrams of color theory and how to coordinate your summer or winter outfit factors, mine always found themselves quite simple. Denim jeans or khakis, cargo shorts if severe heat. Add one of the following: 1. Graphic tee for a film I can quote or a band I know five songs by, 2. Collared shirt with buttons, like a button-up, but buttoned-up, 3. The aforementioned collared shirt but left unbuttoned over a graphic tee following the rules set up in option one (if cold, try potential option 4. Layered pieces aforementioned in option three but with maybe a sweatshirt

or hoodie). Quick shower, just a body and face wash, only run water, no shampoos or conditioners, through the hair starting at a steaming heat and finishing at a frostbitten blast. Trim any facial hair with those tiny CVS scissors, in a way that recalls the essence of Pat Morita as Mr. Miyagi when he taught that cocky LA douchebag how to groom and trim a bonsai tree. Two to three puffs of Nautica blue bottled cologne. Wipe Dove deodorant on pits. Put on prescription “Dahmer”-style glasses and pack up each pocket with my ‘going out’ essentials: 1. iPhone XR, 2. Brown leather wallet including assorted papers and plastics (a few tattered receipts, thirty or so dollars (two tens, one five, and five ones; give or take), ticket stub for *The Doom Generation* at IFC, debit card, random insurance cards, and membership cards for various companies and movie theaters and libraries, one fake ID plus four fake ones with an earlier birthday, five dollars in € as well as £), 3. White lighter, 4. Keychain with dorm-room key, 5. Tangled Apple earbuds, 6. Two nickels, 7. Handwritten fortune cookie paper clip from a failed middle school attempt to propose the act of ‘middle school dating’ each other, 8. Crumbled up wrapper from a packaged *Lärabar*, flavored to the taste of apple pie, 9. Gross-looking molded clump of forgotten papers left within the cloth pocket during the washing and drying machinery stage in an article of clothing’s day.

Maybe I should’ve just sent a scene without any context. Prologues never work. They just prolong and deceive the reader into reading a book they never would’ve enjoyed otherwise.

Cliffs

Ethan Glazar

Nearly four decades ago, a man and a woman went for a walk in Pottsville. The town, situated on a minute river of a shallow valley, consisted only of a church, a general store, and farmland dotted with cows and sheep. Pottsville had existed before the country had declared independence, but the river that runs through it is immortal. It cuts deep into the ground, leaving sheer cliffs nearly three stories tall in some parts. The man and the woman had followed the river to the outskirts of the town, where manmade pastures collided with unkempt wilderness. They pulled their station wagon off to the side of a dirt road. Stepping out, their noses were assaulted with the pungency of late Spring dew. The sound of the mighty small river enveloped their hearing. Leaves blotted out the sky, only allowing small specks of sunshine to dance along the ground. The man grabbed a small box from the station wagon, and told the woman to follow him. They walked along a trail parallel to the cliff faces.

“George Washington used this trail when leading his troops to Morristown,” said the man.

“Has anyone used it since?”

“Yes, I did a few days ago to make sure we wouldn’t get lost today.”

Eventually they reached their destination. It was a large rock that jutted out into the middle of the river, pinching it and causing it to funnel into a natural pool. The width of the pool separated the banks of the river just enough to create a clearing for the sun. The rock had a sharp ledge that stood thirty feet above the pool which invited the couple to sit and embrace the natural serenity. The woman, having grown up in a city her whole life, stood in awe of the perfectly crafted wilderness. She did not notice that the man had not sat down, but was instead resting on one knee. They returned to their car half an hour later as husband and wife.

Five years ago, three friends were returning home after a long afternoon. Corey, who sat in the backseat, had reminded the others that he was moving across the country the next day. This had generated a feeling of melancholy among the boys that developed into an eagerness to accomplish as many things as they could on their last night together. This had included multiple smoking sessions, a drive to their favorite fried chicken spot, watching a two- hour critically panned movie, and a concluding visit to

the local ice cream parlor. With their minds fried, it seemed like there was nothing left to do. Henry, the driver, was tasked with dropping Corey off, then James, then returning home while worrying if he was fit to interact with his parents. He made a right onto Pottsville Road.

"Wait. Turn around," Corey requested.

"Why? You're up this way right? I'm not that high," replied Henry. James turned to Corey, "I know what he's thinking... Yeah turn around Henry."

James pretended to shake the wheel in an effort to have Henry turn around.

"Alright, alright, where the hell are we going?"

"That's the spirit!"

"Just keep following this road into Pottsville and then make a right. We're going to Cliffs."

Henry had heard Corey and James talk about Cliffs before, but he had been too caught up in school or his ex to accompany them whenever they had gone. None of that mattered now, as Summer began to wane and high school faded behind them, along with everyone and everything that wasn't the three of them.

"It's like, pitch black outside. Is it going to be cold? Is it safe?" worried Henry.

"Yeah, we're going to die. C'mon, keep driving."

Henry drove along the winding road, illuminated only by his old station wagon's high beams and the pale light from a nearly full moon. They could make out dark shadows along the hills in front of them- livestock resting from a long hot day. No cars existed on the road. Eventually, they crossed an old iron bridge and a church and general store came briefly into view. Henry was convinced that they had somehow jumped back in time.

"OK, make a right here, and pull over wherever."

James pointed to a street barely big enough for one car and spotted with potholes. They reached a bend where Corey and James instructed Henry to park the car.

"I'm not gonna get a ticket, am I?"

"Dude, there is nobody out here. Don't worry."

They all stepped out of the car. A haze of smoke ascended into the sky from the car, complementing the mid-summer humidity. The air smelled like wet metal and fresh moss. Henry could hear the rushing of a river coming from below them. He followed Corey and James over an iron guardrail and into the wilderness.

"I think the spot is over here. Look, here's the trail."

A footpath had been beaten into the dirt descending from the road to the flat surface of a rock. The water had gotten louder, as if they were standing right on top of it. They reached the northernmost point of the rock- a sharp ledge that presented the scene in front of them. The faintest moonlight had crept through an opening in the trees to illuminate a wide pool that was half still tranquility and half rushing current. Fallen leaves were dancing along the surface of the water, getting dragged in and out by the flow. The pool was just wide enough and the world just dark enough to give an illusion that it was some bottomless pit. The perimeter was lined with sheer cliff faces, each scarred with cleavage and foliage that gave this natural well a feeling of immortality. Henry was enraptured by both the beauty and the terror of it all.

"Okay, you jump in from that point where you're standing, Henry," said James.

"No, it's a foot to the right. That clears you from the rocks," said Corey.

"Oh, you're right," replied James unconvincingly.

"I'm not sure about this. I've never gone cliff jumping before," voiced Henry.

"To be fair, it's only like thirty feet. It's not much of a cliff."

"Still dangerous," Henry pointed out.

"Whatever, let's just go."

Corey and James started stripping to their underwear. Henry followed, but slow enough to make sure they would jump in first. Corey went first, proving that his spot was indeed the right spot to jump from. He shouted on his way down and formed a cannonball. He resurfaced shortly after, and gave a thumbs up to indicate that he did not break any legs. James went in after him but flopped ungracefully into the water. It was now Henry's turn.

"How do we get back up?"

"We'll cross that bridge when you get down here."

Henry could not put his trust into their words, but figured that if anything were to happen it would be better that it happen to all of them, together, than separate. It could very well be the last day all three were together for years. Henry breathed in deeply and pushed off the ledge. He felt suspended in the air for minutes before finally crashing down into the river. His whole body was submerged. He kicked his feet but could not feel any bottom. The water was brisk and shook whatever fatigue he had out of him. He eventually broke the surface, but could barely open his eyes before

James threw water into his face.

“Come here!”

Henry swam over to James to get his revenge. He tried to throw water but missed and hit Corey. They all began to swim around in a craze, jumping on top of each other and pelting water and acting like the first Neanderthals to discover swimming. Corey led them on a climb up the side of the cliff so that they could jump again. This cycle of jumping, swimming, splashing, and laughing continued on for an hour. When they got tired, they swam to the opposite bank to dry off.

“I have an idea,” said Corey.

He swam back across the river, climbed up the cliff face, and disappeared back to the road. He got a small spray paint canister out of the station wagon and returned to the ledge.

“Here.”

He tossed it down to Henry and James.

“Write our initials.”

They got on one knee and engraved their signatures into the rock, solidifying their existence and relationship to that place and time. They returned to Henry’s station wagon, ready to be driven home for the last time.

One day ago, someone posted a video. It was an unremarkable video, but not for Henry. He saw his initials in the bottom right of the frame, along with the initials of his friends James and Corey. The boy who had posted the video was at the cliff jumping spot, and the video had already amassed a million views. Henry, home from college, got in his old station wagon and drove to see the location. Sure enough, cars were crowding the single-lane road. Teenagers, probably the same age Henry and his friends were five years ago, were scattered on the road and into the forest. Henry could not get close enough to get a view of the spot where he last hung out with both Corey and James. Defeated, he returned home.

“Where were you?” his dad wondered.

“A cliff jumping spot I went to a couple years ago in Pottsville. It just went viral. Looks like it got too big for its own good.”

“Where in Pottsville?”

“Along the river- there’s an area with a ledge and you can jump like thirty feet down into the water. There’s a big pool surrounded by these tall rock-things.”

“How many people were there?”

“A shit ton. Too many. I thought it was like a secret.”

That’s a shame. I liked that spot.”



Sheep Bag, Charlie Kreidler

(Nothing But) Pain and Good Intentions

Gil Ferguson

6/5

So my dad is moving. To California. Which is from far from Illinois, obviously. There have been multiple summers up to this point in my life that I've thought of as my last summer in my hometown—the one right after high school, when I didn't know yet I wouldn't be going to school in New York for another year thanks to Covid, and the one after that, when I was convinced I would be spending the next summers in New York after *finally* moving there.

But this one? This is *really* the last one, and despite my years of emotionally preparing for it, it still snuck up on me. I'm sure I'll visit, somehow, but I won't even have a place to live here. Cora offered for me to stay with her family if I visit next summer, but it's not like I know her parents well enough to be comfortable staying with them for an extended period of time.

To make things suckier, Cora isn't even home this summer—she left a couple days ago for LA for a journalism internship. I'm hugely proud of her, of course, but when we hung out before she left, I realized I had no idea when I would actually see her again, which is an extremely uncomfortable thought. I'm sure we'll stay close, as we have up to this point, at least—which is more than I can say for some of the other people I was convinced would be my best friends for life.

Addie isn't coming back this summer, either. She's spending it with her aunt and uncle on the east coast, where she won't get misgendered constantly, which is totally reasonable, but I still wish she was here. I just wish *here* didn't suck so much for her. Or for a lot of people. Or honestly, for me. I haven't even told her about my dad's move yet. The only people I *have* told are Cora and Mag, the latter of whom is back for the foreseeable future. She hated school in Colorado, so she's living at home for next year, and taking classes at the local community college. I think of everyone, those two are the ones who most understand all my hometown-related dread and not-dread. At least I'm not alone in those feelings—or not alone completely, anyways.

6/6

I've been spending a lot of time around Maiden Lake, behind the high

school. Right now, I'm sitting on top of the monkey bars at the playground by the baseball fields watching the sunset. Since Covid began I've been using bike rides around town as a way to process my emotions, but this summer I've been going almost every night. Maybe "process" is the wrong word. It's really just an excuse to *sit* in my emotions—emotions about the people I shouldn't be thinking about. I'm sure it's obvious whose regrets are plaguing my mind now. It's no coincidence I'm at this park, either. This is where we hung out for the first time—me and Fitz. Not when we *actually* became friends junior year of high school, but as acquaintances, with some mutual friends back in middle school.

