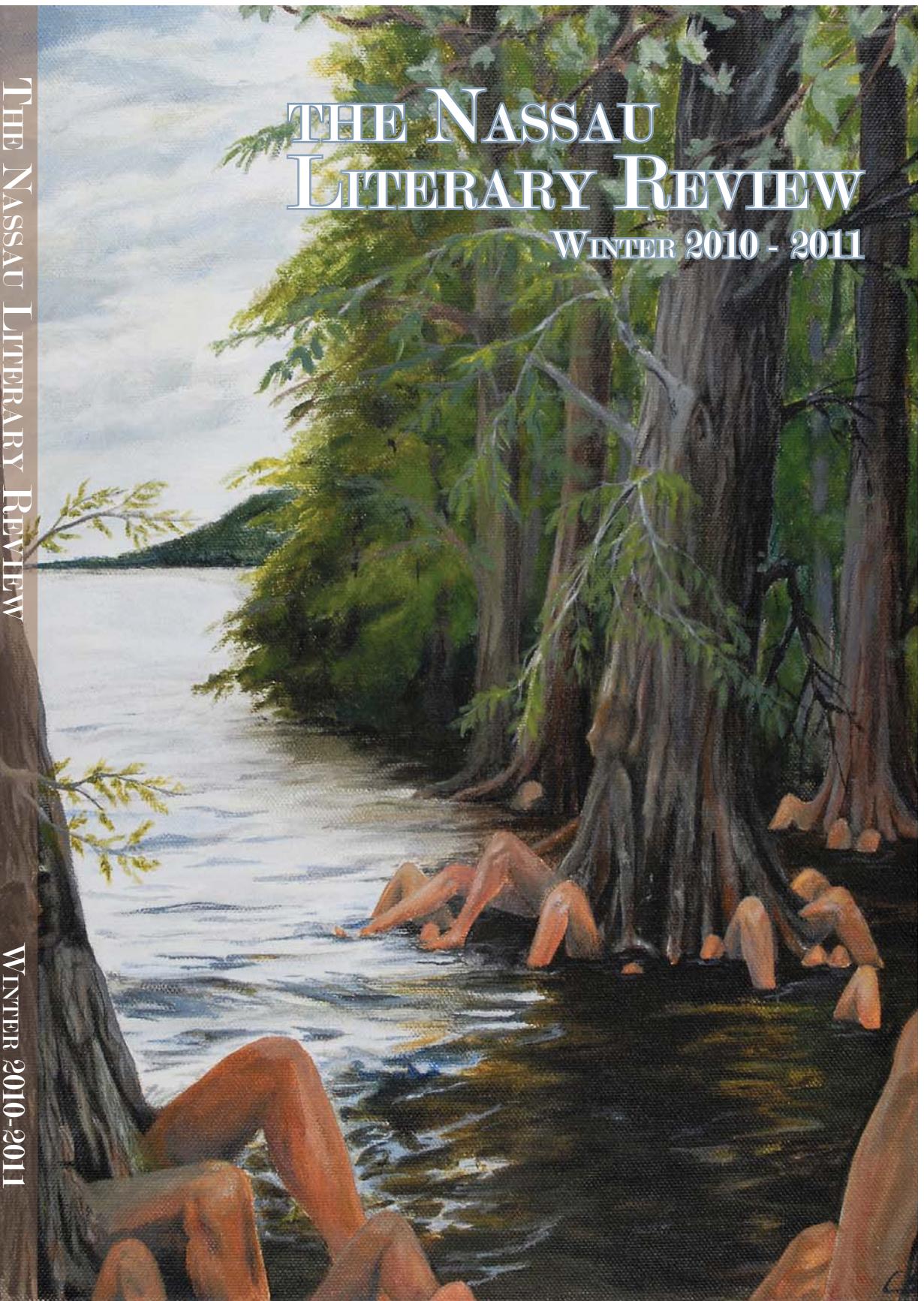


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THE NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

WINTER 2010-2011

THE NASSAU  
LITERARY REVIEW  
WINTER 2010 - 2011



# THE NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

## WINTER 2010 - 2011

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## To Our Readers

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*“What we leave here is more than this class; it’s the whole heritage of youth. We’re just one generation—we’re breaking all the links that seemed to bind us here to top-booted and high-stocked generations. . . .”*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*

Years after his own departure from Princeton, F. Scott Fitzgerald ’17 reflected on the relationship between the university’s storied past and its students’ future. As his characters Amory and Tom wander through campus on their last night at Princeton, they find the grounds alive and crowded with ghosts, shades “of all the gorgeous youth that has rioted through here in two hundred years.” Even as they acknowledge the legacy of their illustrious predecessors, they nevertheless recognize the necessity of forging a dynamic future of their own.

As we at the *Nassau Literary Review* look back on the magazine’s 168 years of history, we too find ourselves revisiting the voices of the past. The work of alumni like Fitzgerald continues to inspire our current vision as we seek out the new voices that may someday represent our generation: we strive to leave this university as more than just a class, to give voice to the whole heritage of this gorgeous youth. The *Review* remains an important part of the Princeton artistic tradition, showcasing the finest work of student writers, poets, and artists.

Reading the works of our classmates almost one century later, we continue to be impressed by the creativity and artistry that arise from these grounds. This issue, we have turned our focus to the youngest year of Princetonians, the Class of 2014, for our centerpiece. We have not been disappointed. For as remarkable as Princeton’s history has been, the writing that we have been privileged to publish from this year’s class persuades us that the future is even more luminous. Though our years may be brief on this side of paradise, this one generation promises to break all the links.

Yours,

Ting Gou, Jessica Yao, & Stephanie Tam

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# Natasha Japanwala

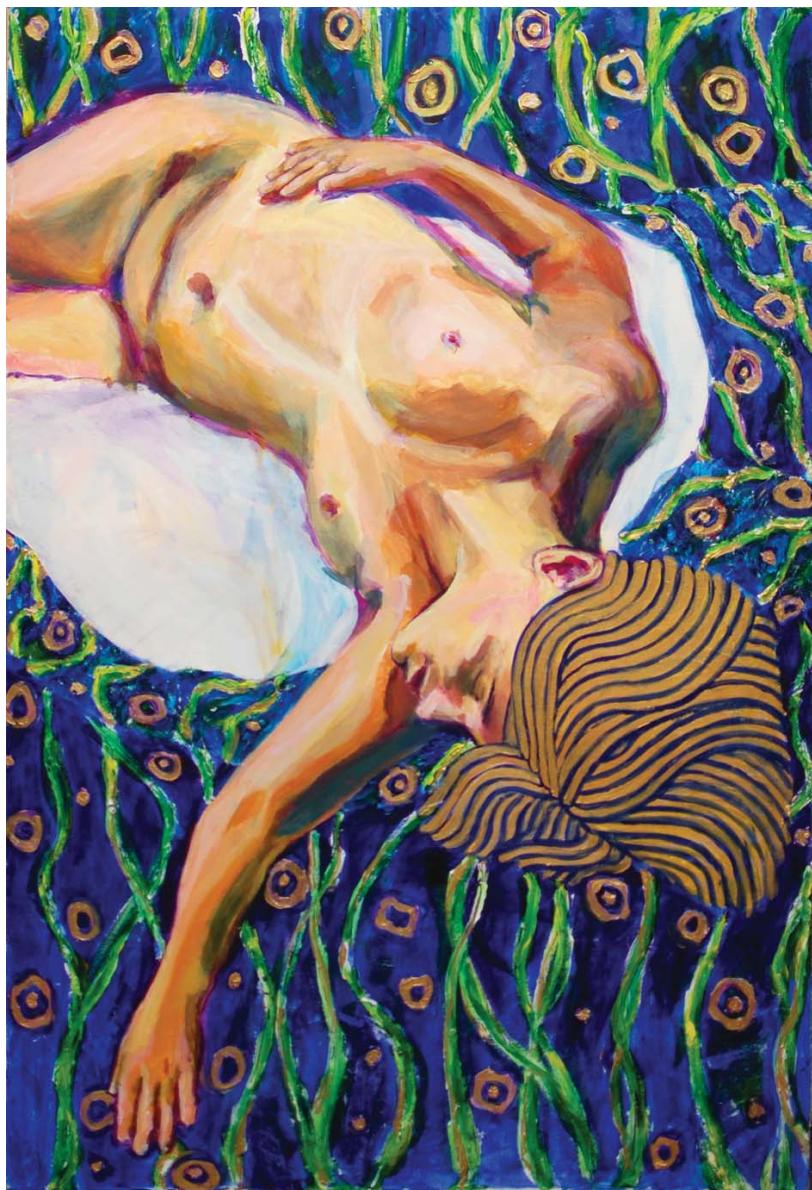
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## *Burning Buses*

He saw colors, flashing paintings of lions, women with bodies not proportioned, and words not written in sequence; letters not belonging to any known language. He smiled at the rusted bells ringing from the broken windows, the thickness of the double tires—

when he struck that match, the bus roared to life, it yelled and shrieked and stamped its metal framework feet on the liquidized gravel. All over again, it was another headline, in black and white, another strike, another day of schools shutting their doors, offices twisting in their blinds.

Three days later, the ashes were swept in a half-hearted breath, the traffic lights left functioning again. Nobody knew what to do with the heaviness of a womb; membranes spread out in layers of grey grit.



**Untitled, PAINTING**  
Alice Zheng

# Matthew Brailas

---

## *Backpacking in Oregon*

The third day  
alone is always the hardest.  
At dusk he hears the sound  
of water, and follows it to a stream, brittle with frost.  
When he was seven he had lost himself

in the woods for four days.  
Stumbled into a cluster of blackberry bushes.  
Stuffed sticky fistfuls into his mouth, and  
vomited until dawn, a substance black as petroleum.  
The search and rescue team found him  
floating face up in a pond, mouth full of bark,  
his feet swollen into bloody potatoes. Through fever-dream  
he watched them, their many-eyed faces  
bright as still water, and he  
fell asleep in their arms.

A breeze freezes the sweat in his hair.  
He pulls up a slick handful of algae  
and rubs it over his cuts.  
He drinks the water, unboiled.  
Then he unbuttons his shirt, wades in  
and waits, patiently,  
for the stream to gulp him down,  
to sink into a belly  
cold with stars and the night  
unfurling before him:

the cracked streetlamps the fields  
dark with peonies  
the florist with tobacco-stained fingers  
the old man who wants to die in a public place  
the boys who wrap their keys around their knuckles  
and the pretty  
Argentinean girl they dumped  
bleeding on the steps of the hospital

a note pinned to her skirt  
frantically apologizing for everything.

He would look over this wriggling landscape  
and for an instant, would know it by name  
before being spat out again,  
naked, dewy  
blinking wildly against the furious light of day.



**Lights, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH**

Nathan Tyrell



**View from the Top, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH**

Rebecca Kagle

# Maia ten Brink

---

## *Paris Sometime Ago*

“We, of then, now are no longer the same”  
— Pablo Neruda

Under my linen shirt Bill Evans  
shivers me  
I skitter apart  
like the rays of the cymbal sun

never hook fitting into eye  
nor thigh  
against thigh  
Even lovemaking  
is a grinding together of stones

I slide slow to the vinegar horn  
kiss along the fluttering muscle of the Seine

Do we own each other any more?  
Or simply wish for dark again  
when the lights come up at the end of the film?

# Marissa Lee

---

## *In Exile*

Leticia was still fat. Her girth was the first thing Whitney had noticed about her, back in the third grade. Their teacher liked to switch around the children's seats every two months. Whitney and Leticia sat next to each other for November and December of 1997. It was ironic, then, that Whitney received Leticia's Facebook friend request the first week of December, about the same time that they had stopped being friends twelve years ago.

Whitney stared at the screen of her MacBook and wondered whether or not she should click accept or decline. Viewing the grainy photo that Leticia had probably taken with her camera phone, Whitney could not help but grate her teeth. The picture that accompanied the request featured a chubby Leticia with shiny lips and a bad weave. She held a baby in her arms. Whitney studied the child and sighed. During the final weeks of the summer before her senior year in high school, Whitney's car broke down and she had to take the bus from Hyde Park to her private calculus tutoring sessions at the Latin School. One afternoon, Whitney saw a girl on the bus with two children. The girl held a baby, and a little boy sat in the seat next to her. Whitney had prayed that the infant and the boy were only that girl's cousins, but remained unfazed when the boy called the girl "Mama." There was nothing else to do but look down and away.

Whitney exited Firefox. She closed her laptop and walked to the bathroom to finish getting ready for the evening. Whitney did not have to make the decision today. She could let Leticia's friend request sit in Facebook purgatory for weeks, even months.

When Whitney got in front of the bathroom mirror she puffed out her stomach. She did not think of herself as skinny, but knew that she was not nearly as fat as Leticia, or a pregnant woman. She rubbed her hands over her extended stomach, thinking about how she and her boyfriend, Eric, had agreed on Whitney getting an abortion if she ever got pregnant. Not that they weren't safe. Whitney was on the pill, they always used condoms and she even had a fertility calendar. She had once suggested to Eric that they have sex without a condom. Even though Whitney had

just finished her period, he refused. Eric said that one in a hundred women got pregnant each year when they were on the pill and taking it as directed. He looked her dead in the eye and asked, “Do you want to be one in a hundred?” Whitney let the issue go. She wanted to get her MBA, and Eric planned on becoming a doctor. Neither would have the time to have children until after thirty, and there was no point in carelessly jumpstarting the process in a relationship that probably would not last past graduation.

Whitney turned to face the mirror and began to touch up her hair. It was chemically relaxed and reached down to her shoulders. Her mother had never allowed her to get a weave, even though in a lot of cases it would have been easier. Her mother also never braided her hair into a million tiny braids, clipping them off at the end with plastic, or decorating them with beads. Whitney’s mother fired her daughter’s nanny after she came home from work one day and saw that the woman had covered her child’s head in braids and barrettes. Whitney’s mother would instead blow dry her daughter’s hair and then put it in two French braids, one on each side of her head. When she got old enough, Whitney got her hair relaxed once every ten weeks and a wash and set every two. Now that she was in college, Whitney often waited three months to get her hair relaxed and learned how to wash and set it herself.

A lot of the girls on campus had suddenly chopped off all of their hair last fall in a deluge of “going natural.” She had once heard a table of them talking about how much easier it was to function since they no longer had to wrap their hair at night. Whitney thought that some of the girls could pull it off, but others definitely could not. She pulled her hair back tight and studied the image in the mirror. Whitney could not pull it off.

She continued to get ready, putting on her makeup and then the four-karat diamond earrings her grandmother had gotten for her for Christmas. When she heard a knock at the door of her dorm room she waited a moment before answering it. She knew it was Eric. They were going out to dinner, one of the few times they would see each other during finals.

She opened the door so that Eric could let himself in, but then turned back around to finish up in the bathroom. Eric followed her and sat down on the toilet. He was wearing khakis, a white collared shirt and a blue blazer. He had thrown his coat on Whitney’s bed. Eric watched his girlfriend for a moment and then ran his right hand through his dirty blonde hair.

“You look tired,” he said.

Whitney threw the sponge she was using to apply the last of her blush at Eric’s head.

“Thanks! It’s not like its finals or anything.”

“But you still look good.”

Eric reached forward; his hand touched her knee and then slide up her thigh.

She batted it away and he grinned like a mischievous child. Whitney got a new sponge from her makeup bag on the counter and turned back to the mirror.

"I got a Facebook friend request today," she said. "It was from a girl I went to grade school with. She has a baby now."

Whitney did not want to tell Eric that the girl's name was Leticia.

"That's not that shocking," he said.

Whitney stiffened. She felt defensive, but tried to keep her voice even.

"How so?"

"I read somewhere that nearly four out of every ten births is to an unmarried woman these days. The trend is being driven by women in their twenties and thirties, so it's not that weird for you to know someone who's had a kid."

Eric stood up and stretched, puffing his chest out. He was six feet tall, a Viking. Whitney observed him for a moment and then relaxed when she realized that she had not told him that Leticia was black.

"A few of my Facebook friends have babies," he said. "Whatever. The important thing is that you don't."

