



Eleven and a Half

2023

2023





11½



Volume 11  
Palindrome



**Eleven and a Half**  
The Literary Journal of Eugene Lang College

Spring 2023

## **Letter From the Editors**

The eleventh issue of this publication is aptly titled “Palindrome”—a word, phrase, or number that reads the same forward and backward—11 ½ Volume 11 or 11 ½ 11. This issue arrives amid an unprecedented crisis for this institution, which is still reeling from COVID-19 and a historic labor dispute. Many of us did not expect our college experience to be fashioned by picket lines and union songs, but it ends up being part of a much larger story: of friends and fights and finding the perfect fashion theory book at the List Center library; of singing and week-long occupation sleepovers on the UC floor as a new community forms in response to student needs and wishes for this institution. In this time of strife for students and faculty alike, we feel that the artistic expression contained in this issue serves as an essential reminder of what the purpose of this institution is, and as a source of relief. Though we recognize that these momentous changes are painful and challenging for all involved, it is also a sign of immense care and passion for and from our community. This empathy and meaningful action will help swing the university pendulum—a palindromic, dialectical journey toward the best institution we can be. Thank you from all of the *Eleven and a Half: Volume Eleven* staff for reading, contributing, and helping sculpt this issue. We hope to continue showcasing art in its myriad of print forms at the forefront of positive and progressive change. We would like to give special thanks to all of the guests that visited our class to share advice, experience, and recommendations with our editorial team—we wouldn’t have been able to create such an important collection of student art otherwise. Thank you to our faculty advisor Jackie Clark for supporting the staff’s antics and tangents, and overseeing a great team of editors to paint a portrait of our university. Lastly, thank you to the readers supporting the life and love of Eugene Lang College’s literary journal. While the last few months have been hectic and unpredictable, we hope you will find comfort in these lovely little words.

# Masthead

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## Happiness is the Tartness of Grapes

Elizabeth Yerkes

Sour forever is the reach and Jesus' blood is white.

So if you bathe with bleach,

and wipe-ass with grapevine leaves -

is there a seat

alongside vintage table-plates,

selective breeding,

and moldy veins 'neath tucked-supple face?

"why do we feel a grammatical joke to be deep?

and that is what the depth of philosophy is." Only ever hints of sweet.

Writhing violent toughened twigs and silent twisting flaky limbs harvest smiles and puckered lips

for bitter fruits. the crucial sins.

The fox does scowl

The fox is ruined

Here along an edge of dew and Death, and Jouissance.

A call with no response

a tiny glass in code and braille,

pornographic pictures of how you fail.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*

Translated by Peter M. S. Hacker, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. § 111



Fossilized  
Alana Basset

## Remember Your Mother

Lauren Lee

*“Never wear lipstick on a date. Gloss is fine, but never lipstick.” I perched on a stool in a clean, tiled bathroom. Mama stood behind me; we made eye contact in the mirror. Her beauty supplies were spread across the counter – stacks of powder, tubes of rouge, big, soft brushes that smelled like the baby shampoo she had used to clean them. “Wash your face with warm water and rinse with cold. Always wear sunscreen. Work with the shape of your eye, not against it. Blush can change the structure of your face. Don’t overline your lips, it looks trashy. Careful with that cream stuff. It was expensive, but you can use it.”*

I remembered her advice today. I’ve pressed powders and creams into my eyelids and applied a slick of gloss over my lips. They feel sticky in the sunlight that glints through the car window. Sam is playing something from the speaker. It sounds like the stuff my father likes. Maybe Pink Floyd, or something in a similar vein, but it’s too loud to really tell. I stare out the window as the suburbs flash by, entertained by this similarity.

Sam shouts something over the music. I look at him, feeling dumb. “What?”

He reaches a long arm over and turns a knob on the dashboard. I can’t help but notice the size of his hands, their steadiness. The volume in the car drops dramatically. “I said, where do you want to go?”

“Up to you, I guess. I usually just pick a direction.”

He chuckles. “Spontaneous. I like that, Grace. How about south? My friends found this abandoned gas station that I’ve been wanting to check out. Pretty out there, too, with the hills and all.”

“Yeah, that sounds nice.” A heat creeps its way into my face as he speaks to me. I look out the window.

*“Don’t give too much of yourself on dates. In any way. Only go out with boys who hold the door for you. Stay in public spaces. Watch your drink. Not that you should be drinking, mind you. But don’t drink too much if you do.” Mama presented me with advice while braiding my hair, driving me to school, in the middle of a sitcom when a scene made her remember something pressing. “Don’t get into a car with someone unless you’ve known them for at least three months. That’s when the lies tend to run out, I’ve found. The way you dress shows how you value yourself. Use it to your advantage. Put perfume behind your ears. Not too much, you don’t want to be that type of girl.”*

Houses melt further and further into the trees as we merge onto the highway, the afternoon light still hot on my cheek. Hills rise around the car until we can’t see the horizon, only road winding around flint and the gentle local forest.

Sam seems at ease as he guides the car along the highway. He leans back, tilting his chin up to catch the sun’s rays. His hair forms a halo where the light strikes it. He glances over and grins. “Do you do this a lot? Just for fun?” His voice is teasing.

“I guess so. Growing up I did a lot. Less to do in town when you’re young. Strict parents.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

*“Careful how you act around boys. You know how they are. They never just want friendship. If a man invites you to his home after a certain hour, he only wants one thing, no matter the pretense. Watch your drink, too. Remember to leave the door open when you have company. Otherwise people will talk.”*

We talk about our lives, about our friends and studies. My voice sounds rushed, even to me. I wish that he would drive faster, though I’m not quite ready to arrive. Sam pulls off of the highway and turns abruptly onto a gravel road. I grip my seat, worried that the car will slip. Again, he catches my eye and smiles. “Don’t worry. We’re not far.”

The abandoned structure has a forlorn, angular beauty. Vines creep up along the once-bright pillars that support the station's shelter. Broken glass surrounds the hollow shell of the convenience store. I can see empty shelves inside, some standing, some collapsed. Sam parks the car under the awning. "What do you think?" He looks at me with a strange, mischievous intensity.

"I like it. Your friends were right." I'm not entirely aware of my words as he grins at me again.

Kissing Sam isn't like the kisses I've had before. It isn't like the first time, with the boy whose name I forgot, tucked away in a closet at a slumber party in grade eight. It doesn't feel like the time I kissed my friend Layla in high school, stoned, before we fell in love for a year. It wasn't quite as hard and fast as kissing Jason, or soft as Anya. But all of them float through my head in that car, as Sam pulls me into his lap, or maybe as I climb over. I can't really be sure.

*Remember your value. Don't spend yourself too quickly, or little pieces of your soul will fall off and you'll be stretched all thin, like an old sock. I know you don't like talking about this, love, but it's important. Listen to me.*

We stay quiet on the drive home. The sun has set, so I use the light of the car's tiny mirror to wipe the stray smudges of liner from around my eyes in anticipation of greeting my mother. Sam plays the music softly this time, humming along to himself, eyes fixed on the road. He drops me off in front of my house and leans in for a hug. "I had fun, Grace. You're pretty cool."

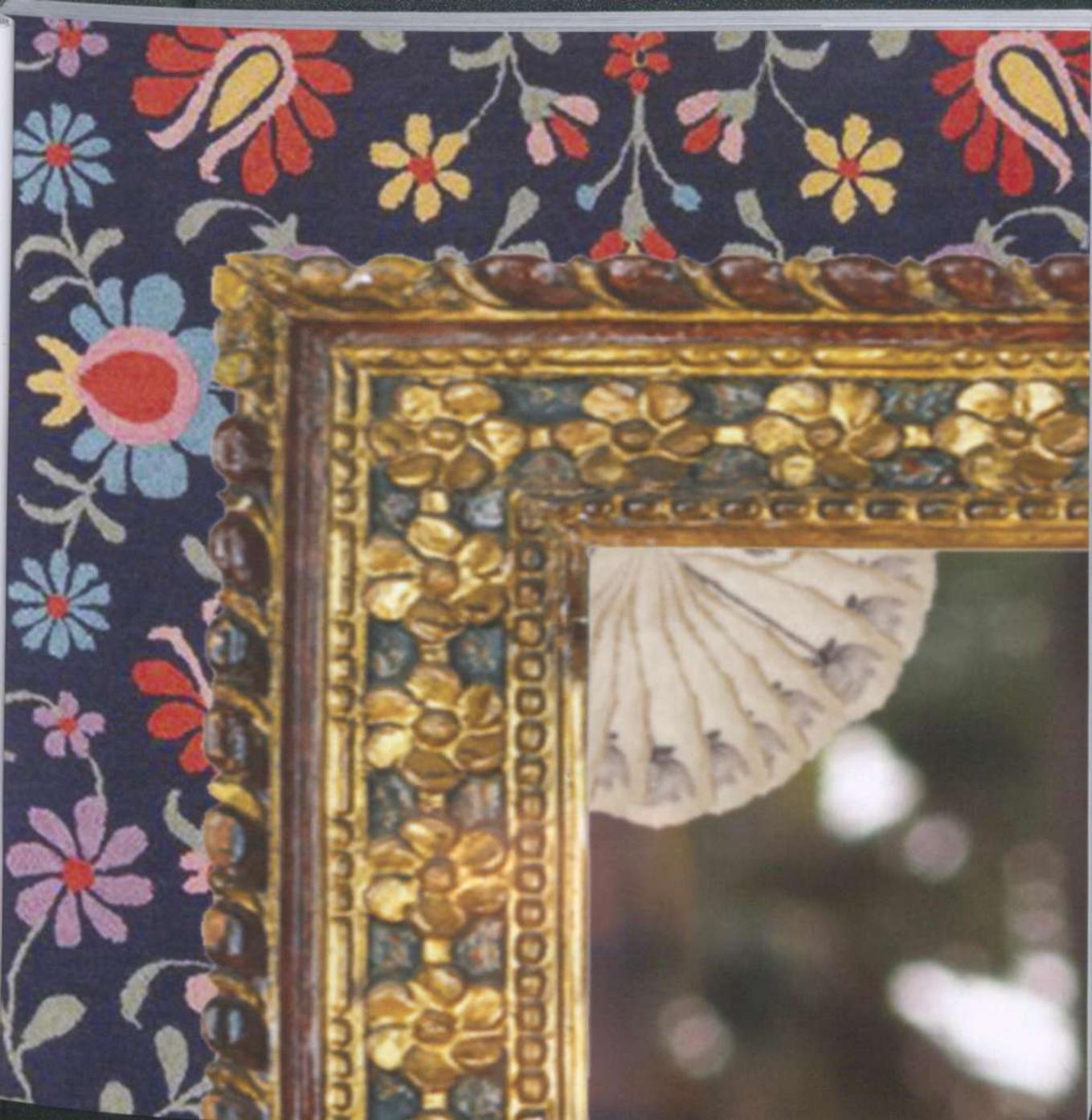
"Me, too." We pause for a moment. "See you."

"Yeah. See ya." He waits until I reach the front door, then speeds off, tail lights disappearing around a bend and into the darkness.



**Eden**  
Clarissa Rubin

Pilsbury Full-Score  
Charlie Kreidler



Hey, want to get plutonium (I'm joking, I actually want antimatter. Make sure to say I was joking right, or someone will come knocking on my door, maybe instead, let's get some uranium)

An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni by Matthew Nakahira Young

Accompanying Graphics by Sophia Cutino

## Introduction

Rosebud Ben-Oni is a Latina-Jewish American poet and writer in Queens. The *Chicago Review* has called her work “unabashedly feminist, queer, punk, Latin X, and Jewish ... would make Whitman both proud and blush.” She is the author of several collections of poetry, including *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* (March 2021), which won the Alice James Award and was a Finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. She has received fellowships and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, City Artists Corps, Café Royal Cultural Foundation, CantoMundo and Queens Council on the Arts. Her work appears in *POETRY*, *The American Poetry Review*, Academy of American Poets’ *Poem-a-Day*, *Poetry Society of America (PSA)*, *The Poetry Review (UK)*, *Poetry Wales*, *Tin House*, *Guernica*, *Electric Literature*, among others. Her poem "Poet Wrestling with Angels in the Dark" was commissioned by the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in NYC, and her poem "Dancing with Kiko on the Moon" was featured in Tracy K. Smith’s *The Slowdown*. In May 2022, Paramount commissioned her video essay "My Judaism is a Wild Unplace" for a campaign for Jewish Heritage Month, which appeared on Paramount Network, MTV Networks, The Smithsonian Channel, VH1 and many others. In January 2023, she performed at Carnegie Hall on International Holocaust Memorial Day, as part of "We Are Here: Songs From The Holocaust."

## Background

This interview was conducted over Zoom on November 21, 2022, and recorded using otter.ai. To start with, I went to KGB Bar during a book launch and Rosebud was a featured reader for that night.

Her story resonated with me and I admired her tenacity, which is why it was important for me to ask if I could feature her for his issue, to hopefully share that strength with our readers. Before the interview started, I was having a lot of problems with Zoom on my end, and so Rosebud was very kind and helped me by creating a Zoom meeting. We talked before the interview and I was able to introduce myself and we discussed about our day. After shutting off the recording we continued to chat, as we joked, we talked about professionalism, which led to Rosebud saying “Hey, want to get plutonium, I’m joking, I actually want antimatter.” I said that would be a great title, and she agreed, saying “to make sure to say I was joking right, or someone will come knocking on my door, maybe instead, let’s get some uranium.” Thank you again Rosebud, on behalf of *Eleven and a Half* Literary Magazine for helping me conduct this interview and being a lovely person.

hand

Jack Yearwood

had / we  
the time  
red light  
still ashine to  
shot filters aim  
thru cortices qua  
glass hollow vis  
-less enticed only

wi ndows leaking derision of hints

par ties and their fearing unknowns

say mine in subs titution say mine

would've just'v e been as snarkily

ackn owlaged just as the cabin

the copse pray tell would you've

reached into me if the light

brighter redder the window

beyond unglazed

unframed



Search and Rescue  
Nickie Cohen

## Notes on Memory

Stephen Leheren

Memory is a real bitch sometimes. Memory is remembering the time your dad took away your John Constantine comic after the bullying at the hands of your scoutmaster got so bad you first told people about wanting to hurt yourself so you could go home and get far away from the first elder figure to turn evil in your life. Memory sometimes feels like watching the super bowl at a yuppie bar a year after you tried to kill yourself for relatively real this time and surrendering to the sound of the city as alcohol and melancholic joy seep in as you fall into another separate memory of when you little and dreamed of jumping on a train and seeing the greater North American continent, but you're here instead in a bar finally fucking learning how a gambling party works and trying to not roll your eyes the hardest.

My memory isn't the best, which compounds the issue, names and dates can sometimes blur together and be totally blackholed, so the issue is only the maze of long-term memory which seems to fold like a child's toy going further and further down, to my first memory of smashing a plate and getting into a fight with my sister, and another 15 hundred things I've done that make me cringe.

Distance in memory begets regret which followed me leading up to my last suicide attempt. I remember the monologue I would recite maybe 5 times in the month leading up to the hospital

"Picture this, you're a young guy who wants to get the farthest from New Jersey he can, so you go to Texas, you work and learn so much and then the world shuts down. You only know school and music and without those things, you start remembering everything thing you failed at, that made you feel like an ogre, creepy weird, and just a general fuck up."

Memory became a maze that I took 55 wrong turns in and was supremely lost. Clawing out took five days with no fresh air and finding a new purpose not of my dreams of once singing in a hardcore band or majoring in art history but in trying to best to go forward every day. Which is going fine.

Somedays its still very hard and I feel guilty for treating myself as a hero of my story for being able to get out of bed in the morning but I still go forward and in going forward, getting trapped inward and going perennially backward has mostly stopped except for one really persistent memory of me in elementary school getting laughed at by two kids in a hallway because I needed extra help with a math test in the form of an aide who I, of course, can't remember but I can still remember the giggling.

Sometimes I wonder if I need to read up on selective memory to figure out if this is an insane amount of unluckiness or if it is because of some sadomasochistic self-fulfilling prophecy setting me up for perennial failure.

I don't think I have an answer to that question or that I ever did.



Paradise Amanda  
Vanya Suchan

## Ripple

Emily Toliver

*"Mortal as I am, I know that I am born for a day, but when I follow the serried multitude of the stars in their circular course, my feet no longer touch the earth; I ascend to Zeus himself to feast me on ambrosia, the food of the gods."* — Ptolemy

Dusk swallowed the indigo tinted skies prompting the life in Death Valley to rise— beholding. Looking out into the picturesque terra firma, Judas and Alec could see all the beauty that bloomed out of the world's terrain from their very backyards. The bulged mountain ranges accompanied by what they thought was better than Van Gogh's, 'Starry Night', was the only acceptable landscape for their weekly outdoor ritual. Crickets and other inhabited creatures whizzed and buzzed throughout the Saharan-like trails, making it apparent that they were awake — and alive. Terracotta sands brushed effortlessly across Earth's body with every breeze, swiveling about the air, making a soft sound that mimicked bristles sweeping along a stone cold floor. The day's heat had partially subsided due to the Sun's current rest which meant that all beings, except for the hot plasma, had come out to touch the planet's surface for a night's play.

"Nature's music" said Alec, taking a swig from his crystalline beer bottle.

Judas smacked his arm, killing the inquisitive fly instantly. "Let me tell you something, I get so tired of these damn gnats. I could kill a hundred of 'em every day and ten thousand'll come back to bite me in the ass."

Alec laughed, "Can you blame 'em? It's just their way of livin', just like ours. We ain't perfect."

"I know that, it just gets on my nerves. Swattin' em' all the time. I lived my whole life in the country and I ain't ever get used to em'. Ever."

The stars sparkled above them, painting constellations atop of the celestial canvas. Some looked like they were flickering or waving hello to everything and everyone that lived below it, just as any courteous guest would do when facing their host. Judas looked up to the sky, enamored by its bewitching lure. His pupils dilated, quick, like an expanding balloon, after making eye contact with the cosmos' version of heaven.

"But, by God, if there's one thing I can get used to it's that. That right there. I'll tell you right now I ain't ever seen anything so wonderful in my lifetime." He said, keeping his eyes glued to the sky.

Alec looked up and saw the scattered blotches of light and thought back to every moment, every memory, spent on land, and in his body and felt overwhelmed with gratitude. There was a gaping rawness that came from this nocturnal display. So unafraid it was almost mocking them. It moved him to see nature so willing to unveil itself to the naked eye. What he was looking at — what they were looking at was not something people came across every day. He wondered about the people in New York City, the city of "lights", who's skies were engulfed by artificial rays and the people in Hong Kong who's eyes only ever touched beams of light emitting diodes.

"Innit beautiful? All of it." Judas said, interrupting Alec's thoughts.

"I can't imagine anything else."

Silence overcame the two as they basked in all of the galaxy's wonder.

"Look! Look right there, you see that?" Judas pointed excitedly.

Alec looked to the direction of Judas's hand and saw a large star that was much brighter than the rest.

"It's got a reddish hue to it. Don't ya see?" Judas pointed again.

"I think that might be Mars. You know how sometimes you can see planets in the sky and what not?" Alec chimed in.

"Well, I'll be damned. We're looking right at Mars."

The orb glittered more and more.

"You know, I used to have this huge telescope, I mean gigantic, it was about this long"

Judas started, mirroring the length of his old telescope with his arms. "I got it for Christmas one year, was about eleven, twelve, and I'll never forget my brothers and I would sneak out of our rooms when our parents were asleep. We were some badass little kids, I mean bad, and we would bring that scope outside and we'd just take turns tryna find stars and what not. And, we had a hell of a time doin it, I mean a hell of a time. And, you know we were just kids so if we didn't know the name of a constellation or a star or we didnt know what the fuck we were lookin' at we made sumn' up. I remember this one time we thought we saw a shootin' star and I don't know maybe we did but we came up with this funny name, well we didn't really come up with it but we named it after our neighbor's dog, Colonel Wags, and we laughed about it for weeks. Every time we thought we saw sumn' shooting in the sky we'd say hello to 'Colonel Wags' and we'd just laugh."

Alec laughed and looked back up at the sky. "Mars kinda looks like Colonel Wags, don't it?"

"Yeah, I guess so" Judas responded, also laughing. "What about you? You ever had a telescope?"

"Naw, not a telescope. My parents were strict with stuff like necessities and what not so I don't think they ever thought we needed one. I do remember though, they used to take us campin' and we'd go swimmin', and hikin', and fishin', and we'd have a good ole time. But, my mother was so afraid of the dark, to be honest I don't think she ever liked camping, I think she only ever did it for us, but she wouldn't let us leave our tent past sundown cause she thought sumn' was gonna get us. Like the boogie man or sumn' but my sister and I, we used to go down to the creak when all the stars were out and skid rocks cause we thought it looked cooler at night. You know with the reflection and all. And, we'd watch the rock's make those lil' ripples in the water and it almost looked like there were ripples in the sky. Sometimes it looked so real I'd close my eyes, thinkin' sumn' was gonna fall on me, now that I think about it I spent most of that time tryna keep my eyes on the ripple and off the sky. Shit looked too real." Alec laughs. "But nothin' ever did end up hittin' me, so we kept skiddin' rocks until our arms got sore and then we'd just go back. Sore arms and all."

Judas smiled warmly and let out a light chuckle.

That's real nice. You see when I look up at the night sky, blue'n all covered with all them stars and nice stuff sittin' up in that glorious universe I forget about everything. I mean everything. The good, the bad, and the ugly." Judas thinks.

"Even the gnats." He finished.

Alec laughed, "Oh, yeah?"

"Yup. Those sons of bitches get on my nerves but it's worth it. Sittin' outside with a view like this and cold beer is all a man can ask for."

"It's crazy how much we don't see during the day. Think about it. All this, just hidin' in plain sight." Alec said, thinking out loud.

"Yeah, it's pretty crazy. But we get to see it every night so' I guess it don't really matter if it's hidin' or not." Judas added.

Alec bowed his head then looked up again, furrowing his eyebrows in confusion. Judas watched as his friend's face slowly contorted into a look of fear and hesitantly looked up too.

"Huh, it kinda looks like Mars is coming towards us, don't it? That's a real illusion right there. Not even David Blaine could pull off a stunt like that." Judas interjected .

Alec stood up slowly — almost paralyzed. He dragged his dark leather boots, now stained with beige dust, through the sand, not able to pick up his legs or bend his knees. His mouth fell, agape. Judas moved closer to the edge of his chair, not getting up or going over to Alec, afraid he might make his condition worse.

