

THE THIRTY-NINTH VOLUME.
OF THE

GALLATIN
REVIEW

SPECIAL THANKS



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Hygge

JENNIFER QIAN

Who I see at a circle's edge

MAHEALANI DEENIK

pe'e poli: to hide (in one's bosom)

tucked into kapa a king begins his journey and runs through time
hair pooling at the feet, climbing, climbing up a whale's bone
and a necklace for a sternum, resting on the chest
teething in the early morning

hā'awi mai: Give me
scales for fish ponds
'awa, for cheese cloth so it gathers secrets into plastic bowls
skin and eyes blood-shot, suppurated
& singing
drink, drink, drink, someone says

'ulalena: tell the fingers reach far and crawl

hands (more of them) more hands as in (to plant)
children in uniforms on freeways, hair resting on open palms
watering

Mo'okū'auhau

: name drop—my name the gold flecks that wait
to be seen in rain sucklings—my name a heavy stone in the throat
my name a butcher in the early morning
my name like steel
somewhere between bone
and nowhere, cartilage caught
between coral heads so it scars nice
my own charcoal keloid, my bluest ridge (my reddish hued rain)

--there is a word for this,
someone says



transience

DIANA SOFIA FELIX IBARRA

Teeth

SOFIA CAPONE

“Tara needs to see someone.”
A sigh. Sounds of sheets rustling and pillows being fluffed. They’re making the bed.

“Tara is fine. If anything, she’s the one we don’t need to worry about.” They think a locked door means she can’t hear. They think their secrets are safe when uttered in the master bedroom.

“Holly, I really don’t think you understand. It’s not normal for her to have those crazy fucking freakouts. It’s not—”

Tara can see her dad’s red face so clearly in her mind. Bloated, sticky with sweat as he spits insults at her mom. It’s hard for Tara to take him



seriously when he yells. The bottom row of his teeth jut out slightly when he talks, giving anyone with a keen eye (usually Tara) an extensive view of their overcrowding. Tara’s dad could never afford braces growing up, now he’s stuck with teeth like shrapnel.

“She’s a nervous kid and you stress her out.”

Tara hates being talked about. It makes her start to itch and when she itches, she scratches and when she scratches Mom says her skin looks disgusting. Tara thinks her skin looks like it’s been raked by the claws of beasts. Tara’s *fits* make her feel like a beast, a wild animal

uncontrolled.

“It’s my fault she has her meltdowns? She needs to grow up and you need to stop babying the kid!”

Tara has had enough. She steps away from the door, hairbrush gripped tightly in her left hand. *I can do my own hair. I will do my own hair.*

The hairbrush tears through her hair with force. It burns, her scalp. She wants it to burn. To feel like she’s ripping chunks of tangled hair from her head. She wishes those strands were connected to brain. That with each clump of hair a piece of bloody meat was lost too.

In Tara’s bathroom is a large three-by-four mirror, wedged in between the sink’s faucet and the wall behind it. There used to be a smaller one that hung in its place. But that mirror had fallen or maybe it was smashed, Tara can’t remember. Perhaps it doesn’t matter, it’s been replaced anyway. Tara stares at her reflection and continues digging chunks of brain straight out of her skull. *Getting rid of the problem at its root.*

There is no knock, the door swings open. “Oh my god, Tara, your leotard isn’t even on. And your

hair. Give me that!”

The hairbrush is no longer in Tara’s hand, instead it’s gripped by one much bonier and paler. Tara worries about this. Those bony hands, those blue veins raised under thin flesh.

Her mother has thin skin, a body littered with soft purple, more bruised than not at this point. Tara’s father is angry and mean, but not that mean. That tarnished flesh is self-inflicted. Constantly bumping into corners, falling down steps, dropping glass on feet—Tara’s mother does not think about her surroundings. And because she does not think she hurts herself. *Mom was made to bruise.*

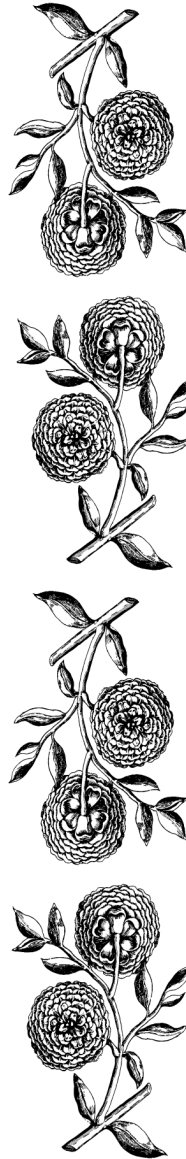
Tara remembers when she was eight years old, and her dad went out of town on business. Tara loved when he was gone; it made the house lighter. When he was out of town Tara could eat upstairs, and not wash her hands, and mom would make junk food dinners. Tara’s mom had been opening one of those large bags of frozen french fries, the smiley face ones that come in a value pack. Tara’s mom had been opening the pack with a big knife from the butcher’s block. She shouldn’t have done it this way.



"It was stupid," Tara's dad had said. "Your mother doesn't think." She agreed with her dad that time. Tara's mom hadn't been careful and had sliced her hand deep. Tara recalls thick red splotches staining their dark chestnut hardwood floors. She remembers her mom yelling very loud and crying and then leaving for the hospital. Her mom ended up being fine, she got stitches. Tara thought about the blood for months afterward. She couldn't stop picturing it. Tara ended up having to see someone about the blood which didn't really help, because talking about the blood just made her think about red sticky blood and thinking about that sticky blood and the way she had to use her fingernails to fully scrape it off the floor made her scratch and scratch and scratch. But then again, it's been years since she's seen the blood, so who knows.

Tara worries this absent-mindedness will get her mom killed or very badly hurt. She does not dare say these concerns aloud.

Even though Holly is angry, Tara is relieved. *Mom will do my bun today.* Tara's head is yanked back as her mom gathers the hair for a ponytail.



"Keep still," she says, a rubber band in between her teeth. She twists then wraps the rubber band around the hair, twists then wraps, twists then wraps. Mom splits the ponytail into two sections, pulling them apart to tighten. There's tension between follicle and skin on Tara's hairline. Her face is stretched taut over her skull. Finally, Mom twirls the hair of the ponytail, pinning it into a bun.

"You still have a bump." Mom points to the few strands of hair that resisted her efforts. Strands that just won't lie flat no matter how much Mom tears the brush through, trying to smooth. "See, this is what happens when you procrastinate and wait till the last minute. Now you get to dance with ugly hair. Do you think Madame Graca will appreciate that? Do you think she'll choose the girl who doesn't care about her appearance to dance in the pre-professional company?" Mom looks at her expectantly. Tara never knows what to say when she does this.

"Your tights are in the dryer, just get dressed." Mom begins to move out of the room with thundering steps.

The dryer? The fucking dryer? Tara feels like there's a balloon in her throat, filling with air, swelling

to a point where there's no more room for air. She can't breathe. Tara can't breathe and her face is hot, so incredibly hot. She cannot see, her vision is blurring. *Don't cry don't cry don't cry.* "You put my tights in the dryer?" Tara's voice is strained, the tightness in her throat barely lets the words out.

"Would you rather dance in wet tights? Hurry up, we need to go." Mom finally leaves the bathroom; Tara can hear her footsteps heavy on the stairs.

I asked her not to put them in the dryer. They're gonna have runs. They're gonna have runs. They're gonna have runs. I can't go to dance. Oh God. Oh God. SHUT UP

Tara will wear the tights. Tara will go to dance. Her legs feel limp.

Tara was once given a small role in a variation from Sleeping Beauty. She had been a statue, made to hold her leg in an arabesque for an entire five minutes. Afterward her leg wouldn't stop shaking. Her legs feel like that now.

Tara feels so weak. So weak as she floats towards the dryer.

Runs.

It's the first thing she sees when she pulls them from the dryer.

Don't cry. Don't cry. STOP CRYING. Tara must remind herself.

Tara bunches each leg of the sheer



fabric up so that they're easier to put on. She slips her right leg through, then her left. She's scared to look.

A huge, giant, tear going from the crotch of the tights down her inner thigh, only stopping right above the knee. Tara's thoughts are interrupted by Holly's voice, yelling from downstairs. Always yelling.

"Could you get a ride home today? I have to pick Millie up from the doctor."

The doctor is not a *real* doctor. They don't say this, but Tara knows this. It is Millie's psychiatrist or therapist or whoever it is giving her twin sister those handfuls of pills she must take each night. Tara also knows her father will not pick her up. He does not pick her up. Not from school, not from ballet, not from the houses of friends.

"I'll ask Elissa."

She does not ask Elissa. In fact, she does not ask anyone. It makes her uncomfortable to do this: ask people for things, impose. She does not want to explain that her sister must be picked up from the *doctor*. In fact, she does not talk about her sister's *issues* at all. Millie is a theoretical sister to everyone outside of Tara's family. Tara thinks it's better to keep this separation,

letting them know she has a sister, but nothing else. To Mom and Dad, they are twins; to everyone else, Millie might as well not exist.

Tara does not worry that Elissa or anyone could come across Millie on the street and confuse her for Tara. They are different and this is obvious to her.

When they were younger, Tara did not feel this difference so much. Tara has always been taller by an inch. Tara is always nicer, more accommodating. Millie was and is smarter. Millie was and is also prettier but “does not care about looks” which makes it even more infuriating to Tara. These qualities used to be the extent of their differences. Things have changed since they were little.

When Mom cut her hand deep, Millie went with her to the hospital. They were gone for almost four hours and when they came home Mom was no longer crying and Millie was holding a takeout bag. She was smiling, with big shiny white teeth. Tara wanted to crack those big shiny whites, hit Millie in the face so hard that they shattered, leaving nothing but jagged shark teeth and bleeding gums. Tara was scared while they were gone. She kept hearing noises



at the front door and seeing blood and why didn't they care that she had been home alone? Mom looked happy too and Tara wanted to hurt someone, wanted to hurt Millie and their mom.

“Suck in. I can see your lunch.”

Madame Graca whacks her in the stomach with another bony hand. Tara is getting so tired of bony hands. “Shoulders down, head up.” She’s moved behind Tara now, her words sharp in Tara’s ear. “Tendu, tendu,” She’s yelling now. “Sharper, sharper, your feet are sickled.” A sigh, then she says, “Don’t bother coming to class if you’re not going to try.” *I am trying.* Tara does not dare say this though.

The center barre is Tara’s least favorite spot in class. It’s not built into the wall like the others. It’s wobbly, off balance, it cannot be trusted. It is also slightly off-center today. It falls right in between two mirror panels rather than being placed in the middle of one. The position makes Tara’s body look warped in the mirror. It looks unlike hers: shorter, squished down overflowing at her torso’s sides. Her hair looks darker, too. Maybe by a shade or two. Tara often finds

herself different at dance, finds that her limbs make sense in that context, her body finally moves in unison. Today the difference feels different. Her body does not make sense here and Tara hates the center barre even more.

As class goes on Tara continues to feel *off*. She hates the way her bun looks. Mom was right. My hair looks like shit. And the tear in her tights keeps getting bigger with each exercise at the barre. It is a bad day, she decides. A bad day full of scary hands and runs and ugly teeth and bad hair and—

“Across the floor,” says Graca. And Tara feels sick, like she might throw up.

Tara’s hand begins to shake slightly as it’s raised in the air. “Madame Graca, could I be excused to the bathroom?” Graca nods and Tara’s feet move with a swiftness, carrying her out of the studio and through the narrow hall until she reaches the singular family bathroom. In the bathroom there is a large three-by-four mirror wedged in between the faucet and the wall behind it. Tara does not remember the bathroom looking like this. She thinks there should be a smaller mirror hung up instead. Cold water runs over her delicate fingers and hands with thin skin, skin that had



once been cut deep. Tara does not feel like herself. Annoyed, she is so very annoyed. Her husband, Sean, refuses to pick up either of the girls tonight and it has been getting so much harder to deal with—

Tara keeps washing her hands, scrubbing and scrubbing until her dainty fingers look thick and swollen. She stares at herself in the large three-by-four mirror wedged in between the faucet and the wall behind it. Tara’s cheeks are puffy and bright pink splotches litter her face, making the whole thing look like an angry blister.