He poked her in the stomach with his pointer finger, but did not move it away. The rest of his hand followed his finger and he slid it around her waist, pulling her close. He bent down to kiss Whitney on the lips and then moved to her neck, pushing her against the bathroom wall.

"You wanna go make some babies, boy?"

Whitney rolled her own eyes at her absurd attempt at a Southern accent as she slapped Eric on the ass. He pulled away from her for a moment, smiling, but still serious.

"You're not funny."

Whitney turned off her iPhone. She was in the airport and would not be able to use it on the plane anyway. She had checked the weather, but avoided Facebook. She would just feel compelled to stare at her friend request tab. Whitney stashed her phone in the tiny compartment on the side of her carry-on bag. Her mother had told her not to worry about the extra charge for luggage, but Whitney had plenty of clothes and shampoo at home, so she felt no need to bring the monster suitcase she normally reserved for international travel.

The airline personnel standing behind the counter at the gate announced over the loudspeaker that they would begin boarding the plane soon. Whitney breathed a sigh of relief. They had already been delayed for two hours because of the snow back in Chicago, but she assumed that it must have let up. When she stood to stretch and prepare to board, angry chatter erupted behind her. She glanced back and saw that two little white girls had begun to fight over a pencil. Whitney pursed her lips and sat back down. She damned the children's parents for not having brought an additional writing utensil. The airline employee behind the counter then announced that she

was sorry ladies and gentlemen but that it was a false alarm and we actually have another hour to go. The argument behind her intensified, and Whitney bent her head down to pinch the spot on her nose directly between her eyes.

Her friendship with Leticia had ended over a pencil. It had not been the catalyst for the demise of their friendship, just the last straw. Whitney had no expectations when she learned that she and Leticia would be sitting next to each other—becoming friends just happened. Whitney liked to chatter during the times when the class was rowdy, like right before dismissal to lunch or after recess, and Leticia would intently listen to whatever Whitney wanted to talk about, from how much she liked the gold stars that the teacher gave out to students when they did well on their homework to the Spice Girls.

It did not take long for Leticia to begin to sit at Whitney's lunch table. All of Whitney's friends were white, except for another black girl, Elizabeth, and everyone brought their lunches with them to school in a brown paper bag covered in stickers or a special lunch box with a cooler inside. They all had the crusts of their sandwiches cut off, sliced apples, homemade chocolate chip cookies and notes from mommy. Leticia qualified for the government-sponsored hot lunch and would meet them at the table a few minutes after they had sat down with her faded mustard-yellow tray. The school was one of the best magnets in the city, and since it was a lottery to get in, no tests required, the student population varied. The children of investment bankers ate with kids whose parents cleaned the bathrooms at the JPMorgan Chase Chicago headquarters.

After lunches already tinted with preteen cattiness to come, the girls would rush out to the playground for a game of Rescue Rangers. The game involved first going to the "headquarters" of the Rescue Rangers, the new green jungle gym. One girl would then go somewhere else on the playground and get herself in a dangerous situation that would require rescuing, such as being stuck on a giant cliff otherwise known as the slide. This was the most sought-after position in the game. They often spent half of recess fighting over the fact that Elizabeth got to get rescued yesterday and they did not even understand why she was even asking to go again and give somebody else a turn, please. Sometimes Whitney joined in the arguing, other times she would inspect the plastic barrettes in Leticia's hair while they sat on the woodchips beneath the jungle gym. The rescuers would then get a phone call saying that someone had to be rescued and they would run and save the girl from certain disaster. Most days they were lucky if they got three rounds in.

Whitney got up and decided to explore the terminal for a bit. She could not stand to hear the children fight anymore. She was sure to bring her suitcase with her; she did not feel like being strip searched just because some nervous passenger saw her bag unattended. As she walked through the airport, tired passengers shuffled by her, drained by delays. Whitney ended up in Borders and headed for the fiction section. There was nothing good, only bestsellers. She would have to wait till she was

postmenopausal and liked the taste of red wine to buy a Danielle Steele novel. She turned to the nonfiction section and settled on a memoir.

Whitney went to the register to pay, happy that she could use cash instead of her card. She had extra with her because she always felt nervous traveling without at least fifty dollars, in case of a disaster. She also felt like she was spending real money when she used cash. The card did not even register in her brain. She could not visualize her credit card statement, but she could see the cashier putting her twenty into the cash register and giving her back five dollars and forty seven cents.

Whitney's first purchase with more than just the pocket change her father gave her for candy bars had occurred in the third grade. It was a stick of roll-on perfume. She and her mother had been in Target the Saturday after Whitney's birthday. Her Aunt Stephanie had sent her ten dollars in a card with Disney's Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* on the cover. Whitney liked Belle the best of the Disney princesses, because she was smart and read books. Whitney felt like they spent hours in Target looking at boring things like gardening tools and skillets, but when her mother entered the makeup section to get a new tube of mascara, Whitney saw the object she had been looking for her whole entire life.

She found the perfume in the Smackers section. It had always been her favorite to look at because there were a million different flavors, from cotton candy to Dr. Pepper. Whenever Whitney even glanced at the lipsticks her mother would tell her that she was too young to put "rouge" on her lips, but she could stare at the Smackers for as long as she wanted. The perfume caught Whitney's eye because it did not look like anything else she had seen, except maybe deodorant, which she wasn't allowed to wear yet. There were only three types: blue, pink and green. The blue was a sea mist; pink was cherry blossom and green was cucumber. The packaging was also very plain. It had a few flowers on the label, but no sparkles like many of the lip balms and glosses.

Whitney figured that the plain label and lack of variety was a sign of sophistication. Maybe it was something teenagers liked to use. Older girls never wore super glittery clothing. As Whitney studied the perfumes she glanced to check that her mother was engrossed by the mascara and then opened each thick tube for a sniff. Her mother had always told Whitney to never open products in stores because it was rude and only people in the dollar store did that, but Whitney could not help herself. Inside, the perfume almost looked like colored ChapStick. The cucumber was yucky and the cherry blossom strong. She liked the cherry blossom, but almost could not smell the sea mist. She picked up the blue tube and brought it over to her mother.

"I think I know what I want to get with my birthday money," Whitney said.

"What?"

"This."

She presented it to her mother, trying to keep her face calm.

"What is this? Where did you get this?"

"Over there," Whitney said as she pointed to the Smackers.

Her mother turned the tube over in her hands, reading the overzealous product description on the back with narrowed eyes.

"Whitney, do you really want to get this? With your birthday money?"

"Yes! It's cool and it was in the Smackers and that's for little girls and it's not even lip gloss or anything. It doesn't smell at all!"

"How do you know what it smells like?"

"Well, sea mist-type stuff never smells a lot."

Whitney's mother scrutinized her daughter for a moment and then looked at the package in her hand. Whitney's eyes got wide and she just knew that she was about to get in trouble and getting in trouble meant "no."

"If you want to spend your money on this, go ahead. It's your birthday money," her mother said.

"I will."

Whitney thanked the Borders cashier and left the store with her book in her hand. She had refused a plastic bag; the diesel fuel in the plane she was about to take would do enough damage to the environment for one day. Whitney continued her aimless trek through the terminal, shuffling her feet.

When she had gone to school the Monday after buying her beloved tube of perfume, she had entered her classroom with more of a strut than a walk. All morning, she kept on glancing at it in her desk. The desks were boxes with one opening on the side facing a student's body, so that they could reach directly in and grab their things. Whitney kept the tube on the right side of the opening, so that if she moved her head to the side she could see it.

At recess Whitney showed all of her friends the perfume and told them how she had bought it with her own with her birthday money. Everyone was impressed and forgot all about Rescue Rangers. They all wanted to try some and Whitney let them, because she did not want to look mean, but they could only use a little. When Whitney got home that night she wanted to put the tube in a special spot on her dresser, but found that it was not in her backpack. She figured that she had left it in her desk at school. Whitney did not tell her mother about leaving it, because she knew that she would make fun. When Whitney arrived at school the next day and saw that the perfume had disappeared from her desk, she was especially thankful that she hadn't said anything to her mom.

Before class started Whitney checked in the lost and found and her cubby in the closet. Nothing. She looked all around her desk and even under the nearby radiator. She was about to give up when she noticed a tube in Leticia's desk. It was the same color blue and size as Whitney's, only without a label.

"Leticia, what's that in your desk?"

Whitney could feel her heart pounding.

"What?"

"That," Whitney said.

She pointed at the tube, but she did not touch it. No one was ever supposed to go inside another student's desk.

"My mama got it for me yesterday," Leticia said.

"It looks a lot like mine."

"Well it ain't. Mine is different. It don't have the same label as yours."

After the three hour delay, Whitney's plane finally left for Chicago. When she arrived in O'Hare the first thing she did was to rush to the bathroom. Whitney was not scared of much; she had killed plenty of spiders for Eric, but was somehow afraid of getting locked in an airplane bathroom. She always refused the drinks offered by the flight attendants. The chemical smell of airplane bathrooms had always made her want to vomit.

As the escalator to the baggage claim inched downward Whitney could see her mother waiting for her in a white parka. Whitney's mother was fond of white coats and jackets, and her daughter could never understand how she kept them all so clean. Whitney explained to her mother that she had not brought any luggage, and her mother just smiled at her knowingly. As the two walked to the car her mother complained about her Reynaud's and told Whitney about how her father had done nothing today but sit on the couch and watch the History Channel and that she was making crème brûlée for dessert tonight and eggs Benedict for breakfast tomorrow because she knew that they were Whitney's favorites.

On the ride to their house Whitney looked out of the car window while the radio played NPR. Whenever she came home she had a true appreciation for how flat and gray the Midwest could be, though it somehow made her love Chicago all the more. The bare trees scrapped an equally barren sky. The only color was on a moving billboard that Whitney was sure had advertised Miller Light for as long as she could remember. They drove past downtown with its blue and black glass buildings and once they got further south on the Dan Ryan Expressway Whitney could see one of the former public housing projects, Dearborn Homes, currently undergoing gentrification. It used to stretch for over a mile, but now went from Twenty-sixth to Thirty-first Street. Some of Dearborn Homes' former inhabitants were lucky enough to land in mixed income housing, but many became internally displaced and ended up moving out to the suburbs. Once the walls had been knocked down between the apartments to form more spacious living arrangements, the yuppies would move in.

Whitney had never learned where Leticia lived. They might have dreamed up a playdate if Leticia had not stolen her perfume, but she no longer took much of an interest in Leticia after that. During Rescue Rangers Whitney just ignored Leticia, who never got involved in their arguments, and focused on her other friends. Whitney had brought Leticia in and she could kick her out. She did not even notice when Elizabeth did not invite Leticia to her birthday party. It was a tea party in the

Walnut Room at Marshall Fields. Elizabeth's mother had reserved two tables so the girls could talk at one and the mothers at the other. The girls all wore pastel colored dresses under white or beige colored sweaters. It was the first time Whitney ever had crème brûlée. At the end of the party Elizabeth's mother gave her daughter goody bags to hand out and amongst the Starbursts and plastic clip-on earrings was a creamy pink pencil with "Elizabeth's 9th Birthday at the Walnut Room" engraved on the side in gold.

By the time Whitney got home that evening she had already lost one of the earrings. She made sure to sharpen the pencil—not in the plastic sharpener her mother had bought her from Walgreens, but in the old metal sharpener with the crank that sat on her father's desk. He had had it since high school and it always made the best points. When she brought the pencil to school with her on Monday she did not use it. She just left it in the indent on the inside of the desk meant to hold rulers and pens. She placed it so that the side that read "Elizabeth's 9<sup>th</sup> Birthday at the Walnut Room" would face up.

Whitney should have known better than to leave the pencil in her desk overnight, but she had already begun erase Leticia from her world. The following day when her pencil was gone Whitney knew where to look. When the teacher had dismissed everyone for lunch, she lingered for a moment and then peeked inside of Leticia's desk. A creamy pink pencil sat within the indent, which was the same in all the desks. Whitney broke the cardinal rule of touching another student's things and reached inside to bring out the pencil and examine it. She turned it over in her hands and saw that in the exact same place that should have read "Elizabeth's 9th Birthday at the Walnut Room," something had been scraped off. Whitney ran a finger over the now uneven wood.

Whitney's mother told her daughter that she would just drop her off at the house because she had to run and pick up an ottoman that had just been reupholstered. Her mother thought that she would bring her home first because Whitney looked exhausted and could do with some lunch. When she entered the house it was silent.

She did not bother taking her bag upstairs, instead leaving it in the front hall where it was sure to annoy her mother. She plopped her coat on top of the bag just for kicks and headed to the kitchen. Whitney opened the refrigerator and peered inside. She reached for the loaf of bread, but then stopped. She would wait till someone came home. Whitney did not like to eat alone.

It was the thing she missed most about being a kid. In elementary school she always ate at a long lunch table filled with other girls, and, as they got closer to high school, sometimes boys. The people around her did not vary that much from second to eighth grade; Leticia's exile had been one of the more obvious changes. After Whitney had examined her wounded pencil, she put it back in

Leticia's desk and went to lunch. When she arrived in the cafeteria the only spot left open was next to the thief, and there was no way she could sit there. Whitney whispered the story into Elizabeth's ear and she passed the message down to the rest of the table. Everyone scooted away from Leticia, making room for Whitney elsewhere.

When the girls got up from the lunch table to throw away their trash Leticia tried to come with them, but Whitney told her that she was no longer allowed. Leticia trailed behind them as they walked outside. As they arrived on the playground, about to head for the green jungle gym, Whitney glanced behind her and noticed that Leticia was walking in the gap between Whitney and her friends and the black kids whom Leticia had been friends with before she changed lunch tables.

"Watch this," Whitney said to her friends.

They all stopped and turned around. Whitney looked Leticia in the eye.

"Bitch!"

It was the first time Whitney had ever cursed. Her friends giggled. They turned back around and ran off to play.

During the first week of winter break Whitney walked up Michigan Avenue, heading toward Starbucks. After she and some of her high school friends met up for coffee, they would go Christmas shopping. Whitney pushed through the slow-moving hordes, not because she was cold, but because she was in a bad mood. She had arrived downtown an hour and a half early so she could look for a gift for Claire, one of the friends whom she would meet that day, in Sephora. Claire's birthday was on December 27, and Whitney always tried to get her something nice because everyone always forgot about her between Christmas and New Year's. But Eric called before Whitney could even make it past the first display, and they got embroiled in a heated discussion. She always hated talking politics with him on the cell phone because she could not read his body language, which made her unsure if her reactions to his statements were justified.

Eric was an ardent Republican, though he hated Michael Steele and Fox News, and Whitney was a passive Democrat who never had the heart to fight Chicago's machine. Eric was not racist, though Whitney had an unfair paranoia that maybe he was, which had made their conversation about "identity" politics especially unnerving.

As Whitney walked into the Starbucks she could not help but notice the homeless man seated near the doorway. He was wearing a faded coat with several sweatshirts underneath and had taken shelter from the snow under the metal awning that spanned the entrance. The man was shaking an empty venti coffee cup at customers and other passersby. Whitney could hear the chime of the coins inside. He dutifully shook his cup at her and she dutifully ignored him.

Homeless people, especially the black ones, made Whitney feel uncomfortable,

guilty and irked all at the same time.

Whitney ordered a plain cup of coffee and was thankful that there was not a long line. She took her drink to the only seat available, by the window. When she sat down she understood why it was empty. The glass offered no insulation from the cold, or from the image of the homeless man leaning up against the side of the building. Whitney decided to wipe the crumbs off her table, one by one.

She felt a gust of cold air rush at her from the front door and looked in its direction, hoping to see Claire, Avery, or Emma. It was a couple. She groaned and decided to text Avery to see how much longer she would have to wait. Avery was the responsible one. She actually answered her texts. Just as Whitney unlocked her iPhone, she felt another draft. She looked up and saw a chubby black woman enter the Starbucks. Whitney heard the homeless man blessing her as she walked inside. She must have given him some change.

The woman was wearing a navy beanie and a Chicago Bears coat. She pushed a child bundled up in a stroller. Whitney studied the woman as she got on line and ordered herself a hot chocolate. She watched as the woman moved over to counter where the barista would drop off her order and then loosened the scarf tied around the child's neck. The woman had her back to Whitney, but turned around as if she had felt someone staring at her. They made eye contact.