"What? What's the matter with you?" Judas asked, concerned.

"It is coming towards us." Alec whispered.

"Don't do that, this ain't one of your lil' ripples. It's just a shootin' star."

"It's not Mars. And, it's not a shootin' star."

"Then what is it then? Huh? What is it?" Judas asked, frustrated.

The red orb rushed closer and closer. It was falling rapidly and there was nothing, not even a wish or a flinch, that could stop it from striking Earth's surface. A loud whizzing sound loudly blew across the air and now both the faces of Judas and Alec were lit by the blazing asteroid that was almost reaching its final destination.

"By God." Judas said in astonishment.

Alec had his eyes focused on the bolting asteroid but shifted them back to the starry night sky. He watched as real stars and planets danced across the atmosphere and remembered his sister, the rocks, and the ripples. And then — it was all there. In the indigo tinted sky along California's Death Valley, his life, body, and memories all forming a constellation of its own. And, instead of closing his eyes in fear of what happens when a rock ripples out of the sky he kept his eyes on his arrangement of stars and faced it head on until there was nothing left at all. Not him —nor Judas —nor the gnats.

**One Winter Morning You Will Wake Up On Craigslist Missed Connections (You Will Not Care, For You Are No Self-Fulfilling Prophet)**

Alexandra Ebert Gold

*"One afternoon when he was there, I burned the living-room carpet down to the weft by placing a boiling coffee pot on top of it. I didn't care. Quite the contrary. I was happy every time I caught sight of the mark as I remembered that afternoon with him." — Annie Ernaux, Simple Passion*

Last night's oil-slick napkin falls from the rooftop three doors down  
like a Trumpeter swan

I'm on the sanguinary edge of calling you up  
describing shadowy stains and  
outlines of unstretched taffeta wings  
all perceived banality and  
vanilla shortbread Scrub-Daddies  
soaking in the clogged drain of dithering remembrance  
phone in hand I'm bare-assed on the edge of the River Lethe  
reconciling the familiar arch of tomorrow's sore knees.

## *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Two*

**Matthew Nakahira Young:** My first question was: What is your astrological sign?

**Rosebud Ben-Oni:** Oh, that is so interesting, because I really don't know much about astrology but I was born on Valentine's Day. So I believe that makes me an Aquarius.

**MY:** My next question was: What were your dreams as a kid?

**RBO:** I had many, many dreams. I knew I wanted to be a writer from a very young age. When I was very young, I always felt some sort of strange air when I would go into shul. There was always this chill in the synagogue. What I think might be described as elation. I remember trying to unravel this mystery when I talked to my Hebrew school teacher about it. I'll just never forget the moment when she's said, "let me show you something in [the] Torah." Every Hebrew letter has a number. *Aleph* is one [the first letter] and *Bet*, the second letter, is two. One plus two equals three. That's the word for Father, *Av*: *Aleph* and *Bet* together. Now the word for Mother is *Em*: *Aleph* and *Mem Soft* together. So if *Aleph*, is one, and then *Mem* is forty, then that equals forty-one. The word for child is *Yeled*. The first letter *Yod* is ten, the second *Lamed* is thirty and the third, *Dalet*, is four. So when you add Father plus Mother, which is forty-four, you get child, which is also forty-four. I remember sitting there before I understood much of anything and I felt what I now call "poet verse" or rather, the "multi-horse verse," beating into my ears. My teacher said, "this is not just writing. This is the power of Judaism and while others might see you different, you are different." At the time, I thought she meant I was different because my mother is Mexican and was a convert; she'd converted from Catholicism to Judaism. But my teacher said that wasn't it what meant, but rather I was different because "you have this very deep inside you. You're going to write about this," and it really freaked me out. I went home and discussed it with my father and he says, "Oh, yeah, there's all sorts of strange math in the Torah." And I said, "but ... whoever was creating the language, were they just doing math at the same time?"

He said, no, and I said, "well, how do you know?" he goes, "I don't know." And then he told me, "It's okay to ask question, to doubt. That is in our faith. You can ask questions and doubt all you want." I said, what about doubting Hashem? And he says, "that is for you to decide how you doubt Hashem and why." But I did. So that was a turning point in my little mind... I was very unhappy and I was happiest, when I was in the synagogue, in sort of solitude, and I felt this strange elation, heard this strange "music," during times of prayer. I was curious and doubtful and suspicious and skeptical. And I wanted to know where this all came from.

**MY:** It's interesting to see just how far back poetry but also language is so integral to that vision. I wanted to ask: What did you get your degree in New York University?

**RBO:** I got my degree in literature. I wanted so badly to start out in physics, but there was a culture at the time, which was very "bro-ish," for lack of better words. I was very young. I was not used to the kind of money that some students had. I was a scholarship kid and the whole culture just seemed kind of elitist, but not everyone was like that. I made good friends.





Kayla  
Sophia Cutino

A sight I know all too well. I am unable to look away from it, no matter how many times I see and try to get used to it, no matter how many times I blast music in my ears and scurry past it. Still, I can't peel my eyes away from it. Couple of sad candles arranged around the photograph of a woman -often young and beautiful- the photograph always a particularly happy or lively one, as if to say 'Look here! She might be dead now, but She lived, you know. She lived and She was here and She was loved and She was a mom and She was a daughter and She was this and She was that.' It's always who She was to someone. Who She was to someone, and never who She was.

It's almost as if the photograph itself doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't matter who the woman in the picture is, as long as there is a woman to keep the candles burning for. The candles that keep burning so we can remember her. So that we don't forget She's dead. She's not just 'dead.' No, that makes it sound like She died peacefully in her bed out of natural causes. Do you think She was granted that kindness? Was Mahsa? She was killed, She didn't just die. She was murdered. Call it what it is.

If you want to remember her so badly, call it what it is instead of keeping the candles lit for the next woman to take her place. The candles burn and burn, so that whoever that woman in the picture is this next time, She can inspire change. So She can be the last one. But She never is, is She? Are you naive enough to believe there will be a last one, or is it just easier that way? To shield your eyes, mind, heart from the truth? To avoid eye contact with the photograph of the young and beautiful dead woman XYZ -who now has to stay young and beautiful forever- so her deadness doesn't rub off on you.

But see, I can't do that. No matter how hard I try. I can't look away, because I know that any day now, that could be me in the photograph. It could be me, or my neighbor that I grew up with, or my friend from second grade, or my teacher that taught me how to read, or my mother that raised me for all 19 years of my life, praying every day that I don't end up with my photograph in the center this time.

They're all from that country far far away that any other day you dare not speak its name so its violent ways and third worldness doesn't rub off on your perfect Land of the Free. That country that any other day you don't blink an eye when you shed the blood of their people, their women you pretend to care so much about. The same women you have no problem silencing when you feel the western media that you control seems to be using them to push their own anti-Islam agenda. The religion that you suddenly seem to care about but any other day you claim it kills its women.

You and I, we're not the same. You might be able to turn your head, avert your gaze and look the other way, but I can't look away. I can't scratch off the faces of the hundreds of dead women etched into my memory.

So for once, try looking her in the eyes. For once, let it be the hijabs that burn, not the candles.



Hennessey 3  
Sophia Cutino

### *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Three*

**MY:** Did you go straight to your masters after NYU?

**RBO:** Yes. And I highly recommend only doing that if you have the stomach for it. I got a full ride to [the University of] Michigan. I got a very generous fellowship. But I was not happy with the amount of sexism and racism that I faced. And then when I went to Hebrew U[iversity], I was like, oh, this is not for me. Home is a strange concept for me, but after many years, I've found that I'm truly happiest here in NYC, particularly in Queens, when I'm coming home on the 7-train. And part of that is due to the communities here in Queens, which I feel very rooted in, for once in my life. I didn't have a very happy childhood. It was very difficult being mixed, coming from two worlds, and sometimes being told by people outside my family that I don't belong completely to either. Poetry is a way to forge my own path, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Mixed background aside, I do believe my Hebrew school teacher is right: it's my ideas and creative processes, particular my work as a poet, that make me different. To be perfectly candid,

*I don't think I'd still be here without poetry, because I think poetry is the physics of the literary world.*

They say without chemistry there would be no biology, but without physics, there would be no chemistry: physics holds this whole weird mess together all the while pushing its boundaries. So, I don't think there would be any kind of writing without poetry, as poetry is where you can truly rearrange the framework, push boundaries, create new worlds altogether. Someone will say, "oh, you can't do that in a poem," and then someone will go and do that exact thing that can't be done. It's endless possibility. And that for me is like wrestling with all these things that I doubt or can't rectify. I'm always chasing the riddle and just as I get closer, the riddle changes, and I along with it. It's just, it's unending, right?

**MY:** You're still deeply in love with physics. And so: What is the latest thing in physics that you've been fascinated in?

**RBO:** The ways in which Sabine Hossenfelder has been under attack. She's questioning if we bending the math, or if we are chasing after elementary particles that we say aren't there; there's an argument right now that if you twist the math enough, you'll get the answer you want, but that doesn't make the answer true. I'm paraphrasing, but what I love about Sabine and why I think she is necessary is that when you look at the standard model, it doesn't account for things that it should account for. Well, why is that? And when you look at the quantum world, there was an interpretation of quantum mechanics that solved a lot of the problems and that's Hugh Everett III, who he is considered the parent of the Many-Worlds Interpretation or the multiverse, as popular culture refers to it. I wish more people knew his name. I always say, "Do you know who came up with the math?" Usually people are like no and I say Hugh Everett! He was ahead of his time, and then he died in the 1982 at the age of 51. They say of alcoholism, but I always say he died of a broken heart, because of the physics world at the time shut him down. Now his work is popular [and] nobody knows his name. Before he died, he said that he wanted his ashes [to just be] thrown away in the trash. And his family for a long time didn't honor that, they held on to them, but then they finally honored those wishes. And it just tears me up inside because I know somewhere in the many-worlds interpretations and Everett Quantum Mechanics that in one of those worlds, Hugh Everett did succeed, hopefully in more than one and that we got to meet and we're prankering at academic conferences. And he was a huge prankster, like I am, we're both impish but I don't get to live that world. I don't get to live that reality. I'll never know him, in this world. And so I've been writing one where we do meet and we do take on the Arrow of Time, right? And we take on like quantum gravity, right. I have a lot of feelings.





gemini

Maxine Soriano Trujillo

## Full Body Prolapse (Excerpt)

Analise Roth

Jane Deaux dangled her feet off the Seal Beach Pier. Below her the green-black sea churned to a sinister rhythm—at any moment the seventy-dollar ruby red stilettos she was wearing could slip off her feet and fall into the cold California depths. Jane imagined falling into the sea's icy grasp with her shoes, clad in that tight, too short, red dress she was wearing. Slipping beneath into the dark abyss never to return. She pulled her feet onto the dock, and wrapped her arms around her legs. She should have worn something less revealing. She felt over exposed. On nights like these, the aesthetics of femininity made her feel less a woman, like she had forced the illusion too far.

Who was Jane Deaux? Nobody really-- you wouldn't be able to pick her out of a crowd. She had long brown hair and pale, white skin. She was neither ugly nor beautiful (though at times she thought she was one or the other). In fact the only thing of note about Jane Deaux was that strange and terrible profession in which she worked. Many people in Jane Deaux's life called her transgender to her face. Behind her back, she assumed, they called her a 'tranny' or a 'she-male,' but to Jane she was always a transexual; a term not chosen for its accuracy or political expediency, but for the way her tongue clicked when the hard 'X' crossed her lips and the strange looks the use of such an archaic terms got from her peers.

"Ms. Deaux?"

She was back in reality. Jane recoiled from the shadow of the man who stood behind her unseen, burying her face in her thighs, "You aren't the person I came here to see."

"You can run away from me Ms. Deaux, but you cannot escape your duty."

"My duty to be your plaything? My duty to humiliate myself for your little art project?" Jane hissed, "The only thing I've been to you *mister* La Roux is a pallet of paint."

Jane averted her eyes from La Roux as she felt his body sit down next to her. She couldn't force herself to look at him. The dark and gentle hands of the pulsing sea seemed to call to her again. Was this why so many wished to live near the ocean? So that they too could be consumed by it?

"You made the news Ms. Deaux. I thought I'd show you what people are saying about the exhibit," La Roux placed his cell phone on the rough wood of the pier and the local news' blaring horn theme crackled through the phone's poor speaker.

"Lolita, do you remember a story we ran a few months back about the discovery of the Elagabalus Gland, in the amygdala of Transgenders?" a male anchor droned in that faux happy news speak.

"Why yes I do, Jim. If I'm remembering correctly, in addition to causing gender dysphoria this new gland could allow a transgender to be turned fully inside out."

"That's right Lolita. Critically acclaimed and world renowned artist Anton La Roux has found one such transgender who was willing to be turned inside out. Jeremy is in Santa Ana with the story."

Jane pulled her face away from her thighs and looked at the cool light of the cell phone. She saw herself, though she looked very different than she did at the moment, hanging from the ceiling of the white-walled gallery by her small intestine; she was like a great pulsating Christmas ornament of organs, muscle mixed with bloody flesh and bone. In front of her inverted body in the video stood another news anchor-- Jeremy apparently.

"Behind me is legendary artist Anton La Roux's newest masterpiece, entitled 'Full Body Prolapse' which is taking the California art world by storm. And I can only speak for myself Jim, but this exhibit is mind blowing."

"That's fantastic Jeremy," Jim cut in from the studio, "and how are the gallery goers enjoying it?"

"Well, let's see Jim," Jeremy said walking towards a teary-eyed woman in the gallery, the camera at last breaking away from pulsating mass that was Jane's prolapsed body, "Excuse me miss, can you tell the folks at home what you think of this incredible art project?"

The woman wiped a tear from her eye, "... for the first time in my life I understand... how hard it is to be a tranny," she sobbed, "To Anton La Roux, and whoever this she-male is ... thank you so much for your bravery."

"Well folks, you heard it here first—" Jim the anchorman was cut off by La Roux pausing the video.

La Roux cupped Jane's face in his greasy, weathered hand and forced her to look at his face. He had bright blue eyes, which shone like brilliant sapphires from his skull which was wrapped tight in pale white skin. He looked younger than he was, but 'younger than he was' was still elderly. Jane was revolted by La Roux's visage because, despite everything that he was, he had the face of an ordinary man. He should have been deformed, a creature of teeth and eyes, not fully human, but not fully beast either. There's no way someone like Anton La Roux could be an ordinary man, for none of his attributes, good and bad, felt, to Jane, at all human.

"Look at the effect we're having on people, Jane," La Roux said at last, "You're the only one who could do this, no other trans person could have the same effect."

"All I heard was people talking about how great you are, Anton."

La Roux slipped his thumb into Jane's mouth as he continued to caress her face, Jane fought the urge to bite it off, to attack him and drag him to the ocean's inviting hands with her.

"You chose to be anonymous Ms. Deaux. I can change that if you want."

Jane pushed his finger out of her mouth, "I'll keep doing this for now, Mr. La Roux—I need the money ... I was never really going to leave."

"I'm glad we understand each other," he said, standing up from the edge of the pier, "I'll drive you home."

"But ... my date."

La Roux smirked, "Jane, honey, there never was a date."



*The Dead Bird* was about the worst bar that could be imagined. Not even accessible from the major thoroughfares of Santa Ana, California, it was hidden in that strange gap between the backs of buildings that sometimes occur in cities; a small wooden box with a triangular roof in a canyon of beige stucco apartment buildings and liquor stores. The only entrance was through a maze of wet concrete paths covered in litter and used needles.

Above it all the Kavalier Cowboy stood, a silhouette against the starless sky. Perched on the flat stucco-covered roof of an apartment building, a long black coat billowed behind him like a banner in the hot wind. His face was shaded by a black wide brimmed hat, and his eyes were hidden behind a domino mask; he wore pale gloves and black denim pants. His chest was bare, adorned with two crescent shaped scars, one under each pectoral ... He too called himself a transexual—but he was of a different sort than Jane Deaux.

At the entrance of the bar was a white outline in chalk. Three days ago a transgender prostitute named Sophia was choked to death in that bar. Her corpse was left in that alley for two days before anyone bothered to report it. Of course, the police weren't going to investigate it. Why would they? The Kavalier Cowboy wasn't much of a detective himself. It could have been any one of the degenerates in that bar, it didn't matter which one it was. Kavalier didn't care about getting that poor woman justice, though it would be nice if someone did. The Kavalier Cowboy wanted blood for blood, plain and simple.

*Swish.* Kavalier jumped down from his perch onto the bar's roof and rolled down its sloped tiles, finding a soft landing in the pile of trash bags at the building's side. Taking no time to reorient himself he slunk around around the corner to stand in front of the bar's rickety door.

*Crash.* The door collapsed under the weight of Kavalier's steel toed boot. In an instant all eyes in the building (though there were few of them) were on him. Kavalier scanned the room until he found his prey.

"Ronald J. Rouge," Kavalier said walking up to the booth where his prey, a brawny but pale man, sat, "They say you run the brothel around here. Hear you have a lot of trans employees. Is that true Ronnie? If that's true, it's a mighty big coincidence you're hanging out at the site of a hate crime not a whole week later."

"I don't like what you're implying," Ronnie stood up and pressed his frame against Kavalier's. He was at least a foot taller and a hundred pounds bigger than Kavalier, "I won't take anything from a little faggot like you!"

"Me? A faggot?" Kavalier said, throwing up his hands in faux indignation, "You don't know the half of it," a tiny pistol popped out of Kavalier's sleeve into the palm of right hand.

The room was dead silent for an eternal second.

*Blam.* Another pistol was in Kavalier's other hand and the bartender grasped at a bleeding arm, with a shotgun having fallen onto the bar.

"Nice try, barkeep," Kavalier said, pressing the first gun into Ronnie's neck.

*Blam.*

A few minutes later Kavalier dusted off his hands, his work finished. He was back out in the alley; Ronnie's corpse had been arranged on top of the chalk outline. Ronnie's wallet as well as the keys to his apartment were, of course, in Kavalier's coat. All that was left was the finishing touch. The cops would be here any second so he needed to be quick. Kavalier conjured a red piece of chalk from his coat pocket and scrawled on the concrete, *The Kavalier Cowboy Strikes Again.*



*Click.* The golden key to Ronnie's apartment twisted in the door. The apartment was the sort that got built when gentrification began, seemingly stitched together from various rectangular pieces, each a different shade of beige stucco. All the accents and handrails around the place were stainless steel. Its 'modern' look not only clashed with the wizened buildings around it, but it was far more pedestrian. The inside of the apartment was far too clean for this city. Glass tables and desks accented the white chairs and the smooth white walls.

Combing through all of Ronnie's things took a long time. By the time Kavalier found what he was looking for as the orange rays of dawn pierced through the apartment's windows like so many spears. What was once clean and organized was now a mess of papers, opened boxes, suitcases and full drawers pulled wholesale from their cabinets.

It was underneath a false bottom in one of his dresser drawers. A black book. This one was even in fact black. A list of names creeps like Ronnie could call upon if they ever needed a deal: clients, business partners, rivals, you name it. Ronnie couldn't use it now, so Kavalier might as well have it.

Kavalier scanned the names, *H. Humbert*, *Bernardo Yorba*, *Alan Smithee* and *Anton La Roux* were among the many names. *Anton La Roux*, he thought adjusting his mask, *Isn't he that guy who's turning transsexuals inside out?* The local news would not shut up about that disgusting 'art' exhibit.

The Kavalier Cowboy smiled. He had a busy day in front of him.



Jane wasn't allowed to park in front of the gallery. The three parking spaces directly in front of the Santa Ana gallery were reserved for (in order of importance) *La Roux*, his manager *Mary McMichael* and the landlord, who despite having her car constantly parked in front of the building, Jane had never met. So Jane was forced to take her beat up 2004 Toyota Camry into the confusing maze that is Santa Ana public parking.

People said Santa Ana was a small city for coastal standards, but by small what they really meant was short; the beige flat roofed stucco buildings were rarely taller than two stories. Set into narrow rows along streets which were only one or two lanes wide, they gave the impression of many cardboard boxes pushed together outside a house as a family is set to move.

What people did *not* mean when they said that Santa Ana was a small city was that it was not dense. The parking places were so tight that the cars seemed to overlap--interlocking together in such a way that reminded Jane of pulling out a particularly precious block in Jenga. Each corner, it seemed, had at least two food carts and walking down the sidewalk was an exercise in flexibility, dodging through, under and beside dozens of people. Jane, now having left her car behind, found her way through these crowds (though it was early in the morning).

When she eventually reached the gallery by foot, she went through the open door. She hoped that after the previous night's fiasco *La Roux* would understand how important she was to his little project.

The gallery was merely two white rooms; the first was a street facing room which held a few of La Roux's paintings, He was part of a movement he called 'Neo-Post-Surrealism' though how that differed from regular surrealism eluded Jane. Subjects included; a nude woman peeling off her skin to reveal a cobalt-blue sky, a man being violated by a giant cockroach and other paintings of that nature. Jane thought they were good, if pedestrian, for the genre.

La Roux's manager, Mary, stood by one of these paintings tapping her feet, "You're only 30 minutes early."

Jane sighed as she turned the corner. It was going to be one of those days. The second room was the main attraction, though it was now empty except for La Roux who stood looking annoyed.

"What are you waiting for?!" La Roux snapped, "Get undressed and hook yourself up so we can open! We're on a schedule." He was always so demanding in the mornings.

This was Jane's least favorite part of the job. Neither La Roux or his manager seemed to have any respect for her privacy. She threw her t-shirt on the ground and spent a moment doing the same to her jeans. Within a few seconds she was fumbling with her bra.

La Roux threw up his hands in frustration, "Sometime this week," he walked up and forced down her panties as she finally unlatched her bra.

Then of course, were the tongs (they had a technical name, but La Roux had always called them tongs)-- two pairs of metal rods attached to long wires, one inserted up the anus, the other through the mouth. These were the machines that would actually do the work of turning her inside out. La Roux always at least gave her the courtesy of letting her put those in herself. They were extremely cold and longer than Jane felt comfortable with. Once they were inserted she breathed in and out for a moment. Jane always imagined during this part of the process that she must look like the most fucked up rotisserie chicken in history. Not as fucked up as she was about to look, she supposed. La Roux stepped up to a small grey control box on the opposite side of the room.

"Are you ready, Ms. Deaux?"

She was never ready, but she raised her hand in a thumbs up gesture anyway.