Now, Maiden Park has become almost synonymous with Fitz to me—or maybe more so a representation of our friendship, or like, the potential of our friendship. I've begun to have this thought—what if we had become friends then? It's occurred to me before, but since I've been home it's become fully entrenched in my mind. I've always sort of believed in alternate universes—not necessarily in the sci-fi sense, but more in a spiritual, "everything that could happen *does* happen in some reality" way. And now I've come to the conclusion that my life is the bad timeline. Like if there were some sort of narrative about me and Fitz, it wouldn't be *this* version of us, it would be some other version where we became friends sooner, and we had more time to strengthen our friendship and figure out ourselves and each other and our feelings for each other and we'd go through adolescence together, and maybe somehow all of that would prevent our friendship from ending the way it did—or ending at all.

I can see it really clearly—the idea of us becoming friends in eighth grade. Maybe, in my search for friends who appreciated me at the time, I would land on him as a potential candidate. Or maybe, I would realize I liked boys earlier, and take an interest in him. I do wonder, looking back, if the reason I was so nervous around him, so anxious when he showed up to the park on his bike in eighth grade was because my body and heart knew something my mind didn't know yet. But maybe it wouldn't be so specific. Maybe we were supposed to become friends, and we didn't purely by accident, in a butterfly effect type way—one missed conservation, one day I sat at the wrong lunch table, one day we walked down different school halls when we were supposed to walk down the same one.

6/10

I broke up with my boyfriend, back in New York. It makes sense, I guess. I write in here about Fitz more than I write about him. Hell, I

probably write more about Fitz than anyone else. He was hurt, I think, but he didn't show it much. And he agreed this wasn't working. We haven't really talked in weeks. I didn't even see him before I left NYC for the summer because he was so busy with finals. He said I need someone who is able to commit to a relationship more. He said he didn't think he was able to give me what I need. He's right in a way, I think. But I think it's not what I need, it's what I crave.

What I crave isn't good for me. What I crave is something self-sacrificial. Something unholy and innocent at the same time. Something that's made up of nothing but pain and good intentions. What I crave is something I can't have. I think that's why I keep sitting in empty fields and watching the sunset and fighting back nausea. Will I ever fall in love with something that stays?

6/11

Rereading my previous entries, I realized it isn't even true that I write in here more about Fitz than my now-ex, or anyone else. In fact, I've really only started to write about Fitz in here since I've been home. I mean, the fiction writing I'm sort of perpetually working on is very much about Fitz, but it's also about Sidney, and everyone else too. But ever since I've come back to this town it feels like my whole existence is about missing Fitz and regretting my past. It feels so innate that I wonder if my life will truly ever be about anything else. I think somehow I peaked in high school but not in a fun way. I wasn't popular, or exceptionally talented or really exceptionally *anything*, but it feels like so much of me will always just be anchored in those years and those memories and those people. Like my body moved on, but my soul didn't.

I wish I could understand how everyone else has moved on. Fitz is in a seemingly happy and loving relationship in which he has no problem expressing love and affection, even on social media. Cora is making strides in her career even while still in college, and Addie is a completely different person than she used to be, and happy to not be revisiting her past. Even Sloane and Mag seem to each be at least somewhat content that their lives aren't what they used to be. And then there's Sidney—I barely even talk to them anymore.

Even my closest friendships, high school and college, don't feel the same as they used to. I realized it's been a long time since I've been truly honest with anyone about what I'm feeling. There's so much shame and guilt wrapped up in all my attachment to the past and languishing of

the present and worrying about the future that I have trouble expressing it to the people I'm supposed to be able to share anything with. When did I become the person who fails at relationships, and expressing my emotions? That was never me.

It's funny to think just a month or so ago I was actually optimistic about the future—or even more, optimistic about the present. I was actually *happy* at school—finding my place, finding my purpose, finding my people. But now I almost doubt if any of that is worth the effort that takes, or the hardship it could lead to. My fears and worries about my life are louder than ever right now, but what might be even more concerning is that they've never felt more worth listening to. My worst fears have come true before—I lost Fitz, I lost Sidney, I lost my group and my community—what is there to stop that from happening again?

A rational person might reassure themselves that all this emotion and dread and depression have just been brought on by returning to my hometown, and things will get better once I get back to New York, but I honestly feel like I can't ever imagine leaving this place. And even if I do, it seems like it will always be temporary—it will always just be a pleasant distraction, and I'll always find my way back here. This is what my life has been ruled to be about: The friends I miss and the friends I lost and everything I could've done better and everything I'll never do better. That's what my mind is telling me, and it's getting pretty damn hard to listen to anything else—or even find something else worth listening to.

6/15

Does it ever get better? Not just easier, but *good again*? I'm regressing so much more than I'd like to admit, or I'm *able* to admit to people—all I think about is Fitz and high school and all the things I wish I did different. Not even all I think about, but all I *do* is think about it. Or write about it. Or fucking dream about it. I'm coming to the conclusion that I'm going to spend the rest of my life looking back. That some part of me lived and died in Fitz's room and the basement at Mom's old house and aimless car rides around town, and that that's the truest part of me there ever was, and it's a part I'm never getting back. I'll never be seventeen again. I spent so, so long craving a direction in life and now all I want is to be directionless again.

It wasn't easy, or simple being friends with Fitz, or Sidney, or living in this town, or being in high school. But it came so naturally. Even when it was hard, it felt like how things were supposed to be. Or, at least, the closest to "supposed to be" that I've gotten, and that I think I might

ever get. With my friends and my life now it just feels like I'm pretending to be someone else. My ex and I talked again. He told me that he loved me, but we're still calling it quits. But I'm not convinced he really did love me. I think he loved what I let him. It feels like ever since high school, ever since *Fitz*, my life has just been about restraint. Don't miss him too much, don't feel too much, *never cry* (even though I really want to), don't show too much, don't love too much, don't be too much. Maybe part of the reason I miss *Fitz* so much is because he knew the most ugly parts of me. I think I've maybe been more honest with him, shown him more of myself, than I have anyone else.

I want to get that back—but am I supposed to? If baring my soul to someone with no restraint ends up... like it did with him, then is it better for me to spend the rest of my life holding it in? Better to contain my most natural self? Is there just something wrong with me? All I want is for someone to take me in, wholly and completely, but maybe I'm only meant to be taken in *small doses*. Maybe I'm not built to be loved, or to exist naturally and easily. Am I just fated to be miserable or to make the ones I love miserable?

6/20

I wish I had realized how many cool spots are in this town before I left for college. Just Maiden Lake alone has at least half a dozen spots I would've loved to bring friends in high school. Great smoking spots too—although I didn't do that much in high school. Another thing I sort of wish I did differently. Not because I wish I had been more edgy, or cool, or whatever—or not *entirely* that—I just feel like I spent high school being *so* terrified of taking risks, so convinced the stakes were incredibly high, when really they were incredibly low. I found my groove, or a groove I was content with, at least, and just stuck with it. I think it would've been good for me to step outside of my comfort zone more.

7/9

I remember Sid telling me in high school this thing their mom said about how when you grow up and move on to new places in life you have a list of old friends you want to stay close with and keep in your life, and over time that list gets shorter and shorter until you're left with just the ones that really matter. I'm glad Mag and Sloane are still on the list. Really really glad. (Written kinda high from the backseat of Mag's car, driving around late at night listening to her and Sloane talk about music.)

7/21

Dad's move is getting closer. Or not *getting* closer, I guess, so

much as it is just close. It's close. Four days close, to be specific. I've shifted from hanging out at Maiden Lake to hanging out in the woods and fields by mine and Sloane's houses. It's funny—both of our families have lived in a variety of houses around town, and moved multiple times, just for us to end up being neighbors again now, just like we were growing up, when I was best friends with her brother and would spend all day at their house. We've talked about that a few times recently—our memories from growing up together and stuff. It's made me realize that I've spent a lot of my life being Sloane's neighbor, and realistically after four days that will probably never be the case again. Her mom said I'm always welcome in their home. I don't think I can verbalize how jealous I am that Sloane gets to keep this place as her home.

I've been running through scenarios in my head in which this town becomes my home again. I don't know when I got so desperate to be here. It's gross. I think I might be sick or something. But it doesn't matter what I imagine—me moving to Chicago and Mom moving back here to be close to me, or my friends and I getting an apartment in the area, for a reason I can't come up with—things will never be the same again. I realized the other day that I have spent every day, every single second of my life having a home within five minutes of the same park—of the playground Mom took me to growing up, of the paths where we walked our old dog or where I rode my bike, of the fields I've marched through with friends. Even when I was away at school in New York, Dad was still here. But in less than a week, he won't be, and I won't be, and there's a ninety-nine percent chance I'll never live by this park again.

Even if I do, by some unforeseen circumstance, end up, like, starting a family and settling down back in my old neighborhood (god forbid) it'll never be the same again. I'll never be a kid in my hometown again. I'll never spend my days driving around town with my friends, or hanging out at their houses or backyards or basements, ever again. Until the end of time. And I'm not sure I'm anywhere even remotely close to being able to fully accept that, and process that, and move on from it. Move on from *here*. I wonder if I will ever be able to.

7/23

I hung out with Sidney—one last time before I leave town—and we had a really good talk. I can't remember the last time it felt that easy to talk to them. I took them to my favorite smoke spot—the roof of the dugout at the baseball fields by Maiden, and then we drove around in their car for a while and listened to music and got food and just talked. Pretty much

what we did in high school. I played this one song that I have a really vivid memory of listening to with them in the same situation years ago—late at night, flying down the empty roads with the windows down in their mom’s old minivan. I told them about the memory, too, and later I saw they added the song to their playlist.

We ended up talking about a lot of memories from high school—Fitz stuff, of course—I told them about the time the summer before senior year, when I finally asked him to kiss me, and he said he didn’t want to be in a relationship, and I cried, and he told me about all this relationship trauma and anxiety he had, and he cried, and then he finally said something along the lines of “I wish I could just have my first relationship with someone I don’t care about as much as you.” I told Sid I wasn’t sure anymore if he really meant that, but I sort of had to choose to believe it, because even though it’s been years since Fitz and I have spoken, I don’t know if I can handle the idea of him saying something like that to me and it being a lie. Sid said they could understand why I was hung up on him for years.

We talked about other memories, too. Somehow we got to senior year homecoming, when they lied to me about having smoked weed because I didn’t want them coming to my mom’s house high afterwards, and it turned into a huge friend-group-wide fight. I was reluctant to talk about it with them, but when I finished explaining they admitted they didn’t even remember that—and they told me they were really sorry—for that, and all the other times they weren’t a good friend to me. I think I finally understand something about them that I never had before. When they would have those moments—of dishonesty, or anger, or cruelty—I don’t think they were even fully aware of the way they were acting. It was just like they were lost. I think they were lost for a lot of that part of our lives. That doesn’t excuse anything, but I think it made me finally able to forgive them—maybe not for the way they hurt the rest of our friends, but at least for the ways that they hurt me.

9/13

I can’t focus today. I’ve been having a lot of days like that recently, even when I take the Adderall. It’s the third week of the fall semester of my junior year. In less than two years I’ll be a college graduate. I don’t know if I’m ready. I forgot my journal at home today, but I wanted to write. For the first time in a while. Maybe that’s a good change of pace. My classes this semester have a lot more reading than writing. I’ve been submerging myself in music a lot lately. Even when I’m with friends, sometimes.

Sometimes especially when I’m with friends. I don’t think it’s their fault. I think it’s mine. I used to be so desperate for company, for someone to talk to. Now I don’t know what I’m desperate for, if anything. Which is weird. I’m not sure that I know who I am without a sense of longing. A sense of hunger. I think I’ve changed a lot in ways I’m still realizing. I’m not sure it’s all good. I’m torn between trying to reconnect with my past self and trying to move forward. Trying to discover someone new. But maybe those aren’t so different. Maybe I’m just figuring out who I’ve been all along. I think part of me is trying to unearth the parts of myself I used to be so desperate to bury. Like the longing. And the inclination to sometimes be alone. I should’ve been more merciful to my seventeen-year-old self, I think. I don’t know why I was so convinced those were bad things. I think I ended up hurting people because I was trying to purge those things, not because of those things themselves.

