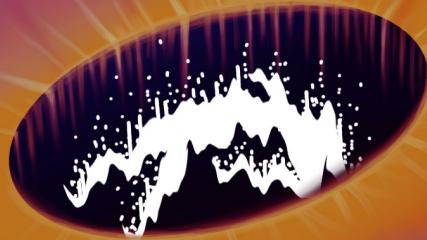


2023 - 2024 LIV EDITION

ERATO



GEORGIA TECH
LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE

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Letter from the Editor



Dear Readers,

As I approach graduation, I find myself thinking back to 4 years ago, when I graduated high school. In many ways, the past 4 years of college have mirrored my 4 years in high school, with college applications turning into internship & job applications, friendships dissolving or drifting apart, another election year (even the same candidates!), and a solar eclipse when I was starting high school and the next as I was finishing college. Maybe I'm finding vague patterns that aren't really there, but isn't life an exercise in constructing meaning?

Identifying the parallels in my own life reminds me of the phrase, "History doesn't repeat itself but it often rhymes."

This observation brings us to the theme of this edition—parallels and cycles. The concept explores the rhythmic patterns that life presents, the echoes of past experiences in new guises, and how they can evolve, break, and persist over time.

I find myself imagining what my ancestors' lives would be like, hundreds or thousands of years ago. I'm sure it would be vastly different because of the privilege my environment gives me. But maybe they sought joy out of the same things: enjoying a particularly pleasant meal, staying up late talking to friends, creating something to be proud of. The cyclical nature of history connects us all.

For my own full circle moment, I had the opportunity of drawing the cover of Erato's 51st edition as a freshman. This year, as a senior, I once again had the privilege of illustrating the cover of the 54th edition, as well as the honor of serving as Editor-in-Chief of one of the very first student organizations I joined. As I reflect on these patterns, I am grateful towards the staff and submitters who make this magazine what it is and through their creativity, bring abstract concepts to life.

As you turn through the pages, I invite you to contemplate the parallels and cycles in your own life and perhaps find meaning in their continuity.

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When I Wake Up

When we woke up, the snow fell softly outside your window: the fourth-floor penthouse in the heart of Budapest. You put the kettle on, I made your bed, and together we sipped our tea. We watched the people passing by on that December morning, giving commentary on their—and our—ordinary lives: we imagined where they'd go, what gossip they had, we talked about my childhood, about your sister and dad.

In the hushed murmurs of the quiet mom-and-pop shop, our voices lost from the nights before, held a quiet conversation just orchestrated through looks. Your eyes would say what you were thinking; there was almost no need to talk. They welcomed me with open arms, still glistening from the moonlight that had shown through your window the night before. I've been to the museums, the symphonies, the jazz clubs, the fancy restaurants, and the run-down pubs and there is nothing in in this life that means more than that moment.

The next time we left the bar, you still managed to get us home: past the 19th-century buildings with the subtle graffiti tags, down the corridors with the slight ochre hue, under the thick yellow lights that lit our way, and through the unmistakable wafts of hand-rolled Camel Blue. I know we talked the whole way, about our lives past and future too; but honestly, the memory does not come easily from that night. I am still glad you held my hand; I might not have made it back otherwise: the eternal calls of a night still young.

Every time you would look into my eyes, I would feel myself fall more into this slumber, into this dream. Every time we would drink your stale black tea, I could sleep a little more in that perfect moment. Every story you would tell me about your small Midwest hometown, I could see it a bit clearer. Every little tune you would play, your little siren song: the soft strums, the muffled hums would carry us away. And I would forget that our time in Budapest was narrowing, just around the corner to never see us again. To never see that Indian restaurant on your block, your stop on the 4, mine just a few down the line, the Dohánybolt¹ just outside my door. So every time I left your room, I would be reminded: I would wake up just a little, but not enough it seems. Every time I returned, I would close my eyes again—just so I could forget again, just so I could dream.

Sometimes you would turn away coyly. You would look up to the ceiling and I could almost trace the thought in your eyes, but it would right fall out from under my fingertips—I could never just make it out. It would pull you away for a split second, just for one brief moment, and then you would fall right back in. I never had the courage; I could never find the time to ask you about those thoughts, those looks in your eyes. And now, I don't know if I would have liked the answer. I know you were looking for something on that first faithful night: whether that was me, anyone, or maybe just my cigarette, I suppose I'll never know. I don't know if your thoughts were malicious or benign, did you have someone else back home? Was it just the project due next week? Was it your sister's call you forgot to return? I don't know... and maybe I just shouldn't. But I laid by you regardless, just one more moment to rest my eyes, just one more moment to dream.

And as I packed my bags, I thought about us—and that look in your eyes. What if we met sooner? What if we did this? Or what if I did that?

What a funny thing time seems to be.

I can imagine all that would have happened but I cannot seem to see it, to believe it just yet. After all, it was just a dream, a momentary slumber. And now, I suppose, I simply need to wake up. There is just one problem: the more I wake the more I seem to fall, not into what we had; but, what could have been. Not into you; but, what I thought you were supposed you were to be. Not into your eyes, the lights, the tea, our lives; but, what I wanted them to represent, what I wanted them to mean.

So now, I am stuck.

Am I not supposed to dream? That's what our teachers, our mentors told us to do. They told us to hang on, to keep dreaming. But I guess we must all wake up at some point. We must all live our ordinary lives. But just indulge me for a moment in this slumber. Just one snooze more. I am not ready to wake just yet.

And when I do wake up,
I hope you have already made your bed.

¹ Nemzeti Dohánybolt (national tobacco store): The state-owned store that is the only legal retailer of tobacco within Hungary, often open late into the night; it also acts as a convenience store.

writing and photography by matthew waloch





nightwalk

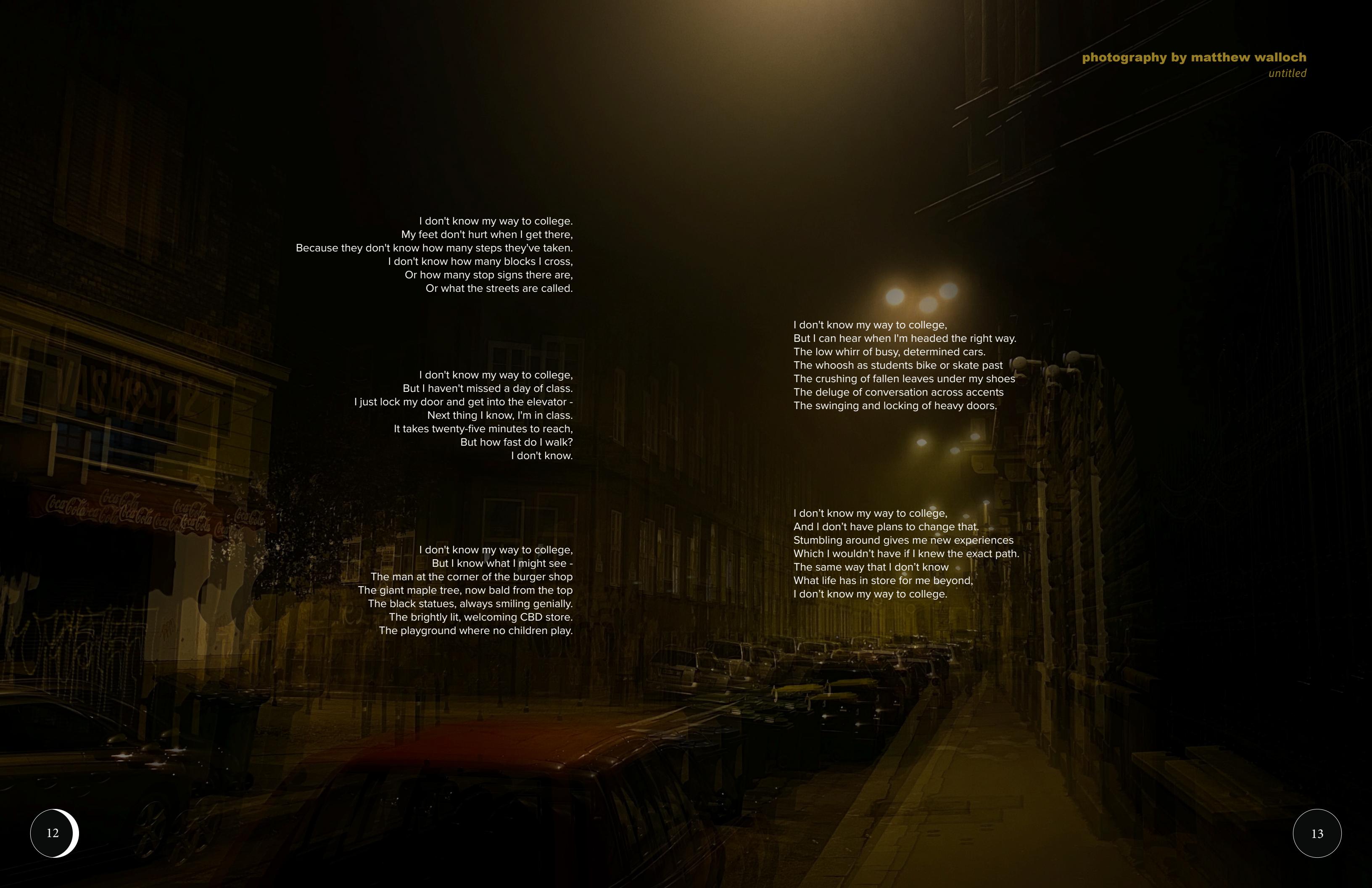


photography by reyna samuel



I Don't Know My Way to College

written by yash chaturvedi



I don't know my way to college.
My feet don't hurt when I get there,
Because they don't know how many steps they've taken.
I don't know how many blocks I cross,
Or how many stop signs there are,
Or what the streets are called.