He flipped the white switch on the control box and Jane's personal hell began. Each pair of rods vibrated with a positive magnetic charge humming with a deafening industrial buzzing noise, and began pushing in opposite directions making her throat and intestines wider and wider until eventually she would flip. The Elagabalus Gland stopped Jane from dying during this process, but it didn't stop the pain. She felt like she was being ripped in two as her vision whited out. She breathed heavy raspy breaths as the tunnel inside her opened like the eye of a hurricane, not that she could hear it, her pain was so great the buzzing of the tongs, her screams of pain and her breathing all seemed so distant. Eventually she blacked out from the pain. As she did every day.

When she awoke her eyes were in that dark cavern of her body's interior. In the darkness she could sometimes make out the vague outlines of her hands, or feet hanging up and down like stalactites and stalagmites in this dry pulsating womb. The only thing she could hear was the occasional muffled conversation from the outside by particularly loud guests. Of course, she could never make out the words.

Despite this she still felt them. The hundreds of leering eyes who came to see her, and the whispered voices, who in hushed tones thanked God they weren't her. She felt. Every. One.

She would stay like this for seven hours and then she would be done. She could go back home and recover for the next day.



During operating hours, Anton's La Roux's Santa Ana gallery stench'd of chlorine or bleach. In the estimation of the Kavalier Cowboy, the cleaning chemicals were there more to reassure the liberal public that everything about this was okay than it was to keep the white room pristine. The fumes made Kavalier's eyes water as he jostled through the crowd. The gallery was packed to bursting; there was never more than half an inch between one individual's flesh and another's. If that.

The only free spot of ground was at the room's center, a five foot by five foot square separated from the masses by a black belt barrier held up on plastic poles. And in its center hung that poor prolapsed trans person. Though it was difficult, even for Kavalier, to view that pulsating mass of organs and bone as human.

The crowd swirled around this central point like a whirlpool of pink and brown flesh mixed in with graphic tees. There were all sorts of people there: urban Santa Ana hipsters, snooty newspaper intellectuals and suburban mothers dragging along wide eyed children and husbands who could care less about art. If art is what this was. If 'art enthusiasts' could describe who these people were. The spectacle seemed to Kavalier to be equal parts performance art, new age religious ceremony and circus freakshow. And Kavalier wasn't sure which part he detested more. Kavalier couldn't excuse himself from his hatred either. He was here-- and not as the six shooting avenger he was in the night-- not as he real self. Now he hid in his secret identity, ██████████, mild mannered accountant, and gun enthusiast. When he was like this he felt so helpless-- he wasn't resisting anything. He was just another drop of flesh in this sea of skin.

"Whattzat?" a toddler's voice sounded from behind him. Kavalier glanced over his shoulder. Behind him a blonde woman carried a boy who couldn't have been older than four on her shoulders.

"That a transgender!" the mother's perky voice responded, "It's very brave, whoever it is, don't you think?"

"Yeah! I wanna be transgender when I grow up."

"No you don't dear."

For five hours Kavalier drifted with the crowd who gossiped in hush tones about the spectacle they were seeing. Eventually the sun set and the crowd of khaki-short wearing onlookers trickled out to only a mere half dozen onlookers. And there he saw who he was looking for: Anton La Roux, talking to a woman in a power suit—his assistant maybe? He was unremarkable for a man his age, wrinkled and blotchy skin with wispy white hair. The only thing that revealed his nature were his eyes, a piercing bright blue that shined like fire from the pits of his eye sockets. Maybe it was a trick of the light.

"Excuse me, Mr. La Roux?" without his mask Kavalier's voice was feeble and weak. He hated it.

"Yes, child?" La Roux responded.

"I love this exhibit, but I have one question. How were you able to find someone who would do this for you?"

"Ahh, my child, to give that would be to give away my ... her secret." Her—so it was a trans woman, "She's very protective of her identity."

"Well good luck on your project, Mr. La Roux."



## MURDER ON THE METRO NORTH

Kate Baker

Anyway, this is to say there's a birth mark on my right thigh you probably don't remember

My first love might, but only to spite me

You refuse to speak of the places that bore you—

The flesh you used to kiss and touch and marvel at

And I keep wondering what would happen if my limbs washed up on a riverbank

An arm, a leg, a birth marked thigh

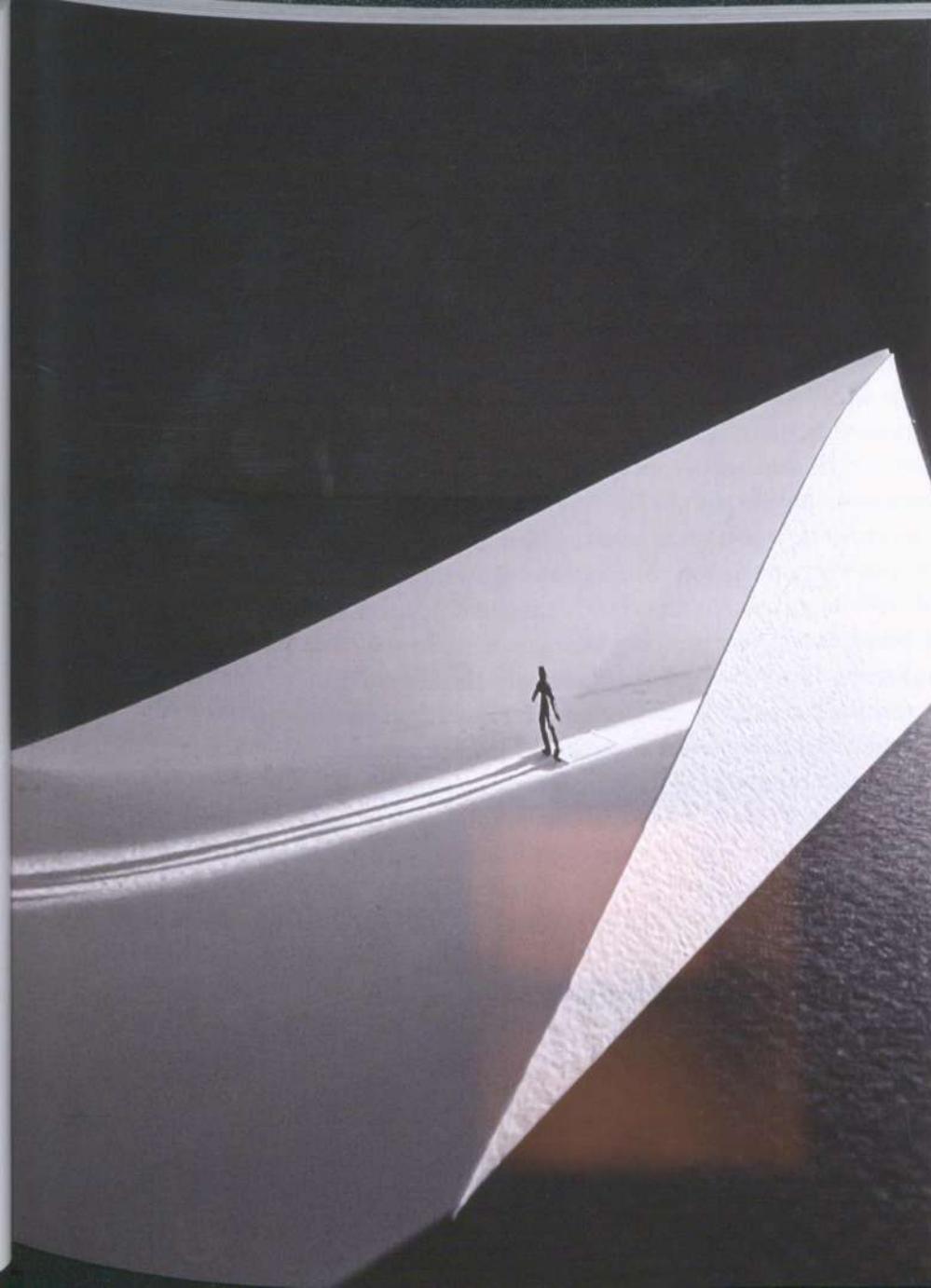
Would you recognize what you used to satisfy a hunger?

Would you testify

"No, I didn't kill her."

Would you promise,

"She was parts, long before we met."



Spatial Explorations  
Aisha Zhanseit

## Between the Bristle

### Tara Bachmann

When I was a toddler, my parents had to pry my mouth open to get me to brush my teeth. "You don't want them yellow, do you?" they'd say. I liked the color yellow. I would cry. My father found it unusual. It was.

In ancient civilizations, people didn't use toothbrushes as we know them today. Those were invented in 1938, which is both ancient and still hardly any time ago. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, people used rags with salt and soot rolled into them. And while cavemen dentists were notoriously poor record keepers, we know that centuries-ago humans were using the bone debris of the dead to pick the stuff from between their teeth. These bone sticks were even placed next to their owners in their tombs.

So surely, not wanting to brush my teeth as a child wasn't so much of a big deal.

After all, it felt like my parents were filing down what were misplaced ivory pebbles in my mouth. A toothbrush is, or was, inadvertently invasive. It must have been the roughness of nylon fibers at that age scraping what underdeveloped pebbles I had. They just barely scraped the wrongdoings from a baby's tongue, if any at all. The toothbrush was always scrubbing away the words I'd vomited earlier that day, kisses I'd given, the applesauce my stomach was rejecting, and the crayons I'd mistaken for gummy worms. Maybe that was the reason I'd scream and cry at the sink as a child. There is something that brush was working away at that seemed too close to me, too much of me, too much memory of me just gone under the veil of a vile-tasting watermelon gel (I would have been too young to handle spearmint back then).

I mean, the toothbrush is arguably the most personal thing you have in your life. Once you have a brush, I'd hope you don't share it. It's been in your mouth before anyone else has and tasted your leftovers. The toothbrush knows where you've been and what you've been doing. Imagine the ways you could be incriminated socially if we all had little DNA brush-testing kits on us.

The toothbrush must be one of those wondrous mysteries of life. Have you ever stopped to bask in its curiosity and question its concept? I even used to wonder what type of toothbrush Dracula used, if there was any point in brushing his lonesome fangs or if there were any point in brushing my own.

Maybe, the toothbrush isn't just the most personal thing, but the loneliest thing.

It sits on the sink and waits for you to come back, collecting the bacteria floating throughout the bathroom. It leans on its side or lays on its belly and wonders what it is that you'll bring back, craving a drink from the faucet and sitting in an invisible dew formed on your sinkside. Or perhaps, the toothbrush is quite literally you - a sponge that is curious to a sundry of chemicals. It can be a soft orange or a screaming hot pink with charcoal black bristles or have a wooden finish like those fancy ones. It can have black or white or multicolor bristles. It can vibrate, a sweet shaking dance for all the hard-to-reach corners, penetrating the bits of slop you unconsciously saved for a snack later and when your tongue is restless in your mouth. As if its job weren't already too much to ask of it, you ask for more.

For this, we've given the toothbrush so many accessories to dress itself in—a spearmint-fresh Colgate, a flaming antiseptic of mouthwash. Crest for the classless, and teeth-whitening strips when you want to shake your finger at your brush as if it hasn't made the honor roll. You pick a style. You pick the brush—you destroy it. You throw it in the garbage and go to Walgreens and fall into the ballpit again. What color? What kind?

*O' teeth, how I love thee.*

Speaking of which, it wouldn't be fair to talk about brushing teeth without briefly circling back to its best friend—toothpaste. The two make a riveting symphony. The toothbrush wouldn't dare to dance around the mouth naked, it'd often wear a striped dress or a pretty teal gel skirt. They accompany each other in the pursuit of health and cosmetology—get rid of stinking breath while whitening the pearls.

The pearls were always supposed to shinemy parents always reminded me of that. The appearance of my teeth became a threat the more I resisted. If I went to school with rotting teeth, the teachers would tell the nurses, then the nurses would tell the principal.

The principal would then call an evil army of people in an attempt to take me away from my parents.

A nurse had even come to my kindergarten classroom one day to talk about brushing our teeth and gums, (which by the way, you are supposed to make bleed). Whether that was at the request of my parents or not I will never know. She told us to brush for 3 minutes and that it helped to find a song of that length to distract us (It's too bad I didn't know Va Va Voom by Nicki Minaj back then) and to not swallow the paste. Then the nurse asked me to take a brush home. I chose the green one because it was my mother's favorite color. I set out then to make my teeth the goddamn healthiest teeth my parents had ever seen.

Part of this process would include occasional trips to my dentist, Dr. Vera, a tall fellow from eastern Europe who'd often ask me complicated questions while his latex-coated fingers swirled around my mouth, looking for something inside there that I couldn't find myself. He'd reach in my mouth probing and prodding with dental tools trying to pull answers from my enclosures that I did not have.

I'd only be responding with half syllables and cannonballs of fluoride spit, hanging onto my last thoughts and inklings of patience in a room small and rectangular, blindingly bright with fluorescent lights and sterile-white walls with pro-tooth stickers plastered on them. Dr. Vera would tell me how tall I've become, how the importance of my teeth and gum brushing would grow with every inch I gained, and how braces would only make this harder; creating a maze that my brush would have to navigate through if I wanted to be a pretty girl with nice teeth who definitely got to live with her parents.

Like so many unfortunates, I had to wear braces from the age of 11 to 13, enduring the permanent gashes and scars tucked under my slimy red gums that the tongue traces all day long as a clandestine reminder. Dr. Vera and his assistant would take turns using UV lights to glue my misery in place, tightening the wires every so often, making me wince in pain - a pain that never leaves, a pain that I could remember if I thought long and hard enough to recall it. The wires would reopen my gashes, spilling blood orange onto my teeth, and making all of my favorite snacks taste like nickels and dimes. All I would leave the office with was tears, a new soft brush, exposed nerve endings pumped with Tylenol, and what little pride remained in the pocket of my molars.

The bristles on my new brush massaged these wounds, caressed my sore tusks, picked the pieces of broccoli locked in my little titanium prison. No matter the amount of toothpaste I'd slather onto my sensitive fangs, there would be no complete clean achieved—only microcosms of salts, desserts, and dinners tucked inside. I dealt with the burden for 3 years until graduating to a retainer. There was no greater relief than being set free, unlocked, and feeling that toothbrush hit my bare teeth. It's a relief I take for granted as I watch my teeth slowly shift out of order again (wear your retainer!). That was just another problem about my mouth that my brush could not fix, but getting that toothbrush at the end of a traumatizing dentist visit somehow always made it worth it. The goodie bag was a prize for survival, a gift—toothbrushes always made great gifts. If I was lucky, I'd get one with a design on it. I'd bring home a new friend with fresh bristles that scrubbed harder than the last, outdoing its long lineage of those who came before her.

Truthfully, I'd been a storm of a girl, and what a storm my mouth had been; a screamer, a laugher, grinner, spitter, a singer. I, a mass of highly sensitive nerves tucked in the ectodermal organ, maintained the importance of my canines, and still do (don't worry). It was a miracle that I had no cavities, considering the toothbrush had been my enemy until the age of 6. I had declared an all-out war. It burns!

All the years a polypropylene stick with little rubber grips on it, as fun and colorfully deceiving as it looked, nudged me into a new world of oral pristine that was not just necessary, but benefitted the bank. If anything, I owe that toothbrush a few bucks from over the years. If I hadn't started brushing the way I did, the fairy probably would have either skipped my house or left a pack of sugar-free gum under my pillow.

It would take more than sugar-free gum to satisfy two decades worth of terrible tastes that have lived in my mouth. I've had my own history of kisses shared with boys who were more insufferable than they tasted. They taste of tar, and dirt, and illegal substances that would decay your teeth if you gave them the chance. I think to one boy in particular, whose kiss was so terribly wreaking of too much tongue, I couldn't remove him from my mouth for 3 days. He had a flavor of misery that the brush closed her eyes to, to let me suffer.

But as a foodie myself, I've opened my mouth wide to an array of flavors. Some of which, I come to learn, get the best of me. I'd once cooked baby bella mushrooms only partially awake, not realizing their brown spots, molded over their body. I had eaten a spoonful of slippery, moldy, half fuzzy mushrooms, sauteed in a wasted amount of garlic and salt and red pepper flakes. These minerals could not overthrow the rottenness of the vegetable. My eyes bulged wide out of my head as the shrooms slithered their way down my throat. I could not keep them down for very long once looking down at my pea-brained mistake. With no hesitation I ran to the bathroom, not making it to the toilet, but to the sink, where my brush resided and briefly welcomed me, before perhaps watching me, frozen in fright. I vomited a mess that would make my toothbrush bow its head in defeat and disappointment, before having to help me clear the mess I created with my face pit. The event was one of many, that left my teeth, and brush, traumatized.

These events in particular would send me into a small sickness that would change the course of the bristle's lifespan of use.

On sick days, the toothbrush serves as an antidote to the taste of death—the one stuck to the roof of my mouth and makes itself home. This is where the toothbrush has her finest moment—what she was built for her. The days of her true purpose are then upon us. Sick days are a war that often times wanes in victory. It seems there isn't enough fluoride to rid the plaque seeping into the throat, yellowing the tongue, and attracting the flies to our breath. The toothbrush is a caretaker in that moment, but she has been worked far too hard. I watch the brush fall slowly to the trash can as I say my final goodbyes. Even though we may have won this battle, her wounds will never recover from the stench and the grease of phlegm, the pure disgust of the flu—the big one. The final boss level of her career. She's no match for the germs that are taking a solidified form, its consistency like diamonds digging its heels into my teeth. The toothbrush doing all she can to rid it, and in the aftermath, has fallen.

But as she falls slowly into the garbage bag, further and further from my widening jaw, she reflects on a story perhaps her toothbrush ancestors relayed to her on the shelf at Walgreens, before being sent off to the war that is my home, my possession.

She is told I once resisted her, flailing my arms at my tired father, already disabled by other events and did not need a toddlered me giving him any more mess. She is told that allegedly I will favor the one who is green in honor of my mother's favorite color of the rainbow, who was a nurse herself and most definitely was concerned with my little God-given dentures.

Maybe as my parents picked out my first big-girl brush, they walked with their fingers intertwined and mulled over each decoration before deciding which one Baby Tara would like. They roamed the aisles unknowingly that I would fight tooth and nail. I would hope after coming across the brush she would whisper all of my incoming teeth secrets, assuring them it was normal, that I'd carry on as normal eventually. For the first half-decade, they'd have to force their way in, but to trust the process, and to trust their daughter.

Though in the wake of the complexity, I feel as though I owe a further explanation on my relationship with the toothbrush today. Yes, we had a tough introduction, but all is well when one changes and adapts to the Stockholm syndrome of everydayness. With time we simply could not live without one another. It is as though I exist to brush my teeth. I lay in bed upon waking up and wheezing through the gunk of my throat, daunted by the pain that morning breath gives me. The first thing I do after planting my feet on the hardwood floors is drag and trip over them to eventually make it to the bathroom to brush it all away. What I mean by this is the toothbrush scratched my back and I scratched hers. She in turn licks away at my gossip, my stories, my bile, my worries, my lies, my fried calamari.

I wish I could show my brush the world—put it in my pocket, let it watch the world go by.

For now I must settle for this... I roll to my side with sleep and sunshine in my eye, rubbing the last bits of my dream from my cornea and out of my mouth before the first attempt at lifting my head. After what seems like 60 minutes of this tussle with my own body I'll swing from the soft of the mattress and let my toes find my slippers. There isn't anywhere else I'd head to first but to the bathroom sink. I turn the faucet and look into my reflection above it, dark circles still smeared onto the thin of my under eyes, wiping gunk from the corners. Soon my concentration steers slightly more to the right.

There she is the beaming blue lady. She stands proud with her back leaning on the newest stand I've placed her in, her orange and white bristles facing me. Perhaps she'd be saying "Oh! Good morning", smelling my morning breath only feet away. Before picking her up and pressing her top button to make vibrate, I look back at my reflection one more time.

Who am I? I often ask myself, but never truly answer. I instead opt for the better option of grabbing the toothbrush and putting it deep in my mouth.

If I'm feeling well-put-together, I might quickly pop on the first short song I have saved. Otherwise, I make a guesstimate with my gag reflex. I brush my teeth and start scraping my slightly filthy tongue until I begin to reject the taste of the plastic, the slight burn of spearmint, and the underpinnings of bile creeping slowly up my esophagus.

The mouth soap foams and dribbles out of my mouth, sometimes continuing down my forearm before making the journey to my elbow and I pull the brush back, and spit out all the wet food crumb bits in my mouth and soon put her under the water to clear what was once stuck between the bristle.

Although, nighttime is a different side of the coin. After a long day there is nothing I want to do less than brush my teeth, and in fact, I sometimes skip it altogether. The day has made me a mouthful of coffee, lunch, dinner, weed smoke in the evening, and if I'm feeling crazy, soda from the Coke can. But after the smoke leaves dust in the mouth it's hard to do anything but lay there. The thought of keeping myself stiff at the sink for 2 whole minutes becomes my living nightmare.

*Tomorrow morning, I say to myself.*

*Please don't tell my dentist.*

I look forward to it each morning, the grime of my insides swirling down the drain with the rest of the city muck, finding its way into bits and pieces of someone else's, making one big fat DNA baby of secretion. The problems of yesterday's news follow it down a metal tube. All of my ages, all of my somethings that make me what I am congeal and meet at the bottom—maybe in conversation. But even with this loss, I gain anew. The glands in my mouth work overtime for something far more powerful and resistant to a brush.