The courtyard is so pretty right now. I think I’ll go sit outside for a while before class. Try to be a bit more at peace. Although, maybe that’s something you don’t try at so much. Maybe that’s something you just have to learn to let happen.

Diversion

Olivia Callender

I'm tired of pushing dirt underneath my fingernails to make it look like I've done something. Pretending like I had tended to the garden when all I had done was fill the pail with water. I couldn't bring myself to tell you that the weeds still sat in the flower beds. I tried to hide that from you. The weeds grew and grew and grew. Until they overtook the ill-tended, muted color flowers.

I would grab your arm and drag you from the window. I would kiss you until your focus was on my hands and not the overgrown patches of land. My dirty fingernails dancing along your side. I would let you take me, and let you think of the pretty flowers.

A Cup of Tea for You and Me, Char Gossage



Haunted

Zora Gandhi

Mama opened the kitchen windows first thing in the morning. The air always had that sickly, sweet green smell. As the sun rose over the water, Mama would start baking the bread. People would soon be lining up to buy with their mouths watering. Over and over again, I would watch her knead the dough and then braid it. Kneading and braiding, kneading and braiding. Sometimes, I would sit out on the back steps and watch the steam from the bread rise and mix with the cool air, curling like snakes. I rarely saw the other townsfolk, and when I did, their eyes lingered on mine. One green, the color of moss, and one brown, like when a muddy stream catches the light.

Late in June, the farm boy up the street got sick. Pale with a fever, he couldn't move from his sickbed. I didn't know him all that well, but Mama still sent me up the road with a basket full of greens and the last of our goat's milk. His mother, Mea, answered the door with a somber look. She accepted the basket and invited me in for tea. Tuwile lay with his feet up on the couch, two blankets draped over him. His cloudy eyes took me in and, in a hoarse voice, said, "Well, look who we have here." Mea left us alone in the parlor while she prepared his supper. We made small talk about the harvest and the weather. When I turned towards the kitchen to see if his mama needed any help, Tuwile grabbed hold of my hand, feebly gripping it, and I was overwhelmed by a feeling of dread. Dark and deep, black like death. My eyes met his, and he gaped, mirroring my own surprise. He closed his mouth abruptly. We sat for a long while until he whispered like he was praying or talking to himself, "Haunting or hunted. Haunting or hunted. Haunting or hunted..."

I visited Tuwile twice again after that day. I begged him for some clarity, answers for the eyes I felt all over me when I was in town. After the second visit, he gave in to my inquisition. He told me the myth of the Old Seer, a tale taught in the nursery school. Mama educated me at home said she needed too much help around the house. The Old Seer was odd as a young girl. But when she got older, she started seeing things. Touching things and seeing their future is a gift, they thought. Then, the storm came. Families perished in the wreckage, and in all the despair, they needed someone to blame. They pointed the finger at the Seer, claiming she brought it on, controlling the seas and the skies with her magic. They

hunted her down, climbing atop the big hill she lived on, and set the house ablaze. Her eyes were queer, one blue and one black, dark as the night.

Tuwile passed shortly after my last visit. Mea ran through the streets in tears, screaming, "The girl! She did this with her black magic." Soon, a crowd assembled, and the head of the militia tried to calm the hysterics. Discussions began, and accusations were thrown around. "I bought her mother's bread and went deaf for two days," "Her goat's milk made me ill," "Her eyes glow in the night, I've seen them myself." The strike of a match woke me up. The bright flames were already licking the walls as I ran out the kitchen door, just in time for the slats of wood to collapse behind me. I couldn't spot Mama through the flames.

I ran. I ran as fast as I could, as fast as my feet would take me. My hair whipped in the wind, smacking against my face. The forest loomed ahead of me, and I could just see an opening in the green, a beam of sunlight shining through. I felt something at the back of my head, and I hit the ground hard. Grass tickled my face and then I saw black.

"Alive we lay still while the dead roam our reveries."

Someone is singing. I wake with a start. There are shackles around my wrists attached to a long, heavy chain latched to a rung high above my head. The stone walls are dirty and scratched at the edges. As if someone tried to pry the stones apart with their nails. I could see the light streaming in from the window at the top of the next cell. The song came again, just as pained and lovely as before.

"Haunting our souls, we bury our dead. We burn our enemies til ashes left."

The singer stopped with a rasp, emerging into a coughing fit.

"Who's there?" The voice said, barely a whisper. I hesitated, not sure what answer to give. Mama gave me the name Olenna, after the hearth, the center of the home. She always called me Lenna. My heart ached and burned to see her.

"Never mind your name." The voice rasped again. The coughs continued.

"I'm sorry." I had nothing else to say. The stone felt cool on my cheek, and I pressed further into the wall.

"What's a youngin like you doing here? Steal from the market?" The voice asked me.

"I didn't steal from the market."

"Really?" The singer sounded curious.

"They think I'm evil." Now I was the one rasping. "They think I'm dark, that I see things before they happen. But I swear I swear I never saw anything. I never did anything. I can't do anything." I gasped for air, unable to take a full breath, and I lay with my back on the dirt floor, huffing and puffing.

They dragged the old man from his cell hours later and hanged him for burglary. The men in the other cells jeered at the guards as they returned to transport the prisoners. A hush fell each and every time they crossed my door. I could hear their breath catching, an eerie silence, and then the bang of the jail door closing. I didn't understand their fear, these strong officers, hardened criminals. They were losing their wits over a young girl chained up! Oh, what a laugh! I laughed and laughed until I was gasping for air again, doubling over on the floor. And then sleep found me again.

A warm glow caressed my face as I slept, and I dreamed of fire. Fire so bright it burned fast and strong, cascading off mountains and whipping through trees. I could almost feel the flames licking my face. Then I saw a storm. Crashing waves and white lightning across the horizon. Forests crushed and swept away. I could smell the sea, the ash of the burning embers, fire, and water. I awoke to the feeling of burning metal on my wrists. I cried out in agony as the flames from my dream ripped from the skin of my palms, breaking me free of restraints, burning and cracking the floor.

Panic came over me as I scrambled away from the floor, inspecting my perfectly fine hands and arms, free from any burns. Seeing it made me want to scream incredulously or maybe pray. But I was yanked out of my state by the sounds of boots pounding on the floor, running, and voices shouting orders. They were getting closer and closer; my palms started to heat, my heart beating out of my chest. In an act of desperation, I stomped on the blackened floor, kicking it out from under me.

I landed in a small room, maybe a cupboard, cluttered with canned foods and pastries. The broken floor had ripped apart the side wall, exposing the room to the jail courtyard. Exhaustion consumed me, even as I heard the voices and noises above me, planning my capture. The time to rest is now. Hurt and running on no food and water for days, my body was on the verge of giving up. Through the tears in my eyes, I spied a loaf of bread, days old but still fresh, sitting on the table. I recognized the braid; I had the same one in my hair. Rage consumed me. A fiery, red-hot rage that gave me my strength, as if I'd been resting for years. The officers surrounded me in the rubble I created, pointing their weapons and shouting

orders. As I looked into their brave faces, arms at the ready, I thought back to my old friend. Haunting or hunted? Fire leaked from my palms.

Infractions

Rowan Leonard

“At St. Yves, we take policy violations very seriously.” Headmaster Baylon wiped his nose with a ruby pocket square. Gabriel kept a stoic look, his usual frown holding back deflections of responsibility. He let the wooden arms of his chair embrace him as his headmaster lectured. He’d been here twice before, always alongside Ridley. Since his friend’s arrival at St. Yves a term prior, Gabriel’s clean record became spattered with minor infractions. Ridley lived up to his infamy. His companionship was great fun, and full of risks, and as they both approached the third year at St. Yves upper school, they learned to break the rules the correct way, where they would not go too far and would not get caught. At least, that was the goal, especially for Gabriel. When they first connected, Gabriel admired and languished over his friend’s recklessness, and insisted on accompanying him to whatever forbidden wing or smoke-filled room tickled his fancy. But now he had followed the other boy too far. Now, he was kicking himself for ever relaxing his original anxiety, for ever taking after Ridley’s nonchalance.

“Mr. Powell, are you listening to me?”

Ridley was, quite obviously, not. He too assumed his natural position, with his mouth slightly ajar and glassen gaze fixed anywhere other than where it was needed.

“Ridley,” Gabriel muttered and kicked his chair. Ridley grunted in response.

Headmaster Baylon then turned to Gabriel. “Mr. Burns, you do realize this is the third time this month I have called you into my office with Mr. Powell?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And, knowing you, I assume you are aware of our three-strikes rule?” Headmaster Baylon spoke with a faux-British accent that became unfashionable 25 years prior, and Gabriel thought it especially pathetic whenever he clashed it with American vocabulary.

“Yes, sir.”

“Then you will not be surprised that I called your families into our meeting today.”

Ridley scoffed, then said, “I bet you tried.”

Gabriel suppressed an eye roll. Self-pitying sarcasm was sickening,

and his friends made him livid. He remembered the night Ridley told him of his parent's cruelty, and how he acted like it was some big, dirty secret. He told Gabriel of how his father, when he showed up, made sure to hit him hard enough so that he wouldn't disappoint him again, to which Gabriel thought, "Whose doesn't?" Ridley also told Gabriel how much he hated his bitch of a mother for letting it happen. Gabriel hated his own mother, but for a different reason that he did not know. His body always tensed at her Chicagoan, "Hi, honey." It was probably because she cared.

Gabriel's body tensed now because both of his parents would care a whole lot about what had happened with "No Good Ridley," as his father called him. Gabriel's father's brilliance lay in the law, not in wit.

"I am going to grab some tea, and then we'll call them together." Headmaster Baylon then exited the room, assuming the regality of a street mime.

Ridley was still studying the window panes, hiding a bouncing leg. "It's not like this matters. Fucking wasting my time. Calling my dad when they want me to be studying or fucking praying doesn't seem fucking logical," he huffed, blowing his bangs from his face. Gabriel said nothing. "Come on, it's not like we'll stop or anything," Ridley boasted as he affectionately shoved his friend's shoulder.

"Are you serious?" Gabriel snapped.

Ridley's face contorted, and then relaxed into a grin. "What?" His eyes did not register his companion's tone.

"If they kick me out, I'm done, so, yeah, it matters," Gabriel's right hand opened and closed. "I don't have a fucking empire waiting for me to graduate, or a bail fund, or even another fucking school," he seethed. Gabriel did not watch Ridley watch him.

Ridley dropped his stare. "Whatever." Gabriel turned to rebuke, but was cut off by the headmaster's return with the same foolish gait. The boys' eyes returned to the window and the floor as he fiddled with the speaker phone.

"Hello?" he called, and three voices greeted him in confirmation. Ridley's attention was focused out the window, on a bird building a nest, while its partner hopped and waited.

"Gabriel?" Mr. Burns spoke first.

"Yes, here," his voice cracked. He attempted to save it with a cough. "Good afternoon."

There were no words for far too long. Headmaster Baylon broke the silence. "Um, as you all are aware, we take policy violations very

seriously at St. Yves."

"Just tell us what they did, dear God," Mrs. Powell slurred, alone.

"I'm sure that our Gabriel will do what it takes to get back on track, isn't that right, honey?" Mrs. Burns sounded so hopeful.

"Yes, mother," he responded dryly, his voice dripping with contempt.

The headmaster tapped his mug. "I know your situation, Mr. Burns, and it would be wise to show eagerness towards improvement."