I don't know my way to college,
But I haven't missed a day of class.
I just lock my door and get into the elevator -
Next thing I know, I'm in class.
It takes twenty-five minutes to reach,
But how fast do I walk?
I don't know.

I don't know my way to college,
But I know what I might see -
The man at the corner of the burger shop
The giant maple tree, now bald from the top
The black statues, always smiling genially.
The brightly lit, welcoming CBD store.
The playground where no children play.

I don't know my way to college,
But I can hear when I'm headed the right way.
The low whirr of busy, determined cars.
The whoosh as students bike or skate past
The crushing of fallen leaves under my shoes
The deluge of conversation across accents
The swinging and locking of heavy doors.

I don't know my way to college,
And I don't have plans to change that.
Stumbling around gives me new experiences
Which I wouldn't have if I knew the exact path.
The same way that I don't know
What life has in store for me beyond,
I don't know my way to college.

ARTWORK BY SOPHIA REGNAULT

LADY OF THE STARS



Sweetling, close your eyes.

Cover your gaze from the horror of what you see;
Open when there is only static around you.

Dove, won't you cry for me?

Cry for the innocence that slipped through your fingers;
Rejoice at the cool translucent greenery that falls into your palms.

You've grown up, I see.

The stone is called jade; the silence is called loneliness.

CONDITIONALITY AS CONGENIALITY

WRITTEN BY JASMINE HSU

Darling, take comfort in the silence.

You are the noble lineage of many still evenings,
And it has made you rich beyond comparison.

My dear, you are cherished.

You have your companions:
A bitter almond shell, a soft verdant character, a grey past (present, or future),
and a world at your feet.

My beloved, dearest you, you are alive.

Vignettes

written by
daniel dejune

I. Unfaith

Mirabel heard wheezing in the vents.
Dad: I'll replace the filter.

Then she smelled sulfur and charcoal, the reek of
burning hair.
Mom: The house has moldy pipes.

Mirabel awoke to find her closet aflame. After
smothering the blaze, the parents found a match on
the floor, the red tip still glowing, staring at them.
They took Mirabel to a psychiatrist.

Mirabel said she didn't do it. It was the man with the
droopy face, ears melted into his head.

The psychiatrist explained that Mirabel showed signs
of hysteria, likely due to the simultaneous pressure of
a new city and no friends.
That night, Mirabel hid under the covers.
She heard hissing. Her neck scorched.
No one told her about God; as for the devil, she
smelled his sulfur.

VII. Valentine's Day Crush

Sister Marie's eyes widened, her cerulean orbs
reflecting the figure of St. Valentine on his knees.
"No," she blushed. "We mustn't abandon our vows."
St. Valentine: "Our vows are to Christ alone; our
orders can be retired."

She examined his eyes for caprice.
"How many nuns have you proposed to before
me?" she asked.
"No nuns — none," he said, smiling.

"The orphanage?"
"We'll offer to manage it, not as monk and nun, but
as husband and wife."

She relented, and Valentine's heart soared high.
Too high.
His arrhythmic heart hastened, and his already
strained arteries ruptured,
like eggs cracked in the carton.

He collapsed, his left hand clutching his cross
necklace and his right, warming in his pocket a ring
twisted of a single daisy.

Vengeance



artwork by jada nicole jones

DEATH

artwork by jada nicole jones



The tip of my nose and the scopes of my cheeks
Now blush a deep rose
Against the dense black of the premature night.
My fingers tingle and when I breathe,
My air is embodied in a translucent realm
Of delicate, ephemeral whisps,
Each exhale a fleeting dance
Across the winter's cold canvas,
Each a manifestation of the warmth of joy
Which departs
As the evening is getting darker.

The months have progressed.
My hands feel numb within the dusk's biting embrace.
My silhouette sweeps the sidewalk
Like a toppled inkwell's spills upon a clean page.
My shadow reflects the hope of the day
Transformed into disappointment,
Where mistakes made become consequences to face,
Where the day's comfort of forgiveness has solidified into regret,
Where the oversaturated envelopment of companionship has
melted away,
Where now left exposed is merely a frigid solace.

I am frozen in place
Until the anticipatory hope of the following season,
For the only escape is time
And the obligatory acceptance of helplessness
As I realize the evenings are getting darker.

THE EVENING IS GETTING DARKER

written by anon

My dearest friend, Elizabeth, explained something to me once. She had a smoldering cigarette perched between her index and middle finger which she stared at longways as though it were an object of curiosity and not the poison that had been slowly killing her for the last few years.

Vaguely, between drags, she talked, circling her hands in gestures that mimicked her slightly slurred speech.

"You know," she looked me dead in the eye then, the most serious I'd ever seen her. "No matter what you do, ain't nothing in this world will ever be the same way twice." She coughed. "The chapstick in my car always melts in the summer," I said, entertaining her thought.

"Is it the same chapstick?"

"Yeah," I snorted. "Same one I had on for my first kiss, same one that left an oil stain on the dress Ma lent me, and same one that melts every time the temperature spikes."

"But you use it, so it's not the same."

I shrug.

"The chemical cherry never fades."

I'm pretty sure I got the thing on a whim anyway. I needed cash and the pharmacy would only give cash back if I bought something. The cherry chapstick was positioned perfectly by the register, perhaps for that very purpose. The 25 cent tube has been in my car ever since. Elizabeth licked her lips, tasting the bitter nicotine that clung to her skin permanently. She talked of the world's inconsistency, but she was as prompt as my ex asking for money when it came to cigarettes. Those paper rolls spent more time with her than I did.

"You're quite the philosopher tonight," I observed, following her gaze off the balcony into the flashing lights of the city beyond.

"No more than the normal amount," she replied. Her cigarette neared its burn out, so I pushed the silver ashtray down the railing for her to stamp it on. I'd folded up some mail into the tray, ready to be burned away. Elizabeth stopped mid-movement and removed the letter on top just before her hot ash dripped onto its exterior.

"Gonna burn his love letter?" She almost sneered as she said it, holding it between her fingers like the cigarette.

"It's not his, it's mine," I yanked the paper from her and tore it to shreds. "Now burn it please."

"Whatever you want dearest," she teased, using the word we often exchanged. The paper went up in smoke not a minute later.

She lit another and held it out for me but I shook my head solemnly. She always offered; I never accepted.

We stood in silence for a while, each withdrawn into our own thoughts.

"Well, you know, I think some things are the same though," she murmured in concession.

"Is that so?" I inquired, half-listening over the sound of cicadas and far-off honking.

"Yeah, you'll always be as hard as a stone, but that means you're always my rock, and I'm glad those don't burn easily."

I smiled sideways at her and she stamped out the cigarette though it could have burned longer.

"Go throw out that crappy cherry chapstick."

I nodded slowly.

"You're right, it ain't been the same after the kiss."

Passion

artwork by jada nicole jones



Devotional
written by sadie palmer

PASSION
PASSION
PASSION

A ROUTINE FLIGHT

ARTWORK BY NOAH GRAFF



The Anchorite

WRITTEN BY ANON

*Oh Reblan, Lord of Space and Time,
Burner of the Tree, Bringer of Peace, and Foremost of
War, I beseech thee, grant an old man your grace.*

I was weary and afraid when I was young, but now I accept your Time of Peace. Locked in your most holy of sepulchers, I have forgone my illusions of freedom and follow your holy path.

*All pleasure is nought to me; only your truth may quench.
I beseech thee, lend an old man dreams of black and white, show me your way.*

Clenched hands with gnarled fingers drifted from the dark ceiling to his sides. He banished the final dreams of the previous night, dreams of old battles where the ground was slick with mud and blood. The first pensive rays of the day emanated from the gray morning haze and through the bars of his holy cell and he was reminded of the bright banners and gleaming armor of his youth. The Anchorite awaited his first supplicants of the day.

The few who came to him, as they always had, made their way across the sunny square and demanded guidance and solace, precious blessings. One or the other. But they were always mistaken and always disappointed. He had accepted this holy death and locked himself in his cell, not to act as wise man and fortune teller, but to ruminate and divine Reblan's holy truths. There he would find Reblan's grace, his deliverance. That surely could not be found in the endless mewling and prattle of the Wudara. But Reblan would not allow him to lock himself away from the world forever. So he abided their mewling and dispensed disappointment.

When will my son come home from the war?

By autumn, if Reblan permits. May he bless and console you.

Will the Kalariadar accept me to his guard?

If your sword arm swings true and your mind is stout. May Reblan bless and console you.

Will the dragons ever return?

Blasphemous! Reblan slew them all long ago. May he bless and console you, young one.

Each blessing ending with a touch to their hearts, their connection to their lord amplified. But not his own.

Sweat trickled down his face in the afternoon sun, a vengeful ball of fire that cast long and towering shadows upon the square and baked the Anchorite in his sepulcher as if he were meat in a clay oven. All the supplicants were long gone, the Wudara hiding in vain from the ceaseless damp of the day. All except for one. A final student, a young girl, strode slowly to his cell. Her step was hesitant, her eyes darting and searching for vacant interlopers. A cold feeling welled up in the Anchorite's chest as she approached and the daylight retreated.

Why have you come to my cell, girl? There is nothing for you here.

She said nothing in return, electing to focus on a particularly interesting section of the cobbles. Her face was obscured in the waxing shadows, but the Anchorite thought he saw something there, hidden in the pale light.

Come here. Let me see your face.

The girl flinched as the scarred arms of the Anchorite reached out to her.

Come. No one here can hurt you.