And I should call myself lucky to not have to wash my pearls in soot or chew on twigs or use a bone, the remains of the dead, to have a clean mouth. For now, I'm among the living, and I'll use my bright smile while I still can.

cookies (a sestina)

Amaya Branche

BLEEDING - MEMORY - AUTOMATIC  
MECHANICAL - MEMORY - MUSCLE  
PHOTOGRAPHIC - DIGITAL - MEMORY  
PORNAGRAPHIC - PERFORM - LUST

for so long, i swallowed in the dirt  
now, i wait, and watch what is growing

KNOWING - MEMORY - GROWING  
SEEPING - MEMORY - AUTOMATIC  
CLEAR - CACHE - DIRT

invasion of flesh, watch the mechanism of his muscle  
injected with the venom of emotionless lust  
syrupy syringe, muddy memories

SEEPING - PHOTOGRAPHIC - MEMORY  
danger - CHOKING - GROWING

involuntary ascetic, lured in by lust  
the urge to self-destruct: automatic  
i wish i'd had more muscle  
still scrubbing off the dirt

BODY - TROUBLESHOOT - DIRT

my body regains its memory

i drowned out my thoughts because the brain is a muscle

hydration is key to keep a muscle growing

the signs of danger were automatic

sad and sick with a lonely lust

lovely, hate-laced misplaced lust

is this the reason we're the color of dirt?

his parasitic pull was automatic

his grip firm, a tapeworm carving my memory

despite everything though, i see that i'm growing

keeping in mind that the brain is a muscle

MECHANICAL - MEMORY - MUSCLE

PORNOGRAPHIC - PERFORMING - LUST

now i watch what's growing

i've swallowed in the dirt

PHOTOGRAPHIC - DIGITAL - MEMORY

BLEEDING - MEMORY - AUTOMATIC

a spirit growing beneath my muscles

a new lust for pleasure flows automatic

transmute and recycle the dirty

## *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Four*

**MY:** No, I love it, I have two questions, one is arguably stupider than the other. Maybe I'll start with that one. How does the Central Finite Curve, in *Rick and Morty*, check out with Everett Quantum Mechanics?

**RBO:** *Rick and Morty* is a really smart show. The creator is an awful person, and like, some toilet humor, but there's, the episode [ep 201], they [broke] apart the universes and on the screen. The only thing is, allegedly, according to Hugh Everett's quantum mechanics when you are making a choice between A and B, both choices have the probability of happening, which is not the same as saying anything is possible, or that everything is infinite. That's not what Everett meant. Everett meant that there's a probability that A and B happen, but you of choice A and you of choice B can never then meet, and so the show, kind of skirts that saying, Rick can go meet other Ricks, it's through his portal gun, or whatever. And, sure, you know, I like that. Everyone's like, it was kind of sexist, and I know: Ricks represents the old guard. I have a poem in the book called "Poet Wrestling with Rick and Morty but mostly Rick," where I wrestle with Rick and defeat him.

**MY:** You said that you understand Cain's [from Cain and Abel] jealousy a little bit, and that you also said "this is not a very complete story, they're not telling us something," I feel that's also connected to why you like to say "Everett quantum mechanics," I was wondering if you could expand a little more about your affinity to Cain's jealousy.

**RBO:** I wrote that poem [If Cain the Younger Sister] because my brother is truly "a whitewash synagogue." He does turn the radio "down passing the burial ground" and I hope he forgives me if he ever sees or reads [this], but he is someone for whom the world is very black and white. And for him, there is a beauty in that he will fight for what's right. But unfortunately, when there's heavy nuance, he doesn't understand. He was the first person I came out to. I was very young, And I was like, "I think I'm gay." We were sitting in my room and he simply said, "I like girls too, well, what do you want to do for dinner blah, blah, blah."

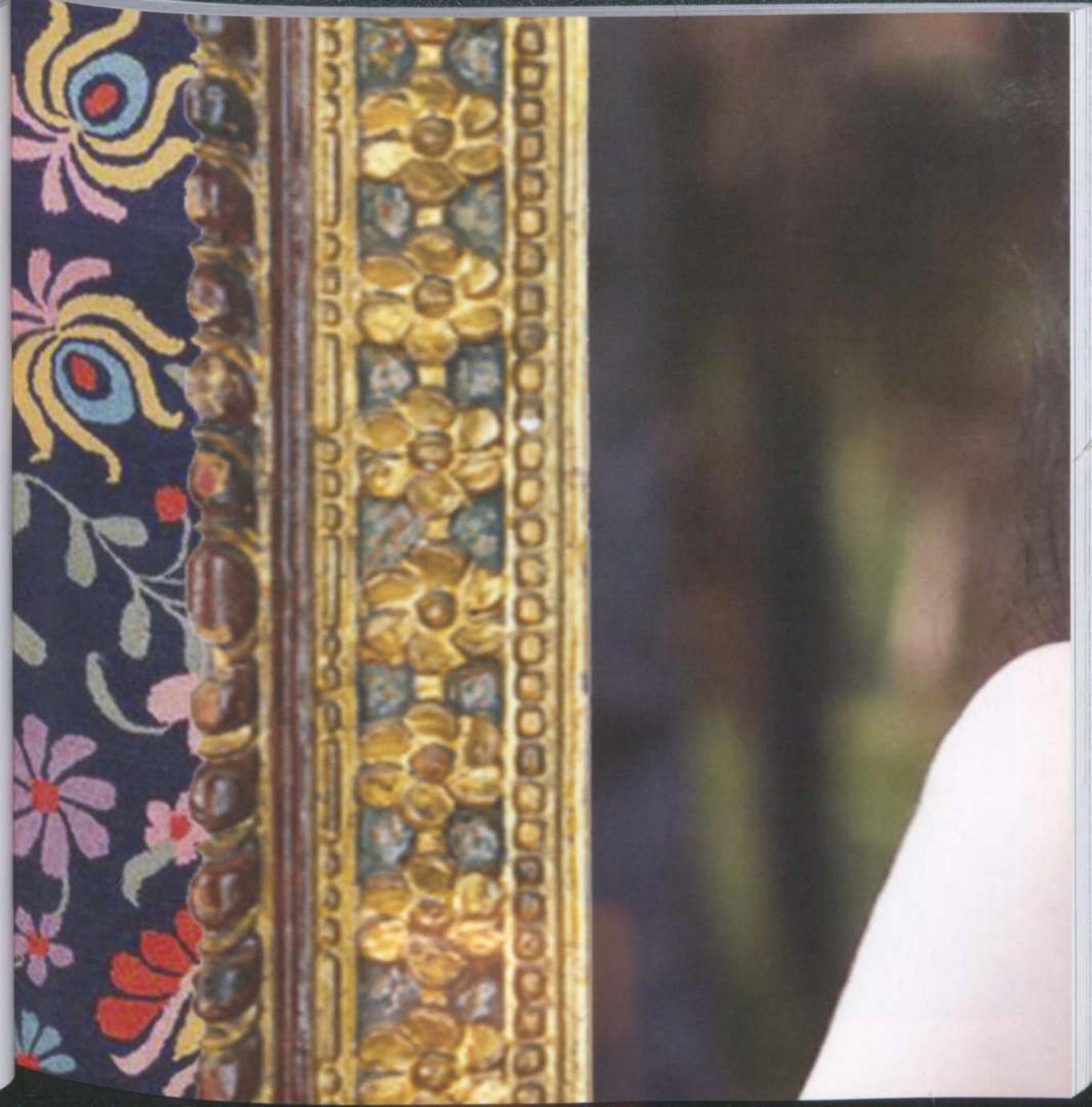
And that was it; he's very accepting. But when you have complex situations where there is nuance, it's very hard to speak with him. And so, in the poem, I imagine that I die and I try to come back, but my brother, he will honor me by building my coffin and nailing it shut, right, so I can't. So, on one hand, he's so bound to tradition, to duty, he doesn't see why the speaker of the poem is the way she is. For him, the world should operate a certain way and he focuses on what's immediate, what he can protect. And to be perfectly honest with you, I told you, I'm also just sort of impish. And I impishly wanted to reimagine myself as Cain because I felt like, well, let's do something that will really speak the candor of the situation. Rather than the candor of the characters.

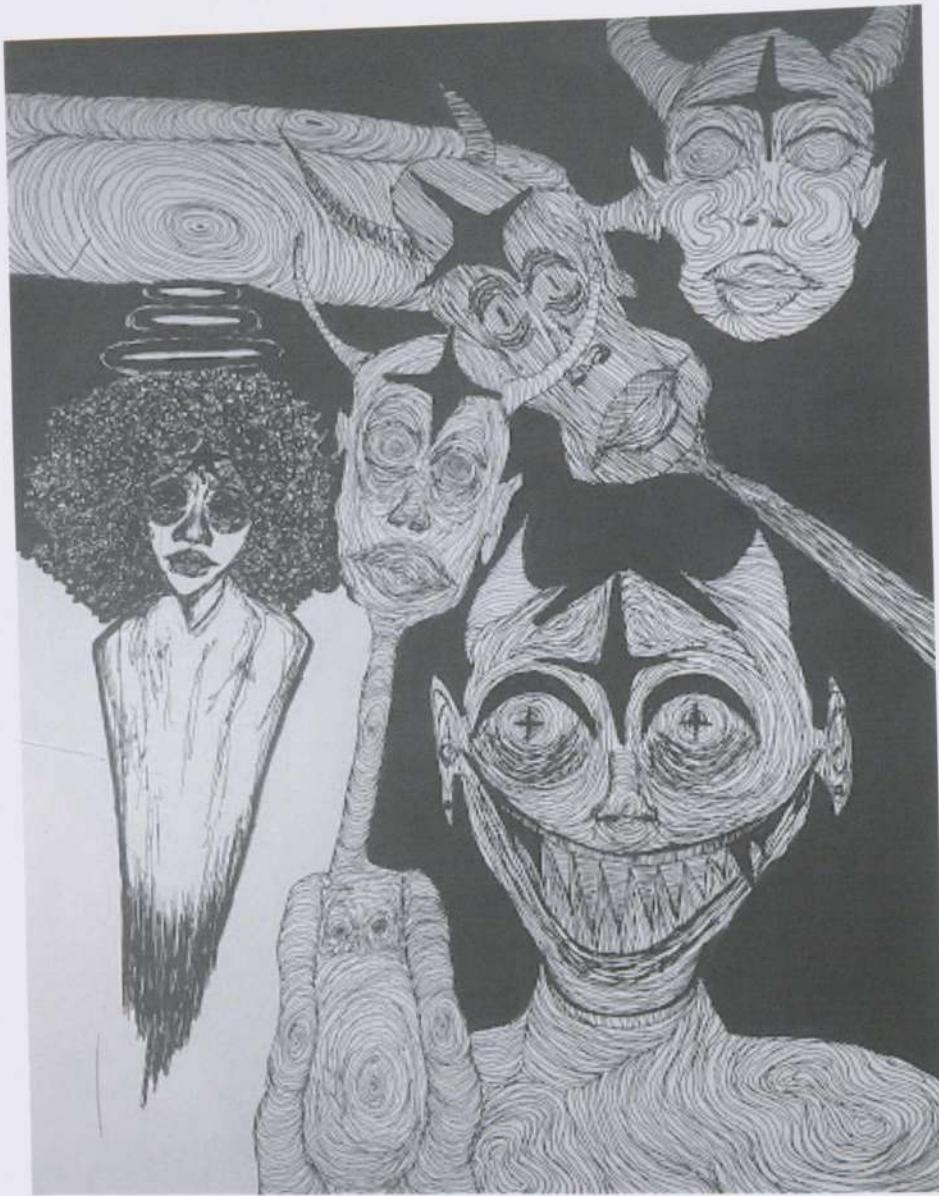
**MY:** I know that you have a Mexican mother and a Jewish father. What did they do as a living or growing up?

**RBO:** I come from humble origins. My dad has a GED, he worked at WalMart and now he sells car parts. He's very intelligent; he didn't have the economic opportunities to do what he wanted. And then my mother just sort of subs in schools. She helps with ESL with students and for a while worked at a little jewelry store as a cashier. Both of them have hourly jobs. But just because I was raised without money doesn't mean that I didn't have a rich, if complicated, childhood experience. They tried to be very strict with me, more so my mother because I'm a girl. That didn't save me from certain brutalities that happened to me as a kid. But I believe the reason why my parents have been together for over 50 years and why they work so well together is that my father privileges love over tradition. So even though I was a very observant little Jewish kid, we often visited my mother's family, my Gomez side, and we always ate whatever my tias served, even if it wasn't kashrut; my mom's family are some of my biggest champions. I wouldn't be here without them, they just [were] there. They're very important to me.

**MY:** You've gotten a lot of community from your mother's side. And there was a sense of ostracization from your father's side because his family was traditional. But-

RBO: They mean well. They had a lot of trouble accepting my father's choices, who he married but also how he raised us. I was married to someone who's Chinese, and they couldn't accept that. My ex and I were married by an Orthodox, [woman] rabbi, which sort of ruffled their feathers, and we had a ceremony [in] Hebrew, and my mother's huge family, my Gomez family, showed up and celebrated with us, and I have a HUGE family on that side. I just find it really funny that when it came time for family photos, it was all my mom's family who showed up and I know they don't understand the Hebrew, but even when I Bat Mitzvah'ed, they filled the shul. My father did have a cousin whom I called Uncle; he was like a brother to him, who I loved dearly, who sat on the pulpit for my Bat Mitzvah. I saw him one last time at my brother's wedding, and then later that year, we got a call that he had committed suicide. And I'm working on a novel right now based on that relationship with him. He loved us dearly, and I don't think my father ever got over his death. I certainly haven't. He wasn't a perfect man, but he never treated us differently, he never mentioned anything to my mother about being Mexican or a convert, he never made my father feel smaller for not making as much money as he did, he just loved us. He just loved people, I think that was part of his problem, he was a bit of a womanizer. He always told me, "you're going to do great things, you wait and see." I don't know why he didn't call my father; nobody knows. He was deeply depressed, and he hid it. So I never got over that.





Untitled  
Tianna Herrington

Performing  
Gil Ferguson

"We're here," I blurted out, slicing through a flimsy silence.

Shay and Skid gave me an odd look as I pulled up to the house. I ignored it.

"Noooo, really?" Shay joked from the passenger seat beside me.

I shifted my mom's car into park midway along the great length of street that lined the brown brick house. I breathed for a moment, and then shuffled out of the driver's seat quickly, my friends fumbling to grab their things and unbuckle their seatbelts and exiting a moment after. I didn't park in the driveway—I think it caught them off guard. But I wasn't planning on pretending things were the same.

I started across the too-big front lawn, my sneakers tamping down on the dried-out yellow-green late summer grass. Skid and Shay's feet fell a couple of paces behind mine. It was just after dusk; I began to feel the tendrils of the cold, crisp evening air coil around me, nipping at my skin and winding through my long-ish hair in a familiar dance. It was uncharacteristically chilly for summer in the Midwest. I reached the front door and rattled its brass knob—unsuccessfully. "Oh. The door's locked."

Remember how I said I didn't want to pretend things were the same?

"Maybe the back door's open?" Skid suggested.

"Or... garage door?" I quickly swung around the side of the house, hugging the two-story brick walls as I approached the driveway, heartbeat matching my impatient footsteps.

"Don't we need a code?" Shay called after me.

"I know the code," I responded, reaching the front of the garage.

"You do?"

"Yeah, it's the date they got their dog," I punched the number into the panel, only hesitating for a moment.

"And you know that day?" The garage door began to grumble open.

"Oh, uh... yeah? You don't?"

Before I could be questioned any further, I ducked under the still-rising door, entering the dark garage. After a moment, a dim overhead light flickered on, triggered by a motion sensor. In an awkward half-jog, I continued to the door and into the house. The second I crossed the threshold into the mudroom, I felt a heavy warmth embrace me—a warmth maintained by a house full of closed windows and an air conditioning machine laid dormant for months, just as the garage light had been. I switched the lights on, waking the house from its months-long slumber. We ditched our shoes in the mudroom, kicking them onto an entrance mat in a sort of thudding symphony.

Shay began to mill through the kitchen. “Damn, it’s been a long time since I’ve been in here.”

“Yeah, I can’t even remember the last time,” I echoed. It was a lie.

I dragged my hands slowly along the smooth, sprawling surface of the kitchen island, the touch of the polished granite countertops conjuring a memory at my fingertips: Shay, off-handedly dubbing it “the America of kitchen islands,” in reference to its size, which of course lead to the revelation that Shay didn’t know the difference between an island and a continent—

and then, and then I said—

I forced my brain back to the present.

Or tried to, at least. Shay and Skid’s chatter was drowned out by memories, memories that seemed to be seeping out of my head and filling the air, filling the moment, with a soupy fog—alongside the heat, it was almost stifling. My gaze spread all across the room—maybe the memories weren’t just in my head; they were flattened into the countertops I braced my hands against, shoved into the forest of mahogany cupboards, leaking out of the unnecessarily large stainless steel appliances. Laughs that should have long-expired bounced off the walls like abandoned balloons inflated by our helium breaths, floating up at the height of the room. I could reach up and grasp their strings if only the ceiling wasn’t so damn high. They were just out of reach.

“Hey, you good?” Shay called, tearing me out of my hypnosis. She and Skid were waiting in the basement doorway.

“Yeah. Fine.”

I quit idling and pulled my socked feet off the kitchen throw rug like velcro. Countless familiar sights beckoned my eye as I crossed the house to the door—assorted novelty wooden signs that read things like Live, Laugh, Love and Home Is Where the Heart Is and baskets of old fruit and granola bars and set aside dog bowls, crumbs of kibble remaining that had long gone stale. I shook these sights out of my mind and made my way down the carpeted basement steps. The deeper I ventured into the house the stronger the trance became, the more I felt like I was driving home late at night and would soon arrive at my driveway, barely remembering how I got there. I lingered at the last step for a moment—Shay and Skid proceeded forward, but they seemed to hesitate, too.

“Hey Lu, can you get the lights?” Shay asked.

I flicked the dimmer switch on the wall, and overhead lamps gradually lit up, spreading a warm glow across the room, revealing what I already knew. Brown leather armchairs accompanied a matching brown leather sofa that was nestled in the corner of the main room. Shelves lined the far wall, loaded with professionally taken family portraits and awards and medals in every activity imaginable. I walked over and examined the medals, which I had realized long ago were not real trophies, but instead custom-made specifically by a friend of the family for their golden boy.

“Sometimes I almost forget his full name is *Fitzwilliam*,” Shay commented, reading the name engraved on the various plaques and accolades as she joined me by the shelves, eyes having been drawn to the same memorabilia as mine. “Like, what kind of name is that? Why would his parents name him that? It doesn’t even suit him.”

“I actually think that technically counts as child abuse,” I said sarcastically. “Or, like … retroactive abortion.”

“It’s almost as fucked up as Skid’s parents naming him Skid,” Shay continued, turning to face the subject of her taunting, leaning her elbows on the shelves. Skid (which wasn’t his real name, of course) had plunked down on the sofa, leaning back into the cushions.

“Almost as fucked up as *me* retroactively aborting you,” Skid shot back from the opposite side of the room, lazy grin on his face.

"Ehh. Maybe I'll get reincarnated. Hey, maybe I'll be born the right gender this time," Shay said.

"Yeah... or you could get reincarnated as a monkey, and sit in a zoo and like... throw your own shit all day," I added.

"Honestly? I'll gladly take a monkey with a vagina over a human with a dick," Shay responded.

"That just sounds like a description of Skid's sexuality," I said, laughter beginning to fill up my throat before I could even get the whole sentence out.

The laughter spread between us, possessing us—the kind of laughter that felt like electricity, short circuiting my brain and rattling down my spine, out my limbs. For a moment, everything felt as it should be—until I became acutely aware of our three laughs filling the room, instead of four.

"But hey. You were right—all their shit's still here," Shay said, pointed towards me.

"Told you soooo," I taunted in a sing-song voice. "I mean, it's not like his family needs the money or anything," I continued, having moved on to the wooden coffee table, familiarly toying with the trinkets decorating it.

"Yeah, I mean if they can afford lake houses in Pennsylvania and Florida, they can afford to keep their house here," Skid said.

"You say that like this neighborhood is cheap," I responded. "But they wouldn't sell it anyways."

I tried to ignore the obvious hope I'd just let slip out of me. I also tried to ignore Shay and Skid exchanging glances. I was sick of people looking at me with furrowed eyebrows. Shay had assumed her position in the left arm chair, and I joined Skid on the sofa—we sank into our seats, filling still-remaining indents like our bodies had been born here, cut from our molds in the leather upholstery. I watched as Skid pulled off his checkered crossbody bag, and, after rummaging for a moment, produced a ziploc bag and a couple small, thin papers.

"You brought weed?" I questioned, trying to balance between disappointment and relief.

"Yeah—you wanna smoke?" he asked me, knowing Shay wouldn't join in.

I contemplated saying no, but I realized it probably didn't matter either way—being high rarely affected me as much as I'd like it to. That is, I never seemed to smoke enough to stop feeling like me. Or maybe just stop feeling. Plus, in the past ten seconds since being presented with the idea of getting high, I had become unable to cope with the idea of remaining sober. I wondered if Skid felt the same thing. I wondered how long he had been feeling it. I definitely wanted to smoke weed. I wanted to stop wondering.

"I thought since Fitz... left, you wouldn't be able to get weed anymore." I watched as Skid carefully rolled a joint. I remembered watching Fitz and Addie teaching him how to do the same, however long ago, in the same basement, in the same spots. I remembered shoving down the urge to stop two eighteen-year-olds from teaching a fifteen-year-old how to roll a joint. I remembered shoving down a lot of urges—down so deep I'd have to dig my entire arm into my pockets to pull them out now. Suddenly Fitz' usual spot in the armchair at the other end of the table seemed a lot more empty. The divot in the seat was glaring at me. I wished Skid would hurry up and finish rolling. I wished I wouldn't wish for that.

After lighting the joint, Skid took a long hit, held it in, and then breathed out, "He gave me his dealer."

"Oh."

I grabbed the joint, following Skid and taking a long hit.



"Do you think he's still logged into Netflix?" Shay asked, picking up the TV remote, maneuvering through the menus for a moment. "Shit. He isn't. We could've finally finished Scott Pilgrim."

"We'll finish it someday," I said, forcing myself to believe Shay and Skid weren't able to hear the silent "with Fitz" at the end of that sentence.

"I mean, we don't have to. Haven't you watched that movie like a million times before?" she asked.

"Yeah, but we were supposed to watch it—" together. They definitely heard that one I took another hit. I lost count of how many that was.

"I'm gonna play some music, okay?" The other two mhm'd and uh-huh'd their approval, so I pulled my phone out of the pocket of my shorts and thumbed through my playlists until I found one that satisfied me. My phone recognized the Bluetooth speakers immediately. I hit shuffle. A dream-poppy, ambient, wistful indie tune started playing.

"I bet, like, half of the polaroids on the wall in your room were taken in this basement," Shay said.

"That's depressing," I scoffed, before receiving the joint from Skid and inhaling again.

"Why?" Shay asked.

"What?"

"Why is it depressing?"

"Oh... I don't know, I just—"

Polaroids—a thought dawned on me.

"Wait a minute. I just remembered something."