Ridley suddenly perked, engaged. "You don't have to worry about that with Gabe, sir. He's a fast learner— eager to please." He chewed nothing and clapped Gabriel's back, causing him to grimace and rock forward. The light in the office grew harsh as the winter sun set outside.

"Don't waste our time, boy," Gabriel's father barked. Gabriel shrunk in his seat.

Legs sprawled over his chair's arms, Ridley simply responded, "Oh, piss off."

After a chorus of "Mr. Powell" and civil insults, it was decided that Ridley would recount their wrongdoings, alone, and then Gabriel would follow, alone. He sat by the secretary outside, straining to hear his companion's account. The oak door let nothing slip. Stoically, he sat for fifteen excruciating minutes, looking between the clock and his hands

Gabriel was kicking himself for his stupidity. He had known who Ridley Powell was, everyone in their world did. He should've rejected the charity invitation to sit at a shared desk. He should've backed away from stimulating lunchtime debates. Why didn't he alert someone when Ridley brought out his stash of cloves? He had when a different boy paraded a flask in his dormitory a year ago. Why, when Ridley said he wanted to show him something, did he not turn on his heel, right then and there? "We're a good pair, you know," Ridley had said, sweet smoke rising from his lips. Gabriel had nodded and he had felt warm. "Just don't let me down, okay?"

Now Gabriel prayed his agreement went both ways. The oak door opened, and Ridley stepped out, looking grim. Gabriel rose. "What did you tell them?"

His best friend shrugged and replied, "The truth."

Gabriel was surprised he didn't hit him. Ridley noted Gabriel's panic, adjusted his schoolbag, and tried to step past, until his arm was tightly grasped. "I thought we had each other's back. I'm done, you understand? I'm done for." Gabriel's eyes were wild and desperate.

"Yeah, you're done being trapped in this hell. You don't have to be miserable anymore," Ridley whispered back. "They've sucked the fun right out of you, now you're a spineless, uptight bastard. Maybe now you have a chance. Get off me." He twisted out of his friend's grasp.

Neither boy understood. Each one's fun had its consequences. Gabriel pressed both palms to his temples, a fruitless attempt to calm his storm. Ridley sauntered out of the administrative wing, and Gabriel could do nothing except watch his only chance at a future disappear through warped glass. The boy collected himself and faced the oak door, prepared for his final meeting at St. Yves.

Hey Daddy-o, #3, Kyle Cheng



Yesterday's Digging

Amy Sihler

The house stood overlooking a much nicer house on the opposite side of the road. If you hadn't known better you might've thought it was derelict, but in reality, at least for a little while, it had been cared for with the utmost vigilance and devotion. Oak, ivy, jade, and jasmine appeared to swallow the facade, and from a distance you could see that the roof was missing a number of shingles. Verna, the owner of the house, had decided that she enjoyed the rustic look. In the spring, she kept all of the doors and windows open but because of her desire for fresh air, the outside commonly made its way indoors. Ants coated the trash can in a thick layer of swarming legs, bumblebees made their way through the rooms occasionally rubbing against the glass of the windows in a futile attempt at escape.

During an unseasonably warm spring, Verna found herself employed neither by a place in the labor market, nor a hobby. Early in the afternoon on the Friday of Easter weekend, Verna kneeled beside her bed, in the shambolic room she'd spent the better part of two weeks in. Her hands were clasped tightly together, elbows digging into the dusty quilt. With closed eyes, and furrowed brow she took a singular breath and began to whisper, "God, I beg you please for your mercy. I'm aware that I haven't been to confession in over a year, and all I have to say to that is that I'd rather not. All I ask is that you give me something, anything to let me know that you are there. That you are there for me." She left her prayer with a simple, "Amen".

After getting off her aching knees with great effort, Verna walked into the living room. It was littered with mugs stained with coffee and the wrappers of a plethora of snack food were crinkled between the cushions of a musty green couch that had once belonged to Verna's mother. There was cheerfulness in the decor. Verna had dolled it up with some colorful curtains and the surrounding end tables and cupboards were peppered with odd, but intentional, bric-a-brac. The walls were devoid of art, but the mantle of the fireplace held a few choice photos: one of her son hanging precariously from a tree branch, and a wedding photo of her mother.

It had been a number of weeks since she'd had a decent conversation with anyone, and the house and Verna had become exceedingly more downtrodden in the time since. A week previous, she had gone out with a man named Paul, but all he spoke about the entire

evening was his Maltese dog named Susan. And just the other day at the grocery store she had asked her neighbor Pamela if she'd like to come over and, "just gab and have a glass of pinot or something," but Pamela had concocted what Verna thought was a pretty lame excuse involving a yoga class and the necessity of stopping by Costco Wholesale.

Walking into the living room Verna could already sense that something was awry. There was the stench of something awful, akin to rotting fruit, burps, and stale cigarettes.

"Ahhhh! Jesus fucking Christ!" There, in the middle of the carpet was a possum, and a severely dead one at that. It's tongue lolled out of its mouth. You might've thought the thing was languorously sunbathing in the beam of light that it had laid down in, rather than dead. "For the love of all that is holy, you've got to be joking." Verna grew nauseous looking down at the horrid little corpse, but she couldn't get herself to move, to look away. She was at a loss at what to do about the fact that a large rodent had strolled into her house and decided to die. She was a child, wanting to call for her father to come deal with the mess.

"Fuck. Jesus Christ," she said, shaking her head. It looked so peaceful there despite what an ugly creature it was. Abruptly, she crossed herself in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and made her way to the shed to get the necessary supplies.

Verna chose to scoop up the creature with a large shovel, and take it into the backyard. She felt obligated not to throw the poor thing in the garbage, and instead she dug a small and shallow grave for it beside her crab apple tree. The wind was beginning to pick up as she patted down the dirt. The air smelled of smoke and grass clippings.

Around noon on the next day Verna plunked down onto the couch, put on her bifocals and turned on the television. *It's looking like the Santa Ana winds are going to reach up eighty miles-per-hour this weekend...* Verna switched the channel. *If you want to get a truly exceptional slow cooker pot roast the key is to first sear the meat on all sides in a pan with oil...* She switched it again. *For the love of god Judy put the gun down!* Verna switched off the television. She found this grueling.

For the past fortnight this had been her routine. Sinking deeper into the crevice between the couch cushions, only getting up when her body began to ache with inaction. She was antsy this particular afternoon, no position she wrapped her legs into felt comfortable and her body was sore from yesterday's digging. Verna picked up her phone and scrolled

through her contacts. Her son hadn't yet responded to the message Verna had written a week ago. *How are you doing? Just wanted to say I love and miss you!* Scrolling up their conversation chain there were many similar disregarded inquiries, occasionally Simon would respond with *busy. talk soon.* Verna always resisted her instinct to tell him it was improper not to capitalize. She tossed her phone to the side and stood up with urgency, for what exactly she didn't know.

In the hall, after putting her sensible sneakers on Verna looked at herself in the mirror. Her face seemed crooked. The bulbous tip of her nose veered mildly to the left, her right eyelid dropped marginally lower than the other. She gave herself a smile, more so to see what it looked like than anything. Her mousy hair had begun to thin, and it gave her the appearance of being a bit older than she really was. She decided to go for a walk, thinking some fresh air would cure her ennui. Outside, the wind was picking up, tunneling from the Sierra Nevada through the California mountains. Verna looked through the window and saw that palm fronds had already begun littering the road.

It was cool outside, but the wind didn't bother her. She enjoyed the sensation of the blistering wind making its way through the thinning parts of her hair, she breathed through her mouth and let the chill seep in between her teeth. Pamela lived two doors down, in a Spanish-style stucco house. In the upstairs window, despite the blinds being drawn, Verna could see the shadow of someone walking around. She yearned to knock on the door, to be invited in, to childishly ask Pamela if she'd like to be friends.

Verna circled the block and arrived at her house once more, inexplicably overcome with the sensation of grief. The big picture window out front allowed one to peer right in. The house looked so sullen, so empty and bereft of light. When her son had lived here there had always been something going on. He would play the piano in the living room, talk to her about what he was learning at school, they would bake brownies together and eat them on the living room floor while watching some dreadful movie. Ever since he left, Verna's life had become still, quiet. That night she slept with the television on.

In the middle of the night, in a sudden jolt, Verna awoke. Her mouth tasted of soy and dread, and the voices from the television were talking about the best way to make pecan pie. Verna turned the television off, and making her way through the dark with her fingertips on the walls, she went into the kitchen for a glass of water. To her horror, upon turning

on the light Verna was confronted with a mess of gray fur and black dirt on the kitchen floor. She let out the sort of scream that you can only emit maybe two times in your life. How did it get here? It couldn't be the same one could it? It had been dead. Not breathing, no sign of life, dead.

Outside the wind tumbled mercilessly through the darkness. The trees trembled and creaked, as Verna walked with difficulty, struggling against the power of the gusts to the garden shed to get a shovel. Rushing back into the house with a slam of the door, she took a deep breath. gingerly she stepped into the kitchen and prepared herself to once again do what needed to be done.

Abruptly, Verna dropped the shovel which made a great clank on the hardwood floor. "What in God's name..." The possum was writhing around on the ground, when it righted itself, and looked up at Verna with an expression of earnest surprise. Verna stepped back unsteadily, her back running into the chill of the refrigerator. Looking this creature in the eyes Verna could see its fear. An odd wave of sympathy and simultaneous terror came over her. The poor thing looked like a ghoul. Was it a ghoul?

"It's okay.. It's okay." On instinct she bent down and placed a hand on the possum's head. The possum reached a paw up to her with pleading eyes as if to say *I'm sorry to have given you such a fright*. Begrudgingly, Verna took the paw in her own, holding it firmly, placatingly smiling as if she were trying to calm down a particularly upset child. All of the hairs on her body stood up, and her heart was beating terribly fast as her mind tried desperately to understand what was happening. "Did he send you?" The possum put its little paw down and stared back at her with unblinking, yet kind eyes. Verna would swear later that she saw it nod. Though she was slightly embarrassed by the act of it, she began to speak sincerely.

"I'm sorry I buried you, I didn't know... I'm so sorry." The possum blinked at her. Verna wasn't sure what to do. She felt bad at the thought of sending this pitiful creature away, and on some level she wasn't sure how in the world she would get it out of the house. She thought perhaps she could corral it, lead it out the door, but for some reason Verna knew that would be an act of cruelty. That this was not just an ordinary marsupial. Had this possum risen from the dead?

Out of the blue, she said to the little thing, "The least I could do is clean you up. Why don't you come with me?" Verna waved the creature along, and walked down the hall to the bathroom. Though she didn't turn around, she could hear the pitter-patter of the possum's finger like feet on the floorboards.

"Now, why don't you hop in?" Verna pointed to the bathtub. The possum did as it was told and crawled into the tub, the softness of its belly bending over the rim as it plopped down. The sight of it slipping around on the porcelain was both frightening and endearing. As Verna ran the hot water tap, and poured in a generous amount of bubble bath, she found herself saying all that had been rattling about in her mind.

"I know this wouldn't matter all that much to you, but I haven't had good company in a long time," she said as she used her hand to rub some of the dirt away from the possum's cheeks. "My son hasn't visited me in two years. Two years." As she spoke the possum appeared to her to listen attentively. It was astoundingly calm in response to Verna's machinations, rubbing its head against the flat of her hand.

"I don't know what I did wrong. I know that he didn't like going to Catholic school, but for Christ's sake I fed and clothed him for eighteen years and this is the thanks I get?"

After scrubbing the possum down thoroughly Verna placed it back onto the floor and dried it off with a towel. Its fur was sticking up wildly in every direction. "Why don't you come sit with me, little friend?" Verna led the possum to her room, where she lifted it onto the bed. They sat across from one another for quite awhile. Each examining the other. The wind had picked up exceptionally and was berating the house. As Verna looked at this creature she knew it must either be something holy or sinister.

