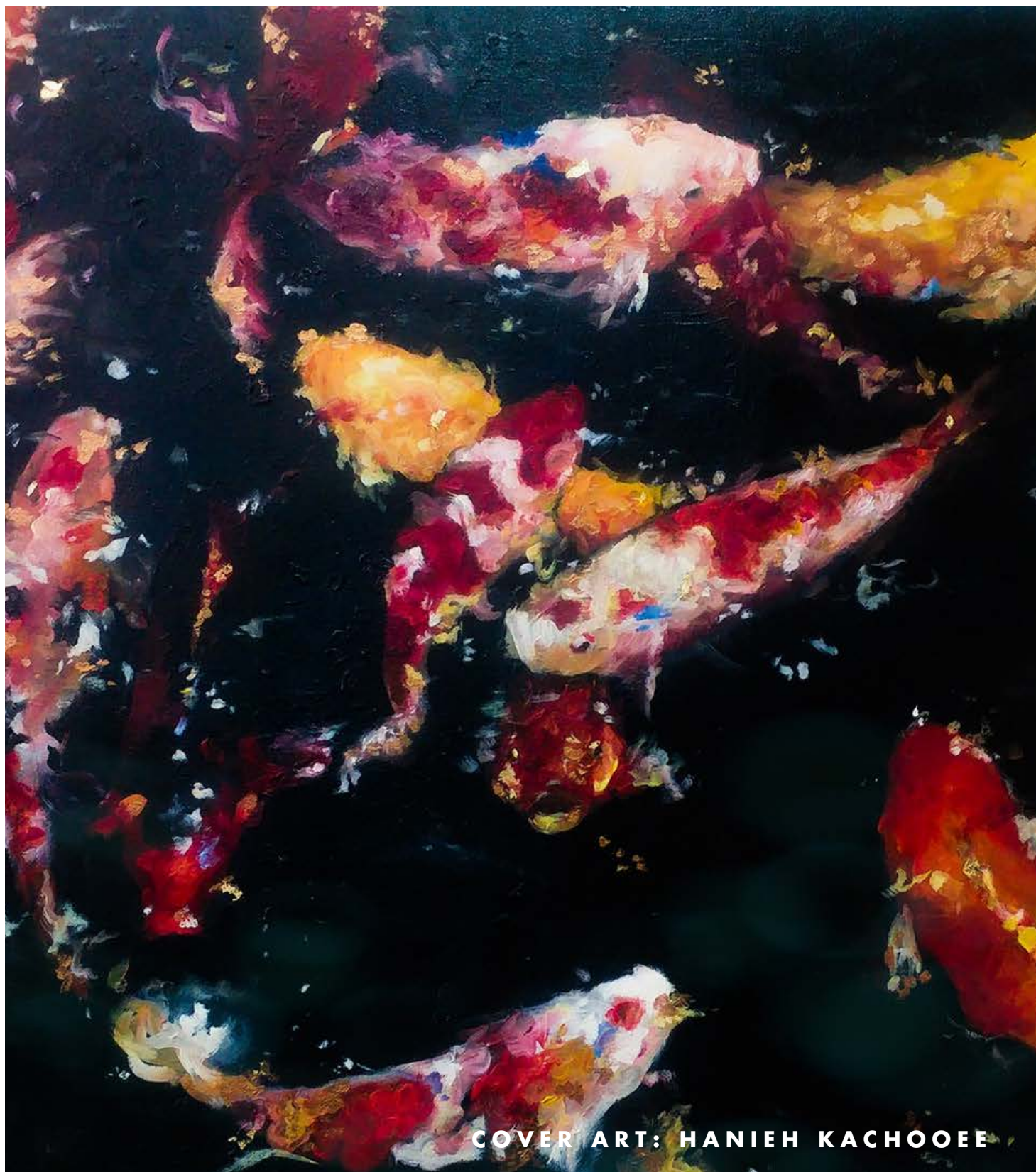


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# LABYRINTH



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# Please take care as some works address sensitive topics. Here are resources.

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If You Are Thinking About Suicide, please call  
**1-855-654-6735**

Need someone to talk to? NJ Hopeline is here to help.  
Specialists are available for confidential telephone counseling and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You're NOT alone.

Crisis Textline:  
**Text NJ to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis support.**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. By dialing 1-800-273-TALK, the call is routed to the nearest crisis center in a national network of more than 150 crisis centers. The Lifeline's national network of local crisis centers provides crisis counseling and mental health referrals day and night.

Domestic Violence:  
National Domestic Violence Hotline  
**1-800-799-SAFE (7233) / 1-800- 787-3224 TTY**  
secure online chat: [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

loveisrespect  
**1-866-331-9474 / Text "loveis" to 22522**  
Secure online chat: [loveisrespect.org](http://loveisrespect.org)

# Hotlines

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**NJ Coalition to End Domestic Violence Women (NJCEDV)**

1-609-584-8107

**NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJ CASA)**

1-609-631-4450

**Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline**

1-877-NJ-ABUSE (652-2873)

1-800-835-5510 (TTY)

**Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline**

1-800-572-SAFE

**Statewide Sexual Violence Hotline**

1-800-601-7200

**NJ Human Trafficking Hotline**

1-855-END-NJ-HT (1-855-363-6548)

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**

1-800-799-SAFE

**National Sexual Violence Hotline**

1-800-656-HOPE

**National Human Trafficking Hotline**

1-888-373-7888

**New Jersey Crime Victim's Law Center**

1-973-729-9342

# Acknowledgements

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Professor Seamus Gibbons, Professor Iris Bucchino, Professor Brian Cordell, Ms. Kelli Hayes, and Dr. John Cichowski. This year's edition would not have been possible without your support.

# A Curious Touch

Ourania Rahman

Again and again,  
Investigate your hands;  
I wonder if they'd fit into mine with ease,

I wonder if the vacant spaces between my fingers  
Would be filled with the warmth of yours,  
Or the reassurance of your grasp  
Is enough to calm my nerves.

I wonder all these things  
While you allow me to investigate,  
Eager with any chance I get  
To engrain the feeling of your hand in my head.

And when your fingertips brush against mine coincidentally,  
My heart is suddenly awoken,  
And in search of your reciprocal harmony.  
Tell me - does yours do the same?



**“Nostalgia”**  
Hanieh Kachooee



**“Let’s go home”**  
Alizeh Hussain



# Too early to call

Rex Harvilla

The number 3 is like  
Putting a smartie  
Between my thumb and my pointer  
And feeling the smoothness  
Of the concave candy curve

The number 3 is like  
Smoking near the hudson  
On some breezy day in april  
And you took a random elevator  
To see a rich man's world

The number 3 is like  
Walking off a plane  
And thanking the flight attendant  
Who gave you the diet coke  
With the most condensation

As hard as I try  
The number 3  
Is never like you

# Epidermis

Jake Frato

When we first met, I didn't exactly know how to take the fact that your name was Skin. It didn't make much sense to me, it certainly wasn't a name. It was more a handle than anything else, a name someone would call a friend in an online video game, or just a nickname one would get for having too many tattoos. It took me around the whole of our friendship to finally understand it as a name, but more importantly, why it was the only way you could ever identify yourself.

You're an artist by natural law and unabashedly live with that notion – you treat your art time as a job where you're the employee, manager, supervisor, HR, pay-roll, and CEO. I can certainly understand why you're treating something you love with such reverence that it is on par with work, as I too am the creative type. The difference between us though is your ownership of a quality I lack: confidence in skill. My words don't spill on to the page in a very meticulous way, my stories never matching the level of detail in your pieces. There is no way that I could paint a picture through stroke of key the way you can with the stroke of a brush, but you've been working on that skill your whole life, what could I expect?

When I took that into account, really got to know the person you were, the reason you were named Skin became a lot clearer. It's almost too clever, the name Skin: it is the ultimate canvas. Your skin serves as the vehicle which keeps you together, a body that itself is as much a work of art as what you create with your touch. Your face is an uncharted galaxy, each pore a star and your eyes serving as two bright blue planets which foster life that one can see if they look close enough. They orbit a smile that can be described in no simpler term than "the sun", radiating warm brightness and giving life to all that see it. Your body has curves that sway like mountains in a landscape, each peak and valley another immaculate design of nature as it takes course throughout years of growth.

Your skin has been treated as a never ending art project. The body modifications you have, the different colors of your hair, the marks on your body are all the intricate details that you attribute to every piece of art that you create. There has never been a more fitting name for an artist than what you choose to call yourself – though, I wonder if perhaps the name chose you. Sometimes I get swept away by the intimidation of knowing someone like you, fearful for my feelings under the weight of your totality. When one sees someone as so statuesque, it stands to reason that the weight of such a thought would be doubled in granite, but what do I know? Well, I suppose, I know how to put pen to paper. That's how I use my skin, I rip it away piece by piece to write another paragraph, sometimes just another word, to try and get my point across in a world where words mean nothing – and the action of tearing myself apart is the true respected art.

Perhaps, for us both, this world was never meant. We were two people who met in the blink of an eye and now are intertwined in one another's lives, like the muscles and tendons which bind skin to bone. We have layers on top of complicated layers on top of beautiful layers of epidermis growing thicker each and every day, and I could think of no greater friend to be trapped in this horrifically wonderful situation with. We are serving as the skeleton of something completely new, which I'd say is fitting after nine months of getting to know one another. That's what causes me to pull out your portrait. I look at you and survey your wrinkles, your piercings, your marks, your story...and as I stare, suddenly, you're gone. I look at myself, the one scar on my leg, my stretch marks – and I realize, I'm still here. I destroy this very writing, and I rip away another piece of skin, beginning anew.



**“cherry blossom”**  
Aamishq Dhir

# Girl in a Kimono

Rosemary Tierney

She's a young girl, dark hair short and swinging  
just above her shoulders. It looks  
even softer than the flowers  
embroidered on her kimono, pink. The flowers are  
white with rounded petals.  
The girl's scarlet obi seems tied too tightly. Surely  
she's too young to have a waist?  
Her eyes are ink-dark  
in her pale face, but bright,  
as if she's visible because of light within.  
Wooden geta make her steps small,  
but not hesitant. She moves carelessly  
and elegantly  
from stall to stall,  
smiling at the noh masks,  
laughing when her net misses the goldfish,  
putting her hands over her mouth as  
she watches a man swallow fire.  
She turns for a moment and I realize  
the back of her hair is pulled up and held in place by  
white pearls that have a strange sheen in the firelight,  
shimmering as though underwater.  
Suddenly, she hurries away  
up a path glowing with lanterns.  
It's almost time for the hanabi, but  
she goes farther and farther away,  
a rosy apparition heading up the mountain.  
I want to follow. She shouldn't go

alone. But it's dangerous.  
I can't see her anymore. And  
as the first boom spills light over my shoulders,  
I turn back, taking my shadow with me.  
The air is seeded with smells:  
smoke, citrus, takoyaki.  
The matsuri continues as if the girl was never there.



**“An Idol”**  
Meredith Cruz

# Miss Me?

Tatyanah Johnson

Do you reminisce?

The scent?

The taste?

The way our eyes turned into shatterproof glass

The connection between your ocean

The jewels of your temple

Consuming the wall guarding my abyss

Souls flowing like sleeping water

Hearts skipping along to the tempo of the magic we performed amongst the stars

Minds racing with the fear of it being too good to be true

No resistance.

Bodies wrapped neatly in a rose petal

That's nature's letter

Each breath we take sinking deeper and deeper

The Titanic

Our bodies fighting to let go

Don't leave

I won't

Do you miss me?

The way I miss you?

The touch of your hands gently caressing my skin

Do you remember?

The warmth of my shea butter skin coating your body

I'm addicting

Pure serotonin

The flavor

The warmth

The connection



Do you miss me?

The way I miss you?

Your hair; the roots, protector of thoughts flowing through my fingers like a chaotic river; needing to be tamed

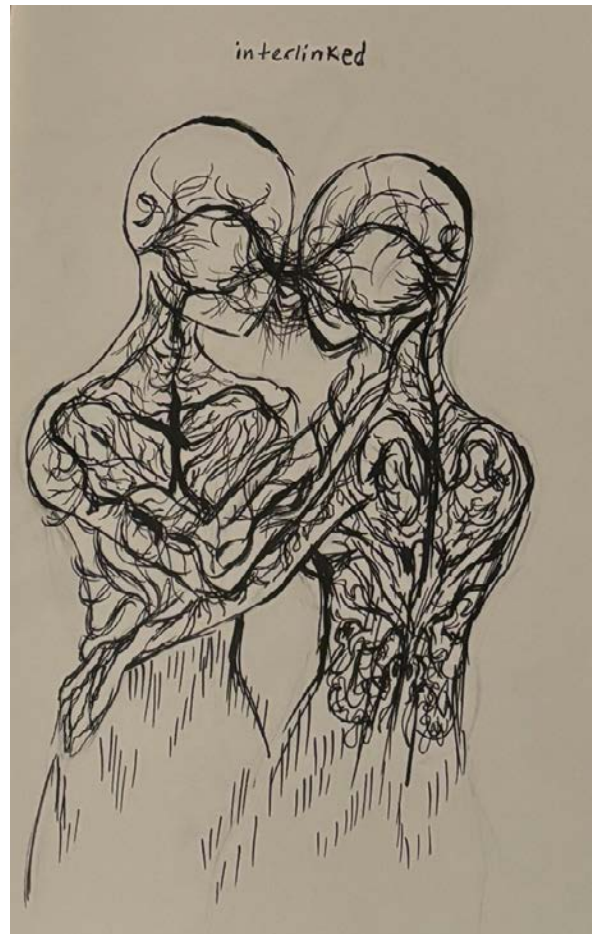
Can you hear the peace?

Blinded by the war between your heart and mind

As if allowing yourself to love is committing a crime

Answer me; do you?

Your heart would have been safe if it were mine.



**“Interlinked”**  
Ourania Rahman



**“High Point New Jersey”**  
Violet Ratliff

# May I Ask This Dance?

Nathan MacCracken

INTERIOR / an Evening / Dinner Inside a Nice Restaurant

Two recent widows, Howard and Selena, are sitting opposite each other at a fancy restaurant. There's meals, bread, and wine on the table, made pretty by romantic, dim lighting. The two are not extremely pleased with the evening. There's a beat of silence, as they eat and fill the time. Scene starts with a medium shot of the two, then all dialogue is single close ups.

HOWARD

How's your um, you got the fetta-chini yea?

SELENA

Yea, fettuccine, it's good, the sauce is, ya know.

HOWARD picks at his food a little, he's disappointed

HOWARD

My food's a little cold.

There's another beat, they seem to have already ran out of conversation.

HOWARD puts his fork down, and wipes his mouth.

HOWARD

I don't wanna be forward here, but I really only took this date as a favor to John and Jenn, he feels bad because he thinks I'll feel, well, lonely and he hates that I call so often. That's what I think anyway.

SELENA is a little taken back, but is tough about what she just heard. She folds her napkin and internally removes herself from the conversation.

SELENA

I don't know what I expected. This was never going anywhere.

SELENA has a dry chuckle, and turns to her wine to make more earnest. A waiter/waitress comes by with an open wine bottle. She fills the non-couple's glasses, then walks away.

SELENA

(quieter)

How long ago? Did she pass?

SELENA points to her ring finger, which still carries the ring of her husband.

HOWARD's ring finger also carries his wife's ring. HOWARD takes a deep breath in.

HOWARD

She took her life, about three and a half weeks ago. Yours?

SELENA

(takes a beat to think)

God I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have asked.

HOWARD shakes his head at any regret.

HOWARD

It was going to come up eventually. Yours?

SELENA

Maybe a month and some change? Two months?

HOWARD isn't sure whether to laugh or how to react, so he looks away.

HOWARD

You don't remember?

SELENA

I try not to think about it too much, it takes the joy out of any moment that I do.

HOWARD

(looks away)

I'd wonder how he feels knowing his wife doesn't think about him.

SELENA

Don't you fucking dare.

HOWARD

I didn't mean any insult, but one must think why you seem so, I'm not sure, well off? You not remembering the date, John told me you've been looking around for a while...

SELENA looks off for a second, as if her husband watches her on the date, she takes a breath, collects her strength, and muscles back to life. There's a sob in her throat.

SELENA

(quietly, with a burning sadness)

I am trying to get. on.

(beat)

Can you get the fucking check and I'll call a taxi home.

HOWARD takes a moment, taking in, deciding on a next word. He takes his time, fidgeting with his fingers, or napkin. With a finger and an embarrassed look, he signals for an offscreen waiter to bring the check. SELENA reaches to put on her jacket.

CUT

EXTERIOR / OUTSIDE THE RESTAURANT/ VAN HOUTEN AVE.

SELENA is the first out of the restaurant, and she's waiting for the taxi that was called offscreen. HOWARD follows her, with his jacket hanging off an arm, the other arm in his pocket. They wait outside, maybe a slight breeze follows. HOWARD's considering his options.

HOWARD

How far is it?

SELENA

(still a little tense)

I don't know.

There's a beat. A slight intrigue follows SELENA, she still wants this date to go well.

Why?

HOWARD

We haven't done dessert yet, and I'd be embarrassed to say we stopped at dinner because we got off on the wrong foot. Can we take it from the top and I'll take you for an ice cream?

SELENA considers it, she takes a beat, looks around and decides.

SELENA

Ah hell, what else am I gonna do? No more about my husband. You don't know the hell I've been through, so do not assume you have a single clue.

HOWARD wants to react immediately, he's a little quick to anger, but he has a second breath towards the situation, telling himself it's better to be quiet this time.

HOWARD

I'm, sorry. I'll take us to ice cream.

HOWARD motions toward the parking lot, which contains his car.

SELENA

No, no save the gas, there's one in walking distance.

The new couple walks together, beside the restaurant, down the street. There's some talking, flirting, and slight touching.

CUT

EXTERIOR OUTSIDE THE ICE CREAM SHOP/ NIGHT

HOWARD and SELENA are a few bites into their ice cream, there's a slight dull to the conversation, but they both are in a more pleasant mood.

SELENA

How do you know John?

HOWARD

(through chewing)

Well, I had met John through Jenn, me and her met through my wife actually, they had a book club together. John had come to a meeting that we had hosted, and it's been thirteen years since then...And you?

SELENA

I'm just a coworker of Jenn's. I'm sure she thinks I talk her ear off about my husband. But that's what it is, we were married for forty-seven years. He's everywhere, and is a part of everything I do. What else can I talk about?

HOWARD finally agrees with her over something. He chuckles a bit.



HOWARD

(with a smile)

That's exactly it. I was only married thirty-four years so you've got that over me, but, I mean you said it best... She was and still is, my reason to get up in the morning. And I don't think there will be a day in my life, where she's not on my mind.

There's another lull in the conversation. A thought comes to HOWARD's head.

HOWARD

(a guilty smile)

Do you think it's funny that on this first date we've only talked about our exes?

SELENA laughs about that. For a moment she jumps out of grief.

SELENA

You know what, I do think that's funny. Comes with the territory probably. I'll be honest, I only took this date because Jenn had mentioned you were also widowed.

HOWARD doesn't know how to take this information.

CUT

INTERIOR, SELENA'S HOUSE / LATER IN THE NIGHT.

SELENA is first to walk inside, then HOWARD. They take off their coats and talk. SELENA rushes ahead of HOWARD by a bit, to see how the house is looking.

SELENA

I'm sorry about any mess, I haven't been a host in a long time, but..um...I've got wine and coffee, you can take your pick. You can lay your coat anywhere you'll remember it.

The two walk inside the living room, HOWARD goes to lay his coat on a certain chair, SELENA grabs it almost instantly.

SELENA

Not that chair, I'm sorry, that's his chair. My mistake I should've mentioned.

SELENA lays the coat on a different chair

HOWARD

No, my mistake, thank you.

SELENA goes to light a candle, she's a little worried about company. It's the first company since her husband's passing. She's anxious.

SELENA

I'll set the table, and play something on the vinyl. Can you bring out, please, the bottle of wine by the glasses? They're hanging upside down, could you get the cleanest two?

HOWARD walks into the kitchen, there's frames of SELENA and her husband, he spots them, then moves onto the wine cabinet. There's a large array of bottles. Mostly empty. Most wine glasses are used. He takes two that aren't.

SELENA

(from the other room)

Howard? You okay?

HOWARD

Yea, sorry just getting the right ones.

HOWARD walks back into the living room with the wine and glasses. SELENA is still setting the table. She pauses for a second, a thought has just caught up to her. HOWARD opens the bottle and sets the glasses.

SELENA

Do you think I talk too much about my husband?

HOWARD

What?

SELENA

I forget when, but earlier you said we only talk about our exes, and you made a laugh at that.

HOWARD

I don't think I said that-

SELENA

-You did.-

HOWARD

-When was this?

SELENA

Either during dinner or ice cream, I don't know but do you think I talk too much about my husband?

HOWARD

Ex-husband right? You guys aren't still married.

HOWARD pours two glasses, hands one to SELENA.

SELENA

I'm aware we're not married, you still say wife. That's strange.

An ember of the previous anger is lit again within HOWARD. SELENA takes the glass from HOWARD.

HOWARD

It feels weird to not say my wife. Honestly, this whole night has felt weird.

SELENA

You're fucking right.

(beat)

I should've left after dinner. Said goodnight, and went home alone.

SELENA sips from her glass. HOWARD stares.

HOWARD

(louder in volume)

Why didn't you?

You can say you should've left, or wanted to leave, but you didn't and you stayed.

SELENA

My mistake, I wanted a break in my miserable routine, don't punish me for it.

HOWARD

Well there are worse things than a nice dinner followed by a nice ice cream.

You're punishing me.

SELENA clutches her wine glass like a sword.

SELENA

You're stubborn!

This steps on HOWARD. He reaches deep into his throat to reply.

HOWARD

(now stern)

You're nervous. An ugly ball of nerves that's going to explode on whoever's close.

SELENA

Go to hell, Howard, you're a sad old man,

You'll die in the coming year thinking of the one woman who wanted nothing but to be as far away from you as naturally possible.

The talk over wine has turned into a fight in the mud.

HOWARD

That's fucking low of you. I envy your husband, he got out and rid of you.

(yelling)

What would he think now? His wife of forty years is a despondent drunk! You're a broken fucking mirror. Where'd you put my coat, I've had enough.

HOWARD looks for his coat, SELENA sips from her glass, her hand shakes. She's in a frantic state. There's a sad silence. HOWARD finds his coat, shakes it off and puts it on angry.

SELENA

(nervous and loud)

Well! That's it! You're weak! You're going to leave like that? You've barely sipped your wine! That's the kind of man you are?

HOWARD's coat is half on, there's a part of this ruined night that he's comforted by, him and his wife had usual nights like this.

HOWARD

You're a sick woman Selena.

SELENA is proud to reel him back in. Her hand still shakes.

SELENA

I can't picture how John thought this a good idea!

HOWARD

Where's my glass, or have you drank it already?

SELENA, with a tearful smile, brings the glass back to HOWARD's hand.

SELENA

You would forget it!

SELENA sips from her glass, it's almost empty now. She sits down at the table.

SELENA

(with an ill smile and a bad 20's accent)

Barrrrrrr-tender!

SELENA waves her glass in HOWARD's face. HOWARD gets the bottle, and reaches to fill SELENA's glass. He fills his own, and sips while he remains standing. There's a beat, and a moment where there isn't much hate in the air goes by, The music begins to swell louder, HOWARD and SELENA pay real attention to it. HOWARD looks into his glass.

HOWARD

My wife would play this during her clubs.

He looks around the house, as if packed with his wife's friends, all with books in hand. There could be a tear, he smiles sorrowfully, like he's looking her in the eye.

HOWARD

I'd hear it all around the house.

SELENA recognizes the honest moment of vulnerability, she gets up, glass in hand, and embraces HOWARD with her head resting on his shoulder, her free arm wrapped around him. HOWARD holds her closely, his free arm wraps around her too. It starts as a hug, as the music grows more in volume and action, the gentle hug turns into a waltz. It's slow, a little slower than the song that fills the room. SELENA lets go of her smile, and it turns into a reply to newfound comfort, she holds tighter, and her face wrinkles with somber. HOWARD stares down at the floor. Close ups.

Then, a wide shot, of the two dancing in the living room.

CUT.



**“never looking back”**  
Aamishq Dhir



**“Let us play, kitty!”**  
Mila Antkevych





**“Lights”**  
Jackelyn Ortega-Manzaba

# God tries

Waseem Mainuddin

Frigid  
Innards,

Smitten by  
That wizard?

Dirty folks,  
Damned infested... Grain for grasshopper,  
You'd like to be digested?