It does not matter that he is forty-two and it’s been decades since anyone has commented on his smile. It’s fucking embarrassing. Utterly humiliating, to be a grown man with crooked fucking teeth like a goddamned white trash hillbilly. He knows she’s too scared to say anything to his face, too scared to say what she really thinks about him. But he knows, he sees her staring at his teeth every time he speaks silently undermining him. He knows and he fucking hates it, hates—

Tara shoves her sweating face under the faucet, letting it run for one, two, three, four, five . . . ten seconds before finally cutting off the water. Better, she feels so

much better now. She can't even remember why she left class in the first place. One more glance at the large three-by-four mirror wedged in between the faucet and the wall behind it and she is relieved to be met with big shiny white square teeth. She loves feeling her tongue glide over the front of their glossy surface. It is time to dance, she thinks, and leaves the bathroom with light toe-heel steps.

Graca is quite happy with Tara for the remainder of class. When they practice leaps across the floor Graca tells her it looks like she's floating in the air.

"You should be proud of yourself," she says. "I've never seen you dance like this before," she says. And at the end of class Graca approaches her, asking if she'd accept a place in her pre-professional ballet company. Tara is pleased. So very pleased.

Tara exits the studio once more and begins preparing her dance bag to head home, when she remembers.

Shiny teeth, big and white and square and gleaming. Toe-heel steps light and floating as she approaches a group of dancers consumed in conversations. They welcome her into the circle because they've seen



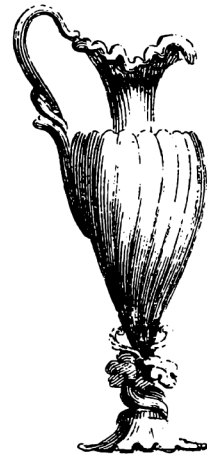
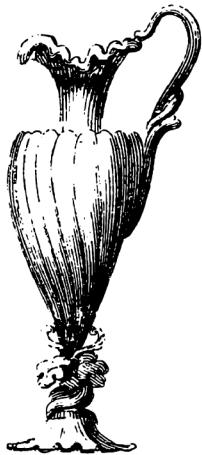
her change, they notice her shiny white teeth because how could they not.

She taps Elissa's shoulder, "Ugh, my mom just texted that our car broke down. Could I hitch a ride with you tonight?"

Eating the world.

ADISON GAMRADT

I want to eat the color red. Peel bananas, bite the sunshine, gobble dirt from the ground up, worms have five hearts and I'll devour them all. I drink house paint like soup, turpentine like tea, turn sand dune to snowcone and pour desert down my throat. I stuff morning news into my mouth, crunch on letters, let p's and q's rack against teeth, slip down esophagus, turn stomach to alphabet soup. I eat brains for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I swallow the thought of stopping anytime soon. I eat speed, I devour distance, I dine on time, I chew the gum stuck beneath high school bleachers—someone has to do it. I lick bowling balls like lollipops, pop pennies like pills, suck on the metallic taste of someone else's blood. I feast on fact and I feast on fiction, I slurp down every string of a fresh





wound's stitches. My favorite fruit is Adam's apple, pear-shaped hips, the watermelon that grew in your stomach when you were six and ate the seed and heard the legend and cried about it. I regurgitate danger into the mouths of several baby birds. I'll have my cake, eat it too, and I'll bite the hand that feeds me. I ingest your eyes as you read this, and I'll eat the apology I owe you. And once this plate is empty, perhaps I'll finally learn to cook.





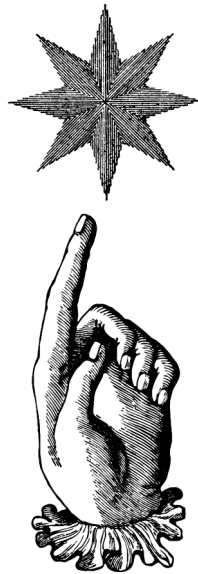
Untitled

IRIS ERWIN

Treardurr Bay

GEORGE FAY

The craggy cliffs on the Treardurr Bay coastline are notched and saw-toothed from the relentless barrage of waves that roll in from the northwestern Irish sea. When I was a boy and used to trek up and down these cliffs, I used to think of the spiked rocks of the coastline as a line of spears, their purpose to protect the land from the assaulting surf. At some points the cliffs are a hundred feet above the thrashing whitewater and even at those points, the misty sea spray rises and falls onto your face, slowly dripping down through the neck of your windbreaker. My brother and I used to dare one another to see

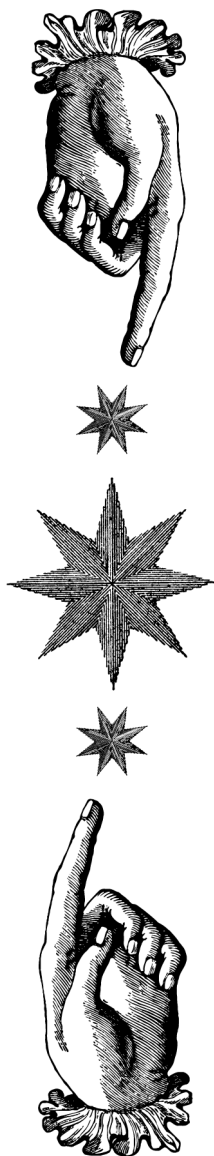


who could get closest to the edge, our Wellington boots edging across the green seagrass that grew on top of the rocks, defying the wind, rain, and salty air.

Treardurr Bay isn't what you would think of contemplating your typical summer getaway. Located in the northwest of Wales, it's definitely not all sunshine. In fact, it rains a lot and even in the middle of summer the sun always seems to be peeling clouds away from its gaze. The ocean there is like one I haven't seen anywhere else in the world. Instead of the crystal blues of the Caribbean, the Welsh ocean is a tie-dye of the darkest blues, greys, and

whites. The water is never flat and deep rollers capped with churning whitewater traverse the channel. It's as if this part of the ocean is bitter that it's been relegated to this corner of the world, and so instead of being able to gently lap and caress golden sand, it takes its anger out on the Welsh coast through breaking whitecaps. Despite what it lacks in beaming sun, Treardurr Bay is a truly beautiful place. It is a place that still is ruled by nature. The sheer power of the roiling ocean is staggering and humbling. Standing on top of the harsh cliffs looking into the horizon with wind whipping my collar and flapping the legs of my trousers, I would feel a connection with the world.

As I would descend the cliffs towards the beach, the pounding crashes of the waves on my left, the beach would come into view. At high tide, it's a lonely strip of sand hopelessly overcome by the surging ocean, its surface dotted with dark green and briny brown seaweed. This sandy belt horseshoes from the foot of the cliffs around to an elevated concrete pier where food trucks sell greasy hamburgers and ice cream. During low tide, the beach looks like the surface of another world. When the water recedes, hundreds of yards of dark,

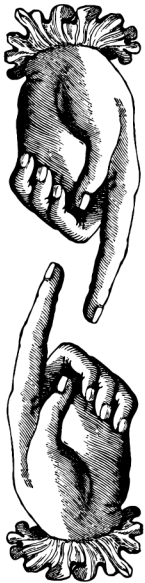


grainy sand are revealed. Families set up picnics at the top of the beach, soccer games are organized in the middle, and where sand meets water, brave children jump into chilly waves. Fishermen prowl the soggy sand, holding a bucket in one hand and an oversized fork in the other, looking for the heads of seaworms trapped in the sand where the ebbing tide had left them behind. With a practiced motion, they chop and scoop their prey into buckets later to be put on fishing hooks and used as bait.

At the bottom of the cliffs, there are tide pools on the surface of the rocks. My brother and I would squat down next to them, each with a fishing line dropped into the shallow water. We would try and cajole translucent prawns, patiently waiting for the next tide to take them back to the ocean, into impossibly biting onto hooks twice the size of their bodies. If we really wanted to capture them, we could have just stuck our hands into the pools and grabbed them, but catching them wasn't the point. The sea would eventually carry them back to where they needed to go.

One summer Downeast for the weekend
I jumped into the abyss with a lifeguard

ELLA ANDERSON



Said hush by brush-fire
By burning or by drowning?
Anything to be buried at sea,
In passage with water.
You've seen someone drown,
You don't want that, take my word.
Wipe my smoke tears,
As they chill my cheeks that flare.
Cling-wrap your arms to mine,
like chicken scraps trying to make a whole bird.
Navigate the moon's forest floor with your bare feet on,
Find where sharp rocks
Turn to soft tire tracks,
Whose sand is stamped down.
Guide me as we walk lifeguard!
Home or to the ocean.
Hold me on your back or
demand it submarine.

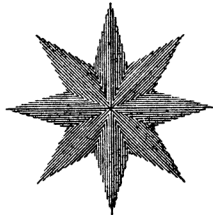
Views of the Future

MIA SLOAN



I.
Two, one after the other, climbed onto the bus: one daughter with long brown hair wearing a blue T-shirt slightly too large, and the older son in a gray sweatshirt, clutching a bag to his chest, wide-eyed. Their father left them at the door of the bus, squeezed his son's shoulder as he leaned towards the bus driver and nodded, lips shaping the words *It's okay*. The son waved through the window, shouted *Bye, Dad! Bye, Dad!* and as we started to move they took a seat, blowing kisses to the man as he became a passing blur. He blew them back and grew smaller, more distant, then invisible. From outside

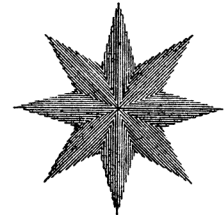




the girl's hand must've looked like a cookie pressed to the glass. I imagine she saw her own reflection against the moving world, giddy with knowing that today, today, she is on an adventure, she is alone, how scary and how free. Then she was talking laughingly and listing names: Sadie, Eliana, Asher, Ella, Delphine. The boy fussed and said *Stop, stop that, stop, stop, stop!* He was smiling.

II.

The eyes of the train sent prisms of light into the blue shadows. Everything, including herself with stubborn fists, clung to the September night. She knew that time was being chased downstream in a dusky river without banks. She and her mother, like two blazing candles on the mantle, stood alone on the platform, nudging elbows and radiating grief in violet shafts. The silver doors slid open into a view of the future, and she drifted like a memory to the red leather seats as her mother teased her with a jesting dance, her feet gliding, their faces mirrored in laughter through the glass. Soon she saw the blurring of lines behind her reflected gaze, the turning of time into watercolor, and as she looked back again, her mother was standing small and lonely against the blue, eyes searching and back curved into a question mark, a clay pot that had splintered and everything was spilling out.

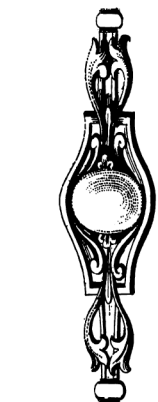


黑暗与恩典 (Darkness and Grace)

HAZEL MA

一半地狱，一半天堂。
一半沉溺，一半清醒。
一半装点另一半。
一半是徒手爬行的婴儿，一半是桥头点灯的老者。
一半昏晕在树的阴影下，一半在枝头即将试飞。
一半在深水里潜行，一半在陆地上指挥。
一半无言、无知、无识，一半狡黠、光辉、睿智。
一半请求另一半。
一半在井底投石，一半在月下诵经。
一半是迷途的羔羊，一半是拄杖的牧人。
一半是信徒跪拜，一半是尊像微笑。
一半击碎了另一半的星惘。
一半补充另一半。
一半踽踽独行，一半呜呜发声。
一半是无法落脚的悸动，一半是随遇而安的确信。
一半是谴责，一半是抚慰。
一半颤抖着握不住篮筐，得不到月之眼的垂青；一半收割了满地的稻穗，包括天空、太阳、丰厚的舌尖。





Half hell, half heaven.
Half indulged, half sober.
Half decorating the other half.

A half is an infant crawling bare-handed,
a half is an old man lighting up a lamp at the
end of a bridge.

A half faints under the shadow of a tree,
a half is ready to test-fly by the branch.