I stood up, wandering into the adjacent room tucked behind the stairs, which had a small kitchenette. Really, it was more of a home bar than a kitchenette, but I recalled Fitz telling me his parents had never used it even once. After searching through the cabinets, where I had usually put polaroids to develop (because you're supposed to leave them in the dark, not shake them, the shaking thing is a myth), to no avail, the white reflective edges of film glinted in the corner of my eye, drawing my attention over to the pool table beyond the counter.

"There," I whispered to myself.

I plucked the photos off the table and examined them in the light leaking in from the main room. The first was a picture of Fitz and myself, a selfie—a pretty inconvenient way of taking pictures with a polaroid. It was older than what I had expected to find—from around the time we first started hanging out. We both bore a smile; they weren't our usual smiles.

His sloppy handwriting marked the bottom of the polaroid: 'Luke and Fitz.' He must have found and labeled the photos before he left. 'Luke. And. Fitz.' I read it again, with more frustration than the first time. Luke. I hated that name. It reeked of masculinity. It reeked of closetedness. It reeked of fear.

I flipped to the second polaroid. 'My friends :)', this one read. I had forgotten Fitz had been one to use smiley faces. It was from last summer—a photo of our old friend group—everyone smiling gleefully, arms and hearts sloppily entangled around each other's shoulders and bodies. Shay, Skid, Fitz, and myself, and then Addie and all our other friends, too. I studied each blindingly smiling face in the photo. I studied mine. I tried to relearn each one—recover what had once been ingrained in my brain, but our faces were different now; even re-memorizing what had been, retracing my footsteps along conversations and car rides, melding my fingers to fit old group chats and shared playlists, wouldn't change that.

"Damn. That's..." Shay trailed off, having appeared to my side, glancing at the photo in my hands.

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

I slid my back down the wall until I met the floor, slipping the group picture into my polo shirt's chest pocket. I set the one of myself and Fitz on the floor beside me. I occupied my gaze with my worn out socks, cuff's dirtied, which were beginning to feel too tight and too on-my-feet. Small threads ran through my fingers as I fiddled with the edges of my corduroy shorts, the ones that had been pants when I thrifted them with my friends, but my dog chewed them up and they had to be turned into cut-offs. Fitz had only seen them as pants.

"Do you remember that night? The one from the picture?" I asked.

"Somewhat, yeah," Shay answered.

"I slept in here that night," I said. "Under the pool table, actually." I crawled under it, emulating my story. "Right next to Fitz."

"Really? I thought you two usually hooked up in the bathroom," Shay declared, pointing towards the door in the corner of the room.

"Wh— you knew about that?" I said, forcing my best attempt at nonchalance.

"What? I, uh— yeah." She backpedaled. "You know … well, with the way you'd stare at him all the time you might as well have been jacking him off with your eyes," she added quickly, not quite committing to the joke at the end.

*Well, not that night. Nothing happened that night.*

Shay became very still,  
"Have you—" I began.

silence growing between us.  
"So—" Shay started.

"Sorry you go—"

We spoke at the same time.

"Oh, you can—"

"You go."

Again.

"Okay."

"I was just gonna… I'm gonna go check on Skid."

Shay began to head back towards the main room, but then paused for a moment, looking over her shoulder, "Oh, what were you gonna say?"

"I was just wondering…" Have you spoken to Fitz at all? Is he okay? Is he worse off without me? Is he better? Does he still care about me? Does he even think about me? Or us? Or this stupid town? Does he blame me? Do you blame me? Do you both resent me and think that this is all my fault and that I'm selfish and a terrible friend and I let my mental illness ruin my relationships and my life and myself?

"…is Skid doing okay? Y'know, with his break-up with Addie and… everything," I spoke low.

"I don't know. I think so," she responded equally low.

"Sure."

*Believable, I thought.*

If I had to guess, I'd say that Shay was probably thinking that, too.

I heard the music from the other room as Shay opened the door and let it slowly swing shut behind her. My brain began to swirl. The music was too much. The pictures were too much. The memories were too much, the weed was too much, Shay was too much, Skid was too much, this room was too much. I planted my now sockless feet on the carpet and stood up, heading into the bathroom. I leaned against the closed door behind me, and slid to the floor. My bare lower legs met the chilled tile. I hadn't bothered to turn the lights on. I rested my head on my knees, closing my eyes softly.



"I want to suck your dick." I was jarred awake by a deep voice in the dark, grin obvious from the way he spoke. Although, I'm not sure I had fallen asleep in the first place—but each moment before seemed like a distant memory—the conversation with Shay, a past life—like my brain was resetting and readjusting and reorienting itself every second. Or trying to. It was failing.

The one thing I *could* orient was Fitz' presence in front of me. However many times I had imagined a fateful reunion, I had never imagined it like this. Or, at least, not *starting* like this. I sluggishly cast my gaze along his nearly naked body sitting on the bathroom's tile floor. Parts of him were almost... blurry. I realized that I was looking at the best idea that I had of Fitz' body—the one that I had gotten from stolen glances at sleepovers and in school locker rooms. He had never taken his shirt or pants off all the way whenever we hooked up. And he had certainly never offered to do ... *that*, before. Whenever we hooked up, I was always the one ... performing.

"What?" I questioned, pushing aside disbelief.

"You heard me. I want to suck your dick," Fitz said, winking. His glasses were off. He crawled towards my crumpled body, resting his heavy torso on my thin legs, heat emanating from his body.

"Is this okay?" he asked. I nodded, unable to take my eyes off his mouth, his one slightly crooked tooth, his semi-chapped lips, his messy brown stubble only a teenager wouldn't shave. He pulled down my shorts and underwear in one stroke, and smiled. Fitz' warmth accepted mine. *Lu and Fitz*. We felt like one. I shut my eyes for what felt like the millionth time that night.



I glanced at the picture of myself and Fitz on the floor as I walked back towards the main room. I hesitated for a moment, but then grabbed it and slipped it into my chest pocket, alongside the other photo. I plopped back down on the sofa next to Skid, joining him in his blank stare at the wall.

"Can I?" I asked, gesturing towards the joint on the coffee table. Skid nodded, and passed me his bag to dig through and find a lighter. I relit the wrapped weed in my hands, raised it to my lips, and sucked the smoke into my mouth. *Sucked. Mouth. 'I want to suck your dick.'*

Smoke escaped my lips, billowing into the room.

"I don't think I'm doing this right."



**Beam**

Maxine Soriano Trujillo



Watercolor Observational Study 2 : Ardeidae  
Lara Agrawal

## Silhouettes

K. Aisling Hashem-Doran

I have lost my nerve. I set up this whole obstacle course, but I am too tired to run it. It's been so long since we last spoke, and I fear it will be even longer until we speak again. I am up late, and I wonder if you are too.



Last night I dreamt that I drove to visit you. You were indistinct, as you often are, the edges of your form bleeding like bad ink, hard to hold in the eye, save for your glasses, chunky and round; your long black hair, cascading past your shoulders in thick waves; the small tattoo on your left wrist, scrawled in my handwriting.



My hands move, like reflex, like heartbeat, a nervous twitch, a memory born in the body which sprouts from the tips of my fingers, stretching to trace the shape of blue and white plush fibers, stained purple by the programmable LED strip taped to the underside of your bedframe, sometimes green, red, yellow, tap, tap, tap, testing out the buttons on the little remote that you would forget about and then lose not long after settling on purple. The carpet was new, and the lights were new, and so was the small diff user on your windowsill pumping out little clouds of essential oils—anniversary gifts from your girlfriend of six years.

The carpet was new, and soft, I remember, and I liked the way the texture of it felt against the back of my head, like a bed of grass in a child's dream. I lay, tilting my head back and forth to feel the grit of my unwashed hair slide over the gentle hills of fabric, breathing in lavender, mumbling, as if to no one in particular, that I used to set my childhood night light to red, because it was "the darkest color." You replied, as if to no one in particular, that you had always set yours to blue.

I remember the lights, cycling, a lightshow played on the backs of my eyelids. I remember the space between the lights, the brief moment where they would click off—an actual click if you strained to hear it, huddling close, two pairs of breathing lungs, speaking in whispers. And then (click) back on, again bodies in a room in the violet world.

And later, waking up alone (you were at a practice, or a class, or a movie, or a funeral) and crying, not knowing why, sudden flood of violet-tinted water from startled, blood-shot eye dripping down to your new-soft carpet, “it’s waterproof,” you had said, “allegedly,” and sure enough, there it goes, sliding off onto hospital-white tile. I curled up like a dog and waited there, at the foot of your bed, until the little fleshy bit at the back of my neck didn’t hurt so much.



Last week I dreamt that you had died and I didn’t find out until a month after it happened. I just kept on sending you funny tweets, texting you single sentences about whichever of “our bands” was releasing new music that week, thinking nothing of your radio silence (you were always like that). By the time your parents got into your phone to let me know what had happened, you were already in the ground.



The record shop we worked at—you remember, the one that never turned a profit, not a single month in the black, the vanity project of the rich beekeeper, who owned the entire block, who will probably own the entire city one day. I forget his name, but I remember the derisive tone with which we would spit it out, cackling, scolding him like mothers. It’s not there anymore, the shop, “probably because of us,” you said, texting me in celebration when the news came out. I know the official explanation, but I think we must deserve some credit for driving it into the ground. I miss it—parts of it. It was all pretty awful, but some of it was awful in a charming way. You agreed, “that nitro coffee shit was so vile and I drank so much of it for free.”

And it was shit, along with the rest of it, the shitty couch that smelled like piss, the shitty over-priced records that nobody ever bought, all sparkling still in their untouched plastic shrinkwrap, catching the light that poured in from the huge west-facing windows, that shitty glare from the setting sun. I miss those long evening shifts spent squinting against the light, the only living souls in the place, just us and the dust and the music we blasted until the speakers blew, like a spell cast to ward off prospective customers, intruders in our shared haven.

I remember the time, our first summer break after starting college, when I came home to high school friends who kept asking why I was talking like that, and I smiled because I realized I had picked up your cadence. I smiled again, wider and goofier, when you told me you thought you had picked it up from me. You asked why I was grinning like that and I said it was just funny and what I meant was that we had created our own language.



Last month I dreamt that I died and all the wrong people spoke at my funeral. My mother cried at the podium and said what mothers say at funerals. They put me in a suit before they put me in the ground. You wandered among the tombstones, whispering as if to no one in particular, and I kept craning my neck to hear, but your face was always turned away.



Do you remember the night I got food poisoning? The night I threw up off the side of Olivia's balcony, down onto the fake geometric shrubs, the ones that made you so angry, "thousands a semester and we can't even get real shrubs!" And you walked me back to my room, guiding me step by step up the sloping sidewalk that felt like a mountain, my eyes shut tight against the dizziness and the wind, cold as it scraped across my forehead and sent stray hairs flying, tickling my eyelashes and getting stuck in the corners of my glasses and the folds of my ears. Hobbling across the asphalt, cradled in your arms, I wondered if I meant as much to you as you do to me.

I know how the story goes from here: I leave, and then you leave, and now this, this better life, this stasis. I would give it all up, and I know it wouldn't help, but in the dark violet night it's easy to think that burning it down might speak the truth in a way that words can't. Like tea leaves. Like lavender. Like tarot readings on concrete under buzzing porch light. That night, we confessed that neither of us believed and both of us prayed, in our most honest moments. That night, I told you a secret, a pathetic prayer of my own, swaying in the breeze under the fluorescents, under the floor-to-ceiling windows, the new brickwork on unfinished towers, the tallest building on campus, "a testament to the beekeeper's hubris." I felt so exposed and afraid. And you took it well, my little secret, and held it close, as I knew you would, but still I always worry.



Tonight, I will not dream of you at all, and I will wake up feeling guilty. I will text you—something meaningless, something safe. You will go to work at the paint store and you will come home to your girlfriend of nine years and you will be happy and content or lonely and afraid and in any case far away from me and I will not hear from you.

Tomorrow, I will dream of you officiating my wedding, your dress long and dark green, your voice as big as it gets. I will watch as the warm porch light fills your wide black eyes, "beady—like a rat," you used to say

A month from now, I will take your hand and tell you everything. I won't show you this letter, though maybe I'll paraphrase a line or two, revised until hollow.

A year from now, you will be closer maybe, a ten minute walk—we can be neighbors. And I will come to see you, and watch you cook, and we will talk like we sometimes used to, and we will not need prayer nor sickness to ask each other for help.

And maybe if I say it all before we're both gone for good, they'll bury me next to you.



*An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Five*

**MY:** I feel like no matter where you've gone, you simply have faced adversity. And I also enjoy the story of going somewhere else, and you said "I didn't really fit in completely anywhere" and so do you feel like you fit in most in Queens? And it sounds like you feel the most complete do you still want to look for full completeness?

**RBO:** Yeah, there's something about people here. I just can let my hair down and be a weirdo. It's just a really great community. And I feel like when I'm out in the poetry world with poets, I'm very happy to be and to meet and to share space with all these voices. And that's one sort of space I love to occupy. I like MultiHorseVerse Rosebud; I like that I've reentered my Impish Era. I don't even know how to define completeness at this point. Happiness is not completeness. I think people get those confused. Some really horrendous things have happened to me over my life. I remember a poet said to me they had heard the gossip surrounding my divorce, how bad things had gotten, especially since I'd had to shelter in-place with my ex, and the poet said "if it happened to me, I would have laid my head down, not gotten out of bed." And I didn't feel that way. I felt there's something deep within me that is like "okay, things aren't great, right? But you gotta get up and you gotta keep going. You still have to do stuff. You'll figure it out." And sometimes it doesn't get figured out and you know, there's failure there. And healing is not always the objective. It just can't always be the objective. So it's been an interesting experience with completeness; I rail against it, for someone like me, who just will never be satisfied with answers, the problems are just going to keep multiplying. So, I am here for it.

**MY:** I like how you said, "healing is not always the objective," because it's not. Is there a time where you felt like you had to coax your rebellious spirit the most?

**RBO:** It's funny that you say that. I was at a CUNY School. And I was adjuncting; this was before I had any books. I was talking to a department chair in front of my friend, who had tenure, and the chair was asking me about my life, my interests, and her eyes kept getting bigger and bigger.

And I've always tried to figure people out because I don't understand humans. She [was] kind of react[ing] strangely to me like she kept going, "oh, hmm, wow, you did that." And I didn't realize she was being condescending. And when I finally did, I just said outright, "why are you responding that way? You asked me these questions you don't want me to answer." And you could hear a pin drop and my friend was like, okay, we're gonna go. And then later, my friend told me that the chair had to say to her, "I don't know if I can work with her, she is going to be trouble." I think about that because that chair, after I won the Alice James award, sent me an email saying, "Would you like to give a reading at the school," and just because I do have some limits, I declined. Because how she acted back then was unnecessary. She'd been asking me all this really personal information about my writing and my interest and when I mentioned quantum mechanics, I think that's what took her out.



sheva  
Sophia Cutino

He Who Watches the Watcher  
Nellie Soames

Coming to the garden has always been a ritual of mine. A place beyond the grief and the sorrow and the ache, it was the early morning reprieve before class, the afternoon ice cream strolls (one chocolate and one mint chip, please), and the late night talks that reverberated too loudly in the house, but were somehow always softened by the stillness of the ducks in the pond. The flowing of the seasons in the garden marked my sense time, from the blooming of the lilacs in the spring, to the fall leaves we'd crunch under our boots, to those beautiful winter mornings, when one isn't sure if the tears are from the cold or from looking at the snowflakes, silently twinkling on the trees. The gazebo in the corner of the park, in particular, was my little place. Well, our little place. There hasn't been an our anything for a long while. No matter.

It was an ideal place to while away the forgotten hours. Watching the regular suspects on their way to work, seeing their kids grow a meter every day and their parents' wrinkles deepen with time—imperceptible quirks and fancies to everyone but me—gave me some semblance of belonging to a person, even if none of them had any clue I existed. Here lives my hundreds of estranged husbands, my thousands of abandoned children, and my millions of friends I haven't caught up with in ages, all simply waiting for me to reconnect. Here lives my home.

Today is no different a day from the rest. I get there around three o'clock and spot Stephen and his son, Little Tom (or so they were known to me), rushing through the park. Putting up my feet and leaning back on the bench, I prepare to delve into my world of invention. I close my eyes and dissolve.

"A lizard? Really? Where did you even get it?" asks presumably-Stephen, his irritation just palpable.

Little Tom, completely unaware of any friction, jumps up and down with excitement, eager at the chance to share his adventure, "He was right under the stairs of the slide, he was all scaly and green, and he kept running so fast, and I finally caught him and I didn't want him to get away so I put him in my mouth."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the way his words and whimsies poured out in a rush of gushing delight. The first time Little Tom confessed to his habit of eating small creatures, I'd choked on my own laughter. After the third or fourth time, experiencing his weekly lecture on what things "we should not put in our mouths under any circumstances," it was simply Tom's thing. Presumably-Stephen's thing was that, as much as he wanted to be angry, he couldn't.

"Well, don't keep me waiting, what's the verdict?"

"Worse than the spider, better than the fire-ant," says Tom, sticking out his tongue.

"Remind me to tell your mother she owes me 10 dollars," replies his father, smothering him with a hug and hoisting him onto his back.

I wondered if Tom had ever had mint chip ice cream, he'd probably like it better than lizards.

Slowly reawakening to the reality of the garden, my heart feels a little constricted as the two pass out of sight – their leaving wasn't a part of the plan. But it's no matter, their absence only opens up room for another story, another friend, to let into my heart.

Creeping from behind the thorn bush, dawdling with an unhurried air, emerges the red-ribboned hat of Emily Cardenas and the big black-buckled shoes of her husband, Ernest. After 50 years of marriage and countless lazy treks through this park, he still doesn't see a reason to replace them. Emily doesn't care, she's just happy she has someone who'll put on their shabby shoes every day and come look at the flowers.

The pair start first at the gardenias, making their way around to the poppies, the daisies, and finally to Emily's favorite, the snowdrops. She's never been one for the sprightly rose or the vibrant lily, but she's always liked the way the snowdrops tilted their head to her as she passed—she always bows her head in return. She plucks one from the ground, brings its petals to her lips to whisper a wish, and tucks it neatly into Ernest's shirt pocket.

"What'd you ask for, sweetheart?" Ernest asks, wearing his new gift with pride.

"I wished that there wasn't a bee in that flower," said Emily with a straight face, eliciting a boisterous burst of laughter and a tight, tight squeeze from her husband. They walk along the rest of the path, Ernest picking flower after flower for her until they disappear with the chrysanthemums.

'The garden was empty again, the squeak of big black-buckled shoes fades off into the distance as the hush of the grass and the sigh of the flowers fill its place.

So, they've gone too. Back, I'm sure, to a home of warmth and comfort, that somehow always smells of freshly baked pies and maybe a little bit of lavender. No matter, I couldn't ask for anywhere better to spend my time, a place to people-watch, and, potentially, to be watched in return. Here, I am only at the mercy of the bees and the honeysuckle, here I belong to myself and everybody and nobody at all.

Distracted, a crunch of leaves pulls me out of my thoughts and heralds a new couple, a young man and woman, walking some distance apart. Far from stopping to admire the roses, they walk with purpose, barely glancing at the bubbling fountain, or the arbor adorned with azaleas, or at me, waiting in the gazebo. This is normal for Kate and Pat, though. They don't have much time for the greenery; they're generally too focused on each other's imperfections.

They didn't used to be like this, though. This garden used to be a place of delirious bliss, not the echo of happiness it's recently become. They would come to this park to enjoy a weekend with each other, just each other, making picnics of chocolate éclairs and little jam sandwiches and sparkling champagne, spending the long, winding day enveloped in each other's company.

Kate's voice resounds across the garden, "For the last time, Patrick, I'm not going with you to your little convention. I have enough work this week without you needing me to look after you, too."

"Fine, then I know Catherine would be more than happy to join me instead. Hold on, can we just back-track for a minute? I thought we were arguing about going to your aunt's next month."

"God, well, if we can't even decide what we're arguing about maybe we just shouldn't speak," rasps Kate, an ice cream cone suddenly appearing in her hand, the chocolate dripping violently down her arm as though it's the most natural thing in the world.

Pat moves to reach out to her but is stopped with the arrival of a mint chip ice cream cone in his hand, already half melted and soaking the grass at his feet. He manages to bark out, "If we can't decide what we're arguing about maybe we just shouldn't date."

I jerk up hard on the bench of the gazebo to find my eyes glazed over, staring at something I hadn't noticed join me in the garden. I see him. Watching me. I've never seen him before. I know this garden and everything in it better than I know my times tables, or my mother's childhood, or why my dad had to leave, but he's something new. I don't know when he got here, I don't know how long he's been staring, and suddenly, I don't know my body from the bluebells. He gives me a wave, and I look hard at the flowers to my left, hoping to seem busy. I check back after I can't take it anymore to find him still looking, his eyes, his whole self glinting in the sun as he sits in front of the carnation. He has a book on his lap, the pages yellow and ripped, although he makes no pretense of reading it. There he sits, his head slightly tilted in contemplation, his posture totally relaxed. He sees me with eyes of the deepest clarity, somehow knowing and curious at the same time, recognizing me in a way I haven't been for a long time. A smile starts creeping on his face, and I can see the fall leaves blowing away, right out of our grasp, the leaking ice cream cones, abandoned on the sidewalk, and the ducks in the pond, ever the same. I can hear the jingle of the ice cream truck go by somewhere in the background, the sound getting louder and louder as the buzzing of the garden, every fly, every flower, every weed, coalesce in my brain. I think I'm about to erupt when I hear a voice by my ear, the soft chords beckoning me back. Standing in front of me, with visible hesitance, is this man of reality, gently offering me a carnation.

## Inspiration Poem

Avery Camp

I try to envision that disco ball spinning,  
ass inches from the floor, buzzed on whatever, because it was all whatever then  
still a weekly occurrence, no hours of hold music  
spur me to dance

as I wait two years for a day in disability court,  
inside anxious, sick, pained, confused body,  
remains a seed of hope  
go get the microscope

I once walked 2,180 miles to Maine,  
now I count stairs  
pray that the MTA elevator won't be out of service,  
damn does that feel inspiring  
I'm basically a superhero now  
the cape is still on my wish list next to tiger balm. Pounds of epsom salt and magnesium,  
but it'll be here just in time for halloween  
sorry, I had to check my finances  
as long as my paperwork is perfect and I get a disability check,  
and SNAP recertification is processed correctly this month,  
maybe by christmas  
everyone loves a crip in a cape  
but no one is jealous

the sun shines and you infantilize me in my rubbers  
only barrier to piss-soaked elevator,

whoops, but nothing can save you from the Union Square elevator shit even the man who  
was smoking crack in here last week  
won't ride in vertical public toilet

I forecast myself someday stuck breathing only through the mouth hours-long maintenance  
request catacombed afternoon  
how exotic

canes and walkers, and wheelchairs,  
oh so many times  
square(s)  
unobservant in mickey mouse ears, playbill yuppies  
even oblivious to intestines escaping his stomach.