"Leticia?"

She smiled upon hearing her name.

"Hey, girl."

Whitney got up, coffee in hand, and crossed the room. She and Leticia embraced, lightly, sticking out their back ends to minimize contact. Leticia grabbed her cup and the two of them moved over to the counter with the milk and stirrers. Whitney began to talk as Leticia added sugar to her drink.

"How are you doing? It's been a while."

Whitney and Leticia never ran in the same circles after those two months in the third grade. When they ended up in the same social studies class or lab group, Whitney was always polite, but never cordial. By the time they got to graduation they were able to do the obligatory hug, but since then Whitney hadn't thought of Leticia, at least until the last couple of weeks.

"It's been forever. I'm doing aight. Hustlin'. Going Christmas shopping. When you get older, the holidays ain't the same."

Whitney smiled and nodded in agreement. She noticed that the boy in the stroller was asleep.

"I'm going Christmas shopping too. Some of my friends should be arriving soon."

"Cool. So what are you doing now? Are you in college?"

"Yes, I'm on winter break." Whitney did not want to say where she went to school. She bent down to coo over the child and change the subject. "Is this your

son? He's very handsome."

Leticia wrinkled her nose.

"I mean, at least from what I can see. He's all bundled up!"

"This is my baby cousin."

Whitney took a deep sip of her coffee. She looked elsewhere.

"Why would someone my age have a kid?"

"I'm sorry, okay? I didn't know."

"Ain't no need to apologize."

The couple that had let the draft in before had begun to stare at them.

"Well, you two do look alike."

"Right. And any baby that looks a little bit like me is mine?"

"Screw you, Leticia. You're pushing a kid in a stroller that looks just like you. It's not an unreasonable assumption. Most people would probably think he was your son. I'm not crazy."

"But you are an uppity bitch. That's what makes the difference."

"Fine. I'm an 'uppity bitch.' So what?"

"You lucky we in the Starbucks on Michigan Avenue."

"Thank God for that. Tell me Leticia, if I offend you so much, why did you Facebook friend me?"

"Oh. My. God. You saw Patrick in my profile picture and thought he was my son. That's why you never friended me back." Leticia began to laugh. "I was friending everyone from grade school. You ain't special. I'm finishing up my associates degree in nursing, I got a part time job at TJMaxx and me and my husband are moving into a new apartment."

Leticia wagged her left hand in Whitney's face. She wore a one carat diamond ring with a brassy gold band.

"I got better things to do than think about whether or not you're gonna click accept. Go ahead and reject my friend request. I don't need 'friends' like you."

Leticia grabbed her drink and left without readjusting the child's scarf.

Whitney would end up sitting by herself in Starbucks for the next twenty minutes. After Leticia made her exit Whitney wandered back over to her seat by the window. Her coffee was now bitter. She cursed herself for shunning milk, sugar and even artificial sweetener. Under normal circumstances a brilliant, albeit ill timed retort would have filled Whitney's head about five minutes after such an encounter. But her mind remained blank, except for a dull, throbbing jealousy. Leticia had a ring and Eric would never put one on Whitney's finger. Leticia was somehow sure of her own path to success, while Whitney, who had done everything right, often felt like a paper boat in the middle of the Atlantic. She had been cheated. People like Leticia were supposed to end up on a reality TV show throwing up in the bushes, confirming that the universe was chaotic, but ultimately ordered.

Whitney stared ahead, disgusted with her thoughts, when her friends started to bang on the window next to her. Startled, she jumped in her seat as Claire, Avery and Emma buckled over, laughing at her reaction. The prank had probably been Emma's idea. Before Whitney could embarrass herself further, she decided to go outside. She gathered her coat, scarf and gloves, but decided to leave her coffee on the table. There was plenty left, but she just didn't want it anymore.

Once outside, Whitney hugged each her friends, but it was more mutual tackling. These were the people who knew her before she had ever had the confidence to talk to someone like Eric, before careers were real things, before she had learned to hide her prissiness.

They decided that their first stop would be Forever 21, and Emma began to launch into a detailed explanation of the crash on Lakeshore Drive that had delayed their arrival, but was okay, because during the time in the car they had managed to do an amazing rendition of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance." Whitney was only half-listening, because she felt as though she had forgotten something. On impulse, she pulled away and jogged back to the Starbucks. The homeless man was still out there, jangling his cup.

Whitney peeled off her gloves, exposing her fingers to the cold. She fished her wallet out of her purse and pulled out five dollars. The man was sure to give her an extra loud "thank you and God bless." His vision was limited, but he could hear the difference between coin and cloth. Satisfied, Whitney turned back to her friends. But the closer she got to them, the more she realized they were staring at her in confusion.

"What was with that?"

"He looked cold," Whitney said.

Emma chuckled.

"What?" Whitney had missed something.

"I've never seen you give money to a homeless man before," Claire said.

"What are you talking about? I give money to homeless people, especially around Christmas."

"No you don't," Avery said. "You always say 'the best thing you can do for poor people is not be poor.'"

Emma and Claire laughed. Avery gave Whitney a nudge and a grin. The four continued on, entering and exiting store after store over the course of the afternoon. Their shopping bags filled with gifts and their conversations alternated between mindless and profound, but Whitney felt like she was struggling against the current.

That evening, Whitney sat in front of her laptop, checking her Gmail. She did not even bother going on Facebook. Next to her computer was a half-empty

bottle of her parent's good red wine. She told herself that her mother wouldn't notice until her birthday in June, and hopefully by then Whitney would have an internship somewhere other than Chicago. She took a sip of the Amarone, thinking about how she wanted to call Eric, but wouldn't. Whitney knew that he would tell her that she had done nothing wrong today.

In her inbox she had a message from a listserv, titled "Gimmie my chicken wings!" Normally this listserv was used to set up study groups for econ problem sets, but during breaks, midterms and finals students would post things to amuse and annoy one another. This particular email had been sent by Elijah Goldman. He was in Whitney's econometrics lecture. She had thought he was cute at one point. Whitney clicked on the link in the email, which, as she suspected, lead her to a YouTube video.

The clip featured two young white men pretending to be black women getting into a fight over fried chicken. Both boys were decked out in wigs, skanky clothes and brightly colored makeup. The two-minute-and-fifteen-second short took place in an actual Popeyes, someone filmed the scene on their camera phone, and patrons that did not get the joke looked on, confused.

"You better gimmie them wings, bitch," the boy wearing pink hot-pants said.

"Uh-uh. You stole my bag of Flamin' Hot Cheetos last week."

"Only cause you stole my boo the week before!" Pink Hot Pants pulled off her gold clip-on earrings and handed them to an innocent man standing in line. "Let's do this."

Whitney stared at the screen. She didn't want to think the clip was funny.

## The Forest Through the Trees, BATIK



Clare Arentzen



## Natasha Japanwala

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### *Rain-cans*

First, only the smell:  
sticky insect repellent by the stacked parts  
of the bed, mothballs in the drain.  
Then, slowly, greasy strands of hair  
on the carpet, evading the vacuum's whine,  
blown-up photographs peeling back their plastic  
and walking up to me, alive.  
Evenings, I run to silhouettes  
on your prayer mat and stroke their thinning flesh  
on skeletons; we press our foreheads  
to trails left back by your cracked heels.  
I can't tell the difference. Between real and imaginary.  
But your face seeps in through the broken  
ceiling, settles quietly into the rain-cans.

**Untitled, FILM PHOTOGRAPH ›**

Michelle Wu



## Matthew Brailas

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### *Elegy for Yia-Yia Brailas*

Nacogdoches. Fall. Midnight. A coral snake  
freezes to death in the backyard.

Yia-Yia wakes to see

flies dripping from the faucets.  
Skin draped over the towel rack. An angel  
rising out of the electrical sockets  
to spit up silverware onto the kitchen table.

Aunt Carrie drives to her house in a bathrobe.  
Feeds her pills. Sleeps on the couch.  
I sit in the armchair all night,  
watching the weather channel.

7:00. Warmer. The sky peels open  
like a blood orange.  
Yia-Yia brings me a toasted English muffin.  
She no longer remembers my name, but  
knows I am here to see her.  
Hold her as she is pulled, gently,  
into the gleaming wreckage of her past.

Untitled, CHARCOAL ON PAPER

Cristina Flores



# Flannery Cunningham

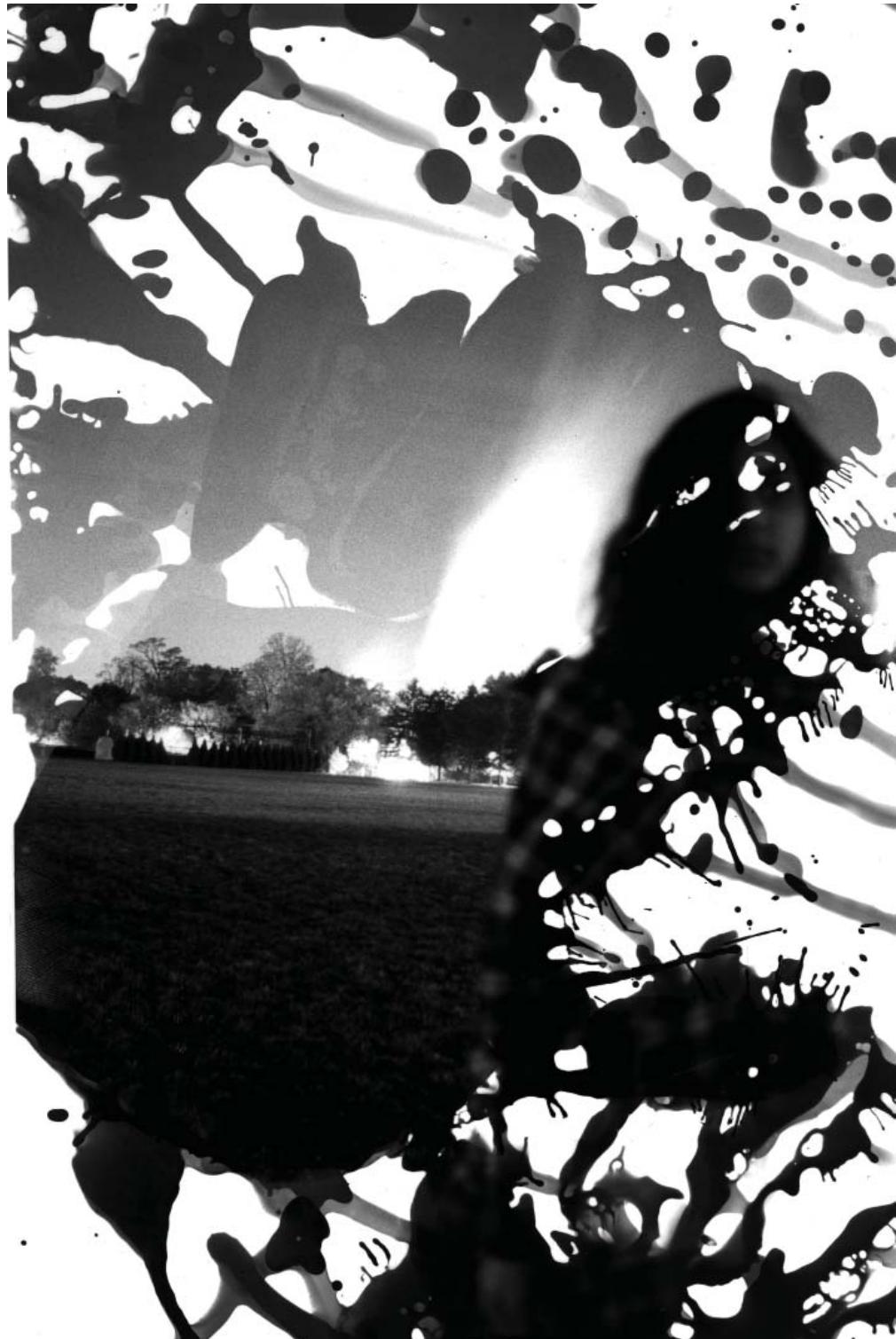
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## *Deeps*

Last night, I dreamed I sank  
into blue-black waters  
where creatures eat the dust motes that  
drift down, slowly, taking their sweet time  
on the way to the dark,  
and now and then a light flashes  
and you know an event of great importance  
has happened in some monster's life—  
a death, or a meal, or a birth  
or maybe a wedding in the depths—  
the groom choosing blind,  
never having seen his bride's face  
for more than the span of that flash.  
There must be some affection in the undertaking  
nonetheless, because of the way he holds her  
in the murk and the pressing quiet.

Above, boats drop lines to hook  
and consume, but they will never reach  
these two, they are so deep—  
and in the depths they can pretend  
they are alone.

For now, the oceans can wait  
I will stay cradled  
in this old green sleeping bag  
zipped together with yours, and  
the tides of your breath  
ebbing into my hair.



**Invented Night, SILVER GELATIN PRINT**

Sean Andrew Chen

# Stephanie Tam

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## *Child of Luck*

*"And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well."*

—Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

A little boy once climbed up a mountain in the middle of the night to challenge the dead. He was driven by the perverse desire to tempt the fate that taught him to fear, and so he climbed. He looked out into the abyss. In the witching hour of the night, in the inky cleft among the rocks, the ghosts were known to reside. He challenged the ghosts to come, if they dared exist. His cries echoed: Come out! I dare you to show yourselves! What a figure he must have struck. Small defiance, trembling on the line between stupidity and boldness that defines boyhood. He must have been full of the exhilaration of his daring, of this adventure in independence. What wonder must have seized him—at his marvelous boldness, at the horrifying possibility of presences out there!

He came home in an ecstasy of triumph, an odd result that suggests he had defeated the ghosts instead of merely disproving their existence. His challenge, however, was not for the ghastly spirits alone, but his refusal to be manipulated by ghostly fears—to prove his fears were ghosts. He climbed against the powers that tempted him to fear: the indifference of parents that could only be remedied by the glitter of financial success and doctoral prestige, the confusion of rivalry and camaraderie among eight siblings, the latent jealousy of a brother that would not manifest its depth (and danger) until years later, and, above all, the absence of dreams in the slums of Hong Kong. Such things were then inarticulate and unknown; even now, they are accessed only by the prolonged and half-legitimate combination of speculation and therapy. This was the scene: the time, the witching hour, the place, the mountain, and the boy alone where it all began.

"You cannot begin your memoir like that, Sara," Eve interrupts, before it has even properly begun. I know she is my sister and six years my senior, but I cannot help feeling irritated. This is not the first time she has inserted her criticism at the very conception of my work, and I am not yet ready for her unconstructive criticism. Just last year she lectured me for choosing a male protagonist for my fantasy novel ("Are you implying that gender-neutral is *male*?"). This time, however, it is not some misguided feminist critique that faces me, but—

"You're making Dad out to be a tragic hero." She's referring to my portrayal of our father on the mountain, and my inability to paint either parent in anything less than sympathetic colors. "When are you going to stop coddling our parents? They'll never learn how to be self-reflective that way. Besides, why on earth does *your* memoir begin with *his* story? You weren't even born."

No use explaining to her that I was not present at the conception of my own story, that it's necessary to begin with the influences and forces that conceived me. She has self-proclaimed her (dubious) position as the "black sheep" of the family and spent the past decade attempting to separate her agency from said conceiving forces. Maybe that could be her memoir. But the point of mine is to set up the dynamic in which I can be conceived: the setting in which my life is conceivable. Nonetheless . . . perhaps there is a *grain* of truth in her criticism: the witching hour, the mountain, and the boy alone cannot be my beginning after all. While I am perfectly willing to allow that my story does not begin with me, it cannot begin with any one individual—and even if it did, why should it begin with my father? (I am still waiting for Eve to notice this gender crack in which to wedge her feminist diatribe.)

Consider: the mountain scene serves a useful metaphor, one that has indeed been analyzed in its time by wife, daughter, and counselor. . . . In terms of literality, I am a little skeptical; I have since visited Hong Kong, right before it went back to the People's Republic of China: I saw no mountains. But it doesn't bother me much; imagination tends to be inversely proportional to time. When my father was a little boy, it probably *appeared* to be a mountain—in reality, something more like a hill—but even if it didn't, imagination had plenty of time to grow it into one over the decades. Still, to claim the story's birth on a mountain in Hong Kong would be neglecting . . . *at least* . . . half the story.