With tears in her eyes she said in a voice like a whisper, "Why does no one seem to want to spend any amount of time with me?"

The possum's mouth opened ever so slightly revealing the pink of its tongue. "Because you're neurotic and often unpleasant to be around," it said matter of factly.

"What?"

On Sunday morning Verna awoke. The possum was nowhere to be seen. She hurriedly searched the house and then finally the backyard. In the wind the crab apple tree had been uprooted, and the little grave she had dug became a part of a much larger hole in the ground. More shingles from the roof had fallen and dust and leaves were scattered over the driveway. As the sun began to make its way up from behind the mountains, everything was still and quiet once more.

The Corpse

Emma Finley

They found her body in the early hours of the day, a faded sunrise illuminating her rotting form. The police were called, forensics analyzing her corpse and photographing her mangled silhouette. They bagged “evidence” and noted her injuries, innumerable as they were. She was desecrated by bruises, her carcass the spotted pelt of a Dalmatian. Lacerations lined her physique, deep and fresh, mapping the pain that expedited her demise. The new injuries were accompanied by old ones, long-held scars that were never allowed to fully heal. Her limbs shared in the monstrosity, set in uncanny angles that dehumanized her whole figure. Worst of all were her eyes, wide open, glaring at all those who bore witness to her death. No one had bothered to close them, to allow her face the illusion of serenity. In fact, no one had touched her at all. Forensics claimed it was so that they could process the scene, but even hours after their charade she still layed untouched. It was the first time in her life she had been permitted such a luxury.

Still, despite the horror of the scene, onlookers flocked to see her remains, a grotesque display of insatiable curiosity. Hoards of people covered the boardwalks on the beach where she was found, each too scared to step foot onto the sand. From their wooden promenades they gawked at the sight of her, their faces twisting into caricatures of displeasure. Yet, no one dared to speak, to fracture the mournful silence that befell the coastline. And silent it was, birds did not chirp, insects ceased their buzzing, and even the waves seemed to restrain their motion. In this quiet, one could only hear their own thoughts as they danced about inside their head.

As the news of her death spread further, all kinds began to gather. Once the boardwalk was filled, they packed into the parking lot, then into the stretches of road that extended beyond. From a distance, the exhaust from the cars seemed to form a long line of smoke signals, warnings relayed far too late. Those too far away witnessed her death on screen, devouring headline after headline, image after image, trying to make sense of the senseless. Children could be seen crying in the streets, having looked up too soon at a billboard plastered with her likeness. Mothers-to-be clasped their bellies, fear wrought onto their features as they wondered what sort of world they were bringing children into, or if they would be allowed to at all. Even the toughest men, locked into their business

suits, seemed to fall apart at the seams. Soon enough, reports of her death permeated everywhere, and for a moment the world banded together in an act of collective mourning, a unification that could only be brought about by such profound dread.

This unity was short-lived, ruptured by those who dared challenge the possibility of her passing, her corporeal form alone not sufficient to quell their suspicions. Vicious words were thrown into computer networks, individuals forming their own theories about her identity. They refused to acknowledge the truth, laid bare for them on a plane of sand and seashells. Nevertheless, they knew it to be true, the world around them dying proof. Their words, now, were little more than shields, guarding them from their own guilt and complicity.

If there had been time, they would have made her death into a holiday, one where world leaders would begrudgingly make speeches about her beauty, her resilience, her *importance*. If there had been time, people would pretend to celebrate her life, using it as an excuse to get drunk, throw a party, and dance on her grave. If there had been time, they would have erected a monument in her honor, constructed with only the most offensive materials. If there had been time, people would forget her death had even happened, and look out at their dying forests and wonder why winter had come so early. It took one day for the planet to die with her, the brain remembering its history before an everlasting sleep. That night, as people held onto the remnants of their lives, they bowed their heads in prayer and whispered under their breath, “if only there had been time.”



An Anatomy of Death, Larkin Lin

Summer of Citrus

Kat Yoakum

Today I painted my nails vampire red. I bought the polish at the CVS down the block, chose the red-almost-black color because it seemed the most seductive. Like I would bite and then leave. Like you would thank me for bleeding. Then I went to the grocery store and bought a bag of clementines, ten pounds of rice, eggs, brownie mix and a twelve-pack of Stella Artois. The total was forty-seven dollars, *how in the world did that happen?* I went home and repainted my nails, just to be sure. Gave it a third coat, for austerity. I tried to eat a clementine but it was raining. This was the most important day of my life. If only it were citrus season.

Joan was visiting the city, staying with Lou instead of me. Both of them, as well as Evan, were coming over at six pm. In preparation, I wiped everything on the patio down with a beach towel, then poured the water out from the cigarette-filled ashtray. Looking at the gray liquid seeping out onto the concrete ground, I let out three phlegmy-nicotine coughs. I went inside and Googled lung cancer, asthma and lupus. Covid, endometriosis, and type two diabetes. PCOS, BPD, and chronic bronchitis.

It was muggy, concerningly so, and Evan would not stop talking about being an anarchist. He seemed incredibly concerned with seeming cool, and kept on using the word praxis. I sat next to Joan, stared at her right collar and scratched at my nails, the color suddenly felt like two hands choking me. I wondered if I could scratch Evan's eyes out, or mine, if that's what he preferred. Joan, the savior, tried to keep up the conversation with Evan, which we all appreciated.

"Have you seen the Purge?" she asked, unironically. Just because I liked her didn't mean I wasn't embarrassed. So I inhaled cigarette after cigarette and imagined chest pain and my grandfather coughing to the death before deciding that none of that mattered. And Evan kept on yammering on and on because he had never had to be aware of how much space he was taking.

As the sun set and the air grew denser, everyone but Joan drank the Stellas: I got yeast cramps, but felt kinder. But Lou started talking about orgies and shrooms and so I went inside and tried to shit. Inhale exhale, I was about to explode. Not enough, though, for dynamite exactly. I sat on the toilet, asshole clenching and unclenching, pimple above my eyebrow both rising and pulsing, pussing and spreading. And I scrolled through

the 'Times to ignore Joan and the bubbling need to scream and read some article about Rudy Giuliani that shouldn't have made me laugh and then one about "the kids these days," being super dramatic or whatever, while the cold seat warmed from under me, my asshole still unable to release, and I picked at the soggy scab on my shin.

When I finally went back outside the mugginess had dissipated, as had the conversation. Lou and Evan went home, bodies slumped together and holding one another up. I drank lychee soju straight from the bottle, burning and sinking, and Joan got high. I couldn't tell if I was the only one afraid to speak. Was overwhelmed by the what-if and the it-was. There was too much to say: everything about her seemed important—her optimism and contradictions, her hair that bled red dye in water. I thought back three years ago, when we were eighteen and I always remembered to call. I had blue hair she had brown. I thought of the night before I left—how we lay on the beach, shoulders touching, feet going the opposite directions. Heads together, bodies moving apart.

Then, Joan finally said something.

"We have a weird friendship," she told me.

"We do?" I said. We always have, I thought. "What do you mean, weird compared to before?"

"Yeah," she replied. "I used to be the brave one. Now you are."

I let her sit with those words, they seemed important, like she thought that she was in a movie. Like this was the climax and I was the villain. And I wished to be eighteen all over again, when I would have been impressed by that sentiment, when I had the impression that she was super deep. I wanted to just like her, simply. I wanted to be the only one she felt comfortable sleeping next to. I wanted to feel naive.

"Will we be okay tomorrow?" I asked.

"We always will," she said, but her eyes were squinting, lying. It was all pointless, this dance, but we were young. It was all pointless, but I sank into depressing possibilities: everything is over and she secretly hates me and my eyebrows are uneven so maybe I should rip them out or maybe just die.

Tomorrow, I thought, I will write the next Great American Novel. Or maybe paint my nails blue.

She left then, after I told her too and she pretended to protest. I threw myself onto my bed, taking up the whole mattress. If only we hadn't been

so afraid. If only red was the right color. If only tomorrow wasn't the most important day in my life. The air smelled of peeled oranges. My nails were still vampire red when they shouldn't have been so I used my teeth to scrape off layers of polish, then bit until past the nail bed. I dug my jagged nails into the pimple above my eyebrow, ripping apart my skin until it stopped hurting. Knocked on wood, three times only. Then I went to sleep.

Raven Usher, #3, Larkin Lin



Philia

Ana Mohammad Zadeh

1. According to Gottlieb Frege, a function serves as an argument; that its a birthright, so to speak. The function convinces the subject that it is true in all cases, proving its tautological nature, and only here may be yielded towards its true purpose. The function is, indeed, a civil servant.

2. Allow us to assume that we too as humans operate in a congruent manner with the Fregian function, a servant towards the *argument* we are predisposed to prove, and in the optimal case, we will prove it again and again, in different ways and words. In the worst case, our experiences formulated through propositions will yield nonsense: something to be passed over in silence¹.

3. In such an example, we may observe ourselves as also endlessly tautological in the best case, and an absolute error in human society in the worst.

4. However, humans are *not* functions (or so my peers relish in reminding me), and the tautological manner in which we go about our pursuits indicates an error in our form, rather than a consistency, a determinate truth in our function.

5. Most choose their pursuits and from there, evaluate it for truth or false value in the form of success. If the endeavour proves unfruitful, the proposition of the experience must be altered, a variable must be switched out. One must change their location, their job, their hair colour, lifestyle, etc, in hopes of finding sense in the proposition, finding the *truth value* of it all. This may be done through logical analysis or empirical observation, nothing more or less. If the endeavour yields success, then it may sprout the correct experiences and subsequent pursuits; here the tautology is revealed.

6. My tautology was discovered too early, or perhaps just early enough, and now I am stuck. I am stuck in a way that I am deprived of a desire for mobility, as I have the sense to understand that while

1 Of course, in reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein's ending of his debut work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. That which is not true or false in all cases has sense, and that which may *never* have truth or falsity must be passed over, in pursuit of the ultimate clarification of language. My thoughts often wander to the dear, late Ludwig.

my tautology has rendered me stagnant, I am *doing* what I set out to do.

7. Where tautologies lack in conveying meaning, they compensate in conveying Truth.

8. Dramatic career changes tend to disgust me, as they indicate deficiency in foresight.

9. I can prove I have no such deficiency, because I strive for approximately three hours of research five nights a week. If one hour yields approximately two pages towards my dissertation, which I have been writing for two months, then I should be producing 30 pages per week. Given empirical data, I have averaged 33.

10. My peers, the 40 other philosophy graduate students at my university, perplex me. Their desires lie in a certain collective intellectual masturbation. I have witnessed them sit in circles, copies of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*² in one hand, the other clasped around their erect penises, viciously oscillating until the much-anticipated apex, where they each yelp out something along the lines of "being for the self lies in the negation of self-actualized consciousness," or perhaps "the intelligible image lies within the synthetic a priori standing of transcendental knowledge." The resulting semen is putrid, reeking of intellectual gibberish and psychologistic nonsense.

11. I find it difficult to disguise my contempt for such people, but I must reside in their company and entertain such qualities, seeing as Connecticut grows grim.

12. Above that, I find it increasingly difficult to disguise contempt for the field itself, and its prospects above sheer masturbation. I've observed those prospects as desolate, and am left to ponder, accumulating an ascending Kierkegaardian outlook on the whole situation. Is philosophy the source of my sickness, and if so, where lies the death –

"Beatrice?"