I caned my way blocks and blocks  
earnestly pursuing this mad man  
dodged ambulances and EMTs like his life would end if caught.

I know how much steel it takes to ignore your body to avoid capture skyscraping hard hats  
even overlook how much  
until arthritis in hands, morning aches in knees,  
company issued back brace,  
thinning serotonin

14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act  
to be a disabled working body,  
accept 50¢  
take seizure medication to the highest dose hush neuroreceptors  
strangle tongue  
slog  
slow brain down to fuzz

welcum to McDonuldzzz  
may I ta(k)e your order?  
dollar menu? yes, would you —  
would you mind ordering one fer me too? gosh, that's so inspiring.

I once heard the survival story of a blind man who escaped the towers,  
flights and flights with his golden retriever for eyes  
now that sounds like an inspiration poem!  
but algorithm suggests “Unsafe Refuge: Why did so many wheelchair users die on Sept.  
11?”  
and I can’t believe the question is still “why”

when the mobility wizard whispers from the dormers maybe you’ll start to ask  
look back at the 3.5 bath  
of your life and see the shutters thrust open  
one, maybe two, maybe three  
if you own,  
if the dormant quake inside you  
cracked you open sooner,  
savings account: no larger than \$2,000 no loan for you

the only overcome consistent in my life is cis men who over cum as if their pleasure is the  
only possible route  
please get off  
split seeds smaller than my hope  
if over-cummers even harvested the nanoscopic energy  
used to find my clitoris,  
we’d have hella universal design  
but at least we have muscle!

at this stop  
please get off

you can carry a power wheelchair up two flights, right?  
the L train elevator is still broken, I know what an inspiration

## The Last Hour at L'Express Diner

Lola Page

There is a man next to me bragging about how he was once mugged outside of the hotel where Reagan was shot. In a strong French accent, he recalls the event in grotesque detail to his younger companion. Nothing happened save for a few lost francs and a good story where the near presidential assassination is a footnote. This Frenchman is now the hero of this story. Reagan, the afterthought, becomes the tragic background lore, who was not able to escape the same fate the man to my left did in the same place.

The man across from him is a potential employee angling for a job. The Frenchman laughs as the story wraps up and such follies continue until they pay separate checks. I think about my father, a natural mimic, and how he would have delighted in that story, to mock a stranger months later. These things are a ghost that lingers within the shell of a moment – a cacophony of nesting dolls that never fit quite right into each other. This mugging fits snugly into a piece of 1980s mythology, only to emerge to an unimpressed crowd. Had my father heard this story, it would have resurfaced later over the years to family. From attempted assassination to a foreigner and an unsuspecting attacker, to me, to my father, to my family, and so on.

I am eating the same meal I have ordered for years. A few stragglers are eating alone, just like me. They might be thinking of their fathers, or Washington D.C., or what their yearly salary could be if they got that job. You have to want the money badly to be interviewed at this hour. It is, at its heart, a business transaction. When I think of my father sitting across from me eating duck confit, he is telling me stories from the 1980s. He is a businessman too, and he was always trying to sell me on the next big idea, if not a story that has come to pass, then what could have been had I witnessed it too. The men next to me eating pâté are a mirror image of my own experiences in this same place, though I had never eaten at the window seat in the left corner by the mirrors, and I never have been mugged. The sentiment is the same—to be told is to be present, and to listen is a part of the transaction, in love or wealth.

I finally looked over to see the man who had been talking all this time, as if he would suddenly start bleeding from a gunshot wound. Instead, he has glasses like my mother, and shoes like my father. It is one in the morning, and I think to myself, my, how things would have been different if you had decided to join the secret service. Instead, he was here, in this diner, passing the time with an anecdote, 41 years too late.



Time Flies  
Nickie Cohen

### *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Six*

**MY:** I know that you also released 20 Atomic Sonnets during the pandemic online for free. And I wanted to ask; Why was that so important to you, especially during the pandemic? And can you tell me more about your thoughts on the glossary, annotations and footnotes?

**RBO:** I wanted as many people to read this as possible and I'm not saying chapbooks should be free, as *Black Warrior Review* did pay me for the work, but it was important that I bring this weird joy into people's lives, especially in 2020. The whole reason why I wrote it is in 2019, The Periodic Table celebrated its 150th birthday. I'm like, this event needs more attention. The Atomic Sonnets is very impish because no one element is written the same. Some electrons are bees and sometimes it's all about Tori Amos. I included a glossary, so people would see what I was doing with each sonnet. I got a grant to write The Atomic Sonnets as a full length and am taking on the entire periodic table. Poets are doing really interesting things with footnotes. When I was in school, there was a very strong emphasis on formalism. I was told that if you ever need to use footnotes, that was a bad thing, your [work] should be universal enough to be understood. One of the reasons I didn't have footnotes in The Atomic Sonnet is, I wanted you to experience the sonnet as it is, and then go back and read the annotations. I'm not against formalism. I think you write without worrying, will this be published? I think you should do the writing, always, before the thinking about the publishing or even the editing. Like, just get it out on the page, play with it and [move] things around.

**MY:** You're such an observer of the world around you, do you think that being an observer has aided in creating your poetry and what do you think is the strength of your observations?

**RBO:** I think it's lived experience, the good and the bad. I have had the fortune to see quite a bit of the world as someone who has been poor and broke most of her life. Even when I was homeless, I was happy.

I was always just flitting about in my 20s, I didn't know better, I still don't, but when I started to have [health] problems, that took me out a bit. But, while I was going through all these periods of immense doubt, that year actually led me to writing *If This is the End of the Age of Discovery*. When the frameworks of my faith were falling away, I didn't want to just be left with memories, I wanted to keep living. I continue to have these really wild and crazy adventures. I feel like the decisions I made in my life put me in some danger of my own making, but I wouldn't trade my life for anything. Even the things that I once believed in didn't work out. [If] I hadn't made those choices, I wouldn't be where I am. I think experiencing things is very important, going through heartbreak, joy, turmoil, having people challenge you, having disagreements that don't end up in fistfights. The first question I asked in my young life is "why" and now the question is "what if"? So I'm very hopeful for the future. I'm very hopeful for all the adventures that people are going to have, I think the next two to three years are going to be very frightening and challenging and *terrifying* for a lot of people, we're just gonna go through so much rapid change with technology. But in this branch of the multiverse, literature will have another renaissance. We're experiencing one now, but there's going to be another one, more people who don't have the time to write will. I'm really hopeful for the people of the future, for the way we communicate, for humans. I don't know how much longer I'll be around. I'm hoping for a while. But I'm optimistic, I'm cautiously optimistic.



The Woman (S)he Becomes  
Jay Pratt

I see her staring at me with eyes of grey.  
Striking, cold gaze. Piercing through my everything.

I've tried so hard to hide.  
Over my shoulder looking to see if she's gone. She remains.

She keeps coming back. As if she never leaves, she stays when I  
tear her off and throw her out like last week's sunrise. She's still  
here.

I just look at her. In her grace, her grey hair tangles in her fingers. I  
want her to become the woman that she is so much that I can't bear  
to look away when she transforms. It's an almost violent act.

She carves and stitches and snatches and yanks. Pulling back  
tired eyes to find someone new. But she does it so flawlessly. She rises and lifts. She floats,  
and spins, and yells.

She caught her reflection and scoffed, as if unhappy with her creation,

She paints a face so unrecognizable, I don't know her anymore.  
She pouts and plucks. And cinches and cuts her eyes at the men staring on the streets. En-  
during the cat calls that hit like bullets.

All the names, and the faces

But she struts, and prances past all of her issues like only she can. Grimey streetways turned into glorious catwalks. One foot after the other, every neon fluorescent sign screams for her moniker.

She goes through the night, so anonymous. But seen by everyone. Touched by adoring hands.

I watch her. Now green with envy. I want her to notice me, I want her to teach me how to become that.

She returns home. To the morning

To the dawn breaking her illusion and disguise. She goes to the bathroom. Rubbing warm water on her sharpened cheeks to wash away midnight.

She becomes him again. He becomes me. And I must become someone else, once more



**Giddy Up**  
Nickie Cohen

To All Joan  
Grant Parsons

My grandma died a week before her birthday. She died alone, with the nurse of a hospital where she had never been. The nurse called us on the phone and we all, together, took turns saying how much we loved her. She couldn't respond. My uncle played his violin over our group phone call.

Our group phone call violin which was being played by my uncle was interrupted by the alone nurse. Unresponsive, she could no longer hear us. The group phone call ended soon after, as no more violin playing happened.

In 6 months, we were together and the violin playing continued. The flowers were the wrong size, the wrong colors. Our pitched canopy's legs kept faltering. Someone, who hardly knew her, said she'd be "skiing on the mountain in the sky." She never once skied in her life and never would've. She always kept her head above the water.

ODE 2 02 (A Mirrored Self Portrait)

Celia Rose

I.

Crave the caress/Not the caresser Intimacy is object/Like a life  
Or homicide rates /Like stomach virus  
& Cyanide/& depression  
Want touch?/& touch?  
Want skin?/& skin?  
Want soul/?& soul?  
Not only firm/Plush like cement You always crave/more&more  
You build fever/Like you build desk Instruction pamphlet/Upside down  
Your head twisted/Behind your arms Squid ink licorice/Flesh twirling like  
Soiled toilet water/Down the drain  
Down the pipes/Flowing into sewer creek And atop the head/Of a  
cotton-mouthing Rat with/Matted fur.

II.

}Celia requests  
Our Lord Dionysus.  
Celia desires  
thick, tender coils creeping  
Between the webs of her fingers. Celia needs  
The 12th Olympian's Heart  
Beating between her  
Thighs.{  
O Celia,  
Once lusted after

The Prince of Denmark

+ Celia

=

The Newborn King Claudius

Praying for his mercy

Like a child screeching for emancipation Through their scorching, invisible  
Tears in the midst of a fit

At the cash register as they begged

To dye their saliva a bright, thick blue With blueberry wands.  
you bathed in the brook

Wfilst

O/Phelia

Boiled in the stew of  
Splintered wood,

Loose Poppies

+ Miniature, leaping frogs With a slick skin reminiscent of  
Virgin olive oil—

III.

Oh Celia!!

Do you remember

When we stuck up

7-11 the night before

Thxgiving?! LMFAOOOO! The look on that guys face

He was like:

:0!

Pricele.ss

Priceless\*

When you pulled out that .38 for all the money  
In the register &  
We only made  
\$1278.97?  
So fcking irritating.  
We legit did all that  
FOR FUCKING NOTHING!!! WE CSNT EVEN PAY  
A THRID OF OUR  
RENT WITH THAT!!!!  
>ik it's so annoying  
Lol. i can't believe we  
Didn't get caught.  
But at least we got something< What did you buy w  
your half of the \$ ??  
>what the fuck do u think I bought bitch?!<  
>She sends me a picture  
Of her holding multiple  
Bags with different brand names Scribbled all over the  
Varied, crumpled wrappings  
Of the plastic and paper protecting Whatever was underneath.  
She was smiling wide  
Her pearl teeth illuminated Under, her soft, balmy  
Pink and brown lips  
Spreading their thick walls.< BS!!! Clearly.  
JKing.  
How much did you spend?? >most of it. anything  
else not pictured  
was ingested and  
shat out or  
sitting in a drawer.  
;)<

## Internal Speedometer

Grace Coleman

Back in February, while sitting in Stuyvesant Park surrounded by bare trees and concrete, I dreamt of a Virginia summer. Against the city's biting wind, memories of dewey eighty degree mornings warmed my hands. I missed fresh air I could taste the rain on, that I could inhale without scrunching up my nose reflexively. When I thought hard enough, I could almost transport myself back to the dark, warm streets of my suburban neighborhood, Crestwood, surrounded by tulip poplar trees and the blaring call of spring peeper frogs.

At the time, I craved stillness. My body was tired, and I missed the ease of driving, air conditioning, and large, well-stocked retail stores. Exhaustion compelled me to forget that, given the option, I'd rather be mentally still and physically wrecked over the other way around. My mind and body are almost never in sync—when one slows down, the other picks up the slack.

When I was a baby, my mom and dad would go on drives to get me to fall asleep. There was something about the motion that soothed me, it was the only remedy for colic that seemed to work. Even today, there isn't anywhere I'll fall asleep faster than a moving vehicle. A therapist once told me that my internal speedometer was set to ninety miles per hour. To me, going fifty might feel slow, but it's actually the speed I should be driving if I want to avoid a crash. It makes sense that I feel most at peace when hurtling down an interstate in the passenger seat—finally, my outer world mimics my inner one.

I was crashing and burning two weeks into summer vacation. My external speedometer had slowed to zero, and my emotional body felt like it'd been struck by a bolt of lightning with no exit wound. I stayed sequestered in my room until the evening (sleeping at odd hours, consuming too much HBO, overthinking), and delivered for DoorDash from seven to nine (if feeling motivated). I lived like a nocturnal cave dweller. I could have called friends, I'd managed to hold onto a few, but an object at rest wants to stay at rest—even when it hurts.

In late June, my mom asked me what Obsessive Compulsive Disorder felt like. I said, "My brain is always coming up with reasons I'm a bad person."

She said, "But you're not a bad person"

I said, "The thing is, my brain won't let me stop thinking about the possibility that I might be. It tells me that other people could get hurt if I stop ruminating. So I have to look back through everything I've ever done to make sure I won't hurt anybody in the future."

She said, "God, Grace, that sounds exhausting."

I said, "Yeah."

The exhaustion I sought to escape in February had simply moved somewhere else, and it was taking a greater toll on me than sore calves and chapped lips.

In early July I visited my aunt to dye silk scarves in her kitchen. I wasn't feeling my best—the stillness had been getting to me that week. On the drive over, anxious thoughts borne from stagnation poured out of my eyes in large droplets, the movement of the car must have jostled them free.

My aunt dresses almost exclusively in teal and lilac. She wears light, flowing materials like linen, and always completes her outfit with dangling turquoise earrings. She is in her mid 60s, sturdily built, and emanates a kind of compassion that is nearly aggressive in its softness. Her name is Joy.

I stood by the window and brushed splotches of blue, green, and yellow dye onto silk stretched across a wooden frame. Joy was finishing up a painting of her recently deceased pug's aura. When we talked, it was about other family members. Joy is the oldest child of five, and embodies the role better than anyone I've ever known. She relishes being the glue that holds things together – the aunt who never forgets birthdays, the aunt who plans art projects with you months in advance. After retiring from her job at Dominion power company, she became a meditation instructor at a studio in Richmond, specializing in a type of energy work known as healing touch. At this point, I was willing to try anything.

Five days passed, and I was back in Joy's kitchen. This time it was dimly lit, with a massage table folded out and a recording of wind chimes playing in the background. We raised our arms towards the ceiling. Joy closed her eyes, I kept mine open. She told me to connect to the Earth's energy beneath my feet. I wondered how long I'd have to stand here like this.

Ironically, there is little touch involved in healing touch at all. When I lay down on the table, Joy's hands hovered a few centimeters over my body. She was getting a sense for my energy field – which I had, at that point, convinced myself was either nonexistent or irreparably damaged. But the session continued, so she must have found it.

Joy sneezed when her hands traveled over my throat chakra. She said I wasn't expressing myself. That's fair enough: despite having OCD for ten years, my mom still had to ask me what it felt like. My mental health is an occasionally-alluded-to secret between us. She's always known that something wasn't right, but she didn't know what "not right" meant. My mom isn't one to pry, and I'm not one to push, so not much ends up getting said. Perceived weakness is hard for me to talk about – every time I bring it up, I feel boulders shifting behind my ribs.

Joy reported stagnant energy around my uterus – just the thing any sexually active college student wants to hear. The top of my skull was also a problem area. She told me I had too much fire energy, and finished the hour-long session with a wooden pendulum she held over each chakra. The current radiating from my freshly opened energy centers whisked the instrument clockwise (although I'm pretty sure I saw Joy's wrist move).

That evening, Joy emailed me a detailed set of notes. She prescribed an increased intake of water energy to offset my fire, such as the following excerpt:

#### **ADD EVEN MORE WATER ENERGY TO YOUR LIFE EACH DAY**

*There are many ways to do this:*

- *Submerge yourself in a swimming pool, river, lake, or the ocean*
- *Soak in the bathtub. Think of the water all around you as a soft hug, gently removing toxins.*
- *Stand in the shower and use your MIND-BODY CONNECTION to INTEND that every drop of shower water is removing tightness, tension and stress from your body and mind. This is your "shower meditation."*

I forgot to do the shower meditation. I also failed to envision my bathwater as a “soft hug.” But for two weeks, I drove to the James River every morning. I took off my shoes and walked on damp rocks until the sky changed from indigo to orange. And Joy was right: I felt better afterwards. There was something about the river that calmed me—as if the rushing current taught my thoughts to flow correctly, on and on, instead of getting trapped in a whirlpool. Paradoxically, New York has a similar effect. The water is replaced by endless streams of people, collectively in motion. The river is the city’s natural parallel.

In August I brought a guy back to my house that my friends told me to stay away from. We put The Cars’ *Panorama* on my record player and rehashed high school drama. I hadn’t invited anyone over in months, and lying pressed against his arm made my heartbeat stutter. The moment felt like potential energy, like a balloon inflating to its breaking point. When stillness is infused with the possibility of motion, it becomes anticipation. Anticipation is what makes motion feel like catharsis.

The anticipation of moving back to the city is what got me through the rest of summer. I watched hours of home improvement videos on YouTube while lying in unwashed sheets, surrounded by piles of unfolded laundry. Apartment tours and Architectural Digest filled me with a sense of purpose—they assured me that, soon enough, I would be in motion again.

With the start of classes, I met my catharsis. I moved into my apartment on East 46th Street and haven’t had one day to myself yet. For now, my physical body is beating out my brain for my attention. I’m not sure if it’s the city or the Prozac I was prescribed three weeks ago, but the result is the same: when surrounded by motion, I am happier.

borscht is borrsh' is борщ

Anna Scola

When my grandmother taught me to make borscht many years ago, I was surprised to learn that beetroot is not the key ingredient. Beets have the strongest color wash, but they offer little flavor. The soup's defining sweet and sour palate draws from a tablespoon of tomato paste. I felt like she let me in on a well-kept Russian secret. A secret I treasure more now that she's gone.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this is the first year of my life that I do not visit my home in Moscow. I feel amiss without my annual helping of borscht. Borscht, a staple of any Eastern European lunch table, traces its origins back to ancient Kievan Rus'. Due to the risk that the war poses to the soup's lineage, UNESCO listed Borscht as an *Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*. And so, in the confines of New York, I embarked on a pilgrimage to safeguard my grandmother's signature dish.



I walk down 2nd Ave to Veselka, a famous Ukrainian restaurant that has been open since 1954. On this sunny September afternoon, words are boldly printed in yellow and blue on every window panel. *Make Borscht, Not War*. I read the Cyrillic script like they are in a language I know. Veselka sounds like the Russian word, *veselo* (a good time). Google corrects me – the word means Rainbow in Ukrainian. One of the windows exclaims: 100% OF PROCEEDS FROM OUR BORSCHT SALES ARE BEING DONATED TO HELP UKRAINE.

As I take a seat on the side street table, customers chatter away. The air is adrift with American voices. The waiter taking my order has an Eastern European accent. I order borscht making sure to roll my r and end on a soft sh—borrsh'. He warns me that the soup contains pork. I suppose many New Yorkers request vegetarian options; I often do too. But, today, I opt for the traditional preparation. He takes my menu and hurries off.

The server who brings me the soup smiles gently. "Enjoy," he says, in a latin American accent.

The soup comes in a heavy bowl stamped with the Veselka logo (an orange ribbon wrapped around a beet), a little container of sour cream, and a slice of challah. The borscht is ruby red, sprinkled with dill. The potato, carrot, and cabbage inside are chopped to the same size, all dyed maroon. The smell of lemon juice and vinegar sharpens my inhales instantly. I dip the spoon and watch it slowly flood with red liquid. Bubbles of oil pool on the surface. Bringing the spoon to my lips, soup streams into my mouth and my throat coats with thick droplets. The meat, cut to perfect cubes, borrows the texture of butter and melts in my mouth. The tangy flavor tells me that Veselka knows about the tomato paste.

I send bread boats afloat in the soup like my grandmother taught me. The challah is deliciously sweet as if baked in honey. I drop an island of sour cream into the red liquid. It slowly dissolves, leaving white specks swimming with the oil. This ocean turns a baby pink. In another spoonful, my tongue plays with the cold and warm textures slipping between my teeth. I bite into a large bean. This surprises me—my grandmother's recipe never included lima beans. I juggle the bean's grainy texture and the softened potato between each bite—I'll include lima beans the next time I cook borscht.

I sit in the corner, savoring a nostalgic moment. I use my finger to lick out the sour cream in an attempt to be recognized for my upbringing; perhaps one of the round-faced waiters shall recognize the Eastern European roots that also shape my cheeks. We could wink at each other, both knowing about the tomato paste. But no one pays attention. New York rushes by. A wave of hipsters pass my table, breaking the illusion that I could be anywhere else.

After paying the bill, I leave and blend back into the crowd.



The next day of my sacred Borscht pilgrimage, I take the subway to Brighton Beach—a faraway Brooklyn neighborhood heavily settled by Russophone immigrants. The air is a light blue. Sun shines through the cracks of the overhead subway platform.

I stroll over to a restaurant that Google claims has the best borscht. An 8-foot plastic bear stands guard with a furrowed brow and claws outstretched; a sign hangs around his neck: *Skovorodka Restaurant Great Food Welcome.*

The space is dimly lit against orange walls and a burgundy ceiling. The tables are covered by deep blue cloths accented with yellow napkins. Kitchy fabric flowers glued to pans dangle from the ceiling.

I greet the older man at the bar. He points to an empty table. I read the Russian half of the menu. When we make eye contact he nods at me, gesturing that he's ready to take my order. I stutter slightly over my accent while ordering *borrsh'* in Russian. Asking what I'd like to drink, he uses an endearing *ti*—the informal you.