He cupped her chin with his rough hand and moved the evening light across her face. Purple splotches and a cut neath one of her eyes. Two salty rivers carving arroyos across the grimy desert of darkness that was her face. The Anchorite grimaced. So much pain and hardship for one so young. He almost cursed Reblan for his heartlessness, but he banished the blasphemous thought as soon as it entered his mind.

Who did this to you? he asked.

My father, she croaked, the words barely audible.

Cursed is the man who lays hands upon his own daughter. May Reblan bless and console you, said the Anchorite. He wished she would go away, but she only looked into his eyes. All too worn and tired.

I didn't come for blessings or consolations. They say you fought in the rebellion. They say you've killed folk.

Suddenly it was the Anchorite studying a particularly interesting cobble. She was too young. Blood and tears had purchased a cruel wisdom she shouldn't yet possess.

They said you were good at your job.

What do you want girl? Why have you come? What would you have me do?

There is a small green house on Ashrad Square, she whispered. My mother and I painted red flowers 'round the doorway a long time ago. Go there tonight and... do what you do best.

I swore a holy vow. To never leave this cell. To never... kill again.

But the words sounded hollow.

You know where to go if you change your mind.

And like that she retreated into the evening dusk. He turned from the bars and lay fetal in the darkest corner of his cell. He had taken a holy vow. He did not belong out there.

Wisdom was bought with blood and tears. Words long unspoken in his mind until today, but the words of Reblan no doubt. He had made a holy vow to the Lord of Space and Time; he had confined himself to this space till the end of his days and in exchange he would scry holy truth. Long years had he sat in his cell and all of his dreams told him nought. No dispensed blessing had gifted enlightenment. All these years and the past still haunted him like a vengeful specter. Reblan's truth was absolution and absolution still a distant dream.

Was Reblan not a just arbiter? Surely his lord would demand action, not complacence. He looked from the bars of his cell and saw the moon, bulbous and white, blotting out the stars, a lone vessel in a sea of velvet black. And he knew that his grace was out there. The Anchorite swore a new vow and slipped through the bars and into the night.



The Drunken Dragon had not changed in the many years that he had been gone, and he wasn't surprised. The full moon shone on crumbling white plaster and a sad old wooden effigy of a once-proud red dragon. He ran his hands through his lengthy beard and long, thin hair, straightened the sorry excuse for a loin cloth that he wore. He felt much like that wooden dragon. His bare feet gingerly beat the smooth paving stones as he moved through the door.

The Dragon was empty, save three patrons and a lousy-looking barkeep. Their close-knit bundle broke apart when they heard the door swing on its rusty hinges behind them. The Anchorite stared placidly back at their gaping faces.

You, said a man in dingy yellow armor with the sheen of tree sap, once resplendent. Long ago he might have had something to say to that. But now he sought Reblan's grace, and frivolous talk was meaningless to him.

Me, he said back to them. The man laughed and cackled, his accomplices chuckling along, though they knew not why. The Anchorite stared back, placid. He had not laughed in many years.

Came out of your hole, didya? Reblan's raker, if only the others were here to see this, said the man in yellow. The man took a swig from a bottle and rested it on the bar top. It seemed as if he had remembered something and the joke that had just walked in was no longer funny. He removed a cigarillo from the blue band on his forehead, lit it with a nearby molten candle. He took a long puff of the cigarillo. Didn't exhale.

Always knew you'd come out of there one day. Crazy bastard, said the man in yellow through a chuckle, his compatriots silent, confused. He wiped his splotchy face.

I came for what's mine, said the Anchorite.

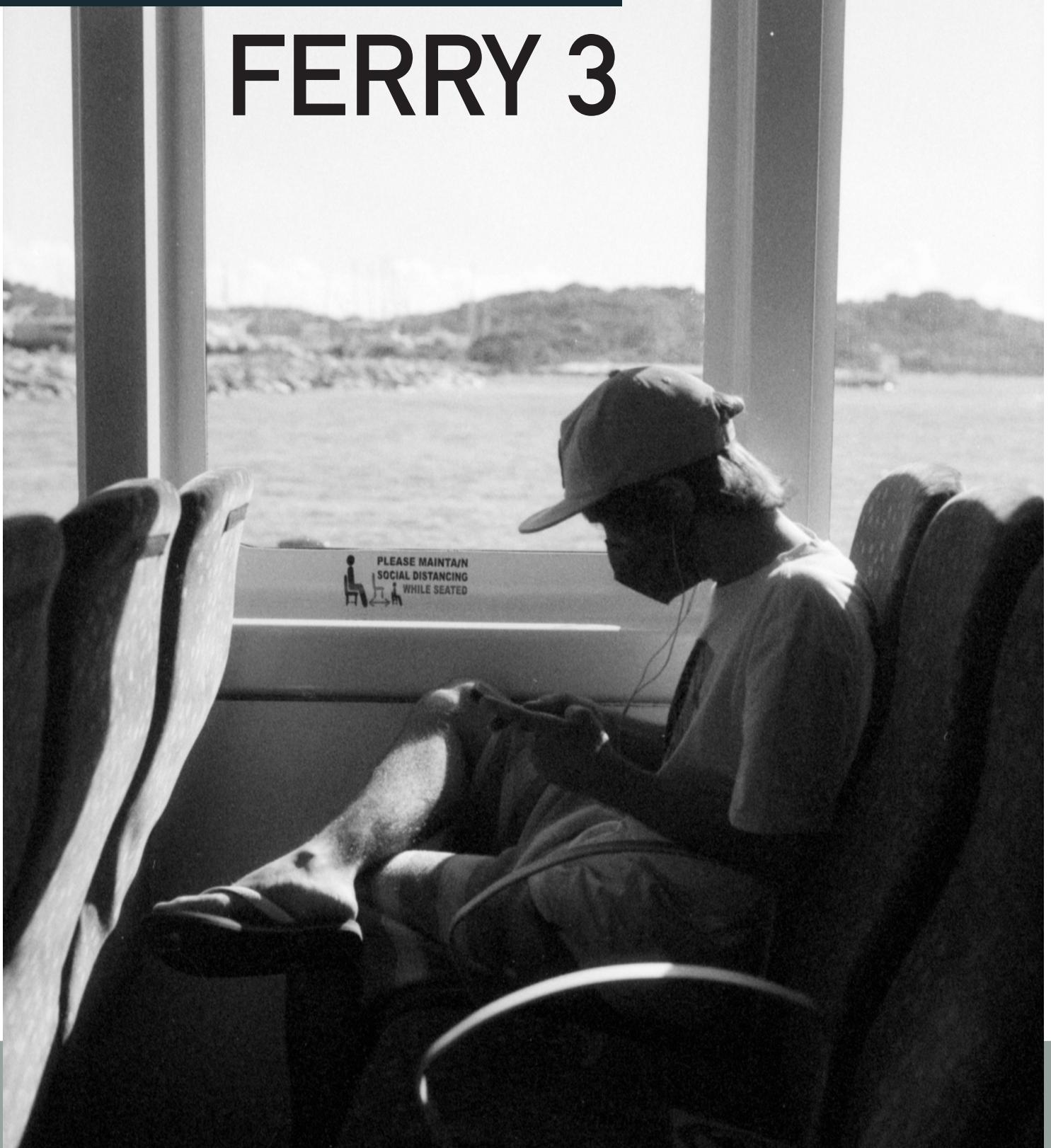


REROUTING

PHOTOGRAPHY BY YIWEN ZHAO

PHOTOGRAPHY SERIES BY ANDREW KNOPS

FERRY 3



I thought you gave that up, said the yellow man, chuckling sadly once again.

I need it only for tonight. Reblan's work must be done, the Anchorite said with steely resolve, the way he used to.

Reblan's work eh? Ha! Boys, let this here be an example that a man can't ignore their life's calling for long! You!

He pointed to the lad on his right, a youth with a neck as thick as his head and a big nose. The green band wrapped 'round his forehead wasn't enough to hide its enormity.

Me? the lad said.

Yeah, you! You got what he came for, don't ya?

I do?

Yep. That blade I done gave ya.

This? The lad held up something wrapped in oily saiga-skin.

I ain't giving it to that old creep. I earned it.

Well if you don't give it to him, he's gonna take it, the yellow man said. He took another puff of the cigarillo. The Anchorite perceived a faint smile appearing at the corner of the man's mouth.

He can come get it then, said the lad. He laid the oily skin on the bar-top and pushed up the sleeves of his rough spun shirt. The Anchorite found he could hardly contain his excitement and he cursed himself. Reblan was the god of war but that didn't mean his most devout supplicant should relish it.

Alright, boy, if that's the way you want it to be. Go easy on him, will ya?

The man in yellow puffed on his cigarillo one last time before smothering it dead on the bar-top.
It's about time I get some entertainment tonight, he said under his breath, just loud enough for everyone to hear. The barkeep groaned his annoyance.

What-and the Anchorite socked the lad in the mouth. Some techniques were eternal, he supposed. The lad went down. The Anchorite scoffed and flicked with his offending hand. Such an imprecise blow and the lad was already on his knees in shock. He had expected someone with a thicker neck to have a better chin. But combat was ever chaotic and random. He fought the sick elation welling up in the bottom of his throat.

But the lad wasn't done. He returned to his feet and tried to reclaim his lost honor. He threw a sloppy overhand and the Anchorite pulled on it easily. Another punch. Slip. Another one. Duck. A furious hook. The Anchorite weaved under and aimed a blow at the lad's liver. The lad doubled over and backed away until he hit the far wall of the Dragon. The Anchorite moved onto him as the yellow man and his other apprentice whooped and hollered and shouted advice. Advice? He was Reblan's chosen warrior. No advice would save the thick-necked lad.

He held out warding hands but the Anchorite did not care. He flicked a jab before closing the distance and locking his hands around the boy's neck. And up came his knees, one after the other. It only took three to the lad's midsection before he dropped to the floor. The Anchorite loomed over the green-banded lad, elbow cocked back to unleash devastation.

