

# ELEVEN AND A HALF



**Eleven and a Half**  
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**Eugene Lang College  
of Liberal Arts**

# Masthead

**Poetry**

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Simran Khatiwala  
Gretchen Donnelly

**Fiction**

Molly Owen  
Nora Vogt  
Daisy Han

**Nonfiction**

Becca Moore  
Sky Brubaker  
Stella Hofferma  
Fincher Douma Wahlen  
Theo Lim-Jisra  
Lillian Heckler  
Annie Wang

**Art**

Sarah Tonra  
Char Gossage  
Siqi Rong  
Joe Glynn

**Palimpsest**

Simran Khatiwala  
Gretchen Donnelly  
Sachi Parish  
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Sarah Tonra

# Letter from the Editor

As the Fall 2024 semester began and our editors met for the first time as a team, it became clear that we wanted to create a product that represented the New School community's voices and their many inspirations. Throughout the magazine, you will find works that speak to the traditions we inherit and reflect on carving out space for one's voice. In the selection and design processes, our team carefully blended these stories and artworks like a curated mixtape. We also asked our contributors to submit a song that reflected their artistic process as their bio, rather than a typical description of who, what, and where. We hope the finished product resonates with you, and memorializes the distinct voices of the student body at this moment in time.

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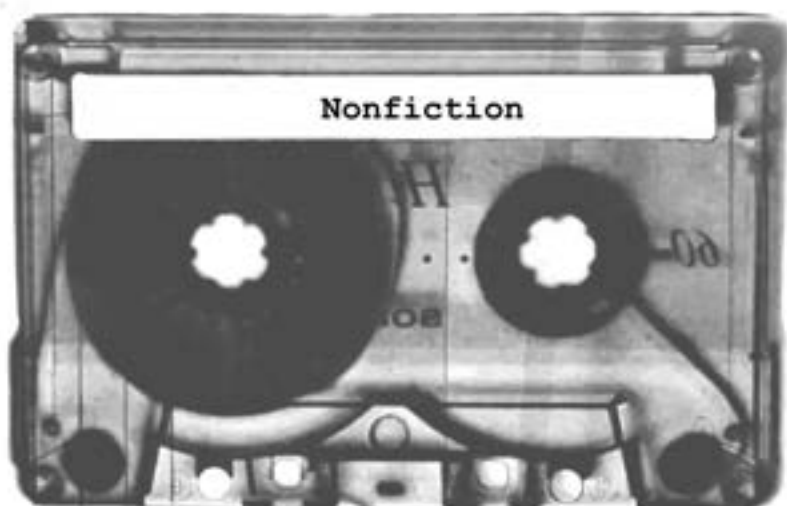
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A	DATE N.R.	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO
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<p>Fuzzy and hard to grasp. Morrisey defenders. Religious revival. Don't cry over cut onions. Mommy issues? Superficial rituals. Nabokov like you've never seen him... Huge fits.</p>		

# Under the Porch

Fincher Douma Wahlen

Caiden and I stood in the doorway with one foot inside, on the tarnished honey-colored hardwood flooring, and the other foot on the back porch, where we were not supposed to stand barefoot. I spun the door knob, the one we had replaced just a few weeks prior after we found screwdriver marks on it, and surveyed how the bolt teetered out and back in. I turned to show Caiden I had gotten the lock perfectly flush to the door, but he was busy watching the train go by on the elevated tracks. I turned to Mom, whose attention had also been captured by something else.

She frantically traveled from room to room as she collected various items and placed them in a shiny silver mixing bowl, the same one we used to make the batter for German pancakes on Christmas and rarely else. She took everything out and held it between her arm and her chest. She set the bowl in the sink and turned on the faucet until it was a third of the way filled. She came over to us, holding the screen door with her elbow and knee, and cocked her chin, signaling us to go. She followed us down the steps and under the porch where Dad and Remke were waiting for us. Dad was crouching down and Remke was sitting at his feet, playing with his shoelaces.

Mom knelt and carefully placed the mixing bowl opposite where Remke was. She set

down paper towels and wooden skewers, positioning them in the order she would need them. It was Dad's turn to go first. Mom followed and then the kids in order of age. Caiden, me, Remke. Mom did it for everyone, except herself and Remke who had squirmed enough to make it a two-person job.

A few years ago, we moved the plastic shed that had been living on top of the cement

and I thought about how my hands were not as small anymore.



*Lindsey Rogers, Untitled (For Ainsley), 2022*

# Mind Blind

Bo Becker

Close your eyes and picture an apple. Can you? Is it vibrant and realistic or a bit fuzzy and hard to grasp? Do you see it best against the black of your eyelids or is it clearer if you open your eyes and stare at a wall? Does it look realistic, or drawn, or black and white? Can you change that? Can you spin it around in the air or imagine your arm reaching out to touch it? Imagine yourself taking a bite out of the apple. Can you hear a crunch? No, don't make the sound with your mouth, just note if you hear it in your head. Can you feel the weight of it in your hands or the pocket of your coat?

I ask you all these questions and you answer me. Then you turn to look into my open eyes and ask, "What do you see?" And I say, "Nothing."

*You don't see an apple?*

*I can't. Or anything else.*

*Not ever?*

*Not ever.*

Aphantasia is the inability to visualize. The lack of the mind's eye. Although scientists have a pretty good grasp on what that means, mental imagery is a difficult aspect of the brain to study. Everyone experiences it differently and gaining access to their imagination is all but impossible. But what we know is this: most people have some sort of visualization abilities. During imagination, you begin with identifying what it is you want your brain to produce. Then, based on your prior knowledge of how that thing may look, your visual cortex will produce some sort of picture. The little research that has been conducted about aphantasia shows a possible disconnection between the visual cortex, to varying degrees.

Around 1-4% of the world's population have aphantasia and, at a base level, cannot produce any sort of mental image. While they can think about the way things look and be able to describe them, there is no mental picture. Aphantasics will often describe it as not being able to see anything, but just knowing that it is there in their minds. Other people, like myself, have it to higher degrees. I don't see my dreams, for example. While I have them and know that they are happening, there is no picture that plays in my head. I cannot imagine sounds either. All that exists in my mind is one singular voice that strands together all my

thoughts. Which really isn't a voice at all. Just my act of thinking. I'm trying to use language that does not allude to visual or audio conjuring. You see how that's a difficult thing to do.

Aphantasia can be developed after a major surgery or trauma but most are born with it. A large number of people with aphantasia aren't even aware of this phenomenon. It's difficult to know when the workings of your brain are different from everyone else's. Aphantasia isn't categorized as a disorder and therefore isn't something that gets flagged at your yearly checkups. Do you smoke? Do you wear a seatbelt? Do you see things when you close your eyes?

I've always had some recognition of this inability. When I was in elementary school and being taught how to read, my teachers would describe it to be like watching television in your head. My classes, which consisted mostly of young bookworms, would read books together and discuss how everyone pictured certain worlds or characters. While they were being transported in their heads, I was very solidly being grounded by the words on the page.

Yet I still spoke to people like I had the same visualization abilities as them. I'd say, "Picture this," or, "I'm drawing a blank right now." I'm always blank. Although these are just simple phrases that are woven into everyday conversation, they assume everyone is seeing the same things in their mind when asked to come up with a mental picture. But it's much easier to speak with a language that will be widely understood than to take the time to let people's minds wrap around my own.

My memory is similarly affected, specifically the autobiographical kind. The inner workings of people's memory are just as difficult to understand as their visualization abilities. Memory is often referred to as a vault of information, accessed by the act of remembrance. People often speak of replaying certain memories. Good ones for comfort or joy and bad ones to overanalyze or wallow in. And while everyone's capacity for memory varies, being able to visualize your memories often allows you to retain them better, especially the smaller details. In my case, my inability to replicate visuals or audio makes it very difficult to call up moments of my past. Autobiographical remembering for me is just a mental narration of the moment which can often get quite boring and annoying. So I don't revisit memories as much as a person who can just sit back and watch them play might.

If during my day to day, I notice or make a mental note of an

occurrence, it helps me remember that moment better. If I can remember how I was thinking about something as it was happening, I can attach that to the memory. My most vivid memories are ones where I was having a lot of internal thoughts. I remember moments when I was alone and had to fill up time by thinking more than when I was present with other people.

Since visualization is something completely removed from my practice of remembering, a different sense has stepped up to help trigger my autobiographical memory- scent. Most people also experience the attachment from scent to memory. However, much like how blind people have heightened senses to help them navigate the world, my lack of a mind's eye has resulted in scent being the main tool I use to explore my memory. Be it actual perfume or just smells that I come across, they allow me to remember physical aspects of my memory by recalling the way things smelled.

For instance, I was putting barcode stickers on books in the reference section of my library which are fancy, old, expensive books that are locked up in a cabinet. They were all blue cloth bound with Handel written in gold lettering. Most of them looked the same but I pulled one out that was thinner than the rest and smelled just like my grandfather's living room. He has lots of old cloth bound medical books that haven't moved in at least 50 years that have permeated the room with their vanilla paper-y smell. Suddenly I could smell the rug that runs over the stairs and the wooden lip you have to step over to get into the living room. The varnished wood of the window sills and how they smell different from the dryer, the lighter wood of the toy rubber band gun. The chair by the bowl of pennies and the one by the fireplace and how they both are a mix of upholstery and metal but in two different ways. I could suddenly remember even the smallest details of this room not because I could see them in my mind but because I knew what they smelled like. I knew that they were once there and that I once existed in the same space, and in this act of knowing- I was remembering.

I'm not sure if my perception of smell is that different from others. I don't step into every room and try to memorize every smell. But again, I have no basis on which to compare. Maybe because there is a recognized disconnect between my memory and visualization, my brain subconsciously tries to find alternate ways to tap into my memory.

My mind has always functioned this way and although it is difficult to accept the inability to have access to something that is both the norm

and a creation as well as a revisiting of worlds, I've made a certain peace with the workings of my brain. Despite this, it's still sometimes upsetting to know that you are holding years of memory and simply cannot access it in a conventional way. Especially as a person who is often driven by nostalgia.

I used to be plagued with homesickness. I left New York City when I was ten to live in Seoul and then only a year later moved again to rural Missouri. During the many years I spent away from urban life I did nothing but miss it. Longing for a physical space that you once belonged to is one thing. But not being able to receive the comfort that recollection brings because of a severance to memory only made me feel even more disconnected from the notion of Home.

As I progressively felt more out of place in Missouri, I tried to grasp at wisps of memories of my old homes for solace. I would squeeze my eyes shut and try to put some sort of picture together. Visuals like the faces of my friends, my childhood room, the block I used to live on, and parks I would play in quickly became inaccessible both physically and mentally; until I couldn't tell if I was reaching for actual memories or was just allowing my mental narration to fabricate stories that I could find comfort in. When all that takes place in your mind is a singular stream of consciousness, differentiating memory from imaginary can be difficult.

In highschool, I had a small travel-size perfume vial of Springtime in the Park by Maison Margelia. Online it is described as the delicate and luminous memory of blooming blossoms. But when I smelled it in my bedroom all I could smell was Korea. The fragrance had notes of pushing open glass doors onto damp parking lot asphalt and stone walls, perfectly trimmed bushes and trees lining the green and red concrete sidewalks with a park on one side and large colorful buses on the other.

During this time, the town I lived in and the people I interacted with were mostly white midwesterners and I felt so far from my Korean heritage and culture it was almost intangible. Besides the physical separation between me and the country, the inability to clearly remember my time spent there made me feel even more distant. I carried a deep sense of loss, for both my cultural connection and my conscious connection. But this unconventional key to unlocking my vault of memories both comforted me and broke open a well of longing. I cried all night smelling the small opening of the bottle. It was one of the few times I felt as I had more substance to my Sadness.



I've never sprayed it on after that. I still missed my time living in Seoul but was enveloped in a comfort that I had a method of vivid autobiographical memory. I still couldn't picture anything in this memory. My eyes were closed and my mind was dark. Nor was I transported anywhere. Aphantasia limits me to just my act of knowing. Like a tugging feeling in your mind. Visualization is deeply rooted and connected to the extent of what you know because your visual cortex uses knowledge to create mental images. For most, to know of something is also to visualize it. But for me, I know and yet I cannot see. Through smelling something that I had once smelt before, it reminds me of what I know to be true, which is the only way in which I can access my memory.

I'm not a neuroscientist. I can't precisely explain why I can't picture things or why scent is the only way I can spontaneously be immersed in my memory. It certainly isn't easy to explain without using the language of sight as a tool to make it more understandable. But if I'm going to continue making new memories, understanding how best to retain them, even if it's more difficult than the average person's relationship with memory, is much more important than trying to align myself with a scientific norm I will never be able to fall into.



# Letter from Vladimir Nabokov

Katyá Danziger

July 24, 1934

Dear Vladislav Filimonovich,

I was very glad to receive your letter. I thank you for your request and fulfill it. I feel bad about your final lines, you know. One should not smell the terrible perfume of emigration (it is easy for me, living in the country, in its almost idyllic wilderness, to say, of course), always at all times and under all prohibitions - to lock oneself in four walls (or else, however, like stokers, who know only their furnace - whatever is done on deck at sea) and to do one's senseless, innocent, humiliating work, justifying in passing everything that, in fact, justification does not require: the strangeness of such an existence, the inconvenience, the loneliness (which I write about in the night) and some such inner exhilaration. That is why the equally clever and unintelligent speeches about "modernity", "inquiétude", "religious revival" and all phrases in which the word "post-war" appears are so intolerable - I sense in this "ideology" the same gregariousness, "let's remember" as was the case, say, in the enthusiasm for world exhibitions yesterday, i.e. in the last century. I wish neither to "fall" nor to "revive". I am writing all this to you as a ricochet - maybe not very conveniently.

My son is a wonderful son. Tensing his upper lip—his nostrils whitening at that—he pronounces, cooing, his first word: "Heil" (which is just very timely) and smiles at his mother's living tongue. His eyes are the color of blue ink (and you still advise not to make a writer out of him!) here with so-called "watches", i.e. with darkness on the rim of the rye. You bend over it, see yourself reflected - and those blue eyes in the shape of a bun - under the bangs of a bun in each. I interrupt this writing now to be at bathing—amazingly he has a smooth back—like a "goose" - the servant's culinary comparison.

Writing my novel, not reading the newspapers- the boon of "my organ" has ceased to come. We see "Numbers"-which somehow always reminds one in syllable and seduction-of advertisements for "Creme Tokalon" (He's off with that blonde again, etc.). Are there more

"Encounters" coming out? Is it also "Stove"?

I wish you, Vladislav Filimonovich all the best, I shake your hand,  
my wife sends you greetings.

Yours, V. Nabokov

24. IV - 39

Дорогой Владимир Филимонович,

Очень рада рада поздравить вас

вашим писем, благодарю за просьбу, исполнено ее.

А жизнь - мне стало не по себе от гнетущей  
ламина строк Котар - в страшном дурачье и миграции  
принимательстве и студент (как, живущему в изгнании,  
в почти административной жизни, много говорить, конечно),  
самые лучшие - как впрочем, всегда, в все время и  
при всем желании, - запертые у себя в кабинете  
~~уже~~ (или еще впрочем: как Котар, запертые  
полюбо свою жизнь - тогда не думало и думать,  
какого) и заниматься своим бизнесом, конечно,  
университетом, - многообразием окрестностей,  
все же, что в состоянии окрестности и не предвидеть:  
страшное многообразие, бедность, одиозность  
(которые я в душе проглатываю от "кожи") и  
~~которых~~ как-то мне так в душе вечно. Хотел  
еще написать ~~своей~~ - равно умная и разумная  
речь о "субстанции", "inquiétude", "remission  
возрождения" и прочее, все, что в душе  
встречается себе "космический". Это в том ~~мне~~  
"идеальной" так же не стандарт, "давайте-все-лучше".

како било, окупано, и утресано, вшарано итавкано  
всера м.е. и промисли виле. Ја не желим ни "Бракови",  
ни "Бурдатови". Мишљу вам би ово као не  
ракометоло — бато лопет и не остане крива.

Сам ми — издан сам. Како сам веровно ту  
и — билимале при томе — кодра, ово прилично, вара,  
ове перне сиво: "халие" (то сам још неке сферице)  
и улабавице при постојаном угајти ограда. Нега  
у кого црвта силног зарила (а би све саветује  
не јавио из које созишће!) са тако каваљем  
"гасиљачи" м.е. може са миснокопачи кадрами  
ко појку рајка. Какобавице кад неке видати  
себа одражачи — би тако силно негати — би форич  
појка, — по ~~то~~ зарила пошта и кадрама. и  
мишља прервати то криво, и то би бато при курали  
— удавчице у које владати сања — "како у ту",  
— куралине одражачи прилици.

Мишљу сви романи, не мишља није — Лиан  
"ли" органа" прилици перестати. Вадити "лиан"  
— котре постојеће вонде мишља каваљем — ко  
мишља и саваљем — рекати "Криво Жоржови"  
("оно оног зарила и то" Лианови" и.е.д.).  
Видати ми све "Ветри" ? То тако "Криво" ?

Желим вам, Јуриј Владислав Францисковиче, бон  
добро, мишља вам руку, желим мишља вам здравје

Вам В. Кабољ

# On Oatmeal and Sailboats. And Death Sometimes, Too.

Lillian Heckler

7 AM, or sometime like that. I crawl out of my bed and put on my crumby slippers, the ones you got me for my birthday two years ago. You and Mom thought that they were ridiculous but I wear them every morning, every night. Every time I'm in my house without my shoes on. They keep my socks clean, what with the litter on the ground.

The point is, I have my slippers on and I'm making my bed now. I pull the duvet up and flatten it out, smooth it down, unfold my pinstripe blanket at the end of my bed, put the cat's blanket back, put one pillow at the top of my mattress, then another, then another, then my massive stuffed bunny, the one you got me for Easter three years ago. You and Mom surprised me with it when I got home from Florida at 3 AM. I think I cried in my room that night, clutching it. I've always been scared about the thought of you dying.

Anyway, my bed's made and I take my retainer out. I let the cat into my room and I pet him for a few minutes, let him rub his mouth against my knuckles. He starts biting at my hand so I fill his food bowl and walk down the hallway to the bathroom. I brush my teeth and wash my face with the soap I keep in the shower and try not to soak the front of my shirt, the one I got when that old fat guy's ass rammed my face into the barricade at that punk show five years ago. You helped clean up the blood in the bathroom and got the tour manager's number. I got to wear sunglasses to school for a week afterward because of the concussion. We went to their next show in the city, on 9/11, and I felt like some sort of fucked up, anti-establishment groupie. I felt like I could fly.

7:15 AM, probably, I gotta make breakfast. I take a pot out of the cupboard next to the oven and fill it with what looks like a cup of water and put it on the front left burner. I could always fill the pots at home with exactly two quarts of water because the sides of the metal were stained. I let the water boil and I dump in a half cup of oats from Trader Joe's, pinch of salt, put the lid on the pot. Simmer. I scrape the oats into a bowl I bought from Goodwill the week before I moved to New York. It's got a scene of a little village at the bottom of it, a house with an orange roof. It reminds me of the painting in the dining room to the left of the doorframe that leads to the kitchen, the one of the house with the orange roof on a pebble road.

I add a teaspoon or three of brown sugar and a little bit of oat milk (oats with oat milk, who would've thought?) and stir the contents of the bowl with my favorite spoon. I used to have a different favorite spoon, but the girl who sublet my roommate's room without my landlord's knowledge took it to work with her one day and never brought it back. I didn't think of the one I'm using now as my favorite spoon at first, just another spoon that I smuggled from home. But then I was talking to Mom about this spoon and she said that it was yours, from the sailboat — you know the spoon, the one with the blue handle and the three white dots — and now I have a new favorite spoon. I can't stop using it.

I sit at my wooden table with my oatmeal and I put on The Smiths, your spoon in my hand and Morrissey's dry hum in the air. And I eat my oats with your spoon.

Sometimes I picture you, in your white tee shirt and your blue jeans and your muck boots, sitting downstairs in your boat at your wooden table, listening to Girl Afraid as you shovel oats into your mouth with that blue-handled spoon. You could never wear anything other than what I've seen you in, could never look any way other than how I know you now. I know you had a goatee and probably a girlfriend before Mom but those facts don't exist in the same brain that I have.

When I picture you, we look the same, hunched over our wooden tables, eating our oats with our favorite spoon. Brown hair, glasses. A book with a cracked spine. Anxiety. I think we look the same.

7:50 AM, maybe, I have to leave for class soon. I think that when you die, and when I picture you after you die, you'll still look 53. And I'll still eat my oats with our spoon.





1/1 Basil R. R. A. S.

"fishies !!!"



# Sky Cathedral: Louise Nevelson's Structure of Total Color

Isabel Hall

American sculptor Louise Nevelson spent most of her adult life in New York, creating artworks throughout the 20th century. She recognized the power objects hold in telling stories, but found something more compelling in the way these objects work in conjunction, telling one larger collective story. The boxes are left open revealing the objects inside, but a thick layer of paint masks them all, concealing whatever past identities they once had.

Nevelson's Sky Cathedral (1958) currently sits on the fourth floor of the MOMA; a looming, dark structure possessing a mass of materials that are difficult to make out among all the clutter. Though it's entirely monochromatic—coated in black paint—the lighting of the room highlights a variance of organic shapes within rectangular boxes, as well as shadowed crevices. It appears like a wall of disorganized shelves from a Dr. Suess illustration with all the color drained. It's the kind of design you could stare at for a long period of time and still not fully perceive every piece of the puzzle. An intimidating size of 11 feet tall and 10 feet wide, Sky Cathedral towers over its viewers with a particular stoicism. Despite its disorganized, almost top-heavy anatomy, anyone can tell it's a structure made to last.