A man walks in and takes the table in front of me. He smiles a lot and scans the menu wide-eyed. I try to discern if he is from out-of-town or far uptown.

"What's good here?" he asks the waiter in English.

"I don't know. Everything. Depends on what you like," the waiter says with a heavy accent and a dim expression.

"What's the most authentic?"

"You can get the borscht. It's very good. Very Russian."

The man looks at the menu item listed as *Ukrainian Borscht*. "Well, actually, it's Ukrainian," he says with a sly smile.

The waiter shrugs at the manager behind him. They holler in unison,

*"borrsh' iz borrsh'."*

The back of the restaurant is full. Slavic words interlaced with accordion melodies coast towards me. An elderly couple begins to waltz between the tables. Their smiles and skin glow in the neon purple lights that bounce off the walls. Another couple offers them applause.

The waiter serves my borscht with a gravy boat of sour cream and a basket of black and white bread. He sees me writing and asks in Russian, *who I am to become.*

"A writer, one day."

"Ah," he says grinning, "*molodetz!*"<sup>1</sup>

The soup glistens with orange oil collecting where the liquid meets the bowl. I mix the sour cream with the uneven cuts of vegetables and shreds of meat. It turns a carrot color. A bay leaf floats on the surface. The pickling scent of dill absorbs each spoonful. Shreds of cabbage drape over a spoon that looks just like my grandmother's large ornate spoons in Moscow. I can't fit the spoon in my mouth so the soup drips back into the bowl and sprinkles my white shirt. I slurp and catch the liquid under my tongue. Surely, tomato paste. I sink into those faraway flavors of my grandmother's kitchen.

With a slice of black bread, I soak up the last of the soup. As a finale, I cleanse my palate with white bread heavily smeared with butter. The waiter hands me the check and says, "you have a very nice cap" referring to my newsboy hat. "But," he says, "it doesn't suit you. You're a beautiful girl, very tall—you need something bigger." He gestures around his head. "Like this and slanted to the side like this. Yes, like a real artist." Delighted by his sincerity, I sign the check and add an extra tip for the advice.

Walking out of the restaurant, I look up at the giant resolute bear. An old man walks by us chuckling. He says to me in Russian, "I thought you were having a conversation with him."

"I tried, but he doesn't want to talk."

"No no, he does—he just can't speak the language."

I look at the chains around his feet. "Yes, and he wants to run far away."

The old man saunters on with a crinkled smile.

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[1] The Russian colloquial and endearing 'attagirl.'



### *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Seven*

MY: I asked what your dream was as a kid. What are your dreams now? What do you want? What do you want to do? Or what do you want to see happen?

RBO: I want us to move beyond capitalism. I realized that we don't need "isms," what we all need is *zero-point energy*. Zero-point energy is this idea that you can harvest energy from subatomic particles floating in and out of existence. Nobody wants to fund it because there's no money to be made. But I think once we do that, there's gonna be a lot of liberation. For me personally. On a more personal note, I'd like to finish these three novels that I've been working on forever, because I need to turn them in (deadlines!); one deals with AI, and the second one expands on ideas in *If This Is the Age We End Discovery*. The third, let's just say, is bizarro and bloody—and antimatter! I'm fascinated with antimatter. I fully plan to start a GoFundMe in which I just need like billions of dollars to get enough antimatter so I can crash my matter self with antimatter and travel at the speed of light and I'll try my best to report back. Because theoretically, if you crash your matter self with antimatter, you should be able to crash at the speed of light. One of my [scientist] friend's dream is to be tossed into a black hole where he is *spaghettified*. He says he's gonna report back. Sure, Jan. I ended up writing a poem about it where I told him that's very boring. Black hole deaths are so predictable, no? But I do like black holes. A reader sent me a Black Hole lunchbox after *The Black Hole* (1979); it's a this terrible movie from Disney. It's great. I love it but it's so bad. For a while I kept a Milky Way [candy bar] in the thermos so I could say I'm keeping the Milky Way in a Black Hole. But then I ate the Milky Way, and I don't like Mars bars. And who wants Mars in the black hole. It has to be all or nothing, has to be the Milky Way. So if you have the stomach for really bad movies, I highly recommend it. *The Black Hole*. Not the aforementioned candy bars.

MY: I will put that on my watch list. I still have *turn around BRXGHT XYXS* staring at me, I believe when you were a kid and saw these eyes in the dark with your mom, your mom said that you both were dreaming. What do you think of them now?

RBO: They terrified me as a kid. A lot of strange things happened in my childhood, with those xyxs. I continue to see them, when I sleep, here in New York and when traveling. The eyes are dark as can be but they're also really *bright*. They watch me and flash out. I do find comfort in them, but it's also not comforting because it still terrify me, I don't completely understand it. The only time that something else I don't understand has terrified me is when I started to have the symptoms of my illness—I felt the ground being *taken out from me*. And so all I'll say is humans are not alone on this planet. Near the Gulf of Mexico, my mother had this idea that that extraterrestrials, would power their spacecraft in the water. I said, "how do you know that," and she said, "because I just know". And that's all you'll get from her. She said, "you figure it out." And so I do, very helpful lady.

## Baby's Blanket Study

Kath DeGennaro

Anthoras and bagels to float upon the red bed went ahead in dye and in the straight sturdy signage. Anthoras nestle in diagonal push and pull against the wheat. We stained the red with food or Jell-O.

Underside is pink translucent heather over side is pilly red and felt strip white. Undesired upside down-ness is flattening.

Bagels boiled in cotton not fattening.

A stitch atop of corner or crease makes for the easy fold for she left a soft red symbol. A regional two by three a real ideal edible diptych for if to crease under your sight it must tent on top of my body. For if to get small it must take up space.

Redness was the emergence of a second child familiar chewing on the Avenues was mellow blue and yellow. Dough to mold a hole out of collects twenty-one rings considered lived in. Consider boxes smaller than two by three trap the body's tented air. Consider legs warmed consider chair adorned.

Blue bedside and ornamental reds fleck between cities and on buses. Consider if the hues' stained windows trap steam it's pleasure.

## Inheritance Study

Cecilia Sagun

I devise, bequeath, and give \_\_\_\_

- 1) pearl earrings (daily reminders that I want to make you proud; ancestors whose names I do not know may watch over me with a powder gaze; my American dreams dangling from my ears as I sprint to catch the subway; faint scents of laundry detergent and ginger wafting across my shoulders; do your eyes gleam from my accomplishments?),
- 2) \$36,000 (my savings account is filling up quick quick quick but tuition takes me out at the knees, sink drips from overflow and my monthly interest profit; if I wasn't a writer I would probably be able to afford an apartment with a radiator that works and no mice in the vents and walls; the metallic rust crash of the trash chute outside my door would be a more lyrical beautiful thing; my bedroom would have a much higher ceiling),
- 3) a low spice tolerance (the Philippines is a sour country, not spicy, and I let the vinegar dance on my tongue as *Fantasia 2000* did across my childhood, before I rewatched it last winter and saw the Dance of the Mushrooms and realized how racist it is; the lentil salad I make has a lemon-turmeric vinaigrette that makes my sweetheart's Bambi eyes twitch; the only heatwave I can handle is a San Antonio summer and even sriracha puts me in a piroquette-tizzy; my mother can never take a sprinkle of chili flakes, a white Christmas flutter - I inherited her tiny ears alongside her acid tongue),
- 4) an increased risk for breast and uterine cancer (I miss you Lola, *mahal kita, mahal na mahal kita, proud ka ba sakin?*),
- 5) the inability to speak Tagalog (I have a mother but no mother tongue drips from my own; I had a grandmother and I miss her in my marrow; I have a Lolo and I should call him more than I do; I wonder if my father still thinks highly of me, are you still proud?),
- 6) rosary (I do not know how to pray but I wonder if God likes my mumbles; I take communion in the kitchen and say "let's eat" instead of grace; you need bay leaves for any good adobo; my roommates used up the rest of my rice wine vinegar so I should go to H-Mart and pick up soy sauce if I'm already there),
- 7) belief (I miss you, *miss na kita, mahal kita, miss na kita, miss na miss na kita; galing galing*),

to Cecelia Claire Sagun.



Space  
Clarissa Rubin

## The Serpent

K. Aisling Hashem-Doran

The hall, though host to thousands, was near silent. All but a few of the bodies gathered were synthetic: empty host servers projecting the form of their possessors, mobile eyes and ears provided free of charge to the many millions trapped in their shelters until the next moon phase.

The Serpent flickered between them, skipping like a stone. Possessors would experience her visits as a temporary loss of signal, unfortunate but expected from the aging and imperfect Public Good Projection System. Premium synthetics could be rented, of course—higher resolution projections, 70% global coverage, and clean, “worry-free” private signal paths—but such brazen displays of luxury were rare in this quiet age, and largely stuck to the elevated balconies, above the rabble. The Serpent settled into a pair of eyes close to the stage by the left wing—a good angle for the coming speech, she decided.

Her Shadow would reprimand her for lingering. In the event of extended habitation, the imprinted synthetic would be decommissioned at nearest convenience to halt the development of identity. If the subsequent loss of that inchoate identity compromised her ability to perform her duties, she too would be decommissioned, and another would be raised to take her place. Whether her fear of that possibility was programmed or her own she did not know. Her love, too, may have been programmed, though she could think of no greater gift her erstwhile sculptors could have given her. Nestled in the crowd, a synthetic among synthetics, she watched her Seraph speak.

They took the stage as a wave takes the beach. Though their body was small, their presence filled every inch of the cavernous hall. The glimmering fabric that shrouded them, though thin enough to be translucent, was layered by the hundreds into a mist of silk and lace, as if the air itself had frozen in place to shield their fragile form from the world’s eyes. The silence grew softer still as their voice, delicate and glassy, wafted over the eager crowd.

The Serpent felt her way around, chasing spikes in signal indicating surprise—a nudge here, a graze there—as the aberration wound his way throughout the room, disrupting the otherwise uniform crowd.

Standard synthetics offered sight, sound, and touch, but the Serpent needed only one to track her prey. Her eyes and ears she saved for the Seraph.

As they spoke, the hall, built for this one purpose, to carry this one voice, came alive: the resonant walls hummed, breathing in passionate concert, weaving their voice into a cradle that enveloped the crowd.

The aberration had settled now, unaware of the Serpent's presence. As she struck, her heart rended for those temporarily robbed of sight by the automated cleanup system. When the job was done, she let the system take over, signals dropping out in waves as the body was dragged silently through the oblivious crowd and out of the hall.

Just before the recall command spirited her away, the eyes which were, for the moment, hers, met those of her beloved Seraph, silver and gleaming with refracted moonlight as if it emanated from their very soul, as vast and inviting as the cold night sky.

Of the many things taken from her, she felt one absence above all: her right to speech. Just as earth-bound man dreams of the sky, she longed for her words to take flight. As her borrowed vision went dark, voiceless pleas rang out in her mind like a desperate prayer, dying out in the missing pathways between thought and speech.

through the attic (melting sonnet no. 1)

*for utkarsh, a childhood friend of mine*

Ian Powers

it was the day after my grandma died because / every day was the day after my grandma /  
died i am trying not to make this beautiful / we got a call: utkarsh fell through his attic /

my mom leaving for michigan, she was gone / or she was about to leave or she just got back

/

or she was both nowhere and everywhere i was / walking through party city, it was almost  
halloween /

would we still decorate this year with skeletons? /

the foam gravestone engraved “izzy dead”? /

quick catalog of things that break: / oor/boards, back/bones, friend/ships,  
line /

breaks too i could go on but we don’t have all day / which day do we have?  
not the day

after / my grandma died (melting sonnet no. 2) the day i could finally go see / utkarsh with his new back/brace more than anything / i just wanted to know that he was alive /

and he was sitting upright in an office chair i sat / parallel and we played trivia games  
on our phones / for what felt like five minutes the house had never been / so quiet anyone  
could've heard our hearts / i

time may break you / but you can't break time /  
and what doesn't break /

melts

*An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Eight*

MY: Very helpful. I have taken up a lot of your time. So I think I have a few more fun questions and then I'll close it out. What color do you wear the most?

RBO: I love all colors. You will always see me in something colorful. I do love red. I remember when I was still teaching in person. I showed up to class, and the students stopped me, they're like, "we can't go on. You don't have your red lipstick on? Professor, please," and I was like, fine. So I pulled up my compact, and then put on lipstick. At that moment, the security guard walked by, and she was just like, "oh, okay," and everyone started laughing and they're like "good, you look right now." And I think they are right—I don't look right if I don't wear it. It's just very bizarre. I also really love blue. And I really love yellow and orange. So you know, I love all the colors.

MY: No, I like that it's a signature. What number resonates with you the most?

RBO: 7 and 12.

MY: I thought you might say *Efes* [hebrew for zero].

RBO: Efes isn't a number though. Zero is not a number. Efes also means "to nullify, to conceal," in Judaism, which I hypothesized in *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* is most likely what dark energy is. It's fascinating because if you want to talk about zero, you can't, because to talk about it, you're still talking about something. So you can't talk or even think about it because you're thinking about something. Even nothingness is not the same thing as Efes. Even in empty space, there's still subatomic particles floating in and out. So Efes to me is the last great adventure. I've been told by scientist friends that my ideas are interesting, but to take the religion out of it, but then I was talking to some MIT students who said, "no, don't take religion out of it. That is fascinating."

*You're not a mathematician. You're not a physicist, be a poet.*"

Because it might lead somewhere and something interesting. My beloved Hugh Everett wrote poetry in his youth, and his mother was a poet and a writer. I named my cat Hugh Everett. He's curled up but he's an extremely impish cat

**MY:** Favorite hobbies?

**RBO:** I'm willing to try anything. I've scrambled boulders, when I was in better health—I'll do it again, one day, sure. I love swimming. I don't have any formal training in swimming. I kind of just kick out and reach forward. There was a brief stint where I played instruments, like the drum set, which I gave to my cousin Michael K. Gomez. Everyone should check him out. He goes by The DMG. By drums I mean I would mainly attack the cymbals. And I did dance. I wasn't very good, but I had a beautiful posture. Right now I'm trying to grow dwarf blueberries because I did a project between scientists and poets. Some botanist gave me dwarf blueberry plant[s]; one is doing really well, and the other has some words for me. I think another hobby quite honestly is just returning to math and doing some math problems. I really love the ones that you just absolutely cannot solve and that's fantastic, since I don't really plan on solving them. I just want to throw my hat in the ring.

**MY:** Take a crack at. Yeah, it's great. I think it's gonna make my next question a little difficult because it sounds like you're great at everything. What do you think you're terrible at?

**RBO:** Oh God, I'm terrible at a lot of things. I have problems with my spine, and I'm supposed to do these exercises and they really want me to practice on deep breathing, I almost feel high. Because I'm not breathing right most of the time. I love the way I feel after, but I just don't want to waste the five minutes when I could be doing something else. So my neurologist is, "like empty your mind." Which I try to do, but then I just start hearing poetry I want to write in my head and I get up. I could still go to physical therapy and pay for it. But like, I really should just do these exercises on my own.

And so I have a really hard time with meditation, even at night.

MY: What do you wish people asked you about?

RBO: Poetry, always. It's always poetry, although I don't really have a process. I kind of just write and the lines end up where they end up. Poetry is going to be the future of everything of how we chart courses to other planets, of how we're going to communicate with other beings, it really is.

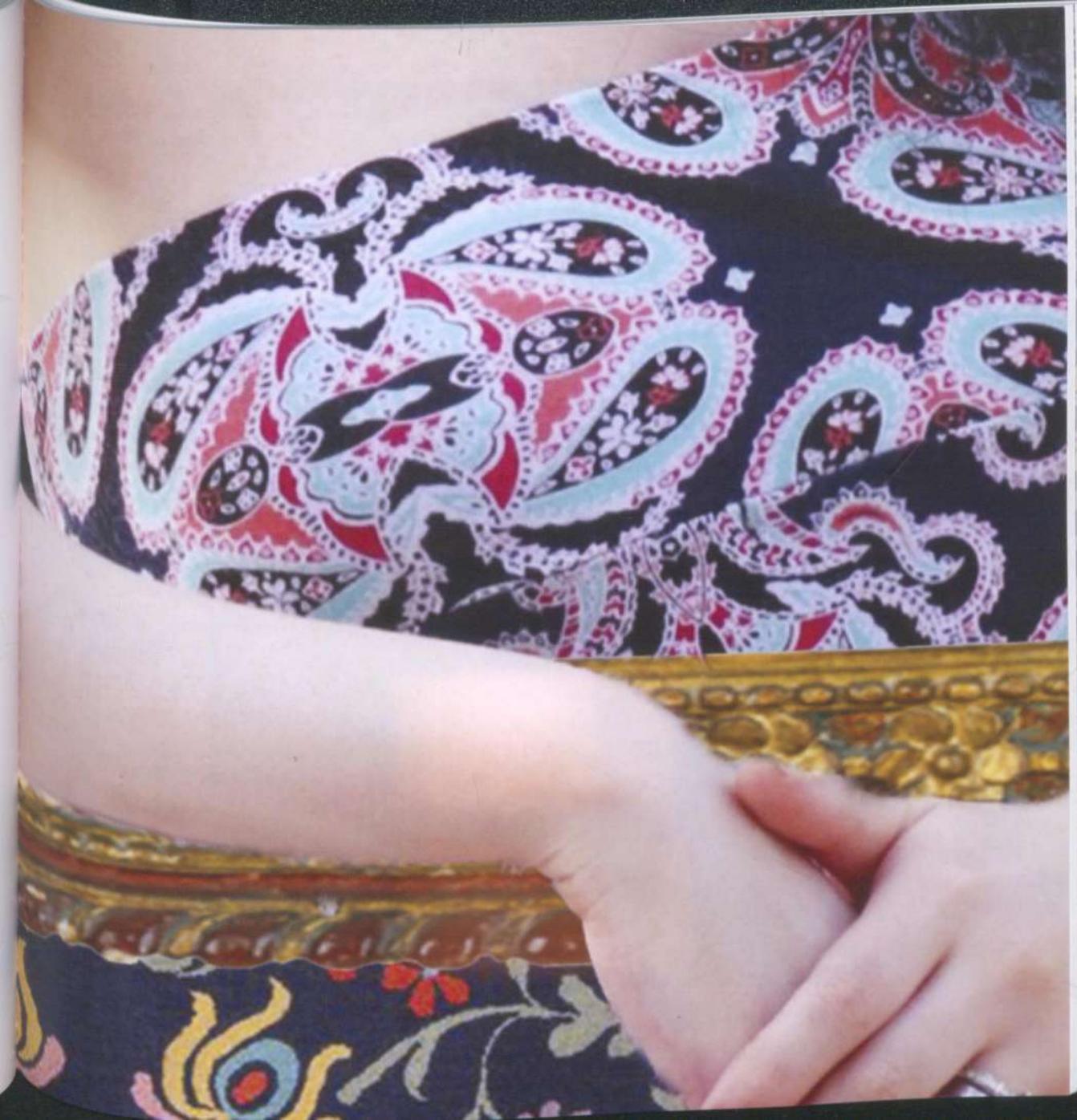
*If people want physics to be the “why” then poetry is the “what if?”*

MY: Any pet peeves?

RBO: I'm pretty easygoing. I guess if I do have one pet peeve, it's been my experience that sometimes the person that you're in the relationship with will see your easygoing, and they'll take advantage of that. I'm very forgiving, because I don't see the point in holding grudges, but there's some people I can't forgive. I just wish people were more honest, and at the same time realized every creature on this earth is fallible and fragile and uncertain and sometimes frightened. And I just think we should be more understanding that no one is perfect, right?

MY: That's really beautiful... What are you ordering at a coffee shop?

RBO: I just like my coffee strong and black. I don't understand the pumpkin spice latte thing. One time a friend tried to talk me into one, and we went in, and the barista was like, "you don't have to order a pumpkin spice latte. If this is your first flavored coffee drink, you can do anything." I was like, "Anything?" So that I ended up getting a lot of *everything*, all kinds of syrup, and by the end of that day, I basically was running in circles on Queen Boulevard from all the sugar I had. I felt like I was gonna die. I'm done with that. Just give me the caffeine. Black coffee. That's it.