Wait! Wait! It's yours! The sword's yours old man! You can have it!

The Anchorite stared at the boy impassively. Blood trickled from a small cut and he swore he could smell the faint tear trickling down the boy's blackening eye. With effort, he relented. Reblan had other foes tonight which required attention, and this lad was not one of them.

You'd do well not to impede Reblan's will in the future, boy. Mayhaps the blood you've spilled and the tears you've shed tonight will buy you some sense.

Yes, sir! Of course! All the sense in the world! said the lad, and he returned to writhing on the ground, as tears streaked down his face.

As the Anchorite returned to the bar top, he found the other three hooting and drinks sloshing amongst them. The yellow man abated his laughter for but a moment, slapping the Anchorite on his naked back.

You know, I'm real glad to see you again. That was just like the old times! Come on back when you're done with whatever you're doin'.

He took the wrapped sword.

Only to return this.

Then what?

I don't know.

The man in yellow looked to his underling and the barkeep, shrugged. Then they all laughed. He gave the Anchorite a drunken hug. It wasn't returned.

Hey, you want some armor? Figure if you got killing in mind, or the Ole Treeburner's justice, or whatever, might need some protection, no?

Don't need it. Reblan offers all the protection I'll ever need.

The Anchorite vanished into the night.



FERRY 2

FERRY 1



He stood in an alleyway leading onto Ashrad Square. The muggy night sent rivulets of sweat coursing through his beard and unkempt hair. No one walked through the street. Late into the night, but faint candlelight still shone through the windows of the green house. Pale moonlight illuminated the red flowers that bespeckled the door-frame. Dark iron bars covered the windows. All else he could see was void.

He unwrapped the oily skin, tying it 'round his forehead. A longsword, resting in a faded red scabbard. He drew it and marveled at its black blade, long and sinusoidal, a sea of undulating waves that held his fate. Its grip, worn and familiar, fit easily back into his callused hands. The Anchorite stared long and deep into the red ruby encrusted into its pommel and it seemed to pulsate like a flame and he was taken back to the days of old when his god was war and he was its most devout supplicant. But tonight the blade was Reblan's instrument of justice and a cleaver for the righteous, his sins of old forgotten. Things were different now. His hands trembled.

The Paladin left the alleyway, his bare feet squelching in the mud as he made his way across the corner of the square and into the moonlight. It glinted off of the blade and he was reminded of a raid near the Takanda River long ago. But things were different now. They had to be.

He heard sound on the other side of the flower speckled door. Incoherent cries, snapping wood, crashes to the ground. Evident chaos. He wiped his muddy feet on the step and slipped quietly inside. His hands trembled.

Indeed he was greeted with chaos, but not of the sort he had imagined. Five men laughed and danced and clapped each other on the back as they strut about the small entrance room. They drank from bottles of clouded glass and cigarillo smoke drifted through the air. By some miracle of Reblan's they did not spy him. The Paladin rounded a corner and saw three women. Two scrubbed away at plates with blue and yellow rags. And the third was her. Old eyes distant as she chopped gowa fruit by candlelight.

Her eyes wandered until they met his and she seemed frozen in time. He raised a finger to chapped lips. Quiet. She remained paralyzed. With fear or Reblan's grace he did not know. He motioned her to stay where she was, and he hoped that she understood. The time had come for divine vengeance, and who was the Paladin to deny his lord?

He returned to the room with the five. Blade in hand, he strode over to them. One by one their laughter ceased as they turned to face their new holy adversary. One of them, shorter than the Paladin, stood up to him. Confusion and then a wave of even greater confusion.

You? The fucking holy man? What are you doing in my house?

He had the same eyes as his daughter, but burning with a hatred he had seen one too many times on one too many battlefields. The eyes of someone preparing to kill. The Paladin's hands stopped trembling. He would now show why his god was Foremost of War.

The man made for a knife stabbing a nearby table. Unwise. He slashed downward with speed he thought he had long lost. The man's arm was lopped off easily, like a sickle through the stalk of the gowa bush. Gripping his newfound stump, the father hollered and floundered about until he blundered underneath the windowsill. The other men stood starstruck, unable to comprehend the might of Reblan's fury.

The Paladin found he could not extinguish the fire within him. Could not squander the momentum his lord had lent him. And so he lunged at his next target, blade passing through his neck like wind through the trees. A torrent of blood rained across the room. It seemed to awaken something in the remaining three and they came to close the distance. Lousy and sloppy. Not trained fighters at all. He jabbed and made half-committed slashes to keep them back and he was surprised to find himself fading already. Was he really that old?

One of them had found the knife the father had reached for earlier. As his attention was drawn away, the Paladin received a blow to the face, and another worked his way inside the sword and gripped him in a bear hug. The Paladin was strong and lithe, but not so much a wrestler that he could stop two day-laborers from pulling him to the ground. They held him there, screaming for their accomplice to bring the knife. To kill the mad man. Mad man? He had never been more enlightened.

Death eminent, the Paladin remembered the old fields of war, fire lancing through dense jungle brush and the rage, the smoldering rage that had burned in his heart. The rage one felt when they were confronted with death and simply refused to die. The rage that suffused the blood that pooled all over the room. The rage that gripped him now as he struggled, every muscle in his withered body tense.

And suddenly, the ruby on the pommel glowed with a malevolent light.

The Paladin gave a final push and made just the right amount of space between him and his adversaries. An infinitesimal line of tiny flames appeared between the combatants and spun about its midpoint to create a fiery disk. An inferno spewed forth from that realm of primordial hatred, and in an instant the three wrestlers were consumed in a gout of flame.

They sprung off him quick, like crickets hopping from a field mouse. The Paladin clung to the fire disk, hardly controlling where it was directed. Soon his world was a sea of orange and yellow light.

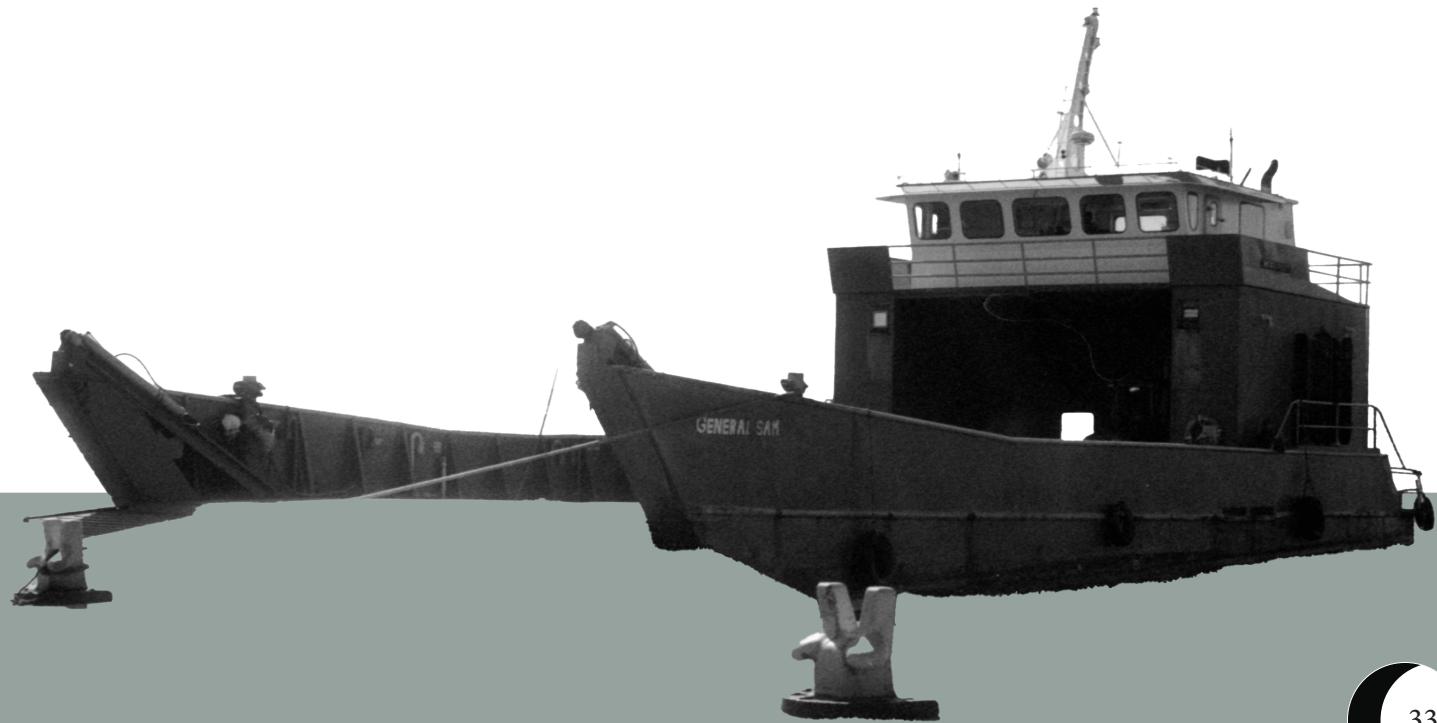
And he swore he had never seen a sweeter sight. He slashed about mindlessly, the flame becoming the love of his life, Reblan forgotten in an instant. Blood fell hot on his skin and seemed to vaporize in the heat. The Paladin laughed and the flame laughed with him. Nothing had ever felt so right.