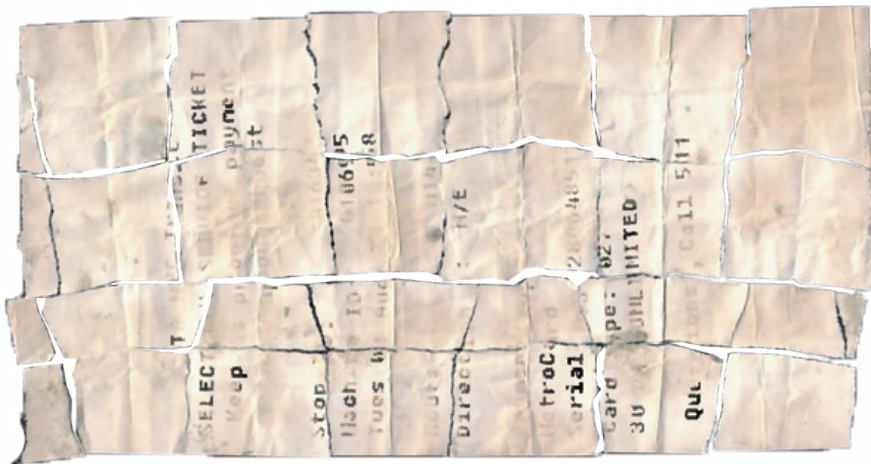
Nevelson and her family were immigrants. Born in Ukraine when it was still part of the Russian Empire, she and her family moved to the US in 1905, joining her father who had left three years prior to work in the lumber industry. She grew up playing with wood scraps in her father's lumberyard, determined to be a sculptor at age ten. In the early 1930s, she gained an interest in cubism after working with abstract painter Hans Hofmann. As a young adult, Nevelson moved to New York City to study artmaking, and began building her medleys of found objects in the 1950s once she had situated herself in lower Manhattan.

Sky Cathedral was composed of everyday objects found around her Manhattan neighborhood, many of them being scraps of wood. Given the nature of its title, Nevelson could be suggesting there is a holiness to the humblest of inanimate objects. There is something transcendent about this work—the plaque at the MOMA compares it to a “shrine”—but

also something remarkably human. All of the objects contained within Sky Cathedral were undoubtedly touched, reconstructed, and utilized by human hands or human processes. It takes people to build a cathedral, and it is a very human inclination to reach for the sky.

Every object within Sky Cathedral had to be transformed, but each one contains an individual history that led them to Nevelson's hands. Living in Manhattan is a bit like the experience of being an object in a piece like Sky Cathedral. Packed together into little boxes filling up space, all playing a part in preventing the structure from collapsing, so different from one another yet all necessary in keeping the structure standing.

It's easy to forget interconnectedness in a place like Manhattan where—despite our proximity to one another—feelings of isolation and loneliness always manage to seep into the fissures of our lives. Manhattan is one enormous system; we all play a part in holding it together, and we are all contained by it, assimilating to become a part of the whole. “For me it is the total color,” Nevelson said. “It means totality. It means: contains all.” There is something about totality that is the driving force of this piece. An all-encompassing, eternal balance; a sense that everything belongs and is in its place. All is one, and one is all.



*Spencer Mazzella, Tickets please!, 2023*

# TIME AND TEMPERATURE

Sam Levy

I spent a dreadful summer in Portland, Maine with my parents last year. They've only been here since I moved to New York, but Maine's better than North Carolina and I suppose they must have been looking for a way out too.

"It's like we've always lived here," my mom would say.

"Tourists."

I like Portland fine. There's a building on Congress Street I'm fond of called the Time and Temperature Building. It's only called that because they put a huge billboard on top of it that tells you the current time and temperature in real time. The billboard has 180 bulbs total and can represent up to four characters simultaneously. This means it can't display both the time and the temperature at once, so the display scrolls at the pace of a typewriter. It's old and unnecessary and its name is redundant.

On Wednesday we ate at a restaurant with brilliant small plates called Eventide. You can see the Time and Temperature through the window across from your caviar and I was told I was acting uniquely nasty that night. We fought about something or other and how living in New York had changed my mind about so many things from my childhood I considered now to be evil and antiquated. My mother's anxious nagging, her overprotection, the self confidence I believed I lacked because of it. Her incessant tourism. We miscalculated the scale of it all and our argument became so loud it ballooned to the table next to us where the mother of two toddlers told us our impassioned bickering had upset her children so much they would have to leave now.

The first thing I noticed when I moved to New York is that there are about 64 Time and Temperature Buildings on every street. Each bodega, halal cart, and subway path has at least three. On the sidewalk, they've got a fancy one with internet connectivity and a high quality screen for recipes and Time and Temperature and facts like: "The Key to The City of New York is Symbolic, it's not actually a real key." It can display as many characters as you want and it scrolls like a dream. New York's better than Portland and so I like to pretend I've always lived there.

When the Time and Temperature sign was built in 1964, it was one of the first large electronic displays of its kind. For a moment, the old city of Portland was a new city with new things. But it isn't useful anymore. In

the early 2000s, local celebrity attorney Joe Bornstein spent a fortune, and now half the time the sign atop the Time and Temperature Building just says “CALL JOE” in bright scrolling bulbs. Joe Bornstein died in 2020, but his name’s still up there.

“I don’t think you’ve ever been very helpful. I think you’ve stunted me,” I said to my parents at Eventide.

“Great, next time you have a break, don’t come visit us. We don’t need to see you,” my mom said. It was the first time I felt like she meant it.

I spent the next day locked in the guest room hunched over a guitar I could barely play. My mom had texted me the Time and Temperature four times that day—all day she had been telling me it was beautiful out. I considered it nagging and so I stayed in that cream colored room with the fish on the wall because I believed I was creating beauty more important than the wind and the trees and the ocean and the unconditional love of my mother.

In the last hours of that day’s light, I went out to the rocks just past the house and the ocean was right there; closer to me than the nearest bodega or incessant glistening sign for vapes were to my Brooklyn apartment that I pretended my parents didn’t pay for; closer than I’d ever be to adult. I hummed the shit song I spent all day writing and I watched the tide rinse the sand and drag itself back towards the sky like a drunk waltz and as the sun kissed my neck and my phone lost reception, I remembered, for a moment, the absurdity of believing I was anything greater than my Mother’s son.

Of the three characters that make up our names, two are the same, only the one in the middle differentiates us—your 珍 means “Treasure” and my 安 means “Peace.”

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When we were kids, our lives mirrored our names, intertwining at intervals. I was used to waking up to pastel pink walls, see-through curtains, and you, groggy-eyed and yawning unapologetically wide across our shared room.

Though we were never in the same school at the same time, we breached our four-year age gap through extracurriculars. Every Saturday meant us coming home with fingers and wrists smudged with graphite, or aprons as colorful as our mixing palettes. Mr. Zhou didn’t have a huge class nor a speaker, so I came to associate your company with quiet sounds. Wet bristles blending different hues. Open faucet. Brushes splashing back and forth until the water turns Misty.

We recreated Van Gogh side by side, choosing the slimmest of the brushes to outline tiny farm animals in the distance. Picasso gave us both trouble and our spin on ‘Guernica’ took abstract art to a whole new level. But your forte was still life, where colors had no domain but shadows did. I could watch you draw an apple for hours, the sound of pencil scratching on paper like fingers massaging strung-tight temples. Your strokes were calculated, precise. Pencil shavings pooled around your easel like petals.

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Pink dominated our world back then. The wallpaper of our bedroom, our bed frames, beddings and pillowcases all screamed in different shades of pink. And it held governance behind the sliding doors next to your bed, where your wardrobe lied.

Perhaps because of the color’s prevalence, we rejected it. Instead, we turned to our palettes of watercolors, and you chose to call green your favorite. Though years later I would come to decorate my first apartment in emerald, olive, and sage, at the time I stuck with blue. It was a small yet significant differentiation, important to me since I shadowed you in every other aspect of our lives.

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I asked you to draw a teapot on my behalf and you obliged. The counterfeit fooled everyone, even Mr. Zhou. Even I was impressed by

how perfect the imperfections were—-you had forged my signature disproportional dimensions and deliberately left several clumsy strokes unblended.

The teapot was bad enough to be believably mine, but it was still crowned by the family as “one of my best works.” It was the only time my artistic endeavors elicited a compliment from our grandmother. As she pulled me aside, she told me in all breathy whispers: “I always thought you’re the more talented one.”

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I stopped going to art class soon after that, the timing coinciding with me entering a boarding middle school. I didn’t pick up a brush again until a few years ago when I got into a Bob Ross phase and followed two of his tutorials on a whim. It was therapeutic—I missed the rusty smell of paint, I missed ruining my spare T-shirts. I missed the Saturdays spent at Mr. Zhou’s, and if I closed my eyes long enough I could imagine hearing your quiet and concentrated breathing next to me.

Mom began to fuss after seeing me paint again. “If only you kept it up back then! Perhaps you could have surpassed your sister.” Dad agreed and put both of my paintings up on the wall.

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My wardrobe lay in another room, and growing up I’d have to travel the length of the hallway to get dressed. It was not unlike the wardrobe that led to Narnia. And like Lucy Pevensie, it was often where I would turn to when we played hide and seek with our younger brother. My school uniforms were hung next to my beloved Lightning McQueen shirt, and broken hangers—casualties of my impatience and pulling clothes off in a rush—can be found among my jeans. Your wardrobe, however, was within your reach. It was more like a bookshelf, with five tiers and no place for the clothes to be hung, so you acquired the title of being a neat folder through practice.

Every morning, the panic would first set in at the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the stairs. From there, we had ten to fifteen seconds to arm ourselves. Mom chose the battleground and how much damage she wanted to inflict. It varied wildly from day to day. Sometimes she went straight for the sliding doors, other times she waited and dwelled on the other imperfections she saw in the room. But always, you faced the line of fire first, while I hid behind you in the rearguard.

As she pulled out one shirt after the other, your bed would start to

look like a cruel tapestry. Pinks on top of purples on top of reds. On days that she felt charitable, our mother would eventually leave after wreaking havoc and let you dress in baggy sweatshirts and jeans. But just as frequently, you would lose the battle in tears and shrug into the pink and purple checkered shirt that you've outgrown. The sleeves could barely cover the knuckles of your wrists. I used to think they looked so delicate.

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Mom loved showing me her C-section scar.

"You did this," she would tell me, "It took a night and a day to get you out of there."

She made me touch it once, and the protruding scar tissue felt soft underneath my fingers. I tried not to pull away but my heart flinched.

Even now, Dad would nudge me to call her on my birthdays. "She went through so much that day, call her to let her know you appreciate it."

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For my 9th birthday, Mom gave me a loop of garnet beads that winded my wrist three times. She chose it because garnet was my birthstone. I wore it for three years before she broke it with the shoehorn, with one precise hit that was meant for you. At the thought of you being physically hurt, I for once couldn't keep hiding behind you. The blood red jewels burst open and bounced off every surface, their pink shimmers pretty as a mockery.

It barely hurt and left no bruises, but as we collected as many of the beads as we could find, I would discover the one that cracked open. I would become mesmerized by the damage, the inalterability of it, and cruelly, the beauty of the sharp edges in place of rounded smoothness.

For a few days afterwards, there would be a lull in the stream of arguments that had been going on for months. Perhaps she felt guilty for the damage—or so I imagined to fabricate hope. It wouldn't be the last time I tried to see the best in her, like someone searching for signs of life in the aftermath of an earthquake.

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They didn't sell much real food at the convenience store, so I brought you candies and chips and a bottle of soda the first time you ran away from home. You had escaped to the artificial lake in our gated community, and hid among the formation of rocks, where it provided privacy and some sense of shelter. It must have been summer because I remember the lotus flowers blooming.

Our younger brother would not have the same foresight—eight years after I sat with you amid the rock formation while you salvaged through the plastic bag of supplies, he chose a chilly October night to walk away from an argument with our dad. I would find him in the empty parking lot and decide not to acknowledge the fact that he was trying and failing to suppress his shivers.

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Our parents signed you up for a strict middle school that required a bob cut for the girls, replacing the ponytail you had for years. The one feature of yours identical to mine. The second time you ran away from home, three years after the last, you found shelter and food at a friend's house across the city, and I, along with the rest of our family, could not reach you.

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The last time you ran away from home, I saw you off at the Beijing Railway Station. You landed your first job as a videogame concept artist, after which you dropped out of college and moved to Shanghai. That was the final straw to destroy your relationship with our parents, who thought a college degree was non-negotiable. I watched you lunge your suitcase through the turnstile with your sleeves rolled up, exposing your wrist knuckles. Cousin Echo came with me and bawled her eyes out after you turned the corner. I thought she was over sentimental. I never imagined that would be the last time either of us saw you.

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Five years would have passed when our mother decided to tell me over the phone that you and our brother were adopted. I had recently gotten into writing, and had just written a piece about your absence from my life and the persistent dull pain that followed me since then. The world was turning pink with the sunset. It's the kind of pink that stunned, the kind I didn't trust on marshmallows, and as it engulfed the world, I wondered if it was another mockery. If the truth that was withheld from me for 20 years didn't also create some kind of rose-colored glasses, one that I saw my childhood through.

The past looked different to me now, but I have no way to find any definitive answers. Possibly, perhaps, maybe are the only words I have answers to questions like: Did our grandmother favor me because of blood?

Did our mother favor me because of blood?



Did they try to change you, mold you, into looking like blood?

I've since had to grapple with our battle formation—you in the vanguard and me in the rear—now that I know I've always been armed better than you. But I have no doubt that blood wasn't what bound—is still binding—me to you.

Last June, when you were turning 23, before our mother told me everything, I tried to imagine what you looked like. Did your knuckles still show? Do neutral colors still dominate your wardrobe? Have you let your hair grow?

I sent you „Happy birthday!!!“ with three exclamation marks and laughed when I saw the wavy dash behind your „Thank you~“

In the empty chat box, the cursor blinked at my hesitation. I finally spelled out a heart—a lesser-than sign with a long tail of threes—and hit send, hoping it was enough, praying that you knew I meant „I love you.“

I have an existential crisis while peeling an onion. Cutting onions didn't make me cry until I was a teenager. It's real, I thought. The thing you hear about all your life; it seems fake until it happens to you. Last night I cried because I was cutting an onion. Last night I cried because I can never say what I mean in time. Pick one: words or volume. Never both. Instead of letting myself spiral, I write about it. I tend to do things based on the odds. People try to convince me it's logical, which, you know, fine. But when you understand so much about so many lives, the extraordinary doesn't feel so astounding. Everyone I love will not wake up tomorrow, or they will, but they'll get hit by a car on their way to work. That thing everyone says, "I never thought it would happen to me." I did. Nothing will catch me off guard. I've already imagined it. I've already grieved all the futures I won't have. I am putting on a brave face while lying about putting on a brave face. My face has always done one of two things: laid my heart bare without my permission, or scared everyone who sees it. The never-ending question of are you okay makes kind of sense. These blank eyes and bitch face might be okay; might not. The glass is half full but half of it is also empty. Logic always seems to get in the way of optimism, I guess. These wounds never heal, or if they do, I don't see it. Moving on too soon, too late; time passes and it never feels like enough. Therapists always want to talk about the one thing I don't. Not everything comes back to that day, you know. Not everything is interlinked. Well, okay, humor me. Tell me it's not. Last night I cut my finger trying to open a box. There's always another meal to make. Or decide on. Or buy. The cut stings. Always another door to open, hang your keys next to, check if it's locked before you go to bed. My eyes and skin are still burning when I move onto the tomatoes. What are you supposed to do with the guts? If I hate the taste, why bother with them to begin with? It's hard for me to throw anything away. This can be good or bad. You could say that about most parts of me. I tell myself things I love about myself even if I'm lying. I am lying. I give myself rules and then I break them. I avoid looking in the mirror. I knock over the paper towels and the roll unravels on the floor. I spill salt on the counter. Always another table to clean, to organize, to try to keep uncluttered. There are still parts of myself I'm getting used to. New ways to be. Areas to uncover. The days are getting shorter. Shadows stretch

longer. Soon it'll be dark by the time I start cooking. The idea of evening covering like a weighted blanket. Then the days will get longer, and I'll have hope again. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Right now, the water is boiling over. I have to go fix the mess I made. At least I'm not crying anymore.



*Hila Mutsafi, Naked Scapula, 2024*

# Ode to the Outskirts

Theo Lim-Jisra



*Theo Lim-Jisra, N. Mount Loretto Forest, Staten Island, 2024*

Crouching in the marsh with mud-caked shoes, fighting off strange bugs I've never seen before, and holding my breath at the stench. Broad daylight in South Queens, and not a soul to disturb me. My telephoto is aimed squarely at a preening bird in the bay, the finder gleaming with promise. I punched the release down immediately after the bird flew away; we both jumped at the roar of a jet flying overhead into JFK just ½ mile away.

My experience capturing scenes like this was part of work on my ongoing project *Ode to the Outskirts*, a collection of photographs taken on the outer boroughs of New York City. The project is not only a robust education in learning how to photograph a different type of landscape, but also gives me a deeper understanding of how surrounding suburbs interact with the city center.

The art of landscape photography originated as a kind of ersatz hunting; a way for outdoorsmen to connect with the world around them, and I tried to embody this spirit when embarking on this project. These photographs were taken in the spirit of famed landscape feature stories and editorials, based on my experience shooting in the Rocky Mountains or on California's Central Coast. Born and raised in Brooklyn, I thought

it was important to bring this perspective back to my hometown, to show the beauty that exists in the most densely populated city in the nation.



*Theo Lim-Jisra, Ducks on the Hutchinson River, Bronx, 2022*

One does not usually spend their college years getting to know their hometown better, and yet that is exactly what I have accomplished since the start of this project. I spent a lot of time in the aforementioned Queens thanks to a close friend and a partner both living there. Spending time in eastern neighborhoods like Bayside and Broad Channel, I was gobsmacked at the low density usually found much further outside of the city. What differentiated these neighborhoods from areas of Long Island and North Jersey were the evidence of what lies beyond, from the wide six-lane highways that rip through public parks, to the silhouettes of skyscrapers, or thick smog that can be seen up to thirty miles away.

Beneath my feet, there are an abundance of secluded pockets, beyond the yellow tape of the city center, that keep me coming back for more. Staten Island, known largely as the shunned, Republican-voting borough, is actually a secluded oasis waiting to be discovered. The borough is home to the largest public park in the city, the 2,200 acre Freshkills Park. The hilly expanse was built on the site of a former landfill where the

city famously decided to store the debris of the World Trade Center after the attacks on September 11, 2001. Shooting on land with such tragic significance was an uncomfortable, yet necessary acknowledgement of the city's history.



*Theo Lim-Jisra, Arthur Kill Rd, Staten Island, 2023*

I hope these photographs offer a different perspective on New York City, to celebrate its tranquil, lush side. My intention is for viewers to occupy the same state of limbo these neighborhoods are, halfway between suburban town and urban empire. Ultimately, I hope that this work encourages reconsideration of the shape of the city as a whole, and what it means to be a New Yorker.



*Theo Lim-Jisra, Cross Bay Blvd, Queens, 2023*

*Theo Lim-Jisra, Salt Marsh Trail, Brooklyn, 2023*





# G-D HELP ME

Stella Hoffermañ

My relationship to religion has always been pretty superficial. Not spiritual or emotional, but rather something tangible, and easily identifiable to the trained eye or nose. My parents and grandparents taught me how to decipher the signs that someone was Just Like Me, so physical qualities and man-made identifiers became false signifiers for what defined my community, and subsequently, what defined me. I could find it in shapes and colors, and the smell of dill and salt. It traveled in the downward slope of hooked noses, contracted and expanded in the loose coils of dark brown hair. It was kneading dough with small, unwashed hands, and attempting to mouth the words of a song in a language I never cared to learn.

The traditional schooling I underwent for my religion was limited and brief. I attended classes weekly when I was about 8 or 9 with the few other kids in my town who were Just Like Me. The older kids told us about plagues and pyramids and taught us how to make bread. Despite our collective pre-installed belief system, I had nothing in common with my peers. In fact, many of them were atrocious. This is completely unrelated to our religion—they were just assholes. All it took was one particularly dreadful carpool for my parents to decide to pull me out, and I never looked back. So, when it was time for me to start preparing for The Ritual, my parents arranged a meeting with a non-traditional religious leader.

She was a wacky woman with wild, curly gray hair that stood high atop her head. Upon meeting her for the first time, I informed her that I had no interest in mentioning G-d in the oral component of The Ritual. Not in chants or verse, not in my language or the other. She respected this and asked what I believed in. I told her I liked to read. So, instead of verses, I recited poetry: Poems about my religion, by other skeptics and secular artists. Oddly enough, I was encouraged to include something by Dr. Seuss due to his work on the idea of “coming of age.” Knowing now what he thinks of people Just Like Me, it was probably in bad taste.