Arming the angels,  
I ask, why did I  
Use soil for soul?

Just so damned  
Could toil for the  
Toll?

Programmed,  
They are for  
Control,

Yet...yet... My children,  
Thy sorrow  
Is mine  
Own morrow,

Wry reptilian,

Guacharo is  
All he wants of  
You,

He's lost the taste  
Of butter, oiling  
His lips whilst  
You stutter... Go forth my brilliant  
Porcelain, go strike,  
Below pikes and spikes,  
They'll be damned

For their carnal  
Cerebration,  
Oi! My damned! I still cry for Your irreverent  
Nation!

—

Alright, alright  
Settle down,

Daemon I have  
Conquered time  
And time again,

It be kwellling  
On your own  
Dwelling,

Ye' did  
This to Yerselves,  
--- All seraphim

Cherubi  
Aileron  
Appendages  
Needed!

Just flash!  
And flare?! And bolt?!  
And blaze!!

--

My damned, I look at ye,

Shirked me  
for the sun,  
Have you? ... but but,

I got  
People,  
Why don't  
You listen?

To the  
Ground is  
Where it's  
Going,

So how about  
You look up  
In the sky!!! My pitied damned!  
I shed a tear!  
This is your  
Last chance!



**“Inconsolable”**  
Bri Schwerzler



**“ripley’s jellyfish”**  
Marllyson Solis

# Kolossus

Vincent Elope

*Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful.*

—*Frankenstein's Monster*

INSERT DRIVE COMPONENTS TO CONTINUE.

RELEASE VERSION H-6613524-24

The letters blinked boldly across the screen. The light inside was dim enough that the brightness exposed the little nooks and crannies in the half-metal, half-concrete walls in front. Eyes of light—of computers, machines, processors, red, orange, yellow—blinked back from the shadows.

“Doctor, come tell the Professor it is online.”

Behind the monitor, a big control panel of buttons and switches, following lines of thick cables and slender wires, a tall, imposing monolith stood in the center of a circular chamber that could have doubled as a small metallic amphitheatre.

Lab coats flurried about the edifice. They scrambled like drones, clacking across metal scaffolds, buzzing around the installation like human ants in a great mechanical hive. It was almost unnatural, the way that they phased in and out of doors, the way they walked, and the way they looked at you when you tried to nod your head and smile. I'd never been in the chamber before. The rest of the facility was room temperature except this area, which was chilly enough so that you could see your breath and imagine for a second whether or not there was ice forming on the wall.

Today, administration wanted all the staff gathered in the room. The others spread

rumors that we would actually be seeing the Professor for once. I remember one day he came through our ward. We were all programmed to immediately recognize the Professor, even though many of us never got to meet him. Unlike the other lab coats, he was easily distinguished by a trademark coffee suit and the footsteps of a large entourage.

Some of the scientists said he was a war hero, that he was discharged from the battlefield. That he too once wore an olive drab coat just like the uniformed guards at the steel doors. But his had all these marks and insignias and medals on them. He had seen what it was like on the front lines; that his research was dedicated to fight the horrors he'd witnessed out there. The scars on his face didn't lie. They were the kind you got from fighting the enemy, that's what one of the guards said.

What's better is the Professor had this kind of... aura about him wherever he went. When he would come in through the steel doors, it was as if he magically waved strings and a conductor's wand over each person he passed, straightening their posture, clocking their right arm into a salute, dropping their jaw, and pressing the play button on a little audio file that would read just like this:

Long live!

Each actor would play his or her rehearsed spiel, and continue on nonchalantly.

Today, however, the staff was lined up in neat little rows opposite each side of the doors, and when the Professor and his aides came in, the silence was heavy.

“Sir, the honor is yours.”

Ever since the Scourge, the lab found itself working with an extra number of staff, along with a couple of new guards. They wanted to be sure of our success, that maybe it could finally end the war. In between cigarettes the guards often talked about how it was better to be stationed in one of these facilities rather than the frontlines. The paper gave a better picture—that we were winning, and the fighting



would be over soon and maybe everyone could go home to their families in one piece.

The scientists would never let me understand what was going on. But they were optimistic about how this would turn the tides of the battlefield, and how it was only a matter of time before we'd push back the enemy. It was revolutionary, they kept telling me, that the Professor was a genius and the Scourge would finally end and we'd all go to sleep knowing our children were safe. Their research was nothing like the rest had ever seen. It was the culmination of the most advanced minds, resources, and technology at our disposal. They only needed just a little bit more time to finish it.

Some days the engineers would bring in cables and wires. Some days they'd bring in chunks of steel and plastic through the doors. When they did you could glance into the amphitheatre and make out scaffolds and concrete in the dim space. The guards wouldn't permit anyone else without valid authentication, but you could still hear the buzz and whirr of screwdrivers and blowtorches. Then they started bringing in weapons and ammunition. Not for the guards, they said, since they already had their own little armory. Some of these guns were the high caliber weapons you'd find on the tanks and planes. One day they brought in a couple of these all at once, and they could barely fit through the door.

The technicians were notable for bringing in all the fancy gear. It was a collection of sleek processors and chips. While they worked, all you could normally focus on was the ambient hum of small fans, and the occasional click, boop, beep! of the machines. A couple of fancy contraptions here and there, nothing like I'd ever seen. They all looked like big metal boxes to me. Sometimes the engineers forgot to bring extra cables so they had to bring those in too. From time to time, though, they rolled in these big, unwieldy computers. Maybe that's why the room was so cold, at least from what I knew about how hot these things could get.

The doctors would bring in patients from the hospitals and the prisons. They'd drug them first, and roll them into a little medical ward. You'd forget about them,

a couple days would pass, and next thing you know they came out like a fresh product out of the factory. Only this time the expression on their face was blank and emotionless, as if they'd been lobotomized. You never knew what kind of twisted experiment was going on in there. I overheard the doctors say they could never find a compatible subject...

Across the control center with all the panels and switches, a metal chair was connected to the monolith with cables and coils for roots. The aides escorted the Professor towards the seat, and technicians adjusted a couple of cables. These had little electrodes on the end which they attached to the temples.

We stood like statues, watching... waiting. The cold air sent goosebumps crawling all over my skin. The doctors said this operation would be final. It either did or didn't. To them, the machines didn't care whether or not it was a hospital patient or the Professor. They just needed something strong enough to hold them together.

The technicians had an argument before and said they had all the software and hardware functional, that it was the fault of the doctors that they couldn't find anybody compatible. Likewise, the doctors didn't understand why the software was only partially compatible with the mind since they diligently screened only for the best possible candidates.

You could tell the time was biting into the staff: they snapped a little more than usual and there was a slight edge to every interaction. When one of the engineers said his gut was bothering him, the guards escorted him out and that was the last you'd ever see of him.

I worried if the rumors were true, that once it spread to you, you'd feel something in your stomach and next thing you know you'd be convulsing on the floor with your guts spewing out. I wondered whether or not if I was ever going to be taken away. It kept us all on edge, about the things we ate, what we touched, and who we talked to. They took extra care in keeping the facility sterile, but you never knew

what would come through the doors. Luckily they kept us in a bunker of sorts, away from any of the major cities. Those were the worst, where bodies piled by the dozens on the streets. Some of those, one man said, were still alive.

We were running out of time. Leadership said they couldn't spare any more, that we'd have to finish or lose all funding and be abandoned for good. The Professor calmed them down enough to grant us a couple months more, seeing how the army had just enough power to keep the meat grinder at a stalemate.

When the operator began the procedure it was a lot more quiet than I expected it to be. You'd think there would be sparks flying around, alarms going off, and the like.

We watched as the technician pressed a couple of buttons. One man standing next to me fidgeted a bit. I recognized him.

Unlike the other man, he kept his mouth shut.

It was only when the pressure locks disengaged with a thundering pop! that the doors finally revolved open, and when they did, you could feel the entire room shudder just a little bit.

Everyone looked at the thing before us.

A weapon they said?

Some would think it looked like a toy.

We're supposed to shoot this?

Maybe it was actually some kind of big shaped warhead.

Were we going to launch this into space?

Rumors existed about similar experiments in distant lands.

This is everything we've ever worked for?

When you looked at it long enough, and let your imagination run wild, it could have been anything. It was just as featureless as the big silo it was kept in. The surface was smooth, polished, and flat—from a distance it might as well have been a big block. Up close, it was like someone took six giant plastic boxes and glued them together.

I caught glimpses being shot at the Professor. He slumped in his metallic chair like some kind of well-dressed ragdoll. The look on his face was the same as the other patients. Maybe it was foolish for him to have risked his own life for this.

But you should never doubt the Professor. He always had a greater agenda.

When it began to stir we all looked back over at the thing. It was a machine, no doubt—not a rocket, gun, or spaceship, but a computer of sorts. The silence in the wing was enough so that for a moment you could hear the little parts humming inside. A light glowed to life, and then that's when you saw its "face." Two dots and a curved line, that's all it was.

A smile of pure, horrific omen.

For all the detail and effort that went into this project I would have never expected the outcome to look so simple. Aside from its eerie smile, there existed virtually no surface detail. It was so geometric, yet its construction spoke of some kind of anthropomorphism, like a kind of giant cuboid doll.

The bottom left "leg" moved, and the entire model agitated forward as if to take a step. It did the same with the bottom right, clumsily throwing its own weight like a child. You heard the whizz of servos and motors as they worked, like the grotesque mechanical intestines of a steel beast. It stumbled a couple of times before it got itself

upright. With each movement it made the entire room shake.

One of the engineers said earlier that they had to launch preemptively without testing any prototypes. It was too expensive to produce any others because the factories weren't designed to machine the kinds of parts they built into this thing. This was the first, and only of its kind.

I looked over at the Professor again. He looked just like the patients, and he hadn't moved an inch. You could still faintly see the soft mist of his breath, but he was a vegetable, like the man was torn right out of the body. Had he sacrificed himself to bring this creation to life?

Or was it much more than that?

The Professor was more or less gone, and there was just this... thing. Was it alive? A couple moments ago it was moving just like a baby, and now it's upright. When it collected itself the entire room just stood there anxiously anticipating its next move.

That's when it set its gaze right at the crowd, right at us. It knew we were here. It was sentient. It had to be. The smile was staring right through you and into your soul. I heard these crazy legends of machines taking over some wasteland in the north, but I figured we'd all be wiped out before the machines could cross the sea. Now here was one such machine—our very own homemade apocalypse, coursing with the power of a sun, right at our doorstep.

When it closed the distance it was even more imposing. Each step was a heavy thud that shook the room. It was easily taller than anything we could have imagined. We held our breath. A few gasped. I feared it could have killed all of us so easily if it wanted. We truly were but mere ants compared to this hulk of an abomination.

A titan.

A symbol.

A colossus.

I was close enough that I felt like I could reach out and just... touch it. It was almost like it couldn't be real.

But it was real, and it was real when it clocked its right arm, real enough to wave its little wand over the entire crowd, real enough to make all our jaws drop.

In order to survive, we freed ourselves from the very acts of God and sacrificed to create something whose existence was enough to shatter Heaven itself—and in its own twisted way, it was so beautiful.

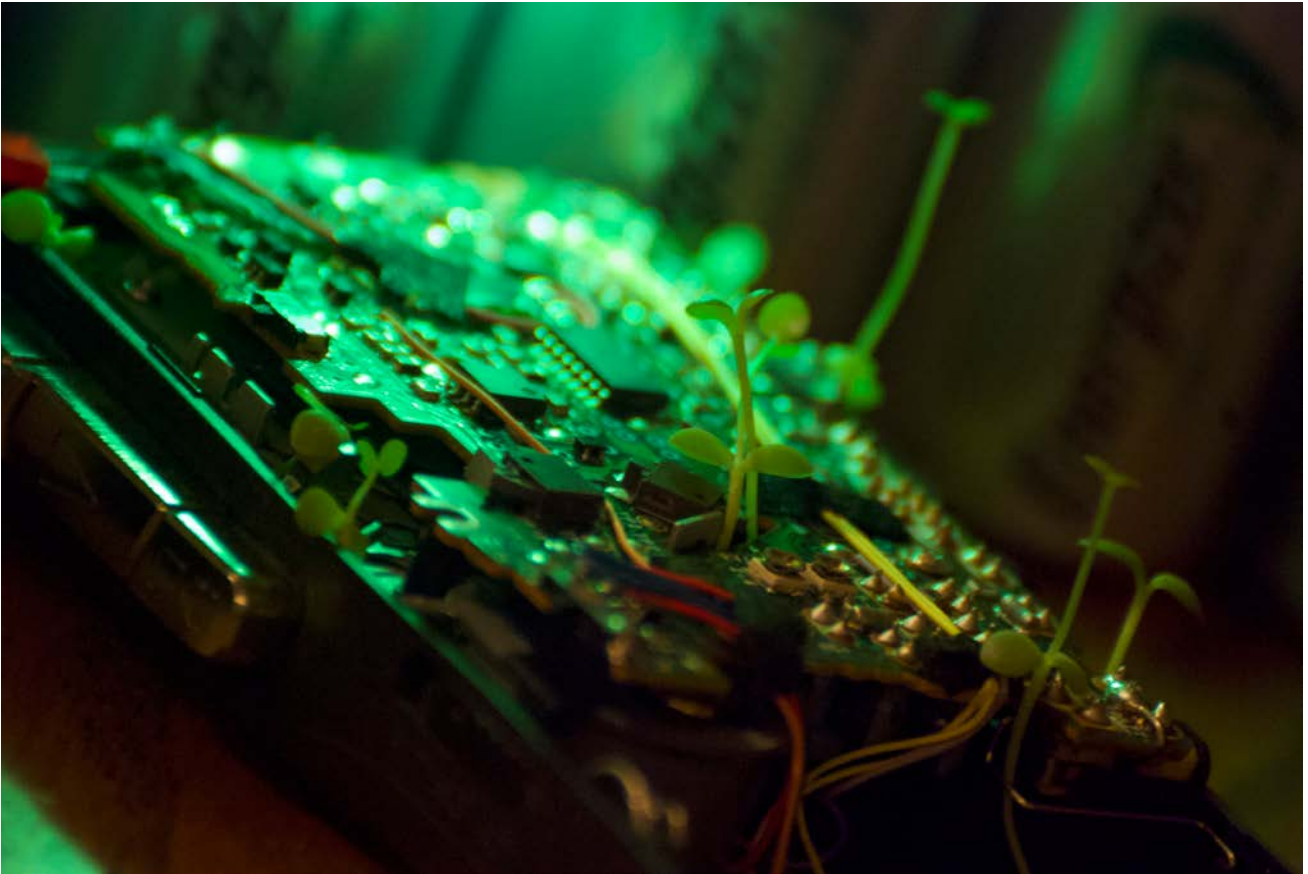
When the first person started so did the second, then the third, and then the entire crowd. The scientists were right. It would be the greatest weapon against our enemies. With this we really could win the war, the Scourge, all of it. In rapturous applause, we would finally have power, and with it, peace. Nothing could stop us.

Long live! Long live! Long live! Long live!

We had defied nature, and the world would pay dearly for it.



**“Ruins”**  
Hosna Kachooee



**“Earthly Delights”**  
Daniel Gajee



# Late Night City

Ivy Fu

I found out something.

When Friday night arrives, all the people will disappear, and I'll become the only person existing in this world. From just that few hours, I can finally get some freedom. No more noisy chatting and footsteps sound from my landlord and her family who live on the second floor, no more annoying boss and depressing college courses, a life on my own, just me, happily alone.

I first found out about this strange phenomenon a month ago. It's a Friday, and I don't need to take two buses and wake up at 6 am to go to work tomorrow. So I stayed up late. At 12 am, I noticed the footsteps sound on my ceiling usually continued all day long and stopped. I thought that was abnormal, therefore I peeked from the small hole in my ceiling, that's when I see everything become dark, there is no light upstairs, and obviously, no one is there. Did they go out that fast? Cause I just heard their sounds a few minutes ago. That's when I also noticed that the lights in the other houses next to me were off too. After seeing this odd situation, I took my coat and my phone and walked outside of my house.

There's no one on the street, not even cars or buses.

I took a walk around this suburban neighborhood, but I just can't find anyone, and I'm just very confused about what was going on. I got on my bike, and since this strange thing happened to this small town, I decided to ride my bike to the big city next to us, New York City. It was not an easy ride because it took me nearly 40 minutes to get there, but it's weird that I kind of enjoyed it. The wind from the summer, the chill music playing from my phone, empty streets, and the most important thing is, I finally got to visit a big city, rather than staying in the "everything is inconvenient for a person who cannot drive" town.

When I arrived in New York City, I saw the blinding lights of the city. This kind of beauty reminded me how little I am, surrounded by one huge office building and apartments. This feeling almost made me forget that there's also no one in this place, it's just me again, enjoying all the fun. Because no one is in the city, I went to some luxury shops, used some perfumes, and put on some fancy clothes. Those store alarms still go off, but since no one is in the city, I simply just keep grabbing more and walking away. And for my convenience, of course, I stole a car. Since I don't know how to drive, I almost killed myself on my first drive, but some videos online are always a great tutor.

And that's me, a young girl sitting on the bench that can view the whole Hudson river and the modern buildings of New York City, eating expensive popsicles, wearing a fur coat that was made in Italy, with limited edition sneakers on my feet, and nothing can be better than this.

Nothing.

When it was almost morning, I saw the things on my hand and my feet started to disappear, even the car I stole was gone, and people started to show up. It almost feels like I just had a wonderful dream, but now I woke up. Since there was nothing I could do, I rode my bike and took a few buses to get home. Everything is back to normal, the noisy sounds upstairs, and the terrible landlord, I'm back to the life I hate, again. But once the next Friday arrived, all the people would disappear again, and I got to enjoy my own time, again.

It sounds great doesn't it, well, it's quite the opposite. Like drug abuse.

When I got the chance to feel freedom and happiness, it was difficult for me to get used to the life I had before, which is a depressing reality. Every time I get back from the city to my room, I feel a huge gap in my emotions, like the last second I'm still enjoying my whole life, and the next second I just want to die. This feeling can be extremely painful. You see a life you want to live in, and not just simply live in, you're been in that life for a night. But suddenly, it's morning again, and you're just...back to the abyss.

Now, I'm sitting on the edge of a rooftop in a New York luxury apartment, knowing that once the morning comes, I will want to murder my rude landlord, quit my horrible job, and drop out of college, even if I know none of these things will happen, I'll just try to forget them. All the places I hope I can live in, hundreds of places and websites I search, and all of them turning me down, just by looking at most of their prices can get me depressed because they're never cheap, and I'm never rich.

"Give up, please."

I heard this voice coming into my mind, it was so loud, so clear, but so sad. I try too many times and pray too many times, but not even a soul wants to help me. I guess the world is just too busy to look at themselves, I guess.

But it's okay.

I stood up because I started to see the sunrise behind building after building, and I want to keep all the beautiful memories in my mind, and never let them go, all these wonderful, quiet nights. I look down at the roads, sidewalks, and high-end clothing stores that are far away from me. "So this is the New York City I love," the morning sun falls on the dry tears on my face, and the breeze from the tall buildings blows through my hair, "thank you for showing me your beauty, I gave me a little freedom I need." I jumped, and just a few seconds later, I'm lying on the ground, with blood coming from different places on my body. It's painful, but I'm happy I'm gonna die.

Because this time, I can finally live in my dream, forever.

# standing on the sidewalk looking up

Rosemary Tierney

the sky melts over me, blue powder dissolves in fire until all is shadow  
when I breathe in the air it's so cold it feels like I'm drowning  
every star that adorns the heavens is a needle in my eyes  
any times of warmth have drifted past and frozen somewhere far away  
here and now everything is so clear and sharp  
it's like living on the edge of a perfectly polished knife

and the sky in its unclouded glory seems so much bigger than ever before  
one slip on the ice and I could fall forever into that abyss that prickles with stars  
ask the silence why the heavens expand in winter  
it's the only one that knows  
but every time it almost breaks  
the answer gets stuck in its throat like a bird trapped in a net  
a dead bird

in the winter all the birds are dead  
that's why they can't be seen slipping through the stretched out sky  
drinking icy gusts of wind only to spit out a chirp  
that gets pierced by the beam from a star and deflates and floats away  
like a popped balloon  
human voices attempt flight  
but each laugh each word each shriek of mirth wavers into a wail  
and is swallowed by the yawning sky



**“Sea of Fog”**  
Violet Ratliff



## **“The Colors of Autumn”**

Victoria Jungermann

# Temptation

Kenia Sosa

With eyes full of tears I see the sunset,  
There is no forgiveness now,  
Nobody looks for the offended anymore.

I saw the world stop,  
How the eyelids stop in sleep,  
I saw that the waves of the sea no longer crossed the stones,

It was like time stopped,  
As if the tide were unbroken,  
I saw the smiles turn into tears,

I saw that those who knew no longer knew,  
The mistakes were marked in the sand,  
They had written in the stars.

Kiss me as if time stopped,  
As if the navigator was lost in deep waters,  
Kiss me with tender and infinite passion,

Look, I've waited for you all night,  
Look how happy I am to have you,  
Kiss me with your silence in my heart,

Kiss me with your eternal love,  
Kiss my heart with a tender heart.  
My heart aches,

My heart cries,  
My heart longs for your caresses,

Come and talk,  
Your voice is a caress of courage,  
You are the song of my heart.,

How can a heart live without its emotions?  
How can rain live without its clouds?  
How can a heart live without love?

A cold place,  
A place without shelter,  
A lost place,  
Lost in the shadow of the hills,

Like a townsman on a detour,  
Like a heartbroken girl looking for love where there is only pain





**“Times Up”**  
Hanieh Kachooee

# Spotify Made For You

Cassie Guinto

I. Songs we think you'll love.

Violent Crimes / Fragile Mind  
Everything Is Just A Mess / Therefore I Am  
Raw / Overgrown / Entropy  
Need You / Right Here  
Truth Is / Love Ain't Free  
Cry & Lie / Take One To The Head  
Borrowed Time / Floating  
We Tried, We Tried  
Truth Is / That's Why I Love You

II. Your ever-changing playlist with relatable titles that soundtrack your day.

Dangerous Thing / Come Back To Earth  
Hold Me Down / While We're Young  
When The World Is On Fire / Take Me Away / Carry Me Home  
I Walk This Earth All By Myself

III. Songs you couldn't get enough of recently, and in the past.

Trouble With a Heartbreak  
Pressure / In My Head / Heart On Fire  
Shivers / She's All I Wanna Be  
Drunk (And I Don't Wanna Go Home) / Bad Habits / Wasted On You  
Cold Heart / Complete Mess / Take My Name  
Give Heaven Some Hell / To Be Loved By You  
I Love You So / What Else Can I Do?



**“Kartel Punk @ Meatlocker”**  
Omar Garcia



**“Listening to Mozart”**  
Mila Antkevych

# Naju and Opu

Waseem Mainuddin

Naju let herself down from the branch, hanging with a slight swing. Opu, shocked at her gall, even though he knew she was the daredevil of the duo. She asked her brother, “Hey, bhaiya! You think I can go all the way around?”

“I don’t think you should, Naju.” He was just thinking of his black chicken.

“Why not! What are you so scared of?”

“Well, what if you get hurt, and then Ma comes...or maybe Abbu? I don’t think I could handle that right now. Come on, Come back up, We’ll look at birds!” His chicken was a bird, and he was afraid of the worst.

“Ma’s with her sisters! Abbu would never say anything to me,” Naju scoffed at his meekness and added momentum to her swing, rocking back and forth as Opu shook above her.

“Hey, stop, Naju, I’m going to fall!” And then he wouldn’t see his black chicken.

“We can both swing, bhaiya, if you want!”

“Naju!” Opu rocked back and forth on the branch, putting his hand against the trunk to try and gain stability. The tree was sturdy, and the light weight of the two children wouldn’t break the branch. Opu didn’t know that, though.

“Come on, if you don’t swing, you’ll definitely fall, and then, I’ll definitely be in trouble! Just have fun, bhaiyah!”

Opu decided, okay, he didn't want Naju to be in trouble, this was his little sister, and two were inseparable. Their brothers called them dui bandoor, two monkeys who could only scamper around, scaling trees, imagining themselves mountain climbers of the Himalayas, the first brother and sister to ever scale Mount Everest, but really, just two monkeys in the jungle.

Opu let himself down by his arms, with Naju's swinging getting faster and faster, Opu didn't have the slow start Naju allowed herself, each of Naju's sways swung Opu rapidly, until she was around the branch, and as he screamed, so was he!

"Okay! Okay! Okay!" Each round, confirmation for Opu's fear for himself and his chicken at home.