There must be halves, then. Maybe even thirds. My parents were not the only ones responsible for my conception—in fact, they might not even be the primary agents. After all, my sister, the only child, was the one who requested me. Whatever my sister's thoughts *after* I was born (This little thing is the wrong size, I ordered a playmate. . . . This baby can't even play dress up! . . . And *why* is no one paying attention to me anymore?), she was the one who conceived of me first, so it seems only fair to include her story in the beginning.

But I will be honest with you: there is a problem. As we navigate closer and closer to my conception, the stories become more difficult to untangle—and they

lose their mythic quality of Truth. With enough distance (over six thousand miles, continents, an ocean, and thirty years), the exploits of my parents become legend. They lose their agency when they meet, and their authority when my sister enters the scene. Here things get unclear: truths intersecting and engaging and coming away twisted. Consider yourself warned. If you want the truth, you will have to read between the lines. It is no more than I have had to do.

My sister was always a very cute little girl. Her eyes are unusually large for an Asian's. In this scene, they were peering out the window, wide and watching as our father's car pulled out the driveway. (At the time, we lived in the Bronx. My father was still in his doctoral residency making peanuts, which meant my mother was making most of the money, and my sister was about three. If you are observant, you might notice from the last detail that I was not yet born. I was, in fact, watching omnisciently from a cloud in heaven, waiting for my father's career to take off in another several years before descending upon my family as the Child of Luck.) I was watching my sister watch our father leave. Her little hands pressed up against the glass, fingertips white from the pressure.

"That's impossible," my father scoffs. "She was too young to remember that."

I have been telling him that Eve remembers that incident in the Bronx. I sometimes try to convince him that what he does in his life is his daughter's business—that our parents' lives influence ours because they are ours. I don't know why no one believes me.

"Well, she does," I reply.

He disagrees. "She made it up. She was probably four, not three, anyway. Why does she not remember that your mom threw my clothes out of the house, first, then?"

He does not dispute the event, just her memory of the second time he left us. (Yes, I know: "us," although I am aware I was not yet conceived; "us" because they are my family and I claim their experiences. The Old Testament justifies my claim; once I have made it into the world, the Lord your God will visit my forefathers' experiences on me anyway. [Exodus 20:5. You see? I am not the one making things up.] Now that I *am* eighteen years in the world and have lived out their tragedies and joys several times over, I know it is true.) My father is sneering, skeptical. If I am feeling generous, I will concede that the reason he smirks at inappropriate moments like this, when I am trying to verify something quite tragic—making himself look like an unrepentant, insensitive \_\_\_\_\_—is because he feels the threat of impending guilt. And, to be fair, he has had a lot of guilt forced down his throat. Mostly by my mother, but also us, trying to make him feel guilty. Of course, if I am feeling generous in the *other* direction, I will insist that is not the case at all; my mother is merely attempting to elicit some empathy. Trying to make him sensitive to our

feelings, to see the other side.

My father again. I do not know why I keep slipping back to him; in the first place, I should have started out with my mother, the key to understanding the entire family dynamic. My mother is the complicated one; it is merely my father's story that is complicated. Still, the first half of my life has been spent trying to figure out what my father was running toward. I could not find it, and so I concluded he was not running toward anything at all but away from something—from what? His mother, first indifferent, and then controlling? Or my mother? The problem is that he could never tell me what he was running for, because he never knew himself, and he never knew himself.

"I thought I would be happier," he once said to me. He was referring to the fact that he had fulfilled his American Dream, becoming a Successful and Prestigious Doctor against all odds, but was still restless and alone on a mountain in Hong Kong. He might actually have said it to my sister, now that I think about it. But he has been saying it to me all my life, if not in those words. A retreating car, a pillbox containing little white capsules, a certain beam of light under the door that betrayed . . . the need to escape from a wife's indomitable resentment. I resent the way he sometimes manipulates my mother through us. Or is it the other way around? ("Of course it is," he says, before I shoo him away. "How could you think that I am the manipulative one? You know it's really—") In fact, he is the one being manipulated by those same forces that drove him up the mountain. Because of my mother's awful relations with the in-laws, resulting from considerable jealousy on both sides and a measure of cultural sexism (depending on whom you ask, they either made her apologize—via kowtow—for not giving birth to a son, or they were just very bad with metaphors), he has had to choose between his families: parents or wife and children.

For her part, my mother has started seeing actions and words as symbols, leading to the general impression of her bitter illogic. It's all very well to interpret a mountain scene as the foundation of a character in a story, but people are not characters, and metaphors are developed in hindsight. In reality, forgetting the placement of a key does not indicate an irredeemable negligence and sloth. Or, arguably should not. If you ask her, though, (or even if you do not) she *will* argue for her remarkable intuition—her problem, she insists, was that she trusted it too late. ("You know that's BS," Eve interjects, with my censored permission because I want to be fair to all voices. "She just vacillates between wise and crazy. Lately, more crazy.") But to be really fair, there has been manipulation and selfishness on all sides; if the parents have been imperfect, so have the children. Maybe the solution is not to redistribute the blame more evenly, but to acknowledge its presence with the simple fact that people can be terribly selfish. Thank goodness they're also inconsistent, or we would all be in trouble.

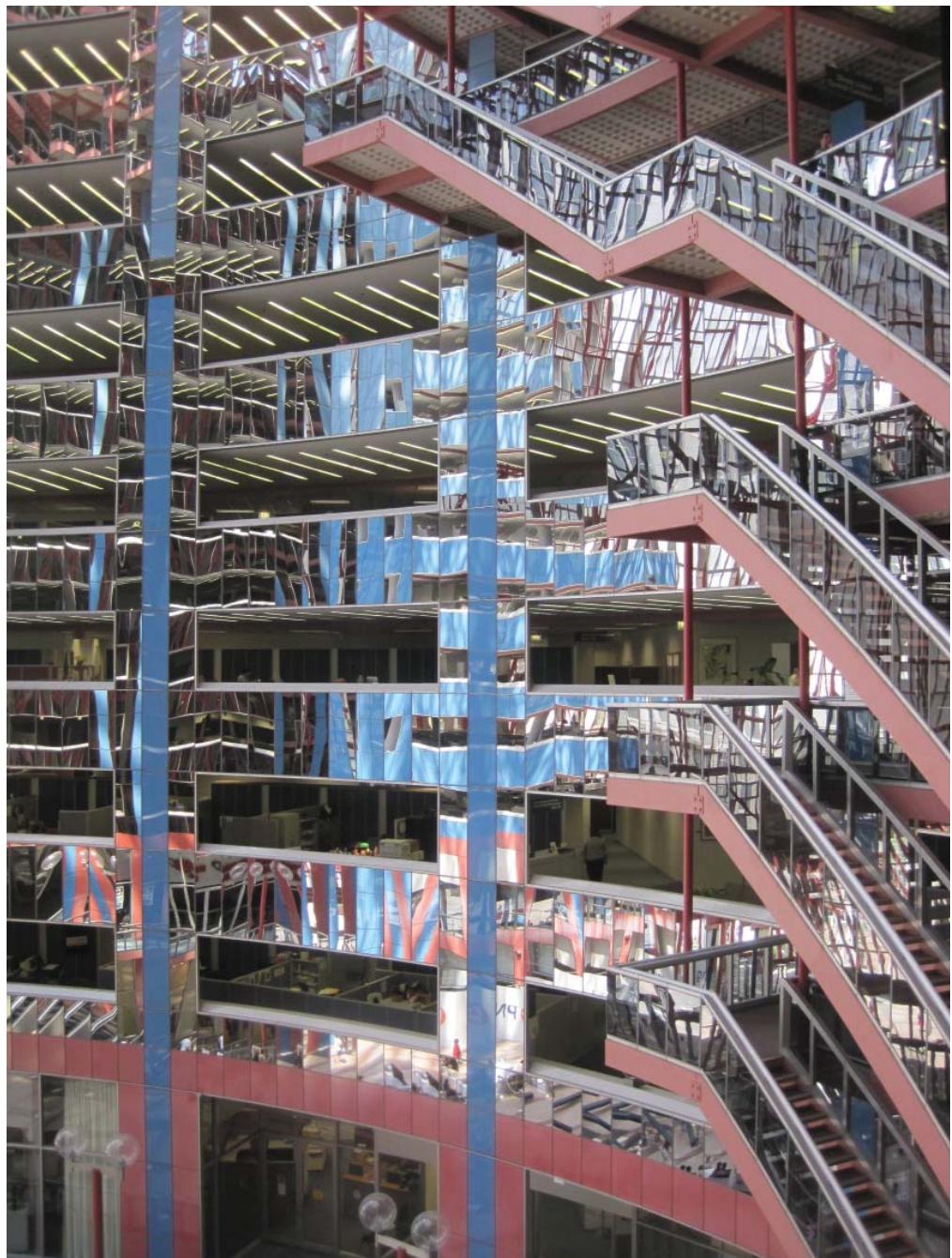
There is a cliché that goes something like: the worst brings out the best in some people. Well. The worst has driven my mother to paranoia and bitterness and

occasional outbursts that defy all logic. But it has also brought her—admittedly on her knees, prostrated—before her God. And as the Old Testament psalmist writes, He is more precious than gold, than much pure gold. I am my mother's daughter, and I have learned from experience that, sometimes, one can only approach God on one's knees. I was too proud to do it when I had my feet, and had I not had them hacked out from under me, I would probably never have crawled to Him. So, there is a silver lining to every cloud. Inconsistency just might be a saving grace.

I have an apology to make to reader and parents and sister. First: I am not going to fill in the blanks, or explain the little white pills or the light under the door. You can use your imagination, as I did. There is a story in the Old Testament about Noah and his sons, about a time when their father was drunk and naked and lying in a tent and the youngest son did not cover him but laughed. Noah cursed him, which when I read it, seemed a bit spiteful. Wasn't he the irresponsible one in the story? What was he doing getting wasted and then blaming them for not covering for him—literally and metaphorically? But I think I begin to understand. People are inconsistent, and I'd like to think that others would have my back because I'd have theirs. That's a rather Karmatic logic, nothing very Christian about it. It is not actually what I take away from the story, but I'm told that people are secular and there is no such thing as altruism, so what other explanation will make sense to that sort of audience? I'm just being facetious: my real point is that there is something to blood, and something about it that it makes us weep at the shame, the nakedness, of our loved ones. And for my parents: they have clothed me all my life. (Eve, do you see it's not because I am a "parent-pleasing coddler" that I cannot easily bare their nakedness, even though it is sometimes hard to bear it?) There are some things that I cannot reveal. I'm sorry. I know I promised to tell you the truth. Still, I *have* tried to bare my parents, for which I must also apologize to them—my loyalties are torn, after all—with my sister's unknowing help. For I have a final confession to make: Eve never criticized my introduction at all. How could she, not having read any part of this memoir?

I hate to leave myself still un-conceived at the close. But it's better this way. Anyway, I am a much less reliable narrator of my own childhood than of my sister's and my father's. In so far as their stories gave lie to each other, I was an expert at weaving the lies into truth. Post-birth, I was just the Kleenex stand. My eyes had an embarrassing habit of leaking before either party even watered. I like to think that it is not merely just because I was a crybaby, but that I am a creature of extraordinary empathy. It would be helpful, at any rate, for an aspiring writer. My sister disagrees, of course, and when she's feeling particularly ungenerous, also adds that it's more out of self-pity than empathy. But, after all, while I am feeling generous towards her ungenerous analysis—enough to include it, anyway—this is my story, and I will also add that if I were choosing between my sister and me, or any other member of

my family, I would choose myself as the most reliable narrator. It's not my choice, of course; it's yours. But if you do choose to believe me, in the end, you'll have to swallow their lies as well.



**Kaleidoscope, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH**  
Abigail Klionsky

## Matthew Brailas

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### *Buzz Cut Before Afghanistan*

I.

A week before you leave  
in a Chicago gas station.  
You flash your brother's ID  
and buy a twelve pack of Budweiser. Tins of Grizzly snuff.  
Back in the car I open a bag of corn chips  
and fling them one by one out the window.

Kids slide down their frozen driveways  
on the lids of garbage cans, but  
we do not belong here  
wrapped in all the old coats we could find  
you still wearing a cowboy hat.  
We stay up most of the night.  
You show me cell phone pictures  
of your naked ex  
and joke about her tits.  
I don't say anything.

Late and drunk to the airport,  
you sleep the whole flight through.  
Sweating out the booze, sweating out the dip.  
Sweating out the tattoo across your shoulder,  
the odors of Texas: limestone, dry earth,  
itching stink of Bullnettle,  
the desert cracked and shimmering, the stars  
glittering like crushed beetles.

Dawn coils, fat, around the plane.  
Something embryonic and swelling  
wrenches itself from your body.  
Looms, toothless and hungry, over you.

II.

Camp Mabry,  
you line the cold metal  
blade against your scalp  
and push.

In Your Hands, digital photograph

Chhaya Werner



# **ABOUT THE CENTERPIECE**

This issue's centerpiece features the winners of our first annual Freshman Writing Contest. We were very impressed by the quality of the submissions, but in the end the winning pieces stood out for their vivid descriptions and surprising metaphors. We came into the meeting with a list of our favorites in each category, poetry and prose, and "Sometimes the Dead Breathe and Even Dream" and "Writing Music" topped nearly everyone's list. We are delighted to feature these pieces in the magazine.

Poetry Judges:

Maia ten Brink, Katherine J. Chen,  
Ting Gou, Mirabella Mitchell, Steph-  
anie Tam, Jessica Yao

Prose Judges:

Ting Gou, Megan Hogan, Mohit  
Manohar, Stephanie Tam, Jessica Yao

# Matthew Brailas

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*Winner of the Nassau Literary Review Freshman Poetry Prize*

## *Sometimes the Dead Breathe and Even Dream*

Years later he would write about the coyote  
that limped up to his porch on a still November evening.  
Two neighborhood pets had gone missing in the days prior. A dog  
heaving in the woods behind the communal mailboxes.  
A cat dying quietly on the side of the road, soft fur of her neck sticky  
and pink as a tongue.

He would remember the way his dog didn't bark, just  
pressed his muzzle  
into the coyote's breast and licked at  
the still-warm Samaritan bullet nestled there, the faint  
smear left on brick after he dragged it into his backyard.  
He could smell the iron under his fingernails, the night  
bright and wet as melting snow,  
the soft, wild violence of its eyes and the stink  
of its teeth and the bruised fragrant dead earth filling him  
until he was damp with it.

He threw the still-breathing coyote over the back of his fence.  
He went inside and washed his hands with baking soda.  
He dreamed of dark birds wheeling  
over black ice. Of endless  
glacial moonlight, and the scent of veins  
sharp on his canines.

# Elizabeth J. Martin

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*Winner of the Nassau Literary Review Freshman Prose Prize*

## *Writing Music*

I was infatuated with the way her hair smelled like suntan lotion and saltwater, and I have always preferred this clean, cheerful scent to the smoky, coffee-flavored aroma of my first relationship—a perfume that I now associate with poor choices, a tight feeling in my chest, and an inability to swallow. My regrets seem deep enough for swimming, though perhaps they only fill my bathtub when I double-check the calculations. I feel foolish, remembering, and my face feels too warm. My palms are damp. I still prefer to breathe the air of the ocean and would rather taste saltwater; more than that, I am still a bad liar.

*We drank a lot of coffee together; I ordered my first café au lait with her hand in mine at a seedy coffee shop downtown. The boy who served us was a year older but in my math class; I was always mildly embarrassed for him. He never had his calculator, and I must have loaned him dozens of pencils that were never returned. He brought our coffees and three napkins, which was one too many, of course. I burned my tongue on the coffee but said I liked it, and perhaps that was the biggest lie of all.*

I wipe my hands on my pant legs, and then find myself lost in tracing the crests and troughs of the corduroy, long, straight lines that are highways to nowhere, to the tops of my tennis shoes. I glance at the cup on the corner of the piano. As I catch my own eyes in the mirror across the room, I scan my square jaw and too-dark eyes, and realize at last that what that girl always said is true. “You look like a pianist. You have music in your eyes.” We laughed then, but she didn’t really ever know me at all. I begin flipping through a sheaf of papers on the bench beside me, reading none of them.