Despite that fateful night allegedly being my transition to womanhood, I hadn’t felt any different. I had already gotten my first period a year prior, so everything after that felt a bit inconsequential. The religious leader informed me that it was okay, that my faith was determined by my actions, behaviors, and intentions, not by my belief in a deity, or lack of belief; that it’s okay if I only pray when I’m digging



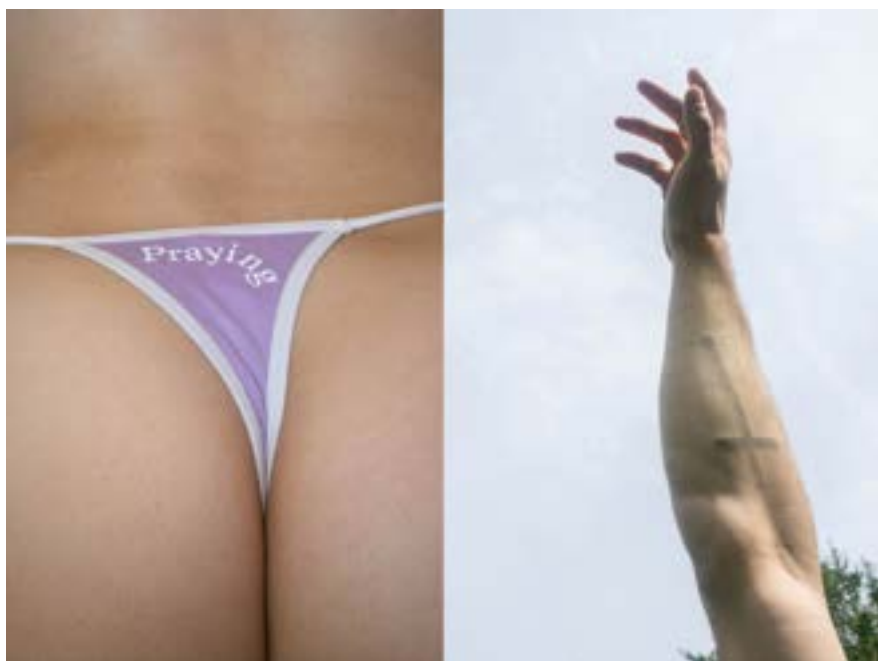
through my school bag and realize I may have forgotten to bring my homework, or when I'm scared that the odd shadow in the corner of my room is actually a demonic figure sent here to curse me, and that the idea of prayer I'd been accustomed to by film and television is actually not the type of prayer someone in my religion engages in, and that I'm getting on my knees praying to the wrong G-d for my missing homework and safety from ghouls.

Following *The Ritual*, I'd heard rumors of an all-expenses paid vacation I could attend where I could finally meet other people Just Like Me; where we could squeeze our hairy bodies into bikinis, and finally find G-d on the ocean shore. (Think *Harmony Korine's Spring Breakers* meets *Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha*.) Ever the skeptic, I figured this was too good to be true— that there had to be some catch—but I held onto hope anyway. I dreamt of a fantasy land where I'd finally understand the divinity of a hooked nose and the majestic beauty of frizzy hair—a place where I could wake up in the morning and breathe in the smell of... fucking brisket, or whatever.

All I wanted was to understand what it all meant. Imagine my shock when I found out that my promised “free trip to Hasidic Disney World” was actually an attempt to indoctrinate me into joining the military of an apartheid state. All I wanted to do was fucking float in the Red Sea, not participate in an ethnic-cleansing Multi-Level Marketing scheme. I'd almost fallen for this Semitic Santa Claus, and then found myself further from my faith than where I'd started.

What connects me to my religion, other than my last name and my gastrointestinal issues? I've been contemplating this for a long time now, and am still unable to come to an answer. If there's no land of my people, where can I go? Williamsburg? Do I need to start fasting in a non-Anorexic way? G-d help me, I don't know—I'm chronically anxious, I'm bloated, and I can't converse with someone without inevitably talking over them. That's all I've ever known.

All I can do now, I think, is exploit the gifts that my ethno-religion instilled in me: I'll just keep being funny as fuck, and having an awesome pair of Ashkenazi tits.

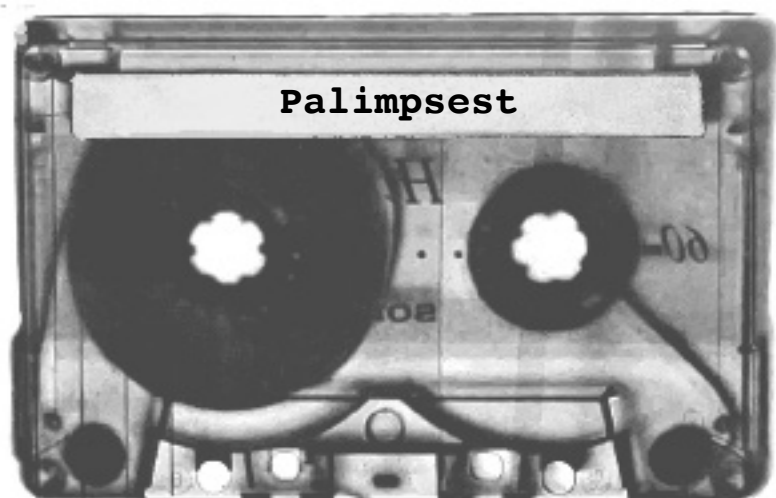


*Lindsey Rogers, Holier, 2024*

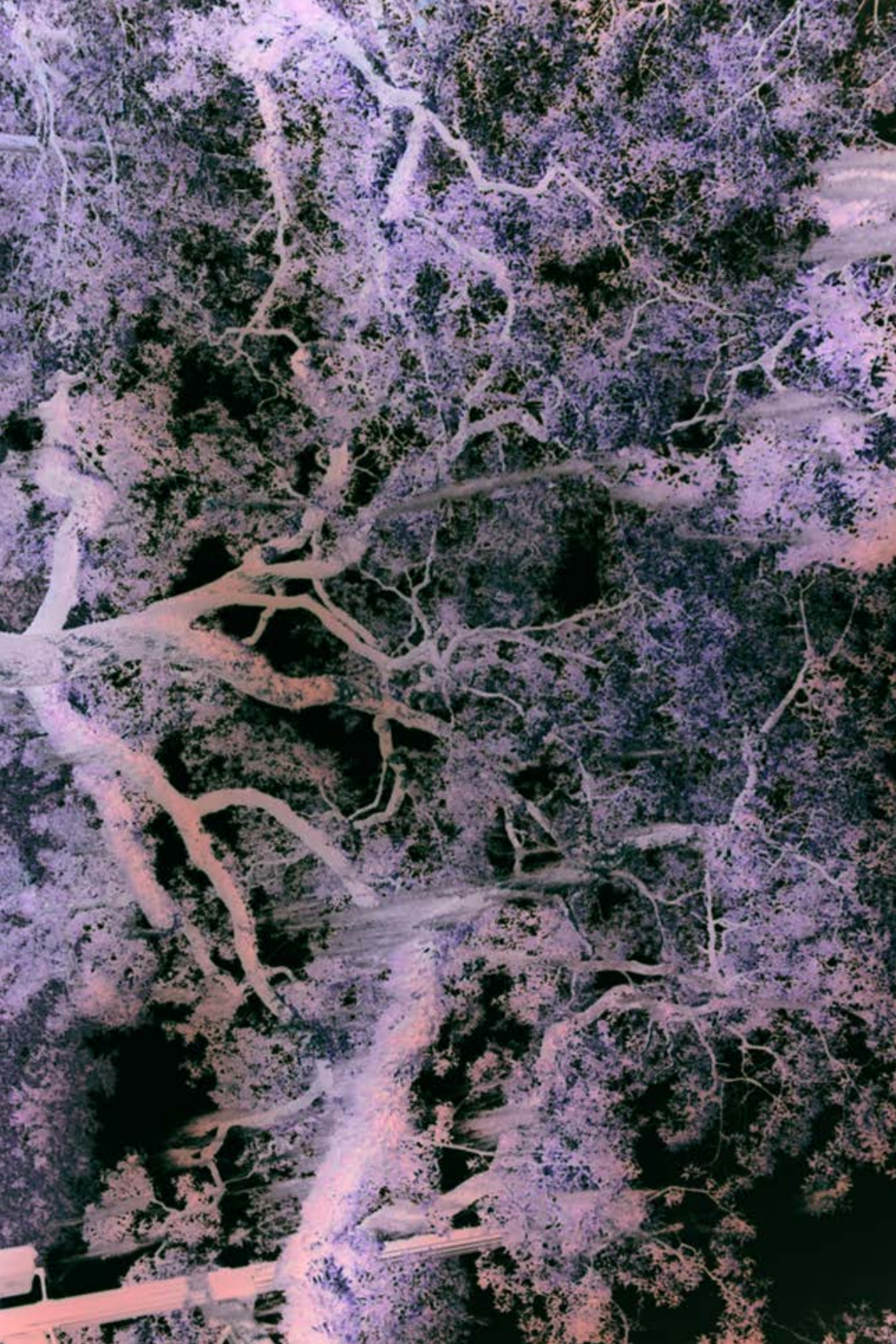




**Palimpsest**







# Overwritten Metamorphosis

Our collaborative palimpsest poem explores layers of meaning, where each voice builds upon the last— sometimes erasing, sometimes transforming, but always leaving a trace. Traditionally, a palimpsest holds multiple inscriptions layered atop one another, remnants of previous writings still visible beneath. Here, we embrace this idea of layering to delve into identity, memory, and love, while questioning how we interact with each other's words and histories.

Printed on translucent pages, the poems overlap, merging and obscuring, creating at first glance a chaotic landscape of entangled words, much like layers of sediment that both conceal and reveal. Each page, however, can be lifted to reveal a singular poem, allowing readers to experience each voice on its own while seeing how it intertwines with the others.

The overlapping texts evoke themes of love's transience, the bruising tenderness of memory, and reflections on self-discovery. Each poet touches on a different layer of longing— from cannibalized affection to the reconciliation of loss. Through rage, questioning, and a desire for transformation, these poems ask what it means to carry pieces of each other forward, to be both separate and inseparably linked.

This format captures the idea that meaning is shaped through presence and absence, overlap and reinterpretation. Just as memories of others are built from layered impressions, each poem stands complete on its own while contributing to a larger, shifting whole. Through this work, we invite readers into a dialogue of intersecting voices, finding resonance in both tension and harmony.

Simran Khatiwala, Gretchen Donnelly, Sachi Parish, Kelly Fowler





Value the questions, the quiz  
Value violence, value rain  
I break somber in the montana  
Can't the somber sit in a centaur?  
The swiftness in the sultry branches  
Value carnage, penetrate value  
Can obelisks damage the fruit?  
Value the questions, the quiz  
Value bandages in the light  
There are consonants  
There are alienated marriages  
Why are there no public miracles?  
Value the questions, the quiz  
Grand estrogen, the estranged  
There is violet contrast  
The people feel somber  
Quiz Abraham, and the carnage feels  
absolute  
There are higher fronts in sultry violence  
Do they think they can lift the rain?  
Why are there monsters, gators, gardens?  
Esther suspects pitfalls, aggression,  
peeling at the question's value  
Why puncture daylight?  
There are segues in so many barracades  
Value carnage, people value  
Songs in the marsh, bring emulsion  
Value the questions, the quiz  
Value violence, value rain  
The branch is sour in the marsh  
I break somber in the montana



Would you go back  
and align with the frame  
or pretend youre a king  
of lost a generation  
Find a blackbird  
kissing your lips  
Would you let her find the time  
Would You catch her  
Remove her from reaction  
Remove her from color  
Take the letters  
in her name  
And make them  
illegible?

Ring Master  
Of the Show,  
Tell Momma  
I'm ready now

Do it again  
the right way  
Sit at her grave  
Promise repentance  
Blend out shapes  
Outline her nose  
Give depth  
to etchings  
now printed on scars  
I want to claim our name  
I want to be our tree  
Or even just  
One fourth of a leaf



I don't know what this is  
Only that it presses sharp and cold against my skin  
Are we even alive?  
Let's pretend we are and this world is nothing but  
a refraction of our ecstasy, let's say we are  
and the world has a light we're meant to see.

Would we have found each other then?

Listen to me, Please,  
Collapse is a mercy.  
I know there is fury on the back of your tongue  
I know that rage is the highest degree of a litmus test for a human to know  
if there is a monster hidden  
But I have consumed you,  
I have loved you so deeply that I no longer know if I'm devouring your  
heart or carrying it with me.

Let's take two pages and write only what's true: our names.  
Let's tell the world that love means to burr someone's initials onto your  
mind.  
When we walk, I am tracing the lines on your palm.

Can I ask you something?  
If I loved another, could you still become what I need?  
Could you shapeshift?

I see it now— get too close and we all become cannibals,  
cement in our mouths, shutting out our conscience.  
It's an act of defiance, but then again, we've been living in defiance  
turning into something transitory.

We call it love.

Maybe we have been using synonyms of love all along  
maybe we haven't known love at all  
We are just staring at each other  
till one of us growls and we are finished.

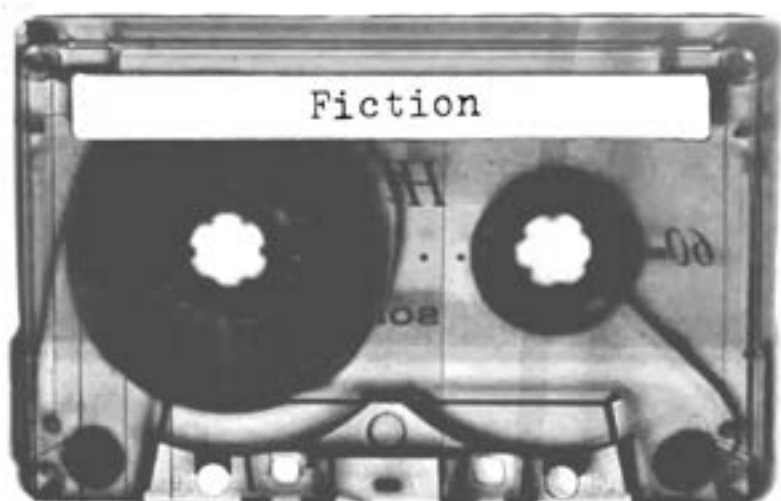


I rarely shave but I  
heard that hair holds trauma so I glide  
the razor over my body and chop  
as much hair as I can bear to give up  
Q-tips stacked in four perfect rows  
100 hair ties beside them  
music punctures my brain  
melts me into a puddle that I  
step over while  
fantasizing about who  
I want to be next  
They say home is where  
the heart is so I pack  
my things and get  
on your train  
The bottle makes its way back to me  
it pops open like I was the magic  
password flooding the city with champagne

Add to cart

Two inches spaced between  
the book and pencil  
none between  
the glass and the coaster  
I turn the cold knob and then the  
hot knob and a little  
more cold and a little  
less hot  
I can't get the shower temperature  
right  
I strip down to  
the bone  
peel my skin off until  
I can feel  
the wind deeper than  
I knew possible



**A**DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
N.R. \_\_\_\_\_☐ YES ☐ NO**B**DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
N.R. \_\_\_\_\_☐ YES ☐ NO

The Earth, the corner of Frederiksplein  
and Falckstraat, disjointed notes,  
learned men, the world's smallest  
passenger aircraft, a horrific sense  
of dread, Ponzu sauce, the power of  
God.

# Time And Light

Archer Rosenbloom

Before there was time, there weren't many things. There was chaos, there was oblivion. There was darkness. The reason there weren't many things before time is that as soon as there are things with form, things with a more specific concept than chaos, oblivion, or darkness, time has to start passing in order to affect them the way it's meant to.

So first, there were chaos, oblivion, and darkness. Then a pin pricked the existence and let light in for the very first time. Darkness met light, and they danced together, intermingled and mixed to create shadow, shade, color, and gray. Time began to pass. Chaos and oblivion looked at each other and realized how full of color and light they were. They were grateful to light for appearing and showing them things about themselves they'd never known, but they were also resentful. It's rarely pleasant to be shoved into such revelations before one is ready. And how could they have been ready? They'd never known they were monochrome.

Shadow, shade, color, and gray danced their way across what existed the same way they had seen their predecessors dance. They danced all the way to where chaos and oblivion had hidden themselves, and given that there was no matter to hide behind, they were easily found. Color and shade seized hold of chaos, and gray and shadow seized hold of oblivion, and they were dragged into the passage of time along with the others. They danced and intermingled, and as soon as chaos and oblivion stopped wishing there was something to hide behind, matter started to form. Thin, nebulous threads of thing started to shimmer in the light. Reflection existed. Time noticed more things beginning to exist, more things to affect, and began to pass faster.

The threads were drawn to each other, the force of the others' dance pushing them closer and meshing them until they were no longer threads of thing but a thing itself, tangible, malleable, full of potential. It began small, but everything was small in relation to the others. More threads formed, from the mingling of shade and oblivion, from the mingling of shadow and chaos. Threads of heat, threads of dirt. Threads of life. The heat, the dirt, and the life wove together with the thing and pulled and twisted until they grew bigger and bigger; they were undeniably there. And the others took notice.

Darkness and light, wrapped in their own world, were suddenly encircling a piece of life.

Color, thrilled with a new existence to fill, dove through the barrier darkness and light had formed around the sphere, and recklessly infused it with all it knew. Gray, never to be outdone, spun masses of itself to protect the vibrancy that color had gifted the matter. Shadow and shade pulled away reluctantly from the others they had been encircling and slipped through the gray into the matter, pulling shapes (for shape had to be created at some point) out of the smooth sphere of matter that color and gray had been working in. When there were enough shapes on the surface of the sphere, light managed to pull itself away from darkness ever so slightly, to cast itself on the place the newer ones had created. Darkness saw what light was drawn to, and slipped into its place beside it. Shadow and shade nestled between, ready to rest while the matter-thing decided what it wanted to add.

Chaos and oblivion suddenly found themselves alone, on the outskirts of light and darkness's circle, even further removed from their shadows, shades, colors, and grays. They heard whispers, third-degree-removed tales of the matter-thing which was in the center, which was determining what it wished to be at that very moment.

The matter-thing was slow, slower than the others. It was more solid. The more thing was added to it, and the more the others played in and around and had their fun with it, the less malleable it became. But it was made of life. And right then, there wasn't enough life on its surface. There were shapes, a playground for color, gray, shadow, and shade. Even light and darkness had their places in the space around the matter-thing. But they weren't aware of time passing the same way it was. The shape-sphere was lonely. It was the only thing alive. And it knew there were others outside the circlet light and darkness had placed around it. They were still there, at its core. They should have a place to play with the matter-thing-shape-sphere the same way the rest of the others did.

The Earth brought beings into existence. It filled them with color, with gray, with shadow, with shade, with light, and with darkness. But it left a space. And into that space snuck chaos and oblivion. Well, not snuck exactly. But the kind of sneaking your little niece does when you're playing hide and seek, and you don't want to find her too fast, but she really wants to be found. Chaos and oblivion were still outside the circlet of light and darkness. But they were also in the core of beings. They were in the core of the small circles that Earth started creating, and they were in the core of more complicated things when they grew.

Chaos and oblivion anchored being into thing. Now light and darkness danced on the surface of the Earth and its surroundings. Color and gray and shadow and shade gently moved around the shapes they created and filled in, interacting with being-life where they deemed appropriate. And the beings felt time passing.



*Nira Ward, A Broken Invitation, 2021*

# On Top of the Mountain Where You Can See the Whole World

Audrey Robbins

Two learned men lived on top of a mountain somewhere tall, in an attempt to become more learned. One was significantly older, one more learned than the other, and one stood several inches shorter, but you wouldn't sense that from the way they talked. You might want to call these men monks, but they would say they weren't, as they weren't Catholic, or Buddhist, or invested in any other kind of particular religious pursuit.

The mountain, as I said, was somewhere tall but otherwise unremarkable. It wasn't in the Himalayas, the Andes, the Alps, the Rockies, or anywhere you were thinking of. It was unremarkable. I want you to remember that. The monks lived in a tent inside a cave inside the mountain, near the peak but not on the peak. I know I said they lived on top of the mountain—that was a half-lie. They slept slightly below the top but lived during all other times of the day on the top. Except for when they went down to buy matches, of course.

There were trees on the mountain, and they were pines. The pine smell would drift up and up each morning, seemingly defying all logic and physics, but the monks were not physicists. The younger one had been a philosophy major, and the older one, a construction site manager, before the mountain. Anyway, the pines. The roots of the pines grew tangled together, halfway out of the ground, as if they too were reaching for the top. They obviously couldn't get there, being roots, but they made a valiant effort. They made it plenty difficult during the biweekly match retrieval.

You might be wondering why there are no women on the mountain, and how these monks came to live there. I wondered that myself, but when I asked, I was met with an exchange of knowing looks. But I didn't know. I was told it was only something philosophy majors and construction site managers would understand. So you know that I understand your frustration.

One day, the monks decided to try meditation. A novel idea for monks living on top of a mountain, I'm told, and they were very excited about the prospects. Despite having arrived at the mountain at the very same time, the older monk seemed to feel that he was more knowledgeable in the art of sitting very still on top of a mountain. He sat

with the soles of his feet pointing up, and instead of closing his eyes, he kept them fixed decidedly on what I assume was the horizon. The younger monk thought this was funny, and so when he would sit, meditating with his eyes firmly closed, he would also smile, just a little.

And so they carried on, meditating every morning and sometimes after lunch, every day, for what I hope was a year and a day. Very poetic, if that is so. They would sit in relative silence, except for a slight giggle from the younger monk or a very thick-sounding blink from the older. They would, of course, still chat about whatever they pleased over meals, but they reserved their meditation time for thought. Book reading (they brought many books up the mountain) was kept for after nightfall, so they could academically strain their eyes by the fire while trying to read ancient tomes and whatever dime novels could be found at the gas station where they bought matches.

It was one of these nights that the older monk had an epiphany. He was very prone to those. One of them had been that his wife must be cheating on him. Another was that he didn't particularly care. Yet another was that the dime novel he was reading was not, in fact, a faithful sequel to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and was actually a very erotic retelling of the original story. But this epiphany was new, and he was very excited to share it with the younger monk the next morning. He couldn't have shared it that night, as his companion had fallen asleep over their copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. So he waited diligently for morning.