A half rows in the deep waters, a half
commands on the land.

A half is inarticulate, ignorant, and
unperceptive, a half is sly, radiant, and wise.
Half requesting the other half.

A half is casting stones to the bottom of a
well, a half is recounting the scripture under
the moon.

A half is a lamb losing its way, a half is a
shepherd leaning on a stick.

A half is a believer kneeling, a half is a
statue smiling.

A half breaks the star-dotted melancholia
of the other half.

Half complementing the other half.

A half walks alone, a half sings aloud.

A half is a palpitation that cannot land, a
half is the conviction that wherever will be
will be.

Half condemnation, half consolation.

A half trembles and struggles to hold the
basket, finding no favor with the eye of the
moon; a half harvests full fields of rice ear,
including the sky, the sun, and a lucrative
tongue.





Jou

OLA KARASINSKA

Our Own Religion

LAINI SHARIFI

It rained for seven consecutive weekends in New York during the summer of 2002. The city was more massive puddle than anything. It was nothing like home, where the heat of the summer is so thick, it choked you. No ceiling fan or AC unit could dry the sweat. Salt built up in your brows, around your mouth; gums went dry and teeth turned brittle; old people died. Sometimes you would see a walker alone on the corner of Wooster and MacMillan, and you would just know someone's grandad was meeting his maker. You couldn't even smoke.

Front yards were dusty, gas



station shelves were barren of water gallons and clippers—hair was the first thing to go, and those who could pull off the look shaved their skulls. I swear to Christ, the town was overrun by skinheads, more red and blistered than anything because how ironic was it that it was too hot to wear a ballcap. I remember Annie nearly peeing her pants one day as we walked past the playground on Marks:

“If I see one more naked child without hair, I swear to Christ!”

I nearly peed my own pants. Some mom must have overheard us and started in our direction from the playground, so we ran, bare feet

slapping the scalding pavement, howling with laughter and sweating profusely from the exertion. We weren't allowed to make fun of the little ones, even though all those hairless little bodies looked like aliens. Even though they were often covered in sweat-streaked dirt, or caked in clay after rolling around in the river like the pigs we raised, trying anything to cool off. Keeping the kiddies cool was important to all the moms—and there were so many moms—so we weren't allowed to make them feel insecure. Or say "Christ." There were too many Christians in the woodwork, all fixed with ears hungry for gossip. They were hunters. I can't blame them. What else is there in a town without anything to do but praise God and drink? And heat makes people restless.

The rain of 2002 had me thinking a lot about home, how different it was from my first June here. I also thought a lot about basement apartments. And subway systems. And whatever else lurked underground. New York City felt like Paris to me, built on all different types of catacombs. They're also both infested with rats and cockroaches and diseases, packed with too many people who smoke too many cigarettes. Annie always



insisted that smoking a cigarette in New York City or Paris was distinctly different from smoking a cigarette in the parking lot between our crotchety middle school and the woods.

"It's not different if you can get cancer from both," I reminded her.

She scoffed at me, a wild grin splitting her face in two. "Absolutely it is! There's a difference!"

I rolled my eyes at her and laughed. "There's literally not!"

She groaned and threw her head back, knocking her shoulder into mine. "You are so not cultured. It's *European*."

"Oh my god!" I laughed at her, excited by her energy and passion. "New York City is still America."

Annie smiled, pondering this thoughtfully for a long time. The wheels on our bikes lazily swirled around where we had dropped them in the parking lot. Her arm was so bony pushing into mine. Finally she looked forward, so I did too. We stared at the woods in front of us.

"No, it's not."

I cupped my hands around her match to protect the flame from the dusty wind.

Annie was five-foot-four and

hated our hometown. She was not a farm girl, she was not afraid of the Dust Bowl or God or her father. She hated the local radio channels and got the most excitement out of torturing the neighborhood boys instead of chasing after them. She was a horrible writer and determined to become an editor somewhere *European*. When we were twelve, she hurled herself into the Left Bank after hearing of its new leech infestation.

“I need something to write about!” she yelled at me from the murky water. “I need to live!”

She somehow contracted koi herpes, a fish disease exclusive to koi, which I guess is better than tapeworm—

“But definitely not better than leeches,” she complained.

Our favorite thing to do was sneak out of church after opening blessings to take the town by storm. Armed with various sticks we had found in the woods, mounted on fearsome, bellowing bikes with loose brake lines, we skidded over cracked asphalt and tumbled over curbs, cutting through the air wavy with heat. We liked this only on Sunday mornings because everyone—literally everyone—in town was at chapel. The town was ours. A ghost town. There were



actual tumbleweeds during certain parts of the year. The faster we peddled, the stronger the wind, the cooler and more ferocious we felt.

“I’m moving to Mallorca!” she screamed.

“I’m moving to San Luis Obispo!” I whooped.

“You can do better than that!”

We laughed like drunk pirates.

Annie and I were daredevils like that. And Annie wrote everything down. She carried around a filthy notebook that she often kicked in front of her as we walked because “writers aren’t rich or clean, they’re raw and beautiful like that.” She fancied herself a Hardy Boy (“Definitely not a Nancy Drew, for Christ’s sake!”) and stalked people around town, marking their days down in her grubby scrawl, embellishing obnoxiously wherever she pleased. She tried to get a few short stories published in the local paper throughout our time in school, but those endeavors always ended with a worried call home informing Annie’s parents of the growing anxiety the PTA board felt around Annie and her use of “inappropriate exploits” in her pieces. The God-fearing would never use the word S-E-X in such a forward way.

“They’re afraid of me and my

truth!” Annie would challenge her mother. “They don’t want to see the world the way it really is!”

Annie’s mom would breathe slowly through her mouth and retie her apron for the hundredth time. “Are you writing the world the way it is?”

Annie would roll her eyes and somersault off the couch.

The neighborhood had mixed feelings; Mrs. Fitch absolutely despised us and often phoned my mom to tattle on me if we were out past sundown.

“She’s just pissed because she’s old and her husband doesn’t want her.”

“Totally.”

“And really, like, I bet he wants us.”

“You’re so right.”

“She’s probably jealous of us, actually.”

Annie might have been right about that—the other feeling in the mix was that we were wanted. At least, I was.

My neighbor, Luke, whose bedroom window looked into mine, once told Annie he was really excited whenever summer rolled around because it meant he could watch us escaping the heat in my room.

“He said he likes to watch us



naked in front of the blower,” Annie told me, after reading her newest passage on Luke’s Typical Thursday Morning, which involved a lot of “inappropriate exploits,” all of which seemed suspiciously whimsical. She pretended to gag on her finger. She was standing in her underwear in front of the blower. “What a fucking freak.”

“You shouldn’t make stuff up about people like that.”

A sweaty purple sock smacked me in the back of the head. I whipped around from my desk to look at her. “Annie!”

She flopped on her back over my yellow duvet, spreading her spindly limbs like a willow tree or the little veins that crept along her narrow chest. A shadow lurking behind the drawn shades of Luke’s bedroom caught my eye. “You shouldn’t make shit up about people, it’s not fair.”

She shrugged and tossed her notebook over her face. “Truth is boring.”

She peeked at me from the top of her musty pages. We both burst out laughing, nearly crying at the hilarity of our own seriousness. We went through half my mom’s old disco records that day, giggling at every skip and scratch, dancing extra sexy for our audience of one from across the alley.

One night, Annie and I went to a houseparty. It was July, and that familiar blanket of heat was stifling. Summer parties were awful—the heat of bodies packed together made everything more severe. People got angry, makeup melted, everyone stank. Annie was pissed it was too hot to wear her hair down. But after all it was summer, and what else is there to do but drink? We definitely were not about to praise God.

I think we were seniors, maybe juniors in high school—but anyway, it wasn't weird for us to be there. It was weird that Luke was. He was two years ahead of us in school, so he'd graduated by then. It wasn't uncommon that kids stayed at home after high school, taking jobs at the library or trailer repair shop instead of seeking higher education. College was actually frowned upon. Annie once told her parents she was going to be a lawyer after we'd watched *Legally Blonde* at a sleepover, and they laughed at her. It just wasn't our culture—not that our town had any. If you hadn't already dropped out of high school, you got to look at that hard-earned diploma stuck to your mom's fridge every morning after waking up in the same twin bed you'd slept in since birth. The kids who graduated became kind-



of-adults, and while they were still in town, they mostly stayed away from the teenagers. There had to be some sense of a line between us all. That's why we were shocked to see Luke that night.

He was sweaty, bent over a beer pong game, light stubble poking through a head full of sunburn. When we walked into that potent wall of body odor, body heat, and teenage hormones, I was complaining to Annie about the sweat gathering under my boobs.

"There's, like, no cure," I whined. "I'm so tired of it."

She spotted him first and laughed. "What the hell."

I followed her line of sight and started laughing. I made a sound like "ew" and pulled on her arm to tug her back out the door. "Let's just go."

She looked at me, eyes wide, lips slowly spreading across her face. Color stained her mouth and I could see the sweat tracking down her temples. She was one of the few who kept trying to wear makeup despite the heat. Whenever I asked her why she insisted on it, even though she knew it would melt off her skin, she reminded me that all women who have any sense of class have a "signature look." She looked a little demented to me.

“We are not leaving!” she laughed, resisting my pull.

I sighed and groaned. “I don’t want to hang out with him here, he’s so weird.”

She flopped her lip down in a pout. Suddenly, she pulled me into her bird-like body, squeezing me in a tight hug. Our skin squelched audibly. We breathed each other in. She smelled like pineapple and her mom’s gin. “Then don’t.”

She was so much stronger than she looked. “What?” I croaked. I could hear her heartbeat—it was actually racketing against her ribs, like it was angry and trying to escape.

With a smile in her giddy voice and the determination of a good American redneck, she whispered into my slick hair, “I’m going to ask him for a smoke.”

I don’t really know why she was so set on talking to Luke. My mom always said it was because he was in love with me and Annie couldn’t live with the fact that I had something she didn’t. I wouldn’t call what Luke felt for me “love,” but then again, my mom is homegrown from our fishbowl of a town and thinks like all those other moms. My mom said a lot of things, speculating for



hours about why on God’s Green Earth, Annie stopped talking to me after that night in July.

Everyone had speculations. Mrs. Fitch was certain she got pregnant and ran off to have an abortion—“Girls like that always do. Take the easy way out of this, take the easy way out of that. Figures.”

Sometimes I would hear girls whispering loudly about Annie, behind bookshelves at the library or over blueberry muffins at the cafe, throwing tales amongst themselves, adding an embellishment here, an exaggeration there each time they vollied it back.

I actually once asked Luke about that party. I ran into him, physically, in the supermarket last year. I was visiting from college, feeling nostalgic for the slanted cement floors and sticky atmosphere of the bakery; he was stalking along the butcher’s counter. He told me about his new job as an agricultural salesman and the classes he was taking at the community college three towns over. We stared at each other in the canned foods aisle for about an hour. When I brought up that July he turned redder than that sunburn he’d had. I wondered if he was thinking about Annie and me in my bedroom; then again, that may have been another of Annie’s

tales. He recalled her asking for a “smoke,” how he had laughed at her for calling it that, and how the lipstick crinkled around her lips when she spit in his drink. Then she’d left.

“Have you heard from her at all?” He seemed curious, almost like he was concerned for her. Annie would have laughed at me if she were here right now. Some part of me felt like she was, like her shadow was just around the aisle, nestled into a cloud of Wonder Bread. Like her bony arm was digging against mine.

My skin pricked with sweat. “No, I haven’t.”

Luke sighed. “She was a weird one.” He looked a lot older now.

I snorted at him without thinking. “She wasn’t the weird one.”

He eyed me. I snapped my mouth shut. With his head tilted slightly, his brows crawling together, his lips snaking away from his teeth, he grinned.

We stared at one another.

A knife wailed on its sharpener. An oven timer chirped. Rickety cart wheels groaned somewhere. It made my teeth hurt.

“Annie was the weird one,” Luke said, frankly.

I think a lot about that night.