Oh my god, oh fuck. He's here. I look like shit, is there mustard on my chin? Oh god, oh fuck. "Hi! Sorry, just having lunch before my next class. I can't deal with the undergrads while I'm hungry." I rub my hand along my face, closing it around my chin

2 I believe Western society has progressed far past a need for German Idealism. I would go as far as to call it child's play, but alas, children need their toys.

in hopes of catching any condiment remnants, quickly standing up from my laid out position on the grass, only to see that my knees have those hideous red little indents from where the grass pressed against my skin.

"No worries, spotted you and just thought I'd say hello. We're meeting tomorrow at 4pm, correct?" Scott has both hands clutched around the strap of his leather satchel, which is around two or three shades lighter than mine. His satchel, not his hands. Our hands are probably around the same colour, not that that's important. Wait, I haven't responded—his eyes are entrancing.

"Yes, 4 pm! Been looking forward to it all week, of course." I stare at the outline of his nostrils in hopes of studying him a bit closer.

"Remarkable. Well, I'll see you in my office at four, Beatrice. Be well." And he is off, disappearing into the university pavement. He wears an olive-green corduroy blazer over a grey pullover and light brown slacks—it is indecipherable from the attire of most other professors and Ph.D. students, but my god, on him, it is holy.

13. Kierkegaard, in his misery, had a crux of hope, which to him was the pathway from the human self to the 'theological self,' he who exists before the dogmatic standard of God. This may alleviate the imminence of the sickness that the subject feels (the misery of existential ruminations), as it confirms the sin as an affirmation, rather than a negation, of that which the subject *knows*.

14. My God, my object of transcendence, my only opportunity for actualization of being for self, is my Ph.D. advisor, Scott. He has a delicate kind of beauty; a tall and scrawny man wearing thin round glasses. He resembles the late Ludwig both in appearance and mannerisms, or how I imagine Ludwig to have fared had I been alive in the same era.

15. In each of our five meetings, I have sat before him, studying the proportions of his face. Now that my dissertation has begun, he tells me that he would like to meet more frequently, and when he tells me that, I understand the God that Kierkegaard references—above that, the God that the Bible references. All the Bibles, the Quran, too. The Book of Mormon, the Buddha, all of it.

I drive home after I teach the undergrads. Upon entering, I

call out to announce my arrival, as there is a freeloader of sorts who spends most of his time in my apartment. "Hi, I'm home!" is all I can muster. I slip off my shoes and hang my keys on their hook as my boyfriend emerges from my bedroom with disheveled hair and a red hue of the eye. He approaches, and I hide my grimace, as I have true certainty that he has not showered today.

"Hey, how was school?" He presses his lips to my cheek, and I allow him a kiss for a single second before I move to my room to drop my bag.

"It's not really school, it's work. I teach classes, I don't sit and learn." It is difficult to contain an eye-roll, as it always is with him.

"For sure. Right. Well, how was it?" I unbutton my blouse and slip off my skirt, beginning to rummage through my dresser as he sits on the bed and hungrily watches.

"It was fine." My watch reads 6:23, which gives me just over half an hour before he will leave for work at a local bar. I carefully insert myself next to him in bed, and begin to passionately kiss him. It is always in my best interest to have sex before he leaves for work, as that way, I can ensure he will not try and wake me up to be titillated when his shift is done and he comes home, and I can achieve a peaceful night of rest.³ We kiss, and kiss, and eventually, I lay down and gesture for him to initiate. He moves quickly and predictably. I reach and grab a rod of my headboard, because thinking that he is fucking me with such a vigour stimulates him, and makes him cum faster, for which I am grateful—and then directly after, he showers and leaves for the night, for which I am much more grateful.

16. Upon his kiss with death, Hegel remarked that "there had only been one man who ever understood me, and even he didn't understand me."

17. Kierkegaard, and my dear Ludwig, both chose to remain liberated from the tyranny of marriage.⁴

3 This is not to imply that I possess no sexual attraction to him – surely I have some – but after a night's work on existentialism in logical theory, coitus feels much too earthly.

4 Of course, in Wittgenstein's case, it is much more likely that those he took pleasure in lying with were not in his expected pool of marriage prospects. Perhaps in 2023, he would have been able to let his freak flag fly. Would Wittgenstein find himself on Grindr? Likely not—but Foucault (though hardly a philosopher) certain-

18. What does it entail to know a mind like those? I have wept for such questions. Who would be maddened first—the philosopher, he who likely will never love one as much as he loves the questions he asks, or the lover, she whose only question lies within the structure of the mind of the man before her, and how it may move in such a way, connecting dots and lines she could never conceive of.

19. Surely it is absurd to lay claim that women cannot pursue lives of philosophy, but I cannot ignore such pronounced patterns regarding solitary lives.

—

“How many pages in are you, Beatrice? You started this past September?” Scott crosses a leg over the other, the side of his right nested perfectly on top of the space where his thigh and knee connect. He writes in a small leather-bound notebook, his glasses tilted forward on his nose as he scribbles away. Is he writing about me?

“You can call me Bee. Um, and yes, I started this semester. I just hit over 130.”

He pauses, pushes his glasses up, and looks up from the notebook now directly at me. “Over 100 pages? How old are you, Bee? Don’t report me to Title IX for that please, I don’t mean it some sexual harassment kind of way, these kids take everything as some direct social offense—”

I interrupt his stammering. “Oh please, don’t worry. I’m 26.”

“Right. I only ask because, well, you look so young, and you are so young. When I was 26, I was not churning out this many pages towards a dissertation, that’s for sure, and I assume that they’re at least halfway decent pages, since I hear my colleagues talk about you, Bee.” Am I ovulating? Did I just release an egg to be fertilized? I can only assume so.

“They talk about me?” My head cocks forward, my back losing its poised posture.

“Of course.” He flips back a few pages in his notebook and begins to read from it. “You’re teaching First Order Logic, Normative Ethics, and Existentialism, which is, to be frank, more than half of our adjuncts.” He looks at the notebook again. “And you *didn’t* come into the program with an MA. Remarkable.” He leans

ly would.

back in his desk chair holding his pen at face level while he waits for my response. In the same hand as his pen, his gold wedding band flashes, taunting me like a schoolyard bully.

“I mean, I don’t feel overworked or anything, it’s just what I like to do. You’re kind for saying that, though. I guess most people my age want to do ketamine and fuck each other, but like, I think Wittgenstein and Frege are more sexually arousing than actual sex.” I bite my lip, and envision a world where I did *not* just say the words ‘sexually arousing’ in a colloquial context with my advisor, who yes, I so desperately want to sexually arouse—but he can’t know that.

“One could argue both are nothing more than a struggle for recognition.”

“Philosophy and sex?” I ask, to which he nods in response. “Don’t say ‘one’ when in reality you just mean Hegelians. And I can’t imagine the instance of mutual recognition between the philosopher and philosophy—”

“You don’t think that that’s what drives the philosopher mad?”

“I think that the Hegelian model of dialectic thinking is an avoidance tactic from truth—who’s the master and who’s the slave doesn’t matter if there’s no answer, no way through. There are no valuable questions without answers.” I pause momentarily, acutely aware of how I have just spoken of his specialty. “Oh wait, please don’t take offense. I think Hegelianism is, um, invaluable important to philosophy.”⁵

“The answer is in the dialectic itself, Beatrice.” He smiles and closes his notebook. “I’m going to go ahead and schedule your defense for May, you’ll be finished by then. Also, don’t act as if Wittgensteinians are anything more than implicit Hegelians. Close the door on your way out.”

I can’t even recall saying goodbye, I must have blacked out in the process of leaving, because the next thing I know, I’m naked and on top of my sweaty boyfriend, which is very significant because I’m *never* on top. I reach for the same rod in the headboard, for real this time, and close my eyes. I discard the image of my moronic, regrettably chosen mate beneath me, and I instead envision

⁵ The words taste like cough syrup in my mouth, and I will deny making any claim of the sort in a formal court of law, or when arguing with, well, anyone but Scott.

Scott. He is naked, and, wait, who's there with him? It's none other than my dear Ludwig, and they seem to be together, pressed and fondling, and my god, I feel the screws of the headboard being challenged. If it were not for the desperate, pathetic pants of the boy underneath me, I would be in pure bliss, the transcendental reality, the actualized self-consciousness.

20. I am no scholar of the ancients, but if I am correct, *eros*, the erotic and physical nature of desire, is what causes the mortal soul to recall the true form of love, which only exists above the heavens.

21. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes, “god-sent madness is a finer thing than man-made sanity.” For the proceeding sequence of weeks, I will struggle to make sense of the notion.

Our meetings have grown to twice weekly, each over an hour, sometimes two. We know to schedule them at the end of our work day, when there is nothing or no one waiting for us. We rigorously discuss. I insist he sends me a copy of *his* Ph.D. dissertation, and I pick it apart with a sewing needle. He tells me that he had never thought of the critiques that I am raising, nor did anyone on his panel, and I tell him that he is lucky to have me, so as not to embarrass himself even further. Once, he compares me to his wife. She teaches comparative literature at a preparatory high school in New Haven, and he says that should she have gone for a doctorate degree, she could perhaps have been as “bright, sharp, and focused” as I am. He claims literature is only a stepping stone towards philosophy, the true genius’s playing field. I ask what Sor Juana would think of such a remark, and he has no response, but looks at me deeply and tells me that his wife once said the same thing⁶. Reasonably, such a comparison should aggravate me. He seems to lump all the women in his life together – all some amalgamation of the things that he deems intellectually and perhaps physically (I hope) desirable – and as a feminist, I should be disgusted at such a comment diminishing and patronizing the academic value of literature as a field. But as a subject of sexual desire, I am only lustful and further impassioned.

“Do you read and write in your sleep?” he playfully asks one meeting.

⁶ The Mexican female philosopher, I’m sure, would remind Scott of the arbitrary and misogynistic line drawn between what is referred to as “literature” and “philosophy”.

“I wish.”

“I only hope that you still find time to be a young girl in the prime of your life. It doesn’t get better than this.”

“I enjoy myself, really, I go out a bit, here and there. My friends and I go to this Irish pub in Black Rock most Fridays, just for a few beers and shit. I can assure you, nothing is being wasted.” I think nothing of the exchange, and the following Friday, I am at the pub. I go out with three other girls, all in the doctorate program, and we sit in the same booth at the back right side of the bar. And then it happens. At around 10 pm, I see Scott and two other professors from school walk in. We all spot them simultaneously.

“God, are we going to have to find a new bar?” my friend Vanessa comments.

“That’s literally my dissertation advisor.” I have told my friends nothing of my fantasies. It is best that nobody knows.

“Fuck, really? Do you wanna hide? Or leave?” As she makes the suggestion, Scott sees me, and we both smile. I react as if this is the worst possible outcome.

“No, fuck, he already saw me. I’m gonna go say hi really quick so he doesn’t think I’m being a bitch, then I’ll come back.” I swiftly get up, holding my beer in one hand so I look like I’m having fun, and walk over.

“Alright, I’ve seen it with my own eyes, now I’ll believe that you do have a social life.”

“Ha-ha. So comforting to see that humour and sarcasm don’t depart with age.” We’re being so cheeky right now, am I drunk? I’m definitely a bit drunk.

“Great to see you.” He pats my shoulder, but with a slight lingering rub. Somewhere between a pat and a rub. A pat-rub?

“Likewise! Just wanted to say hi, extend pleasantries, y’know. Be courteous.”

“Don’t be a stranger. I’ll buy you a drink before you leave if you’d like.” I black out again, muttering something like “totally,” or “for sure” before I patter away, down to my booth.

“He’s like, so prehistoric.” I tell my friends as I sit down, and they all laugh. I drink at least two more beers adding onto the preexisting two already in my stomach, and cannot stop glancing at my watch, waiting for the time when my group usually starts to

disperse—all while praying Scott doesn't leave. Finally, at around 11:20 pm, Vanessa stands up, deciding she's going to call an Uber, asking if we're all going to split one, as we usually do.