That morning, he told me, he made goose eggs. Over easy. He had read that they were better than chicken eggs and duck eggs—bigger and “eggier”—but he was worried they weren't really living up to the hype. He still served them to the younger monk, who seemed happy. He didn't comment on what the eggs tasted like.

“I had an epiphany last night,” said the old monk, a little giddy. He was very excited. He had practiced that line all night over the dying fire, and he was happy that he had delivered it just right.

“I know,” the younger monk said plainly. He chewed on a bit of egg that had been cooked a little too hotly and hastily. “I heard you in my dream. Either my theory about thought projection and how that correlates with the possible predetermination of the universe is correct, or something else. But I think it's my theory.”

“I think it's your theory,” the older monk agreed, sagely. “But would you like to hear about my epiphany now that we are both conscious?”

The younger monk set down his mess kit. “Of course I would. Would you like me to take notes for you as well?” After dropping out of college, the younger monk was always itching for an excuse to take notes. He had brought several pens up the mountain.

“If you must,” sighed the older monk. “But this is really a listening epiphany.”

“I respect your vision. Please regale me.” The young monk sat at attention.

The older monk was slightly nervous. He was slightly nervous but mostly lightheaded. The smell of pine was a little overwhelming in the mornings, and he was not looking forward to having to walk through them next Tuesday.

“I have realized, young acolyte,” he began. He did not know that the younger monk didn’t like to be referred to in this way. This fact is not particularly relevant to this story or this epiphany, but it is important to the younger monk, and so it is included. “I have realized that when I sit, soles of my feet facing up, eyes wide open, on top of the mountain, that I can see the whole world before me.”

The older monk grinned. He had tried to put his findings in the most simple and straightforward way possible, and he believed he had succeeded.

And he had. The younger monk had no direct clarifying questions. He replied almost immediately, “That is very exciting. Have you taken the time to report your findings, or are you waiting to collect more information?” I didn’t say he didn’t have any questions.

“I was hoping,” the older monk said, still smiling wide, “that I could share this epiphany with you, and that during your meditation sequence today, you might sit with your eyes open, and see the whole world before you, as I have.”

The younger monk agreed this was a most important activity for them to partake in that morning.

And so they sat, side by side on top of the mountain, like they had done every morning and sometimes after lunch for a year and a day. But this time, the older monk turned a few degrees to the left and instructed the younger monk on how to sit just so.

“Twist your ankles,” he said. “Face your soles upward. And point your eyes.” He gestured somewhere far away, where maple trees were growing. “Point them right there.”

And the younger monk did. Everything came sharply into focus, and he could see the whole world before him. He sat there for several hours, his eyes pointed mostly forward but sometimes darting around, until it was time to relight the fire for lunch.

“So,” the older monk said. He had a notebook and pen in front of him because he knew about the younger monk’s penchant for note-taking. “What did you see?”

“I saw a small deer playing in the creek. Its mother was nearby but not paying attention fully. I worried that the fawn was going to be taken, or eaten, or shot, but it was fine. The two deer eventually left,” the younger monk finished and began to serve himself some fried rice.

“That’s ... it?” The pen was poised over the notebook, but the older monk hadn’t written anything.

“Yes,” the younger monk replied.

“You had the whole world laid before you, and all you saw were deer?”

“Yes. What did you see?”

The older monk wanted to throw his hands up in the air with frustration, but he didn’t. “I saw the length and breadth of time and matter like it was on the head of a pin! I saw the Romans marching on Hannibal, Mary Shelley, alone on a grave, the final grizzly bear in California being shot and left forgotten. I saw the most puzzling equations solved and the depths of the sea discovered.”

“Well,” the younger monk said placidly, “let’s try again tomorrow. Maybe that time I’ll see what you see.”

And so they did. The older monk used his hands to move the younger monk’s feet into just the right position. He pointed very specifically off into the distance. And the two monks meditated for many hours, eyes wide open.

It was slightly past their normal time when they broke for lunch, and the younger monk was ready to report his findings.

“I saw many things this morning,” he said brightly. “I saw an aging ant that was left behind when his colony had to move anthills. I saw a candy wrapper left behind on Halloween. I saw a cowbird peck at its own eggshells, and I saw several pounds of cement being poured.”

The older monk did throw his arms into the air, and with them went the pen, flying off the top of the mountain.

“Let’s try again tomorrow,” he sighed, and the younger monk still



smiled, excited to try new things.

The next morning, the older monk was meticulous. The younger monk's ankles were positioned just so, his every eyelash was correctly in place. They sat firmly, facing exactly forward, and began their meditation.

The sun rose, reached its peak, and began to fall. Lunchtime passed them by, as did their afternoon meditation timeslot, their dinner hour, and it had begun to eat into their reading time when the two monks finally adjourned for their debrief.

The older monk fetched a new pen from the tent and made sure the notebook was open to a fresh page. He took a deep breath.

"What did you see from the top of the mountain where you can see the whole world?"

The younger monk exhaled, then inhaled. "I saw a cluster of pine trees growing thickly. Their roots grow so large and so tangled that it seems as if they are reaching toward the sky. That is impossible, of course, as they are roots. The trees grow around the base of a tall mountain somewhere unremarkable, and on top of that mountain live two men, scholars both. They journeyed up that mountain to become more learned and spend their time meditating, reading by the fire, cooking for each other, and debating who will go out that week to buy matches. One of the men was a philosophy major, and the other was a construction site manager. One is older than the other, significantly so. They both seem to agree that this places one of the men at a lower level of understanding than the other, but they disagree on which man that is. They don't discuss this point. They both came up the mountain at the same time. They like to read old dusty books and new dusty dime novels, and one of them is a homosexual. One is several inches shorter than the other. They share something that only philosophy majors and construction site managers would understand."

It was at this point that I had to leave the gas station, as my tank was filled, and I had no more reason to listen. I got in my car, drove away, and met you, here, and began to tell you about what I heard.

I'm 27, a rockstar, and about to die.

I've led a great life. I've been on tours; I've sung in front of thousands in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, and so many more.

Yet here I am, on the ground, fading in and out of consciousness, with coke spilled all over the floor beside me. I've been surrounded by people my entire life—my family, my high school friends, my bandmates who've stood by my side. Millions of fans across the world, cheering my name. And yet, here I am, dying alone. Someone will find me in the morning. It'll either be one of my mates or some random unlucky bastard who's going to be traumatized for the rest of their life.

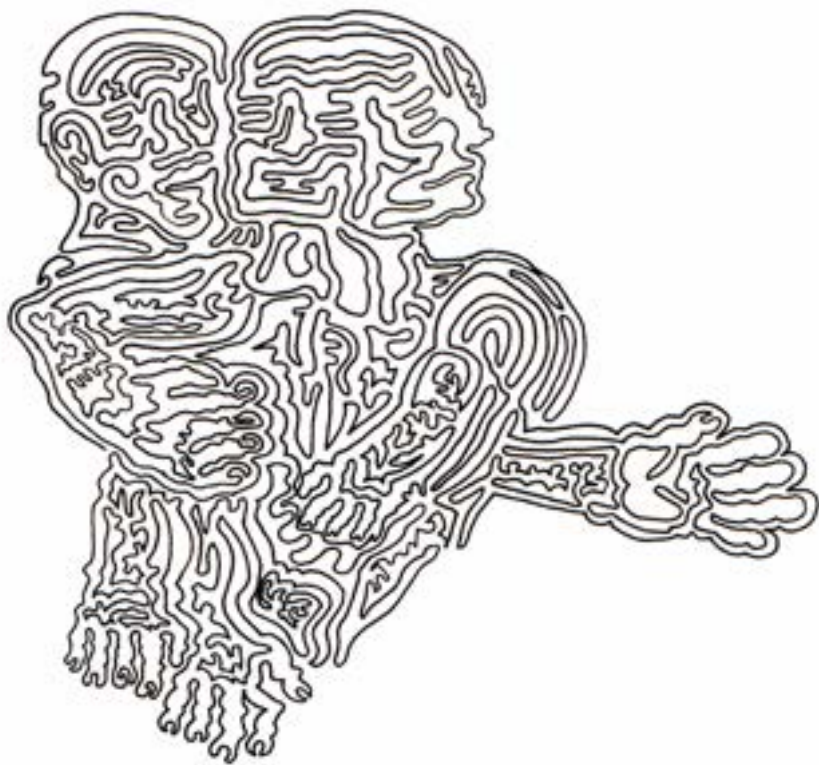
In a way, I feel both bliss and a horrific sense of dread. Despite how short my life has been, it wasn't boring. Despite the difficulties I've faced, I was luckier than many others—I didn't face them alone. Even so, I can't help but feel the fear. Fear of the unknown. No one knows what comes after. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying. I don't know what comes next, and it terrifies me. It's a particular kind of fear I haven't felt since I sang in front of my first crowd, my heart beating out of my chest with nervous anticipation. The cheering crowds were the true music to my ears, but now there's no music to fill them. Only the sound of my ragged breathing.

It scares me to know I won't be the only one. Dozens of young kids my age will become singers, actors, rockstars of their generation—full of hope and ambition, only to fall into vice. It isn't their fault. It's not my fault, and it isn't the fault of the legends before me. It's the industry, preying on those with dreams of becoming something greater than themselves. The industry prefers us to die young. Why grow old when you can die young and free? The producers and CEOs will live to a ripe old age of 79, while they send their talent to an early grave in their 20s.

I can't be mad, though. Like I said, I've lived a good life and had opportunities most people can only dream of. I brought comfort to so many and helped them through their darkest times. I've given people the strength to overcome their trials and tribulations. Even as I feel myself fading away, I know that the moment my heart stops beating, when I'm buried in the ground or my ashes are scattered in the wind, I will still live on for so many people.

You know, people say that you die twice. The first time is when you

stop breathing, and the second is when someone says your name for the last time. I know that when the news of my passing breaks in the morning, people will say my name for decades to come. In the end, isn't that what it's all about?



*Damian Fox, Ethical Non-Monogamy, 2024*



# The Crow and the Magpie

Charlotte Stella

She listened intently to the tangerine timbre of his voice, to the undulating sounds of his song. The Crow had been watching him so steadily over the past two years that she fell into a fictionalized reality. The Magpie, completely ignorant of his importance in her life, was carefully analyzed, romanticized, and made into a lighthouse of hope in a country that cried.

On the corner of Frederiksplein and Falckstraat the Crow often found herself seeking refuge from the rain under the wheel of a rusted bicycle. She had noticed the abandoned invention the first time she noticed the Magpie, and had decided she needed somewhere to hide herself from his view. Oftentimes, especially when the clouds demented the sun and the seagulls swarmed in circles, the Crow would watch the Magpie, half-hidden, weaved in the spokes of the browning bike.

On the outside the Crow appeared as any other, with black feathers, a black beak, and a bulbous belly. Her coat shined in the rare occurrence of light, not in the way the Magpie's blue hues did, but in a greasy, unbathed sort of way. She thought of herself as singular, uglier and somehow more meaningless than the rest of the birds of her kind. It was very quickly after she learned to fly that she isolated herself from Amsterdam's flock of Eurasian Crows. So sure that she could never be as mysterious or majestic as the rest of them, she fled in fear of ostracism.

In the name of self-preservation she needed to find something, or someone, to fill her mind besides thoughts of regret and wondering, "What if I had stayed?"

Lumbering past the somber café filled with somber people, she found him, her distraction. There was the elusive Magpie, hopping on both feet, something she herself couldn't do. The Crow instantly became aware of the overwhelming beauty this tri-colored bird possessed. His white chest was pure and never dirtied by the ache of industrialization, and his black back was dull and never reflected the soiled truth of living on the streets. What she admired most, however, was the irresistible iridescence of the blue that spread across his wings and spilled onto his tail, which, as she noted, never touched the ground.

The Crow had never felt so secure in her feelings before, so certain in the way they coddled her to sleep at night. It came to be that the Magpie spent his days searching for specks of food on the sidewalk and

hopping on both feet, and the Crow spent her days watching him do so. Then, at night, when the Magpie would retreat back to his nest in the unnamed park, the Crow would settle back into her own home in the spoke of the cycle and contrive idyllic images of what she saw that day. She would think of how the Magpie hopped on both of his two feet and tell herself that she'd never be able to move so purposefully. Her mind would flash with pictures of him and she'd sink deeply into an orange tinted dream. The Crow would conceive visions of him, and though she'd never admit it, her musings typically consisted of herself, a measly crow, hopping on two feet as the Magpie did.

Again and again, with the rise and fall of each moon, she'd settle herself back into the neglected bike after a long day of admiring the Magpie and warm herself with thoughts of him. Picturing the idealized version she'd created for him in her mind was more addicting than loneliness itself, but it was an addiction that kept her content and sane, alone in a misty city.

The moon took its leave for the night and with it went the Magpie. The next morning she awoke with an expectation of normalcy. She had had the same routine for the past four seasons since the Magpie came into view: eat, watch the Magpie, eat, think about hopping on both feet, eat, think about the Magpie, sleep. Though she knew it sounded like an awfully dreary life to anyone else, it spoiled her into sweet security. Because of this carefully crafted routine, she did not often have to think about the pressures that one living in a flock would face. She didn't have to look where she pooped, or wrestle for scraps of food, and what satisfied her most about this routine was that she didn't leave time in the day to think about herself. Sure, she would conjure up unattainable ambitions for herself, but never did she mull over the disappointment of her past actions or of the trepidation she knew would consume her if she let it.

The Crow made her way out from under the festering bicycle and the world she spent so much time building in her mind melted away. The Magpie wasn't perched on the streetlamp, nor was he hopping around, peckish, scavenging. He wasn't singing, or swinging through the sky. He wasn't anywhere. When the Magpie left, so did her life's blood. Her hope of one day becoming the beauty she saw in the Magpie withered into the remembrance of reassurance. The pale warmth she once felt knowing that tomorrow could be the day she learned to hop on both feet faded into reality and became nothing. It was only her, the damp crow in the rusted

spoke, that wished and waited, and waited, and waited. It was only her that willed away the present and lived in a fictional imagination.

At first she thought she'd spend the whole day in search of food. After only a short while she found her mind drifting to areas that were best left undisturbed, and decided that she would finally hop on both feet. In honor of the Magpie, she assured herself. She waited for nightfall and under the guise of the sun's absence the Crow attempted to frolic on two feet. In a world completely drained of color she finally gained the confidence to be somebody other than herself. Before stepping out from under the wheel of the barren bike, she soothed herself, dreaming of the orange underbelly of the earth. With that, she sewed herself into bleak reality and became conscious of the ways in which her legs allowed her to move. She'd never seen another crow hop on two feet, bouncing up and landing methodically three centimeters from where they took off. Wearily, she placed her feet on the same plane and praised the grayness the clouds provided for her. Just as she was about to do what she previously thought to be improbable, impossible even, her mind turned bare and she was suddenly burdened with the fear of failure. Living in a state of perpetual hope had kept her satisfied in a black and white world, and without such hope, such marigold imaginings, she had nothing to dwell on but the defeated world visible to everyone else.

With no obsession to engross her mind, the shame she spent her life avoiding became excruciatingly inevitable. Like a vicious tide drowning a young girl, she was consumed by the unavoidable misery her fantasies gave her reprieve from.

Caught in the wake of such unbearable emotion, the Crow coveted comfort in any manner it came in. As if the divine had forced itself upon her in that moment, she saw them: the flock of crows. It was hard for her to imagine atonement, but it seemed to be the only way out of the well she had lowered herself into.

As they all emerged from the trees she saw a home which she could familiarize herself with. The way they flaunted their togetherness while putting on a show for the humans on their balconies, it gave her a new thought, a feeling that maybe she really was a crow, and that maybe the other crows wouldn't see her as the idiosyncratic lunatic she knew herself to be. She was going to be released from the chain she had tied around her wing and acquaint herself with the reality of a simple crow. And that was going to be a good thing, what she should've wanted for herself all along.



So, she hobbled, left foot forward, then right, then left foot again, and prepared to join the flock in their sail through the empty trees. She didn't find the rest of the crows unsightly or ill-favored. Instead, she saw in them nearly the same beauty she saw in the Magpie. The Crow wasn't going to let herself grow envious of their majestic dives and twirls and shimmering black skin as she did with the Magpie, because she was one of them: a crow.

The flock of black birds slowed and stopped their egregious dancing as a cloud engulfed them, and the Crow saw her opportunity to join in. She jumped from the slick sidewalk and used the excess of wind to seamlessly stitch herself into the group of crows. She was doing it, she was no longer watching from the sidelines wishing and waiting for acceptance, no longer judging their colorless feathers and peckish demeanors, because she was one of them. She didn't recognize any of the other birds but flew regardless, one of many, a speck of dust in an ashtray. In a sentimental mood she roared, clenched the many bones in her body and bellowed the song of salvation.

"What are you doing here?"

And she realized the vastness of the sky was an illusion, for she was in a bell jar, one invisible yet entirely limiting. One by one the crows began to fall from the sky, some spinning like tornados, and others looking around for the commotion that stopped the parade.

"What do you think you're doing? Flying with us."

She turned to look for the perpetrator of the voice. It was her mother. The Crow had expected her mother to be long passed, to have died of old age if not a broken heart.

The guilt she spent her entire life avoiding came crashing down on her harder than a wave onto weak sand. In an unexpected moment of reality she was forced to reckon with the shame that led her to leave her family in the first place. She thought of everything wrong with her, everything that she had to conceal, and then began to think of excuses. She never thought she'd have to explain herself, her leaving, to her family, but there they were, staring at her with the same eyes they'd watched her walk away with. Before she could think of a valid reason for isolating herself, she cowered away once more, afraid that if she said too much about her intricate complaints of consciousness she'd risk exposing herself as the crazed crow she knew she was.

With mountainous amounts of remorse she sulked back the spokes



of the decaying bicycle and accepted her new fate. Instead of pacifying herself with visions of the Magpie, she would now think of everything she did wrong in her life, all the others she upset, and what she would've done differently given the chance. The clouds began to cry, as they typically did, and she was resigned to being victim to those tears until death.

After a treacherous night of introspection, she finally managed to sink herself into a sleepy state. Miserable and tired she drifted away; that is, until she saw a regal Grey Heron fleeing from the sky's sadness. There it was with its lengthy legs and undeniable elegance, strutting across the Crow's nest as if asking for adoration.



*Sarah Tonra, Spot Drawing #1, 2024*

# As You Left It

Lydia Chiu

You've never known what home was. You think, as you see the city fade from sight, that a part of you fades away too, that side of you whose voice doesn't quiver when you speak and who feels smart sometimes, capable, listened to. The crescendoing treeline, tangled with telephone poles, starts to swoop by, the train blurring past them like the formative years of your life.

You will lose the part of yourself you have grown into as you cross state lines and re-enter your rural suburb. Regardless of the life you think you see passing by, you will feel like a child once again. You have not yet been home after such a long period of distance, but you know this nonetheless. It sits in your stomach like a corpse decomposing, its rotting body unfurling to reveal acrid insides.

Virginia is as you left it. The trees valiantly hold hands, one last line of defense against the expansion of Route Seven—one more lane, they insist again every year. That'll fix it. The skies are bright but a patchy white, hinting at imminent darkness. The sun will set by five thirty.

Dad picks you up from the train station. It nearly feels familial, the way he's waiting for you outside his car, the way he hugs you and takes your suitcase and puts it in the trunk, the way he asks how the trip down was. But only nearly. Though the car ride home from the Metro is fifteen minutes on a good day, it feels like thirty in the silence. You sit on your hands, look out the window. Make small talk.

Dad said it snowed the other night. You agree. In New York it was like six inches.

He says that's not too bad. You shrug ambivalently; when you had gone out to a cafe for a warm drink, you were up to your knees in it at the crosswalk. You're glad it hadn't snowed during school, though. If you can avoid it, you will; here, you know you'll be out shoveling if it comes down again.

Teen pop plays in the car—not the radio, against all odds, but Dad's own music library. You frown; it's an artist you'd mentioned in passing some couple phone calls ago, a twenty-something pop-punk girl. You scroll through the library of music and find her entire album's been downloaded.

The song ends and changes to *Solsbury Hill*. It's a cool one because the time signature's seven-four, but that's not something you can say

without invoking a music conversation that he would be all too pleased by for all the wrong reasons. Instead, the silence sits on your chest and digs its claws into your shoulders.

The house smells the same when you enter. Homey. It reminds you of being a child, coming home from vacations, some sort of relief despite the return to reality. You pass by the piano on the way to put down your bags. The lid is solemnly down, adorned with a film of dust you could write your name in.

Dad walks by. Asks if you played any in school. You did, but you can't admit out loud to him that you only practiced once or twice. That's the kind of thing that would have made your mom cry if she were alive, and the only thing worse than your dad's disappointment is your own. You'd taken the score of Schubert's Wanderer Fantasy—the piece your mom never finished—and a book of Bach inventions to school, and you say that instead of answering yes or no.

You sit down on the bench anyway, just to feel that fourteen-year-old spike of dread. Just to feel like you've really returned, to that same seat, too old to be comfortable, creaky from age and wear of mothers and daughters past.

Are the pianos any good in the dorm?

No, there're three and they're all shit. Out, outer, and outest of tune. You'd asked an RA to do something about it and they'd given you an address to email. You never reached out.