Especially with all that time I had to spend inside because of that ceaseless, godawful rain. The summer of 2002 in New York City was dreadful and wet and stinky, and reminded me of Annie’s miraculous koi fish STD. Everything in New York reminds me of her. All that smoke and smog and glamor chokes me like the heat of our hometown. Sometimes I have a moment of tired, novel cliché and I swear I see her disappear around a corner, but when I run after her, it’s just another girl walking too fast.

I can’t decide how I feel about that summer, or the savage heat of my dusty childhood, or the rain washing everything in cold, sweet water. My mom always said that rain was God’s gift of a fresh start. She loved the part of Sunday Sermon that preached God’s presence in nature. Said it was gratifying and gave her purpose. Maybe that’s why she stayed in our town after high school, why she turned into a salmon and raised her kids there, why she endured that heat, that cracked earth and all those old people dropping dead—God would bless her with the rains of another chance. Those Sunday services kept my mother going, just like everyone else in town.

But Annie and I would have been

halfway to the creek by then, a pack of cigarettes smashed into her back pocket, a magical walking stick brandished before her. Our sweaty bare feet sliding off our bike pedals, our shoulders flaming like ambulances, red and blistered proudly from the sun, our screams ferocious and wild, from the tops of our lungs, ringing into every dusty corner of our ghost town. No one around to tell us no.



You're in the Corner Again and It's All Drama

HELEN RUCKELSHAUS



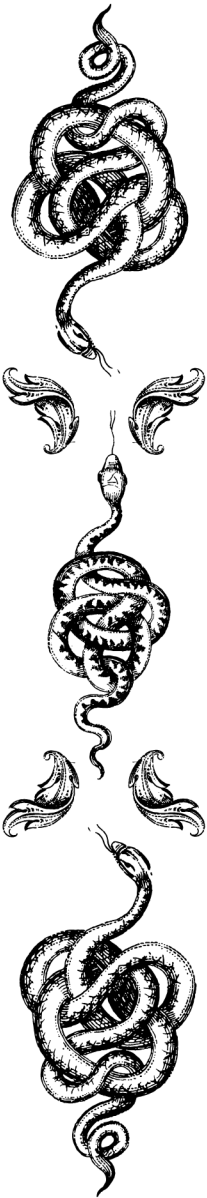
It's all girl drama, but still
The final
The expanded
You earthly thing
You egg

Let's liven up the party, go all about it that way
With pomalons and
princess type

This will be the final one
The party of all time
The great web
the glass ball

The night of it all
The whole thing
Go about that way





Strut it up, front like that
Magnolias, neanderthals, the best

She said my chin was a rose
she wanted in on it all night

You've forgotten the names of the cats
and the uncle
and the grandma
and maybe the town
but you haven't thought on it too hard

Let's say sorry first, get it out of the way
Do it up
Dress the part

Say the word saxophone,
There are girls in there
Brunettes

The jasmines
They are always fish
Lucky girl fish

Billy said they love you, you know
They love you like they would wait it out because they don't
want you to think that they don't care

So it's not really love, it's not honest, it's self-effacing
You're in the corner again
and it's all drama
It's all girl drama, but still
Hair up hair down
all beauty, all noticed

Let's win the race, full front, all out demolish the game
Hack it, rig it out

There are things in your nightgown
There are thieves in the crowd
Summoning Buddha and the goons

Oh christ! oh other lords!
please give me that rockin bod
Give me that fresh cut nettle
That boy spider
Who walks on his tongue

This is the bed
This is the end, the final notice
This is the last ticket



About Kiki's Risk It All

HELEN RUCKELSHAUS



She didn't mean it
I want to be good by you, she said
I want to be elegant for you

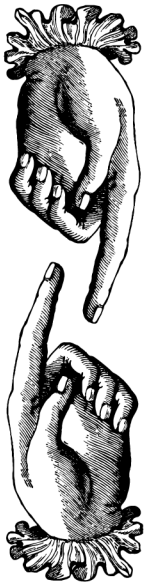
Walking through my mind I see a tall garden
I see a king I see a long open
street filled with

strange boys wearing different things
like hipster belts and
hair.

Place your hands on the belly, girl
Tell me I am fat and rich
Tell me I've got the shine

I want my body to go to the moon
she said this when she died
when she reached up and everything



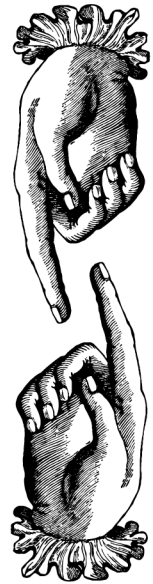


Kiki didn't mean it
she soared that thing, her ship
and she, a hungry man

She said I like the way you do things
I like the way you sing and the way
you look at buildings and

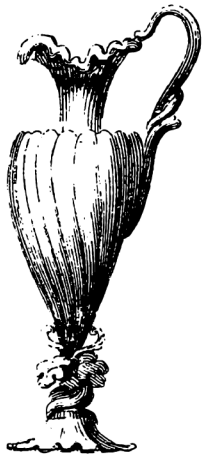
the way you put things
like ideas and butter and weight
She said my soul was a bat

She said she wanted to get free
she went out to the street with boots
to cry and to be the fire part of fire



A Sketch of Crazy Drunken Lesbian Poets

YIWEI ZHAO



Bastille Eve should be pounced with crazy elegance
when poetry, frenzied, or might not, miserably

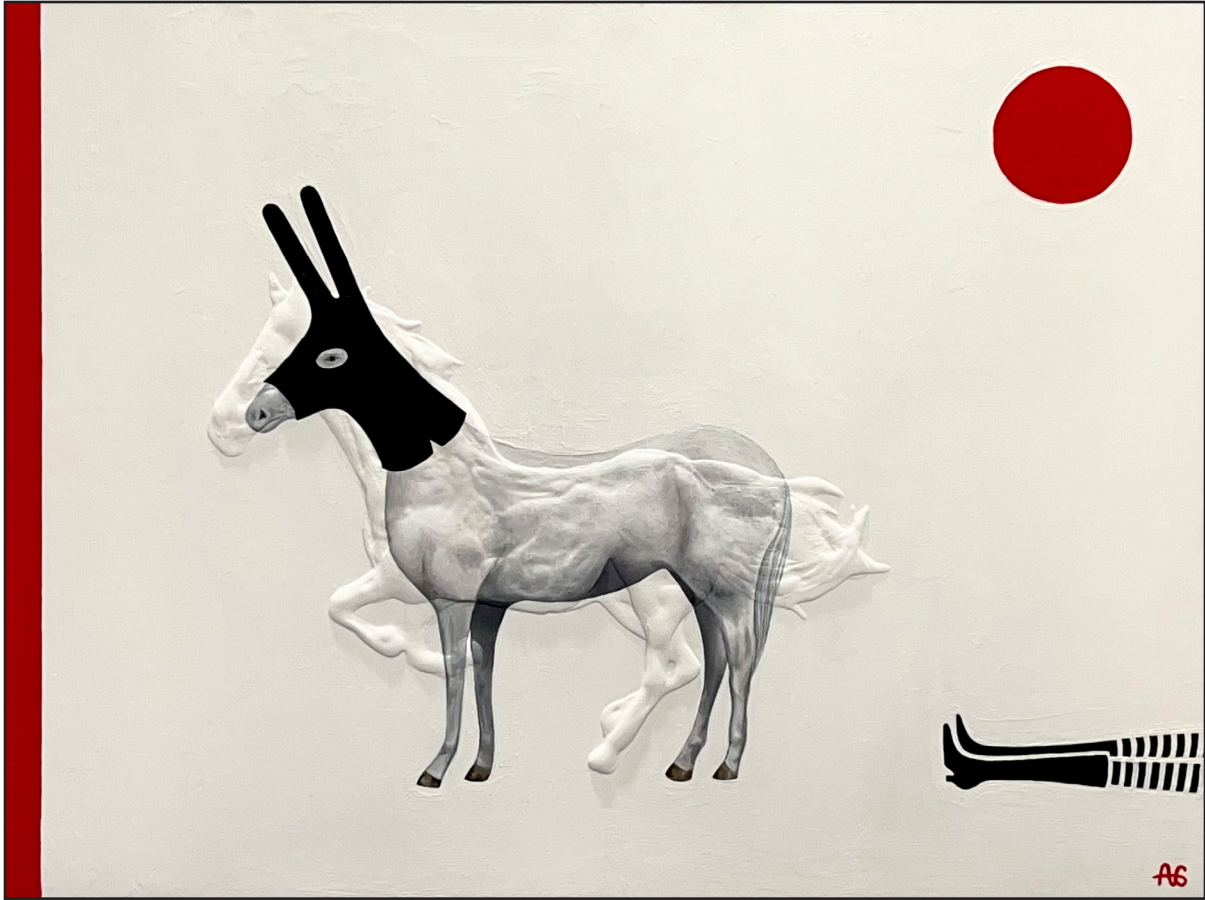
ended up leaning on a balcony, lips the luxuriant
blossoms on the tip of the lowering branch,
burning of summer's pomegranate,
to kiss every lovely woman passing by, under their boughs



Honghua 1, 2023

BENJI HSU





Jockey

ADISON GAMRADT

The Subway

ELLA ANDERSON

Walking down Canal Street feels like a game of bumper-cars. I'm following the rules, remembering what my mother once told me, as if preparing me for something: walk fast and to the right. I take the 6 train uptown to class and the E to get to work. Sometimes I'll attempt the Q on Centre St, where there's always someone holding the emergency gate open. The first time I rode a subway, not *the* subway, but the one in DC, I cried. I was eight, and my mom took me to visit my great-aunt Marti during April break. It was morning rush hour, and my four-foot self got squeezed between



a woman's backside and everyone else. Then the woman took a seat, and in a Southern accent told me, *it's alright, baby, stop those tears.*

Growing up, I had a fear of going places. Bikes, cars, planes, trains, ferries, canoes. My dad died mountain biking when I was six. He dropped me off one August afternoon at a playground in New Brighton, Pennsylvania, to play with my grandma, Marti's sister, and two policemen returned in his place.

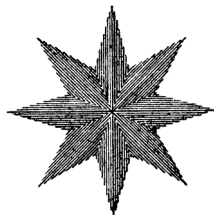
I remember sitting in the back seat of my grandma's car in a booster, peering through that little space between the headrest and the body of the passenger seat. It was empty

now, and there was my grandmother at the wheel, paralyzed in silent fear, for me, for herself, or for her son, praying, maybe, I'm not sure.

A therapist once asked me to draw what I felt about it all, or how I envisioned this loss. At six or so, I could only bring myself to draw my dad biking across a bridge. A little further down the drawing, he had simply fallen into the rapids below, and washed away.

After that, I felt like the risk of movement was too much. Sensory emotion took over; if emotions could be physical, this was it. Everything felt like it was going too fast all the time, like the world was continually on fast-forward. When I told my mom that everything was going too fast, all she could think to say was, *close your eyes*.

The other day at work, a Swedish bakery in Chelsea, I was steaming milk for a cappuccino, making a hot chocolate and an oat milk matcha, and giving a man a hot water refill—and in the corner of my eye, a woman stepped too close to me. *There's no saffron buns, you told me there would be at this time*, and I told her how very sorry I am, that I just don't have control over any of the baked goods, any of this really,



she told me she walked all the way from Grand Central, I shouted, very quietly under my breath, *take the subway!*

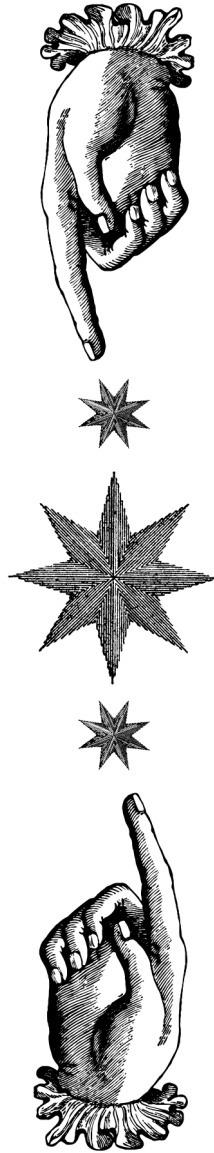
In the seventh grade, my aunt Janny, an optometrist, checked my eyesight because I was having migraines nearly every day. She told me that my eyes were out of alignment and focused at different levels. She teetered her hands up and down, like someone telling you to turn the volume down a notch. She told me my eyes were constantly working against one another. One eye had always been trying to catch up to the other, working twice as hard to keep up or stay in-sync, like puppet strings with different puppeteers. She recalled that when I was a baby, I'd been passed back and forth between her and my aunt Renee, also an optometrist, looking into my giant blueberry eyes searching for something wrong. Apparently deciding nothing was, but she can see it all now. This is why sometimes I wear glasses, there are prisms in the glass, to help the weak one out. The first time I wore them I fell down in the carpeted hallway of my middle school.