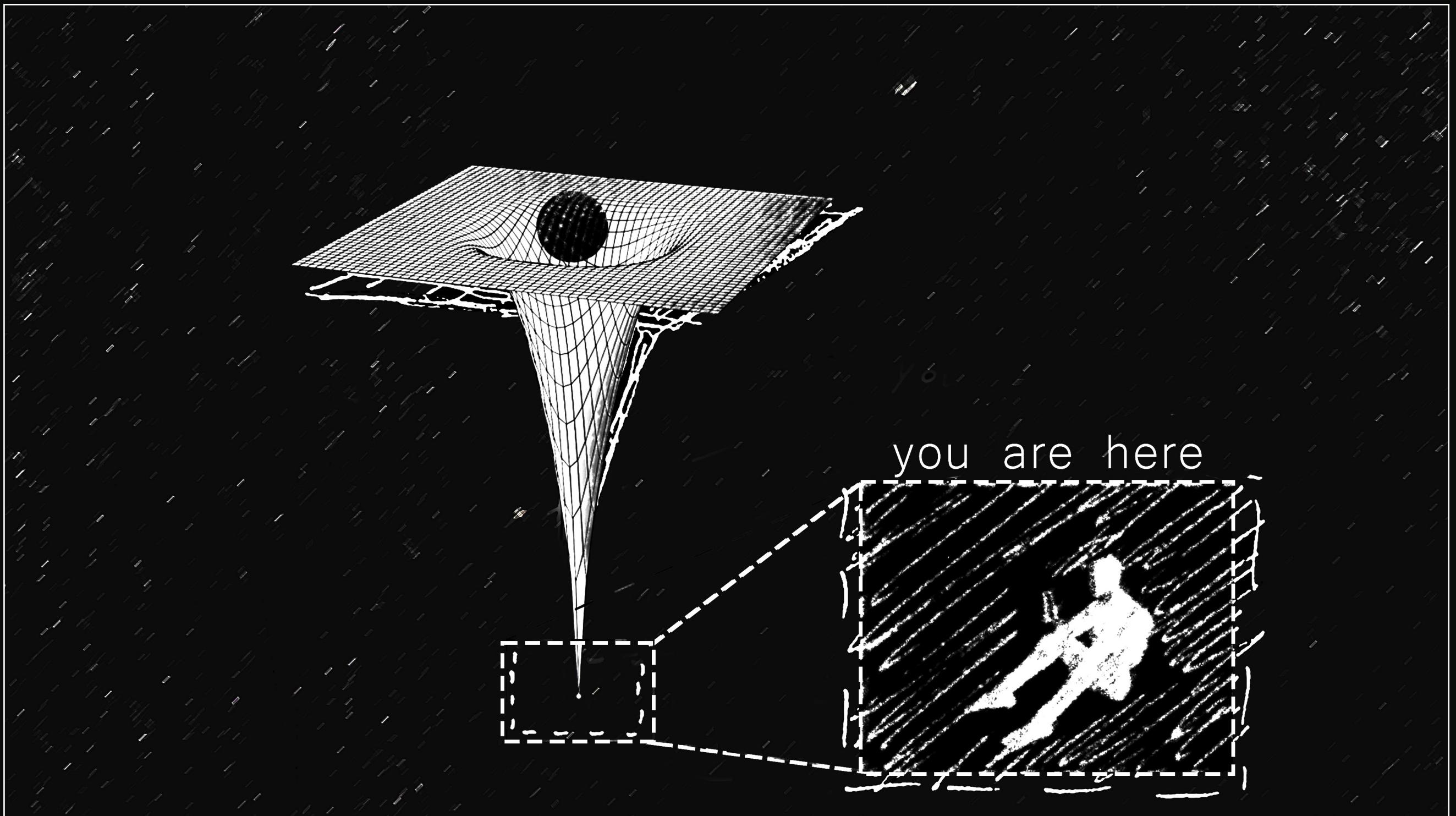
He burst through the window and ambled through the street, his sword operating like a cane. The Paladin stumbled about and coughed black smoke from his lungs. He screamed at the pain all over him and fell to his knees, shoulders slumped. The house burned behind him and silhouetted in the flame was her. She sat in mud as the Wudara slowly poured in, buckets of water helpless against the inferno.

There were no screams or prayers from her lips. Only her mouth working silently through the night. Hands clenched in a death-grip around a blue and yellow rag, half turned to burnt fibers. She was alone now, all that she had consumed in the blaze. His mind came back to him and with it his newly committed sins. A whole family, now a bloody memory. He let the blade fall to the ground, the smell of hot metal wafting up to his nose. It seemed grace would still be a long time coming.

When would he learn that blood and tears are currency for nought?

- **FIN.**





ARTWORK BY CONNOR WRIGHT

FLUORESCENT

written by aw wt

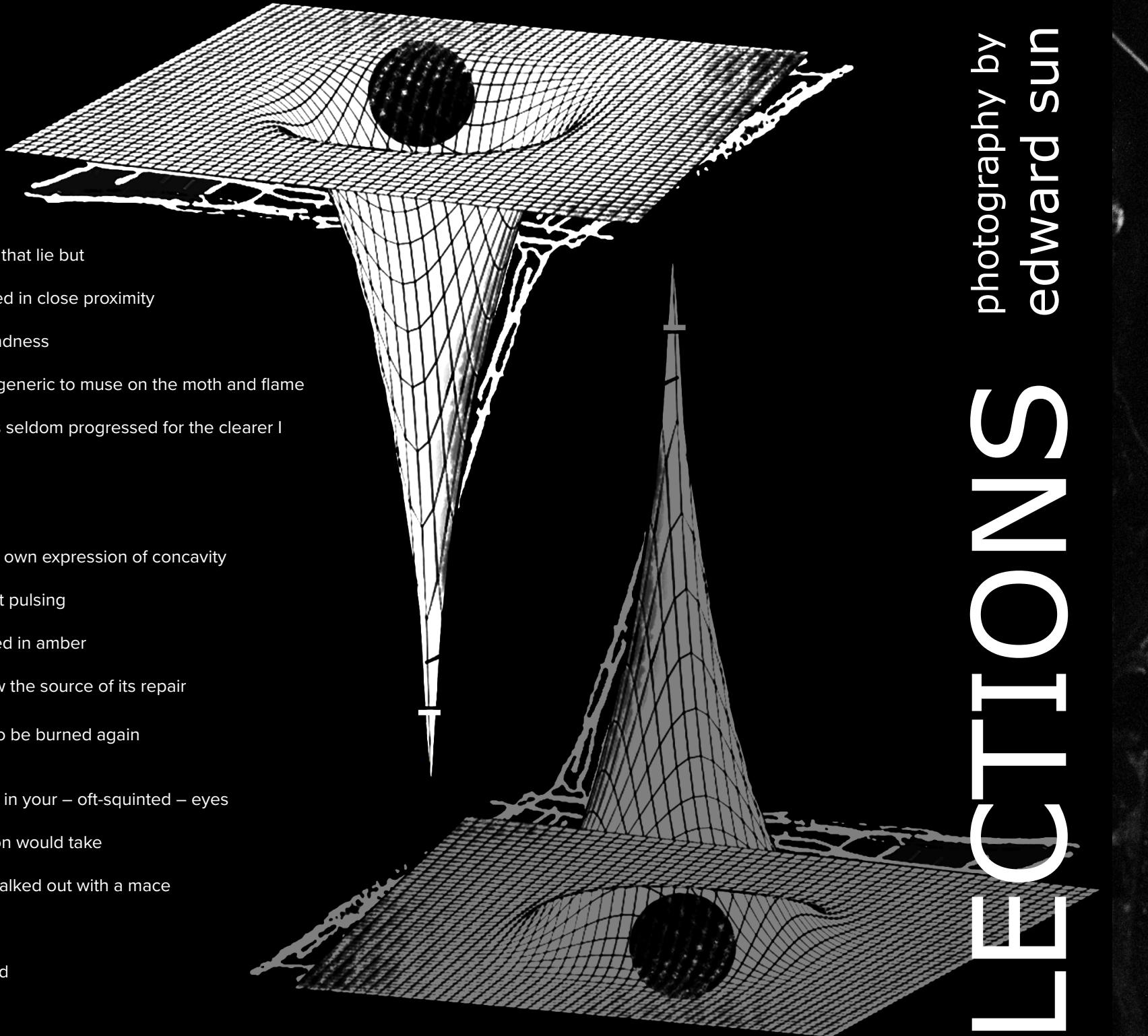
it's not just the lips that lie but
kinesthesia muddled in close proximity
to needles and blindness
would it be overly generic to muse on the moth and flame
with vision that has seldom progressed for the clearer I
but a seeker

Yours

ribcage flexing, my own expression of concavity
breath-baited silent pulsing
yearning crystallized in amber
pretending to know the source of its repair

how can it desire to be burned again

meeting the gleam in your – oft-squinted – eyes
I saw what addiction would take
he had a smile – walked out with a mace
alas
a condemned world
but where
is he who believes in the Devil but not in God



photography by
edward sun

REFLECTIONS





Old Soul, Young Spirit

written by kristin shurney



struggles in art exhibition

photography by yiwen zhao

Time, the one thing that works against me
It can only move forward, so I must, too.

Seen much of the world, yet it's not enough
To satisfy the curiosity in my spirit.

My body may not live too long,
but my soul will transcend.

It will roam the landscape until it
Goes home to the astral plane.

The spirit is nothing short of
ambitious, but the soul is wise nonetheless.

The soul can learn a thing or two,
"Ancora imparo," I suppose.

The spirit has something to guide it,
So it can indulge with no regrets.

Space, the one place that always expands,
Where no limits exist, so I also cannot be.

Let a single moth remind us all
That beauty can be fleeting.