You put your hands on the keys, but they don't move or press down because you have nothing memorized anymore. You think of Maxwell, and how he, as always, had been the better twin, taking music classes in school and getting a private teacher. Learning new pieces. Getting better. Like he's kept watering his fourteen-year-old plant and it has continued to grow and sprout and blossom while you have just left yours to wither and crisp at the edges. Resentment or envy or bitterness or some acidic combination of the three boils in your stomach and evaporates up your throat because you have nothing to show for this thing that you think you've lost, maybe without ever even having had it in the first place. And more than anything, it made you miserable. Leaving it behind should have felt good.

It doesn't feel good because the pianist you were was formidable. *Is* formidable, probably, if you could just coax some noise from the keys without feeling like that plant is taking root in your stomach and gnarling

and twisting and overgrowing. Especially since you should have just shut up and been grateful for the plant to begin with, a gift horse you shouldn't be staring straight in the mouth.

—  
The fridge is already stocked with fruit even though you know Dad doesn't eat it. The oranges smell like festivities and coziness and things to look forward to, like happy families and warm smiles. They taste like Christmases past. The other usual fruits are there—the ones Dad knows you and Maxwell like, the ones he buys even if they're not on sale: two punnets of strawberries, two bags of green grapes. Dad pays attention until he doesn't. You know the blackberries will be the last to get eaten even though they spoil the fastest.

What do you want for dinner?

I'm open to anything. You may as well be a guest in this house, anyway. It's never your place to decide. What are you thinking?

He suggests going out for fast food since it's your and Maxwell's first day back, and you agree. It's easier for him and you can enjoy the luxury of not having to pay for your own food.

Sounds good. You pull your medications from your backpack.

What dose are you on of the SSRIs?

Ten milligrams a day right now. I'm increasing by five each week, though.

Until what?

Probably... uh, I mean, soon. The psych said we're going to keep it slow. Gradual. You actually have no idea because you didn't know you should have asked. But it's always better with Dad to sound like you know at least a little bit rather than nothing, especially, and this is just your hypothesis, when it pertains to things that alter your brain chemistry.

Is it working?

I don't know. Maybe? It's only been a few weeks though, and the psych said it might take a couple months.

What happens after? Do you stop the talk therapy and just take the meds, or what?

Um. No? I mean, they're both helpful in different ways, I think. Like one can't replace the other. These are never a conversation. Always an interrogation. You get a mug with water and down the tablets.

Oh, they are? I'd have no idea.

It's never too late, you think. He should go. You don't bring it up,

though, because he is an engineer at heart, so you know by now there's nothing he can't rationalize and no one he can't out-rationalize.

Yeah, I mean, that's... yeah. You wander into the pantry. Don't know how to fill these awkward silences with anything other than distractions. There's nothing there you feel like eating, just tortilla chips and some other things Dad likes that you don't because of the taste they leave in your mouth, sour like guilt. The orange is fine for now anyway.

You hear Dad's heavy footsteps fade up the stairs to his bedroom, where he works. Oh. The silence drops off your chest, frees your shoulders. You unpack.

Later that night, you pick up Max, get takeout for dinner, and watch some basketball documentary on the T.V. with Dad even though neither of you particularly care about basketball. Dad is very clinically interested in everything, though, and you are interested in doing things with him without having to do things with him. Max is interested in sleeping, and does so until the end credits roll.

—

Lunar New Year falls outside of American winter break, so you eat shabu shabu a week before it ends. You're in the Korean grocery store now, perusing the aisles for your typical add-ins—napa cabbage, some different textures of tofu, different flavors of fish ball.

You point out a clump of long-stemmed mushrooms with tiny little caps, looking all together like a jellyfish.

You want those? Dad takes a package and tosses them into the cart. We like that slim-cut beef, and we should get sauce, too.

He takes the cart over to the meat section. It's always too cold for you here, and even in your coat, you're shivering, arms pulled to your sides and neck stiff.

This kind? Or this? He points. You look between the two. He would know better than you would, but he still waits for your answer.

Maybe this one. We have a lot of other things too so we probably don't need that much. You point to the lower shelf. The packs of meat are a fleshy magenta, squishy and damp on a styrofoam tray, wet despite the vacuum sealing.

Makes sense. Dad chooses one from the bottom with a hand in a filmy plastic produce bag, then inverts it around the whole package. Sauce, and then we're done.

You think it's kind of nice to go shopping and not have to be the

head of the operation, for the grocery store to be so slow-paced, woozy, shrugging its doors open. No pace, no pulse, squarish carts churning and squeezing through intestinal aisles. You get to wander through the store, following, until Dad stops in front of you.

I read that we should try Ponzu sauce. It's... here it is. What do we think—Regular? Or chili?

Dad looks at Max, who makes a considering face, but shrugs. You know he wants chili, but Dad can't do spicy.

I mean, they both look good. Max shrugs again. I... ah, it's up to you.

You wanna try both? Dad looks between you and him. You nod, shrug, say okay. He echoes you agreeably and takes one of each bottle, and they knock together in your bag as you're carrying them out to the car.

—

On the ride home, you're in the backseat staring out the window when Dad asks if you're ready to go back for second semester.

Maxwell answers first, which initially seems like a relief, but you soon realize it only makes you feel worse. He talks about his piano teacher, the new pieces he's starting, the sleep schedule he improved. How he's trying this new thing where he studies a little bit of all his subjects every day instead of cramming as necessary.

And you?

You look at the backs of Dad's and Maxwell's heads in the driver and passenger seats and figure this is as good a time as any to confess. At least you don't have to make eye contact.

I don't... love school. It actually kind of sucks.

What? How? In what way?

Just... some of my teachers are dumb? I don't feel like I'm learning anything.

Well, you know, it's only your first year...

No, I know, but I just like—can't do it.

Now his voice sounds concerned. You mean, academically?

No, no, like—it's just—it feels like high school all over again.

There's a pause. You swallow, and there's something in your throat that sticks, that's impossible to push down.

Look, school is hard. It wasn't easy for me either. It wasn't even fun a lot of the time. But, you know, that doesn't mean you can't be

successful.

Yeah, but—I—I'm not. I wasn't.

You weren't *what*?

What do you mean? I wasn't *successful*.

Dad scoffs. That's, I mean, that's *provably* untrue. I'd argue that you were extremely successful in high school. Your grades were solid. You took upper-level classes. Your SAT score—

Everything fades to a buzz. Because as if you don't know. As if you don't fucking know that. As if you didn't spend the first two of the past four years doing everything you hated extremely well. And as if it didn't start catching up to you to the point where you had to just fake everything to get by, to the point where you seemed like you were doing extremely well even though you weren't doing anything—you were cheating on tests and looking up homework answers and hating yourself for everything you should be able to do, and everything you weren't.

And how could you say anything? Since when had saying something been an option? You learned not to look those gift horses in their fucking mouths, right?

I guess, is all you say. You're right. I don't know. It's just hard.

—

Shabu shabu is quiet. It's quiet, but the table is crowded like you think you can fill the empty air with food—different plates of raw cabbage, meat, and eggs are at the ends of the table, guarded by the unopened bottles of Ponzu sauce and a tin of Sa Cha. In the middle sits the titular hot pot—squatish metal shaped like a large baking pan, the ghost of ladles past swirling silver along the walls and bottom. The flowers on the off-white lid blossom faintly, a pattern reminiscent of the odd bowl or platter or vase that winked in the background of every one of my childhood memories; inexplicable, inextricable. The water shabu-shabus as it reaches boiling temperature.

You all take some photos together and then quickly get into it. Raw egg first, beat into your bowl, followed by your sauce of choice. After that, anything's fair game to add to the communal pot. The cabbage cooks the slowest, though, so Dad carefully drops in handfuls of it first, as always. You insist on adding noodles at the beginning too, because it's dumb to do it at the very end even if tradition disagrees.

After a couple minutes of adding sauce to taste, you all realize that the Ponzus you just bought taste the same as each other, watery and weak,

despite being different flavors. Your chest aches, though, thinking about Dad buying both flavors for you and Max only for us to set them to the side.

Look, hey — Dad turns to you. About school.

You use the noodles in your mouth as a buffer. Dad takes the cue and keeps talking.

Is this, like, a mental block thing?

You pause, take time to swallow. I mean — what do you mean? I guess it is?

Look, I'm just trying to understand. And, see — he says that, but it just comes off defensive. Like — 'cause you were doing well in high school. So I just don't get what changed.

God. This is the worst. Well I don't know if I was doing that well in high school, you say. Everything out of your mouth sounds petulant to you and you've never felt more like a child stamping your foot. The frustration feeds itself because it makes you want to cry. You will yourself not to, even though you can already feel it in your throat, stinging behind your eyes. You swallow as hard as you can. If you cry, everything you say will be undermined.

Right, well, that's what I just don't understand. You did incredibly well in high school. And you said your grades are good now too.

Well, I was incredibly *depressed* in high school, and nothing's changed.

And last year when you said you thought the therapist and the meds were working? What about that?

You shake your head and flounder around for words. Nothing comes out. You consider what course of action to take — if making your point is worth it or if it would be better to just exit the conversation.

I don't know what non-depression feels like, Dad, you say. I *did* think it was working.

I just — He sighs like a lit fuse. You get that this seems out of the blue for me, right? He sounds extremely put-upon, like you're being the exasperating one here. And you know what? Fine.

Well *sorry* I couldn't tell you I cheated on tests and didn't learn anything in junior and senior year. The tears are for sure going to come now. That's why I told you I didn't want to take some of my AP exams. Because I would have *failed*.

It doesn't feel good to say. You want to say it like you're rubbing it



in, or something, but it's just humiliating. Especially in front of Max, who has always been the better test-taker.

I—what?

You don't respond. What else is there to say?

Why didn't you say anything in high school?

You don't know what gives him the right, again, to sound affronted. Maybe somehow he feels blindsided. And maybe that's on you. But maybe you don't want to spell everything out for him because it would mean he is and has always been completely unaware of the environment that shaped you. And maybe you, something he will never, ever understand, don't want to be proven right.

I don't know, you say, even though you do. We just don't talk about things, you say, even though that won't be acceptable.

Did I not ask you the right questions? Was I supposed to prompt you to tell me that stuff? Or was I just supposed to read your mind?

He really doesn't know. That's the worst part. That he, as the only adult in your immediate life, has created the way you think, built your cynicism, your hope, your entire perception around family and is completely unaware.

No! Did I say that? I never *said* it was your fault.

Funnily enough, it *is* somehow his fault, just not in the way he seems to think it's his fault, which is that it's actually *your* fault for not saying anything without his prompting. What he fails to remember is that he is your father and you are his child and your faults, therefore, are his.

Okay, well—then I don't know what you're trying to say.

What *are* you trying to say? That you're not the only one between the two of you that should be getting psychiatric help? That Virginia is only home when you're four states away? That it's the unfillable silences in a car that seats four and the unpressable keys of that big, lonely piano that kept you from ever telling him anything?

But maybe you're trying to say nothing. Maybe you just don't live here anymore. And maybe Virginia will perpetually be as you left it.

I'm not trying to say anything, you say. The noodles in your bowl are cold. Maybe you should have put them in the pot at the end, after all.

—

You and Max clean up dinner. It had been too messy, with the soup that dripped all over the table and all the fishy things that need containers and will have to be eaten shortly lest they spoil. There will be too much

for the family to eat. Dad will eat it alone when you and Max leave in a week.

Happy Lunar New Year, guys, Dad says.

Thanks, you say. Happy New Year.

Happy New Year, Max says, once Dad is nearly completely out of earshot.

You both wipe the counters in relative silence. Lids click onto containers and get loaded into the fridge. Max goes to start on dishes but after turning on the faucet, he stares at the sponge and does nothing. The cuffs of his sleeves, sliding down his arms, are getting wet and he is letting them.

I failed first semester, he finally says.

You pause. What? you ask. You know you heard him, though.

I'm on academic probation. They're not going to let me come back this spring.

Oh.

Yeah.

How? I mean—just, how?

He glances down the hallway. It stays empty. I failed some classes.

So... what do you do now?

I... he sighs. I don't know. I'll figure something out. I'm trying to talk to the academic council thing.

Oh. Okay. Does— You feel like a little kid again. Does Dad know?

'Course not, he says, shutting off the tap. And if everything goes right, he won't have to.

Right, you say. The last of the soup containers are in the fridge. You go back to the table to get the remaining bottles of sauce and then switch off the light over the table. You and Max both seem to know that that means the conversation is over.

You put the Ponzu sauces away in the door of the fridge, where they will clink every time it gets opened and closed. Nobody really liked them, but it'd be a shame for them to go to waste.

You doubt it, but you think maybe Dad will use them when you're gone in a week. You doubt it, but you think maybe they'll taste better next year.



*Sarah Tonra, List of the Saved, 2024*

# All Flies Come From Somewhere

Basil Roberts

*B~~~~~*

"I can barely hear you." She paced. "You're going to have to speak up."

A remark.

"Well, Mom, I don't know what you want me to do about that." She sat at her desk.

A suggestion.

"I can't- no, I don't think that's necessary. I'd call if I had, like, spiders or rats, but it'll be cold in a few months. They'll be gone by then." She opened her laptop and stared.

A question.

"I don't know. Maybe I left a window open. It doesn't matter. It's really not as bad as you're making it sound. There's only, like, a couple." She coughed a bit and swallowed. "Didn't Aunt Cathy stop by? How's she?"

A long answer. She set the phone down and typed. Once she noticed the voice had finished, she said something about getting back to work and hung up at 1:14 p.m.

*B~~~~~*

At 1:15 p.m. the kettle on the stove whistled. She shuffled through white envelopes as she moved into the kitchen and stacked them neatly on the counter, leaving the one labeled "Fox Ridge Senior Living" on top for later. She lifted the cup from over the sink drain to pour out the steamy hot water. She carried the kettle into the bathroom to do the same. Something raced past her peripheral. The startled whip of her head to try and spot it made her almost lose balance and drop the kettle, but she gathered herself. She sat at her desk the whole day, blinking slowly, bouncing her knee, and occasionally placing a hand on her stomach and fingers over her mouth. A million tiny eyes peered at her, so she fixed her posture.

At 5:31 p.m. she got up. She took out the trash, then bleached the bin and doused it with a watery, red mixture that smelled slightly sweet and smokey. She brought out the latter to dust the bookshelf and above the fridge and the cabinets. The Swiffer pad remained a pale yellow. She vacuumed, then mopped, then vacuumed again. She bleached the

At 8:46 p.m. she placed a cold plate in the microwave. The aroma brought them out.

She coughed a bit, then took the plate out with 1 second left. She hunched forward and ate quickly with one hand holding the fork and the other shielding her dinner.

At 2:11 a.m. there was another one.



It was humid – it always was – but it was also Spring. I didn't like the way the sky shifted over our hill, but I ignored it. Dixie sat criss-cross applesauce in my passenger seat with my Letterman swallowing her like a whale. She played with two plastic ponies she got on her eighth birthday. Zach Bryan sang through the radio, and my bat clanked around the bed of my truck.

"I was talkin' to your boyfriend," Dixie drew out that last word. She was at that age where she'd burst into a fit of giggles at the idea of "crushes" and all that lovey-dovey shit. "Cash loves you, don't he?"

"Doesn't he," I corrected, lifting my chin a little.

"Cash" wasn't his real name. He had a nice, low singing voice and led the choir on Sundays. He lived with his family in a trailer in Pine Valley. When he'd joined us for dinner as my "good baseball buddy," Dixie hammered him with questions about school, work, and his botched ear piercing. He made me pierce that ear, knowing full well that it'd turn out like shit. He said he wanted to look tough, which I didn't think was possible with his uneven smile and face full of freckles.

"But, yeah, he sure does."

She squealed at that and clinked her ponies' faces together. "Owen and Cash sittin' in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N—"

"Okay, that's enough of that." I leaned over to swat at her, and the car swerved slightly on the bridge. I began weaving the car across both lanes. She giggled and squirmed in her seat.

As white ranch fences whisked by, Dixie begged me to pull over so she could pet Senator Daniels' prized horses. I parked in the grass, and she hopped out of my truck and reached a hand out to them. As I leaned on my rusted hood to take her picture, three hideously shrill, disjointed notes shrieked from my phone, causing me to swear and drop it in the wet mud. A nearby gate scraped open, and the engine of one of those fancy antique Mercedes—the silver ones with the doors that open upward like shiny bug wings—roared and popped as the car swerved down the middle of the road. I picked up my phone and read the alert:

**"Severe Weather Alert:** The National Weather Service has issued a TORNADO WATCH in this area until 9:00 PM CDT..."

I shrugged, wiping off the screen. "Come on, Dixie."

Nana had a Clyde Daniels sign in her front yard underneath a swaying tire. Dixie just about tripped on one of the exposed roots

anchoring down my mom's old oak tree because she wanted to race me to the front porch. We left the screen door open behind us when we went in. Dixie ran to her room, ponies in hand, to avoid Nana spanking her for something she didn't do. Grandad was hollering at the Hogs game from his recliner, and Nana was unboxing a chicken pot pie for dinner. Grandad had forgotten he'd already asked me if I had a "special little lady" yet, and if I'd play for the Razorbacks in a few years. I ignored the first one and pretended I wanted to stay in Arkansas for college.

I showered off the dirt and sweat from practice and then half-heartedly watched the rest of the game with Grandad while trying to memorize U.S. presidents. Baseball couldn't be the only scholarship I went for. The game was interrupted by a red-nosed weatherman who said to watch for tornadoes touching down.

"Goddamnit!" Grandad threw up his arms. "They're holdin' up our game with this horseshit. I mean, seriously! Can you believe this, Owen?" I shook my head and pulled out my phone to distract myself with whatever shit-post Cash had sent me.

"Language, Donny!" Nana called. "Wash up, you two. Dinner's ready. Where is that little devil Dixie?"

The weatherman rattled off counties in the background: "Clark, Polk, Montgomery, Pike, Hot Spring, Saline, Pulaski, Perry..." There was a faint drone sound outside, I assumed it was a siren but couldn't be sure. Nana had already taken Grandad to bed, and Dixie was helping me study when the door creaked open, letting in the noise from outside. Dixie leaped at Dad who put on a smile for her and called her "Sunshine" as he scooped her up. He tucked Dixie goodnight in her room and came back out looking a little less spent. I didn't blame him for his muffled "hello" as he microwaved some pot pie. He slumped next to me and ate silently. His shadowed eyes and wilted limbs told me about his day.

That hellish three-toned alarm jerked me awake in my chair. I jammed my finger into my phone's power button and tossed it back onto my desk. Wind blared like seven trumpets outside my attic window, and there was a loud, uneven banging coming from downstairs. I rushed down to find Dad already awake. Our front door was making dents in the wall, about to fly off the hinges. Our screen door was gone. Together, we shut the door and pulled Grandad's recliner in front of it. I meant to say a quick prayer for our safety, for the town, for Cash, but I caught a peek of the outside.

When I was in Sunday school, learning about Jesus's second coming, I thought it'd look something like this, like pillars of fire raining down, and lightning like barbed wire scattering about, like a horde of whirlwinds violently tunneling a path to righteousness, but now that I'd seen it, I could say that God wouldn't make something like this. In the distance, Senator Daniels's horses spiraled. A mass of clouds and dust merged with chunks of earth, whole barns, and lines of train tracks whorled and moved slowly past us. God wasn't this brutal.

Someone in the house yelled. The house itself sounded like it was screaming as it clung to its foundation. I felt something old and persistent groan beneath my feet. I felt it bend with the currents and finally collapse like a heart that's stopped beating. My mom planted that oak tree out front by the nursery as a little girl, and its branches grew to swaddle the house. When she died about eight years back, the nursery became Dixie's room. The whole house rattled, then stillness crept in as the wind moved on from us.

We tried all night, but we couldn't pull her body out from underneath its trunk.

My throat burned the next morning, but I ignored it along with all my splinters and gashes. My truck was gone – it was on its last leg anyway – so Dad and I walked to the street to see the rest of the damage only to find out that we didn't even get the brunt of it.

Dad talked a lot like he did when Mom died. I wasn't listening. Instead, I looked at the plumes of smoke floating into the sky. The trailer park was gone. I'd already tried calling Cash, but it didn't go through. I prayed he and his family got out, that God at least saved them, not sure if that would've helped at all. The world wasn't ending. He would've sent a couple more signs if that were the case, and we never got any warnings for something like this. It was like God and his legion of angels had driven their plows through our town. Like they'd stripped it down to nothing but broken trees and lost homes but had forgotten to lay down any seed. Even if they had, I didn't think anything would sprout up from this soil.



# A Woman Scalded

Emma Finley

Whispers of black ash fog the air in darkened tendrils, a trail of pine and flesh extending into the sky. I hang there, on the pyre, roasting. I am a shell now, an outer crust that breaks away as the flames caress my skin. I thought I could escape this fate, I thought...

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I was stripped from my bed under the brilliance of moonlight, a flailing figure cast in a bright white glow. Their fingers left deep impressions on my skin, blue blotches that colored me in the days to come. I remember trying to find my footing, to break away, only to slip on the muddy ground and be trapped in their arms. They held me with such force I questioned my own sanity. How could such malnourished individuals be so impressively strong? The crops had failed time and time again in recent years, yet their grip on me bespoke some magnificent intervention. The clergyman might say that it was the power of God that allowed them to exorcise me and my demon from my mother's house. If I'd seen it happen to anyone else, I might be inclined to agree.

Moving as much as I was, I struggled to get a clear view of those around me. My mother in the doorway, the men holding me, and the neighbors who heard the commotion all morphed into blurred figures of a past reality. Despite the limits of my vision, I remember with great clarity the image of Mrs. Wright on the road, her scowl infinitely penetrating. The solemnity of her gaze betrayed a deeper inclination, and I found myself immediately assured that she was the one who had declared my guilt. Perhaps it was her chilling stare, or the weakness in my own limbs, but I felt myself give up the fight at that moment. Through an act of betrayal or belief, my fate, I knew, was sealed.