*I am in a coffee shop twenty-two years ago, my hair too neat for the artists and musicians and coffee-drinkers around me, too tame for the hollow-eyed girl who sits on bar stools with her knees tucked into her chest, one hand on her left ankle and the other around her latte.*

I drink peppermint tea now, with one teaspoon of sugar, and I am happy.

I glance down at my hands next to the black-white-black-white-black-white of the keys and see her face on my palm, see her sharp, pale cheeks and the emptiness beneath her prickly eyelashes.

*She had the smallest hands I have ever seen—she couldn't play an octave, though I would try to teach her to make the leap with her pinky on the upright piano in the basement—and her fingers were as cold as the ice cubes she swirled in an empty glass while I scribbled the beginnings of mediocre melodies in a notebook at the table by the window of a pizza parlor, because if I didn't appear mysterious and pensive and as deep as my seventeen years would allow, she would see that I wasn't really all that mysterious, all that intoxicating, wasn't really anything special—I liked comic books, lightly buttered toast, my shirts organized by sleeve length before color, and the way I imagined my father used to read the paper in the morning and then refold it, setting the sections on the nightstand in the order my mother would read them later that night.*

*Yeah, I wasn't anything special at all, except the boy who was dared by his friends to ask for her number one Tuesday afternoon, but she wrote it on my hand in purple felt-tipped marker, the ink smearing as it swerved toward my thumb, and I kept that hand in my pocket for the rest of the evening, to my own surprise. All I knew was that she sat three rows up and one over from me in physics, and I remember when we studied magnetism, I said something clever to myself to explain why my eyes were so often drawn to the way her hair curled at the nape of her neck or the flick of her wrist as she brushed eraser dust off a test or the smooth way she walked to the pencil sharpener, a dancer in faded blue jeans and beat-up high tops.*

Focus. That was before you understood what it is all about.

I put the papers on the music stand and play a few scales, barely able to hear the notes over the voices of my physics teacher, of a hundred teenagers, of every musician I've ever known. The air conditioning switches on. It is louder than it seemed yesterday afternoon. I stop playing and trace a tiny tear in the edge of my polo shirt with an index finger.

*My knees trembled and my watch alarm went off seventeen minutes before noon for no particular reason, but what that meant was that the universe wanted me to jump before I faded away entirely, and so I did. I saw myself lean toward her outside a classroom and whisper something, anything, and I saw her look up, tilting her face to mine in the same way my mother tilted a dinner plate she had just washed and dried so that it caught the light to make sure her work was done. I flinch, remembering. The pen was in her hair, tucked behind her ear and half-hidden in dark curls, and she didn't speak as she scribbled on the back of my hand or as she turned and left, not glancing back. I didn't know her last name; I never learned her birthday.*

Sharpening a pencil, I can taste the smell of the wood. I watch the spirals of shavings wind their way into the beige wastebasket at my feet. She bought it for me because it fits under the piano bench, and it makes me think of her because she is the type to recognize that I needed such a thing and to crawl under the bench with a worn tape measure and write the necessary dimensions in her spiral notebook. Her temperament is relatively beige as well, I think, and though it sounds pejorative, it isn't—it is what I love most about her. She is unassuming, gentle, more careful than anyone I have ever met, and she is calm and easy to stand next to at cocktail parties, though I sometimes cannot look at her because she is blinding in red satin

and smoky makeup and candlelight; I will keep my eyes on those earrings she wears instead, the way they catch the light, swinging against her neck, and I will study the wisps of hair that stray from her elegant chignon; she is always polished, never perfect, an indefinite miracle. Her grey eyes and blond hair are floating in my teacup now—she always brings me tea in the mornings, even in the middle of the summer when I can barely stand to drink the sweltering liquid. She says she likes greeting the day with me, sipping slowly and knowing she isn't alone, and I always agree.

I spin the thin silver ring on my finger, thinking of the two of them and myself and how different we all are, and I hear my heart throbbing in my ears, a vein in my temple pulsing with blood. The beginning is always the slowest part, and I let my heartbeat be a metronome as I listen to the melody playing in my mind. I have been humming it all week in the aisles of the grocery store and in the steam of the shower, and in those moments before I fall asleep when she is silent, her breath growing slower and more even in the deepening darkness. It is a song that I am pretty sure has never been written before, and it is time to put it down on paper, let the magic come as it enters my life, acknowledge its power for posterity, for generations of pianists who choked down lattes and dreamt of something a little more true.

As a composer, and a mildly successful one, depending on whom you ask, I have learned what it means to write it down, to watch the melody trace its way across the page like purple ink along the back of my hand, like a cup of tea spilled across the coffee table because of trembling hands and hidden passion. I hold my breath, savoring the last moments of solitude, of silence, and then pour the song onto the page.

This song is a secret. Capture it. This song will help her understand that she is the last, the most important, the only. This is it.

I twist the ring around my finger three times, forgetting to breathe.

I've tried before, on napkins and in the margins of paperback books and on the backs of receipts and on whole sheets of blank copy paper, but today is the day I have to get it right. Yesterday afternoon I found myself standing in the kitchen, staring at the shades of gold in the apple in my hand as it was lit by the sunlight, unable to move or speak or remember what I had been doing or thinking, and I was just there, barely breathing until she came into the room, slipped the apple from my hand and danced from sight. That moment of paralysis was a sign, and I know I have to write this for myself, as a sort of desperate swimming to shore, and for her, most of all. This song is for the thin silver ring I turn absentmindedly around my finger, the way she hums songs that get caught in my hair and on the exposed edges of my heart, the picture of her walking barefoot on the beach, her jeans rolled up and her grey eyes almost blue next to the water and the sunlight caught in her hair that I keep on top of the piano; this song is for her, this song is her.

Closing my eyes and fingering the keys, I see purple writing on the back of my hand and dark hair and bad poetry, and I shake my head and sigh. What where you looking for? Did you think you'd find it in a dingy coffeehouse? You should have spent more time watching the sun set over the ocean. I remember riding my bike

barefoot, the pedals rough on my calloused feet; remember ice cream dripping down her chin. I remember smiling for real, being for real. I remember the first things she said.

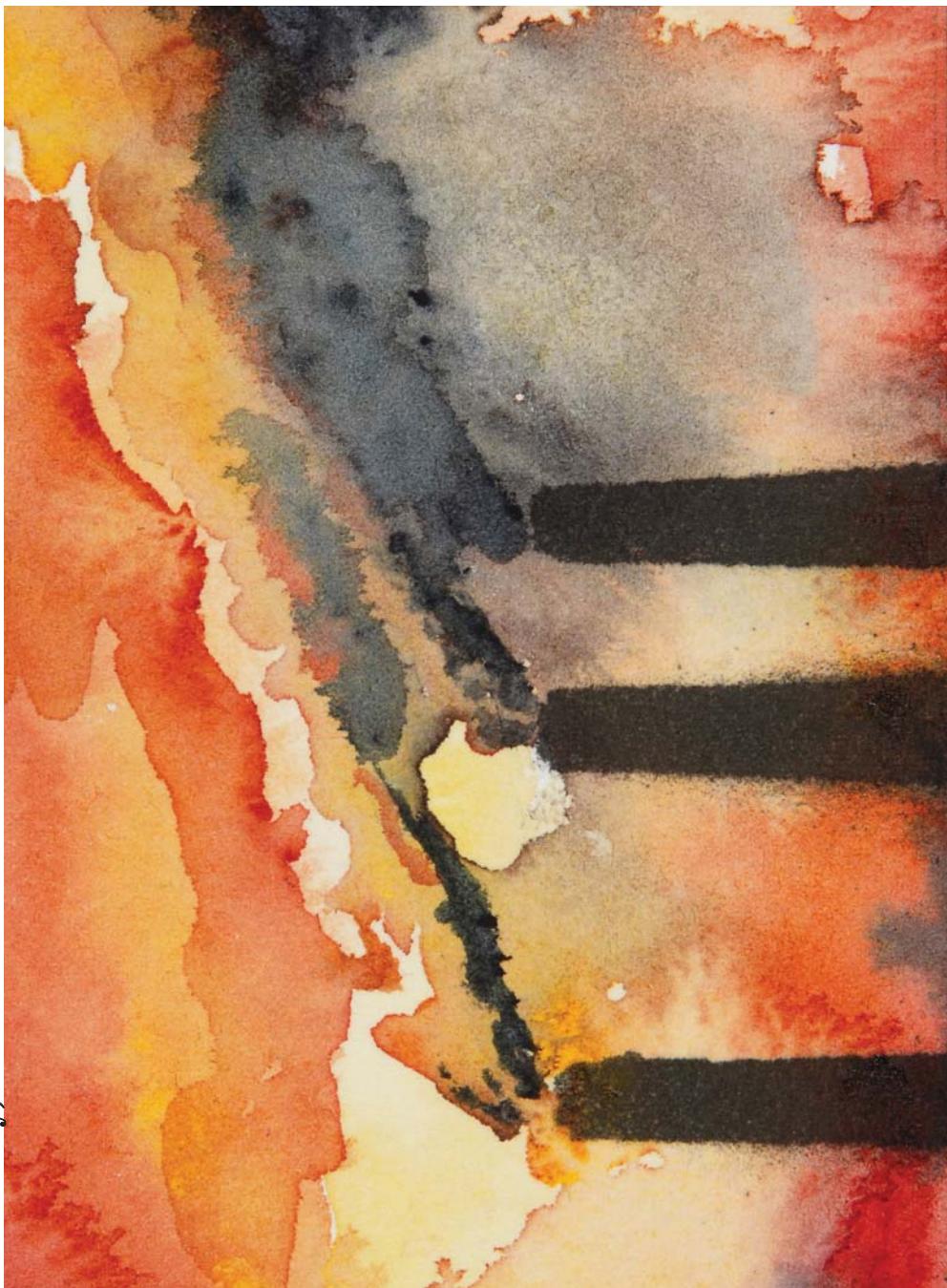
Her hair was longer then; her eyes seemed bigger. She had more freckles than anyone I had ever met, and they made me think of stars scattered across the night sky. I wanted to count them, and then count her fingernails, and then number her too-dark eyelashes. I remember quite clearly the look on her face and the blue-green of veins beneath the translucent skin under her eyes and the way she absentmindedly traced her collarbone with a lazy index finger. I remember saltwater taffy. I remember tossing breadcrumbs to seagulls, writing for real in a notebook because the world was suddenly so packed with inspiration that it filled pages effortlessly. I remember that she wasn't necessarily the catalyst, but that she probably was because she was the first to say, "You are it, for me," and I remember the broken seashell she found between the foamy fingers of the ocean that I carried in my pocket for weeks afterwards, clutching it in my fist when I talked to her on the phone, her voice crackly and softer, but no less intoxicating, and stroking it with my thumb when I found myself unable to focus on anything but the last thing she'd whispered in my ear. I remember those times when everything was so wind-borne and glowing.

The pencil meets the lines of the staff on the paper; they shake hands briefly, and I begin to write, tapping my toe to the silent melody that she can almost hear from where she stands in the doorway, her golden hair aflame in the afternoon light.



**Sulfur Sky, WATERCOLOR AND SPRAY PAINT**

Clare Arentzen



## Matthew Brailas

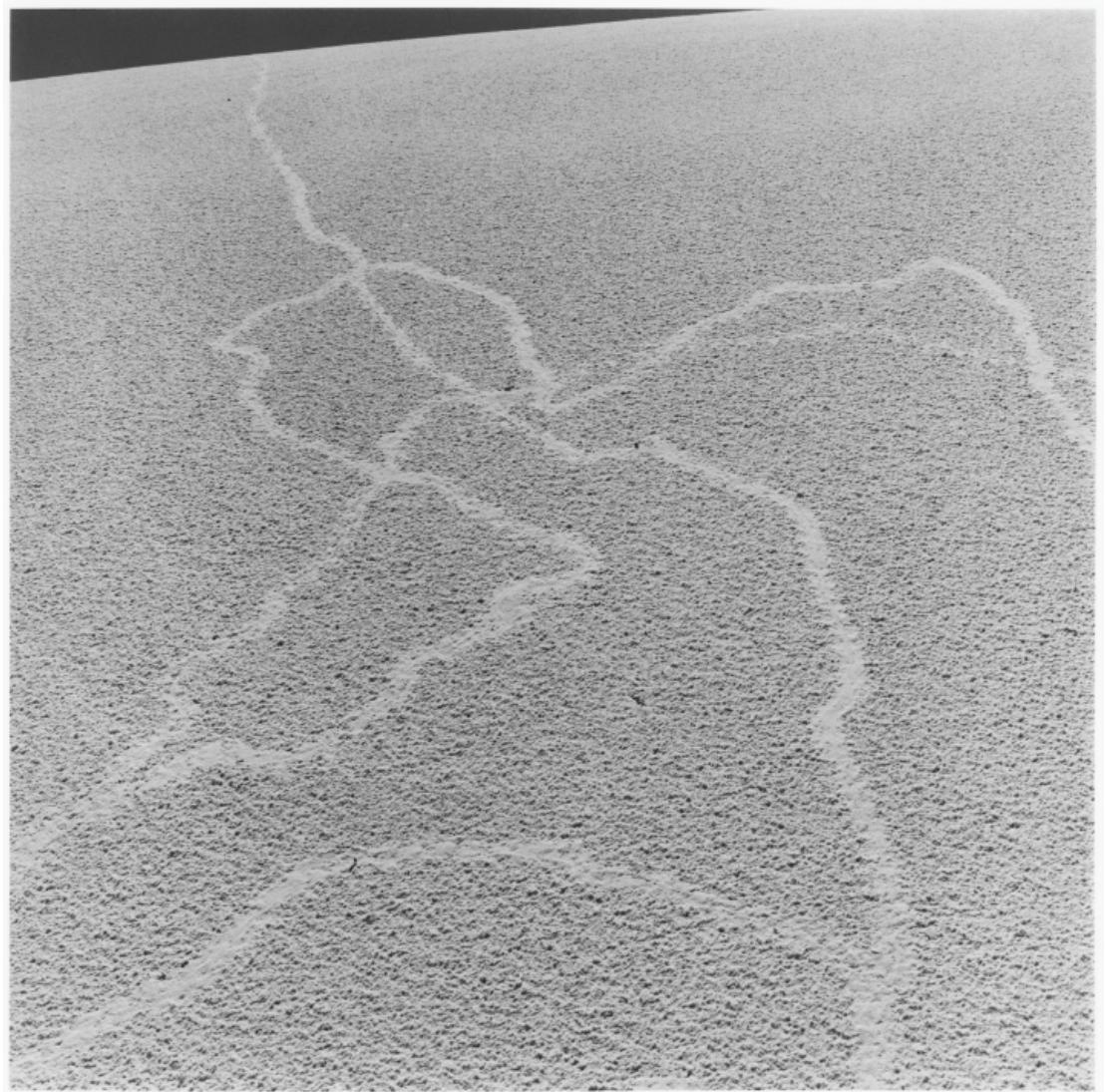
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### *Paz*

Adrio's birth falls like a hurricane, letters, toys,  
formula filling their tiny home and him  
fat and butter gold, rattling the silverware with his cries.  
His mother wraps him in mustard blankets.  
Jams his mouth with a bottle.  
Slowly the stream of visitors halts.  
House settles, licks its cuts.  
On Sundays, Adrio  
eats mashed oranges out of a plastic bowl.  
Mother stands by the kitchen counter  
and thinks of the Algarve.

Down the street, a widow is turning  
black as her curtains, as the iron bars  
over her windows.  
She can stomach nothing  
but warm honey for a week.  
A robber calls 911 when he  
finds her in the bedroom, eyes  
swollen to the size of plums.  
Night sick with sirens,  
The neighborhood gathers  
to watch the ambulance roll her away.  
She returns a month later,  
thinner, quieter.  
No visitors in the hospital. She  
does not press charges.