Time, is the one thing that works against me,
Yet, it shall not decide my destiny.

the used bookstore

written by grace osborn



i had a dream you found a new girlfriend
in the used bookstore
we walked inside together
i came out alone
i left for i thought merely a moment
to pluck a volume off the shelf
but when i came back
you have grown old and gray with someone else

me still in my young, thin body
littered with acne scars
mouth agape
when i saw her wrinkly hand in yours



when your eyes met mine
they twinkled
as if tickling an old memory
“well”
you explained,
and i could tell your heart was breaking

“you had been gone so long
i had moved on
i had stopped searching”



ARTWORK BY YUCHAN CHO

BURDEN



Inheritance

written by anon

I visit home and remember that I inherited my mom's thin hair and the way she overthinks the punctuation of every text message.

I have my dad's wild curls that have since gone gray and his gasping laugh, a shriek that consumes the moment.

I have my mom's dark eyebrows and the way she sings when she can't bear the silence that allows her thoughts to be the loudest.

I have my dad's chin and mouth and sarcasm that he uses as a shield to deflect any attempt to reveal his emotions and his square hairline and tendency to hole up in his room to work, forgetting the people in his world exist.

I have my mom's round cheeks that shine like a full moon and a reflection of her dimples when she smiles and her anger that builds up like water in a dam before it overflows, rushing out in a tsunami of sharp words clawing their way into the victim's heart.

I picked up these gifts from being raised in my home but I don't know where or how to put them down because they cling to me even when I've moved away.

V. Growing Up

written by daniel dejune

Once there was a boy who didn't know what he wanted to be.

"So long as it is a doctor, lawyer, or engineer," his father defended, "you can be anything you want — even all three."

So a novelist he became. He was no doctor, lawyer, or engineer, and certainly not all three.

But he wrote stories with words the way a violinist sings songs with strings.

He put his characters in space. With dinosaurs. Into the future. Sometimes he combined all three.

He even wrote about a caryatid. She departed from her timeless perch to console a boy who was lost. No advice she gave, but embraced him and wept together, as the temple fell all around.

The story failed commercially but carry it did.

Janus Split
photography by jasmine hsu

Easy Revenge

let's make treason to the season,
we'll make mounds out of the leaves and
dive into the mountains,
we'll go snorkel in the streets, and
we'll limbo through the garlands,
we'll go surfing in the Tetons
we'll slip n' slide the slaloms,
we'll get lost, and lock our keys in
the car.

written by josh bishop



UNTITLED

photography by ethan moore

A FRIEND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY YIWEN ZHAO



When I awoke, it was cold and bat-dark. My mouth was dry. I crawled over to the bed of my co-conspirator.

“Arthur?”

He wrestled awake with a high arcing “Uggghhheaa.”

Holding hands, we inched across Dead Man’s zone, avoiding the camera against the wall.

We found the light switch. On.

A voice over the camera: “Amelia, Arthur: back to bed. NOW.” Angry dad voice.

We dashed into the nearby closet. I pushed the elevator buttons the way grandma taught me yesterday. Beep – boop boop – beep.

I told Arthur, “When I open the door, we’ll be at the beach.”

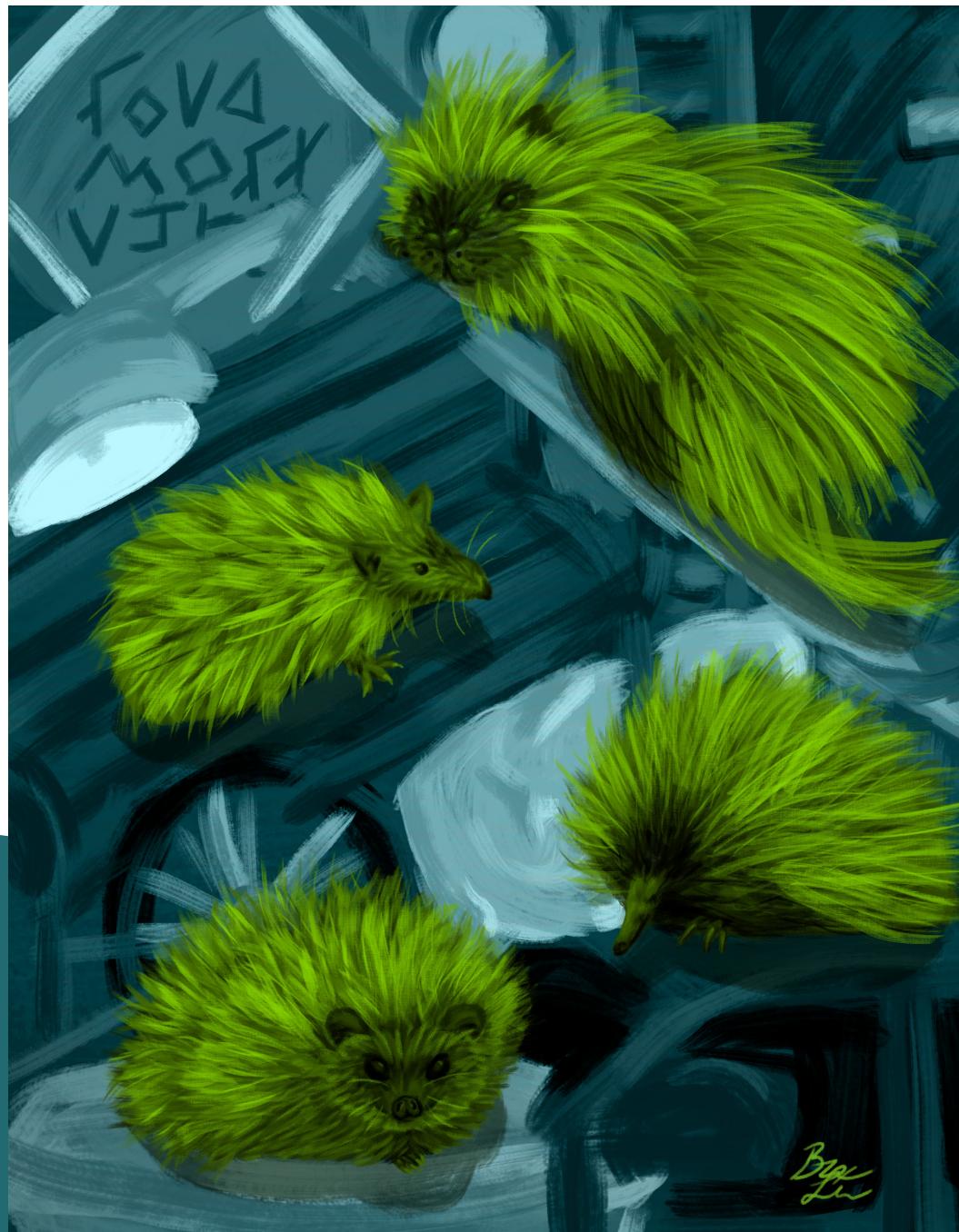
We walked out. The light shined bright. The coarse old carpet curled in between my toes. My ocean blue blanket awaited. My mouth watered. Freedom.

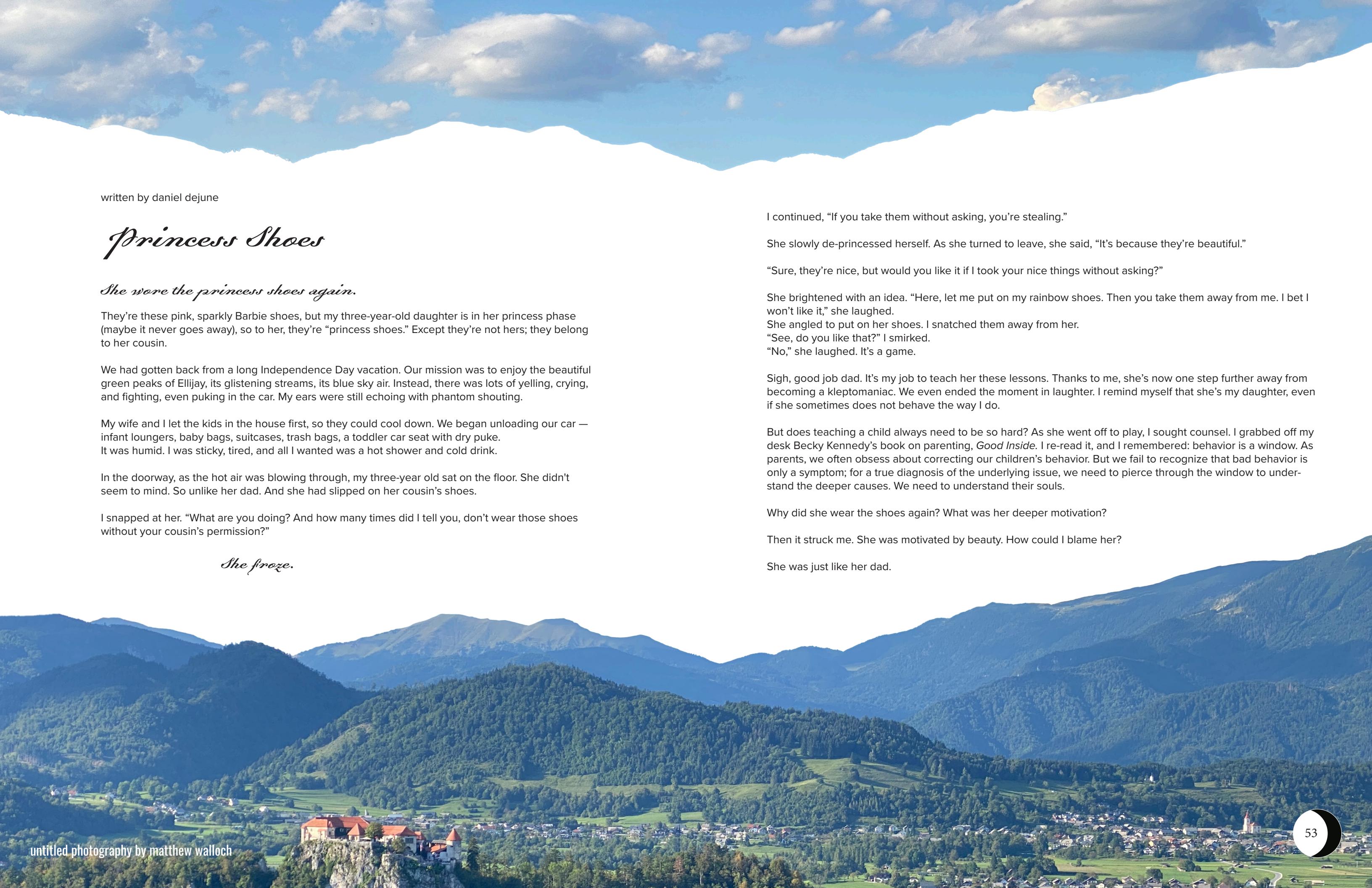
VI. JAILBREAK

WRITTEN BY DANIEL DEJUINE

Convergent Evolution

artwork by brie lindgren





written by daniel dejune

Princess Shoes

She wore the princess shoes again.