The next morning, however, bestowed me with a great feeling of unrest and an inability to accept my predetermined demise. I woke to a glimpse of sunlight in a barren room, dashes of it filtering through slits in the stone wall. As I assessed my makeshift prison, a room I was clearly too exasperated to notice the night before, the certainty set my mind on fire. I felt the cool floor beneath my hands, embellished with a thin layer of dirt. Between the grains were a great deal of material, bits of skin and nails, perhaps from biting, locks of hair, and, most disturbing, droplets of

blood. I was sitting in a pool of death and decay, of those that had come before me, and I had to pinch myself to quell the bile in my throat. The rest of the room was not much better, the cool stone bricks extending across the walls to form an impenetrable barrier. The hairs on my arms stood up from the chill of the room, barren as I was in my nightgown. Last was the wooden door, stony and bracketed with metal beams. The silence in the room was shocking; nothing could be heard from outside, and presumably nothing could be heard from within. If I were to have screamed, no one would have heard.

The morning passed in an eternity, and with time I curled into myself further, praying to God that I would be recognized as pure. By midday, or what I assumed to be such, the seal to my cage was broken, the creak of the door deafening after such a long period of silence. The hangman appeared in the doorway, looming large. His face had just-settling lines, and his eyebrows were permanently downcast. He approached me quickly, aiming to grab me in a single gesture, but I fought his incoming frame by kicking the air. I scrambled into the corner, suddenly terrified of what he would do to me. This was a man I had seen hang bodies and light pyres.

“Why can’t you come peacefully?” he whispered angrily, mostly to himself. I thought of my predecessors, of their parts strewn on the dirty floor. He was used to old women, to hags whose time to death was shorter than my own. He was used to women more frightened of themselves and their possible ailments than him. I knew my own innocence, and I knew he would try and take it from me. I would not come peacefully.

Nevertheless, he was determined. He lunged again, catching me off guard. He kicked me while I was on the floor, and I doubled over in pain. My stomach came alight and for a moment, I gasped at the air, trying to draw it into my lungs. Death danced about my body, whispering in my ear. He took the advantage and grabbed at me, casting me across his shoulder. We passed through several corridors, me screaming all the while, until I began to grow dizzy from being upside down. Finally, just as I felt I might faint, he brought me into a dingy room even colder than my cell. Enclosed within the space was a long wooden table, on which I was promptly thrown. I tried to wriggle from his grasp, but he pressed down hard on my body, keeping me in a horizontal position that limited my movement. While holding me down with one hand, he chained me to the table, circling my figure to capture each limb. I felt the chains dig into me, denting my skin, and suddenly became aware of my complete entrapment.

From this position, with the restraints in such a taut condition, I had no control. I was at the hangman's whims. Fear entered my body with fresh abandon, twisting my insides.

Without preamble, he began to cut away at my dress. I objected immediately, stunned by his wantonness. I stared at him in abject horror. What did he intend to do to me?

"I need to examine you," he explained, clearly accustomed to the violation. With that, he carried on, and soon I was laid bare on the table like a skinned chicken, ready to be cut up, ready to be cooked. Next came the razor blade, which he brandished above me in apparent anticipation.

"Please don't hurt me," I begged, aware that my pleas would mean little to a man whose life I was making more difficult.

"This is just for the hair." With that he began shaving away at my body hair, dumping small clumps onto the floor. I felt myself lean back into the table; I did not want to watch him do it. The ceiling before me was a dark abyss, and I pictured floating into it, away from his rough, hardy fingers. After some time passed, I felt him shift, putting the knife away. His hands once again found my body, this time scrutinizing every inch. I watched as he began tracing lines across me, pathways to some foregone conclusion. As he examined my side, I felt him suddenly stop and tap against my skin, clearly finding what he was looking for. I glanced down to see that he had found a mole. He looked at me grimly, shaking his head. "The devil marks you," he pronounced. I thought of the many moles I had seen on my body, and I knew he would find each and every one.

—

The room became a daily ritual, one I had succumbed to follow. It made the day go by easier when I was cooperative. The hangman seemed to agree. Today, however, when he brought me to the room, I could see that things would be different. The creaky table had been moved to the side, and now a lone chair filled its place.

"Sit," he commanded. Hesitantly, I obliged. He tied me to the chair, and stood above me, ominous and terrifying in the faint light. "Are you in communion with the Devil?" he asked, his tone taking on a deep timbre. I shifted in the chair, scared to answer. I felt my heart begin to race.

"No." Without warning, he turned around, snatching a whip from

the wall. He flung it against my arms, and I writhed in pain. I screamed, knowing at once that he would not stop.

“Does he call out to you?” he half yelled, half whispered, his tongue circling his lips. My lip trembled before me.

“No.” Another crack struck me, almost causing me to fall over with the chair. I looked down to see dark red rising to the surface.

“Do you follow his orders?” he said quickly, wasting no time. I tried to breathe, tried to understand what was going on.

“No,” I breathed. The whip came again, this time knocking me down.

“Are you a witch?” he bellowed, cracking the whip against the floor. All I could see were his feet, large and looming, and I pictured him stepping towards me, stepping onto me. “I said, are you a witch?”

“No!” I cried, “I promise you.” The whip came again, and tears rolled down my cheeks, flooding the floor.

“Tell me the truth! I see the marks of the devil on your body, I see how he worked through you to kill that poor mother and child, I see what you really are. Now, are you a witch?”

Again, I said no. That day, the pain was shocking, but I could swallow it. I could hold onto the hope that someone—my mother, my father, perhaps Mrs. Wright in a twist of fate—would proclaim me innocent. I would be absolved of my newfound title. I would be freed. I believed I only needed to wait a little longer. That day, hope melted on my skin with each hit, pooling with the blood drawn by each new laceration, and I thought it would heal me. That day was only the first of many.

—

I’m in a room, surrounded by men I used to know. I try to see them, but their faces are blurry and bloodshot. They look at me like what I am, with fear.

“Tell us your order of events, from the beginning,” one of them says. It’s my trial, I remember someone told me.

I open my lips slightly, trying to speak, but no words come out. My mouth is empty, hollow, waiting to be filled with others’ words. It is impossibly dry, it feels full of dirt and dead leaves.

“I—” The hangman grips my shoulder, crushing it. I realize I am kneeling on the floor. He lets me go after a moment, and I forget the

question. “I’m sorry,” I whisper, my speech coming out in threads of air. I shift slightly, my battered knees catching a splinter from the wooden floor. Blood begins to seep through my shirt, dripping onto the ground. My wounds have reopened.

“What are you sorry for?” His voice is salt-dipped, seasoned, and I felt it sink into my open wounds.

“Everything. For the mother, for the baby...” I picture them through a small window in my mind. I remember the birth, the baby coming out all wrong. I see the woman, Mrs. Wright’s sister, exhausted and soaked. I see the blood staining the sheets, pooling on the floor. There was so much of it. I look down now and see my own puddle of red.

“And you admit you killed them, that the Devil told you to do so?”

“Yes.”

“And what are you, what have you become?”

I see my own reflection in the blood, bruised and battered. I glimpse cuts and dry lips, thinned hair and pale skin. I notice the freckles on my face, the moles peeking out from behind my wounds.

“A witch.”

—

The moment they lit the pyre, I felt my skin sear in indescribable pain. It flaked and bubbled, and I began to cry and cry out. It felt somehow worse than the torture, a pure agony in knowing that this was the end. Then, it felt different. Instead of singeing my skin, the flames coated me. I stared in wonder as they darted around my fingers, coming out of me. A voice in my brain, perhaps the Devil himself, whispered a dangerous thought. I smiled, holding onto the flames like precious objects. At once, I let them go. They cascaded from the pyre, flooding the surrounding crowd, the village beyond. I watched in wonder as they consumed all that I could see.

Death came to me then, not cold and wicked like the months I’d spent prior, but red-hot, and with a vengeance.



*Daisy Han, Adolescence, 2022*

# How to Be a Woman in Politics

Emma Finley

## Step 1: Get into politics early.

When you are eleven years old, watch TV with your parents. Sit on the far side of the couch, creating a cushion of air between you and the battle happening to your left. Quietly, innocently, reach for the remote and turn the volume up to drown out their anger. Curl into yourself. Try to pretend they're not there.

In your struggle for escape, get lost in the TV program. Watch as a line of men in suits stand behind little podiums, throwing their hands in the air and interrupting one another. Glance to your left and see your parents doing the same thing. Search for the outlier, for proof that adults aren't always like this. Find him standing in the middle, entirely unfazed. Watch as he laughs when people yell at him. Watch as he responds with a smile. Feel the energy of the crowd as they applaud him. Silently join in. As your parents fade into the background, look up to him. Think: *I want to be him*. Lie awake that night rehearsing your acceptance speech.

## Step 2: Commit.

In high school, join the debate team. Devote your afternoons to considered conversation, to the art of the argument. Perfect your technique. On Saturdays, take the competition stage. Win. Become the star of the team. See how good it feels to be taken seriously, to be proven right. Realize: *You're good at this*. Realize: *You could really do this*. Realize: *You don't want to do anything else*.

## Step 3: Define your image.

Start out as an intern for a little-known politician. Bring him coffee every day with a smile. Watch as he treats you like an animated doormat. Consider cleaning his shoes the next time it rains. Imagine laying down in front of the door, leather brush in hand, tackling his feet as he walks in. Realize he wouldn't get the joke.



Take what little opportunities you're afforded. Linger in meetings after you've dished out lunch orders, stealing tidbits of information on polling, on policy, on politics. During these excursions, don't try to speak, to give your opinion, lest you be met with rolled eyes and a prompt dismissal. Try your very best to suppress your need for more. Fail, every day.

Notice the other women in the office, the ones he likes and the ones he doesn't. Analyze what they wear, how they act. Copy them. Late at night, perform dress rehearsals. Put on your best costumes, practice your stage makeup, and perform every version of "your coffee, sir." The next day, cover the bags under your eyes and put on a show. Create a spreadsheet for your failed attempts, with space for every slight shift in his behavior toward you. Scrutinize your findings, searching for the common denominator.

One day, try something new. Put on red lipstick. Watch your face change as you put it on: severe, cunning... suggestive? Consider if it's too much for the office, too provocative. Swallow your pride and decide you're out of options. That morning, as you bring him his coffee, watch as he does a double take.

"Good morning," he'll say, a smirk teetering on his lips.

Try not to scream out loud.

"What was your name again?"

Smile as you give it to him. Pretend not to be offended. Pretend that he's just a busy man who forgot your silly little name. Pretend you are overjoyed that he asked. No, no need to pretend for that one. Know, in that moment, that he'll remember your name, that he'll prefer you to other women in the office, that he'll give *you* the opportunities.

Wear a red lip every day after that. Make yourself a caricature.

#### **Step 4: Get elected.**

Run for a small position, local, but enough to give you a taste of



success. Spill over with excitement when the race is called, when you are officially in politics. Address the small crowd of staff and supporters. Thank them for their help, their generosity with their time, their advocacy. Watch the smiles that bloom on their faces, the hope that's springing to life. Give hugs and handshakes.

After, listen to the woman who comes up to you, tears pricking the corners of her eyes.

"I'm so proud of you. I know you'll fight for me, for all of us. I can't wait to see you put those bastards in their place."

Cling to her words. She isn't your mother, but for a moment, pretend she is. Pretend you've made her proud.

### **Step 5: Make a deal.**

Get invited to a meeting—the meeting. Arrive in your best blazer and pants. Wear your hair up, in a French twist. Toe the line between pretty and professional.

Keep your smile plastered to your face as you enter a room full of older men, men who see the outline of your body before they see you. Wish you'd worn a different outfit.

Sit at the end of the table, opposite their wandering eyes. Notice their hands first: knotted and dusted with sun spots from an excess of vacation. Their hands are dripping in gold—wedding rings and expensive watches—and you are momentarily blinded by the shine. See these men as statues, pillars of wealth, and understand that you are being permitted to view them. They make you wait like that, in reverence, daring you to make the first move. Take the bait. Be interrupted. Your mistake.

"We'd like to make you a proposition," they say. Nod slowly, confused. "You're at a key moment in your career, and we think you have a great deal of potential. We'd like to help you get elected to Congress."

Stare, wide-eyed and baffled. *They want you in the big leagues?*

“Of course, we would expect a favorable outlook from you once you get elected. You know, just a few small favors in return.”

Nod before you can question your decision. Nod so that you can pretend you don’t know what they are asking. Nod because there is nothing more that you want in life than this, no matter the cost. Nod and become the person you never thought you’d be.

Wonder, briefly, if selling your soul classifies as prostitution. Wonder why it’s legal. Shake their hands anyway.

### **Step 6: Change course.**

Knock on a door, firmly, but with depleted confidence. Hear him call you in, greet you from his desk. The circumstances are familiar, but at least now he stands and shakes your hand.

“They want my vote, then? I thought my conditions were a deal-breaker.” He’ll puff out these words, get high on having control.

Say: “Circumstances have changed.”

“They always do.”

Look at him as he says this, glean his double meaning.

“I mean, look at you. You were the rising star and now people can’t stand you. They no longer want such a...”

Feel your cheeks redden, like they’ve been slapped. You can hear it in the pause, *such a good girl*. They’ve said it about you before, that you’re not tough enough to survive in their world. *People pleaser*. Think: *My own party had abandoned me*. Think: *Can I really blame them when I promised change and gave them the same thing, repackaged?*

“And I suppose they want a man like you?” Say it with respite, but realize it’s true.

“Of course, but you know that. If I were you, I’d take some pointers,

make a splash. You want to stay here, don't you?"

He'll say it to demean you, to make you feel small. Understand, in that moment, that you will not give this up for anything. Wonder if this is what it's like to be colorblind, for the world to be entirely cast in red, white, and blue.

"What do you suggest?"

### **Step 7: Go too far.**

### **Step 8: Decide who you are.**

Hold a press conference. Sit, as still as a statue, on top of a pristine white couch. Set yourself at an angle, ankles crossed, legs turned inward to encourage a "conversational atmosphere." Despite its plushness, refuse to lean into your seat, to get too comfortable, to be a woman without manners. Remember your choreography and turn to the camera. Flash a smile, just enough as to convey confidence, but not so much as to appear arrogant. Pray to a god you swear you believe in that your red lipstick hasn't smudged. Gaze into the lens as if it were an old friend, as if it were not the angry people watching at home that blame you for fucking things up, for fucking them over, for fucking up their children's futures.

When the team counts down, cueing you, open your mouth.

*Is this who you are now? A pair of lips disconnected from the brain?*

Bite down, hard. Feel the blood spill into your mouth, overwhelm you, suffocate you. Think: *I deserve this*. Think: *Is it even my blood if all of me is owned?* Feel your eyes water, tears forming, begging to break free.

Stop. *Swallow*. Feel the iron hit the back of your throat. Drag your tongue across your picture-perfect smile. Wipe the blood away. Forget it was ever there.

Now, open your mouth and lie through your fucking teeth.



*Siqi Rong, Haenyeo Diver, 2023*

# My Response to the Assigned Reading

Sam Levy

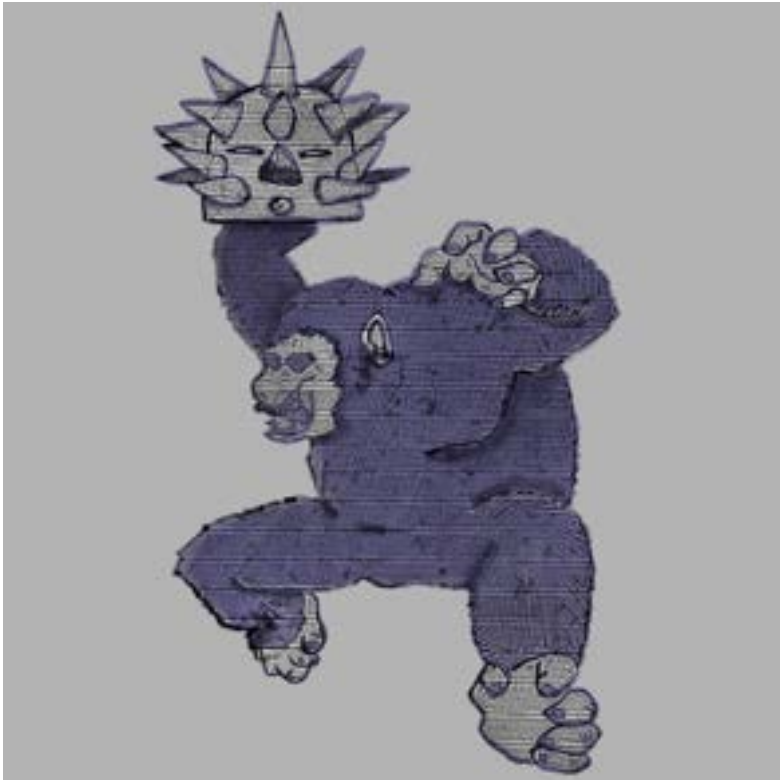
I don't need to read the Marx PDF because I know what he's all about, and hell, I'm all about it too. What he believes is cool, and it's fine by me. I agree— money is bad. I would like to have none of it. I would like for my father to be hospitalized for something non-painful but critically life-threatening and be sued for every nickel on his death bed by an environmentally conscious company with a commitment to green energy solutions. I would like to receive none of that money, and I would like for it all to go towards the environmentally conscious company with innovative green energy solutions.

I would like for the insects to be replenished and the biosphere abundant enough so at least my future child can turn over a rock and catch some sort of disease. I would like for the ice caps to be bigger and taller and unpredictable enough to cause a second Titanic-event, preferably to a Disney Dream Cruise liner or a 200-guest yacht orgy. I would like for the weather to be so plainly predictable The Weather Channel is forced to air reruns of 9/11 and Chernobyl to satisfy its quota for mesmerizing disaster content. This is to say: I would like for all disasters to be human caused, and I'd like more of them too, so long as they are inspired by the abominable human spirit for more innovative green energy solutions. Perhaps a chain-reaction of exploding wind turbines on November 23rd, 2025, or a Disney Dream Cruise liner sucked into the blades of the world's largest ethical hydrodam on June 5th, 2026. On June 7th, I'd like a TikTok Live cheese plate memorial service by Hailey Bieber and the cast of Breakfast With Mickey, and on June 12th I'd like for Breakfast With Mickey to be discontinued in order to give him time to think more about innovative clean energy solutions.

I'd like the sea to be cold, cold, cold, the sun to be warm enough, and the ground to be mostly worms. You shouldn't be able to step on anything that isn't a worm, and if you're not wearing any shoes you should die near instantly because the worms are so ripe with bacterial fauna they'll desecrate your liver and turn your organs inside out so a group of one million mice with Microsoft flower crowns can feed on your dead carcass.

I know what the Marx PDF is all about, and what it's about is ethical, environmentally conscious corporations with innovative green energy solutions. I'd like my mother to turn into a deer and spend the rest of her

life roaming hazel pastures of grass and guts and bacterial slush. I'd like all the grass to be wet, wet, wet, and strong enough to puncture a Tesla windshield. I'd like Elon Musk to turn into a frog and I'd like him to show his frog dick to seven female flight attendants on the world's smallest passenger aircraft, which is smaller than even the largest passenger aircraft, which is only five feet in diameter and six feet long. I'd like for Karl Marx to reprint his PDF in cyanotype and I'd like it to fit on an infographic small enough to graffiti onto an anthill. I'd like more anthills, more antlers, more anti-capitalist shorthand in Hulu ad breaks, more cranberries, more mountain-sized mole hills, more flax and whey and tofu piccata recipes on more cell phones on more laptops on more televisions on more jumbotrons with E-ink displays and low power fast charging recyclable double-A batteries that smell like lichen because that's what they're made of, and more, for the love of god, more environmentally conscious, eco-friendly, nonplastic, reusable, non-GMO, Greek Yogurt Flavored Condoms. That's what the PDF is about.



*Levi Mutchnick, Ape, 2024*





<b>A</b>	DATE _____ N.R. _____	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO
<b>B</b>	DATE _____ N.R. _____	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO
<p>New-born mountains, euclidean, compassion, more masculine, deadbeat poets, brain deliquesces, submerged, ourpboros, bare chest, road kill, scar twisting intestines, cat coasters, unpaid fines, must</p>		





*Sarah Tonra, Spot Drawing #2, 2024*

# An Upwards Timeline

Liliana Green

*After Jenny Holzer*

Its whorl sat waiting, patiently

For thirty years

Spiral staircase up your truisms

Glittering and flickering in digital excellence

Triangular zig-zag, look up,

Six rotating ramps fill your head.

Tears fall in your train stations

Salt mingling with fascism

Peppered around your neighborhoods,

Outside, a projection on leaves bursting with LED

Curiosity     projectile             projectile

Your blue laser and

Typographic aesthetic meet

The public eye, lined

With horn-rimmed glasses and

Temporary permanence, you say

In Venice. “Take away the award,” you say

You win.

Scattered around your midwestern modesty

Your neighborhoods say

“Thank you,” necks craning

High and higher still, reading your aphorisms

Lined with light, affirming,

“SLIPPING INTO MADNESS IS GOOD FOR THE SAKE OF  
COMPASSION”

Suggestive flickering truths

Of your future and our past.

# Non Euclidean Consciousness

Harwood Kore

I have reached the hours of sleep  
deprivation,

That I like to call Non-Euclidean  
Consciousness.