"My boyfriend's picking me up actually, he had something to do in the neighbourhood." Vanessa squints ever so slightly at me, then shrugs.

"Sounds good, see you next week, Bee!" I wait exactly three minutes after they've left the bar to stand up, to avoid any possibility of them walking back to claim some forgotten item, or whatever, and then I walk over to Scott—who, to my delight and surprise, is seated alone at the bar.

"Where's your friend?" I ask, taking the stool next to him, setting down my bag.

"Had to go relieve the babysitter." Fuck, he's never mentioned kids. Is that because he hates his kids, like some abusive and aloof father?⁷ "Times like these are when I don't regret my vasectomy for a second. Where's your little posse?"

I laugh, relieved in my own series of logical inferences and unsure of how to internalize the image of his sperm cut off from his tubes, a whole organic sewage system underneath his slacks. "They went home. They all have husbands to get to."

"Not you?" I contemplate the next step. Will bringing up my boyfriend close me off to him? Illogical—he has brought up his wife, therefore I will not act in any manner that could not be an extension of his.

"Um, I have a boyfriend, I guess. But he works late, and also, I hate being around him." He laughs, I wince.

"Is he as smart as you?" He sips from his drink, which looks like an old fashioned, or a Manhattan, or something else only old academics drink, which turns me on.

"He's a bartender. And he likes... books that hiker men read, Krauckaur and Kerouac. Fuck, who am I kidding? He's dumb as rocks, hasn't read a book since he was 22 probably, and that's being generous. I don't know why I'm still with him, it's been like 2 years, and I don't have the energy to sustain a whole breakup ordeal, and all of his shit is at my apartment, and it's all just too much work. And

⁷ Occam's razor—the outcome that hinges on the lowest amount of assumptions is the most likely. Scott has never mentioned children and has no pictures of children on his desk; therefore, it is most likely that he is a childfree man.

he's nice, so I pity him. Oh my god, I'm saying so much, sorry, this is like my fourth beer." I jokingly bury my head in my hands, hair falling forward.

"Please, I like seeing you loosened up like this—" He gestures to the almost empty bottle in my hand. "Would you like to make it a fifth?" I am well aware of my alcohol threshold, and how we are about to surpass it. I wonder how many he's had. Is he drunk too? He looks neat and composed, as always, or maybe that's just how these intellectual men always appear. "You need to start acting your age."

"I don't think you'd spend half the amount of time with me if I did."

"Yes, because most of my grad students don't insist on annotating and critiquing the dissertation I wrote 20 or so years ago—but you did, which is compelling and worth looking into." I lick the piss-tasting beer off my lips.

"Worth looking into? Like armchair-style psychoanalysis?"

He scoffs at the comment. "Oh please. Psychoanalysis is for pseudos."

"I'm sorry, please remind me of both of our fields. I seem to have forgotten." This flirting continues for a while. And eventually, I accidentally rub my foot against his ankle underneath the bar counter, and that is when I see appetite in his eyes, an appetite I am unsure of how to satisfy, or rather, whether or not he would like me to. The bartender announces last call.

"Do you want to keep chatting? It's not very late yet. You're too young to be calling it a night at midnight." I nod my head yes, and soon we are in his car, driving to my apartment, and I'm rushing to text my boyfriend that he needs to spend the night at his own place, as I seem to have a horrible and contagious stomach bug.

22. *This is the god-sent madness, and I am now aware that I was prior existing in a state of man-made sanity.*

23. *The mad man, the lover who has become taken with his beloved, has recalled the true form of beauty, and that is why he is regarded as mad, because he has confused his earthly, mortal body, with one that is heavenly and celestial, and his wings are, therefore, an illusion of his madness.*

24. Scott fucks me, and I feel, momentarily, that I am his beloved, and he is the madman. His hands are calloused with a certain knowing, and they grip my wrists, as if trying to bestow the knowledge and experience onto my body.
25. Scott is a Hegelian, so I look for the dialectic of his fucking me. Am I the beloved or is he? I too feel maddened, and winged, bound for the heavens that lay above all of my feeble attempts towards understanding the general form of the function, of Truth, of the world, of me.
26. Maybe now, I am a Hegelian too, because I have found the dialectic. We are both the beloved and also the lover, having achieved true *mutual recognition*, which is what he would say, if he was not too preoccupied with the anticipation of raw, uncensored, celestial orgasm. It is somehow Platonic and also nominalist, universally true and also arbitrary, meaningful and also void—truly dialectical.
27. We fuck twice weekly from here, and it is how I envision most 26-year-olds to have been having sex regardless, ones who had not been trapped in the man-made sanity, the endless tautology in which I found myself so young.
28. Our meetings seamlessly fade into blowjobs, and I ask him to read my pages with me on my knees. “The thesis of the chapter is buried underneath all of this shit—revise the whole thing,” he says, and I agree.
29. “Too many examples in this section, draw fewer abstractions and focus on the one interpretation. You should know better.”
30. I recognize him as master.
31. “The tone of your prose is changing. Where’s the edge?”
32. He recognizes me as slave.
33. There is *active* and *passive* despair. While yes, I do think it is a bit dramatic to think I have been living in a perpetual despair, let us assume so. In active despair, I regard myself as my own master, and while it is said that the mastery is illusionary, as the despairing self has failed to *be for oneself*, the mastery is the source of pleasure and joy. In passive despair, the negated self must negate his despair, and therefore lives in the passive and infinite state, unable to abstract the sources of the despair for itself. Which one am I now? Which one was I before? The answer remains difficult to ascertain.

34. Scott asks me if I’m drunk while I write my pages; “They’re that sloppy. Horrible pacing, elementary observations. My high school teacher wife could write a more sophisticated analysis than this.” And he says it all with his fingers inside me.

It is February and I am beginning to unravel. In my apartment, Scott sits naked with my laptop in front of him, shaking his head. He unfolds his glasses to put them back on. “What’s the purpose of this section? Do you even need it? It’s 3 pages of nonsense—”

“Did you always think I was stupid? Because I remember you telling me about how ahead and advanced my research was, but now it seems like you get off on telling me it’s shit—”

“You get off on it too, don’t you?”

“That’s not the point. Do you only say these things to get off? Or to get me off—”

“God, no. It really is subpar quality, and I can’t have one of my students submitting a dissertation of subpar quality—who do you think looks worse in that situation?”

I move off the bed to pull a shirt over my head. “None of this was happening beforehand! What’s your authority beyond this circle jerk of a school? You fuck me so I affirm you as, as something to respect, and listen to—”

“And you like affirming it! You like it so much you cheat on your boyfriend, you let your pages go to shit and stop paying attention to the thing you claim you love so much: philosophy.” His tone is curt, almost polite, considerably patronizing, and certainly infuriating.

“I do love philosophy, and I’m good at it—”

“God, you don’t love philosophy, you love its control over you—it’s the question you’re never gonna fucking answer, and to you that’s just as good as an orgasm.” He takes a deep breath. “You’re a beautiful girl, Beatrice, of reasonable intelligence, but look at what a bit of a distraction did to your writing. Do you really think you’re going to keep publishing if this is what happens to your work when it really comes down to just writing a dissertation?” I push him off of my bed, indistinguishably screaming for him to get out of my apartment.

35. We are familiar with god-sent madness, and the antithetical

man-made sanity, but is there a god-sent sanity, or a man-made madness? I believe myself to be in the state of the latter.

36. Towards the end of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates, in his palinode, states that the truth of the relationship between lover and beloved relies on them each resisting the urge to lay with one another, and choose the higher good, which obviously is, a life of philosophy.

37. My dear Ludwig lost three of his five brothers to suicide, the other two plagued by the same thoughts. Ludwig claims he was bound to the same fate, if not for his discovery of philosophy (prior, he was pursuing a life in aerospace engineering), and the validation and encouragement of his mentor at Cambridge, Bertrand Russell.

38. Perhaps, if Ludwig began laying with Russell while studying at Cambridge, he would have met a similar fate to mine, and would have never written the *Tractatus*.

39. I revise my dissertation again and again and prepare to defend it at the end of April. Scott and I refrain from meeting. I decide that I am not displeased with much of what he had to say, for there was an air of truth. The affair has reminded me that I know much better than to waste my time engaging in questions of socio-political dynamics and metaphysical claims—their nonsensical nature may not yield anything of substance, anything of truth.

Several students of mine ask to attend my defense, in addition to a colleague or two, and I agree. Scott behaves professionally and refrains from cross-examining me in the same manner as he did during our rendezvous. It is a smooth process, one that I have adequately prepared myself for. It runs for just over one hour, after which they deliberate for a peculiarly short time. The few public guests trickle out, my students and colleagues kindly congratulate me. After deliberation, a woman named Francine who runs the Ethics subdivision of the Philosophy department, invites me back inside to sit before the committee. Scott sits in the middle of the three, Francine to his left and another male professor to his right.

Francine speaks a moment after I sit down. “I think I speak on behalf of all of us, and other faculty members familiar with your work, when I say that that was truly outstanding.”

Scott speaks next. “This should come as no surprise to you, considering how quickly you have gone through the process, a remarkably young 26-years-old.” I make no indication as to how I perceive the

weight of his words and their origins. *Remarkably young*.

“That’s incredibly kind of you all to say.”

“As you know, every few years we invite a doctoral graduate – from here or another institution – to serve as our postdoctoral fellow, and we’d like to formally offer you this position. Of course, you’ll receive the offer in writing, all the details laid out for you, but we sincerely hope you accept. We think you’re going to be a real asset here—great work lies ahead of you. Oh, and of course, you will be graduating summa cum laude.”

40. In his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein set out to create the ultimate clarification of philosophy through the construction of a crystalline-pure plane of logic, on which one may reside. This world, in its purity, would have no place for dialectical ambiguity, masters, slaves—for its language would leave its subjects unable to speak of such things. He stepped back to admire the work, and would remark that he had done it—he had found the general form of the function, the picture of reality, the route to Truth.

41. Yet soon, the crystalline plane proved troublesome in its lack of friction, and my dear Ludwig began to slip and fall, unable to grasp the function’s general form, as it was of course, made of ice. Years later, he would banish himself to what he referred to as “the rough ground,” unable to live in his world of logical truth.

42. At 19, as an undergraduate sophomore, I read the *Tractatus*. I read it once a week, viciously annotating its pages until the propositions seep into me. I begin to conceive of the crystalline purity and decide that I am alien on the rough ground. I promise my dear Ludwig that I will create a version of that world in which one may stand, and walk, and thrive. This pursuit has carried me far, so far that all of my propositions, all of my work, my writings, myself, have become true in all cases—a pure tautology. I have constructed the world, just as he did, and I have been graciously invited to live inside of it, safely nestled atop the ice.

43. But it seems as if, despite my ability to walk, the ice is very cold. Though bright and radiant, reflecting all the Truth of the world, the walls hug my body tighter. The lack of friction is daunting, but I fear that a fall to the rough ground would be so great I may not arise again.

44. Surely, there must be something unaccounted for, a variable that I cannot see. Highly improbable—all truths are ones that may be ascertained through logical analysis or empirical observation. I cannot see anyone for miles, I know that there is no one here—all I see, or feel, is ice.

45. I see the Truth of the propositions, and I look deeply into their eyes, in hopes of telling them what I have sacrificed in hopes of living in their company. But they do not stare back. They are void, seemingly apathetic that I am here.

The Mayor of Sixth St,
Char Gossage



Eleven and a Half, Class of 2023-2024



From left to right:

row 1: Joe Glynn, Ally Frans-Kohn, Gil Ferguson

row 2: Izzy Hall, Isabella Anand, Amy Sihler, Annelies Stealey

row 3: Avery Camp, Camila Pernisco, Ana Kent, Becca Moore, Kat Yoakum

Not pictured: Zora Gandhi, Ashley Iorio, Celia Shanley, Lily McDonald, Sara Magnuson

Photo by Fiore Petricone



Contributors

Nonfiction

'Imiloa Borland is a senior Global Studies student from O'ahu, Hawai'i. She enjoys writing about Hawai'i, queerness, and queerness in Hawai'i.