January. Their aunt's wedding.  
Twelve year old Dani is left  
in charge of the house for the night, Dani  
who knows only how to chop onions.  
Chops till the walls weep with their scent.  
Piles of them, white as milk,  
filling up the bowls.  
Adrio screeching from his crib.  
Bleary with exhaustion, Dani stuffs  
orange peels into the baby's pillowcase  
to mask the scent. Paz, paz.  
A breeze ripples into the bedroom.  
Adrio begins to hush.



**Then Grandmother Dances**  
**Snake tracks on sand dune. White Sands, New Mexico. 2010,**  
**GELATIN SILVER PRINT**  
**Oriana Poindexter**

## Sean Paul Ashley

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### *Poem of Witness: Vietnam War Baby*

I wrench your hand from the stone fastness  
and you float aloft, wrested from your bone cradle,  
with the intact caul of shell casings and dum-dums,  
scored like old flints with furrows of blood  
Dead mouths flayed with ironic whispers: Xin Loi.

Your eyes quaver with subterranean tremors  
and then crack open,  
with iris bright hues of milk and honey and black,  
and I exhale, breath rotten like the jungle  
you yellow in my arms like a hunk of old ivory,  
and me trembling  
as you blow up like a mortar shell  
red faced and screaming,  
thundering through my pebbled helmet,  
cleaving my skull.

Let the mad monks scream the valleys  
they wished for, hot as your birth cry,  
as you rend the grim-faced khaki stillness  
with a fug of madness that broke rolling  
upon my overgrown and wooded heart  
like thunder, and burnt me marrow-deep  
with a weak and trembling scream  
that sounded like a fetal God  
seeking suck at my wrung and barren breast  
and when the black hunger growled at him,  
he screamed, and screamed and screamed,

while all around him totemic teeth forged of,  
steel and awe, guts and punji sticks, shattered femurs,  
tore at him like my black-greased fingers,  
ripped away yellow corpses to clutch you in my palm.

**Bliss, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH**

Abigail Klionsky



# Matthew Brailas

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## *Entropy; or, A Study in Chaos; or, The Time She Left the Refrigerator Door Open Overnight and Had to Eat Her Cereal With Water*

### I.

He showed her how to extract the juice from a cactus. Walked her through fields of sun-scorched grass till they found one, a great thorny tower, tottering with water. They snapped away the spines, and cut free the purple fruit. She remembered the sugary smell of it as it sizzled in the pot. The thick purple pulp left shining on cheese paper when they finished filtering. Afterwards, they jumped naked into the lake, and dried out under the sun, and she hurled her love at him like handfuls of bees, and promised nothing, and he said nothing, and she walked home alone, shoes in her hands, a plastic bag of syrup dripping into her purse.

### II.

The last time she drove was February 19, 1997, when a gray sedan spun out in the rain and smashed head-on into her truck. The 22-year-old driver was sprawled over the steering wheel like a crushed bird, his face glittering with safety glass. The firefighters wrenched open the door with a hydraulic claw. Cars sputtering and groaning like bombs, fused by twisted metal. He slid onto the stretcher, hollow and brittle as a child, slick with red light from the ambulance. She never learned his name.

### III.

In a voice dark with nicotine, her grandfather would read to her: Cinderella's sisters hacking off their heels, the Mermaid dancing on knives for a man who would never love her. Sometimes she would hide in her blankets and imagine the wolf's ribs closing around her, the whole house heaving like a vast stomach, tighter and tighter, bracing itself for the blade, for the roof to split open, for the Hunter's hand to reach in and pull her out, damp with blood and acid.

### IV.

The week after her divorce, she drove out to West Texas with her brother. They parked by the Pecos and sat in the back of his jeep all day, drinking from bottles of Evan Williams and spitting tobacco into the dust. At sunset they found ants swarming over the brisket they'd packed. Drove to the nearest gas station, where she flirted with a cashier who still would not give them a discount. After dinner they let the liquor soak into their bones, watched the last shimmers of heat rise off the river like molted skin. She fell asleep to the gentle swerving of the car as her brother drove them home.

# Ting Gou

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## *Icarus*

I.

I stored the wings in the garage because your body  
catapulted away so suddenly I was almost sucked in, too.

II.

In that story with the Greek boy and the ocean as crisp  
as lapis lazuli (the correct word is *azure*, but you never  
knew that color, being content with the generic), the  
pictures were so beautiful no one could think seriously  
about dying. Icarus with skin like teeth, sandwiched  
between Mediterranean pigments. Clean sweat  
sutured the air to his flesh.

In this story, you are painting me. The last of a dozen  
times, the first being my birth when your daughter  
lent me to you for ten seconds. In your hands,  
I developed consciousness, for my body must have  
grazed the blanket and felt, even then, that this great,  
immense world is no bigger than what I can touch.  
I bring you water; you look outside and my eyes follow

like sheep. A thousand birds lift from snow-covered earth beyond the city. The images I've stashed away of you might last me through the winter.

### III.

*I almost went to war, you said,  
but I became an engineer instead.*

I imagine you, bent over a blueprint, the year 1955, sketching to a parade of bombs. A Daedalus in the Mao regime, hated and needed, trained like a rabid dog. You survived because you were starving.

On lonely nights in Fuzhou, the air draped with organza stars so thin you're not sure if they or you had substance (what is substance but tea poured straight from the kettle, resin evaporating from amber mats and the littered halves of sunflower seeds) you build those wings again and again. Feathers from geese in Guangzhou, saplings from a yard not yet yours, twine from braids of children and grandchildren, tokens asking for your love. You worked diligently from your bed, until hundreds of these wings lived in the room, leaning against walls and clumped on the floor, some large, some small, some feathered in radiant hues, some dark enough to eat light, some leathered like dragon wings, some made entirely of dew and mist, some strung with double wings, some with hidden knives, some open, some folded, some indented like ears, some with distinctly human forms.

In the hospital room, I wonder if it's you or they I'm seeing.

### IV.

*Ma ma* is straightforward in Chinese.  
*Ba ba, father*, a permutation of lips. *Ye ye*.

*As Icarus fell, Daedalus saw through his son's eyes,  
those slices of laurel branches opened wide.  
Burgundy roofs revealed their intricate definition.*

My tongue quivered against the roof  
of my mouth. Ye ye, I said.  
*Grandfather.* Words like salt.

V.

I dab your mouth with a wet rag the texture of  
shaved lichen. This is where the metaphor breaks down.  
You who wheeled me on tricycles, read to me  
in thunderstorms, are watching me watch you die.  
A kilometer or so from here is a thermos you haven't washed,  
a tub of pickled radishes soaking for the New Year.

*That boy on the street  
is buying some gum.  
He couldn't be older  
than I was when I  
lived here, ye ye.*

You kept a garden in your apartment, urns with assorted plants.  
You believed that three-leaf clovers were lucky because  
I had told you so.

*His bicycle is red,  
like mine was. When it  
was new, it must have  
glistened.*

No story translates into this, the protagonist  
seeing himself through his child's eyes,  
falling away from the body he had held  
and the wings on it. Icarus, grandfather,  
reclined in a plotless room with windows,  
dreaming of Canton or Fuzhou  
or his thermos, green and surprisingly heavy.  
His dreams do not need to be translated.  
He is my translation.

# Auschwitz Gate, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

Karis Schneider



# Nadirah Mansour

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## *The Captain and the Kid*

The sentinel took a long furtive look into what remained of the road below, then quickly ducked back behind the shattered window. Beside him, his captain, Thomas, grimaced as a steady stream of soot and concrete cascaded into his face. He brushed what he could out of his eyes, all the while suppressing a body-rattling cough, and turned to Bill, now squatting awkwardly on the floor besides him.

"Report: what's the situation below?"

"There ain't any street left, sir," he whispered, round eyes wide. "And there're craters everywhere."

"Any signs of life?"

Bill thought for a moment, lips pursed in concentration. He half-glanced at the window, in hope that it would jog his memory. "Nah, don't think so. No lights, too."

Thomas nodded sourly and looked around the room himself, searching for some inch of inspiration. It was an office, this room; the shelf-lined walls and the oak president's desk betrayed that much. It would've been simply ordinary, the haven of any middle-class businessman, with papers strewn about the desk in organized disarray and the half-filled glass of water beside them, had it not been for the shattered window frame and the clock on the opposite wall—cracked, but still ticking along incessantly. You'd almost want to sit back in that large authoritative winged chair and shuffle some documents busily, if a film of dust and gunpowder weren't clinging to every surface. His eyes came to rest on the stairwell, just beyond the partially open door.

"Bill." He leaned urgently over to his companion and cupped his hand around his ear. "Bill, when I give the signal, crawl to the door. This is of the utmost necessity. Crawl as quietly as possible. Then we'll go down those stairs. Ready?"

Thomas got on all fours and nodded to Bill to do the same. With another shake of the head, they began to crawl, each movement in perfect sync. Beneath them, the great Persian carpet rustled and gravel crunched against their knees. He glanced back at Billy, whose face was in one set line, even as the shattered glass cut into the fabric of his trousers and gashed at his small palms. He brought his gaze forward and

focused on the door.

"Almost there," he whispered, more to himself than to Billy.

"Yessir," Bill mumbled obediently.

In what seemed like eons, they reached the door and Thomas straightened up. They'd scrambled up these stairs just an hour ago, but the curving iron rail, running along the flat, almost unobtrusive plush carpeted steps, seemed wholly unfamiliar to him. He turned around to face Bill, who was still crouched on the floor, looking up at him expectantly. He leaned over and soundlessly helped Bill to his feet.

"The stairs, if I remember correctly, lead to the front shop." He lightly brushed some of the dust and pebbles off Bill's front. "And behind the front shop is the storeroom. We can get to a backstreet from there—it won't have been destroyed."

Bill nodded cooperatively, ignoring the distant rumble of shell fire.

"Our rendezvous point's the safehouse by the river. There're the rest of the troops and our supplies. By my calculations we're not far: when we came in I remember seeing the Abbey's spire. And we're on the city perimeters: they always bombard from the outside in, the predictable bastards."

Bill flinched slightly. Thomas felt his authority swell and continued, without pausing. "Then there's the wind. Just look at the way those papers are rustling over there. And you know what they say about the wind and the river." He gave Bill's front a final brush over, then promptly turned around. "We'll be off then. All right?"

He'd regained his composure, he realized, as they edged down the wide steps. The curse had given him an edge, like some medal or a long scar running across his face up and over the eyes and misconstruing the mouth. Thomas looked at Bill. He didn't look nervous either now, but rather trusting and optimistic. A hard knot formed in Thomas' throat.

As they neared the foot of the stairs, Thomas held his hand back, bringing them both to a steady stop. He perked up his ears, trying to distinguish between Bill's gentle breathing beside him, and potential approaching footfalls or the front door gently edging open.

With a meaningful look at Bill, he stepped nimbly down the remainder of the stairs and into the front shoproom. There was no sign of the enemy, or even a broken window, for that matter, but he stared a bit longer anyway. This was the sort of place his mother shopped in. He could just see her now, the place gleaming with cleanliness and the alacrity of regular customers, edging between the marble counters and wooden racks, pausing every now and then to inspect a tin of crackers or pick up a jar of jam. She'd bustle over to the counter, groceries overflowing in her arms, only to haggle with the beefy shopkeeper for a quarter of an hour before paying standard price.

"Let's go, Bill," he said, for the first time that hour, without even the beginnings of a whisper.

In the back alley miraculously untouched by the bombardment, Thomas spotted

the nearest street sign. "Ahh. Mauvie Street. We're not as far from the river as I thought. You remember the way?"

Bill put his hand to his plump chin, in a brief bout of contemplation. After a few moments, he nodded slowly. "Down this way. Then we turn right at the sign with the horse on it."

"Correct. The Inn of the Dancing Shetland. That's exactly what we'll do. Shouldn't be too hard." He looked into the looming distance, where sporadic bouts of shell fire lit up the darkening sky. "Bombing's getting lighter and I doubt there's any of the enemy on the ground. We'll walk from here."

They briskly stepped through the narrow alleyways in silence, only breaking their gait to avoid a puddle or an inexplicably large rat. The backstreets seemed dead, no longer the blatant underworld they were reputed to be. Thomas could envision his mother here, too, lost in the truest sense of the word but steering him and his brother confidently by the elbow, nodding a merry hello to a tramp slumped in a dark doorway and offering an apple from her shopping basket to a scantily clad, heavily made-up woman perched on a street corner.

He didn't know when it began to happen nor when he later looked back on it could he even understand why it had even happened; all he knew was that it did, that suddenly the pair of them began to run. The scene seemed to rush past him and slowly, everything melted away: sound, sight, touch and smell. All that remained was him and Bill and the Inn of the Dancing Shetland in the foggy distance. He filled the emptiness, imagining he was a sprinter at the Olympics, cheering spectators galore and sunlight glinting off the stadium walls; he was a horse running through the verdant countryside under an azure sky; he was a young boy, running, thin rubber soles slapping the cobbled road, with his brother, in a game of make-believe.

As they rounded the corner, he felt Bill stretch out his arm and search for Thomas' own hand. Thomas reached for it and, in a moment of perfect probability, grabbed it. Bill began to giggle, geysering up in infectious spurts and bubbles. Only moments passed before Thomas followed suit, laughter crashing like waves against sand. He clutched Bill's hand tighter as their laughter swelled to one continuous note.

"My God! Tommy! Billy!" the young mother shrieked from the front steps of her brick townhouse. Two young boys, hand in hand, ran towards her through the thin mist before collapsing at her feet in one giggling heap.

"I was worried sick!" she cried, helping them to their feet and holding them to her in tight embrace before letting them go and shooting them both piercing looks.

"What's the matter with the two of you? Stop laughing and come along now to the shelter." She ruffled some gravel out of Tommy's hair and then, taking them both forcibly by the arm, hurried them through the backyard and down into the bomb shelter.

They were still laughing, she noted grimly as she turned back to lock the door. Probably gone mental, the pair of them. She closed the heavy door, but not before giving the skies overhead, full of the cacophony of the Blitz, one last heavy sigh.

## Maia ten Brink

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### *Border Runner, Fire Runner*

Seven hours I cannot escape  
this steaming raving desert

in dreaming country  
where all my old friends, stitches, fears  
have pitched their tents.

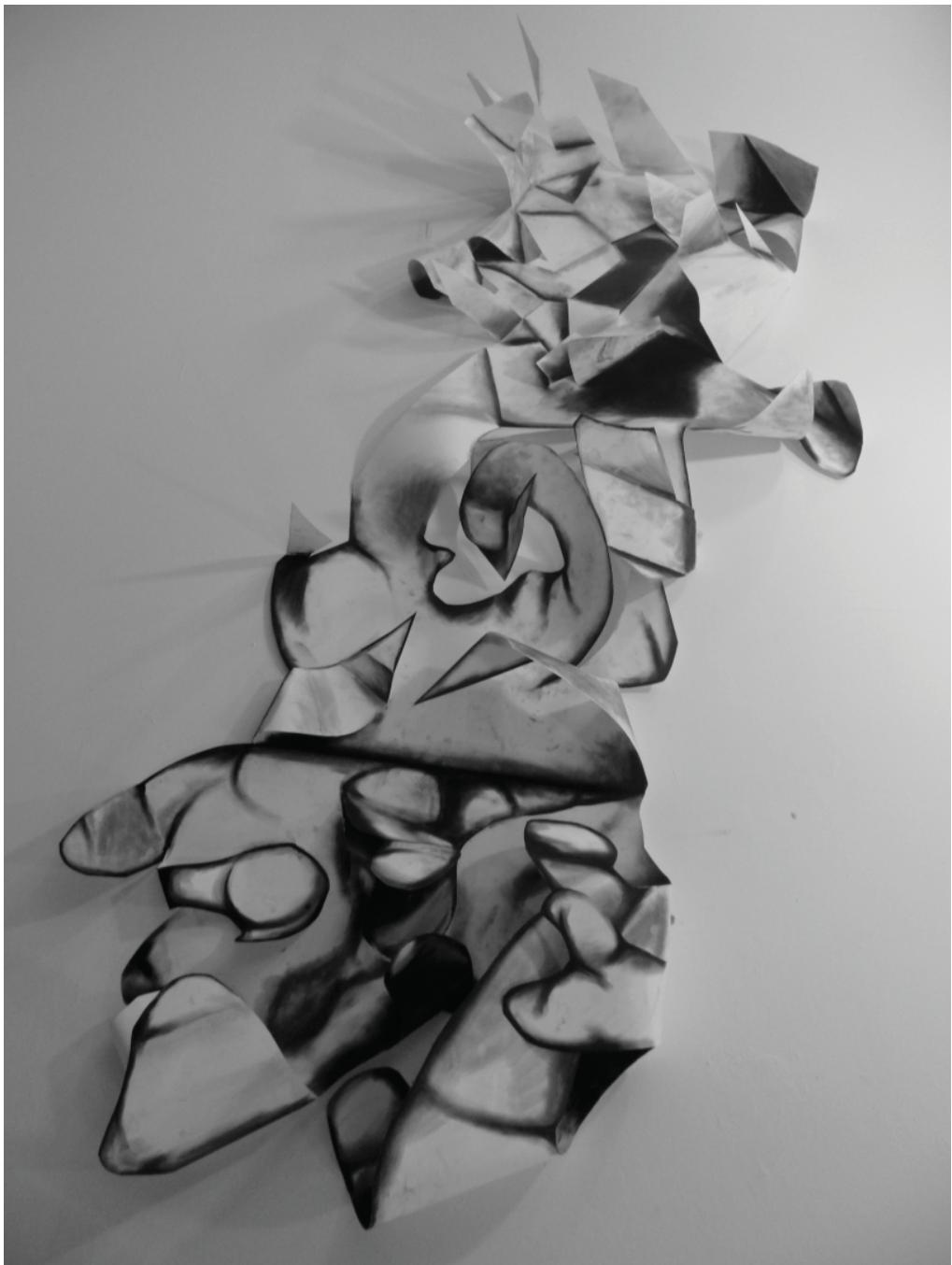
The bandy red stone casts its gaze  
over me like a lighthouse.  
The river gouges a wide circle.