They're these pink, sparkly Barbie shoes, but my three-year-old daughter is in her princess phase (maybe it never goes away), so to her, they're "princess shoes." Except they're not hers; they belong to her cousin.

We had gotten back from a long Independence Day vacation. Our mission was to enjoy the beautiful green peaks of Ellijay, its glistening streams, its blue sky air. Instead, there was lots of yelling, crying, and fighting, even puking in the car. My ears were still echoing with phantom shouting.

My wife and I let the kids in the house first, so they could cool down. We began unloading our car — infant loungers, baby bags, suitcases, trash bags, a toddler car seat with dry puke. It was humid. I was sticky, tired, and all I wanted was a hot shower and cold drink.

In the doorway, as the hot air was blowing through, my three-year old sat on the floor. She didn't seem to mind. So unlike her dad. And she had slipped on her cousin's shoes.

I snapped at her. "What are you doing? And how many times did I tell you, don't wear those shoes without your cousin's permission?"

She froze.

I continued, "If you take them without asking, you're stealing."

She slowly de-princessed herself. As she turned to leave, she said, "It's because they're beautiful."

"Sure, they're nice, but would you like it if I took your nice things without asking?"

She brightened with an idea. "Here, let me put on my rainbow shoes. Then you take them away from me. I bet I won't like it," she laughed.

She angled to put on her shoes. I snatched them away from her.

"See, do you like that?" I smirked.

"No," she laughed. It's a game.

Sigh, good job dad. It's my job to teach her these lessons. Thanks to me, she's now one step further away from becoming a kleptomaniac. We even ended the moment in laughter. I remind myself that she's my daughter, even if she sometimes does not behave the way I do.

But does teaching a child always need to be so hard? As she went off to play, I sought counsel. I grabbed off my desk Becky Kennedy's book on parenting, *Good Inside*. I re-read it, and I remembered: behavior is a window. As parents, we often obsess about correcting our children's behavior. But we fail to recognize that bad behavior is only a symptom; for a true diagnosis of the underlying issue, we need to pierce through the window to understand the deeper causes. We need to understand their souls.

Why did she wear the shoes again? What was her deeper motivation?

Then it struck me. She was motivated by beauty. How could I blame her?

She was just like her dad.

Somewhere, someday, I met Dahlia Moreau. Brown eyes more serious than I ever thought a person could be. She used them in such an assessing way to look me up and down and make calculations about the trajectory of our lives. If I was a boat, then she was the crashing waves, deciding our course.

Some might describe our encounter as a meet-cute, demarcated by the oscillations of her life that sent her back and forth between her hometown in rural Virginia, and my hometown where she occasionally found herself when she needed to find work. We'd met on the bay in the way lovers do and stared at the ships coming into the port. She told me later that the way I scrunched my face at the saltwater breeze was amusing and she'd wondered why I was even out there at all if I couldn't stand the sensation. I don't remember what I told her, but it likely had no business being said in that moment.

Something was always on her mind. Dahlia needed a project to ground her, whether that was a design she was tinkering with, or a person. I often wondered what new part of me she had identified to pull apart and put back together.

Sometimes we spent long hours in silence across from one another handling tasks the other only vaguely knew about. Our truly private lives were hidden behind screens but we floated hints just to keep the other interested. When we finally spoke, our lips were concealed by coffee cups with browning stains that dripped onto crumpled napkins.

In some way, we always migrated back to one another. Perhaps it was I who was stuck in her orbit, or her tethered to the place where I could always be found. She became so inseparable from my life experience that whenever I thought of the future, her silhouette was burned there too. There was only her in that moment. There was no "after"

Dahlia Moreau.

My front porch light flickers as moths flutter around its strobing luminescence. The edge of my lips burn with peppermint and the fading taste of something stronger.

Shakespeare once wrote, "Hell is empty, and all the devils are here." I would like to add that they are good hiders, wearing the grins of humans so well.

Ren pulls up a rocker beside me and mutters something about the porch light. I wave his thought away with my hand and gesture for him to come closer so I can rest my head on his shoulder. He smells faintly of lemon and ginger, like the confection we were just baking inside. He's still warm from being by the oven, but I am already cold from the late Fall air. We exchange our body temperatures for a little while until the ding of the oven pulls him back inside.

Ren wants to fix the porch light, but it draws us together in the same spot, the way the oven heat makes our shoulders brush against each other when we fight for its warmth after being outside.

I may not be able to tell the devils from the humans, but I am able to tell when a light doesn't need fixing just yet, or that the first timer you set for the oven won't be your last.

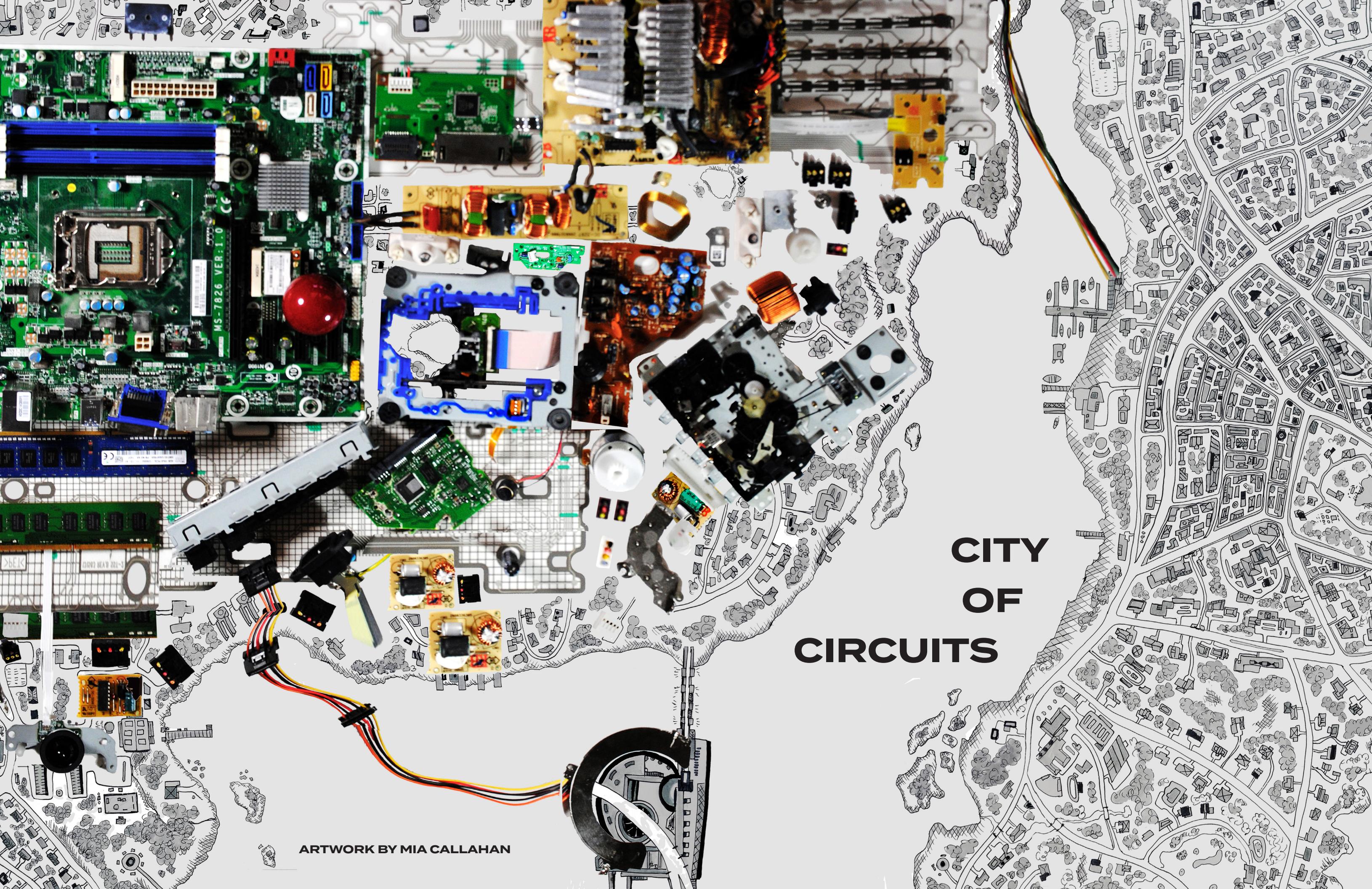
Ren rejoins me outside. "It needs a few more minutes."

I smile and he wraps his arms over my shoulder, draping them around my neck. We breathe in time for just a few more minutes and I let the light flicker, back and forth, intermittent in its beaconing home.