Angels

I live with six strangers. A filmmaker, a Russian girl from Miami—who wore a full bright red tracksuit to our first suite meeting and told us all she “actually wanted to kill” the last girl she lived with, Evvy, who lets me in when I’m locked out, one whose name I can’t remember, and two of God’s extremely devoted children: Crystal and her roommate Natasha, who both live across from me. The other day, I walked down our empty hallway to my room, and realized our two doors facing one another read, “B.C.”

Crystal was watching *High School Musical* one night in the kitchen, and she sang along like she was at church choir. I joined in. She’s a theater major, so she comes home at 11 p.m. most nights and starts making dinner. She has vegan tendencies and she always saves some for Natasha.

Crystal hosts Bible group. Records videos about Jesus I can hear through our cheap flex walls. There’s one about why you should never have sex in college—she made some good points—another about finding peace, and another about how “your body is not your own, so it’s really not your choice.”



She told a commenter on the video who disagreed with her that they’d been sent by the devil themselves to curse her. My stick of full-fat butter looks sacrilegious there in the fridge we share together, next to her vegan substitute—but it’s my body.

Somehow we cohabitate with each other, little bits of each other, at least. But if she knew any real bits of me, would she set my room on fire or say a prayer? I don’t know, but she calls me “love” in the hallway and I bring her bread from the bakery. And, when my heeled boots echo in our hallway late at night, void of any shared home furniture, she doesn’t say a word. And when I can’t sleep because she’s on the phone, or watching a prayer, or late-night talking with Natasha, I don’t say a thing. I just turn on the air conditioning.

I ran out of class one Monday night this fall, onto West 4th Street. I headed down Mercer, alone on a quiet-cold sort of night, when there’s no one in front of you and you can just close your eyes and take in the fresh playground air. I tried to call my mom, then one friend, then another. No one answered. I looked up at vine plants spilling over the

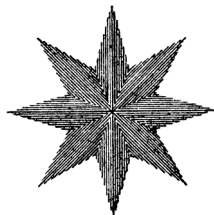
NYU housing terraces; a young kid was playing on one of them and looked down at me. I did a twirl, then flapped my arms around like wings.

I walked around the sidewalk grate, passed the bookshop with neon lights, and glanced in the small cafe I used to have dreams about, then stopped at the corner by the Angelika and waited for my turn to get to the other side of Houston Street.

I recently discovered that I can buy a sweet potato for \$1.29 at Target, and that can last me two days if I pick the right potato, either two breakfasts or two dinners, but I needed ketchup.

Inside and down the Target escalator, with a potato in my hand, I stood staring at the different bottled spreads: Heinz, Hunt's, Target brand, when I was approached by a figure. She had long fawnish hair and was one of the other distinctly non-Californians in my Poetry Writing class on Monday nights, where I had just come from. Had she been walking behind me this whole time? Or far ahead: passed me when I'd closed my eyes?

Ella? She was standing on my right glaring up at the different kinds of mayo, percentages of price points differentiating each of them. We



talked too quickly to one another, like you do when you're making a friend, we discovered we live in the same NYU building, she asked me if I was walking home, I said yes, and she proposed her regular route to me, as if I knew street names, *I just walk down*, I told her. We walked out onto Broadway and it had begun pouring rain, the quiet-cold had turned to a scrambling, frenzied chaos: people trying to get cabs, or checking license plates for their Ubers, make-shift rain coverings blocking everyone's line of vision. In all the slosh, she popped open an umbrella.

We talked about our small towns, and how it's not as hard coming here as everyone assumes, then we laughed at our white lies, the ones we tell ourselves to feel more at home. I was wearing my dad's canvas jacket with a corduroy collar, and the right sleeve had become completely soaked on our walk back to 80 Lafayette, but I didn't dare move. I was sheltered here in a stranger's polka-dotted rain-resistant halo.

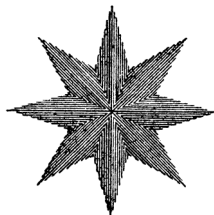
Next class we left with one another. She proposed a Target run once again, but I didn't need anything. We slowly walked by the entrance.

She looked torn, but she said she'd be fine, she had eggs at home, and we continued walking. We talked like old friends, unfiltered in some strange way you can only ever do with a stranger, but that's what she was. She skips the elevator because she lives on the third floor. I learned she's a senior and I probably won't be seeing her much after poetry class. We never returned to Target together.

Coffee Shop Questionings

I'm sitting in a coffee shop and there's a woman with big sunglasses out front who I can see through the floor-to-ceiling window, instructing her boss, employee, maybe lover, to write in his notebook and sip the coffee for a photo. She flails her hand around, air-writing, telling him to pose with his pen, the mini-notebook, and of course his cappuccino, like a writer. She then directs him sternly through the glass once more, beckoning him outside. They dawdle at the corner of Walker and Broadway, ultimately deciding to get a shot of him walking across the street and around the corner.

I think about the guy who asked me to take a picture of him in the alleyway alone yesterday, and I'm



reminded of the colossal image of this place, even the alleys, just even existing here is appealing, maybe even addictive. A girl just walked by the same window I'm watching the street from, with an NYU Bookstore bag, and her two parents. Sometimes I feel out of place here, like this is something people pay for, and I'm just pretending I do too.

It's Thanksgiving Day. I stand quietly around the kitchen island in my mom's friend's house, in upstate New York. The room is filled with New Yorkers who have second homes in the Catskills.

I keep hearing the phrase: *I grew up working class, so I can say that.*

A woman with short gray hair and a snappy vest starts questioning me as I reach for a fancy piece of cheese that smells strange, but tastes complex, rich, and interesting. *Who are you? You haven't told us anything about yourself.*

I'm her daughter, I point to my mom.

Are you a painter? All of the people here are either painters or partners of painters, or gallery owners in Chelsea, or professors in painting, drawing, and the like.

No, I'm a student, I say, a phrase I've become so fond of, a phrase that

allows me to claim no responsibility over what I do, or create.

Of what?

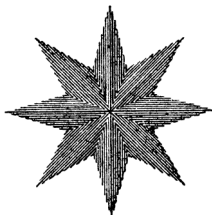
English, Writing, Journalism . . . and my voice trails and trills slowly down an octave or two. I change the order and the breadth of the statement based on the room I'm in, and that night I picked the wrong order. *You're in the wrong house now, aren't you?* she says. She starts to laugh.

My mom, speaking for me now, says, *she's got a good eye, though.*

Back

My mother does not like to drive into New York, and I never got my driver's license. So, when I came to NYU, we took the bus. I've taken the same bus every time I've gone home or come back to New York. It's much more relaxing. The drop-off point is at East 42nd, between 2nd and 1st Ave. To the east you see the river and across it, a sign that reads Long Island City, reminding me where I'll be stopping next: Long Island, Maine. Not Long Island, New York, far from it, but where I grew up. This bus goes one place and that is back.

On that first bus ride freshman year, they played *The Great Gatsby*



with Leonardo DiCaprio on all the mini TV screens that are placed every few rows. I remember watching without any sound as Daisy Buchanan cried in her pearls, as Gatsby tried to build and buy some place in that world. Sooner than later we were driving through the mile-long cemetery and New York came into view for me.

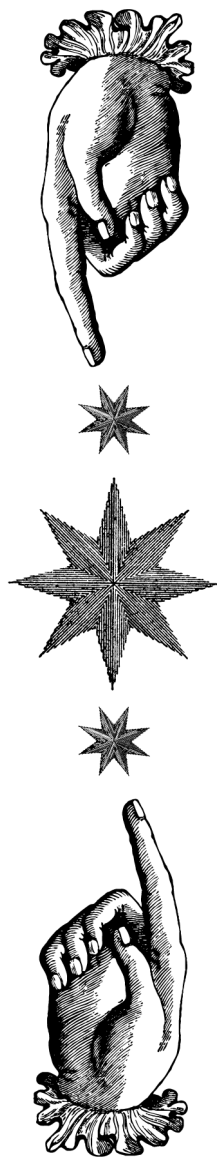
I'm on the bus now, again, stuck in bumper-to-bumper. Just until we leave this state. The sun set before five and the engine's humming loud, like my air conditioner. I'm drifting back and forth like the luggage below. The trees turn to lines. I lean my head painfully against the glass window and drift further and further from New York.

I'm woken up by a jolt of the bus brake, truck stop in Connecticut. I look out at I-95 where lines of sharp red tail lights point one way, white and gold headlights flow the other, we've replaced the people with cars, and I feel scared again.

I got on a bike in New York for the first time this year. At home, I bike every day, when the weather permits it. Long Island, Maine is three miles long, marked in thirds

by hills. I don't remember when or where movement changed for me, but I ride down those hills no hands now. Maybe it's gradual.

One night a little over a year ago, my old roommate, Lucy, took me to a party in Brooklyn. She offered to pay for the Uber there, as neither of us knew how to take the subway then, we were freshmen. When we left that party, she wanted to take an Uber back, priced at about sixty dollars. She mimicked me when I said the subway was only five minutes away, she drank too much, her cheeks red. She rolled her eyes, *take the train if you want to take the train*, without a second thought I walked away with my arms crossed, in no direction in particular, then turned a corner and found an entrance to the red line, glowing in a shade of soft honey. The train that night, early morning, was nearly empty. Only a few nurses in scrubs sat beside me so I closed my eyes and rode the subway home alone.





Untitled

IRIS ERWIN

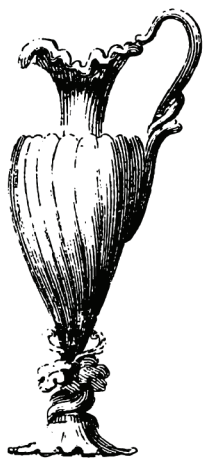


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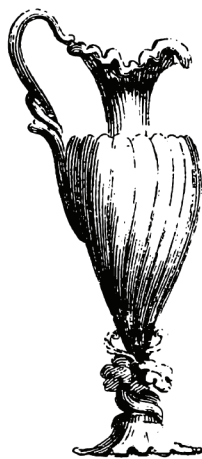
出去 (To Go Out)

HAZEL MA



窗户有一种力量，消解我们对禁闭的着迷。
那滑落的太阳，你无法钓捕——它好像一只受伤的鸟，从空中扑腾凌落，烧灼到你。当大地的熔浆涌起，弓箭在墙壁上颤动，打猎来的鹿角逐渐粉粹。你踏过地板，它硬过泪。行走出去，是为了停歇于寻找的满足？将远处的北斗星从自己的锁骨里拔出。门框在注视下融化，巢穴里只剩湿嗒的志气。捧起脸，对照镜子里掩埋的苦难。

雪地冷得缓慢，它使麻痹的室居者苏醒。





The window has a kind of power, to dispel our obsession with confinement.

You cannot fish the gliding sun—like a wounded bird, it flutters and falls from the sky and scorches you. When the lava hidden in the earth swells up, the bow and arrow quiver on the wall, and your hunting prize the deer horn gradually pulverizes. You step across the floor; it is firmer than tears. Do you walk out just to rest in the satisfaction of a search complete? Pluck out the distant Big Dipper from your own collarbone. The doorframe melts under your stare, and there is only wet morale left at the nest. Hold up your face and check against the mirror buried distress.

The snowfield cools down slowly, awakening the numbed indwellers.