"Whee. Yay, yes!" And for Naju, a call to joy, until she realized she was scared too, would she be spinning forever, she let her foot hit the trunk, wavering her flow, thankfully, coming to a full stop. Opu had one or two swings left, she pushed him to have a little more fun.

Naju climbed up the branch and sat down, exhaling from the exhilaration, as Opu stopped, tears in his eyes. Naju saw this and helped him up.

"Aye, bhaiyah! Breathe! It's okay, it was fun. You're alive, and Ammu and Abbu don't know a thing! Sometimes you can have fun without the birds!" Not without the chicken.

"But, Naju, I didn't want to do that. You made me do it! And then I embarrassed myself, and you're supposed to cry, like a little girl!"

"Seems like you're the little girl!" She stuck her tongue out, and leaned back, looking up into the mango tree. The green fruits were blushing, on their way to ripeness, Naju's mouth watering. Her two older brothers, Saifuddin and Khaled, bhaiyah and bhaiyah, were probably home, eating all the mangoes they had left. However, the top of the tree was calling to her, and she knew Opu would climb up

after him if she went all the way up.

“I’m going all the way up there!” She let herself down by her arms, and scaled from branch to branch, reaching the penultimate perches. She scaled to the treetop, and stood up, taking in the view.

“Come on, Opu! You can see the banyan tree from here.”

“I can see it down here, Naju, just fine! If someone sees you, we’ll be in trouble. I don’t want to be smacked. You don’t either!”

Opu could only see the bottom of the ancient tree that scared him. His friends told him the soul of a ghost was in there, and his brothers said that witchcraft was practiced in the host tree, a dead tree which seed found home in, sprouting the massive fig flora. Saifuddin and Khaled claimed the tree came alive at night, with its aerial roots becoming spears, impaling children and sucking their blood for her magic. They, of course, were just messing with their little brother.

Opu decided to climb the tree, as Naju’s swinging idea was a good time, so he let himself do the same thing as her. Her graceful climb was replaced with Opu’s apprehensive ascension, the motion’s he made had a slight hesitation, each scaling shaky as Opu feared falling to the ground. He made his way to Naju’s throne on top of the tree, a thick branch nestled in leaves.

“Wow, it is nice up here! And you can see all the birds up here! Look, pigeons! Like me and you!”

The two monkeys was actually a new moniker given to them, with their Ammu having originally dubbed them the two pigeons. Naju identified more with monkeys, and thought of pigeons as a diminutive comparison.

“But don’t you like being monkeys? Pigeons are so boring!”

Unlike the rock pigeon, the common pigeon, whose shades includes gray, black, and iridescent green and purples only on the neck, they saw a pigeon common to the tropics, the yellow-footed green pigeon.

A chartreuse body, and pastel blue and lavender marking the head and wings, these birds seemed gentler than the common pigeon, with those red and black eyes being replaced by magenta and cyan with yellow feet. They flew into the Banyan tree. Opu let out a little gasp.

“No, the witch is going to get them!”

“Stupid! There’s no witch, It’s a fig tree! Abbu told me. He said that the tree was nothing to be afraid of, and is a good thing.”

“But how can something that kills another tree be good? I don’t understand how killing is good...”

“Your precious birds kill other birds and fish all the time!”

“But they have to.” Still, in the back of his head, were Ammu and Abbu going to cut the chicken’s head off?

“So does the tree.”

The Banyan Tree was on the path towards their school, and though Naju was tough at the top of this mango tree, for years, they believed the Banyan to be a dark grove of trees. When they were on their way home from school, they would always make sure to run past the massive tree. But from far away, Naju could tell, it was just a tree, and it fed the animals.

“Hey look, more pigeons!”

More uncommon common pigeons, emerald doves, flying low, and in a single pair,



sharing characteristics with both the rock and yellow feet, with wings of emerald on top and chestnut revealed in flight, grays adorning the rest of the body, with a blue-white head.

They flew to the bottom of the Banyan tree, picking fruit and seed that had rolled from the nearby jujube tree, their fleshy cere's holding fresh red & raw green fruit.

"I like how they stay close to the ground," said Opu. "I think those birds have kind souls. I think those birds are really us!"

Two children they knew, Tawhid and Koorey, younger than the pair, went to scare the pigeons. They ran up to emerald-winged birds and shook a stick at them. One didn't immediately take flight and started to bob away on its feet, walking as fast as a pigeon could.

"Well, that one is definitely you."

The other bird, scared as well, took a different approach and flew directly at the children. They screamed and ran in different directions, off to bother some other poor animal. The flying bird landed next to its companion, and continued to forage.

"And that one is definitely you!"

The morning sun was shining on the tops of their heads as they started to sweat profusely, with their excitement ramping up with the height of the tree. Opu looked down at the ground, and he sweated even more. Naju looked down as well.

"Hey, that dirt is wet! The rice paddies are being tilled. We could jump."

"No, Naju, I don't want to jump."

"Come on, bhaiyah. Saifuddin bhaiyah showed me, we won't get hurt, and we can land right on our feet."

“But, if our feet are muddy, or if anyone sees us, Naju...” Surely now, the black chicken would die for their foolishness.

“It’s always if anyone has seen us, or what if, what if, what if! Well, what if you didn’t climb up here with me, you’d be shaking down there, afraid of some ancient fig tree!”

“I still don’t like it...”

Naju rolled her eyes, and took another peek, jumping straight down onto the mud. She landed right on her feet, with the mud absorbing all the shock, protecting her ankles and toes from breaking.

“Come on, Opu, You’re a big boy. You’re a year older than me, and now, really, who’s being a little pigeon?”

“Okay, I think I’m fine. I’ll just climb down.”

Naju went to the base of the mango tree and attempted to shake it. Her little hands weren’t really causing it to sway, but as she hit the tree, wind blew causing Opu to retreat to a lower branch. He looked down at Naju, smiling up at him, and thought, why not? He stood on the branch, with his knees wobbling, and took an anxious leap down towards the same mud, absorbing his fall as well, but the initial wobble from his perch caused him to stumble when he landed, almost falling on Naju. He gained his balance, and gave her the look of a pigeon.

“Don’t look at me like that! You had fun, and now we can go home, before our bhaiyah’s eat all of our mangoes!”

“We could have just taken some from these trees.”

“Last time we did that, We ACTUALLY got yelled at. By Ma, or our bhaiyahs, or

Abbu! They get fresh mangoes so we don't have to pick these half-ripe ones."

"I suppose you're right."

They walked on the dirt path towards their house passing a farmer arguing with someone dressed in a western style suit. Their arguing frightened Opu, who grabbed Naju, making themselves smaller, hiding behind a jackfruit tree. There was a hole right in the top-center of the tree, and their eyes could just peek out to see the disgruntled farmer and government worker.

"So, how long, in terms of production, do you think you will be able to supply more rice for export needs? There is a quota you need to reach, and you always come up short. I know times are tough; the war just ending, and everyone's a fucking lunatic. But in order to become a proper country...we all need to comply."

"What bullshit are you talking, from the city, you can say, easy? Fresh fruit, fresh life, you have an easy existence. That's a nice shirt. All the freedom fighters took what they could, and they killed some valuable farmers. Hindu, you know. Or they thought. I don't know, I was visiting my sick mother."

"And I was there when the soldiers raped in the streets, so Muslim they are, they think they came from Allah himself. My sister was killed, my mother was killed, they were abused, it was horrific."

"May Allah bless them, sir. But it's still the same, you know, this bullshit you ask me. It's bullshit! I can't supply, and that's what you're going to have to tell them in Dhaka. I need to feed my family, and I'm not afraid to protect them."

"Enough said, calm down, bhai." He took his thick rimmed glasses off, and wiped them with the bottom of the shirt, pulling out a little tucked into his pants. He only smudged them more. "Do I have to keep talking to you?" The rice farmer didn't let him answer, and told his only farmhand to come along. "We've got to get this big man's rice someday. Ha!" He tugged at the rest of his shirt from his pants, pulling

the full hem out. “You’ll be less hot if you wear it like this.”

Naju and Opu’s eyes widened. They knew people were killed in the streets these days, but they never saw it, and no one really talked to them about what was happening.

They understood a war had happened, but mostly, they were shielded from the events. They weren’t East Pakistan anymore; this was Bangladesh. It was a point of pride for them, they never knew Urdu, and they didn’t want to learn a new language for no reason. That’s what the war was about, right? Language and the rights for mother tongue?

Here, the complications of post-war life became alive to them, because if any sort of violence was happening, pre or post war, they bolted the doors and all stayed in one room. The fear of death was alive in their early years.

The man in the suit spit on the ground. He tucked his shirt back into his pants, and called a rickshaw-walla. “Get me out of this shit village. I’m going back to Dhaka.”

The driver seemed confused “You know, I can’t take you...all the way to Dhaka right? I know this is Dhaka district, but it doesn’t work like that. I can take you to the...”

His already steamed glasses fogged over, and his face turned red like the sweet mango Naju and Opu refused to pluck. Opu and Naju went from fearing this man to laughing. Naju’s laugh got louder and louder, until Opu grabbed her mouth and said, “Stop! He’ll take us away.”

The well-dressed man responded to the rickshaw-walla. “Just take me to the train station! Fucking new country, new job, all to be treated like this by some...”

“Sir, by some what? This is my rickshaw, sir, bhai. Please, we are all Bangladeshi, isn’t that what I fought for?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were a veteran...May Allah Bless you.”

“Thank you, bhai! Okay, let’s go!”

The government official rode off, in the opposite direction of their house.

Thank Allah for that one, thought Opu. What if that man thought they were being bothersome? They’d be arrested! Naju, however, started openly laughing once Opu let her go. She puffed her cheeks and tried her best to turn the same color red as the man had turned, but kept blowing air out of her pursed lips, unknowingly deflating her cheeks, spitting as she laughed.

“What was that all about? Rice, exports...weird, I don’t know what that means.” Naju puffed her cheeks more and more, until Opu lightly grabbed her face, deflating her one final time.

“I think it means going somewhere, or leaving. Bhai and Abbu were talking about it, for the law classes he’s taking.”

“Saifuddin bhai...I hope Khaled bhai becomes a doctor.” Naju quickly forgot her brother’s occupational tribulations as she got hungrier. “Okay, so they’re definitely going to eat all of our mangoes, should we run home?”

“Okay, I’ll race you!” Opu, with a sudden bravery from conquering the tree.

Naju and Opu started running down the path until they saw their house, Naju gained speed and tried to trip Opu, but he jumped, giving him a half a meters distance over him. They ran all the way laughing, until Opu got tired right before they got to their cement house, Naju kept running and ran right in. Her father caught her in his arms, hugging her.

“Okay, so what are the dui bandoor doing?” Their father had a big beard that

touched the top of Naju's head, nuzzling herself in his stomach. He had just taught all day, and smelt like sweat, but so did Naju, so she wouldn't notice anything. She was happy that her father was home, and happy that he wasn't upset with her for having fun. Opu came behind her.

"We saw...two pigeons...well, two kinds of pigeons..." he was breathing hard.

"Full day for you two paki, come on, let's have a snack." Her father lifted her up.

Even though she was a bit too old for that, she was still light enough to be held and took her to the dining room. Waiting there were some cubed mangoes and jackfruit. Opu held his hand behind him.

Their two brothers, Khaled and Saifuddin, came with fish and coconuts in hand. Saifuddin asked his buddy to scale the palm tree; the machete already at his waist.

"Abbu, can we have the kids snacks?" Saifuddin knew the answer, and his father knew that he knew the answer, always ready to scold him.

"Saifuddin, you ask, and you say. Kids. Kids snacks. Do you need a snack for law school?"

"No, Abbu, I just wanted a mango." He put his hands in the bowl, ignoring the forks on purpose. "Saifuddin, stop. Give some to the kids. If you are going to be some kind of slob, express it in the courtroom. It's how a country is built, it seems." He pulled out a newspaper, the headline reading "Bihari Folks Found Dead In Their Ghetto In Dhaka".

"Abbu, you read this newspaper? Look at how they talk, people just killing these folks."

"They support Pakistan. They still do. You were all about Bangladesh when it started. What does it mean to be Bangladeshi to you?" Their father didn't move

away from the newspaper, patting Naju on the head, who was intently listening.

“It doesn’t mean...one of my classmates, Harish, he perished.”

“How?” Opu asked.

“Opu! This is adult business.”

“You are just in school, Saifuddin.” Khaled chimed in, who blatantly disagreed with his father, but chose not to voice his opinion. He just shook his head, frowning, thinking about how he would shirk his anatomy class to watch Bergman’s *Cries and Whispers*; he wanted to see white people in color.

“So are you, Khaled bhai, shejo bhai, don’t talk to me. And what about class? Do you like the stories and films they show?” Saifuddin saw Khaled outside the cinema in Dhaka, smoking a cigarette, talking to Rekha Lata, a local modern style singer who sang Rabindra Sangeet with a rock band backing her.

She was becoming quite the hit, and Khaled’s constant companion in whatever new wave and arthouse came to the Gullistan cinema.

Khaled barked a quick chup. “Saifuddin, I can’t talk about the body in front of Naju and Opu.”

“Why not? They have bodies.”

“They can’t know why your hindu friend was murdered?” Khaled threw the jackfruit at Naju, making faces in the corner at her two brothers, who were boring her.

“Khaled bhaiyah, Saifuddin bhaiyah, stop fighting, and put away the food you brought. It’s hot today, it will go bad.” Naju was tired of people shielding her from the death around her, but also tired of conversations about people she did not know.

Khaled and Saifuddin got up from the table, bickering as they walked away. Their father kept his eyes on the newspaper, reading the second half of the article about the pogrom of the Biharis.

“Y’allah, if Bangladesh and everyone else keeps killing her family, who will be left?”

Naju and Opu stared at their father, the black chicken running in as Saifuddin kicked it towards Opu, who chased the chicken out the door. Naju kissed her father, and ran after her chicken brother.

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*They've got the hospitals surrounded, bhai. If you can, please tell the school board, the local politicians, if they have any power, they are killing doctors. Deliberately. They don't want us to live because we're not going to be like them. They're the desert. We're from the jungle, of course they can't help us. It's a simple case of biome.*

*But still, I fear I won't be alive once you receive this letter. I hope your children are well. I hope you can forgive me for any sins I might have caused; I know once I misguided you with Naju's flu. She healed quickly though, a spry child. But once, you even misgraded my maya's math homework. But you rectified your mistake. I guess we are equal in sin.*

*I have patients coming in with gunshot wounds, shrapnel. They are bombing houses, bringing folks out into the streets. Shooting them, one by one. We are trying our best. Even now, I hear gunfire. Some children are getting killed. A colleague of mine had to sew up a woman whose uterus was torn open by a bayonet. She was 8 months along.*

*I do not understand the plight of creating a nation state. If war is what we want, then what happens to us? Our image? Do we become savages in the eyes of power? I think we do. They say they can invade because we're killing their brothers, the Biharis. It's true, savagery exists everywhere. But it's of no consequence, everyone will die the same way. You should protect your children. Because it's genocidal, what their government is doing. And the children are next.*

— Shamsuddin Mahmud, MD

# The World Is My Labyrinth

Ariana Brea

We traveled far  
In fear anxiously carving our ways  
As beings or creatures, we did it.  
How'd we do it?  
In the most vulgar displays  
From our own wrongdoings and  
Our cries for justice to  
Our first despair to let it all go,  
We did it until  
We had lost it.  
We asked without the patience  
To receive it  
We spoke without the feeling  
To understand it  
And it left us in the middle of a maze  
That was never even ours.  
SO, FOR THE DAYS  
OF UNQUESTIONED HOURS  
In the ends of all our times how could we not  
Notice it?  
From eyes, to the illustrations of the sky's  
From signs, to the explanations of our times  
From sighs, to trying to force it in our minds

The answers right there, it's always been  
And  
For a moment I hope you seek to listen, to  
All my philosophers  
And all my inspirational writers  
We've all been looking in the wrong places  
It's not all as it's supposed to be  
It's more and more than just that  
It's all of my answers laid in front of me  
It's the moments that I realize  
Our universe we claimed as a maze  
Is my labyrinth now, Confoundedly I face.



## **“Look in the mirror”**

Mila Antkevych

# Marathon

Nex (Eunsung) Lee

Home is where our heart lies at ease. Some of us are graced with a home to grow until we start building our own, while others venture into the unknown, hoping to find an anchor we'll call home one day. I realized I did not belong in my home and my country itself, since being treated as an anomaly to everyone. In the involuntary solitude, my goal was to search for home and comfort. That was when I was 6. The house that I belonged to was chaotic. The weight that compressed me into suitable for society was getting heavier. I found out about the American dream at the age of 12. The word "freedom" is the States' selling point. Even though I wasn't the brightest in the room, I focused on English more than any other fields; hoping it would come in handier than other subjects such as math.

I ran away from home on the night that I couldn't stand the chaos anymore. With some pocket money in my possession, I made my way to a friend's home where I witnessed a happy functional family. I didn't want to feel the disconnection between me and my people any longer. When the police escorted me back to my home, it was evident that they would send me away to the United States since I was becoming unbearable.

Obedience cost me sanity and money. From my mother's church, I was introduced to a study abroad program run by a Korean in Tennessee. Charmed by flamboyant words such as Home-Stay and Christian School, my parents invested a significant amount of money to "fix" me. The process was simple: Acquire acceptance to school, interview in the embassy for the student visa, and out I went to the land of

the free. The 14 hours on the plane heading to the United States was the peaceful time I felt in my life. However, I was unaware the rest of my time in Tennessee would be hell. I was ready to blindly follow the program director's directions as they took advantage of my family and my insecurity.

As soon as I arrived in Tennessee, I could hear my heart in my ear as the scenery of diverse races blinded me like a kaleidoscope. At the airport, I was greeted by an "Aunt" who was my caretaker. I was placed in a house with two other boys similar age as mine. Our caretaker was a Korean woman around my mother's age. I'm not sure if it's because of my age or similar social background, but they had a knack to taunt me. Unexpectedly, I was subjected to verbal abuse and expected to be the boys' tutor in biology and English, which meant no life outside of school unless she let me.

This second home suffocated me with the same confinement as back in Korea: strictly controlled by maternal figures. What kept me sane was the friends I made in school. I am very pleased that my investment in English came to fruition. For instance, I was regarded as fluent as a native in English by the school language evaluation. The frustration came from being able to express myself but being suppressed in the land in which I hoped to be liberated. It started to eat up a little by little as I was choked in this house with this woman and the boys. As time passed by, I didn't know my mind was deteriorating into madness. I grew dull around my surroundings and yearned for a sensation that would prove to me that time and reality didn't freeze. This is when I went psychotic self-inflicted wounds and an eating disorder. A year later, when the program director found out about my behavior at home, they labeled me a psychopath and kicked me out of the school.

The flight back home didn't feel as long as the one before. Fear feasted me

with memories before the Tennessee incident. From confinement to another confinement, without treatment or care, I was soon sent back to another religious school in New York. Unlike housing in Tennessee, I was placed with a Colombian family along with a girl from Spain. I felt more relieved since they weren't as controlling as houses that I'd been living in before. A better phrase would be I was scapegoated by them as they enjoyed the Spanish girl's presence more than mine. I sought comfort in music and tried to stay away from the family. With the help of a musician friend, I was able to find a vocal tutor in New School Mannes, New York City. Twice a week, I was out in the city where I enjoyed freedom on my own for the first time. I walked miles just because I could and there was nothing that could stop me. I felt the power to control my life.

It wasn't long before life gave me a lemon and squeezed it on the gash on my heart. One night, on the LIRR train heading back to my home, I was raped in the presence of 10 people in the cart, I saw people averting to recognize what was going on behind their seats. An ad sign blocked the view of the security cameras. An hour and a half, I disconnected my body and mind as it was overbearing to process. At the final station, he asked for my number and I asked what he had done to me. I watched him walk out of the car. I made my way out to the car. The world felt different until the body finally answered the questions my mind was firing.

I broke down in my theology classroom, and I knew there was no recovery for this. When the caretaker came in and found out what happened to me, she called the school. The school let the international student department handle the situation. When the news got to my mother, she gave me another label, whore. There was no investigation as she called it off to be buried and the school accepted it. That fall I was removed from the house where I was staying and placed in my fourth home.

There rose a new era of rage. Investing in being the best version of myself rather than being stable gave me a distorted vision of myself. The mind blamed the body for being incompetent to withstand the stresses. Mental illness strung me up within my mind while my body sought control back. In an endeavor to figure out what was wrong with me, it led to my indulgence in psychology. I learned and analyzed as much as I could of myself. I realized that the only hope of freedom was power and I was starving for it. Eventually, the music in me also succumbed to hunger.

With a beacon of hope, I was allowed to study psychology further at Michigan State University. Unlike my previous living environments, I was placed in a dorm with 3 other students. I would like to apologize to them if I ever get a chance to see them again. They are the first-hand witnesses of my rapidly declining mental health. The medications that are known to be very helpful to illnesses like mine gave me side effects and side effects only. I was in constant pain, trapped in my mind, struggling to see another sunrise. This fifth home felt nothing better than the houses that I lived in before. Two years passed while I sought departure from this world. Fortunately, life redirected me and I followed.

Three times the charm but looks like life doubled it and passed it on to me. Conclusively, I finally compromised with myself after all the torments I endured, I had to hear what myself screamed in me. "Listen to your heart." This is the worst quote in my opinion since I could not ignore your heart and how much you try. After all, I didn't want power, control, or any overseeing skills. I needed a sanctuary to be fragile and soft. In every contract and relaxation, there is my blood and tears swaying in my veins. Life wasn't stirring up chaos, it's nature just like the heart beating. In pain, I found strength and pleasure. The strength to overcome and the pleasure of appreciating the lesson filled the cracks in me. As I started to repair myself, love came into my life, love who was damaged as ostracized as me, agreed



to stay and build our own home. I am still not completely free from my demon, and I never will be. Still, I came to terms with them more often than less. Regardless, I embody the freedom to change the trajectory of my mind. Whereas I gain power and fluency of life.

I lived in 6 different houses each leading to another. If anyone asks me to relive it I will refuse in a heartbeat, although, I won't change anything even if I'm given a chance. I am one of the migrants who searches for a home in life. Some run from danger while others have the luxury to travel. We know where our home is when you feel so. Despiciously, I hate my life but I'll take the challenges for the sake of meaningfulness sake. Because, "I'm all about the bass, bout the bass, no treble." as Meghan Trainor sings. I hope everyone will find their base to call home one day.



## “Ivy’s Drawing”

Ivy Fu



## “Ivy’s Drawing”

Ivy Fu



## “Ivy’s Drawing”

Ivy Fu



**“the beauty of a cat”**  
Destiny Figueroa

# Kitchen Table

Melissa Rendon

The table set for three

We ignore the fourth chair

The walls echo her voice, strident and howling

The couch in the adjoining room sags beneath his weight

He sits there, seething and unheeding to a word I've said

I can see my reflection in the kitchen window behind her, rain-drop studded and small

The cups sweat, the plate at the head of the table still untouched

The just-gone touch of a tender hand warms my cheek

Tracing the groove I carved into the corner with a butter knife when I was still missing teeth

I stare at her face, trace those spots and colors and arches I've known since I knew how to know

Everyone says I look like Mama, with her nose and mouth and cheeks and chin

But I've got Papa's eyes and brows and curly crazy hair

Do I look like her?

Does my mouth droop at the corners like hers?

Do my brows draw down like his in a rage?

Do my restless fingers like his, tap tap tap away waiting for something to change?

Do the echoes of that prodigal son muddle my voice in her ears?

Will she say that my eyes still shine when I'm in her chair, right hand to the head of the table?

Does my spine groan like a Caryatid's beneath her rooftop burden?

I look at those spots and colors and arches that I've known since I knew how to  
know

I blink and the spots blur, the colors fade, the arches wobble like a funhouse mirror

My reflection in the window behind her has fogged over

The food at the head of the table's gone cold

# Waiting

Miriam Szokovski

A young girl sits on the top step of the front porch of a house on a hot, dusty street. She's wearing jelly sandals and a short-sleeved dress, with a backpack at her side. Her face is pink and sweaty and some of her hair sticks to her forehead. Her frozen water-bottle is beading with condensation, leaving a puddle on the step next to her. The steady sound of a ball thumping repetitively against a brick wall can be heard in the background.

Jenny: (walks over from the neighboring house) Hi Mia

Mia: Hi Jenny

Jenny: What are you doing?

Mia: Waiting.

Jenny: For what?

Mia: For my daddy. He's taking us to a farm. (excitedly) I'm going to milk a cow and collect chicken eggs and maybe even shear a sheep!