There is the minefield and the sinkhole.  
There you are, dreamed  
as I remember you, hurt-eyed,

hands in your pockets.  
You become prairie fire  
singeing deep the sockets of the earth.  
There is no refuge from memory.  
I cannot duck back under  
the barbed wire into waking.

I am far from my father  
and my motherland.  
I have missed you terribly.

It is all I can do not to stand still  
and burn away.



**bestehender Gestaltkrieg, CHARCOAL AND CHALK ON PAPER**

Michael R. Jimenez

## Elizabeth Shoenfelt

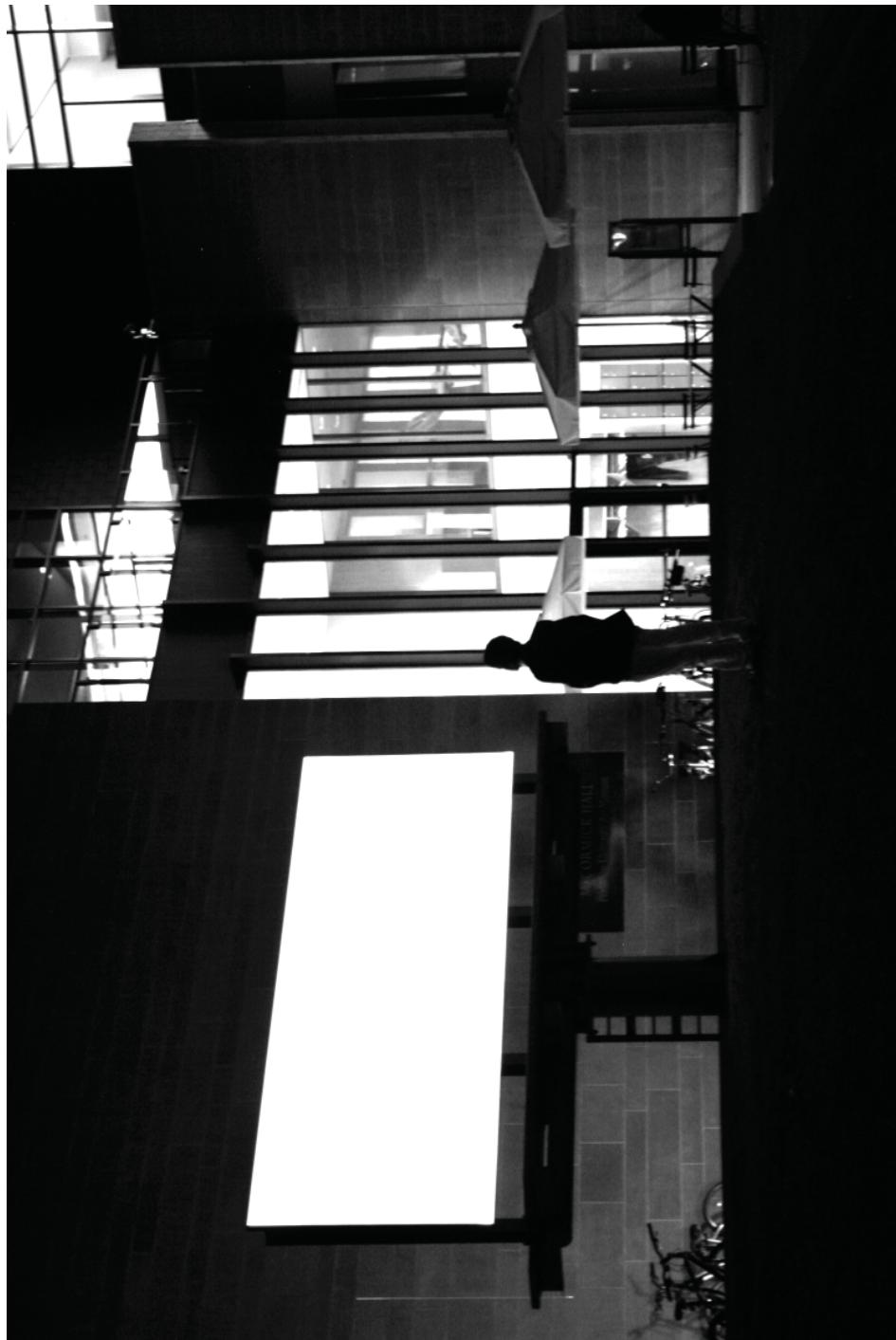
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### \$65 Cab

He said he was worried and just about to page me  
in the airport. I said I was the last one  
off the airplane, but really I just had to pee.  
The Vermont mountains were beautiful, covered  
in snow though.  
We drove down the road  
with the windows down.  
He played the shrill tunes  
of Kate Bush  
“She doesn’t give concerts anymore.  
People got hurt trying to get close  
to her.”  
He thought her “Candle in the Wind” remake  
Was  
about Princess Di.  
He said he was self-taught in web design  
“What’s ‘Javascript?’”  
The mountains were beautiful  
He pointed  
to an ugly field  
right next to the highway.  
The corn had been ripped up  
for silage  
so only crusty stumps were left.  
Water pooled  
in the grooves  
of the tractor tire tracks.  
“This is where my house is going to be someday,  
someday,  
when I get rich.”

# Deep Thought, Princeton Art Museum, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH

Krishna Choudhary



## Amy Gopinathan

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### *Missing Me One Place*

“It would be raining, wouldn’t it? Tonight of all nights—poetic justice or something like that,” Todd said, his fingers working through Annika’s tangle of onyx curls, the way he used to when they were teenagers, lying in the back seat of his car. Annika would drag her index finger across the frosted window writing Walt Whitman quotations. But they had grown up, which meant trading the backseat for a bed.

“You know what they say about rain,” she said, pressing her cheek to his chest.

“What?”

“It’s a symbol. Don’t ask me what it symbolizes. I suppose it means anything you want it to—that’s the beauty of English. You can just make it up. When I say things like that to George he bristles and redds, like I’m trying to offend his work or something. . . . I’m not, you know. I married him, didn’t I? Besides, I think teaching is incredibly,” she paused, “noble.” She propped herself on a scrawny elbow to scrutinize Todd’s face, smiling slightly. She hoped he’d catch it, because those should be contagious. Smiles. They should multiply instead of cells gone awry, cells that don’t know when to stop growing, forming masses where they shouldn’t, the size of several toes mashed together.

“Do you think that we messed up?” he asked.

She thought of her daughter Lillie and of his son Eric.

“No. We almost did.” She pressed her palm against his bare side as she said this, glancing at his still-buckled belt and her own bunched skirt.

“I meant our lives.”

“You just have to remember what you want. Do you know? What you want?”

“You didn’t answer my question,” he said.

“You didn’t answer mine,” she replied, pulling away from him. She straightened, her back against the headboard of the bed, knees hugged to her chest. Todd followed suit.

“I want there to be no consequences,” he said after a moment’s pause.

“You’re not special. Everyone wants that. At some point, you have to grow up.”

"Oh, and you were so grown-up and mature today, flinging yourself at me, tearing at my shirt like you had something to prove. You're so mature."

Crack. Hands seem to have mind of their own, Annika thought, before pulling away and bringing her reddened palm to her face, feeling the heat of the hit against her lips. Todd touched his cheek, mouth opening and closing.

"What? Katie's never slapped you?" She began laughing, struck by the absurdity of the moment. I've already started to lose it, she thought, whatever might be left of my brain before it loses shape and melts, like ice cream or sorbet. You should never think of yourself as an ice cream or sorbet, she thought.

"My wife is significantly more dignified than you are," he said, rummaging along the bed for his shirt.

"Dignity seems like a worthy tradeoff when it comes to maintaining your self respect . . . although I suppose my temper can get the best of me," she said, rubbing her knuckles. "Look at that, I hit you so hard that I hurt myself."

"Was there an apology in there somewhere? Here, let me see it," he said, joining her on the bed. He reached for her wrist, brushing his fingers across her knuckles.

She jerked away from him, severing the tentative contact. It didn't make sense, this renewed madness. There had been an unspoken agreement after that night. She glanced at the clock: 8:15. The play wouldn't be over yet. She'd said she was feeling too ill to see Lillie's performance that night, but she'd have a cake ready.

"I'm supposed to make a cake for Lillie," she said after a few moments.

"She does remember the last time you baked, right?" He asked, smirk quickly vanishing as she smacked the back of his head.

"That was not my fault. . . . Come on, you. For old time's sake," she said.

"I should go, Katie's out of town. Eric shouldn't be home alone too long . . . He's got a new girlfriend and Katie is terrified that they're having sex."

"Are they?"

"He's my son. . . . What do you think?"

"Poor Katie," she said, laughing softly, remembering a teenage Todd.

"I should go," Todd repeated. "Don't argue, you know I'm right. This isn't us screwing around as teenagers or getting drunk at the Lake before your wedding and . . . I won't be able to keep my hands off—I'll beg you to spend your remaining time with me."

"That would be very selfish," she said.

"I've never once said I wasn't selfish. I've never claimed to be a good man. I've never been good at putting someone else first. I go the path of least resistance with people. You know that. . . . This thing between us—it's different."

She knew what he meant. This thing between them surpassed an infantile selfish desire to have one's own way, to rewrite history, to live unchallenged. This was adult desperation at being submerged in a sea of lost opportunities, so immense that you could drown beneath waves of missed moments. It was like that time—the

time they'd made love before her wedding, barely able to get each other's clothes off, the smell of tequila permeating the air. This never happened, he had said after it was over. He always did take the easy way out.

"Do I get to be selfish instead? Can I ask you to do this for me?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"If I got up, just got up and went to the kitchen. Would you follow?" She stood and walked to the bedroom door. She flicked the light switch. A warm buttery light filled the small master bedroom, highlighting empty mugs, used tissues littering the floor, and tangled heaps of unworn and worn clothing trampled in the morning's haste. She glanced at the window.

"The rain's let up . . . please." She exited, not waiting to see if he would follow. He did.

The house was much smaller than his, older, with creaky floorboards that groaned in protest every time one mounted or descended the stairs, two small cream-colored bedrooms, and a sagging front porch. Annika flicked the light switch; the kitchen awakened.

"Well? Going to call your son?" she asked.

"Of course," he said, and then he plucked his phone from his left pocket, cupping it in his hands like a baby chicken, and dialing his son. It took five minutes to convince Eric to join them; for while Eric adored Annika, he and Lillie had been feuding since middle school.

"How is it that we have been best friends for over thirty years, and our children can't even be in the same room together?" Annika asked after Todd finished speaking to Eric.

"It's because they danced naked when they were very little. Now, all the mystery is gone," he said.

"So if you and I knew each other as little kids and danced naked together. . . ." She wiggled her eyebrows, and flicked some flour at him. He jerked away, trying to brush the fine white powder from his shirt.

"That's not what I meant," he snapped.

"Babe, lighten up," she said, leaning against the edge of the bisque colored counter, implements of her baking adventure spread behind her.

"Do you remember what I told you, that first Christmas you moved here? The kids were by the tree, arguing passionately over who got to be the conductor for Santa's train."

"You said that you were sorry for Katie because I was a cheat, because I was never satisfied. . . . Told me I had to stop looking for you," he said.

"And you said that you weren't looking for me, and that—"

He cut her off, "I was a shit."

"Yes, you were," she agreed, turning away, "I was wrong."

Todd stiffened.

"About?"

"We made a mess of everything," she said.

"Except our kids," he reminded her, but she shrugged it off.

"How can I possibly expect my fifteen-year old daughter to grow up without me? How do I impart all my wisdom? Don't laugh. All right, perhaps I don't have that much wisdom. But what about my forty-two years of experience? I've got six months left. Six months to shape a life."

Todd was forty-four years old. He worked on Wall Street and moved with the best of the best, the cream of the crop. He had a leggy blonde wife, with the fluttering lashes and a quick killer instinct that gave her a salary almost as high as his, and an Ivy League degree. He'd chased her, throwing the money and success at her, until there hadn't been any chase left in him and she'd said yes to him, to the house, to the money, to the family. And they had a family, the baby in their arms that night in the hospital room, the three of them, smelling sterilizer and antiseptic, as well as gardenias and peonies, the flowers that Annika had sent. It had been the last time, gazing at his son, surrounded by the flowers, that he had cried, not a lot, not a little, but just enough to feel the moisture begin to make opened eyes uncomfortable. As he watched Annika, back rigid, black shirt hugging her body, dark glossy hair falling in messy ringlets down her back, he felt it—that exhausted feeling that deadened his limbs and made his eyelids feel heavy, almost mutinous.

"You don't have to," he said, waiting for her to respond, but wasn't surprised when she didn't. He knew what was troubling her, the killer question. How do you find the tools to quantitatively measure regret? When do you begin to try? He stepped closer.

"All things come to an end. Even remission. . . . Do you know what kills me?" She turned around then, her eyes like large cornflower blue discs pressed into her powder white face, "you're still the first person I want to tell. The one I—" She paused, unsure what to say. This next bit had to be done just right. After all, this was it, the last moment.

"I cheated on Katie," Todd said before she could continue, "you knew about that, but—I lied, when I said I didn't want her to be you. The other one . . . I wanted her to be you. I still think about that night, before your wedding."

"I know," Annika said, "but you wanting me was outweighed by your need to belong to that world that you thought you were supposed to live in. Don't pout—yes, that's a pout. I have a fifteen-year-old daughter. I am well versed in the language of pouts. I'm not blaming you. I knew I'd get burned. I was something of a glutton for punishment—and you thought, you thought I'd always be there. I always thought you'd be there too. But then came George and Katie."

"I think I'm in love with you." He pressed his forehead against the refrigerator.

"You think. . . . Still taking the easy way out—no, don't say anything. We wouldn't have worked. You're a shitty husband—and you never could have loved me. The real

me, that is. You can't love people, I don't know why. . . . You're passionately in love with the idea of people, with how things are supposed to be. You always just miss it. You missed me." She glanced out the window. Black tree silhouettes against primary blue sky. She was struck by the sublime beauty of night. For the first time in her life, she was relieved that the day had passed so quickly.

"What if we'd gotten our act together?" he asked, voice soft.

"I'd be a lot better at baking cakes. George can't bake either, you know."

"Eric's a good baker. . . . I taught him," he said.

"He can teach Lillie."