Vision

JENNIFER QIAN

On Drying

BENJAMIN GALLOWAY

Dad once told me that when Oakland caught fire, the eucalyptus exploded. Now, the trees strip their bark like the tendrils of their leaves and before it turns to mulch, the subtle cracks underfoot become something insidious. Their trunks bear the pressure of a foreign coast, as the fog does not penetrate them with moisture that makes soil soft. In my adolescent mind, the canopies above me become firecrackers, and the wrinkled stems in my palms with their leaves torn away were matches.

The eucalyptus, in the manner that it has crowded the hills of

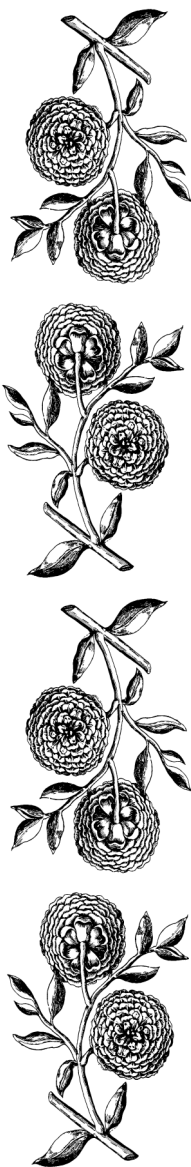


the northern California coast, has demonstrated its ability to occupy the land. And yet, in instances of disruption—or catalysts—like the fires that swept Oakland in the fall of 1991, its unnaturalness in a foreign landscape becomes abundantly apparent. It is as if the trees have proven to their new world their ability to be residents but unfriendly neighbors to the environment that hosts them. Even after six generations spent residing along the bay, there remains a taint in my mind of how this land came to be mine and how to reconcile my choice to remain a part of it. To love and be critical of the only place

you will ever really know is a great American disillusionment.

My tongue recoiled at the pressure of the raw ice plant sapping the saliva from its place. It is a game: how long can I hold the plant to my mouth before there is nothing left to swallow? How long before my cheeks beg for moisture and the leaves beg to be returned to the ground? The dog loves the scratchy feeling of ice plant through his coat. Lolling on his back, he twists and undulates to embed the saltiness of the water and let the sand fall from his tightening skin.

There is a classic saying that goes along with having grown up within reach of the coast; it's something along the lines of the ocean always being a part of you. I can't say that I abide by this or take even the slightest advantage of the Pacific's presence in my life. The cold water makes me shrink back. Yet I hate the feeling of my hair unthickened by dry, saltless air; my sense of time relies on the sun's final set into that ocean; I am deeply distrustful of seafood in the Midwest. And when I think of the ocean, by no means is it an image of anything reminiscent of a travel brochure. Rather, I see the battering of waves upon rocks that turn to smooth Martian crags, kelp clinging to submerged cement, the



opaque enclosure of fog hovering over dark water, or the misty image of the outlines of the Farallon Islands whose silhouettes seem so rare their existence is in constant question.

It is hard to reconcile the enormity of the Pacific lapping at my heels as if taunting the view of ever-changing land. It feels as if we are bound to the ocean's call; as if we feed it with our irreparable behaviors as it rises. We are at fault for having the seas rise, producing a grander and grander body that can no longer feed itself. And we still let fires dance on the edge of the swollen ocean, neither able to contain the other. Just like the childish game of pressing ice plant to one's tongue until it becomes arid, the human behavior that produces toxins that make the land destitute is a game filled with malice.

I think about what it is like to choke on smoke. To feel the aberration of raw, gritty air in the back of my throat and stinging my eyes. When the sun sits high but has hardly risen, there is beauty in the orange lozenge that has dripped onto and obscures the world. Yet it tastes like something industrial, like something I've been running from only to realize it is of my own making. And now, it clings like dry

skin in the corners of my lips and tears at my cuticles.

Corn lilies shrivel like flowers hung by clothespins to dry, skunk cabbage turns to husks before I ever make it outside in the summer, pussy paws rise in the day and sulk in the evening. The velvet flowers cling to granite as I make the point to step over them. Nothing that has done the job of keeping the mica in the rocks company for so long should be disturbed. I am no longer young and have to look up to see my mother. Yet the tall grass by the spring can tickle my collar bone and if it were not for the top of her head I would lose sight of her on the trails run by dogs.

Can one find beauty in a landscape so altered by fire and drought that life struggles to grip its drying soil? Upon writing about my home I am choosing to detail moments of living in conversation with nature, and minimal moments with the people who are always around me. I could write about the shadows cast by glimmers of light that split the gingerbread trim of Victorian houses, and the immeasurable time I spent on buses in refusal of getting a driver's license. I could write about those obvious reminders of human existence. For there are any number of stories that would serve



as microcosms of my experience in the world in terms of interactions with people. Yet, instead, what feels translatable to the page to describe the mark I see of people on my life is what may feel uncommon: bearing witness to the drying of the natural world around me.



Untitled

IRIS ERWIN

Dressing the Border

SAMRA ADHANOM

For most people, the US–Mexico border is distant and misunderstood, a movie set that exists for political battles. Growing up in southern California, the border is physically close, but that doesn’t remedy the confusion. It is simultaneously an instigator of hope, pain, anxiety, and fear. As a child, when I heard stories of my aunt crossing the border, I imagined a line drawn in the dirt. One side being the US, the other Mexico, and you can leap between the two like a game of hopscotch. I saw her large sunglasses and flowy silk dress blowing in the wind as her pointy boots crossed the line, luggage

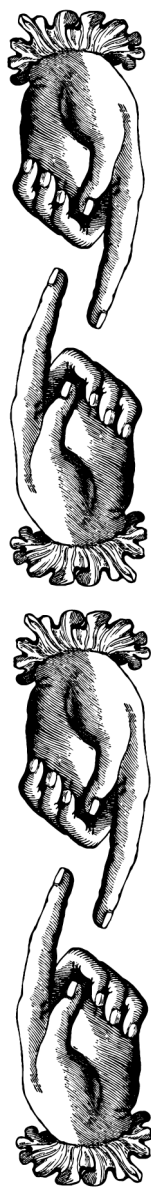


leading her abroad. When I grew old enough to replace this scene with the real story, I embarrassingly couldn’t conjure another image. I couldn’t picture my aunt back then in a way that didn’t resemble the glamor I associated her with.

My mother got the idea for my aunt to come through Mexico from her co-workers. Working food service in Los Angeles, crossing the border was as frequent a discussion as the banality of a shift. Wiping tables, picking up your cousin from Tijuana. So, the story was always told to me with the same casualness. In between tasks, in the car, over the phone. My mother never stopped to

tell it. You don't stop for ubiquity, and this experience was the equivalent of high school prom for many immigrants living in southern California in the 1980s.

I attribute the rest of this casualness to the fact that my aunt's journey to America doesn't carry the pain of my mother's or the seamlessness of my father's. My mother's story comes in splices, as if her mind only gives small bits to not overwhelm—a white shirt suddenly consumed by a small circle of red, sandals flipping and flopping under the desert sun, leaves hiding her head while planes circled above. Such painfully youthful splices. My father's story was always told to me succinctly with a frustrating lack of detail, and through the words of my mother, like most things about him. Left Eritrea. Flew to Italy. Flew to America. That is the extent of my knowledge. I have no idea if this is actually how it went, but I stopped prying for emotions, afraid that my inquisition may be the result of my own selfish desire for a story rather than actual concern. My aunt's journey serves as a palate cleanser. It washes away the taste of pain and confusion left by the stories of my parents. My family recites it with an air of humor paired with subtle comedic jabs to poke fun at



the way her experience epitomizes her personality—booking a nice hotel in Chihuahua along the way on my mother's card and arriving in Tijuana with two large suitcases in hand. “Only she would do that,” we say, laughing at the absurdity of choosing clothing over safety. Only she would not be willing to compromise her closet.

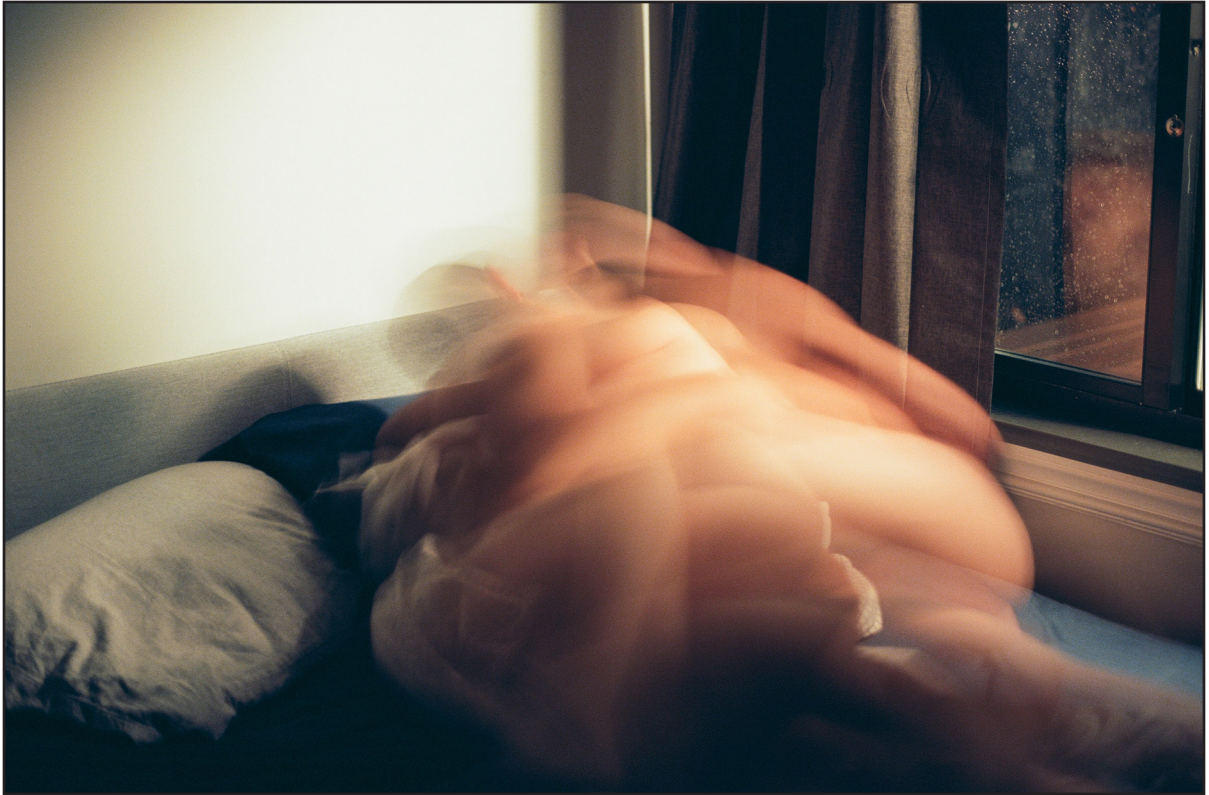
Before arriving in Mexico my aunt had been in Italy for a year and had amassed a collection of clothing that she carried with her (although, knowing her, clawing might be the more accurate verb). Her road to Tijuana was bumpy but in the way that children's movies are, where you know that everything will end up okay in the end. I like the twists and turns, they don't leave me holding my breath ready to grieve the person sitting next to me like my mother's stories often did. I've always been aware of the selfishness of my affinity for my aunt's story over my mother's, a palatable level of pain, but I still cannot help fixating on the humor—my aunt's face as she realized she got on the wrong flight and ended up in Chihuahua, my dad and uncle trying to squeeze all of her clothes into my mother's 1984 Toyota Corolla. Finding the funny leaves room for hope that these experiences are not solely

destructive. I hate that I do this to her story, but I will never be able to not focus on the clothing.