Jenny's mom: (calls from offstage) Jenny! We have to go, we'll be late to church!

Mia waves goodbye; Jenny skips off stage. Mia sits in silence. Then the thumping



gets louder and a boy walks onto the stage, dribbling a basketball.

Mia: Ben. (Ben doesn't look up)

Mia: Ben! Beeeeeen!

Ben: What?

Mia: Are you ready? Daddy's almost here. He won't wait if you're late. We're going to the farm, remember? I'm going to milk a cow and get alllll the chicken eggs!

Ben: (Shakes his head and sighs, turns back to his basketball)

A woman opens the door and steps out onto the porch.

Mia's mom: Mia! Ben! Come here, let me put sunscreen on you. It's a scorcher! (turns to Mia) Look at you, getting burned already. (smears sunscreen on the children's arms and legs)

Mia: (blocking her face with her hands) Let me do my own face, Mom!

Mia's mom: Ok, (squirts a small amount of sunscreen into Mia's palm) but I need to make sure you don't miss a spot. It's gonna be real hot today.

Mia: (scrunches up her eyes and carefully rubs the sunscreen into her cheeks, forehead, and nose)

Mia's mom: You missed a spot, just there (pointing) on your chin.

Mia: (rubbing aggressively) Got it!

Mia: Ugh, Mom! I smell like coconut now. You know I hate coconut.

Mia's mom: (opens her mouth, but is interrupted before she gets a word out)

Mia: But today is not a day to make a fuss! Oh no, this is no ordinary hang-out-at-Daddy's-house Sunday. Today we are going to the farm!

Mia's mom: (looks relieved) That's right, honey! (looks at her watch, worried) I hope he'll be here soon.

Mom goes back inside the house, the screen door bangs shut behind her. Ben leaves the stage, but his ball still thumps steadily in the background. Mia sits in silence

Mia: (looking down at the pavement) One, two, three ... (mumbles to herself) seventeen, eighteen ... twenty four ...

Ben: (wanders back, this time without his basketball) What are you doing?

Mia: Counting ants

Ben: Baby!

Mia: Am not!

Ben: Are too!

Mia: (pounds)

Mia: (waving at the neighbor, getting into his big blue 90s Ford) “Hi Mr. Green!”

Mr. Green: “Good morning, Mia! Where are you off to today?” (gets into the car without waiting for an answer)

Mia: (looking triumphantly at Ben) See, even Robbie’s dad can tell we have special plans!

Ben: (rolls his eyes and snorts) This is boring. I’m going inside.

Mia sits in silence. She picks up her water bottle and turns it upside down and back again, seeing all the ice has melted.

Mia: (singing softly to herself, looking down the street) We’re going to the farm, we’re going to the farm, hi ho the dairy-o, we’re going to the farm. We’re gonna milk a cow, we’re gonna milk a cow ... (trails off as a car sounds in the distance)

Mia stands up and runs to the gate, looking down in the direction of the car excitedly.

Mia: He’s here! He’s here! (her shoulders slump and her voice deflates) Actually no he’s not.

Mia walks slowly back to the porch, kicking her feet against the ground as she goes.

Mia's mom: (comes back out onto the porch) How about a popsicle, honey?

Mia: A red one?

Mia's mom: (smiling) Always!

Mia: (smiles and reaches out for it, opens the wrapper and starts licking) Thanks, Mom.

Mia: (looking at her mom more carefully) You've got your I-think-this-is-not-going-well face on, Mom, I can tell. But you're wrong. Daddy's just late. I know he'll come. He promised.

Mia's mom: (hesitates) Mia ...

Mia: Why did Ben go inside? He needs to have more patience, that's what you always say, right Mom?

Mia's mom: (sighs). Right, honey. Do you want to wait inside? It's awful hot out here.

Mia: No, I'm staying here.

Mia's mom goes back inside with a worried look behind her. Mia goes back to counting ants.

Mia: Seventy four, seventy five, seventy eleven ...

Mr Green arrives back home and two boys pile out of the car behind him.

Robbie: Hi Mia!

Max: Mi Mia!

Mia: Hi Robbie! Hi Max!

Mr Green: Still waiting Mia?

Robbie and Max wave their chess trophies at Mia and she gives them a thumbs up.  
Mr Green and the boys go inside their house. Mia sits. And sits.

Mia's mom: (comes back onto the porch)How about some lunch, Mia?

Mia: We're eating when we get there, Mom!

Mia's mom: Ok, how about just a snack then?

Mia: (nods) I am kinda hungry.

Mum brings a plate with a sandwich, seven animal crackers, and a glass of lemonade. Mia eats in silence, dropping her crusts and watching the ants swarm around them.

Robbie: (calling over the fence) Wanna play?

Mia: (wiping sweat from her forehead, shading her eyes from the sun) No thanks, I'm going to the farm.

Mia: (restless, looking next door longingly, talking to herself) What if Daddy comes and he doesn't see me? He knows I always wait on the top step. He might leave. (stands up and looks both ways down the street) I don't remember exactly what Daddy's car looks like. I think it's silver. I can't see any silver cars, but maybe he has a new one now.

Mia paces, then sits back on the step and waits. The neighbors are heard getting ready for a bbq. A woman walks by with her dog. The light turns to evening light.

Mia: (pricks her ears, hears the phone ringing inside)

Mia's mom opens the door and hands her the phone.

Mia: Hello?

Mia's dad: (off stage) Hey Mia! Sorry about today. Time just got away from me. We'll go another day, okay kiddo?

Mia: Okay, Dad.

Mia's dad: Buck up, Mia! You know I love you, right?"

Mia hangs up and angrily squishes all the ants with her jelly sandals.

The street lights come on. Mia is still sitting on the step, with the phone in her lap,

dead ants on her toes.

Mia (talking to herself) Tomorrow, when Miss Susan asks, “What did you do over the weekend?” I will not say, “I went to the farm.” I will not say, “I sat on the step all day.” I will not say, “I didn’t play with Robbie and Max.” I will not say, “I counted 243 ants.” I will say, “I killed 243 ants.” And then everyone will say (smiles), “Oooh, Mia, you bad girl.”

Mia’s mom: (holding out her hand) Let’s go inside, Mia. I’m sorry today didn’t work out.”

Mia: (taking her hand and following her inside) We’re still going. Maybe next week. Daddy said.



**“Father In Film”**  
Meredith Cruz





**“Roots”**  
Hanieh Kachooee

# Dinilysia

Rex Harvilla

Today is

September 29th 2023

Dianne Feinstein died

I know she will come back

To us one day

Would 1000 arms have helped

Her get more done

Do you think she knew

How to change a tire



*Untitled*  
Jaeyoung Noh



**“Just Dance!”**  
Leeyana Marcelo

# Spin the Bottle

Felicia Zekauskas

Has anyone played  
spin the bottle?

We did,  
on a hot  
summer night  
in the red barn  
behind the house.

We were all  
unkissable  
yet,  
we were kissed.

Tommy had braces  
Tobi had buck teeth  
and Michael's ears stood out.  
Marc and Gary  
were too young  
and Susan had way too many freckles.

And Barbie watched  
in her glassine box

aghast  
on the old  
wooden shelf.

Who knew  
that Coca-Cola  
could taste so good.

# Shades of Amber

Ourania Rahman

The fall was as presumed:

You are the fall; an angelic being who swears to protect all that dies,

Kiss them different shades of amber,

And let them pass to allow a newly born life.

You did just that to me,

A lovely willow tree growing inside me,

Growing limitlessly, endlessly.

You are the fall in my life,

You are the spirit I fell for,

And every time the leaves start to shrivel and frown,

I remind myself a new life awaits.



## **“Electric Ambience”**

Juniper Garcia



# hanahaki disease

Destiny Figueroa

Hanahaki Disease, a love-borne affliction  
A flower blooms in my lungs, a cruel addiction  
I can't stop thinking of you, my heart aflutter  
But every breath I take brings me closer to utter  
Agony and despair, as petals fill my chest  
I cough and hack, trying to rid myself of this pest  
But the more I try, the more the flower grows  
A constant reminder of the love I'll never know  
I wish I could rid myself of this curse  
But my love for you only seems to worsen and worsen  
I can't escape these feelings, try as I might  
Hanahaki Disease, a never-ending fight  
But I hold on, to the hope that someday  
You'll return my love, and the flower will go away  
Until then, I'll keep fighting, with all of my might.  
Hanahaki Disease, a test of love's might

# I Can Never Forgive You

Giovanna Casano

I can never forgive  
the heartbreak suffered by your  
hollow words and shallow actions.  
How you so easily planted my seed  
in your poisonous woodland,  
I became constricted  
by your deceiving vines,  
to mistake instability for safety,  
contempt for love,  
that drained me  
of every bit of light.  
You carved away  
down to my bleeding grain,  
until there was nothing left  
for your pleasure.  
I was forgotten,  
in the air's stillness  
and the overgrown weeds,  
of every pitch-black night  
I wandered endlessly.  
How I climbed to the treetops

of your forest, with a void in my chest,  
to see the sun shine once more,  
unknown to me then  
it never would rise  
from your side of the world again.  
I will never forgive  
how the glow of day  
almost stopped to rise for myself  
completely.



**“Thorned”**  
Ourania Rahman



**“Life Smokes Away”**  
Ramil Acosta

# Drinking Monster Energy at 2:46 AM

Aamishq Dhir

A shadow is cast.  
Mere soulless, dark, reflection;  
Perfect silhouette;  
Distorted, but alluring.  
All of the color is gone.  
The harsh white light from  
My laptop scorches my eyes.  
Minutes tick by painstakingly  
Slow; world frozen  
Around me. When will this end?  
Deafening silence  
Closes me in. Images  
Projecting across  
White walls, dull memories haunt.  
I gaze at the blank ceiling  
Yellow and orange  
Occupy my room again.  
The sun has risen.  
Screeching sounds throughout the dorm.  
Droopy eyes crawl out of bed.  
Another coffee.  
Light contrasts dark swirling  
Into one-  
Another. Mesmerizing.  
Alas, I'm out of sugar.

# don't wanna grow up

Leeyana Marcelo

Lake Runaway wasn't actually called Lake Runaway. It had an actual name—Lake John or something of the boring sort. All the locals of Intmont called it Lake Runaway because that's where police usually found runaway teens who were still teetering on the impossible decision to take the Amtrak to the West Coast or go back home. The lake was also a popular spot for parties thrown by rebellious teens who thought themselves grown because they drank and smoked. It felt even more sneaky knowing Saint Mary's was just far enough away that the night guards couldn't hear the music. It was located an odd two miles behind Saint Mary's Immaculate Conception Academy, far enough away from the city to get a clear view of the stars. It was a little tourist spot for people who found themselves in Intmont, a rare pocket of nature in an otherwise industrialized area.

That is where Remi found themselves on this fateful November night, with nothing but their school uniform, a pack of stolen cigarettes, and their untraceable iPod shuffle on their person. The path to the lake wasn't a particularly easy one, and as Remi slowed their run to a jog, they thought they should throw themselves into the lake. It would teach their father a lesson too—at least they hoped for that. They stumbled down to the shore of the lake, groaning as they stripped off their stupid Saint Mary's blazer and sat on it. Their heart was still pounding in their chest, a mixture of exhaustion and pure anger forcing it to beat. A thin rivulet of sweat ran down their temple, dripping down their jaw like a tear as they caught their breath.

They had run all the way here from their father's house, which in itself was a feat considering his house was a few good miles away from the lake. They found that funny, oddly enough.

“Like hell I don’t ‘apply myself,’” they muttered to themselves, chuckling a bit. A fresh wave of anger swelled in them as they said that, their jaw tightening as they thought of the fight that had brought them here in the first place. Remi flopped onto their back, looking up at the sky. The stars were brighter here than they were in the city or the suburbs. A memory of them as a child rose up to the surface of their mind, of them trying to memorize all the constellations one lazy summer day. Their father had promised to take them to a tall mountain so they could see it for themselves. Of course, that never happened. Their father wasn’t one to keep promises.

A strange sense formed a pit in their stomach. They couldn’t quite put a name to it—grief? Anger? Relief?—but it sunk them all the same. A hot tear fell from their eye, running down their face and getting absorbed into their hair. That was the only tear truly cried that night.

Maybe in another universe, I’m happier.

It wasn’t unlike Remi and their father to get into fights nowadays. Ever since he got this fancy house in the suburbs, away from their cousins and friends in the city, and enrolled them in Saint Mary’s, it seemed every day there was a new disagreement. It was usually just normal teenage things that every parent chides their child about—their music, their fashion, their friends, and their ongoing rebellious streak that had landed them in numerous fights and ISSs. He was probably right about some things, but it had always given Remi a weird feeling. He criticized their art, saying that they could do better than collages and zines and he would enroll them in “real” art classes if they just asked. He criticized their bass, saying they should stop practicing simple basslines and try to study theory instead. He criticized their fashion, saying they shouldn’t be wearing such “ugly” clothes and that it made them look “dirty”. He criticized their friends from the city, as if he didn’t grow up in the same shitty area and the rest of the family didn’t still live there. Worst of all, he expected them to agree about the rest of their family. He



said they were too stubborn for their own good and he felt offended by them constantly turning down his offers to move them into the suburbs, often with a high and mighty undertone that left them feeling awkward.

Tonight, though, everything had blown up. It started in the car when he had to pick up Remi later than usual. They had been at an extra credit session, a last attempt at raising their pre-calc grade from a C to a B before the fall semester closed. By the time they got out, the buses had stopped running. This, of course, was a huge problem for their father. They had sensed it even over the phone. Their father wasn't very able to hide his emotions, and his irritation was clear in his voice. They had considered calling him again to tell him someone had offered them a ride home and then walk home, but then thought that would probably only make him angrier. Remi could tell he was angry by how he pulled into the school's parking lot, speeding in and slamming the breaks in front of the curb. They had kept a nonchalant face on as they climbed into the car, ignoring the pit in their stomach growing heavier as he sped away.

"Why were you so late?" he had finally asked, jaw clenched.

"I was at an extra credit session," Remi answered, looking away from him.

"Look at me when you answer me. How many times do I have to tell you? It's bad manners. God."

Remi bit their tongue, turning to face him as they repeated their sentence again. "I was at an extra credit session."

"What class?" He fired back also immediately, as if trying to catch them off guard.

"Pre-calc."

He had been so proud originally when they had gotten their schedule. They were only 15, and pre-calc was usually reserved for the upperclassmen.

"Why did you need extra credit? Are you failing the class? Seriously? I mean, I spend a lot of money putting you through that school, Remi. The least you could do is pass your classes."

“I have a C right now.” Remi muttered, holding their book bag closer to them.

Why would you assume I’m failing off the bat? They thought bitterly.

“A C? Are you kidding me?” Their father scoffed, making a rough right turn onto the main street. “You know, if you just applied yourself more, you could probably be passing with an A.”

Remi didn’t answer that. They stared at their knees, counting every hole in their fishnets and trying to ignore the way their ears were burning. They ignored his grumbling about 5 o’ clock traffic and squeezed their eyes tight when he made a comment about how they should’ve just taken the bus home.

I’m doing the best I can. It’s a lot of work and I missed a week because you insisted I come to your work trip with you. I had trouble catching up after that. He wouldn’t listen to that. He’d call them excuses and tell them to “be better” and “make this chance worth it”. Why don’t you ever believe in me? Why can’t you just think good of me? Why can’t you believe I’m trying?

“You’re lying to me, aren’t you?”

“Huh?” Remi looked up, confused at his statement.

“Are you lying to me, Remi?”

“Why would I lie to you?”

Their father unexpectedly slammed the brakes, Remi jolting forward. Their book bag tumbled out of their arms.

“God damn it!” He blasted his horn, roughly swerving around the car that had stopped to parallel park.

Remi had bent down to collect their bag, hands properly shaking. They had no idea what had gotten him so angry, but if the whole car ride was going to be like this, they would rather open the door and tumble out. They grabbed the bag around the middle. Out of the unzipped middle pocket, a carton of Marlboros tumbled out. It was opened, with a few already taken out.

“Shit,” they whispered, swiftly picking it up and trying to shove it into the pocket.

They turned away from their father, quickly zipping the pocket closed.  
“Remi.”

It felt like someone had gutted them when he said their name. His voice was like a fire so hot you couldn't tell if you were getting burnt or frozen.

“What is that?”

Remi looked at the carpeted car floor, vision swimming. Their ears were burning. A dozen little lies, all flimsy, popped up in their head.

He started laughing, a disappointed and sardonic laugh. A loud SLAM against the car wheel made Remi jump. They squirmed as far away from their father as they could. They laid their forehead against the window, watching the main street roll by and disappear as they turned down their road. The rest of the trip was spent in tense silence. Even if he had said anything, all

Remi could hear the beating of their heart. They held the bag close to them, mentally cursing the little box.

Their father violently pulled into the driveway, shoving the gear into park. Remi's hand went to the door to open it, but the lock swiftly turned with a clack. They still didn't turn to face their father when he asked.

“What was that in your hand, Remi?”

“It's nothing,” they replied, quiet as they tried to hide the tremor in their voice. “A pack of playing cards. M-my friend gave it to me.”

The lie slipped so easily off their tongue.

“How many times do I have to tell you, Remi?” His volume rose as he spoke. “Look at me when I talk to you!”

Remi squeezed their eyes shut, loosening any tears that were yet to fall. They quickly wiped their face and turned to face their father with the best still face they could manage. It was better to face him wearing nothing than with fear. Fear tended to make him angrier.

“Now answer me again—truthfully. What was that in your hand?”

Remi took a deep breath, gritting their teeth.

“Playing cards.”

“Goddamnit—give me your bag right now, Remi.”

They clutched it tighter to themselves with one arm, the other hand on the door handle.

“Give it to me!” Before they could react, their father reached out and snatched the bag out of their arm. They quickly reached out to grab one of the straps, but it slipped out of their hand, their fingers arching to grab air.

“Dad! Give it back to me!” Remi scrambled to try and reach it, but he turned away from them so they couldn’t see. The sound of the zippers sent a pang of pure fear into them. “Dad, seriously! Give it back!”

Their father whipped back around so quickly Remi flinched, their back hitting the car door. There was no hiding the fear in their eyes as he held up the carton of cigarettes in between his fingers.

“So you were lying to me, right?”

Remi didn’t answer, gripping their skirt and playing with the fabric in an attempt to calm themselves. Everything felt so pointless at that moment. It didn’t matter how hard they tried in school or how they tried to hide their feelings about moving to the suburbs. It all came down to that stupid little pack of cigarettes. What little trust he had in them was gone forever because of that.

“Why do you have these, Remi? Huh?!” The last statement was a shout. “Do you even understand what these can do to you? Of course you don’t. You don’t think. You don’t think about anything or anyone other than yourself!”

He flung the pack back at them, some cigarettes flying out of the carton as it landed against Remi’s chest and onto their lap. He yanked the key out of the ignition, getting out of the car and slamming the door hard enough to shake it. Remi grit their teeth, not letting any tears fall. Their eyes hurt with the effort it took, but at the moment, they needed to show him it didn’t hurt. He needed to know that they

didn't care. It was worse if he knew they were upset.

None of their fights ended in apologies. Everyone in the family had a reputation for being stubborn, and that didn't exclude Remi or their father. Remi collected the cigarettes, tucking them back into place and put it in their waistband. With a deep breath, they opened the car door and went into the house. They thought they were ready for anything that faced them there. They could take a berating with a straight face. They could take the silent treatment. Two could play that game.

What they weren't prepared for, though, was the sound of paper ripping coming from their room. Their stomach felt like it had been pierced with a shard of glass. Immediately, they dropped their bag to the ground and ran to their room. Remi flung the door open, panicked eyes finding their father ripping all their posters from their walls. He took no caution or care. There were pieces of paper already lying on the floor among the flung about clothes and hangers. Remi watched in horror as he grabbed the top of their Live Through This album poster, ripping the entire right side of it from the wall. The other half hung sadly, Courtney Love's face torn in half before it fluttered to the ground.

"Dad! What are you doing?!" Remi ran in, grabbing the already discarded paper from the ground.

They held it up. It was a collage they had made for their art class of cut out flowers from a horticulture magazine surrounding a roughly drawn woman. They had gotten a 100, their teacher citing "Excellent creativity!". They flipped it to the other side where the grade had been written. Only the 1 was visible.

"I am getting rid of all your—" Their father gestured to the rest of the room with a look of contempt. "—trash. You buy this with my money—or let's be honest, you probably stole all of these posters and shit—so I have the right to do with it what I want! Because that's what you do, right? Just do whatever you want!"

He moved to another poster. Remi didn't think the situation could get any worse, but as he put his hands on it, they knew that it could. The poster in question was vintage, straight from the 1995 Live Through This tour. It was one of Remi's prized

possessions, and their father knew that. He had gotten it for them for their birthday last year. He had seemed so pleased they were happy. It drove a knife into their heart that all it was to him was just another piece of leverage.

“Dad, please, not that one, please—!”

Their cries went unheard—or perhaps, it fueled him as he took the top with both hands and ripped it off the wall. He turned to them and ripped it apart with both hands, lining up the halves and ripping it into quarters before letting the pieces fall to the ground.

“Why are you crying, huh? You think your actions don’t have consequences? You think you can just lie to me when I work my ass off just so you can get a good education?” He was moving to stand on their bed, reaching up to grab yet another poster off their wall. “You’re sickening, Remi. You are nothing but a selfish brat, and there is nothing I am more disappointed in than you!”

Remi wasn’t even hyperventilating. Their stomach churned as they looked about the mess that laid on the floor. It was mocking them, somehow. They turned to stare at his foot, his dirty work shoes grinding into a teddy bear they had left on the center of their bed. He stood right on its chest, its arms and legs splayed out in an almost comical way. They picked up one piece of the now ruined tour poster, eyes welling with tears as they stared at it. They didn’t fall.

“—did you hear anything that I just said, Remi?”

Remi looked up at their father, still standing on their bed with the shreds of a L7 poster in his hands.

“Answer me, Remi!”

“FUCK YOU!” They screamed back, so raw it burned their throat.

Remi bolted from the room, skidding to a stop beside their bag and pulling out their pink iPod nano by the headphones. Without a second look back, they flung open the door and ran. Their father bellowed behind them, but it wasn’t long until

they were far enough away from the house that they couldn't hear them.

From there, they just ran. They ran down their street onto the main street. From the main street, they ran to Saint Mary's. From Saint Mary's, they ran to Lake Runaway, never stopping for a second to try and catch their breath. Everything was a blur—they couldn't hear the beeps of cars as they hurriedly crossed the street or see the faces of the passerbyers that they shoved out of the way. They just needed to go. So here they were, panting as they looked up to the stars. The night chill hadn't gotten to them yet, still warm from their run. Remi splayed their arms out, letting the mud cool their feverish palms. The dampness hadn't yet soaked their blazer. Finally, their world felt back in place. Here, their father had never discovered that pack of cigarettes. Here, their father had never moved them out of the city and into the suburbs. Here, Remi was just themselves, and all of them was finally enough. There was no one left to please, no expectations to meet other than to lie down and cool off.

Maybe this is the universe where I'm happy.

Remi reached into their shirt, pulling out the iPod nano from where they had haphazardly shoved it into their bra. They put the headphones into their ears, turning it on. They lazily skipped songs, not quite listening as they stared up into the sky until they heard the intro of Miss World. They put it on their stomach and covered it with their hands, aware of no other sound except for Eric Erlandson's guitar and Courtney Love's voice.

I am the girl you know, can't look you in the eye...I am the girl you know, so sick  
I cannot try...

Remi let out a deep sigh that could be taken for contentness. Their heart had finally stopped hammering, their breathing slowing. If they died here, they would be happy. Then at least, they wouldn't have to go back home. They knew the police

would probably be coming in a few hours. But in the hours alone, they would live in this undisturbed universe, happy.

I'm Miss World...watch me break and watch me burn...no one cares, my friends...

Remi had always had dreams about being a rockstar. They were still in their wannabe phase, with their ripped up fishnets and Fender Squire bass with a broken cable. Their dreams were still scribbles in their journal about their first album release and what labels they wanted to give their songs to. They hadn't even gone to Club Dread downtown. Their father would never agree to drive them, and they were too out of the way for anyone from the city to pick them up. A wispy cloud passed over the stars up above. What if their father was tossing their bass right now? It was a funny imagery, imagining their father in some Kurt Cobain-esque pose, smashing their bass into pieces. What if he was reading their journal? He probably was. Oh, whatever.

They didn't care. Let him see how much they hated him. Let him see all their internal thoughts and dreams—he wouldn't care. They didn't care if his feelings were hurt.