Amaya Branche is a twenty-one year old writer and fourth-year Literary Studies student at Eugene Lang College.

Lananh Chu from Vietnam, is taking Documentary Studies at The New School.

Isabel Hall is a second-year student at Eugene Lang with a passion for writing, a myriad of interests and a multitude of creative pursuits.

Stella Hofferman is a Journalism + Design major and Literature/Critical Analysis minor from Colorado.

Ashley Iorio is a Literary Studies major with a Writing concentration, and her main interests are autofiction and creative non-fiction. She's also a singer/songwriter!

Sara Magnuson is a fourth-year student at The New School, living her big city dreams in New York after growing up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is currently studying literature and politics.

Becca Moore is a literary studies student at Eugene Lang. She is a collector of trinkets, a lover of tomatoes, and an advocate for a healthy amount of gossiping.

Kiera Renteria is an undergraduate student at Lang College and Parsons School of Design.

Celia Shanley is a senior majoring in literary studies and minoring in journalism and design. Her primary genres are nonfiction and poetry.

Annelies Stealey is a senior Literary Studies student at Lang who primarily writes about Instagram stalking and Appalachian folklore. She lives in Williamsburg with her roommate and her calico cat.

Poetry

Nadja Anderson Oberman (they/she) is a writer and artist from Philadelphia, PA, currently based in Brooklyn, NY. They are a junior Literary Studies major with minors in Race & Ethnicity Studies and Screenwriting. Most of Nadja's work centers on themes of Black identity, queer identity, and the intersection of the two, as well as the depth of interpersonal relationships that both identities make possible.

Avery Camp is a conceptual artist living in so-called Manhattan. A disabled and trans artist, they center community care in their work, and offer moments of crip rage, longing, and queer intimacy through poetry and photography

Ollie Davis is a freshman who fell in love with poetry after buying Danez Smith's "Don't Call Us Dead". Ollie dedicates their poems to their partner, who made loving themselves easier through loving him.

Gretchen Donnelly is an undergraduate student at Lang College.

Calia Fernandez is a junior, studying philosophy at Lang.

Galacia is a non-binary Igorot-American multi-disciplinary artist and student at Lang College of Liberal Arts.

Zoe Hussain is a senior in the Journalism and Design department, originally from Long Island, NY. When not writing about current events, she enjoys writing and illustrating her own poems

Soph Lajnef is a Visual Studies major at Eugene Lang college of liberal arts. They love art, writing, poetry, and animals! Writing poetry is their favorite creative outlet, and they do it whenever they can!

Alyne Padilla is a Californian creative nonfiction writer and poet, now based in Brooklyn. Alyne's work focuses on intimate pockets of solace, memory, and family. Crudeness appears when it can!

Radha Peacock grew up in a small town outside Nashville, Tennessee. After moving to New York, she writes primarily about class, gender, and the contrast between the city and her upbringing.

Camila Pernisco Californian writer and artist, based in Brooklyn, NY. Encounters intimacy/meditation/preservation/ephemera in her text + image practice. Can roast a good chicken.

Ian Powers is a fool and occasional poet currently residing in The Burrow, cocooned in pipe cleaners and pinecones. When they emerge, they will be awfully disoriented.

Sofia Rangel is a writer born and raised in Bucaramanga, Colombia. She is currently living in New York City.

L.A. Ritchie is a Brooklyn-based writer, photographer, artist, and final-year student at TNS seeking Liberal Arts BA. Born and raised in Portland, ME and the Hudson Valley, NY. He is writing a novel.

Fiction

Olivia Callender is an illustrator and writer who crafts short stories and breathes life into them through her drawings. With both mediums she creates new worlds, transporting readers into her artistic realms.

Gil Ferguson (they/them) is a writer, Literary Studies major, and general weirdo at Eugene Lang. In their free time, they enjoy being awkward, off-putting, and having strange vibes.

Zora Gandhi is a fourth-year Literary Studies Major with a concentration in Fiction writing. She has two black cats and loves horror stories and romantic comedies.

Ethan Glazar is a second semester Junior studying Creative Writing and minoring in Screenwriting.

Lauren Lee is an illustrator and writer from Kansas City. Often combining written and visual work, she aims to bring a touch of the fantastical to her storytelling.

Rowan Leonard second-year writing student at Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts. Fan of the comma.

Amy Grace Sihler is a junior at Lang. She is a Literary Studies major, and also dabbles in other things. Conceptually she likes to ride bikes. Realistically she likes to watch birds hop around on cafe tables, which frightens the patrons, but delights her.

Scott Soth is a second year Eugene Lang student. He performs stand-up comedy around the city and is working on a novel. Soth also writes film reviews and produces short films.

Kat Yoakum is a literary studies student at The New School. In her free time, she likes sitting, sleeping, and lying.

Ana Zadeh is a budding writer and philosopher! :) <3 She loves figs, HBO's 'Girls', twitter politics and springtime. She hates neoliberalism, Jane Austen, and stand-up comedians.

Art

Lara Agrawal is majoring in Literature & Culture+Media, with a Parsons minor in Comics & Graphic Narratives.

Isabella Anand is an undergraduate student at Parsons School of Design.

Kyle Cheng is a multimedia artist! They have worked with glassblowing, ceramics, 3D mixed media, printmaking, and painting. Acoustic, video, and kinetic work is where they currently are with their artistic vision.

Madeline Early [born 2002, Lancaster, PA] is a photographer and digital media artist. Her portfolio explores notions of time passage and personhood. She views photography as an act of love.

Milo Evaschen has been taking photos on 35mm film for 6 years. They are a passionate artist early in their career and are still learning to take their work seriously. They shoot using a Pentax Program A SLR Camera.

Ally Frans-Kohn is an undergraduate student at Lang College and Parsons School of Design.

Chris Gentile (they/she) is an artist and writer at The New School.

Joe Glynn (he/him) is a visual artist attending Parsons School of Design. Joe spends his time drawing people and characters, as well as the technology and spaces they interact with.

Char Gossage is a New York based Illustrator. She mainly works in mixed media to create 3D sculptures. Currently her art focuses on themes of nostalgia and dreams.

Ana Krent (they/she) is an illustrator from Brooklyn, NY! They love exploring storytelling through tangible mediums, and they enjoy going on long walks and collecting random little things :-)

Charlie Kriedler is a composer at the Mannes School of Music. His favorite thing about making art is the process of uncovering what has been there all along.

Bridie O'Loughlin is a first year photography major at Parsons. They spent most of their life living in Shanghai, China but moved to Bangkok, Thailand for their senior year before moving to NYC :)

Josephine Racz (Josie) casually takes pictures and sometimes they come out cool.

Sarah Tonra Sometimes before Sarah draws they'll enjoy a warm cup of tea.

Raven Usher Inspired by the style of engraving, Raven's works seek to explore the boundary between light and shadow, life and death.

Acknowledgements

Jackie Clark, for advising us through this issue

Sean Grandits, our printer

Camila Pernisco, for assembling this issue (a book baby, truly)

Daniel Alberto, Amy Sihler, and **Becca Moore**, for unearthing The New School Archives

The New School Archives, for allowing us to scavenge ferociously, and find, along the way, our pride as Langies

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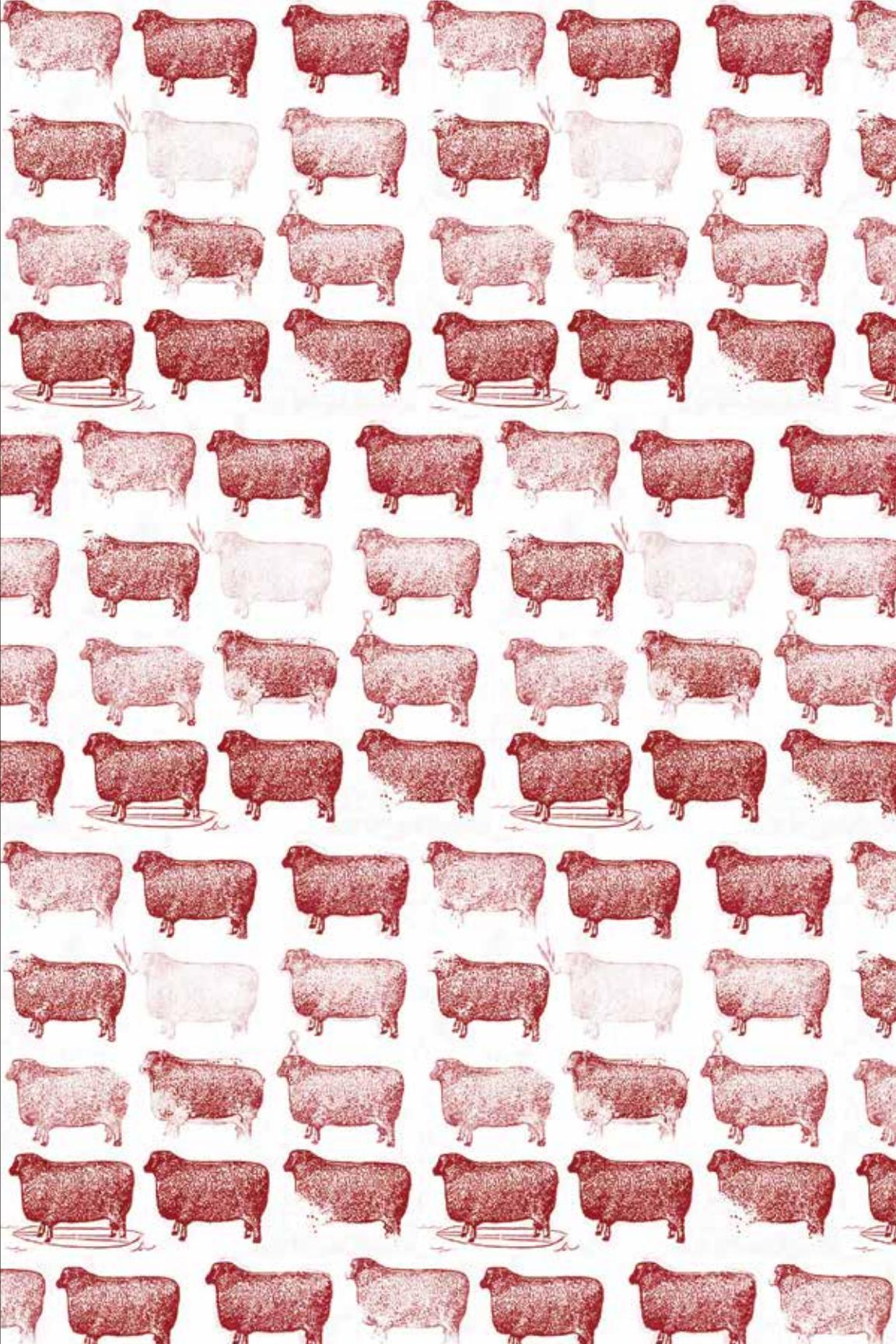
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Font Used: **Barlow Elastic**, designed by Dries Hamels, Olivia Marly, Florjent Nuhiji



Peace and Love!



Cigarette Anxiety, Ephemeral
Langie, Lots of Lesbians, Problem-
atic Ghouls, Empowering Vaga-
bonds, Pontifical Instagrams,
TW: mentions of Derrida, French
New Gays, Pedagogical Pos-
sums, Spunky Fanfic Discourse,
Essentialist Dogs, CVS Groom-
ing Section, Sterile Resumes