Meetings with a Stranger: Prologue

written by sadie — palmer

Meetings with a Stranger: Epilogue



CITY OF CIRCUITS

ARTWORK BY MIA CALLAHAN

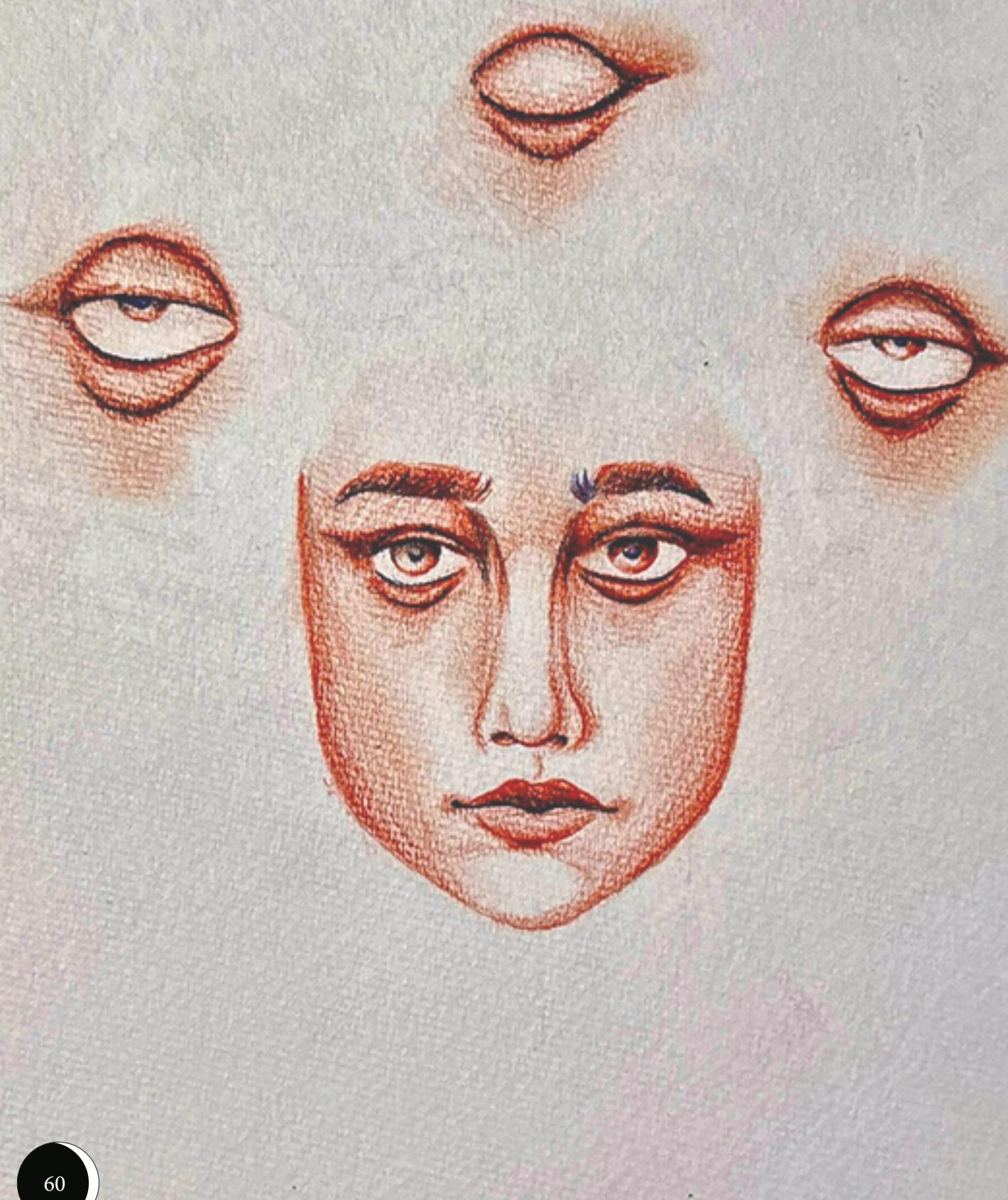


WRITTEN BY AW WT

A DROWNING RECALLED

knapsack, time capsule
flooded resolve
I scream a lost sentence in graphic decimation of soul
I scream a lost sentence in graphic decimation of soul
soul of decimation graphic in sentence lost a scream I
know who I was meant to hold

You had said it's reassuring
the animals – machines –
do not think of death
and at last we are saved from death by robotic thought –
tomorrow, from cyanide poisoning or possibly
bludgeoning via a salt shaker mother owns
for the sake of allegiance
for none to touch and bring sin to the household
I beg apology for wastefulness
I beg apology
this time, too has been suspension
Things have grown wings to become near
and kneel, I...
the thumbs and throes – motion like an unknown
frequency too sentient to be
the wicked in me
has gone now
it has all gone now
the death in me
has packed its knapsack

A surreal illustration featuring a woman's face in the center. Her eyes are large and brown, looking directly forward. She has dark hair and a neutral expression. Surrounding her face are several pairs of lips, some open and some closed, all rendered in a reddish-brown color. The background is a light, textured gray.

1:40 PM

written by
mia callahan

My friend wakes up at 1:40 pm
She does so as I pat her head
She rolls over, a soft "no" escapes her
I have already completed half of my day
She is just getting started

When she finally gets out of bed,
she asks me to leave the room
I see her in a towel, opening the door
ready to shower off last night's thoughts
She comes back and takes the cup of cheerios from my hand
As I pull up my laptop to study

I turn on my speaker
Playing music for us to feel
Something that is full of heart in our little home
I vacuum the floor as the playlist ends

She gets up to go to class
All of her classes are in the afternoon
And she asks to meet in the dining hall soon after
So I walk down with music in my ears
To sit and watch to her nudge at the food

We stroll around and she sings to a random tune
She begins a discussion about a celebrity I don't know
I smile and try to understand, to contribute
As we approach a place to study
Somewhere with open space, the clicking of keyboards,
Coffee, and lots of people strolling by

We head back to the dorm to change and go to the gym
She's gotten me into lifting weights more
The long walk there is filled with a calm silence
So we can prepare to release the day's worries
Just as the walk back is lit by soft streetlights

Before bed I take a shower
She reads from her favorite series
She discusses things that bother her as I lay down
I'm falling asleep as she tries to, but stays on her phone

My friend wakes up at 1:40 pm
She does so as I say her name
She rolls over and becomes quiet
I have already completed half of my day
She is just getting started

When she finally gets out of bed,
She opens up her laptop
Completing another assignment
That has bugged her for the past few days
She asks for some of the popcorn I put in the microwave
As I pull up my laptop to study

I turn on my speaker
Playing music for us to smile to
Something that is full of heart in our little home
I change my outfit to be comfortable

She gets up to go to class
All of her classes are in the afternoon
And she asks to meet in the bigger dining hall soon after
So I walk with her across the road
To sit and watch to her nudge at the food

We stroll around and she tells me about world events
She begins a discussion about a movie I don't know
I smile and try to understand, to contribute
As we approach a place to study
Somewhere with bright lights, the mumbling silence,
Coffee, and not as many people this time

We head back to the dorm to change watch another episode
She's gotten me into a nostalgic series
The show is filled with so many interesting characters
Enough for her to pause and ask my opinions
As I pause to admire the artwork

Closed

artwork by abby creyts

My friend wakes up at 1:40 pm
She does so as I say her name
She rolls over and becomes quiet
I have already completed half of my day
She is just getting started

When she finally gets out of bed,
She opens up her laptop
Completing another assignment
That has bugged her for the past few days
She asks for some of the popcorn I put in the microwave
As I pull up my laptop to study

I turn on my speaker
Playing music for us to smile to
Something that is full of heart
in our little home
I change my outfit to be comfortable

She gets up to go to class
All of her classes are in the afternoon
And she asks to meet in the bigger
dining hall soon after
So I walk with her across the road
To sit and watch to her nudge at the food

We stroll around and she tells me about
world events
She begins a discussion about a movie I don't know
I smile and try to understand, to contribute
As we approach a place to study
Somewhere with bright lights, the mumbling silence,
Coffee, and not as many people this time

We head back to the dorm to watch another episode
She's gotten me into a nostalgic series
The show is filled with so many interesting characters
Enough for her to pause and ask my opinions
As I pause to admire the artwork

Before bed I take a shower
She tells me she wishes she could feel differently
About so many different things
And her anxiety keeps her awake, as I crash into sleep

My friend wakes up at 1:40 pm
She does so as I throw a pillow at her
She rolls over, asking for me to wake her up in 5 minutes
I have already completed half of my day
She is just getting started

When she finally gets out of bed,
she asks me to leave the room
She opens the door and is already in new clothes
To begin something fresh
She asks for one of her granola bars
As I pull up my laptop to study

I turn on my speaker
Playing music for us to laugh at
Something that is full of heart in our little home
I pull off my sheets to clean them

She gets up to go to class
All of her classes are in the afternoon
And she asks to meet in the student center soon after
So I walk there with music in my ears
To sit and eat quality food

We stroll around and she makes a joke
She exclams references from shows I don't know
I smile and try to understand, to contribute
As we approach a place to study
Somewhere with many windows, an abundance of stairs,
Coffee, and no one that we know

We head back to the dorm to change and go to the gym
She's impressed with my arm routine
The long walk there is filled with a calm silence
So we can prepare to release the day's worries
Just as the walk back is lit by soft streetlights

Before bed I take a shower
She reads on her phone
She laughs at something as I rub lotion on my face
We continue to talk and I know I will be sleeping in
tomorrow
This is my routine with her,
and I don't want these days to end.

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