It wasn't like those dreams were ever going to come true, anyways.

The song was beginning to ramp up, the electric guitar finally coming in and Courtney's voice becoming a defiant yell.

I've made my bed, I'll lie in it! I've made my bed, I'll die in it!

That was something their father would say to them. You've made your bed, now lie in it. He was probably kicking himself right now for not saying it. They thought back to their ruined room. You've made your bed, now lie in it. What had they done to deserve it, though? It wasn't fair. You're a bad kid, Remi. Of course you deserve it.

Why am I thinking like that? Remi's eyebrows furrowed, their hands tightening. They didn't. They never deserved any verbal attack because of a low grade. They



never deserved to be insulted because their interests were never proper enough. They thought back to their ruined room. They never deserved to have their room torn apart because of a simple mistake. It wasn't their fault.

I've made my bed, I'll lie in it! I've made my bed, I'll die in it!

"I'm never gonna be sorry for anything again," they whispered to themselves, holding a pinky up to the sky. "I'll always be a selfish brat."

I've made my bed, I'll lie in it! I've made my bed, I'll die in it!

"In this universe, I am happy."

I've made my bed, I'll lie in it! I've made my bed, I'll die in it!

"Fuck you, Dad. I'm gonna make something real of myself, and you'll never see it."

I've made my bed, I'll lie in it! I've made my bed, I'll die in it!

Remi smiled to themselves, putting their hand down to their stomach. The blazer was now properly wet, now soaking into their shirt. They barely felt the chill. The song dwindled down to a close, the final notes of the guitar twanging as it skipped to the next song. Remi was no longer listening. They closed their eyes and turned to their side.

I am the girl you know, can't look you in the eye...

...

From: rclermont45357@smica.org

To: drunkdr1ving@me.com

Subject: drum kit?

yo sparrow do u still have ur drum kit

To: rclermont45357@smica.org

From: drunkdr1ving@me.com

Subject: (re) drum kit?

WHERE THE HELL WERE U LAST NIGHT UR DAD WAS AT OUR APARTMENT also yea i still have my drum kit why

From: rclermont45357@smica.org

To: drunkdriving@me.com

Subject: (re) (re) drum kit?

wanna form a band lol



**“freedom”**  
Aamishq Dhir



**“Sunday on Film”**  
Hanieh Kachooee

# The Ashtray

Felicia Zekauskas

In the morning  
you empty  
the white ceramic  
ashtray  
filled with  
yesterday's  
memories  
that you  
inhaled one  
by one.

# The Voyage

Cassie Guinto

Drawings on the walls  
Evidencing a home-in-progress  
Outside, bettas in suits swim in concrete  
From twelve o'clock to twelve o'clock  
Dreams and non-dreams  
Recessed into the ceiling of this city  
Set up shop near a window; sit up straight  
Like your mother and her mother taught you  
And never quit breaking in that pen  
Stories that a five year-old can think up  
That which a forty year-old cannot fathom  
Fictitious worlds coalesce into a mosaic: a cosmic sheet  
At your doorstep, an eager neighbor welcoming you home

# The Wooden Spoon

Felicia Zekauskas

The wooden spoon  
is a witness

to Sunday gravy  
with soft meatballs  
and greasy sausage

to warm apple cake  
served in a round pan  
with powdered sugar

to flaky current squares  
with buttery crust  
and lemon peel

to whispered conversations  
and eruptions of anger  
to unhappiness  
regret  
and dreams unfulfilled

and tender moments  
maybe

I don't know  
ask the spoon.



**“The Blue-Eyed Asian Girl”**  
Jaeyoung Noh





**“Grandma’s house”**  
Hanieh Kachooee

# “Little Do You Know”

Michelina Chermark

It was a blistering summer, the blades of grass were singed by the heat. The clouds hovered under the azure sky. The boisterous children, running in and out of grandma’s humble abode. There was a slight breeze which drove the scent of her cooking out from the kitchen window. She always had a green thumb, and cooked straight from her garden. Infectious aromas of tomato, basil, oregano, and garlic quickly joined the clouds in harmonious matrimony. All the while, grandpa’s in the living room watching the latest PGA Tour on his man throne, the recliner. The uncles and aunts are in the backyard, savoring their chilled Limoncello in small dark green liquor glasses and sitting under the chestnut and chocolate color awning. The girl didn’t know what was happening at the time, but these would be the memories the girl grew to fear and cherish the most.

A collection such as this didn’t just transpire in the summer, but all year round. Every Sunday, dating back to before the girl could remember, the family gathered for a meal and to be in the company of one another. It was one of the many family traditions and was part of the glue that held us together. Grandma would cook meatballs and pasta, salad, and always the freshest bread to mop your sauced plate once you were done. Wasting food was never accepted, you ate what you took. Throwing out food was a means of disrespect and you’d hear about it before you were able to rise from your chair. The girl’s eyes were always bigger than my stomach, filling the plate with more pasta than the girl could swallow and feathering many layers of pecorino romano. One would have thought it was considered gold in that house and she’d let you know when you were using too much. A smack to the hand or asking “if there you were cold from all the snow on your plate” was the aftermath of that.

Neither the rules of her house, nor her for that matter, was what the girl feared. It was the cousins that asked to play while dinner was getting cleaned off of the table, or when they were setting the table for dessert. The chaos of resetting was the perfect distraction. Those who didn't help were in the living room mesmerized with whatever was on at the time, outside playing basketball, or in the pool swimming. The basement was finished and where the old kitchen set was placed, with a foil ceiling. Major holidays such as Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter were always celebrated downstairs, but Sunday dinners thrived upstairs.

The games played were never scary at first, but they then would evolve into the most terrifying situations. Games that children should not be participants of. Playing house is innocent, but relationships are not. Whether it was Barbies, Bratz Dolls, or WWE action figures, it always seemed to turn into something more. There were "pop ins" of family members coming down to grab plates or napkins, but not long enough to see what was going on. Then you'd hear a call "Who wants dessert?" and everything would stop, they'd run upstairs. This went on for many years to come. Later, the games evolved into uncomfortable and inappropriate conversations. When it was time to swim, it often turned from "marco polo" to "pull your suit off." Inappropriate touches lead to unspeakable acts.

Throughout those years, a voice was silenced and a choice was made to love what happiness was left of life, not to be consumed by anger. The grandmother died when the girl was sixteen. After her twenty-fifth birthday, the girl could no longer carry the weight of her abuse and decided to tell her family of what had happened. Instead of shaming her with endless ridicule, they embraced her with love and support. Today, at twenty-eight, that girl continues to choose to love what happiness is left and then some. There was now no blame, nor shame that she carries, but freedom, love, and understanding.

Again, there was not a thought to what was going on. There was nothing said due to the ideology of people not believing the situation. Grinning and bearing it was the coping strategy and the hopes that it would one day cease. Knowing the

situation is wrong is only half of the battle. It is the behaviors and reactions that come prior, during, and after the fact that is the real battle. Sexual abuse is common within families more times and not many have the courage or strength to share their stories. With therapy and medication, it is possible to overcome such adversities. Little do you know of one's experiences when masked through a smile and making jokes.

# Ghazal on Turtle Ships

Catherine Park

There is nothing romantic about calluses,  
even on a violinist's fingers curved around her bow.  
Let me play you a Concerto in G Minor that sails.  
I forget afterwards, onstage, to take a bow.  
My mother would say humility is a luxury,  
and modesty tastes like the rosin on my bow:  
chalky and syrup sweet. It creates friction  
I can't afford. Meanwhile, my mother imagines me on the bow  
of a battleship — a geobukseon with a dragon masthead.  
I wish I had been born in the year of the dragon; I want to bow  
my head before I have to rear it. That is to say, I need time  
to kindle the fire in my throat. The bow  
in my right hand must feel weighted, if the music is to begin  
with an accented note. Don't bow,  
my mother scolds. You don't need to pay your respects  
to everyone. I look at the calluses on her non-bowing  
hand. Violinists know friction is necessary  
to create music. I was five years old when I learned to bow  
to sugar-lipped strangers and snakes with unhooded eyes.  
Mother, a geobukseon is hard to build, and standing on the bow  
of the ship makes you vulnerable. Let me trade  
these armored plates for a musician's hands, and take my bow.

NOTE: geobukseon (거북선): a type of Korean warship that was used during the Joseon dynasty; also known as "turtle ship" in western descriptions for its protective, shell-like covering



**“Orchids”**  
Mila Antkevych



*Untitled*  
Jaeyoung Noh

# Kokubetsu

Rosemary Tierney

Wind tangles in trees,  
bends boughs and rustles red leaves  
under the full moon.

The grass is grateful  
to be so deeply rooted  
that it might look up

to see the kōyō  
that sweetens a sad season  
along with the rain.

The golden full moon  
and the lush scent of wet earth  
bring a flush of warmth

on night's raw currents  
where autumn leaves are dancing  
in the lunar light.

Among the maples,  
drinking in the skin-soft night,  
my heart rejoins yours –  
here, in this moment of pure  
memorialization.



So much is coming  
to an end and at last I,  
we, can let it go

# To Chen Chen

Cassie Guinto

*After "i love you to the moon &" by Chen Chen*

i love you from the earth to

nowhere else, let's never leave, let's take it slow & sip boxed wine on the living  
room floor, stay up 'til the next day

begins at home (our home), the one we bought

with the money we saved in college (so much), it's like i was already drunk  
as a lover on earth

since i was born, so this is the chronic  
symptom of life, are you

feeling it with me, don't forget

our show comes on at seven, let's watch

our show at seven while husbanding our energy

earth to loverboy, let's catch our breath

(so deep) like astronauts coming home, let's be the moon  
on earth

# Temptation

Ourania Rahman

Your smile, a fluorescent glow,  
Like the crescent of a moon.

An array of shiny pearls:  
Each a shape proving unique from the other.

They daze at me, luring me through a glimmering reflection,  
No siren can compete with such magnificence of enticement.

The temptation it strikes within me immeasurable,  
For I have fallen in the same fate as Tantalus himself.

My very will escaping every hitching breath,  
For it takes the strength of Jupiter's gravity,  
Tenfold, not to lean into you

And seal our lips together.



**“Ethereal Whispers of Womanhood”**  
Destiny Figueroa

# The Unheard Wails of a Body Waiting for Rest

Leeyana Marcelo

You never hear  
the way a body yearns  
for rest after a long day.

You never hear  
the way your overused arms  
moan in pain when you raise them  
your left shoulder screaming its protest unheard.

You never hear  
the way your knee is one step away  
from collapsing; worn like an old pillar your foot begs for mercy  
your hip silently breathes out in relief  
as you finally find your seat on the bus.

You ignore  
the way your eyes strain to focus on your book words floating underwater, just out of reach; your  
jaw aches from the way you grind your teeth your molars endure the flash of pain  
from an ice-cold drink.

You never realize  
how much your body can take, or rather how much it has taken  
and you never realize  
when you will finally  
break.

# Emptiness

Eqerem Isallari

Dots and spots  
That I see  
Are full.

Their flow  
Gentle movement  
On my chest  
There's something.

And me, oh me?  
I am empty.  
Or, perhaps  
Better off  
I am void.

Alone  
I don't know what to do.  
Nor how to fill myself  
Lonely everywhere

The flow of canals  
Carries the full water.  
Takes it somewhere.  
Where I cannot reach  
For I am unfulfilled

And I walk, I walk.  
Endlessly  
Without direction  
Empty

Droplets and droplets  
The dots continue.  
Steps increase  
The flow fills.

But me.... but me  
When will I fill up?



**“crybaby”**  
Hanieh Kachooee



# sorry for rambling

Jazmin Perez

“Hey.”

“Oh,” Doc looks up from his desk, “You made it.”

“Yeah.”

He checks his watch, “Damn. About time,” he smiles, “Forty minutes into your session?”

“I had shit to do.”

“I know you didn’t.”

I sigh. I’ve paid this guy for a very long time to listen to me. I don’t know why.

“Can I sit?” I glance at the couch in the corner. Everything in this office looks like it’s from the fifties. Doc isn’t old, but old enough for me to think his trinkets and toys might be from an ancient time he remembers. There’s only one wall, and it’s the one behind his desk. Books cover the rest of the room. He’s read them all.

“Sure,” he gets up from his desk and sits in his listening chair, “You look beat up.”

“He lost,” I lay on the couch and stare into the ceiling. There’s so much brown in this room I feel like I’m swimming in mud.

“You know that doesn’t matter. I thought you were done fighting.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever man. Can we get to the important shit? You’re still gonna charge me for the whole hour, aren’t ya?”

“I’m just saying. You told me you were done.”

And I was. I’ve been in and out of a lot of phases of my life where I feel things too much – anger, sadness, joy. You name it. I keep Doc around for a reason.

“I am.”

“You’re not. You’re here, bleeding on my couch.”

I look down and the scrapes and cuts on my knees are still beading and falling onto the couch. I feel kinda bad, but he needs to get rid of this thing anyway. It’s old and ugly.

“He had a knife, so,” I roll my eyes, “I did what I had to do.”

“Yeah,” he scoffs, “Roll your eyes. You know what I’m going to say.”

“This isn’t what I came here for.”

“What did you come here for?” He pushes his glasses up and crosses his legs.

“Not for you to look at me that way or talk down to me. I just need you to listen today.”

“Don’t I usually listen?”

“You don’t,” I wipe some blood off my hand and onto my shorts, “You listen so you can say stuff.”

“Isn’t that how a conversation works?”

“You’re not understanding.”

“It was Monty, wasn’t it?”

Silence. I don’t like hearing his name.

“What did you do before you came here, Lola?” He questions. He always does this. Why do I have to answer this stupid ass question? What does it look like I did?

“Nothing.”

“He’s not your ‘responsibility,’ Lola. You decided to take ‘care’ of him?” He uses air quotes.

“I didn’t do anything I didn’t have to,” I hissed.

“What did he do this time?”

“Be a fucking asshole.”

“Isn’t that what you’re used to?”

“He was going to hurt Thomas,” I sniffled, the ball in my throat making it hard to talk.

“Monty started it?”

The silence again. There’s not much I remember about stumbling into this building. After the

fight, my head felt like it was going to fall off my shoulders. I hopped in my car and drove straight to this shitty office. I might've parked my car in the fire zone. I'm dizzy, and definitely a little hungry.

I swallow the ball, "Yeah. He did."

"Lying again, are we?"

"I don't lie to you."

He scoffs, "You don't?"

I don't. I withhold information sometimes, sure, but that's because he'll say some smart shit that'll piss me off. I hate that I'm just like the people in the movies – the ones that don't know what control is when they get mad. I see red. And not to sound like a movie, but I seriously doubt anyone likes seeing me when I'm angry. It's just so stupid to be controlled by one emotion.

"He's just so fucking –"

"Monty didn't do shit," he interrupts, "Still mad about the rent?"

"Maybe," I sit up, "But it's also that stupid fuckin' face of his."

"You've never told me that much about Monty. Everytime he comes up," Doc sips his tea, "you refuse to elaborate. I don't even know who the hell he is."

"You don't need to know that much. He deals drugs and he used to beat me up. I'm bigger than him now."

"What else?"

“That’s it. He’s a deadbeat dad.”

“Yours?”

Another silence. I don’t call Monty or Thomas “Dad.” Thomas is cool but he only took me under his wing to train and feed me. Now that he’s injured, I gotta take care of him the same way he took care of me. My apartment ain’t much but it’s enough to keep us both on our feet while I go to school. He cooks, I clean. It’s cozy, too, nothing like this office.

“Something like that.”

“Where’s Bea, Lola?”

I don’t talk about family with Doc. Actually, at most, I’ll graze the topic with a ten-foot pole. I talk mostly about my art and how to get it out there – Doc doesn’t do “talks” full time anymore. He just really likes my paintings and knows some people around town.

“Dead.”

He swallows his tea and coughs, “Dead? Jesus Christ, Lola. Since when?”

“Last Summer.”

Doc drops the smart-ass act, “I’m so sorry, Lola. She was a joy.”

“Yeah, I know. She didn’t like it when I fought either. Coming home all beat up n’ shit.”

“I mean, look at you. You look like crap. You’re covered in blood and dirt. I can’t believe you’re sitting on my couch right now.”

“She used to tell me fighting wasn’t ladylike. When I was little,” I sigh, “I used to wear dresses. She’d pick them out for me and pin my coils up. I looked like a doll.”

“Cute.”

“I guess,” I continued, “But it wasn’t me. I found that out pretty quickly.”

“When did you start fighting, again?”

Doc sometimes forgets details about me. To be fair to him, I don’t see him too often these days and he’s got other stuff goin’ on. “When I was nine. I got bullied, so I wanted to learn how to beat people up. Monty used to call me ‘fat fuck’ whenever I came home from school.”

“He is your father.”

I turn to look at Doc, “What?”

“You used to call me ‘fat fuck,’ too,” He smiles, “Remember when we first met?”

“Nah, I’m not that mean,” I lied. I might’ve called him that, but I really don’t remember. He’s not even that fat, I was probably just mad or something.

“You did. It was kind of funny, too. I was more professional back then. You were my toughest patient.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, for one,” he smiles, “You hated me – I think you still do. You also hated my office and used to climb the bookshelves and knock shit over. You were a real pain in the ass.”

“No one knows me like you do.”

“Aww, Lola!” He smiles, “You do have a soft side!”

“Okay, you can shut the fuck up now.”

“Alright,” he chuckles, “Where were you?”

“My mom.”

“Right.”

“She loved me and I knew it. I knew it even though I never saw her. She was a nurse, remember?”

“Yes.”

“Monty,” I sigh, eyeing the ceiling again, “was also never home. He was out usually doing whatever shady shit he was into at the time. When he was home, it was always either to beat my ass or to beat Bea up. I dunno why, but my mom never said nothin’ bout it. She would cover my bruises with concealer and send my ass off to school. She just didn’t want me to be taken away – or, at least, that’s what she used to tell me. She also used to promise me she’d take us away from that dickhole, but I guess she just never found a chance.”

“No other family?”

“Nah. My mom got disowned by my grandparents when she had me.”

“I remember her telling me that,” he sinks into his chair a little, “She almost didn’t have you, y’know.”

“Yeah. But I know I was put here to protect her. Thomas, too.”

“Thomas?”

“My coach?” Have I really never told Doc about Thomas?

“Really? I thought you just learned how to street fight from...” he stops to think, “the street!”

“I didn’t learn how to street fight. I learned how to box and fought in the street.”

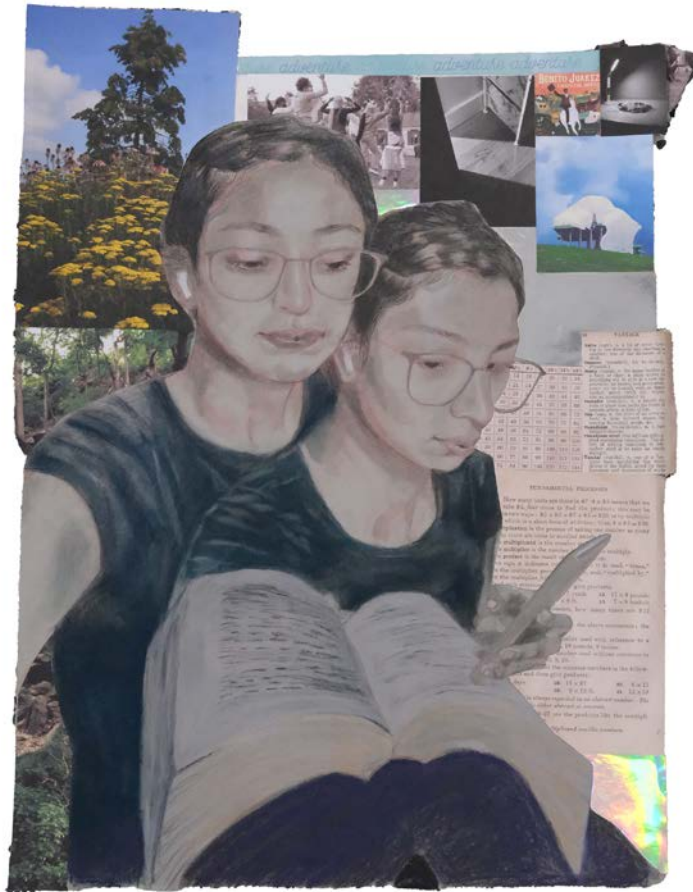
“Ah,” He nods, “Makes sense. I don’t know anything about fighting.”

“I can tell.”





**“Ruins 2”**  
Hosna Kachooee



**“How We Consume Media”**  
Helen Escobar Barajas

# Nirvana

Sariah Sanchez

My Dear Brother,  
—he died before I could get  
The line right, in time his  
Blue-green guitar stands  
Dusted and out of tune  
I hear you. I hear you.  
Through the walls on a  
Haunting loop: a muted  
Hum, each Cobain song,  
His crying hushed, I knock  
And knock until my knuckles  
Draw blood as an offering as  
If in turn, it would lead him to  
—a home, a sweet oblivion.

# Prisoner of Memory

Lynne Kim

The winters in Strasburg were quite lonesome. The frigid air punctured breaths like a fatal stabbing and darkness swept over the skies as early as 4:30 in the evenings. The few lamp posts that still had a flicker of light left only provided enough to showcase the emptiness of the town. It had been nearly three weeks after Christmas, but the decorations were already stripped away by the bellowing force of the wind. Frances didn't mind. There was something exquisite about the short walks home from school; he liked how he could see his reflection in the frozen puddles and the whispering conversations he'd have with his best Friend, his only Friend, for they could not bring themselves to disturb the tranquility.

"Miss Darcy gave me a C on my history quiz," Frances mumbled under his scarf.

"She didn't give you a C, you got it on your own."

"I suppose you're right. But it's her fault for giving out a quiz right after winter break, I'm sure no one did well on it."

Frances felt snow brush off his shoulder when his friend pitifully, but assuringly patted him on the back. They said goodbye to each other once Frances arrived at his home, but not before launching snowballs at each other's faces while giggling, like they would when they were younger until Frances' mother would berate them for not wearing proper winter attire. His Friend patiently waited for him to unlock his front door, even though it took Frances nearly four excruciating minutes to fish out his keys from the bottom of his backpack.

As he stepped inside, he let his backpack, scarf, mittens, and about two more layers of outerwear fall onto the floor, like shedding armor after fighting through a storm. He knew his mother would scold him for leaving such a mess, but he laid down in front of the fireplace so that the pulsating heat could revive him. The cold always bothered him much more once he was out of it.

Later that evening, Frances poked at the roast that had been sitting on his plate for the past hour. No one ever spoke during dinner, so it was rather an uncomfortable experience, one

that he wished he could disappear with. Frances remembered how this time last year, his mother would always reach over and gently place her hand on top of his before asking him how his day had gone. He always told her his day was fine, and she would smile as she put her arm back to her side, not because he had told her that he had a fine day, but because he hadn't reacted in a hostile manner like his father sometimes would. She would ask his father how his day had gone as well, but timidly and with her head down. She also never placed her feeble, soft hand on his. Frances resented his mother's weakness.

Once, a few months back, Frances asked his father how work had gone over dinner, which caused him to abruptly stand at table and leave their home for several hours. His mother said he was going out for a walk so he could digest his food, but Frances could still recall the muffled noises of his parents fighting in the kitchen when his father returned, and the potent smell of whiskey on his father's beard when he stumbled into his room later that same evening.

After dinner, his father retreated into the living room, where he drank and grunted at the television for several hours until he knocked out, and Frances completed the rest of his homework in the kitchen because he knew his mother liked having company while she did the dishes.

The next morning, Frances plopped down on his front steps, and waited for his Friend to trudge along so that they could walk to school together. Ten minutes went by, then fifteen, and Frances was gradually becoming aggravated and bored of throwing pebbles out onto the street. Just as he was about to walk to school on his own, he heard two, size 6 boots smacking rapidly onto the pavement.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry-- my mom accidentally slept past her alarm so she woke me up late, sorry," his Friend was now panting, his hands clutching onto his knees, like he had just sprinted a marathon. Frances coldly ignored him and began walking, while his Friend followed behind, wheezing with every step.

"So, how's your morning going?" His Friend eagerly asked, as if some revolutionary event had occurred in Frances' bathroom this morning as he was brushing his teeth.

"Fine. How the hell did your mom sleep through her alarm?"

"She worked late again last night, came home at like 2 in the morning. I think she's gotten about seven hours of sleep total the past two nights, I feel horrible..."