The picture I see when I imagine her debilitating dilemma: a small car, four passengers, and way too many clothes. I see my father's afro I only know from photos and my uncle's lanky figure. I imagine the three men deliberating about what to do with the clothing, hands swaying, voices clashing and spiking in the classic tones of Tigrinya as my aunt stands idly by. I see them relaying the news that the clothing must go and I imagine her grip tightening and heels digging into the dirt in protest. The reality of this moment is that my aunt was dressed casually, in a T-shirt and jeans, as one is when they are crossing the border, and when she heard that there was no room for her luggage her eyes began to water. I now understand that the tears weren't for the material but for the pain of being told to leave the only things that you possess. What I've learned from the stories of my family is that as a refugee home is scattered; you must learn to pick it up where you can find it—in people and things. Clothing was her consistency and hearing that there was no space for her stuff was like having a locket ripped off her chest,



cruelly targeted and intimate. They soon realized that she wouldn't part with her home and ended up leaving the empty bags behind, stuffing her clothes into the crevices of the car. I imagine dresses lingering under the seats and shoes kicking at the door of the trunk. This is the funny part. The part that makes the story easy to tell over dinner without spoiling the meal. The part that makes it as comforting as the vintage font tracing the words "The End" when a film finishes, characters riding happily off into the sunset. My aunt sat in the car squeezed with all of her clothing, crossing into America with something most refugees do not have: a full closet.



Desire 2, 2023

BENJI HSU

The Thoughts of An Incarcerated Soul

SOLOMON CORBETT

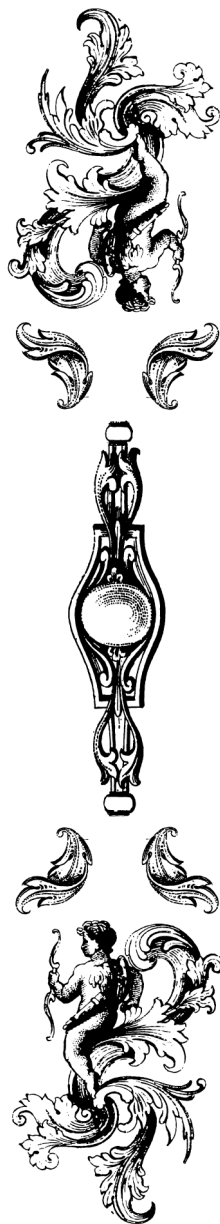
As I sit inside myself, working on me mentally, emotionally, morally, and spiritually, I am currently sitting inside what I call a modern-day plantation, in the form of one of the Department of [In] Corrections and [Un]Community Supervision facilities. And I say [Un]Community because the word *un* when used with another word is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as 1. Not: *unhappy* 2. Opposite of, contrary to: *unrest*. And to me, nothing about this environment where



I have been physically held in bondage for the past ten years is or was built to strengthen a community, nor are these facilities honestly or positively motivated to guide us as Incarcerated Individuals. In their speeches, judges, politicians, and DOCCS administration members like to broadly state, the system is about rehabilitation and reform, and individuals like myself who have made some bad choices and mistakes in our lives are placed in an environment that is suppose to help us grow and develop into

the individuals we need to be in order to be accepted back into a society we were once labeled as being a menace towards.

The core belief about the prisons that were built around New York State is that they were constructed to rehabilitate and reform individuals who committed a crime against the people and state of New York. The system cannot allow anyone who opposes the law and decides to live lawless to remain in society and interrupt the life, liberty, and freedom of law-abiding tax-paying citizens. So once you are either found guilty by a jury of your so-called peers, or you plead out to avoid a trial and possible longer sentence, you are placed in an environment where you will have to be reintegrated back into the mindset of a law-abiding citizen before you are released from your sentence and tossed back into a society that has already labeled you and cast you out. But what are we as Incarcerated Individuals actually coming home to? When we were arrested, many of us current

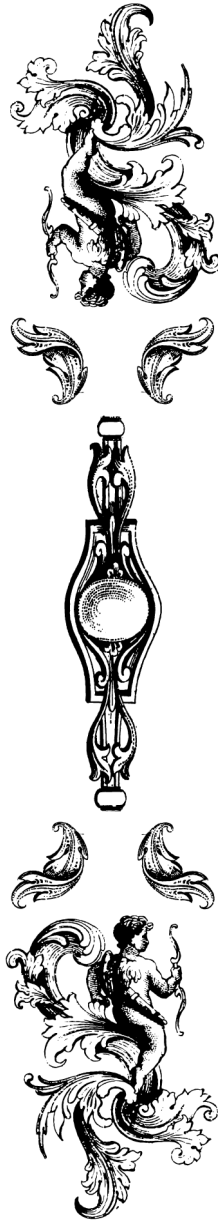


Incarcerated Individuals left an already dysfunctional family environment. Then the distances, hardships, trials, tribulations, overwhelming obstacles, and the many emotional, mental, and financial barriers us Incarcerated Individuals and our families had to endure only made the circumstances we had to face even more dysfunctional.

Whether society acknowledges this fact or not, the reality is that everyone who was involved in the incident that caused a person to become an I/I, they all become victims to the system, and they all had to face physical, financial, emotional, mental, psychological, moral, social, economic, and spiritual barriers that incarceration brings into one's family, community, and culture. We all have a story to tell; some may have a deeper, darker, and more traumatizing story than others do, but everyone's story is different. Everyone's experience is different, everyone's circumstances are different, and everyone in this world has a different view, outlook, and

purpose in this life we're all existing in. I feel like my purpose is to bring awareness to not only the struggles of Incarcerated Individuals, but also the struggles, trauma, and sacrifices everyone involved in that I/T's life has to endure. So, during this journey I've been traveling on, inside of the Department of [In]Corrections and [Un]Community Supervision and the many different Plantation Facilities I've been to, I chose to use the time I was sentenced to become a better version of my former self.

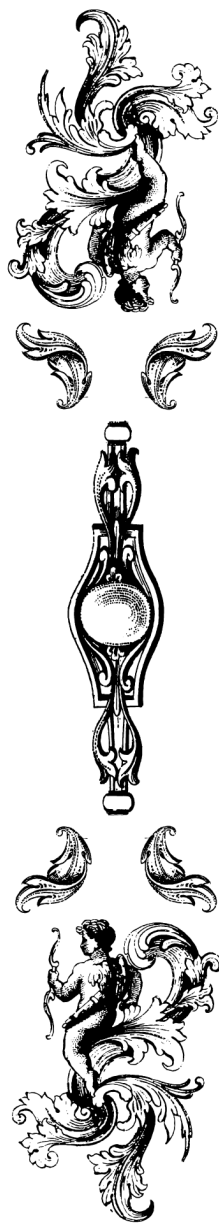
Out of the many different opportunities presented to me, all the different individuals and organizations I had the privilege of dealing with, the most important thing that allowed me to see it through was my pure will to become better as a man, a human being, and most importantly, a father. I took the steps necessary to move a step closer to reaching that goal. And I say a step closer because every day that I am allowed to rise from my mental and



spiritual cleansing process, I am being allowed to work towards continuing to do something differently in my life that I didn't get to do the day before. But I wouldn't have never been able to reach this level of consciousness and understanding if it wasn't first for my belief in myself, my belief in Allah (God) and his purpose for my life, my daughter, and most of all, the many positive people who have entered my life throughout this incarceration and given me the chance and tremendous opportunity to believe in something other than what I was brought up and programmed into believing.

I know that in this current life we're living in, where society is in complete turmoil and is being divided, everyone on this earth is not going to believe in the process of change, and the need for it. Many of us have been programmed to be content with the way our lives are and have turned out. And that is because for many of us, life has never been made easy, and I like to speak for myself and try not

to speak for other people and rationalize on how or why my life—or even their lives—turned out to be the way it did. I speak for me and only me, because no one can or will ever understand my life and why my situation turned out the way that it did. Many may be able to sympathize with me, or even have empathy for me. But no one will be able to understand why my trials, tribulations, trauma, abuse, abandonment issues, pain, experiences, and all of the many things I was forced to endure as a child shaped my reality and views on life and myself the way that they did. Because it is my story to tell, and that is the purpose of this essay titled “The Thoughts of An Incarcerated Soul”—I hope to bring some type of awareness to the forefront of a conversation that has yet to be established. And when or if that conversation begins, I hope individuals use my story as a backdrop of understanding—as in the saying “never judge a book by its cover”—that we all have a story to tell, and in order



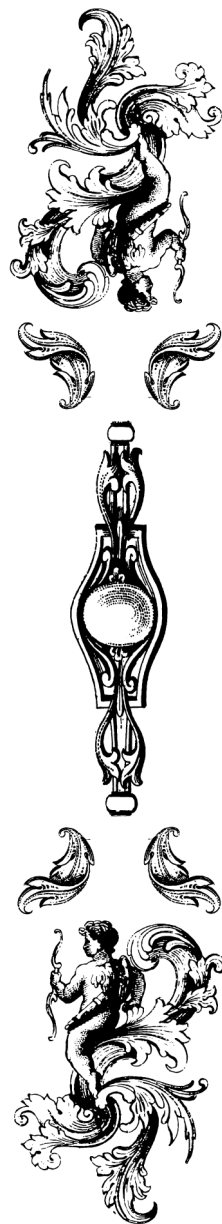
for anyone to understand how I got to this part of my story, they first have to understand where it all began. Well, here’s mine.



I was born into a difficult life as a breech baby on August 21st, 1987. I was born as a triplet to a teenage mother, who only a year earlier had had her first child, and a father who was in his early twenties, and who was at the time serving in the US Army and also dealing with demons that eventually caused him to be another statistic added to the list of Black men in America labeled as absent fathers. And his as well as my mother’s choices, actions, decisions, and mistakes that they made in their lives shaped my view on the world, and how I saw things. The era I was born into was known as the Crack Epidemic, and if anyone who is or was familiar with the effects that crack had on the many inner cities of Black America, my story isn’t that much different than that of many others who’ve

lived it, but my experience living through it is what shaped me into the person I became. My father was not in my life from what I can remember, and my mother was a Black single teenager with four kids, only a year apart, and three of those infants were all born on the same day. So now looking back at that time and what my mother had to endure, I can understand how things may have been difficult for her, but as I grew up in that time, especially as a child, my only concept of understanding at the time was that my mother was barely around, and my father was nowhere to be found.

However, when I was growing up, television gave me the concept (even though it was a false concept) of what a family was supposed to look like. But my reality and my everyday environment contradicted that concept. As a child, my siblings and me missed many meals, and barely knew what hygiene was, what it meant to be clean. We didn't know what Christmas, Thanksgiving, or any of the

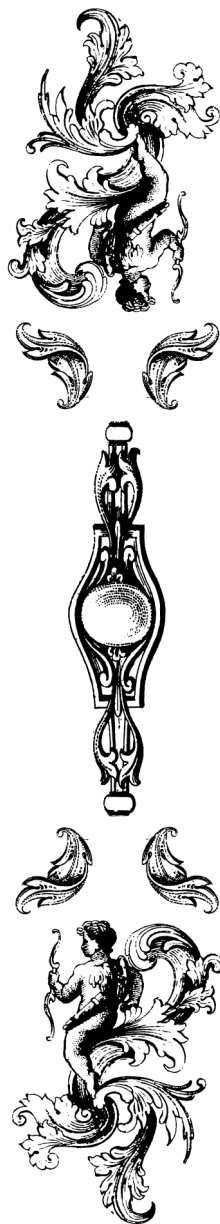


Americanized holidays felt like. We didn't go to school for a full year, if at all (according to the records from when we went into the foster care system), and we didn't know, have, or even feel a loving, caring, safe, and healthy living environment. Our views on the world were shaped by the violence, abandonment, drugs, abuse, and the many other moments in our lives that we experienced and saw growing up, either in our household or in the community around us.

Now, how can a child properly grow, function, develop, learn, explore, and become someone who is deemed important and rich in this world, when their upbringing has been plagued with one traumatic experience after another? From the age of five to twelve years old, I grew up in the Foster Care System of the nineties. If anyone is familiar with that era of time when the organization that used to govern the safety and care of the children of New York City, which was known at the time as BCW, it was the most dangerous and

traumatic time for families and especially for the children who didn't make it out of the system. Many of the children of that era who were placed in the system in the nineties—many of those my brothers and I grew up and went to summer camp with—did not make it out, due to the system's neglect on how they monitored and cared for us children, who they deemed were unsafe and in danger living with our biological parents or family members.