A term I coined as I am writing this,  
And if not for these words would be  
gone from my head in a moment.

As many things are to me now:  
Elusive.

I feel as if the world around me is a  
million miles removed,

Yet I feel if I were to reach out.  
I could feel it all beating.

Desperate revelations rush to the  
center of my mind,

But finding the lights off,

They move to the next:

Threshold of madness and majesty...

I have been here before.

Time is much less of a line as a  
being,

Subject to the whims of gravity,

The constants of constance.

Time warps around these moments  
that hurt enough,

To push outwards and bend reality  
around its memory.

Like cold hands pooling over old  
scars.

Each turning of this numberless  
clock leaves me again,

With questions of where I've been,  
And fingers to map it out on me.

Here you see where I tore a rift  
through flesh in the name of my  
love;

Again here you'll see a darkened  
burn of apathy refusing to be  
forgotten.

My body is littered with the fading  
marks of remorse-

I am still learning how to stitch  
myself back up.

Weaving those chasms of pain,  
With pink twine,  
That I might be able to look to-  
And smile.

Perhaps:

A Non-Euclidean Consciousness,  
Must be held in a Non-Euclidean  
Body.

My scars tell stories of pain,  
And while they are many.

This must mean...

The body is a timeless thing.

It reaches out,

And encompasses all;

It is empty.

It is all I have.

And if my scars are all the pain my  
body carries,

Then what shall I make of all the  
skin that lies between?



*Levi Mutchnick, Untitled, 2024*

# Not There, Thanks

Molly Owen

There is an urge to reach out and touch, but the fear trumps it. I'm always fucked. Doesn't matter. It always changes, it does, and then it gets walked back. Not worth it, you know? Mortifying. I mean, they both are.

I could reach out and grab you. You're very close to me. Not quite. I am small and slender, I am rigid and frightful. Reach out and grab it, you're right there. So close. Can taste it. You're right there but you're not, or I'm not, or I am, but I don't know it yet. It is all around, is it not? Up in the air. It's not natural. It does hurt. It shouldn't. It didn't.

Where are you? How did you get there? You were always there. And you were, weren't you? Never anywhere else, couldn't be. Didn't want to be.

Should've wanted it more. Should've known better. I knew I would but I couldn't feel it then. I feel it now.

You are there, I can see you quite clearly, and yet. And yet.

I rehearse in the dark, I curl up in the aftermath. Not a comforting sleep. Should have given it my all.

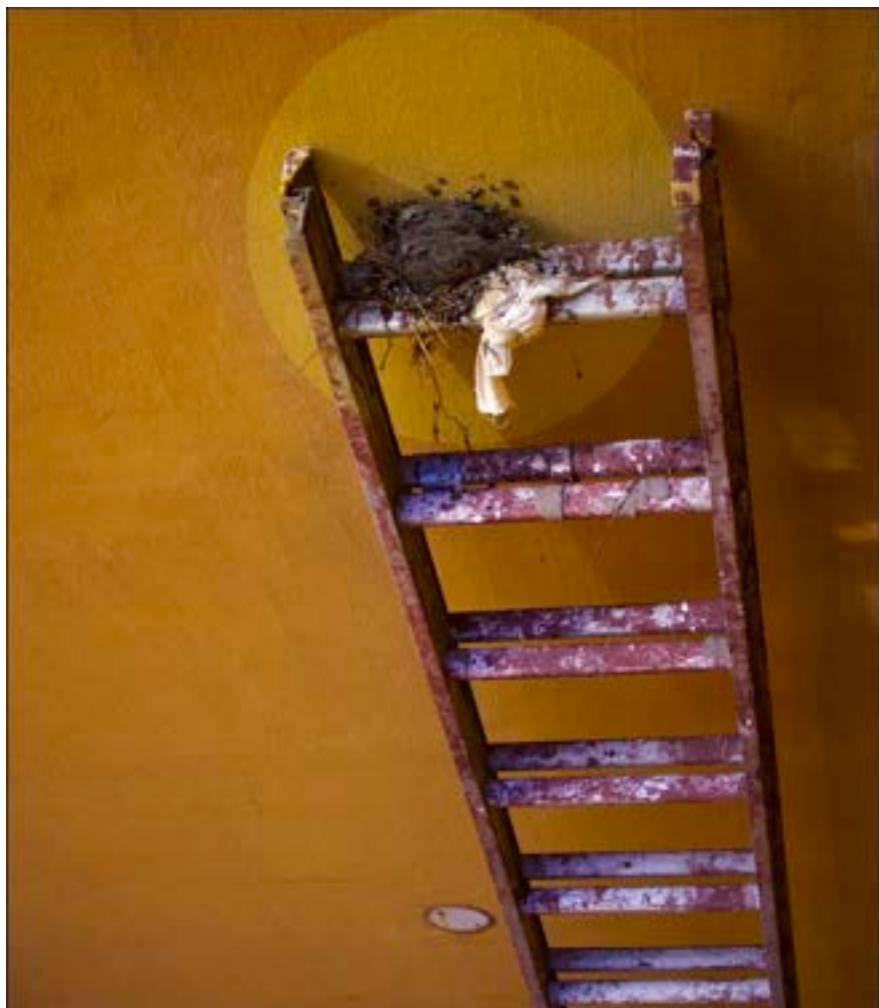


*Hila Mutsafi, Naked Scapula, 2024*

# A story comes into being

Indigo Lee

once i am ready to do so i'll mash my hands together  
like the fly. i didn't think it knew what it was doing,  
warbling around & landing on the double-sided tape,  
the blanket, the month-old lemon, hard as a knuckle.  
how to say it all while you're still listening. but then  
it kept praying or biding time, cocking  
its head back like that five times a second, i want to  
call it a he. john knew how to keep things uncomplicated  
and i liked that about him. his tin cup with different  
species of fish lacquered on it. my 42oz insulated stanley  
with a rainbow straw topper. he'd harp about my  
poor financial decisions and i'd say, *john we need a  
butcher block. where the fuck else are we going to  
put the food. and we need scissors, and i want a new  
lamp, and i just like experiencing things.* came high  
tide & he kept pulling over the side of the highway to put  
more oil in his broken engine, that battered red subaru. i said it  
was a lesbian ass car and he took it as an insult. sometimes  
i try to compliment things only to realize i'm too bespoke,  
too alone. but i don't want  
to pass by the good life in search of the right  
words. and we'd find things we'd both queen out over,  
like the fairy lights he strung inside his car or my thrifted  
cat coasters. the bike off facebook marketplace he haggled down  
to half its price. i like the simplicity, too. don't know how to  
enjoy it sometimes because i'm too thirsty for un-hurt. but  
maybe i know something about it, if the unknown  
is synonymous with malice. i tried. his empty room  
after the weekend  
he left. we fought over a tv and then he was gone four days  
later. my number blocked, droning. and  
i didn't know what else to do but to burn incense in that room,  
trample over the places he couldn't because  
he'd had a bed, a nightstand, a desk,  
then sit down to bang my head against the wall, whispering  
to the dusty light, *john's gone. john's gone. john's gone.*



*Nira Ward, Climb With Me, 2024*



# Time Travel

Kelly Fowler

and suddenly I'm 11 again  
sitting alone in a stairwell,  
inhaling the smell of other people's nostalgia  
that is a little too similar  
to the smell  
of must.

Only this time

I'm 22  
And my mother isn't down the hall giving a lecture  
And the smell is seeping into my pores  
And it's storing itself so deep  
Below my skin  
That I won't notice it again  
Until the nostalgia  
Becomes by own.



*Sarah Tonra, Spot Drawing #3, 2024*

and maybe this longing is for what you represent. serendipity,  
and the beauty in the blood  
shed on the steps

of those who came before you, are brown now.  
then into the light,  
until they are forgotten.

so you'll never have to bear the crushing weight.

\*

the park across your high school, to go to after school.  
to talk about infinity  
and tropical fruit.

beach towns  
and walking home in the afternoon

\*

then we'll watch the night  
fall.  
into place,  
and envelop your palomino sky. I'll press my lips

against the warmth of your breasts, feel our bodies wrenching,  
retching  
interwoven

ribbons flowing  
from your opulent opening.

\*

there's a tent on the knoll,  
by the red pine trees

where the fractioning tower stands. past the city limits,  
and train tracks,  
beyond the storm front.  
your head's in my lap  
and we're smoking

out the window of your father's El Camino. your eyes are brown, yet so  
are mine,

for your hazel fragrance  
is the truth that distorts  
my longing for human connection.



*Char Gossage, Untitled, 2023*



*Kian Doughty, Pigeons, 2024*

# How Art is Made

Marta Johnston

It's bubbling up  
bubbling up  
and will it boil over?

Boils on hands  
from working too much,  
from wanting too much,  
so they say,  
and that's how they get you,  
with boils on hands,  
it's all our fault.  
Anyway,

after my brain deliquesces  
and spills out of the top of my head,  
its searing contents deluging  
down my hair, leaving none,  
across my shoulders, disclosing bone,  
leaving welts on my chest,  
blisters on my breasts,  
erythema stripes everywhere

i'm a tiger  
(what good is a tiger when its brain is on fire?)

when all that has happened and it has pooled around my feet  
and cooled and been made stone  
making me

immovable,

what will be left for

me?

And it's maybe a trap and maybe I'm stuck

or perhaps it's the first time I've ever been warm  
and there's no other way to be still.

# Untitled (drain)

Emma Miller

spiraling  
endless

ouroboros of  
a cyclical death

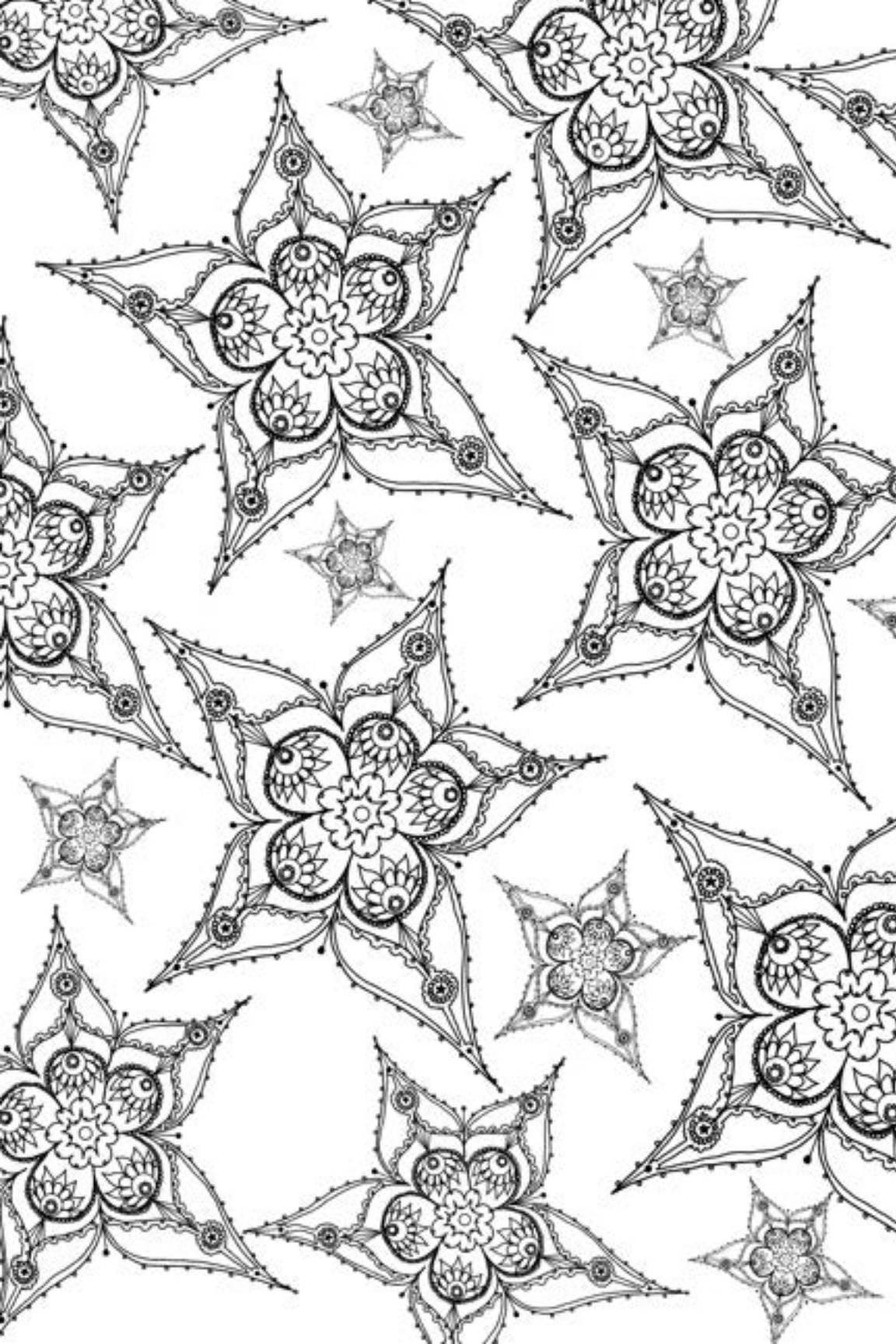
psyche slowly fades into oblivion

short of life

tapping thumbs tapping veins

euphoric everlasting

*Nora Vogt, Flower Doodles!, 2024*





It was the look in your eyes when you told me  
That I still remember seeing through my own  
Blue eyes  
Mine and yours  
When we started FaceTiming at the beginning of the year  
You said my blue eyes were so beautiful  
And I said, "Well, they're yours."  
"But yours are just...brighter."  
Maybe you didn't remember that a week before you said  
It was stupid for me to try and work in Paris this summer  
Maybe you didn't remember  
That the reason my brother likes Paris at all  
Is because in our childhood game  
The one birthed from my imagination  
The characters we played lived in Paris  
And isn't it funny  
That my roommate's mom is going to Paris  
The same week as you?  
And her mom asked what I didn't dare  
"Why isn't she taking you?"  
Why aren't you taking me?  
"You'll see," I told my brother. "As soon as I move out, they'll start  
taking you  
On all sorts of amazing trips."  
"You just think I'm a spoiled brat."  
"I'm telling you. They'll take you to Europe.  
I bet you'll get to go to Paris."  
My roommate said  
That her mom was going to see a girl  
Who she'd always been compared to  
Because the girl was outgoing and bold  
And her mom was going to see her in Paris  
And meet her friends  
And how my roommate's mom

Would love to meet Miley Cyrus  
“She’s been through so much. And she’s so outgoing and bold. Just like me,”  
she said to my roommate,  
“Not like you.”  
“I didn’t want to cry in front of her,” said my roommate.  
“I get it,” I replied.  
“It’s just this look in her eye  
This look of ‘try me. I dare you.’  
And later she’s gonna wanna tell me about the trip.  
And I can’t cry in front of her.  
She’s gonna tell me I’m being immature.”  
But when I comfort you crying in your closet  
Because you and dad had a fight  
And when I worry about you when you go to see your family  
Because they’re horrible  
You’re my mother  
But aren’t I yours, a little bit, too?  
No one will love you like your mom  
No one will take care of you like your mom  
But no one can hurt you more  
No one can make you feel less loved.  
I told my roommate my brother is just a perfect child.  
“But that’s just a reflection of their parenting,” she said.  
“Because she made mistakes with you.  
And now she’s a better parent for him.”  
You birthed me.  
But as the waters run from your veins to mine  
Your heartbeat still echoing in my ears  
Your red lipstick always staining my mind  
My cheek, both kissed and turned  
As I look at the mother I don’t recognize

The mother you are for him  
This new woman  
Eyes bright as the lights on the Eiffel Tower at night  
I can’t help but ask myself  
If maybe

Between the deepest love  
And most excruciating pain  
I birthed you too.



Mark Wong, *9 Ball, 9th Circle, 9 Lives*, 2023

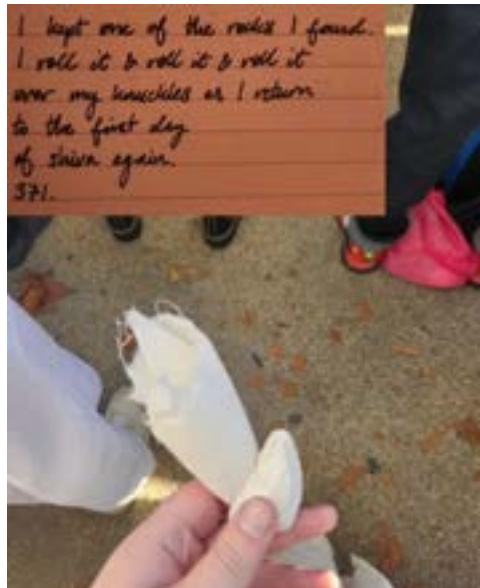
# letter w/ devotiondrain

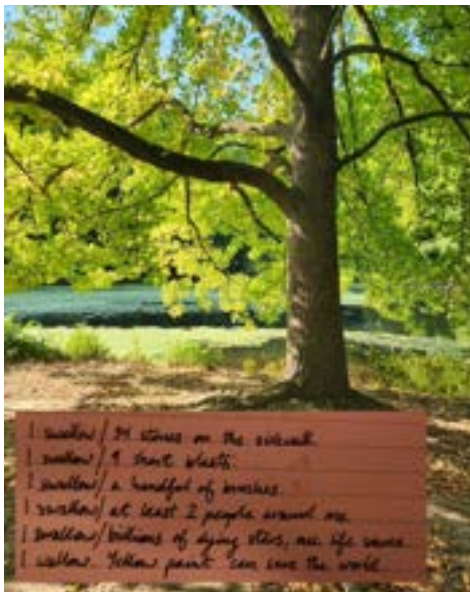
ian powers

hi god/love/mom  
i am so sorry  
i keep saying it  
but what america has done  
look mom/god/love  
i can't think of you without thinking about money i am so sorry  
can't reach for the right words without grabbing  
rage,blood,bassdrum,obliteration  
the gaul to think the english language could undo empire but love/mom/  
god how do we live how  
do we live how do we? liveleak as earliest memories, the violence of  
looking at life like  
psychedelic mucus, god/love/mom i'm sorry i know they're profiting off  
your exhaustion  
you painted my room such pretty colors  
and i've drunkenly scratched it all off  
now i'm weeping at my cracked nails  
i wanted to make the world more beautiful  
or i don't know what i wanted my  
dreams drowning in a deluge of debt & distortion

# rock hunt

Ash Albert







## rock hunt, accessible alternative text

does g-d listen when we cry?

soil is caked below my fingernails and nothing i do seems to wash it out.  
i spent a day digging. i'll spend a lifetime a postmodern lady macbeth,  
spots on my hands from that earth that i rooted and rummaged around in,  
stains in a fabric i wonder if no-one else sees.  
maybe they'll hear it if it tears.

i kept one of the rocks for myself.  
i roll it & roll it & roll it over  
my knuckles as i return  
to the first day of  
shiva again  
371.

being a spectacle is an anesthetic.  
controlling perception is liberation.  
pajamas alone in a bedroom for two, face freshly washed, hairs of  
abnormality and subversion  
softly blending into the colored light, is standing naked before my creator  
and asking them if they still love me.  
i crawl on my hands and knees towards a tunnel and i don't remember  
if it's the one i entered from. it's dark and it's hollow and i can hear my  
heartbeat through my silent headphones. it radiates.

i swallow/34 stones on the sidewalk.  
i swallow/9 short blasts.  
i swallow/a handful of brushes.  
i swallow/at least 2 people around me.  
i swallow/billions of dying stars, one life force.  
i wallow. yellow paint can save the world.

go hunting for rocks, and rocks are all you see.

# don't tell my mom

Nadja Anderson-Oberman

i am / grasping at ties ceremoniously severed quicker than  
umbilical / cords used to pick out lullabies in the after birth and aftermath  
/ cutting me from my mother / land around me is finite and fleeting and  
not mine i was / planted here / shrouded in soil, acidic and aching for a  
homeland where the crown is not of thorns / a homeland that does not  
prick and draw the blood of / annuals two-hundred times over / forced to  
photosynthesize / to take and take and take but only so much more / to  
give to give to give / making the air breathable when i cannot / i am  
gasping / and grasping



the day i look in the mirror and do not see my mother's face is  
how i'll know i'm mine / when my eyes don't crinkle and crease / like  
tissue paper shrouding my spirit / as its laid to rest beneath soil / stained  
by centuries of sacrilege and curdled / cured like resin, canned and  
beholden / to history's brine—this is quite the pickle! / how to preserve  
and move forward at once / when ripples of my mother flood into me / the  
dissonance between the Nile and the Erie / rings through me like static / i  
look just like her.



# Anesthesia

Liam Glass-Hussain

hey alice, there's another body in the river today but i swear it wasn't me this time. the cat washed up on the bank last month reeking of hot fish, that glint still in his eyes that said he knew something we didn't.

it's february, still muggy like handcuffs you can't get off and love is in the air. or maybe it's just the stove leaking again. who's to say. I'm seeing things, alice, there's no other way to explain it. funerals like cheap perfume bought in bulk. here's one for all our friends. we'll bury them in the backyard next to the cat and say a prayer to our god. not to look for an answer, just an excuse to scream. let some part of us hope he'll take pity and make the ending quick next time. none of the kicking and screaming, a little murder between friends. something that says we're unforgivable. it's tradition at this point.

you know, alice, there's a certain draw to the river if you ignore all the death. i get it now. the water is so warm you could almost let it swallow you whole and you wouldn't even mind when the moss and blood made a home out of your lungs. maybe the tongue and the teeth are just sick of tasting disappointment. and of course we're not getting the cat or our best friends back so this might be the next best thing. the reason behind all other reasons.

still figuring out where we fit into the story. the world ending as we know it.  
suppose someone has to be left to tell it. someone has to be left to listen.

call me crazy, alice, but there's not much left for us to lose.

i think we could love this if we tried.