Frances scoffed as his Friend continued blabbering about his poor mother. It was probably his

fourth night without any sleep and each day he felt more invincible because of it. He enjoyed staying up late when the world had gone to sleep, for those were the moments where he could truly and freely act as himself. Those were the only moments he felt peace in his own home. His Friend had been chattering nonstop for the past few minutes; each word coming out of his mouth was a pathetic excuse as to why he was late, vicious lies that scathed Frances, and increased this overwhelming feeling of loathing that was pitted in his stomach. Every time the wind blew through the town, picking up tiny flecks of snow and dirt as it traveled, Frances felt his ears ring uncontrollably, like he was inside the massive church bell they passed everyday on their way to school. He grasped onto his head to stop it from shaking so intensely, and biting down on his tongue until he only tasted warm iron.

Within a flash, not more than a few seconds, Frances looked up and watched as his Friend bent down over him, and then at the ground which was right next to his face. When he looked back up he could no longer see anything but a set of eyes where his Friend had been standing. These eyes glaring, penetrating right through his skull, and he mustered up all the courage he had left to protect himself. Heroically roaring like men did when they fought at war, Frances flung his arm back over his body, grabbed a rock slightly larger than his own fist and smashed it into the head of the evil being with glaring eyes, again and again, until he could no longer recognize its face. Frances pulled himself up and glanced at his own soaked jacket, and down at his hands, no longer shaking but stained with blood.

Frances wiped his watch before checking it, and groaned at the fact that he would be late. He contemplated sprinting to school so that he could still make it to his first class, but he remembered how his mother always reminded him to clean up after himself. Frances yelled out for his Friend, but his Friend was nowhere to be found. Frances was alone with no one except this horribly disfigured mess on the ground. He crouched down and began dragging it into the park to give it a proper burial, lifting with his legs like his father had shown him, just like he and his father did when he came into Frances' room that evening a few months back, belligerent and drunk, and ordered him to grab a shovel to bury his dear mother.



**“noose”**  
Aamishq Dhir



**“Corrupt”**  
Ourania Rahman



# Japanese hokku

Mila Antkevych

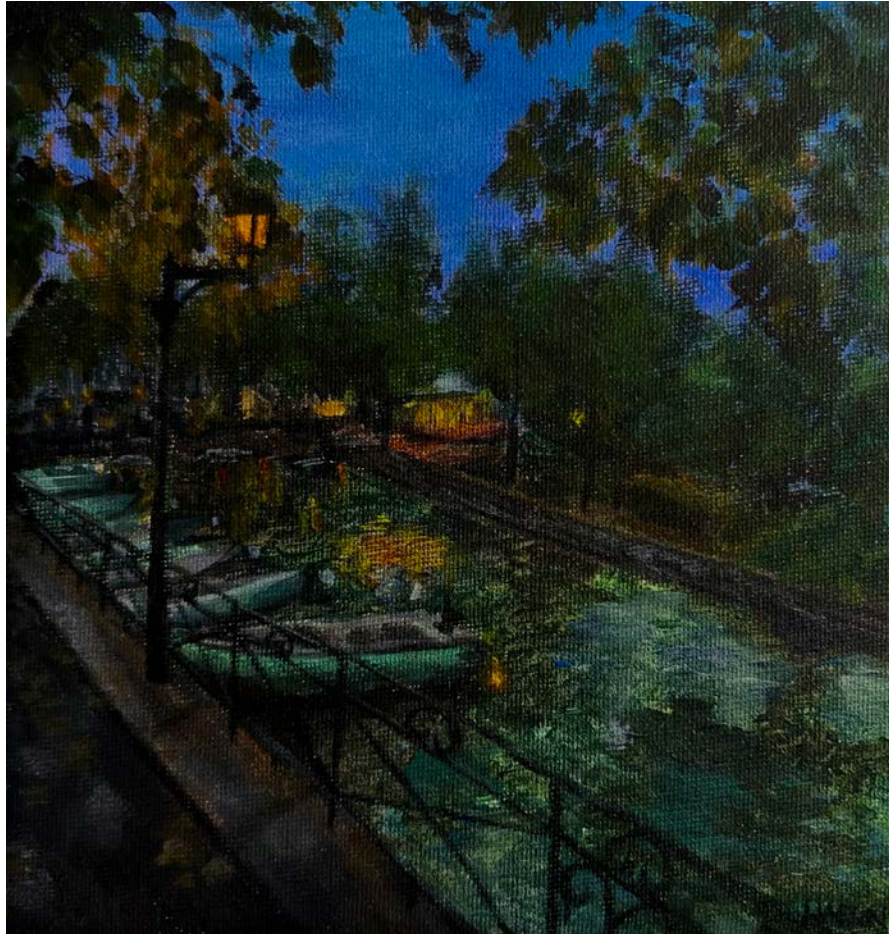
An old coy easel-  
the brush looks reproachfully  
on watercolors...

Stolen years of youth-  
calloused hands hold the Bible.  
Pray to your God now...

How many lessons  
we might to learn in life?  
Broken abacus...



**“Inner Child”**  
Michelina Chermak



**“Le Thiou, Annecy”**  
Haeun Kim

# Paper Dragon

Rex Harvilla

Slip your soft hand into the dragon's paper throat  
Assuming its tendencies, likeness, and life  
So naturally your four fingers form its upper jaw  
Your thumb hiding, stiff below  
Make your way into my world  
Right half wooden floor, left half 9 feet of space  
All the practice of sneaking smarties from the candy bowl  
Before halloween  
Formed a pathway you walk far too often in your mind  
And traveling it once more you stuff your paper mouth  
With your hoard of gold you collected from past foolish men  
Wave your arm up and down while softly floating across the floor  
Red crayon glowing like seafoam  
leaving a reminder for anyone with a 1 second delay  
Paper dragon like a wet whale crashing out of the water  
Into the left side of my world  
Commanding all 9 feet floor to ceiling  
Heart profoundly curious and expecting  
Pulled 90 degrees to awe in your beauty  
The stirring in your soul moves the bloody hydraulics  
Widening the gap between your fingers  
I live the one second delay  
To come back to the explosion of gold  
Burst in the sky  
Glistening from the light of your lamp

Raining down like glow worms and chrysopoeia  
Revealing the one second delay  
And finding its resting place in the dip in my chest  
Filling me with hope  
That the paper dragon  
And your hand  
Will come  
To gently rest on top

# drowning

Destiny Figueroa

Drowning,

His lungs burned for air,  
Though futile, he still drew a breath,  
Every muscle protesting,  
As he clawed towards the surface,  
Desperate for salvation.

Limbs heavy, body numb,  
He sank deeper,  
Further from escape.

With each gulp of water,  
Hallucinations taunted,  
Mocking his struggle.

Disorientation grew,  
Fighting the inevitable,  
Each second a torment.

Lungs scorched,  
Death's shadow looming,  
Panic fading into numbness.

Heartbeat slowing,

Mind blank,  
His body surrendered.

Consciousness slipping,  
He drifted into oblivion,  
Lost to the vast, menacing sea.

Drowned...



## “The Resurrection”

Leeyana Marcelo



# The Red Giant

Kevin Tejeda

“I just needed to get away, you know what I mean? You and I both know that none of this...” I gesture with my hand in a circular motion toward the expensive hotel room that surrounds us. “...could work if I brought them along.” This is all I’ve ever wanted more than anything in the world. I’m sorry if that’s a bit selfish but shouldn’t I come first? All I’ve done my entire life is please others and it gets so exhausting. Sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice! And what do I get in return? Absolutely nothing. Do you understand how red hot we are right now? Of course you do, we will make history and you also know exactly how long I’ve wanted this so don’t look at me like I’m mad!”

A pause fills the room in which the only thing that can be heard are the steps of my frantic pace. The silence is broken with a dry chuckle of mine.

“Who am I kidding? There would be no going back from this but, damn it, I’m gonna do what I want. And it’s not like I think I’m some kind of saint. I know that things won’t ever be the same again, and if I’m being honest, I am a bit fearful.”

“Fearful of what?” The man sat to my side asked.

Shaking my head, “I don’t know. Fearful of the person I’ve always wanted to be.”

Two Hours Earlier

Inhaling deep and exhaling ever so slow, smoke passes my lips and spreads into the damp air. Head back whilst leaning in a chair; I stare up into space. The sound filling my ears is deafening. I’ve never played a show this packed before. My leg bounces upon realizing that they are only getting louder. I take a sip of dark liquid from my silver flask and yet another drag from my cigarette. Footsteps quickly approach the small room I have been waiting in. Two knocks at the door followed by an immediate opening of the door reveals a man that appears to be in his 40s and is dressed in an ebony three piece suit.

The short man with bushy eyebrows and grays at his temple asks me, “ Star! How are we feeling baby? I bet you feel like your heart is on fire kid!”

His booming deep voice fills the once empty room whilst putting just a bit of emphasis on the word fire. With a raised eyebrow and smug look on my face I respond,

“Usually, Joe, when people knock on a door the sole purpose for them knocking is to let the person inside the room know that they...”

“Alright I get it, I get it. Smartass.”

I grin. Not too sure where’d I’d be without Joe; this guy is the only reason I’ve taken all of it so far.

“Alright kid, you’re on in five, so do your rituals or whatever the hell you gotta do and get your bony ass on stage.”

I nod my head and Joe exits the room with a smile buried underneath his bushy gray mustache. Taking one last drag and sip, I jump to my feet and begin bouncing. Small leaps up and down almost like a boxer preparing for a main event. I take short and quick breaths nearly making myself light headed in the process then with everything I’ve got in my soul I shout my damn head off. No more than two times should do the trick. It helps get the nerves out but it’s most likely terrible for my vocal chords, especially if I have to sing on stage for about forty minutes. Nonetheless I reach for my jade laced electric guitar and rush out of my room and down the hall. The butterflies in my stomach are more like ravenous vampire bats with a craving for human flesh. At the end of the short hallway three stairs lead onto stage. Moving aside the red curtain my fans catch sight of me. The room erupts. Walking slowly to the center of the stage I take it all in. Fist bumping the members of my band, our drummer Nova exclaims, “You’re late as always.”

With a chuckle, I see thousands of people from all corners of the globe with different faces and races mixing into a splatter painting of humanity. Standing there stoically, I speak into the empty microphone in the middle of the stage.

“Ladies and gentlemen...” I assumed the room couldn’t get any louder. “ Get ready to set your soul ablaze, for we... are Absolute Magnitude!” Looking toward my band mates I yell, “Let’s burn this place to the ground!” Hi-hats repetitively crash followed by booming drums and screeching of guitars. I then sang in unison to the instrumental like twelve-thousand people weren’t watching.

Joe chuckles heartily, “Yeah I thought you mucked it up for a second there, thought I had to break out me ol’ six string devil and save the day.” We all laugh in unison. “But no, you lads did great as always, this tour is going to be brilliant. As you all know we’re playing the Wembley on Sunday!” We all burst into slurred cheers and whoops. “So we need to be in tip top shape for that.”

I reach for my booze and respond, “Cheers, you fossil. Wouldn’t be playing the biggest show of our career in two days without ya.”

Crashing my bottle into the old timers can, we all take a drink. Shortly after, the drummer of our band, Nova, stands up on wobbly legs.

“Right mates, the night is still very young. Who’s coming with me down to the glass? ” Saying it in a sing-songy voice.

All of the other band mates begin agreeing and whooping. Rock and roll blairs from a nearby radio propped up on two cans. Nova grabs his drumsticks and begins to play pretend air drums to the cheers of our two other band mates. Swinging one of his sticks and pointing directly at me. He asks, “Star, what about you? Ya twig, never a good time without you there.”

Cackling, I shoot back, “Who ya callin a twig ya fat bas...”

Our private hotel suite front door erupts in consecutive bangs. Our volume lowers a few octaves and the laughs fade into silence.

Joe stands with a grunt. “It’s probably one of the neighbors ready to complain.” Scoffing, he clears his voice and cracks open the door. “How can I help you mate?”

The man behind the door has a sense of urgency in his voice that can be heard through the door. “I’m looking for Shawn, I know he’s in here.”

My heart plummets. That’s the first time I’ve heard my real name in ages.

“Is he a fan or something?” Loon, our other guitarist shouts.

Joe sticks his hand out from behind the door gesturing for Loon to lower his volume.

“You’ve got the wrong room. Be on your way now.” Joe dismissed whilst slowly shutting the door.

“What’s his name?” I say with a wince right before the door completely closes.

“It’s Ricky. Your brother.” The man calmly says. Joe looks back at me awaiting my response. God, what is he doing here? Just forget about me and get on with your life, why don’t ya? Sobering up

immediately, I nod my head to Joe.

Joe shuffles off to my side as my brother Richard slowly swings the door open. Upon locking eyes his demeanor shifts from reasonable to absolutely livid. Shaking his head, Ricky begins to tear me a new one.

“You really are the scum of the earth, Shawn. You know that?”

The temperature rose a bit in our little hotel room.

“I go by Star now.” I calmly respond, holding a sad excuse for eye contact.

Rick scoffs, “Oh yeah? Well Star, You think you can just up and leave? Just like that and no one would bat an eye?” My eyes shifted down to the empty liquor bottle that I began to caress with my thumb.

Nova, immediately realizing the seriousness in Ricky’s tone, clears his voice and utters, “Yeah, let’s uh, leave them to it fellas. Sounds personal.”

The three of my bandmates awkwardly shuffle behind Ricky, exiting the room. Joe, being protective as he always is, stands motionless right at my side like a elderly pitbull that knows nothing but loyalty . Once they leave Ricky continues after taking a deep breath, in a less emotional tone of voice.

“So there I am, sleeping with my woman as I always am and the ringing of the phone from downstairs awakes us. About 5 past midnight. I go to pick it up and it’s none other than Macey.” He begins to slowly pace and my leg can’t sit still.

“Sounds like she’s gone mad, talking about how you vanished and went missing in the dead of night. How she’s worried you might have been kidnapped or something in that regard. We were about ready to put in a missing person report on you by mornin’! Then we heard a familiar voice on the radio singing a very familiar song. And now, here you are.”

He points to empty bottles and other illegal substances that riddle the coffee table in front of me.

“Enjoying yourself I see.”

Joe looks down at me with a look that says, “Is this all true?” I can see the confusion in his eyes. With shaky hands I pop open the empty bottle and turn it completely rightside up to sip on whatever was left in it.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about mate.” I say with a slight quaver in my voice.

Richard chuckles and shakes his head. “Yeah? What about little Theo, huh? I don’t think you

realize what your selfishness will cause, big brother. Not to mention..."

"He's not even my kid, is he?" I interject, raising my voice. Ricky sighs deeply, with the disappointment no younger brother should feel for the person he'd give the world to, growing up.

"You said you'd still father that child. You said you loved them."

I try my best to fight back a quivering lip. I do love them but they just wouldn't understand, neither does he obviously.

Ricky wipes his forehead, "It doesn't have to be this way. Macey asked me to find and confront you. But that was it. She doesn't even want me to ask you why you've done all of this, she wants to hear it for herself."

He opens the door of my hotel room.

"She said you've got till Sunday to come back home. If you're not there by then, you can forget about ever speaking to either of them any more. I'd also probably give you a proper beating if I ever see that bloody face of yours again." He slams the door, knocking over some of the glasses and empty cans on the table.

I stare blankly at my guitar that is leaned against the wall just a couple feet away. There is an awkward silence that might as well be another guest in this hotel room; it takes up as much space as humanly possible, spreading itself long and wrapping its arms uncomfortably around Joe and I. "Hey kid." Joe gravelly opens, "Let's talk."

Following a barrage of excuses that I already prepared to rain down on anyone who questioned my actions, Joe, for the first time, challenges me.

"So kid, what do you want to do? I'm your manager. Can't really disagree with you. This is your personal business."

Shocked by the non judgemental response I take a moment to think.

Sinking deep into the couch, I pleadfully ask, "Tell me the truth Joe. Forget that I pay you just for a second."

As much as I'm embarrassed to admit it, Joe is like a father to me. Didn't really have a present one growing up so, naturally, I cared quite a bit about his opinion.

Joe looked to his feet thoughtfully. "Look kid, I know how long you've wanted this but you can't forget, you're not the only band I've managed, not the only guy I've seen surpass his wildest

dreams of fame seemingly overnight. I've seen people do a lot worse, this art attracts assholes.”  
We chuckle.

“All I ask is that you don't abandon your true, kind self, Star. The promises you made to yourself as well as others shouldn't melt away just because some lads have heard you on the radio. The world of rock and roll has enough lunk heads, don't be one of them.” Joe pats me on the shoulder pad of my leather jacket and begins to exit the room.

“Joe?” I ask with indecisiveness practically spilling from the corners of my mouth.

“Yeah kid?”

“What about Wembley stadium ? We won't be able to play it without me.”

Joe thoughtfully nods his head. “Yeah, won't be the first time you miss a show. It's a big one but I'm sure Loon can take over for your bits as he's done before. We'd all understand.”

He shuts the door. Deafening silence pounds into my ears. With a shaky breath, I rub my face slow yet aggressively. My hand shoots out, grasping at a nearby rotary telephone. Whilst dialing frantically my breaths begin to get sharp and shallow. Starting barely audible and growing in intensity as I punch in the last few digits. The phone rings a few times and right as I'm about to give up and slam that phone with an “I tried” excuse, she picks up.

“Hello, this is the Bradley residence. Hello?”

It's been months since I heard her voice. She sounds different. I could always tell when she's stressed and by the sound, she's under quite a bit of it.

She continues, “Hello? This is Macey speaking...”

Nothing but a suppressed squeak can be heard from my throat. As hard as I try I can't even force a syllable. Normally anyone would hang up by this point but she lingers.

“Shawn? Is that you?”

Gasping whilst covering the speaker of the phone I slam it down, hanging it up. “I'm so sorry Mace. I'm so sorry.” I mumble these words to myself as I melt into the cold, hard wooden floor.

That following morning I bought a plane ticket home. About an hour flight from London. I restlessly sit at the airport as I have a couple of hours to kill. Running my hands through the stringy ginger hair piled haphazardly atop my head, I stare down at the ticket. I can't believe how upset Macey sounded and, god, little Theo. He's only just turned one so he probably hasn't the slightest clue, but still, he shouldn't have to see his mother stressing.

“Oi!”

A small obnoxiously loud voice jolts me in my chair, suspending my deep thought. A bowl cut blonde haired brat sprints in my direction. He looked to be no older than 7.

“You that Star bloke? The singer for Absolute Magnitude?” He asks, sounding as if he has a mouth full of sweets.

I was honestly taken back that he recognises me without the pounds of facepaint I slather on my mug at every show. With a green and maroon striped collared shirt, khaki pants and white trainers he seemed oddly well dressed considering his demeanor.

“Uh, yeah that’s me. A bit young to be listening to our music, huh? Where’s your parents?”

Picking at the candy in his teeth, he points, with his other non-saliva covered finger, to where the bathrooms are. “In the loo.”

I nod my head. “Well you should go on, don’t want to worry them.” Saying it as dismissively as possible.

“My older brother is going to watch you play tomorrow night, you know? He’s very excited to see you.”

“Well, I won’t be there but I’m sure he will still enjoy it.” Looking back down at my ticket hoping the boy doesn’t have any more questions.

“Why?” The sound of his higher pitched question pokes a needle in my ear.

I ignore the child.

Just before he can ask his question again a woman in a teal dress and black heels trots over and scoops the blonde kid up into her arms.

“You scared me there Ken, don’t go running off.” She then looks to me as if she’s seen me somewhere but can’t identify just where.

“I’m sorry for the disturbance Sir.”

With a forced smile, I respond, “Please. He’s a charming little bugger. Not a disturbance at...”

“The show won’t be the same with you gone.” The child, now in his mothers arms, interrupts me.

“But it’s alright. Don’t worry, I won’t forget you.”

His mother and I chuckle, yet I think for different reasons. She probably thinks that he is mistaking me for someone from a telly show.

“Well thank you little one.” I give the boy a pat on his head.

She gives me a smile and returns to her business. I stare at the mother and child getting smaller in the distance.

“What a funny thing to say.”, I thought.

“I won’t forget you.” Crinkling the corner of my plane ticket, I pondered on the small child’s words with an epiphany slowly revealing itself to me.

## The Next Day

Slowly approaching a door, I rub my hands on my coarse pants. Anticipation is practically crawling up from my throat. With a deep sigh, I stand in front of a white painted wooden door. I can hear indistinct chatter, with my name being thrown around a few times. I’ve never been one to contemplate, I always just do. Call it impulsive or childish, it is what has gotten me this far in life. But for the second time in my thirty-one years of life, I had debated if I made the right decision. First one being, of course, the decision that got me into this mess in the first place. Nonetheless, without a knock I let myself in. The entire band as well as Joe looked at me as if I was missing a head. I’m wearing a full scarlet leather outfit. Jacket and pants that have the same matching color. My face is also already painted with harsh and hurried strokes, sharing colors with my guitar that I have strapped to my back. The dressing room went silent. Every one of my band members awkwardly shared looks with each other in disbelief.

“Star?” Joe asked, taken aback. “What are you doing here, what about your...”

“Nothing is as important as this.” With a stern voice, I interrupted him before he could complete his thought.

“Tonight, gentlemen, we become immortal.” I shift my gaze to the entire band, “Our lives will change forever after we go up there. So we gotta burn bright!”

Passionately, I declare, yet my smile slowly drops upon scanning the room. With an apprehensive look on every single member, they all weakly nod and agree. The lively and cheeky members I have grown closer with in these last few months upon becoming the singer of their band have shrunk into quiet mice. Any banter that was present prior has fizzled out, feeding the colossal elephant in the room.

Joe approaches me, with his eyes glued to the floor and a permanent look of disappointment



etched on his face, “Alright kid, we’re on in five.”

Staring a hole right through Joe’s forehead, I respond, “This show is going to dictate the rest of Absolute Magnitude’s future. If I’m not here over some family drama, I’m as good as a grain of sand in a desert, or the faint image of a passing tree that flies by on a road trip. I refuse to be a former member of my own band.” My voice raises in volume but upon Joe now looking up at me, it causes me to pause.

“Look kid, you don’t have to explain yourself. But I know that’s not how you truly feel.” In silence, he stares at me for a moment. His expression is completely indecipherable, a mixture of disappointment, anger and possible relief. For the first time, I can’t get a read on this open book I’ve so grown close to.

Joe suddenly claps a number of times to startle the band to their feet. “Let’s go, let’s go everybody on the stage.”

I stay as the others march out the room. Even with the swirling tornado of regret that rattles my mind, pulling additional stress filled thoughts from my brain like tiles off of a roof, I have a ritual that must get done. I bounce to loosen up, albeit more stiff this time. Now as the time draws near, I can hear the arena fill up with adoring fans. The loud cheers are audible even all the way in the dressing room and it doesn’t sound human. The collective noise produced from thousands of humans begin to almost sound alien to my ears as I begin to break a short lived sweat.

I take a deep breath. With a puffed up chest, I shout the most blood curdling scream that pours out and fills up the entire room. Drowning me in the sound that reminds me of the mistakes that have now soaked my character. The yell feels like it is shaking the room along with me, blending into the static oneness of the cheering fans. Suddenly the scream cuts out abruptly, crashing and burning into a bloody cough. I try to utter a word, speak a sentence or even sing and nothing comes out. With a hot face to match my outfit, I listen from the dressing room, to an otherworldly guitar solo introducing our first song.



# “The GhostRider”

Ramil Acosta

# Stealing of Sol

Waseem Mainuddin

Today I  
Woke up  
Early,  
Take no  
Heed in  
Yearning,  
Just get  
On yer  
Steed  
And keep  
Earning!  
I always  
Wonder  
Why 'e  
Gave me  
The pyromancy  
Chambers,  
And not that  
Big balled idiot  
In the sky!  
What's the  
Sort of sick  
You need to  
Have to love  
Irony so much?

It seems ol'  
Thunderbolt  
Only knows  
How to give  
Out a one...two  
Punch!  
And here's  
The thing,  
That big  
Ol' fart  
Beams down  
And makes  
Even the  
Damned happy,  
Boy, you know  
What I could  
Do with that  
Brilliant buffoon?  
And, no, I know  
What you're thinking,  
I have no use  
Of the moon,  
So how bout  
This? I'll filet  
The world whole,  
Cause conflagrance  
Is just fine,  
You said I had flame  
In pocket (THUNDERBOLT!!!)  
I'm just taking what was mine!

# China Dream

Rosemary Tierney

Where there's a wall there's a world beyond it.  
So it follows that the greater the wall,  
the richer the world it guards.  
In my waking hours  
pained by Western trivialities  
I imagine traveling over stones and scales,  
100 miles, 1000 miles, 10,000 miles, more,  
and I continue in my sleep, a hundred thousand spirits  
plucking strings  
somewhere under the surface beneath my feet.