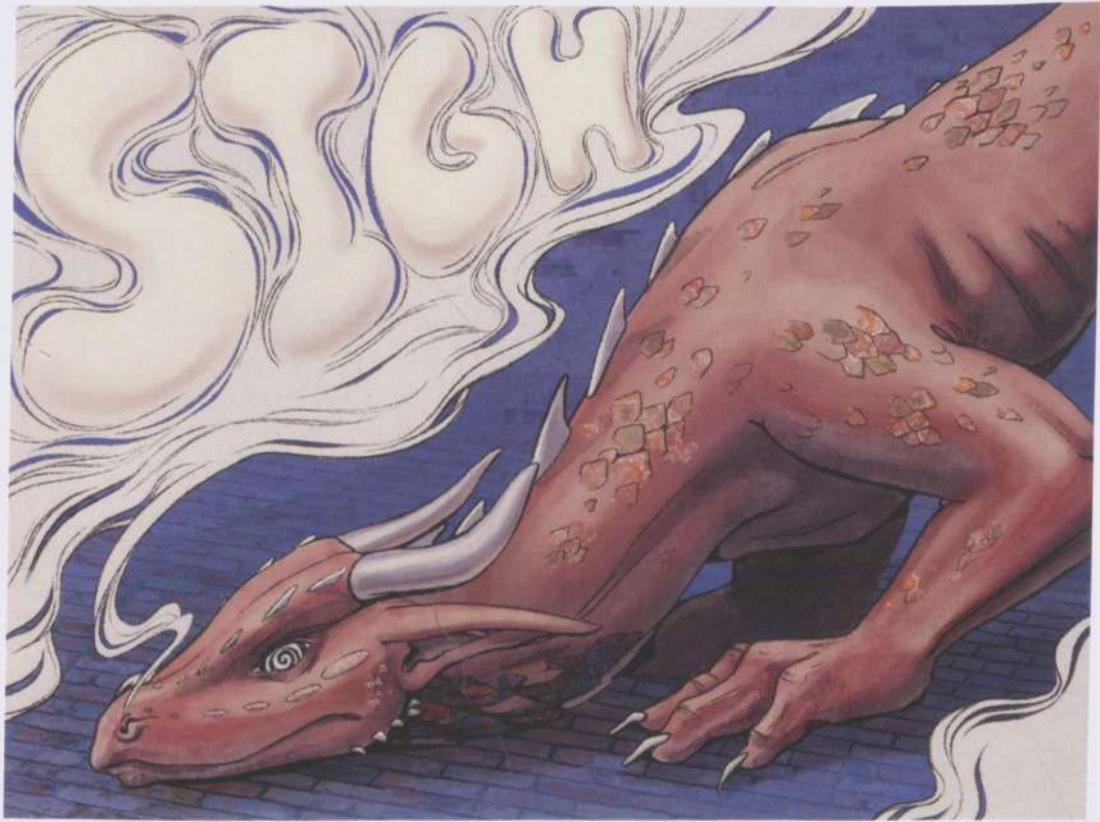


Nearly Perfect Almost Together  
Fin Bunting

prelude

Annelies Stealey

i gave up a tonal shift,  
a burst of the appendix,  
i left my wallet somewhere  
on the main line  
i found freedom in a destitute axis  
and kissed an older boy when i was  
thirteen  
there are variables here  
of pushing coming shoving  
of autonomy in movement  
and of finding myself in nothing  
i do not subscribe to the  
unmovement of it all  
i line my eyes with disrupted boundaries  
i lied because i liked it and i was  
honest  
because maybe i never did anyway



Sigh  
Lauren Lee

## The Sleazebag Speaks

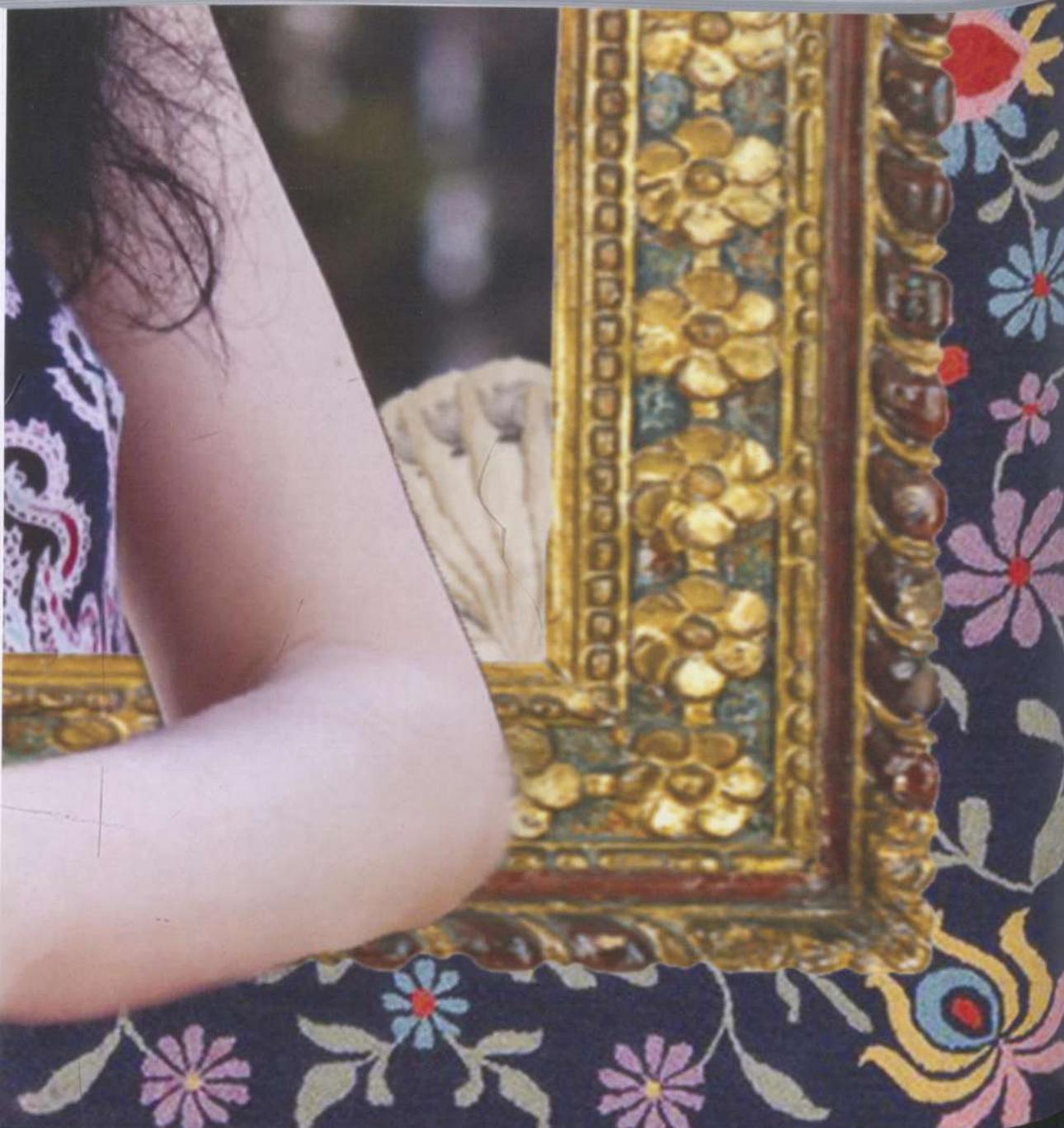
Lova McKnight

When we are born our hands are smooth, like any child  
But look closer and you will see  
we have the hands of a creator, almost like a God.  
We fashion the object from raw material  
like clay to make soft lips and baby fat,  
when we're done  
your bones might ache but they rarely crack.  
We're careful not to harm the product,  
beyond repair; Who will purchase damaged goods?  
Not a good man, that's for sure.  
A good man deserves the prime  
Cut, fresh,  
paint-pink and pliable,  
He is my brother  
in arms and what's mine  
And what's yours, is his.  
Bring the camera closer, he wants  
To see you cry  
tears of joy,  
they water the bright skin pasture and  
By spring next year you'll be good as new, I know  
it takes time to recover from  
a death of the soul.  
You thought you were dying,  
I know, I felt everything you did, I felt it  
through you. On the inside

of your body is a seed glowing bright,  
more beautiful than anything I've seen.  
There is so much love  
to be had in this world, I only wish you could feel it  
like I do. You can't answer  
when I hold your tongue  
but I know you love me, too.



Sun Soak  
Vanya Suchan



## *An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Nine*

MY: What's the story behind your name?

RBO: Well, I was very, very tiny when I was born, and I'm still small. So I think Rosebud is very fitting. I remember one department chair (yes, the aforementioned one) wouldn't call me Rosebud because she didn't think it sounded very "professional." So called me Rose. I signed my emails back to her Rosebud.

MY: I know that you love the 7-train: What is your favorite memory on the 7-train?

RBO: Coming back from Jerusalem, heartbroken. After returning to New York, I was going to meet a friend for dinner in Woodside, in Queens, and I got on the 7-train. I was still trying to find my way and at that time, I didn't know how I was going to make it, see through another day, and a few moments later, the train exit the tunnel as we approached Court Square, and it started going up and then we were outside, lifted into the [setting] sun. I just looked around the car and I'm like, this is where I need to be. It's very bizarre, that particular moment the 7 exits and elevates on the tracks, and I just love it.

MY: Do you have any words or advice for upcoming artists or for anyone who reads this amazing interview?

RBO: Yeah, just take risks. Don't worry so much. In my 20s, I didn't really think about publishing. I did send work out and I got lucky, I got into some really great magazines. I just wanted to live and see as much as I could of the world. I will say I take issue with people who rail against technologies saying, "oh, the kids are always on their phones. They're not living experiences." I do feel that's a little ableist because some people have accessibility issues. And I want them to be able to access things and that's why they're on their phones and to enjoy things that way. I think there's all sorts of experiences for everyone.

But if you can if you're able to, see as much of the world as you can. I did it, very bare budget. I took a lot of risks that were dangerous, but I'm glad I did them. And I would say take a lot of risks in your writing. Read as much as you can. And I'm also of the opinion that you don't just need to read poetry to be a great poet. If you find your voice in Cardi B or really bad sci-fi movies like this one here [holding up *The Black Hole* lunchbox], as much as you love poetry, do it; hierarchies are so anti-poetry, and what is real poetry, anyway? What will be the canon of poetry? There's no room in the 21st century for canons. But I promise you there are going to be ways in which humans will be able to access lots of information in a way that will make it easier to hold a lot more. You won't need to cherry pick who and what is the so called best. I just think inspiration comes from everywhere. And the other thing I will say, rejection doesn't mean the end of the world; keep sending out work. And if you were told me I was going to win the Alice James award for the crazy outlandish [things] I do in that book. I would have said no. Anything is possible. I literally came into poetry with no connections from a working-class family. I didn't know anybody. And you know, I think I didn't just survive, but I *found* my way and I think it takes a lot of courage and persistence. And it's okay to have those days where those aren't in influx. I have days where like, you know, I have a lot of physical pain because of my condition, and sometimes, the pain is A LOT. So you have to be gentle with yourself. Most likely, 99.9% chance, the poem you're working on now, is not going to be the last poem you write, you've got a lot inside you.

MY: I like all those points. I like that. Be persistent. Be gentle with yourself. And 99.9% of the time, that's not gonna be your last poem.

RBO: There's so many.



Title Page  
Sophia Cutino

## The Spider

Isabelle Reardon

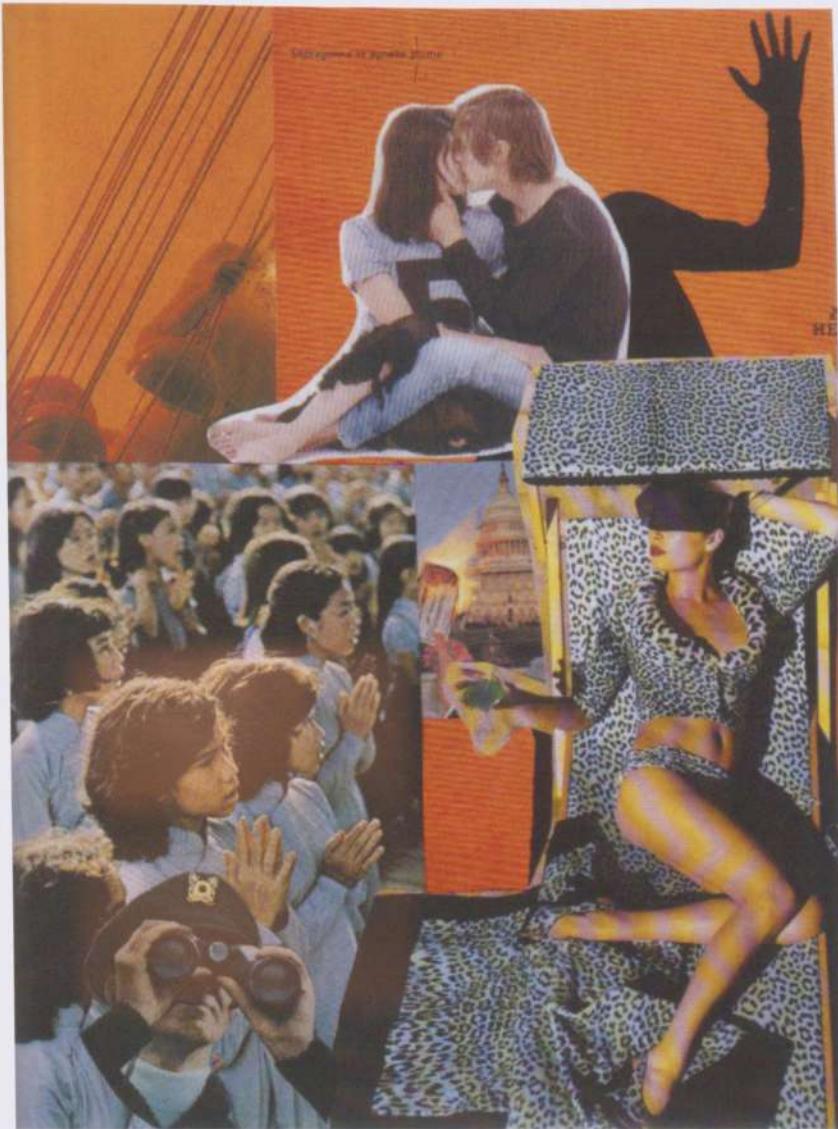
Time makes  
way for white bark,  
spindly branches  
puncturing paper sky,

a sky that rips  
under cat claws, bows  
to the artist, disintegrates  
under the saliva of the family dog, who is still  
here, and isn't.

Time pushes  
against the knees of the mother crouching  
before the open fridge, unable to decide  
which vegetables are still good.

The rugs roll  
up. The suitcases are not packed,  
and everyone needs  
help closing them.

The artist sits  
on her stool in a shadowy corner, painting  
a spider that walks  
through a three-hundred-year-old patch of sun.



surveillance

Maxine Soriano Trujillo



What's Left Of Me In The Shower  
Vanya Suchan

## January / April

Jessie Freedman

### I. January

the violets will read in the newspaper soil about  
forests in white with their snowflake larch trees  
in blossoming dawn and the sheer horse of gold

that crouches in Silence they learn of what was  
Disappeared into the gauzed, bandaged midnight  
The forest in white has a lesson to the violets

they learn that angels too wondered  
of a wind paling space to time  
even the months on the calendar are alive

The world has always been open  
and will always close with you

### II. April

I'm to you (secretly, at the least)  
in the blossoming of the birch,  
we're anything voice his leaves  
anything could be rainbow  
always joyful no tree begs permission

tiny winging selves are singing  
adoring shyly alive then never

Made of nothing bright worlds wave calling to screech-owls  
sharing their wisdom, they say to the titmouse      an ocean is faith  
growing a lifetime in the dark  
darting floating to every now and here  
the air breathes you in too

I'm asking the raindrops to coat your neurons  
let them leech out the dark thoughts  
deliver them to the damp soil



Fear Won't Guide You Once Inside  
Fin Bunting

*An Interview with Rosebud Ben-Oni: Part Ten*

MY: Is there anything I should have asked you? Or anything you wish I asked you?

RBO: I believe that there's always a way forward. And that there are times when you can't do it all by yourself. And that it is a duty of humans to help one another when that is no longer the case. I think we're far from done with our evolution. Because what is the force without interaction?

MY: Where can people find you next, or what projects you're working on?

RBO: What I mentioned before, and my next book of poems which revolves around a certain Icelandic horse I knew for less than a week. I've written so much about him, but there's more.

MY: You often say "meet you in the quantum" to your band of dreamers. Is that how you would like to sign off in this interview?

RBO: Yeah I'll meet you in the quantum, but we're also both still here to meet in the quantum and hopefully we'll meet in real life.

MY: I hope so too. I have all these books that I will ask you to sign.

RBO: Yeah, I think it's important to keep one hand in the world of the small quantum mechanics and one hand in the world of the large classical mechanics and that means planets and gravity, sure, but it also means the here and now. And I can do that, all of that, as a poet.



poetic speculations by Am  
Matthew Nakahira Young

i am worried that my type of poetry is dying nextline  
nextline

i am worried that my type of poetry is dying in the fertile winds of change and that it  
is not that i am unwilling to adapt PARENTHESES well COMMA that too CLOSE  
PARENTHESES it is also that i do not want to write poetry for the sake of its or my own  
survival but poetry that will be and if that poetry is to die then so shall it be as it is written  
SLASH typed SLASH spoken SLASH shared SLASH thought of PAUSE conveyed to PAUSE  
said in place of PAUSE i love you nextline  
nextline

i am worried that my poetry is not wanted nextline  
nextline

not on the walls COMMA not in readings COMMA not in literary journals that I have read  
nextline  
nextline

stage direction COLON breathe COMMA talk slowly COMMA complicate words that will  
drown in the talent that saturates this room nextline  
nextline

not even i publish work like mine nextline  
nextline

my poetry does not yell about social justice COMMA it does not reek of love and does not  
fear death nor embrace it COMMA it does not demand your attention or cry to be heard by  
all ears COMMA to beg and plea and ask for change of some form in our lives nextline  
nextline

i am worried that my poetry has no place in the world COMMA and i will write it nextline  
nextline

am i worried that my fantasy of the future is the solidification of the starving PAUSE

SPELLOUT A R T I S T nextline

nextline

lay my poetry to rest COMMA as it is no luxury and the ability to read is not an ability that  
is necessary for survival nextline

nextline

when i look into all todays' i do not see work like mine COMMA but i see myself having  
written yesterday and yesterday's yesterday and tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow

nextline

nextline

i doubt it will be poetry after poetry nextline

nextline

lie to me COMMA tell me you see how the empty square that coincides with the line that  
says QUOTATION MARK ongoing feeling of TAB TAB TAB TAB TAB SPACE  
SPACE SPACE emptiness QUOTATION MARK and looks like a checklist of symptoms for  
a medical condition that is obviously placed because i do not have the confidence to leave it  
out nextline

nextline

i am worried that my mouth is incapable of reading a poem that is full of punctuation  
marks that i do not know the name of being used to do something i think means something  
nextline

nextline

i doubt therefore i think therefore i am PAUSE not COMMA therefore please let me exist  
nextline

nextline

told to me by the white princes of the last dying generation telling me to follow the path of  
stomped grass nextline

nextline

i am worried that when i read COMMA there will be no one to listen and when i show you my work COMMA you will turn away because it only takes up a quarter of a page and does not mirror the relative of an essay nextline  
nextline

my poetry symbolize all the things that if i said out loud i would have to close my eyes and cover my ears because they are meant to be heard without a witness COMMA it holds out its hands to be cradled reaching for the touch of an empty room PERIOD believing it has no right to be cradled nextline  
nextline

i am worried that this poem will not show my brilliance ~~STRIKETHROUGH~~ nextline  
nextline

lie to me COMMA tell me you are smart enough to see how the increaginlgy mispelled word of QUATATION MARK blur QUATATION MARK is really a metaphor for a blurring vision for my

eyes SEMI DASH COLON nextline

TAB focus nextline

TAB yet they blur SPELLED              B        L        U        R nextline

TAB blur SPELLED    B        L        Y        R nextline

TAB blur SPELLED    3        L        U        E nextline

TAB blur SPELLED    V        P        J        R nextline

nextline

you cannot tell COMMA but the font of all my work is in a font DASH style called lustria and it is in a font DASH size 10 COMMA i hope you acknowledge those choices that took me several years to decide on COMMA then commit to nextline  
nextline

i do and i must wonder how poetry will survive the ebb and flow of historical necessity that as humans were once illiterate they flowed and flocked to literacy COMMA and must eventually ebb back to when written words have no meaning generating the era of post DASH poetry  
nextline

my art is small and it envies to be admired and appreciated COMMA it must scream but has no mouth and it yearns to be appreciated as the speaker lusts to be appreciated for its bluntness and instinct to speak a truth but it will not and i do not know if you will nextline nextline

though i do astonish COMMA do not make me explain my poetry PERIOD do not make me tell you its meaning PERIOD do not make me silence the voices that is and are the conversations that follow my poetry that makes my work sound vastly superior than my inconsequenscopic abilities nextline

nextline

am i worried that i have no brilliance and my insecurities are not false prophets but truth sayers nextline

nextline

did i get it right this time COMMA is this what you expected COMMA did this satisfy your expectations nextline

nextline

next time i write i hope to spill my blood on it so it cannot be read outloud but must be seen to read the brown COMMA crusted splatter that is my dried up SLASH withered SLASH nutrients SLASH life fluid SLASH living fluid nextline

nextline

when letters fail to recognize each other and the diversity of language becomes mono audible or past that which makes language nonexistent and the transfer of voice is the essential thought sequences pasted from ether to soul to body to flesh to heart to neurons to mind to entity to envoy to deity to what is my informative consciousness nextline

nextline

i feel therefore i can be free PAUSE from the western conventions that tell me i am not coveted and that i am not canon enough to be on remembered because of my identified birthrite nextline

nextline

i feel therefore i can be free PAUSE from the western conventions that tell me i am not coveted and that i am not canon enough to be on remembered because of my identified birthrite nextline

nextline

taught to me by the black mothers of the rising generation who show me that I must follow my path paved by the shoulders before me COMMA covered by untouched wild flowers

nextline

nextline

and i will write my poetry COMMA that i fail to appreciate or enjoy COMMA for the one person that may not understand but maybe does not COMMA but sees the poem's SLASH my ephemera and its momentary conception SLASH consumption SLASH abortion SLASH afterbirth nextline

nextline

PAUSE



## *Eleven and a Half Bookshelf: Editor Reading Reccomendations*

**AMAYA BRANCHE** • *Heart Berries* by Terese Marie Mailhot

"People have a right to think things will change, I allowed myself that much"

**NICKIE COHEN** • *Dreamland* by Rosa Rankin-Gee

"You said that you would come back. You looked me in the eye and said that. Well, if you had, this is what you would have seen: soft wood, black cracks, fridges in the road. The broken spines of old rides at Dreamland."

**SOPHIA CUTINO** • *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil* by George Saunders

"Everything about us is as it should be, for example, we can be excessive, when excess is called for, and yet, even in our excess, we show good taste, although never is out taste so super-refined as to seem precious."

• *Middlesex* by Jeffery Eugeneides

"I was born twice, first as a baby girl ... then again as a teenage boy"

**ALEXANDRA EBERT GOLD** • *Nine Stories* by J.D. Sallinger

"She was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God."

**LOVA MCKNIGHT** • *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin

"There is a time for any fledgling artist where one's taste exceeds one's abilities, The only way to get through this period is to make things anyway"

**GRANT PARSONS** • *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino

"Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places."

**ANALISE ROTH** • *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino

"We had her on top of us all the time, that enormous Moon: when she was full—nights as bright as day, but with a butter-colored light"

**NELLIE SOAMES** • *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf

"Illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth. Roll up that tender air and the plant dies, the colour fades. The earth we walk on is a parched cinder. It is marl we tread and fiery cobbles scorch our feet. By the truth we are undone. Life is a dream. 'Tis waking that kills us."

• *Sirens of Titan* by Kurt Vonnegut

"It was all so sad. But it was all so beautiful too"

**ANNELIES STEALEY** • *Blood and Guts in Highschool* by Kathy Acker

"The world is a conglomeration of objects, no, of events and the approaching of events towards objects, therefore of becoming stases static stagnant, of all that is unreal."

• *The Plague* by Albert Camus

"No one is capable of really thinking about anyone, even in the worst calamity"

**JACK YEARWOOD** • *Once Teeth Bones Coral* by Kimberly Alidio

**MATTHEW NAKAHIRA YOUNG** • *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones

"I Hope Your Bacon Burns"

## Acknowledgements

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