"Assuming they don't light one another on fire."

"Yes, assuming that," she laughed.

"When will you tell them?"

"Not until it's close to the end. She shouldn't worry, and George, he can't keep a secret. She's got him wrapped around her finger," she said, smiling slightly.

"We have six months. Six months," he exclaimed with a sudden burst of energy. "We'll go all over the country. We'll find every cancer clinic. . . . It's not fair. We should have just—I should have. . . . This wasn't how it was supposed to be."

"Growing up means no take-backs," she said gently. And that was it: where gray matter in the skull feels melted, like ice cream, but it still works—your mind, that is—and you can't stop thinking. About everything. About the maybes. The what-ifs. For there it was, the tedious business of dying, and the world, it would not slow down, nor spin from its orbit like a failing dreidel. The only maybe that mattered was this: maybe their children would get it right. She and Todd, they'd already made their lives. No take-backs.

He took a step toward her so that they were only an inch apart. She brought her hand up to his cheek, about to tug his chin down to hers, but she pulled away at the last moment, edging crustacean-like away from him.

"It's me! She set the kitchen on fire yet?" yelled Eric, banging on the front door.

"Aren't you sorry now? Sorry that you never learned to bake?" asked Todd.

"No," she whispered.

"Annika, I . . . Me too. I'm not sorry either. . . ." Todd's eyes were a bit too moist to remain comfortably open, because in that moment he understood how impossible it was to live. Without consequences.

## Maia ten Brink

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### *The Bearer of Bad News*

The telephone is an eye at the center of the room,  
like a trapdoor but not a trapdoor.  
You cannot escape through it.  
If you remove the telephone the eye remains,  
as after the wound the skin remembers it.  
If you close your eyes the eye remains.  
All sound escapes through it.  
You might say the telephone is a pistol  
that you put to your ear.  
You might say that.

Happiness, PAINTING ›

Alice Zheng



# Sofia Orlando

---

## *Domesticity*

my favorite part of day is when  
we spin around each other like  
clothes in the washing machine  
and listen to the buttons clicking

while outside the squirrels and the  
stars listen to our spit-spot  
conversation by the toaster  
without making any judgments—

you tend to send me the right  
coffee vibes, especially when  
you pair them with the peonies  
and plum cakes dreaming on our pillows;

the phone calls and sleepy  
post-it memos are integrated  
into this life of afternoon walks  
and graham cracker chats.

all it takes is for you to  
trace the shadows that the cherry  
tree makes on the yellow back door  
and I'm submerged,

or when you step on my feet  
and tell me that it's therapeutic  
while I gasp for air like a junkie and pretend to cry  
until you let me do the crossword puzzle over crumpets—

and if we're lucky and have the time  
we'll pop yogurt-covered raisins into each other's  
mouths with awful aim and then  
pluck the sweetness off the furniture with our teeth.

## Maia ten Brink

---

### *The Beautiful Girl with the Mysterious Mole*

She sleeps in an erasable face,  
skull full of minnows

*I saw her bra through her shirt*  
braids a fire in his brain,  
leaves tire treads across his palate

Seven minutes, two stops  
He smelled her deodorant—  
a leaf of female wine or a purple stocking—

Removed his breathing apparatus,  
silenced his eyes, heard the whirring  
of trains tasting the bread-dough morning

She stings like a yellow ghost scratching the cloudline,  
luminous, immaterial color  
A spiral arrangement of light-up sneakers,  
a lacerator, a poster collector

*—Moving, move me, it rained,*  
more tragic than playful  
*I always wanted you here—*

Standing outside in a brainstorm,  
he abandoned his interiors  
for the fabric of the visible

His palette became darker and narrower,  
her curvilinear forms  
slit the surface of his painting—a living brush,  
an Oracle installation

He understood the honeycombing of things—  
we do not float because we are full of holes  
we float because we are full of wholes



**Hold Still, Silly,** CHARCOAL ON PAPER  
Nicole Sato

## Matthew Brailas

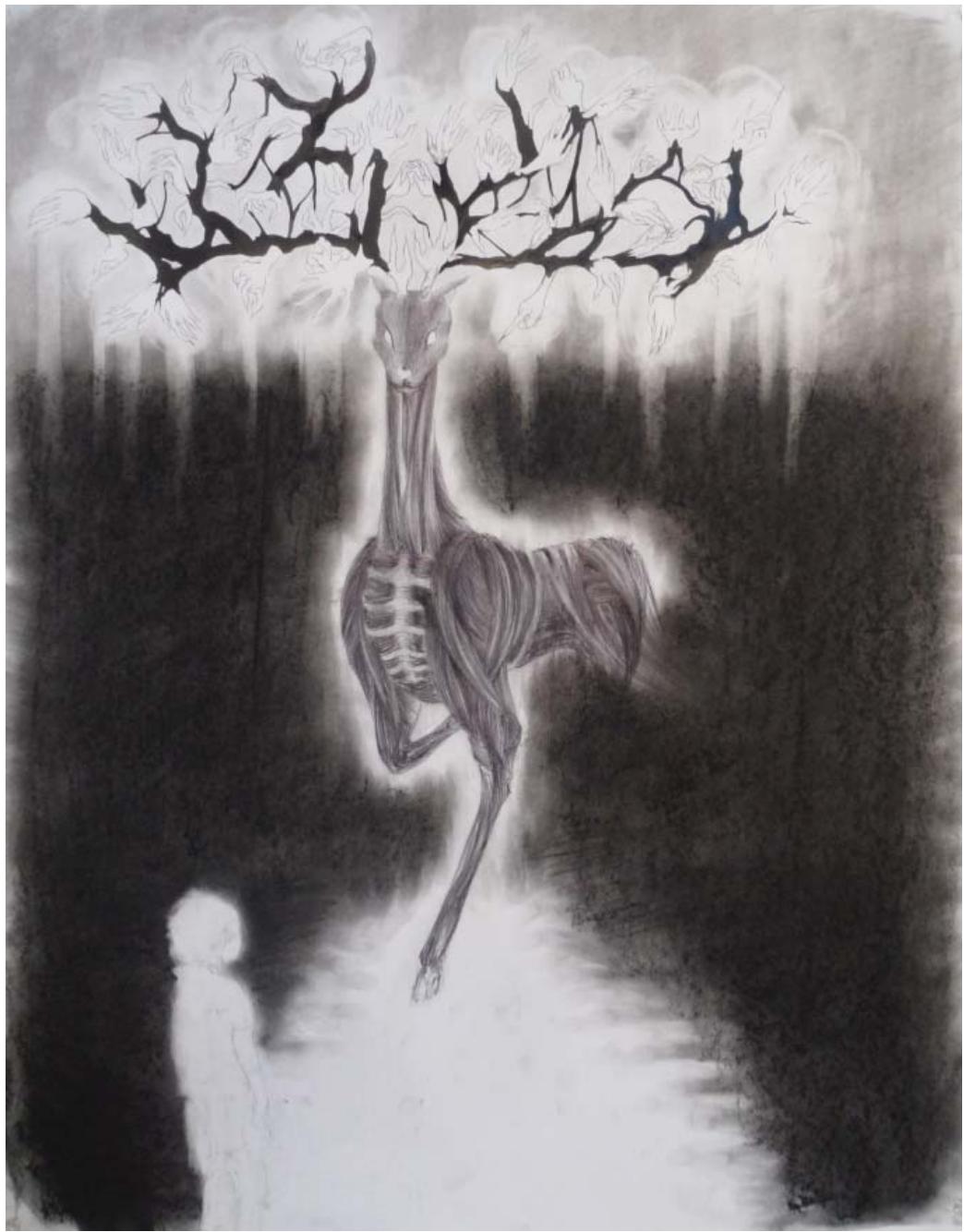
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### *Bartholomew in Texas*

In the silent wounds  
of Jim's paintings, this, always—  
Big Bend. The desert  
lush with Harvard Agave  
with the cream colored  
poisonous flowers of the nolina.  
A landscape violent and delicate  
as a dragonfly, dug out by the breath of deer  
the furious rutting of bighorn sheep.  
A pregnant ewe steams  
in the morning chill.  
A bee floats from the petals  
of a dry flower—this

and always,  
in the center,  
the martyr.

Hoisted from the barbs of a honey locust,  
or sprawled over the rocks  
cacti licking at his heels.  
He is fat and pink.  
He is holding a tanning knife  
and the damp rag  
of his own skin.  
He calls to Jim  
in the clatter of body on stone, “we  
love you. We  
will eat you alive.”



**Bearer of Burden**, PEN, CHARCOAL, INK  
April Lee

# Ting Gou

---

## *Zhuge Liang to Sima Yi*

*In The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, Sima Yi is tricked by Zhuge Liang into retreating from a defenseless fort.*

Your slew of horses.  
The journey you took that resembled  
your teeth. The armor has bitten  
into your shins and the familiar poison  
blinds your tongue. Your superstitions  
run thick. The floor sweepers?  
  
I employed them. The houses inside?  
Not a single living being.  
  
See past my bluff, and the city is yours.  
Believe in my cunning, and we're both  
doomed. Do you want me to sit up here  
and rot? Will that make you satisfied,  
to leave me with my little victory?  
I don't hang these trophies  
  
like an eager kid. This campaign  
has broken my back with its absence

of bodies. We can wait here all day  
until the streets become sickly clean

with sweeping. Welcome to  
the East City, to my side of this

story. Bring in your troops,  
talk to me about blue mountains,

but stay outside at your own caution.  
Arrows slip like candle wax.

You could wish into being  
whatever you hate most,

whole armies, warships.  
and, in this desert, an armada.

# Maia ten Brink

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## *Mostly Waiting*

The winch driver hums  
something in Lithuanian.  
Leo is his name. The other one is Charlie.  
We wait as the wire pays out,  
the rust singing under tension,  
all of us sore-footed hovering back  
from the edge of the swallowing dark.  
I watch the red line on the screen  
in the dry lab, settled in my own fine dust,  
waiting for the thud,  
which is when we reach the bottom of everything.  
I feel it in my stomach, down there I feel it  
in the groan of the winch-line as the piston core  
plummets into the stolid earth  
and takes it away from itself.  
We wait for the machine to drag the bottom  
to the sea surface, the earth in it  
howling for two miles,  
the ocean heaving and bucking.  
We lift it under the half moon onto our wet deck.  
The bottom spills out on us—pungent sea soil,  
granular, dark olive, slick on our fingers.  
It is speckled with the faint silver  
of seeing light for the first time and touching  
the bigness of everything.  
It is freezing like another planet.

## **Handicrafts in Pipili, India, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPH**



Krishna Choudhary



## Madeline McMahon

---

### *Bouquet*

They stand beside me  
As if they have burst  
From the dark confines  
of a Dutch still-life.  
At the forefront,  
blooming with splendor,  
quivering with still life.  
On the sides, their heads  
bowed in mortal prayer,  
Yellow-capped saints  
become martyrs  
for the cause of  
*memento mori*.  
But all I can think  
is that I have never seen  
such gorgeous dust.



## Bios

---

**Clare Arentzen** is an avid artist from the beautiful (and flat) land of corn known as Illinois. Her academic interests include biology and, of course, art, which she hopes to continue to pursue at Princeton.

**Sean Paul Ashley** is a sophomore from Kingston, Jamaica. He is considering majoring in philosophy. People hang on his every word, including the prepositions.

**Matthew Brailas** is a freshman from Austin, Texas. He is currently planning to pursue a degree in English with a concentration in creative writing.

**Maia ten Brink** is a sophomore from Falmouth, Massachusetts. She likes her bicycle, writing, and taking naps. She is pursuing psychology and a creative writing certificate.

**Sean Andrew Chen** attended Juilliard studying cello and composition before attending Princeton whereupon he decided to turn his attention to the visual arts and architecture. He uses his beloved medium format Mamiya for most work and loves playing with dangerous chemical in the darkroom.

**Krishna Choudhary** lived in India for the first 13 1/2 years of her life, then went to Los Angeles for High school. She started taking interest in photography in junior year of high school, but currently she plans on majoring in physics.

**Flannery Cunningham** hails from St. Cloud, Minnesota, and is a composer in the music department. She likes music, words, and music with words.

**Cristina Flores** is a junior from Atlanta who loves any kind of art, especially drawing and oil painting.

**Ting Gou** is a senior molecular biology major from Atlanta, Georgia, who is also writing a poetry thesis. She would like to thank the editors and staff of the *Nassau Literary Review* for putting together a beautiful issue, as well as everyone who submitted. She hopes to teach middle school science as a Teach For America corps member next year.

**Natasha Japanwala** is a freshman from Karachi, Pakistan, and probably consumes

a million cups of tea each day. Among many, many other things, she loves early mornings and the early morning sun, old books that actually smell like old books, and the sound of water in any one of its many forms.

**Michael R. Jimenez** is currently a junior in the Mathematics Department. He is interested in abstracting form.

**Rebecca Kagle** is currently a sophomore in Wilson College and hopes to pursue a major in molecular biology with a certificate in Italian. She is from Boston, is a triplet, likes to sketch in her free time, and loves post it notes.

**Abigail Klionsky** considered buying a DSLR this summer as opposed to a laptop; then she realized that a computer was probably more practical for what most of her time spent at Princeton will necessitate. Her favorite things to photograph are reflections and super-macro, nitty-gritty, rusty-peely urban decay scenes. Other than photography, she enjoys hiking, frisbee, traveling, speaking Hebrew, and babysitting. And she has no idea what she's going to major in.

**April Lee** is from New York and is aiming to major in molecular biology. Art has been something like a hobby until now, but she is glad that Princeton has given her the opportunity to explore it more seriously.

**Marissa Lee** is a history major from Chicago, Illinois. "In Exile" is a short story from her creative thesis. She is an associate editor for news with *The Daily Princetonian* and wants to be a TV writer.

**Nadirah Mansour**'s greatest ambition is to write an episode of *Doctor Who*. A freshman, she thought it was perfectly reasonable until Neil Gaiman (whom she'd like to kidnap and keep under her bed) wrote one. Back to the drawing board.

**Lizzie J. Martin** is a freshman from North Carolina. She spent nine months last year doing service work in India with the Princeton University Bridge Year Program, and she is a firm believer in Dave Eggers' assertion that "what matters is that you do good work. What matters is that you produce things that are true and will stand."

**Madeline McMahon** is a sophomore who has not seen *Star Wars*, *Inception*, or *The Dark Knight*, yet finds herself alive and well in the 21st century. She enjoys all things Elizabethan and Georgian, and hopes to wake up one day knowing her major.

**Sofia Orlando** is a freshman from Rome, Italy. Sofia likes traveling, Woody Allen films, and frozen Oreos. Her favorite poet is E. E. Cummings.

**Oriana Poindexter** is a senior in the photography department, and has been dabbling with drawing both in and on her photographs.

Born and raised in Honolulu, **Nicole Sato** enjoys bellydancing and listening to korean pop music. Her potential major is chemical engineering, and she is interested in global warming and sustainability. This is her self-portrait from introductory drawing.

**Karis Schneider** takes pictures sometimes.

**Elizabeth Shoenfelt**, a sophomore from the tiny town of Skaneateles, New York, plans to enter the geosciences department next semester. She loves short stories by Ray Bradbury, and she has always loved capturing little chunks of the world in her poems.

**Stephanie Tam** is a sophomore from New York, New York. She is enjoying her last year of being UNDECIDED, although the reality is that she will probably be an English major. She writes, and does some other things, too.

**Nathan Tyrell** is a member of the class of 2014 and an engineer. In his free time he enjoys listening to The Clash and perhaps taking photographs.

**Chhaya Werner** spent last year in India with the Bridge Year Program. Her life at school is comprised of science, ballroom dancing, and tigers.

**Michelle Wu** is a wannabe photographer who actually knows absolutely nothing about photography. Still, she enjoys carrying around her mother's 1984 Nikon FG-20 and pretending that she knows what she's doing. She also likes biology, singing, long runs on the beach, and the moments just following rain.

**Alice Zheng** is a painter, writer, and prospective computer science major. She likes food, art, poetry, books, music, trees, and nice people. Outside of academics, she likes to work for the Student Design Agency, act for BAC|Drama, and write for Equal Writes.



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