Step by step the stones become scales,  
a mixture of blue and green edged in gold. But  
bit by bit these scales pale the farther I travel  
on this longest of heights. With a red sun growing  
smaller at my back I reach the end and find it  
to be the start. For instead of a gate or a door  
I step down to find a dragon's face, old and weathered,  
white blindness in one eye, the other eye a black  
so dark there's no telling where its gaze falls.  
The opaque eye reflects the setting sun.

I look into both eyes, thinking of how far I've come and  
how far I must have to go.  
I want to ask the dragon to show me the way,

but as soon as I open my mouth there starts a rumbling, low  
at first then louder as the wall splits apart like  
a thousand locked doors have burst open all at once and  
dirt and stones and  
rotting scales and bones crash  
down down down —

A flash  
and an explosion of smoke burn my eyes shut  
and when I can finally open them again  
I'm awake and aching in my bed  
my arms pinned under books heavy with  
red kingdoms and rivers and a standard bearer.



**“Mid day”**  
Hanieh Kachooee



**“Play Time”**  
Meredith Cruz



# *Untitled*

Krishnett Estrada II

[stage directions] (line delivery)

A boy sits comfortably alone in a bedroom on a bean bag chair reading a magazine. Another boy opens the door and trudges in; he is hunched over from the huge backpack on his back; he greets the seated boy as he puts his bag down and scrambles to a swivel chair next to a desk and catches his breath.

AL: Hey Scotty Pico [still catching breath]

SCOTTY: Sup [throws up a peace sign]

AL: School was so very stressful, I can't believe I still had to go to my gym class, they made me run in these! [points to his dress shoes] And after all my protests they let me leave only 5 minutes earlier than everyone else; Which is barely enough time. I need at least 7 minutes to even get there with all my stuff, and then I need another 2 to cut through the G hallway to go buy a snickers

SCOTTY: That sounds awful man, did you eat your snickers?

AL: Yes. (emphasis on stupid) And After all of that, I wore this stupid bowtie for nothing and all the stupid lacrosse kids called me stupid gay.

SCOTTY: Don't call it stupid? It makes you look professional, bro trust me. Those kids may not pay you any good attention but you know they're secretly comparing themselves to you.

AL: [muttering to himself] Yeah right, nobody likes me.

SCOTTY: Trust me bro, I do it all the time. [Scotty turns his page and kicks his feet up to rest on Al's full basket of laundry]

AL: That's not it though; I got dressed up super fancy today, got through all the stress and grueling work of gym class, and Sally Dawson wasn't in the. (whispers) fucking class! [he puts his head on the desk with a thud]

SCOTTY: ooh now I see

AL: Do you think she might have ditched? To, you know, avoid me?

SCOTTY: Definitely; but not because of you; remember the big packet Mr. Mahcich gave you?

AL: Mhm?

SCOTTY: (smugly) I'll bet she never did it.

AL: (Gasp) You're so absolutely right! There's no way she did all that work. It was 30 pages long and I bet she doesn't even know what a rational number is!

AL: Man I hope I don't screw this up with her. She's so cute and I can't even think about anyone else. Those 2 seats in between us might as well be the entire Hudson River!

SCOTTY: That's not that long I can see New York right now.

AL: Length wise not width

SCOTTY: Oh. Well damn Al, you really fell hard for this girl. Are you sure?...

AL: Am I sure?

SCOTTY: Well yeah, are you sure you're like... ready?

AL: (offended) Of course I'm ready, if you're ready I'm ready. How could you even say that when I'm the only reason you're dating your girlfriend.

SCOTTY: Sure, sure but are you so sure that that's all that went into it?

AL: (more confrontational but still timid) Well yeah I introduced you two and you hit it off.

SCOTTY: How so?

AL: Excuse me? [getting more tense at the persistence]

SCOTTY: How so. How did I just go over there, talk to Fiona and get her to like me? Go on, think of an answer.

AL: What are you trying to say?

SCOTTY: Well before I was talking to her you were, so how come she liked me and not you?

AL: (More confident and confrontational) Hey! That implies that there is something wrong with me, when that is not the case at all. You and her are simply more compatible than her and I!

SCOTTY: No it's not that there's something wrong with you per say, but there was something wrong, but go on elaborate. [taking his feet of Al's laundry and squares them to point at Albert]

AL: With pleasure. You play lacrosse in high school, she's a cheerleader. You like to antagonize the teachers and she's stupid so she probably finds it funny. You wear a members only jacket and

I dress sharper than all the teachers, so I guess she doesn't like class. You're a rebel and the lacrosse and baseball kids like that, and she likes that you're liked. That seems to be the thing that stinking matters today. Oh and you just you... [tries to think of more things]

SCOTTY: [Scotty interrupts] You (pause) are jealous.

AL: (Blows up and whiney) Well yeah I'm jealous, I work so hard to keep straight As, I dress sharp, I speak with intelligence and intent! I make sure I color in the lines and check all my boxes so that a girl would be impressed let alone look at me! Dammit every guy I ever see with a wife, four kids and a house seems to act just like me, so I don't know what I'm doing wrong! Everything's just gone to shit,(sigh) I guess girls don't like the achievers anymore.

SCOTTY: (upset but still calm) Are you done? Cause I've had enough of you making excuses and bad mouthing my girlfriend right in front of me. "Intelligence and intellect"? Oh please man, you're just angry and you'll spew out whatever you need to to protect your precious little world. because you can't accept that you blow at talking to people. Maybe if you smiled once in a while instead of staring at her tits she'd have the basic respect for you, or how about you talk about anything other than the future or other nerd shit, or just be nice, huh!

AL: I said intent.

SCOTTY: (loud) Really man. This is all about you, just like everything else. You don't like Sally Dawson or even Fiona, you just want a warm body to be next to so you don't have to talk to me all day! It makes no sense why I even hang out with you, I could be over at Fiona's right now but I'm not because I care Goddammit, but if you don't want to hear it, I'll leave! [Stands up from the beanbag]

AL: (yells) Fuck you!

[Albert's mom then chants from the kitchen, Al reacts visibly worried and uncomfortable having completely forgotten about his conversation and back in a curled up hunched over posture in his chair, after this Scotty disappears behind the scenery where he will exit the stage unseen]

MOM: [From offstage] (yelling) Albert Finney you get your ass down here for supper and if I hear you drop another F-bomb I'm gonna come up there and beat you senseless you hear me!

ALBERT: (sigh) You know Scotty Pico. I don't know how right you were about everything, but I do have myself kind of a temper. I shouldn't have mentioned Fiona. I'm sorry.

[The actor for AL now reads for "Albert" and "AL" now that scotty is no longer on stage as if

albert was talking to himself the entire time]

AL: (no longer upset) That's okay Al, I forgive you.

ALBERT: Hey, let's forget about Fiona for now. Do you wanna play Centipede together on my Atari?

AL: Sure that sounds fun.

[Albert then walks to center stage as if he were to plug in his atari but gets interrupted]

MOM: [from offstage] (yells) Albert Now!

[Albert then shifts back to his meek posture and shuffles out the door and exits stage]

Treatment.

This play is about a boy named Al, he is in 7th grade, has a nasally voice, doesn't have many friends, and lives with his mom. While Al may not have many actual friends his best friend is his number one supporter and Al couldn't live without him, Scotty is a few years older than Al, speaks with a heavy New Jersey accent and seems to be very outgoing and likable.

We meet them in Al's home they are shooting the breeze and talking about Sally Dawson, the cute girl who sits two seats down from him in their math class. Fiona is Scotty's girlfriend who Al used to have a crush on. They talk about girls they like and kids they don't like, when Fiona gets mentioned. Fiona had rejected Al in the past and Al is very bitter about it and Scotty is having none of it. He calls her names and insults her dignity and Scotty points out that Al is not cut out for pulling a girlfriend at this point and how much better he is at it, and that Al doesn't actually want Fiona he just wants a girlfriend. They fight for a few lines when Al's Mother calls him down for supper and Scotty Pico suddenly is no longer in the scene. All of Scotty Pico's lines are now spoken by Al and we finally understand the whole picture that Al is truly a loner so much that he fabricates Scotty Pico as another person to have all the good experiences that he doesn't have access to as a way to compensate for his poor social skills and bad attitude.

# Interview Question #4

Catherine Park

Q:

If you could have a conversation with anyone,  
living or dead,  
who would it be, and why?

A:

Here, the July air is always more  
humid than I remember, heavier  
than you could imagine.

What about you?

Have you ever hated the shape of your hands?

My hands are too small. Never the right size  
for guitar-playing or diamond-cutting  
or water-cupping or nightmare  
-killing.

What about you?

When did you write your first story?

Most of mine were born here,  
from the summer womb of a raging monsoon.  
My grandfather has a jeweler's fingers—  
I am learning how to wage a war  
with inadequate hands.

What about you?

Would you call yourself a revolutionary?



**“I <3 Flowers”**  
Nadia Donahue



**“Istanbul on film”**  
Hanieh Kachooee

# MACHINE GUN MEGA CHURCH

Waseem Mainuddin

Drug dealing nuns? In West Bengal? Mother Teresa's own convent...what a story.  
It's absolutely untrue.

But these sources are from the government.

The government is always lying, Come on.

The Americans are going to love this. They love seeing us fuck up.

-

After Sister Ashley's hanging, her brother John Joseph Lakwani sat in a bootleg  
DVD store, Radiohead's In Rainbows opening up over the speakers.

*How come I end up where I started  
How come I end up where I belong  
Won't take my eyes of the ball again  
You reel me out then you cut the string  
This is American music right now?*

Nah, English!

Isn't American English?

What, are you stupid? It's Thom Yorke.

I don't know who that is, but, that's okay.

What's wrong with you, sitting in my shop, not even looking at the DVDs, you're  
lucky I'm so nice. Some of these guys have cricket bats for people like you, loiterer.

Okay, calm down. He started to wail, uncontrollably.

Woah, woah, bhai. I don't have a bat. I just want you to look at some Dragonball  
Zed DVDs or maybe you like Bollywood?

He rifled through his massive DVD collection, many ripped from the television,  
some just direct copies of the ISO files of Western DVDs.



See, this one? Perfect quality, a massive American hit, Spielberg, a little alien, some people say he stole it from Satyajit Ray, but some people talk too much.

John Joseph wiped away his tears, a military man, he knew it was unbecoming to cry towards a random person.

Do you have the movie called The Cross?

What? I think, there is some documentary...

This is a rhetorical question. In my heart, and in my sister's, there was a void.

Loneliness, of course. Death, our father and mother, so when she gave up her life for good. So did I.

Listen man, I don't know what you're talking.

You don't know? She was the messiah, and they killed her, again.

Allahhhh, you got to get out of here, man. At least look at the dvd's, areehhh allah!

-

John Joseph took a flight out of Kolkata, hoping to forget his beloved sister's death, returning to his employment in America.

At the airport, he met Pratik, an old colleague of his. They were in a troop deployed to settle a dispute in Kashmir.

They only saw action once. John Joseph and Pratik were very close.

Pratik, I can't believe I'm seeing you again. To be honest, everyone always thinks you could die at any moment.

They don't believe in me.

There are many things people in this world do not believe, there is a purpose, there is some strife. My sister, gone, expired by my own employer's hands.

I've heard. Big shame, even if she was doing a deed, she was a nun, acha.

Yes, some people don't understand divinity.

The two mentally ill fundamentalists exchanged handshakes and were off, Pratik off to ruin the lives of two women and find god, John Joseph hoping for a resurrection.

-

John, John Joseph! Why you have such an...american, traditional type name! Don't get me wrong, I find nothing wrong with this, I think it's wonderful, but you're Indian? Military? Ex?

Still slightly military associate.

Ah, of course, and to find yourself with the civilized.  
You believe the American South, this large church, is some mark of civilization?  
Well, I do indeed believe it is, How big are your churches?  
Religion is the biggest thing in our nations.  
I suppose you're right, what with the, I mean, I guess you're not from their country.  
Who's country?  
You know the, he mouthed terrorists.  
This is also the country of therapists.  
What, man, you have jokes for such a serious posture. You're a big Indian fellow, if this was back in the day, we'd be duking it out on some horses.  
Sir, you have a severe misunderstanding of...  
I don't have a severe misunderstanding of shit! You don't know how to laugh!  
You're in my church, and you're working for me! So shut! THE FUCK UP!  
John Joseph had a black suit and tie on with a brimmed hat, a classic priest without the chain replaced with an arm band signifying his troop, a bandanna with a patch of a peacock holding a machine gun in its beak. The megachurch owner pulled the patch off, holding it in Joseph's face.  
I need discretion. Real fucking discretion. Do you know what these nuts are doing to my people? Poisoning the water!  
How do you poison the water in such a public place like this?  
Hell India's poisoned, I been there on business, and it's public as fuck. Billions of fucking people, running in the streets.  
Sir, we work together, but please, keep it civil. I am a christian man like you.  
Well, sure.  
So, it's some sort of elimination.  
Sure. Eliminate the god damn pastor, with his little tiny church. Putting poison in the water.

Poison! In the water! No! Gun in his mouth, the pastor screamed. John Joseph delivered soliloquy, praying for the soon to be.  
Pastor Adam Fitzpatrick, I understand your plight. I believe this television church owner, my employer, to be a true bastard. Who else would sell their soul for a fake christ so millions could watch? He is a fool, a coward of a man.

He is on my path of resurrection, so do not worry, for your death is not in vain. You are on solid ground to die such a quick death. I know there is no poison in the water. We are good friends, and for that, I am truly sorry. But you are also on my path to resurrection.

-

Pastor Adam Fitzpatrick funeral was closed casket. His wife was horrified that someone could so brutally murder her sweet husband. John Joseph attended the mass.

I know your husband was a good man. He was kind enough to show me his journals to god, a real devout. You should be proud you were married to a man so kind.

Thank you, John Joseph. Give the kids and Peggy our love.

-

And you! Your sickness is gone! You can walk! So walk, god said, I SAY! WALK! The woman got out of her wheelchair, walking towards her crying family. A team of paid actors, all professional as hell, all crying about separate traumas to make their money, the old lady never with a lack of mobility.

Father James Christ here telling you all to keep the faith in god, and the faith in James Christ Church. Amen.

The program switched to an infomercial selling ornate plates, faux silver, faux gold, impressed friends.

He takes the name of Christ.

I work with someone named Jesus, sometimes we say Jesus with the J, and sometimes HaySoos.

I don't care much for that either.

I don't care for that either, you're so silly! Please, you care for me, and us. John, You should come home.

Home is where I have been.

I know, but you're married to me, your work is out here, I know your sister just died, so devout, so passionate, she was a wonderful woman, John.

I know. I should be a family man. I'm not so fond of my new employer.

Not giving you enough work?

No, he has plenty.

Well, as long as it pays, and you get paid pretty well. This house keeps us all safe, warm, we can watch all of your favorite tv reverend, James Christ, himself. We just want you here!

A pitiful excuse of a Christian. Giving himself up for a gaze. Setting up stunts so people will give him money.

Why can't you talk about your sister normally? Sometimes when you talk, it's not as Christian as you think it is.

Thanks for always keeping me honest, Peggy. I miss her.

-

Can we talk about these nuns again?

What do you mean, I believe it's cut and dry, they hanged the main sister...Some women from Italy are coming to

Kolkata, I believe? Or maybe from another convent in the country, I haven't really kept up.

The newsroom was packed with ambition, all the junior editors were ready to pitch stories, but Priya felt something was off. How did these nuns traffick drugs to an area that was largely unaffected by the affliction?

Seriously, why can't we talk about them? Don't you think there's something strange about a bunch of nuns and drugs.

Look, we went over it. We published the story, all the publications followed suit. We got our day, we got good ad money, too. Priya, you got paid pretty well for that if I may add, when you wrote that article. They want you to go to America; maybe you can write something.

Yeah, write something else, Priya.

Nobody told me I was going to America. What for? Priya was distracted from the truth.

Well, you know, these Americans have some sort of diversity quota, it's like a peabody, but not.

It's an award.

For reporting a lie?

Don't tell them that.

-

Two first names? Can I call you John?

No. John Joseph is my first name.

John hyphenate Joseph?

I am no hyphenated individual.

Okay, well, no matter to me John Joseph James, whatever the fuck. Job's still the same. A diner owner can't pay, so it's really your choice. Him, or his family, or both. Either way, we need the restaurant, and he needs to be out.

This is next to my shop.

Not my problem, you're in this profession. Son, how you fake it, that's on you.

-

The entire family? Even the child?

You can't even recognize him, his face is all blue.

No guns, no fingerprints, just rope and tied together cloth napkins.

Maybe it was an eagle scout, these knots are so well made, the detective cutting apart the noose John Joseph fashioned for the family.

The diner was on a desolate road next to an computer repair shop, John Joseph's Comp-U-Fixed. Comp-USA tried to sue over the hyphenated Comp to U, but the charges were dropped when the lawyers saw his business as insubstantial.

John Joseph was standing behind the counter, tinkering with a Dell laptop motherboard when the police arrived.

Mr. Joseph Lackawanna?

Lakwanni. You know that, Officer Pembright.

I'm just joking, but I don't know if you can have lunch next door anymore.

My wife, despite her looks, cooks like an Indian woman.

That must be nice for you.

Is the family next door okay?

No, okay is the last thing that they are.

Are they hurt?

Past hurt.

I will pray for them.

You weren't here last night? Didn't see no suspicions?

Suspicious...no, I close the shop at six, go home and eat dinner.

Right, I know John Joseph. You're a good man, family man, even though you always going back to India.

Condolences on your sister. She seemed like a beautiful woman.

She had given up beauty for grace.

Okay, well, okay. I don't really have much to ask you if you weren't here. Detective thinks they were killed in the dead of night.

A shame to see innocence lost.

Innocence lost...man, John Joseph, all your people think like monks. I remember reading about them, the yogi's, the devout. You're pretty devout, but you're like me, or your wife.

Why do you think we're married?

True, love sees no color, there's no shade, except that eternal shade...Hey, I think you're rubbing off on me.

That's sweet, Officer Pembright. Now, if you don't mind, I need to fix this child's computer before his father comes.

-

Under a neon cross, whites and magentas on opposite bulbs, John Joseph held a man who owned a string of apartment complexes next to James Christ's megachurches under water.

Through the rippled death, Why? Who are you?

I'm doing this for my family. So, that she can be praised.

-

John Joseph, you were once a pagan man, what can you tell us of the occult?

He was sitting in a bible study class, mixed folks from the neighborhood, all who loved him, all who had their computers tinkered by him.

Our parents were Hindu, they raised us for only a short period. We never learned much. It was the orphanage where we found our god, and abandoned our foolishness.

Can you tell us a little about that?

John Joseph got up, in his casual short sleeve white shirt, black slacks, wiping his horned glasses between the two articles of clothing.

My sister had some understanding of our previous religion. She had a real relationship with our father, who gave his pooja...that's like a prayer. She had a small picture of Ganesh that she carried for years, even after our full conversion.

Ganesh?

The elephant god, who lost his head, and replaced it. But Sister Loveleen told her that god could not be split into many avatars. Like how we believed, God was not the forest, God was not the sea, God was not a woman. God is creation, and the son, the messiah, was the resurrection.

That's beautiful. So you gave up those ways?

I never felt Hindu. But it was hard for Ashley, she was attached to our parents.

Before the police found us, she would pray every night to Krishna, Vishnu, Ganesh. And, like I said, in the early years at the orphanage...

Tears rolled down John Joseph's square face. He did not sob, he continued speaking. I'm sorry. A man who served his country should be resolute.

It's okay, John.

John Joseph.

-

Priya arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, unsure of what to expect at the awards ceremony. A driver holding a tablet with her full name "Priya Raya Pratak" displayed took her to a black Lincoln sedan. She was not expecting such formalities.

I was just going to take a cab to my motel, I'm only here for a day or two.

Miss Pratak, please, The James Christ Foundation is very pleased to provide you with whatever service you need.

James Christ Foundation...somebody told me this award was related to the Peabody Awards, like a sister award.

The Peabodys? No, I don't think they will be coming.

You're telling me, this James Christ Foundation, is going to give me an award?

Jesus, I need to call Dhara.

Acha, drive man.

-

Dhara, Dhara, please. This is some, whispering, Christian thing. I thought it was for journalists, international journalists.

Priya, we fired the intern who didn't know how to read. Very sorry. You know, I would never send you for something like that.

We did all that paperwork, no one noticed

You didn't either, Raya.

I know, I was excited, to get a little recognition. You know when the New York Times published their article, which was a paraphrased version of my article in slang, this writer got some kind of deal. He's become some Indo-expert, after one article.

Well, that's absurd. Is he Indian?

Well, yeah, he is. He's totally from an Indian family, but he's from, I don't know, Queens, or maybe, New Jersey,

Edison, I don't know. It's all the same to me. But he's getting some recognition for a culture he doesn't operate in.

He's American, and he knows it. I wanted some of that American praise. They seem to run on praise here.

They do, but listen, don't think about that. We can get you on a flight two days from now. Why not go, anyway?

You'll see some of the country, Atlanta tanta, so enjoy yourself. She hung up, expecting Priya to comply.

Areh, she can be too much, but whatever. This isn't my hotel, driver man.

We know, the Foundation is putting you up. They just want you to go to a live event, before the awards.

There's some kind of story here, Sure, why not?

They pulled up to a gated community, three castle-like buildings, ebony and slate, etched with golden latticework.

Crucifixes carved on every pinnacle, the southern sun casting an aureate hue on the grounds.

Are we in Atlanta right now?

No, these are two unincorporated towns, just outside. One owned by Sir Christ himself, and the other sorta owned by the people who live there.

Strange...you could never just learn about a place like this from the internet.

I mean, the proph...Sir Christ has a substantial social media presence.

Guess I never followed.

-

John Joseph and James Christ sat on leather seats, in Christ's Den, crucifixes and taxidermied heads. Every Jesus was painted with a different colored blood.



John Joseph, you are really such a gentleman. I could be handing you expletives, and still, you've delivered.

The path towards resurrection is long and winding, but I believe I am close.

Sure, whatever you say. You speak like a maniac, but I guess, who else would pick up this sort of work? You don't bat an eyelash, you just hit it.

Hit it, hmmm. It's a human life you so freely speak of.

Oh, you wanna moralize now? James Christ tipped his white hat, off camera, he was a regular cowboy. He always changed from spurs to loafers.

John James held his hat in his hands, It is a life of purpose I live. I understand that people don't understand me.

You understand that people understand that I understand that we have an understanding. How about that, Injun? He brandished a revolver, fashioned for roulette, if he drew, John James would kill him immediately.

I'm paying off your house and shop, right? The one your wife works in most of the time?

Don't ask me of my personal finances before delivering payment.

Jesus James Christ, you fucking really talk like that. Okay, so there's a mayor, he's the mayor, of your little municipality. And that's the big one.

I know what you are doing.

Yeah, who fucking doesn't? You're the plow, buddy, and I'll be driving you, as long as I want. Get the fuck out of here, I got a show, important stuff.

The mayor and his security guard were found with crosses carved into their chests.

John Joseph had finally only needed one more for his resurrection, but he had to make sure his wife had properly fitted a motherboard onto a

Gateway computer from 1999.

He saw smoke, and turned into his store on fire.

He got out of his car, silent. The children had a half day today. When that happened, Peggy picked them up, so they could do homework in the shop.

-

Aye, America is crazy, you saw this? A paramilitary group literally rappelled onto a broadcast for one of those evangelical churches. Shot hundreds of people, ripped them apart with machine guns on live television. The main guy was killed on screen too, zoomed as they shredded his face in rapid fire. It was on the internet,

I mean, it's still on the internet, if you want to find it. James Christ Church. The Machine Gun Mega Church Incident.

My god, Priya...oh my god, Priya.

-

Priya's body flew back on the same plane John Joseph took home. He went to where his sister was buried, along with all the other nuns. They were given a small, mass grave, near a chapel, nowhere near their old convent. The church believed they shouldn't be cremated, as the government had originally intended. Their bodies should still be honored as christians.

John Joseph started to dig. The bodies were wrapped in cloth, bugs biting through to skin. John Joseph cut free every single body, until he could recognize his sister, her artful hands that taught him politeness with slaps.

He embraced her blackened body, the insects crawling towards carrion. He held her skeletal left hand, skin gnawed away.

You died for our sins. You died for my sins. I couldn't stop. I couldn't. But, I wanted to see you one last time. I failed in my resurrection.

He wailed, uncontrollably. Authorities seized him, while one detective vomited on the grave of a priest.