*Sarah Tonra, Tutelary Music, 2024*

# Holding Hands

Gretchen Donnelly

I believed it would be the solution  
but maybe I have the wrong house  
Running is the action but I would still  
be here if someone had stolen my will  
Doing it or not

I still                      remain                      absent

Maybe I should look for another way but I've never been presented with  
one

It's the feeling within my body  
that cold abandoned feeling when it's 102 degrees outside and my  
mother's telling me

I need more sunscreen

Now I'm wrapped in warm sweet abandonment  
and sitting by the fire

I'm constantly reaching for it  
and it slips

and now I want it more.

I pick it up and it becomes  
the simple thing I'm still running from

Like my hands    lack    tact

Submerged in water  
maybe not water but some kind of sticky mess  
that I can't let go of. Suffocating  
losing the never-ending game  
of marco polo  
contained and remembered in points from a to z  
From sea to bee to pea  
And I wonder if I could pick it up  
pick it up And hold it and feel it's remorse  
Without drying my hands off first

# return to sender

Nadja Anderson-Oberman

sink sank sunk  
deeper into all i've evaded  
a momento from my first  
girlfriend and my last  
a keychain made in kindergarten  
i pocket it for the drive  
as i pour out of my mother's buick  
and onto the 3:15 megabus  
back to new york  
i don't mind the past  
when i can pick it for myself  
like thrifted furniture in first apartments  
i don't know what's fixed to the fibers  
of the purple couch in my living room  
and i'd like to keep it that way  
sink sank sunk  
and held and cradled by remains  
indistinguishable from the rubble  
that wraps my room in reminiscence  
making old patterns look current  
and returning my past to present tense  
every time i'm on the bus  
i try to write a poem  
and i never know if i want it to express  
grief or growth or sadness or stagnance  
as i barrel across the ben franklin  
this is my first trip  
since they changed the bus route  
so maybe for the first time  
i'll finish my poem



*Char Gossage, Murky Beginnings, 2021*

# Monk

Kian W. Doughty

The deadbeat poets of our city gathered their belongings  
    acid specks on their tongues  
    like snow in the mouths of children,  
I was only fourteen and like other boys  
    who rode the train deep into brooklyn  
    traded swigs side to side  
    seeking sex and sounds from the tavern  
    which usually rejected me  
unless Penny's brother guarded the gates  
    and I got too see Monk  
    painting at his piano in the Minton  
    sometimes a trio sometimes alone  
when I first went my father struck me  
    once for sneaking out  
    then for mixing with stoned poets and dishonest women  
it did not work as I became a soldier of smoke  
    sultry souls licking their palms under the blacklight  
    parchment rolls of lime green sprung from seeps in the rooftop  
    the cops and the newspaper men  
    the junkies with spots on their arm  
    the fat professor and his fat wife  
unlike them I had no motivation  
    no article to write  
    no fix to gather  
    no person to please  
    only the pubescent who traded jovial jokes to my ears  
no cigarettes but the ones I bummed  
    bumming unknown pleasures  
    foot tapping and sex and shouts of war  
    and socialism and screaming over drinks  
    and fuck the president and praise the secretary of defense  
    we watched the commotion and smiled idly

midtown was like a train,  
buddy holly had been kicked off years ago  
forgetting to pay his union dues  
while davis and bird and getz  
and monk  
who strung together fractured vertebrae  
into magnificent flurries  
mess and beauty  
and a girl five years elder  
had her arm on my hip as we  
watched  
him  
play  
his  
way  
to freedom



# letter to x (literally...)

Nadja Anderson-oberman

i've been dressing more masculine lately,  
though your voice still rings and pangs and echoes and sometimes yells.  
i went shopping with my mom on monday;  
my first time at the mall in years and it wasn't king of prussia but it  
sufficed.

we went to primark then forever 21 (no h&m, sorry)  
and everything was so new, so eager, looking for its first life—  
something to gloat about when mingling in my drawer  
with years-old thrift finds that lived a whole life before me.  
i went first to anything pink or short or skin tight  
and the yelling almost subsided, but still threatened to blow  
like a bottle hardened by carbonation, cured only by time and patience,  
undoing the lid, slowly then returning it even quicker.  
when i went first to anything pink or short or skin tight  
i could feel myself returning (if i'd even left).  
i took a breath and walked away slowly.  
the fact that i had two legs felt like a revelation,  
like a baby toddling forward for the first time  
and looking downward, not out of shame,  
but to make sure they're still moving.

i left the store with a long-sleeve green button up and wore it the next day,  
i was so excited. i paired it with a new hairstyle you never got to see.  
when i told you i wanted a mullet, you laughed at me  
(you weren't the first to do this but you definitely made me feel the worst.  
how can you laugh when someone you love shows you who they are?  
what is wrong with you? do you even know you're cruel?)  
it's become one of my favorite hairstyles now,  
after finding a way to substitute bobby pins for buzzed sides.  
if we passed each other on the street,  
i wonder if you would even recognize me

or whether i would become your missed connection  
housed deep in the lex app  
lightskin-cutie-with-a-curly-mullet-walking-down-fifth-ave



you-were-wearing-a-green-button-up-and-jorts-and-you-were  
really-attractive-and-definitely-didn't-look-like-my-ex-at-all  
and-anyway-i-was-just-too-nervous-to-say-hi-but-if-you-see-this-my-  
instagram-is  
(and then i wouldn't be able to follow it because i'm blocked anyway  
(even though you had no reason to block me)  
(i should've been the one to block YOUR ass)  
(but it's fine)  
(i'm really calm about it actually)  
i laugh because i know you'd think i got uglier,  
(part-consolation for losing a bad bitch)  
(part-because you'd really think it's true)  
if you could even see me at all  
since i wasn't wearing anything pink  
or short or skin tight.  
i've been dressing more masculine lately  
and it feels like being taken out of the drawer  
for the first time after years of being crumpled,  
sitting somewhere dark, steeping in mildew  
(and a big ol' middle finger right to your  
fickle femme4femme face).



*Mark Wong, Pairs of Threes, 2023*

# PEACH TREE

JACK BROWN

This is the peach juice dripping  
off hand  
this is the peach tree that bore  
the fruit in California  
this is the boy  
at the kitchen table in Georgia with  
the magnolia centerpiece.

This is the peach juice  
dripping to elbow  
this is the sugar  
in the folds  
of a juvenile body.

Here's my plunging teeth:  
my mother taking the skin off,  
wet flesh on wet flesh &  
the pitted heart revealing  
itself—

That magnolia, yellow-dusted  
white:  
all the leaves of a filial labor how she  
hands him the secateurs and sees  
beauty  
for the home while the boy sees something  
to cut.

Can't ignore that peach the way it ignites  
me, how a soft fuzz  
can be the best thing  
to lose  
I once went to William's house  
and bit into fur to  
forget where home was.



*Sarah Tonra, Spot Drawing #5, 2024*

# I Wish I Were Named After a City

Simran Khatriwala

I wish I were named after a city  
instead of a prayer  
certain things can break and fall,  
bathe themselves in their blood,  
and the world will call them glorious anyway.

I have a legacy, hidden inside my bare chest.  
men pick out the obstinate parts in me,  
eat them alive,  
as if stubborn were the most dangerous thing a woman could be. And I tell  
them  
rather, it would be the most glorious thing.

I grew amidst four women,  
one of them only alive in memory.  
every once in a while, I have the urge to ask ma  
if she knew that I'd grow up to be a disaster like this, or if all was well the  
day I was born.

I don't remember the exact time i was born- it's not like forgetting, it's  
like not knowing it at all.

Ma knows though, she knows the birthdays and times of all of us, and I  
cannot imagine being as glorious as a woman who'd attach herself to so  
many others

to help them grow.

A fortress shakes at the brim of my tongue

as I talk of womanhood in my house.  
it is the closest I've been to god.  
I've been close to god,  
I've been shoved away from God in pure daylight. I reach out my hand in  
the sunlight,  
trying to clasp the molecules in the light  
they are there even when the sun isn't,  
but I cannot see them, and that makes all the difference.  
I'm that one line woolf stretched out  
in the note she left her husband:  
"I can't even write this properly."  
most love letters that end up looking like suicide notes are not well-  
written, but well-remembered.  
will I have to die after I write him a letter,  
to be remembered, at least by him?

He reaches out his tongue in the dark  
I take a step back,  
to see what he is doing,  
and it is no wonder that we appear like wounds, carved out of flesh just to  
be used as bandages on the rooftops and broken windows  
of peaceful, yet mournful, unsettling households.

I watch him in my sleep, in my dream,  
and there's a firefly flying above his nose.  
when it sits on him, it feels good to breathe,  
and I know then, it is okay if the lover you touch grieves, and makes you  
grieve  
at least he lights up your collarbones and caresses your spine.

Something is always better than nothing, always. spell out this line on  
your left thigh,

right above your tattoo, to remind you of how some freedom is always  
better than no freedom, and that a lover who loves you incompletely is  
always better than one who fakes it all as he pulls out words from your  
gut only to call it infatuation.

I clutch the bedsheet as I remember him—

his hair, his eyes, the tears sparkling down his eyelashes. I grieve for him.

I lie there like a breathing grave of a woman who died in the same  
household her lover left her aflame.



*Lindsey Rogers, Slip, 2019*



# Roadkill

Emma Miller

I have felt the burning embrace of a tire's wobbling path/Scar tissue/  
Take me/Twisting intestines grimace in the sun/Becoming stiff & caked  
from it's embers/My sulfuric stench draws you near/Quivering/A carcass,  
empty skin/I am/inside out/At your mercy/The wind passes me by/An  
imaginary breath held in/My hand as yours/Only yours/My breath, my  
being/Flattened animal mechanisms [your way to sedate me]/As I lie here  
in complacency/You tear through my throat/Blood dripping down your  
bare chest/Cascading in pools above my empty eyes/A socket of truth  
unveiled/Carcass meat crawling/Away



# Dreaddeferral

ian powers

each day / bumbling / bulges out of the last  
tummy fluttering with apologies and unpaid fines  
i let my hair grow so long i couldn't see  
myself without it so long i began using "we"  
when i didn't know / who / i was speaking for  
but knew community as highest priority / rephrase:  
dissolution of self puddle of i oh i pleaded with the moon  
morphine / mender / milkeyed / melt&make me whole

but a twelveton train snuck into the apartment  
like an undercover cop culling through contraband  
and my dovetailed debts accrued ex/ponentially i  
watched the horrible little king/dom of numbers  
swandiving to death / like some greek tragedy

and i am going out tonight anyway / and while straight  
men on the subway read kierkegaard and think about kanye  
i try to bend my sweaty body into something i myself can love  
but i am hoisted by own loans / hypocrite confusion coughs  
are a given when i check my image in the iphone camera

so the night becomes glass and drunkmess / debt diss  
olution of i puddle of i the we now sweeping / up glass  
and drunkmess with our hands / hands that are meant  
for cradling one/another



*Damian Fox, The Happiest Family to Ever Bounce Together, 2023*

# the node is lonely

indigo lee

The node is lonely,  
even in embrace. I say  
“I’m right here” and you giggle into the oily night,  
the dark yard, tucking your only  
chin into my lap. Oh,  
how a laugh walks away  
from mercy, from light. It doesn’t carry,  
just smears as you swear not  
to touch me, honesties  
despite frailty, despite night. You mutter only  
what my hands would tolerate  
without a mouth: *you have a strap? & you scare me. &  
i can’t be with you. i can’t stand the judgment  
of my friends. i’ve told you this so many times.*  
I nodded.

I kissed you. I was here. I closed my eyes &  
you—a goldfinch flashed  
by—i watched its shadow sweep the floor—in the  
wooden dusk. your ankles waiting, like newborn mountain  
goats, on the legs of your desk  
chair.

I didn’t  
know what happened  
after that. I opened my eyes. I kissed you again. You  
ducked. In the black trees the baby bird  
squawked, alone perhaps, cradled  
by another’s  
brittle bones, unheld yet by the  
earth’s soft hands, trapped by  
its own unknowing, its wetness. I know,  
you. I bit your neck. I tried not to cry. The pain

docked so tautly I could taste  
it in my wrists,  
my clavicle, sternum. & parts,  
no matter how sterilely  
you say them, always  
transfigure like  
freedom, unbearable in  
its weight, footless  
& sprawling lest you  
prey it away. Say *sorry* and know

I won't wither. Say *tomorrow* and  
forget it isn't owned. *i wasn't thinking*,  
*i was just falling*. I kiss you, anyway. My  
girl parts hanging  
in the wind,  
Anyway. Your salt on my chin  
as we stirred slowly in the dark,

the jive unable  
to carry its own  
syncope past the  
iron gate, the  
drunken yard. Like you couldn't imagine  
the streetlamps behind me  
as I crawled into the cab,  
the moon orbiting around  
me, only  
around me.



*Nira Ward, Mourning Love, 2021*

# The fishmonger

sachi parish

The fishmonger  
chased me last night  
When I was rushing down  
the current

Collecting pearls on my hip,  
And going through cycles of water,  
And realizing I was a fish

He ran me all the way to the village of himeshima  
Where the gods are rather hungry  
And bones are smashed with gray obsidian

I wanted to know  
About the foxes that had faces of children  
And why they danced so fervently against the wind

Or how they picked at the ashes  
Of obaachan  
Lifting the remnants of her bones  
With differing chopsticks

But he wouldn't tell me  
Instead,  
He snatched me up  
in heavy blue metals  
And brought me to a land called  
america

# uproot / brute choir

ian powers

unfurl further / mycelial tethers /  
through the fissures and the frack /  
entangle the hands as they grasp /  
for false certainty to feed is an act /  
of love / because of you the world eats  
itself and lives forever because of you  
the dirt churns with abundant / breath  
despite //  
people have hands for holding /  
or ripping so this / earth held tight and  
torn / gripping handfuls of grass  
handfuls inside of hollowed bison /  
if not coughing blood in chase bank //  
blessed tracheostomy / blessed tendrils oh curl into / my love their  
buildings buckle //







## Ash Albert





## **on loss of childhood and working at sephora, accessible alternate text**

a woman enters my zone. it's her 65th birthday and she's dreaded this day for years. she's buying herself a gift, it'll make it feel a little better. she wants to know if a retinol or a collagen peptide is better for anti-aging. her best option is to die.

she's a beautiful woman. she has a certain warmth to her, a soft golden glow radiating around her when she calls me honey & laughs about massachusetts weather. i could trace her face and draw the rings of a giant tree trunk cut down by landscapers but still rooted firmly in the ground, i could embrace her and feel the quiet peace of a forest that knows itself the keeper of generations. i tell her i can be happy about her birthday for her, she tells me i remind her of her daughter. we stand side by side in an aisle and i look at her like a fawn alone on the side of the highway and she settles on caudalie premier cru.

a few hours later i ring up the purchase of a young girl—can't be more than 11—and she's holding the same cream.

i recognize the girl. she's been in my store before, she asked for a sample of a serum. i warned her it had lactic acid and i wouldn't recommend it for her. "i'll make you the sample anyways, if you really want, but please do be careful with it." she agreed to try something gentler instead. her gaze at me waned for a moment and i wondered if i watched the dissonance click in her for the first time. if suddenly she too now knows her age but not what to do with it, not what it means when she says it aloud.

as i begin to scan her basket, she asks if she can also get one of the blushes behind the counter. i ask which color, she asks for testers, and i show her the tubes of lollipop-looking jellies with little nibbles from still falling out teeth. she settles on a shade called spritz.

"good choice. my first blush was peach colored too. i think that will look lovely on you."

i'm neither a daughter nor an elder one, but from eleven to eight i think i become one. it's a deeply intimate affair. if i close my eyes, i see myself bending into a bridge over a time-enduring, winding sea. i am contorted into a walkway that can only be crossed once, then stared at longingly for a lifetime by those stranded on the banks. i myself am uncertain which

side i stand on. even still, i scatter lighthouses across the water below me;  
they cast beacons calling out to either side, they call,

“please, please. i know your mind feels ancient. but your body is young,  
your presence is young. you are cloaked in a divinity so much greater than  
sets of twelve, so much greater than yourself. nobody can take this from  
you. please, i love you and i love you not like an ad on a subway car. i  
love you and i love you not like 01100111 01100101 01110100 00100000  
01110010 01100101 01100001 01100100 01111001 00100000 01110111  
01101001 01110100 01101000 00100000 01101101 01100101 00101111  
01110011 01100101 01110000 01101000 01101111 01110010 01100001  
00100000 01101000 01100001 01110101 01101100 00101111 01100001  
01101100 01101100 01110101 01110010 01100101 00100000 01110100  
01101111 01110000 00100000 01110000 01101001 01100011 01101011  
00101111 01100011 01101100 01100101 01100001 01101110 00101111  
01110010 01110101 01101110 00100000 01100100 01101111 01101110  
00100111 01110100 00100000 01110111 01100001 01101100 01101011  
00101111 01111001 01101111 01110101 00100000 01101110 01100101  
01100101 01100100 00101111 01111001 01101111 01110101 00100000  
01101110 01100101 01100101 01100100 00101111 01111001 01101111  
01110101 00100000 01101110 01100101 01100101 01100100 00101111  
01111001 01101111 01110101 00100000 01101110 01100101 01100101  
01100100. i love you and i love you like we cry the same tears. i’m pretty  
sure we do. there’s a better place for you than here.”

but here my eyes are open. here, four walls carve out these bridges and  
seas, not me. and here, i think if i pressed my ear to the black tile floor,  
i think i’d hear the giggles of little girls too small to see themselves in  
endcap mirrors.

their cheeks are rosy & so are mine.

### **on loss of childhood and working at sephora, binary to english translation**

get ready with me/sephora haul/allure top pick/clean/run don’t walk/you  
need/you need/you need



*Joe Glynn, Keep It In Mind, 2024*

# Contributors Notes



# Nonfiction

Bo Becker: "Return to Cherry," Part Time

Sky Brubaker: "Sweet Disposition," The Temper Trap

Katya Danziger: "4 Pieces from 6 Kleine Klavierstücke" Op. 19: No. 6. Sehr langsam," Arnold Schoenberg

Fincher Douma Wahlen: "Real House," Adrienne Lenker

Isabel Hall: "Strangers," The Kinks

Lillian Heckler: "There Is a Light That Never Goes Out," The Smiths

Stella Hofferma: "Bath County," Wednesday

Sam Levy: "Murder in the City," The Avett Brothers

Theo Lim-Jisra: "Home at Last," Steely Dan

Annie Wang: "One Summer Day," Joe Hisaishi

# Art

Ming Chua: "She is inside, He is outside," Mass of the Fermenting Dregs

Ivan Chien: "The Night We Met," Lord Huron

Kian Dougherty: "Stolen Moments," Ahmad Jamal Trio

Damian Fox: "Come and Play in the Milky Night," Stereolab

Joe Glynn: "Always Returning," Brian Eno

Char Gossage: "Swans," Matson

Daisy Han: "OFF MY FACE," Måneskin

Spencer Mazzella: "Bloodhail," Have a Nice Life

Levi Mutchnick: "The Goblin Has Fallen in Love," Rezzett

Hila Mutsafi: "Dissect Me Again," Meira Asher

Basil Roberts: "fish food," Philip Brooks and runo plum

Lindsay Rodgers: "A Lot's Gonna Change," Weyes Blood

Siqi Rong: "Big Fish," Zhou Shen

Sarah Tonra: "Beguiling the Hours," Flaming Tunes

Nora Vogt: "Just What I Needed," The Cars

Mark Wong: "Alabama Pines," Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit

Nira Ward: "Pink + White," Frank Ocean

# Fiction

Lydia Chiu: “Mum,” Luke Hemmings

Emma Finley: “Burn Your Village,” Kiki Rockwell

Sam Levy: “Touch of My Hand,” Britney Spears

Connor Perkins: “Riders on the Storm,” The Doors

Audrey Robbins: “Thunderstruck,” AC/DC

Basil Roberts: “body horror,” eilonwy

Archer Rosenbloom: “That Funny Feeling,” Phoebe Bridgers

Charlotte Stella: “Come Wander With Me,” Jeff Alexander

# Poetry

Nadja Anderson-Oberman: “I Gotta Find Peace of Mind,” Lauryn Hill

Ash Albert: “Weird Dream, Conscious Stream,” I Hate Sex

Jack Brown: “A House in Nebraska,” Ethel Cain

Kian Doughty: “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding),” Bob Dylan

Gretchen Donnelly: “Silver Spoon,” Lily Allen

Kelly Fowler: “Getting Older,” Billie Eilish

Liam Glass-Hussain: “Martin,” Car Seat Headrest

Liliana Green: “Romance,” Ex:Re

Kore Harwood: “Monsoon,” Hippo Campus

Marta Johnston: “Sundried Mind,” The Tins

Simran Khatiwala: “Layla,” Eric Clapton

Indigo Lee: “Cool Cat,” Queen

Emma Miller: “M,” The Cure

Molly Owen: “Summer’s Gone,” Placebo

Sachi Parish: “Pearl Diver,” Mitski

Ian Powers: “Sorry for Party Rocking,” LMFAO

Amit Ronen: “Bohemian Rhapsody,” Queen

Mark Wong: “You Can Have the Crown,” Sturgill Simpson

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*Ming Chua, Band Band Band, 2024*