**“Ruins 3”**  
Hosna Kachooee

# The Sands of Time

Maximillian Venskus

The swordsman, covered in dust, crested the mountainous dune and gazed out over the city he once called home. For one thousand years he had been searching. For one thousand years he watched as the world warped and twisted around him. The great peaks of the royal palace just barely protruded from the sand. He finally laid down his sword, an elegantly crafted and maintained piece of art, plunging it into the top of the dune that had marked the end of his search.

Around the sword he set up camp, preparing for the work that was ahead of him. The next day, he started his task. Slowly, painfully, he plunged his shovel time after time into the sand, carving out his entryway with his grizzled and calloused hands. As he worked his memories began to flood back to him.

He remembered running through the meadows outside the palace with his true love. He remembered when the prince, rotten to the core, attempted to steal her away from him. He remembered when he challenged the prince to a duel for her honor. He remembered when he won.

Tears began to fall upon the sand, as he continued to bore his way down. He remembered his exile. He remembered how they stole his memories, so he may never again find his way home.

After a month had passed, the entrance to the great palace he used to roam had been revealed. His shovel, now an amalgamation of metal and wood from many different repairs, was set down. It's purpose had been fulfilled.

He took a breath before placing his palm gently upon the large ornate door. Once it had been gleaming with the wealth of several generations, proudly displayed for all to see. It seemed that at some point looters had stripped the gold and the jewels from the palace.

A gentle push was all it took, as the door slowly swung open, as though inviting him back home. His first footstep echoed out through the large empty hall. Ancient chairs and tables lay overturned and discarded. Not even the animals

entered here, as there was nothing for them.

The hall was lined with statues, all of people he once knew. He walked up to the first one upon entering the hall. He placed his hand on the shoulder of the small boy, his stone visage forever laughing. The boy's voice rang out inside his head.

"Enzo! You're back! You know I can't talk long, mom wants me back for dinner, but will you play ball with me later?"

Enzo smiled, clearing his throat he spoke for the first time in over a month.

"Of course buddy." The statue was silent.

Enzo continued his journey through the hall, next approaching a statue of an old woman carrying two baskets full of fruits and vegetables. Placing his hand on her shoulder, a raspy voice echoed in his mind

"Enzo?! You need to eat your vegetables young boy, or you'll never grow big and strong!" Enzo began to cry once more, keeping his hand on the statue's shoulder.

"Oh mother. Wait till you see me now." As he said this, he doubled over coughing. Deep red liquid erupted from his mouth and splattered onto the sand beneath his feet. "So I did make it in time." He walked further down the hall, His face growing slightly pale. He approached a statue of a young man, with a look of gloom upon his face. Enzo once more placed his hand on the statue's shoulder.

"Will you comfort me Enzo? The world is so different now. I'm scared." The swordsman embraced the statue, holding it tightly.

"My friend. The world has changed in ways you wouldn't possibly believe. But I must move on." He released the statue and continued his walk, now dragging his left leg along. He came to a statue of a woman with a commanding appearance, dressed in the war clothes of his people. Hesitantly, he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Enzo! Maggot! This is not the first time you've shirked your duties! I'll have you cleaning the barracks for the rest of your life!" Enzo winced, even after a thousand years, being chewed out by his commander made him uncomfortable. He could feel his muscles begin to weaken and his vigor fade.

Pulling himself down the hallway, he came to a statue he had been dreading. The young man clutching his side, his face twisted in agony. Forcing himself, he placed his hand on the dying man's shoulder and winced, preparing for the wrath to

come.

“I forgive you. Take good care of her for me.” Enzo’s eyes widened, and tears once more began to well up.

“But why?” Enzo asked, no response was heard. Now all that was left was for him to forgive himself. Enzo felt his right arm give out, and he could no longer lift it. He approached the end of the hall and to his shock, there was a person standing there. A woman, pale as death, dressed in tattered rags, was gently polishing an empty pedestal with a torn cloth. Enzo opened his mouth to speak, but no words would come out.

“Welcome home.” The woman’s voice was soft and gentle. It washed over him like a cleansing wave would wash away the blood on a battle stained shore. He could feel his knee begin to shake and give way, and he barely caught himself with his one good remaining arm. He shakily stood up and walked towards the woman as she turned to face him.

Her hair was brittle and thin, her face gaunt, her skin stretched tight over her bones. She was the most beautiful sight Enzo had ever seen. He approached her and once more attempted to speak, to no avail. There were too many words to say.

“Come, let me help you.” She seemed slightly more mobile than him, and ducked under his arm to support him. The second his hand touched her shoulder, memories flooded into Enzo’s mind.

He saw her weeping at the loss of her fiance and exile of her first love. He saw her curse the king and renounce her inheritance. He saw her live the lowly life of a servant, cleaning the palace for generation after generation. He saw the invaders arrive, and lay waste to the kingdom, toppling a once mighty empire. He saw his people, pushed to the breaking point, enact their final sacred duty. He saw her refuse. He saw her continue to maintain the palace, as sand reclaimed it over seven hundred years. He saw himself, feeble and weak.

As the memories ended, he returned to the present, and saw her eyes, wet with tears. He tried to raise his arm to wipe them away, but it would not move. She looked up at him and smiled, most of her teeth having fallen out.

“You came back. I knew you would. After all, you still have a duty to

uphold.” She did not wait for a reply, as his jaw was too weak to lift, his mouth hanging agape. With a grunt, she lifted him onto the pedestal. He could feel his strength return, his flesh heal, his muscles return to their prime. As he stood, he looked out over the hall, and noticed something out of place. The pedestal across from him was shattered and crushed, and the plaque at the bottom had naught but a faint etching of a name.

Enzo.

His eyes grew wide and with his final moments before upholding his sacred duty, he reached down and pulled his love close with all of his might. She gasped in shock, and Enzo watched as her former beauty returned to her. She opened her mouth, but before any words could escape it, the stone set in.

The two lovers stood atop their marble pedestal bearing the name Vivian. Enzo looking deeply into his lover’s eyes, Vivian gasping in shock. Together, they upheld their sacred duty, as had all those they knew. For the rest of time, their statues would preserve their memories and lessons, and pass them on to any brave enough to offer comfort.



**“Seagull”**  
Mila Antkevych





**Untitled**  
Eqerem Isallari

# Collage

Laura Manis

Who are you?

I laugh at such a broad inquiry

Who am I?

Do they really want to know who I am or do they just want some surface level answer to satiate minor curiosity

Such tedious questions tend to aggravate me as how am i supposed to answer something so broad in such few words

Every version of myself lies within every crevice of my personality

I am the 5 year old who cried when she realized bambi's mother would not be returning

I am the 12 year old begging my mom to let me sleepover at my best friends house

I am 15 wincing as i force messy eyeliner on my lash line

I am 18 and I toss my graduation cap in the air as I meet eyes with peers from kindergarten

I am 20 and I am more myself than before

perpetually gaining new versions of myself

compiled by the small moments

every era reflected in every one of my actions

how could anyone ever truly know each and every version

I glance in the reflection of the window and all the versions of myself stare back

every fiber of my being glued and stitched together

I am a collage.



**“Fairy Phantom”**  
Ourania Rahman

# Just Breathe

Aamishq Dhir

“Another day, another new therapist,” I sighed. My last therapist quit because there’s “too much wrong with me.” It took me two months before I finally found a new therapist and today is my first session with her. After curling up in a little ball of anxiety on my bed and contemplating everything that could go possibly wrong for two hours, I finally gathered the courage to pull myself together. Despite trembling from anxiety, I had to start getting ready so that I won’t be late. I turned the water on and slowly stepped into the scorching hot shower hoping I would melt to death. Too bad it doesn’t work like that. I stood in the shower until the water ran cold enough to freeze my scarlet skin. I grudgingly walked over to my closet and picked out an oversized grey sweater and a pair of faded black skinny jeans. It may be eighty degrees outside, but I would rather have my body hidden than wear something cooler. I balled the sleeves in my hands, clenching them as tightly as I could and took a deep breath before looking at myself in the mirror. I didn’t recognize the wreck looking back at me, but I guess that’s part of the reason I need therapy.

The ringing of my phone was too loud for my anxiety riddled brain, but I had to pick it up or they’d send an ambulance over. It was my mom as expected. Who else would call me? “I’ll be there to get you in twenty minutes, honey,” she reminded me. I wasn’t allowed to drive, but now is a good time as any to try my luck: “I could save you the hassle and drive myself.” I could imagine her giving me the “mom look” as she replied, “you know it doesn’t work like that, dear. Not after the last time.” I could hear the sadness in her voice. I knew what she was talking about, but I didn’t want to think about it. I didn’t want to remember how I had rammed my car into a tree... in the middle of nowhere... and hoped it would be enough, but it doesn’t work like that.

They found me and fixed me at the hospital. Even after I was “all better,” I had to stay locked up in the hospital room so they could be sure I wouldn’t try it again.

They told me the cliché “dying doesn’t end your pain, it passes the pain onto someone else,” but I didn’t care as long as I wasn’t the one that had to feel it. It doesn’t work like that though, I had to feel my own pain and my parents’ and my friends’ because they need me to.

I heard a car honking outside. Must be my mom, I didn’t realize I was on the kitchen floor, sobbing. How had I gotten here? How long had this attack lasted? Did I ever hang up the phone? This was very, very, very bad.

Washing my face and taking two minutes to steel myself, I grabbed an apple and ran out to the car barely stopping to lock the door. I tried to hold it together in the car even though I was shaking like a tree branch in the wind. My mother wouldn’t be able to handle one of my breakdowns. “Just don’t think about it and it won’t affect you,” my last therapist’s words popped into my head. Yeah, well, it doesn’t exactly work like that, hun. How am I supposed to avoid thinking about the sole thing filling up my amygdala? I spent the whole ride trying to control it. It’s just therapy...

Nothing scary...

Just you...

And another person...

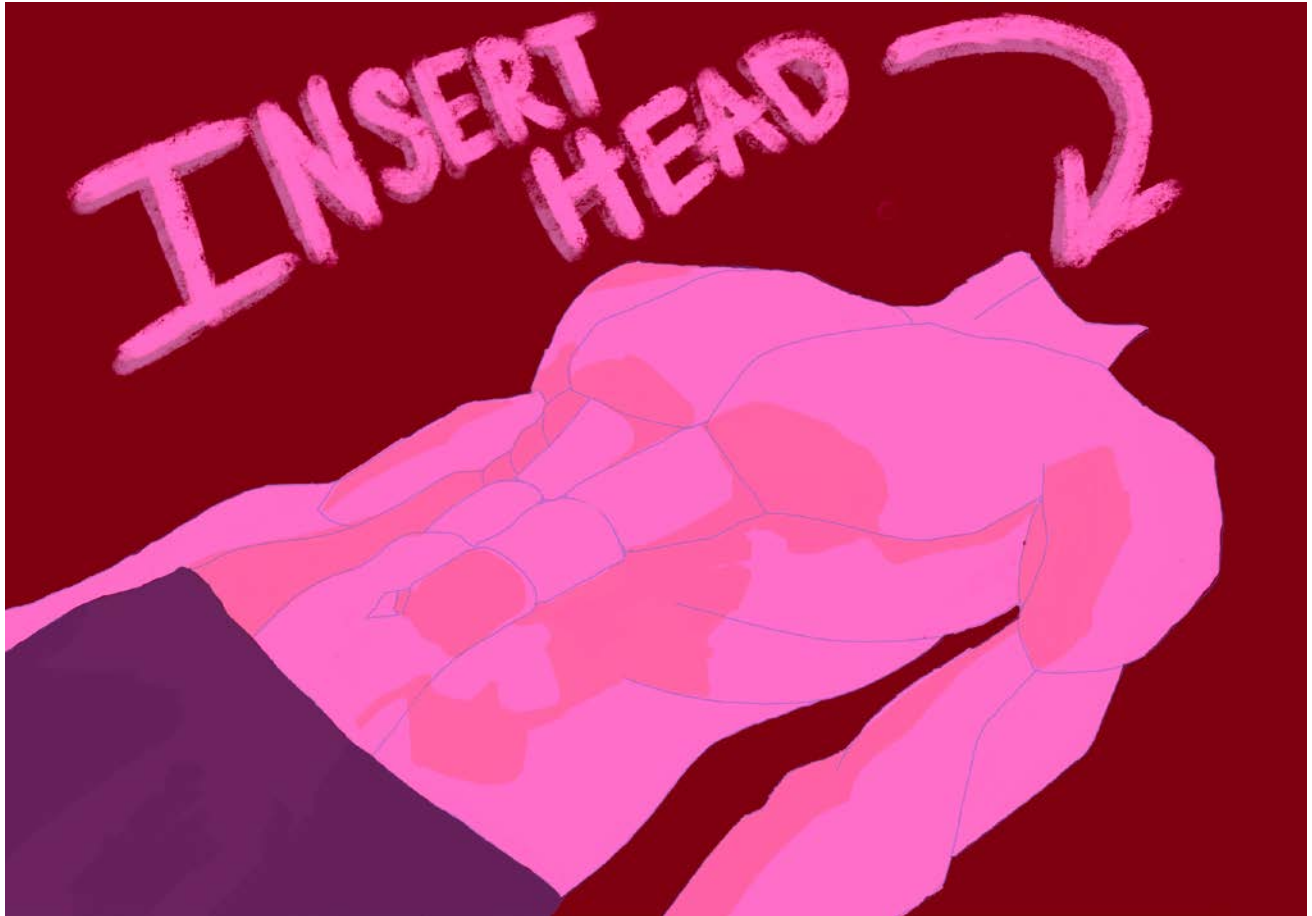
Locked in a room...

For an hour...

talking about all your problems...

And trying to make you look less  
crazy!

See, nothing scary. The walls of the car closed in on me and I was suddenly out of breath, hyperventilating, the sounds of the outside world were too much to handle. My mother looked at me frantically. She had no idea what to do. So we sat there, in the parking lot, until I could calm down enough to walk into the lobby and force words out of my mouth. But it doesn’t work like that for me.



**“Need a hand no, I need some head”**  
Andrew Parian



**Untitled**  
Mia Obrotka

# The Sun Keeps Us Happy

Waseem Mainuddin

Swathed in  
Shine,  
My damned  
Resigned,  
Should have  
Known they'd  
Get To this  
Overwrought  
State,

Just to become  
Apes apostate,  
Denouncing I  
For flare,  
My all They  
can do is  
Stare!  
Oh la de  
Fucking da,  
Here comes  
The hate,  
Hate be  
The first step  
To going  
Straight,

---

Sixteen  
Million



Hoisted  
The  
Orb  
On their  
Backs,  
And counted,  
We walked  
For 300 years,  
Took a break,  
Just so the  
Ropes could  
Break,  
And dirty  
Filthy said  
“We have

Nothing to  
Look forward  
Too! We got  
No aim, we got  
No soul, you even  
Took our pipe  
Dreams!” Arms extend  
And solar  
Embraced,  
They had found  
New fetish!  
Now foolish!  
Guess it’s time  
For me to become  
Ghoulish!

# Silver and Gold

Catherine Park

*Early morning in GIRL's bedroom. All the lights in the room are turned off, except for one standing lamp. It's as if someone forgot to turn it off before they fell asleep. In one corner of the room, there is a chair with a pile of GIRL's clothes on top. BOY and GIRL are both asleep in GIRL's bed.*

*With a slight start, BOY stirs, as if he's been woken up by a sudden noise. He sits up; he looks deep in thought. He pulls out his phone and begins to type, brows furrowed in concentration.*

BOY: *(to himself, quietly)* How am I supposed to explain this?

GIRL: *(waking)* Hey.

BOY: Hey.

GIRL: When did you wake up?

BOY: Just now.

GIRL: It's so early.

BOY: Yeah.

GIRL: Did you set an alarm? Oh, I forgot you said you had an early morning shift.

BOY: No.

GIRL: Hm?

BOY: I didn't set an alarm. And I called out sick today.

GIRL: Then let's go back to sleep.

BOY: I want to talk to you about something.

GIRL: What is it?

BOY: I just have something to say to you.

GIRL: Okay.

*(BOY gets up from the bed and moves to the chair.)*

BOY: I'm going to move this.

*(BOY unceremoniously tosses the pile of clothes onto the floor.)*

GIRL: Babe, come on.

BOY: *(sitting)* Just listen, alright? I've written this down, and I don't want you to talk until I'm done.

GIRL: Alright.

BOY: Last night was really nice. I mean, these past few weeks have been really nice, but I don't think I'm ready for a relationship. With you. And it's not because I don't like you, okay? I don't want you to think I've been leading you on. But I just don't see how this is going to work.

GIRL: This is kind of sudden, don't you think?

BOY: Yeah, well. You know.

GIRL: What about last night?

BOY: I've had a lot of time to think.

GIRL: I didn't know men could have such complicated introspections while they were asleep. BOY: Can we be mature about this?

GIRL: What brought this on?

BOY: Like I said, it's been a long time coming. I kind of felt it last night. It just doesn't feel right, you and me.

GIRL: You were the one to call me, last night.

BOY: I know.

GIRL: Showed up at my door with two bottles of wine. New haircut, new tie.

BOY: I didn't think you noticed.

GIRL: You poured me a glass. Told me I was beautiful—

BOY: Alright.

GIRL: —then you poured me another glass.

BOY: Don't put it like that.

GIRL: How would you describe it?

BOY: Look, I really like you.

GIRL: I remember.

BOY: You're beautiful. And smart. But I just can't be in a relationship right now. I can't be in a relationship... with you.

GIRL: Someone else, then?

BOY: (*getting agitated*) No! But we're too different, you and I.

GIRL: Liar.

BOY: What?

GIRL: (*moving to the edge of the bed*) You invite me to your parties, you flirt with me, you buy me drinks. You show off your car, your guitar, your skateboard. For weeks.

BOY: Oh, come on.

GIRL: You text me every day, every hour. About how much you miss me, how much you want me to "come home" to that godforsaken town. You bring me flowers, chocolates. (*Pause.*) And now what?

BOY: Nothing.

GIRL: (*sweetly*) Boys and their toys. Are you bored now, Jason?

JASON: No, that's not it!

GIRL: Coward.

JASON: (*stands up forcefully, knocking the chair over*) You're acting crazy. GIRL: (*smiling*) Coward.

JASON: For God's sake! I'm in a bad place right now, don't you get it? You know what happened to me yesterday? I was fired! No explanation, nothing. Just a notification on my phone. How am I supposed to move out now? How am I supposed to find another job? Nobody's going to hire a high school dropout. And

then you've got the guys, always asking me for money — asking me for favors. And you! You never shut up! About your fancy college and the city and how much you love the view from this goddamn dorm room. How's a guy supposed to cope? How am I supposed to handle that?

*(Beat.)*

JASON: You've never had to struggle at anything in your life. Born with a silver spoon in your mouth. I remember you in high school. You used to look at me like I was gum on your shoe. Always the smartest kid in class. You never even had to try. Some of us aren't born as lucky as you, Medea.

MEDEA: Lucky.

JASON: Yeah, lucky.

MEDEA: What a strange word.

JASON: Did you hear anything I just said?

MEDEA: Why did you come here last night, Jason?

JASON: I don't know.

MEDEA: You're going to have to do better than that.

JASON: I wanted you. No, I wanted to know I could have you. If I wanted.

MEDEA: But you didn't.

JASON: I don't know.

*(Pause. MEDEA is smiling again.)*

JASON: There are other guys for you, Medea. Better ones.

MEDEA: Spare me.

JASON: I think I should go.

MEDEA: Do you?

JASON: Look, it's better this way. I think... we should both stick to our own.

MEDEA: Our own? Like your pretty neighbor? With that ridiculous name — what was it? Princess?

JASON: She's a friend.

MEDEA: She has terrible taste in fashion, poor thing.

JASON: Leave her out of this.

MEDEA: I think you should go.

JASON: Finally, something we can agree on.

MEDEA: Don't be such a child, Jason.

JASON: *(turns to leave)* I'll see you around, Medea.

*(MEDEA takes out her phone. JASON walks to the door and places a hand on the knob.)* MEDEA: *(without looking up from her phone)* Babe.

JASON: What?

MEDEA: Give her my love. Your... Princess.

*(JASON hesitates for a moment. Exits. MEDEA looks up with an amused expression.)*

Lights go down slowly.



**“The Peacock”**  
Gabriela Chevasco



**“Woke”**  
Michelina Chermak



# The Labyrinth Team

## Catherine Park - Managing Editor

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Catherine Park is a first-year Literature student at Bergen Community College. On campus, she is also on the Student Government Association executive board and a founding member of the BCC Literature Club. In her free time, she likes to read, journal, and add books to her ever-growing TBR list.

## Lynne Kim - Advertising & Content Editor

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Lynne Kim is a psychology student currently in her last semester at BCC. She also works as a peer tutor at the Cerullo Learning Assistance Center and is the Chapter President of Phi Theta Kappa. Apart from her interests in clinical work and research, she loves to paint with watercolor, read Jane Austen novels, and crochet animal hats.

## Hosna Kachooee - Graphic & Web Designer

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An IT student at BCC, Hosna is passionate about providing technological solutions in different clubs on campus. When she isn't staring at screens, gardening and knitting ambitious outfits keeps her busy.

# The Labyrinth Team

## Dr. John Findura - Faculty

—

Dr. John Findura is the author of the poetry collections *Submerged* and *Useful Shrapnel*. He holds an MFA in Poetry from The New School and an Ed.D in Educational Technology from NJCU. His poetry, criticism, and essays have been published in numerous national and international literary journals. Since 2009 he has been the Writing Center Supervisor at Bergen's national award winning Cerullo Learning Assistance Center. Currently, he is patiently awaiting the full disclosure of the fact that aliens exist and have been visiting Earth for thousands of years.

## Dr. Kelly Keane - Faculty

—

Dr. Kelly Keane is a long-time member of the English Composition and Literature Department as well as faculty liaison at the Writing Center. When not helping students with college transfer essays, she is keeping her dog Frank out of trouble.

# Spring 2024 Judges

Professor Seamus Gibbons

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Seamus Gibbons has taught composition, creative writing, and literature at Bergen since 2009. He has formerly served as the English Coordinator for 5 years and the Director of the Judith K. Winn School of Honors for the past seven years. Privately, he writes short stories, plays and novels, and has had his work published in journals in America and his native Ireland.

Kelli Hayes

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Kelli Hayes [shelher] received her M.A. in Writing Studies from Kean University in 2019 and her M.S.L.I.S. from the Pratt Institute in 2021. While studying at Kean, she also completed a minor in Fine Arts with a concentration in Metalworks & Jewelry Making. Her work focused on the construction and deconstruction of identity, exploring how the material and digital worlds bleed into one another — themes incorporated into her thesis project *Degenerate's Gallery: Exploring Self-Representation & Aesthetic Presentation in New Digital Media As a Resurgence of Dada Idealism*. She has worked at Bergen Community College since 2018. Currently, she is the Academic Coaching Supervisor at the Cerullo Learning Assistance Center where she supports students in creating and pursuing futures for themselves. Kelli is both deeply inspired by the students she helps and humbled by their persistence and will to succeed.

Professor Iris Bucchino

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Iris Bucchino has been a Professor of college English courses for over 35 years; 15 of those years as Assistant Professor at Bergen Community College where I teach Developmental English, English Composition 1 and 2. I am the Student Success Course Coordinator and past Chair of the Two Year College English Association, Northeast. My interests are researching current trends in higher education, writing and reading for pleasure, relaxing on the beach, listening to music, and taking long walks with my dog, Brady.

## Dr. John Cichowski

—

John Cichowski received his MFA from the New York Academy of Art where he concentrated on portrait painting and anatomical study. He completed a postgraduate residency at Oxford University's Ruskin School of Art. He received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts where he majored in illustration with a concentration in graphic design. Dr. Cichowski also worked at the National Academy of Art and the Art Student's League of New York for eight years as a teaching assistant for Peter Cox (National Academician). He continues to draw and paint and has taken up digital photography using vintage manual lenses from the 1960s and 70s. He has been teaching at Bergen Community College since 2004.

## Professor Brian Cordell

—

Brian Cordell is the author of the chapbook, *In Their Final Performance*. His work can also be found in *Alien Magazine*, *Rise Up Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *New Haven Review*, and *Caesura*, among others. He earned an M.F.A. from Vermont College of Fine Arts and is an Associate Professor at Bergen Community College.

The logo for Labyrinth Magazine features a stylized eye in a blue square above a red square containing a white fountain pen nib.

# LABYRINTH

M A G A Z I N E

Thank you to all the participants and congratulations to all our winners.

The Labyrinth contest is held each year and all are welcome to compete.  
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