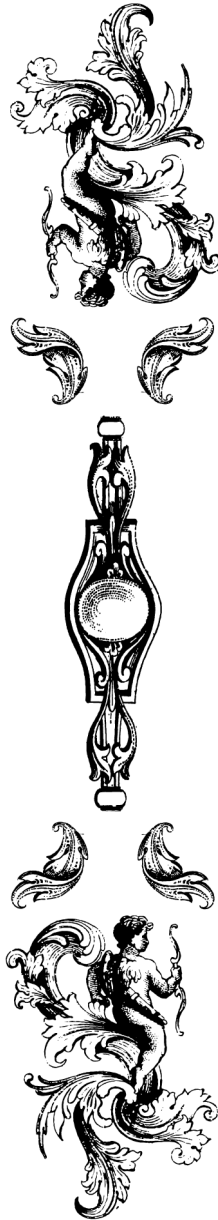
Many of the children in the foster care system in New York City were forgotten about once they were placed in a foster family's care, foster families who swore to protect, provide, care for, and love them. But for most of those children I grew up with, those foster families they were sent to only saw them as a check and benefits that would enhance their lifestyles and living conditions. You take a child from a parent who isn't deemed qualified and is unable to care for that child, and you place them in another environment where someone says that they're willing



to do so, and then that child is mistreated or worse, even dies. What made them any different than my mother? Or any of the other parents who were deemed unfit and unable to care for and provide for their children, at that time. My brothers and I were placed in two different foster homes in the six years that we were in the system, and a child's concept of family is shaped by the environment they are in. But as a child who is living in the home of a family they do not know—what do you do? How can you feel, when the only reason that you're with that family is because they are receiving financial compensation for you? How can a child possibly feel loved, wanted, cared for, and accepted, when your reality is if the money stops, you're out, if you age out, you're out? What does a child do with that reality?

I am an incarcerated parent to a fifteen-year-old young woman, who is living fatherless in a society that is governed by social media, political self-interest, hate, and negative

mindsets that only value a dollar and materialistic things over the welfare, care, and consciousness of the people it is supposed to govern. I can sympathize with today's generation, because my generation went through the same things they are facing, we just didn't have the entire world looking and still allowing it to happen. So my entire adolescence and young adulthood, my hatred and anger towards my parents has been misplaced and misused. Yet I have come to understand due to personal experience, that it was by design for me to be angry at my parents, and to hate them for how my childhood turned out. I was part of a system that was created before I was born, and through my traumatic experiences, I was being programmed to believe that I was to hate myself and everything and everyone around me. I could only become an effective agent to the system that needed me to further their agenda if I didn't know who I was or what my purpose was as a human being, and if I didn't

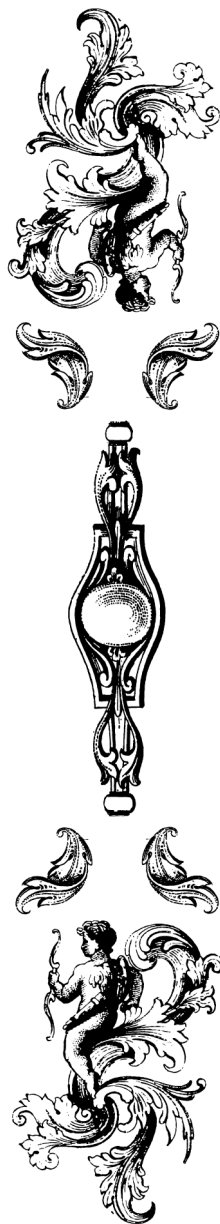


believe that there was more to life than what I already knew.

I've learned that you can't get somewhere in life if you don't know that somewhere exists. And what I had growing up is all I knew: my environment, my circumstances, my trauma, and all the trials and tribulations limited my hope and beliefs. And when you are not only told, but also shown by people who are supposed to love you and care for you that you're nothing, by hindering your growth and development as a person, they make you feel like you will never amount to anything. You start to believe that narrative, and everything that you do in life comes from that narrative you've believed. So, how can one change from who they currently are if they do not know or believe that they can or deserve to be something better? It all goes back to my purpose in life: I believe strongly that I was meant to travel down the path that I experienced in life, from my breech birth, to going to foster care, to my incarceration

and everything that came in between all of those moments. I went through all those events for a reason, and life has taught me many things throughout this journey I've traveled on, but the four most important lessons I've learned were: 1) experience is the best teacher 2) time and life waits for no one: while you're stuck in one moment, life and time are moving through another one 3) life will always give you the test, before you receive the lesson and 4) one's life is never more important or more traumatic than someone else's, everybody experiences life differently, this is why we're all different, yet we are all the same.

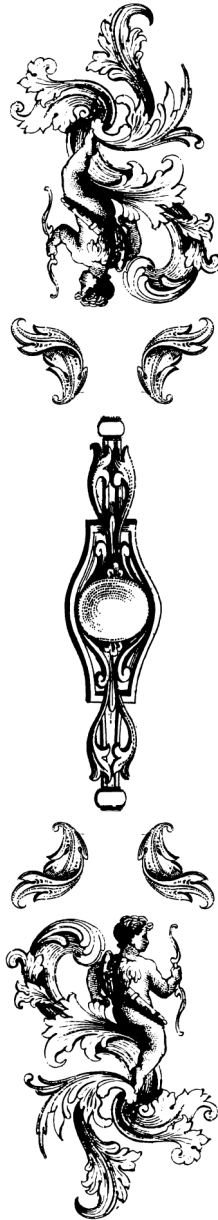
My journey towards changing had to begin with me first destroying my old self emotionally, mentally, morally, psychologically, and spiritually, in order for the process of reconstructing myself into the new person I believed I needed to be. And when I say I believe, I say that because I feel no one truly knows who they need to



be, or who they even are for that matter, right now in their life. Life shapes your character and experiences; situations and circumstances shape your actions. Everything that I've experienced, seen, lived through, participated in, done, and learned in life has made me the individual I am. Up until I was arrested on October 28, 2010, I didn't know my true self, I didn't love myself, I didn't believe in myself, I didn't trust myself, and I didn't care enough about myself to want to be better. So, how could I effectively, properly, safely, constructively, lovingly, and positively be a part of a society and live among people I didn't know and do all those things, when I didn't have it in me to do it for myself? I couldn't even do any of those things for my daughter who was a child at the time, because I was emotionally, mentally, morally, psychologically, and spiritually dead and still a child myself.



A note to the readers: No one knows what goes on in the minds of Incarcerated Individuals, and many forget that although these individuals are incarcerated, they are still human beings. We still experience the same emotions and realities as anyone else, we are just in an environment that makes it nearly impossible to express ourselves without seeming weak or looking vulnerable. Throughout my incarceration (before the HALT Act went into effect) I've spent countless months, on many different occasions in what is called the SHU (Special Housing Unit), which is an isolated area where you're locked in for 23 hours a day, 7 days a week. You are away from the population and your human contact is limited, if you receive any at all. With nothing but time on your hands to think and reevaluate your life, many incarcerated souls use it for a wide range of reasons. I chose to use it to clean out my closet. I just wanted to give the outside world a glimpse inside of an Incarcerated



Individual's soul and thoughts, and hopefully there can be a better understanding too of how we all can better serve the process of prison reform. The only way Incarcerated Individuals like myself, and those who are still striving to get there, can be reformed, is if we are truly being recognized for our reformation. Some of us are only Incarcerated Individuals because we got caught for being us without worrying about who saw us, others are Incarcerated Individuals because they were placed here by a corrupt system that didn't care if they were guilty or not, and the many others who are not Incarcerated Individuals, well I guess they were smarter than we all thought we were. But, I guess the purpose of my thoughts and why I chose to write them is to say that in life we all have to understand one thing: just because it isn't you going through it, doesn't mean it couldn't be you who's going through it. History has a funny way of removing the wool from people's eyes when it wants

them to see what it wants them to see. Just pay attention to the world around you today—what's different from twenty years ago to what's going on now? I hope my thoughts were felt; don't just feel them from an Incarcerated Individual, feel them from the man behind the label.



In My Lifetime

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON

In my lifetime, the color of my skin is my curse and my beauty.
My beauty is the actions of my heart and my heart is filled with love and hate.
Filled with love because I love my fellow man for which we stand together in
 harmony,
and uplift the human race.
Filled with hate because no matter what I do in life I will be judged by the color
 of my skin
and not for what's within.
So, is hate really up for debate? Can I change the way you think at this rate?
I don't know, is it even worth trying?
Hate is something that can be removed from one's heart if he or she reflects on a
 future of unity
and not about race or gender.
Because when it comes to the end we will all be dust and bones and bodies in a
 deep grave.
No longer around and nothing left but our legacy and deeds.
Is it enough to get us to that better place, if we choose to believe?
It's the end so does it really matter?
I guess we all will find out one day because no one exists forever.
So, in the meantime and in between time, let's find time, to get time, and benefit
 from that time
because we are running out of time.



Kellan and Ali

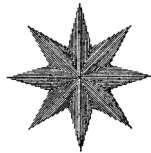
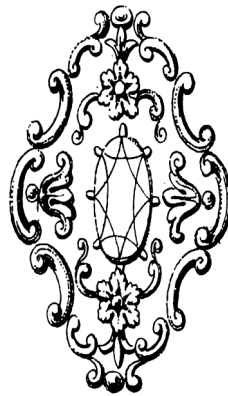
TESSA DILLMAN

My Dad and His

ABE CHABON

For some reason, my grandpa—well, probably not him, but someone—had decided it would be best for him to be buried on my birthday. I don't believe it was intentional, I was away and not dead, and deaths do rank above birthdays. You only get one. But even so, I think it would have been worth consideration. He had not died on my birthday, at least. He was not selfish.

My grandpa collected stamps, “tchotchkes.” Other things as well, but mostly stamps. He had binders full of stamps, and books about them. When I first saw the books and binders, I decided that



stamps did not deserve books, nor binders. His collection was valued somewhere between unbelievable and priceless, according to him. No one else seemed to think that. I saw the binders and books for the first time when I visited him in his apartment in Portland, Oregon with my dad. I decided to give them my own appraisal.

“This one”—it had a small president on it—“is worth over 500 dollars.” My grandfather pronounced dollars like Dollars.

Dad satisfied him with a *hmm* and a *wow* to give me enough time to search for it on Ebay.

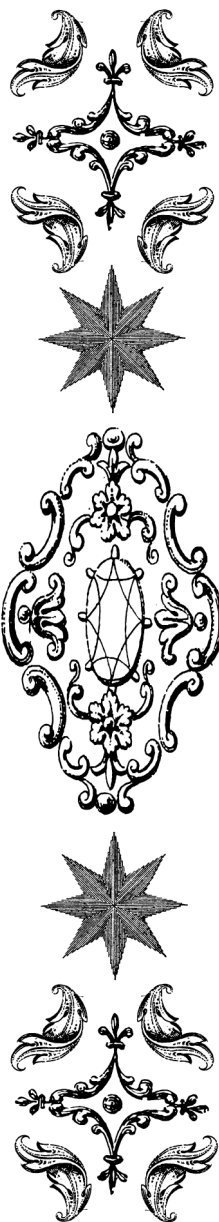
“No, it isn't.” Ebay said so, and I

told him.

“Well,” he said, flustered, “my friend, an Expert, says it is.” It is always easier to attribute a lie to a friend.

We continued on like this until he gave up. The binders looked cheap. They were split into two categories, large and gray fabric with oversized rings, and fake black beveled leather with smaller rings. But they were all binders, and they were all filled with overvalued stamps. The stamps, ranging from presidents, to national parks, to airplanes, to birds, to Olympic rings, were organized neatly in plastic sheets with small pockets designed for stamps. It was all organized well and with care, which was comforting because it suggested that maybe he believed his lie about their value, and was not trying to deceive his family. It was also discomfiting because it could mean his friend, the Expert, had lied to him.

For as long as I knew Robert Chabon, my grandpa, he was fat. He had a large belly and wide ankles. But he also happened to have a kind face. Friendly eyes, bushy eyebrows, a large nose, silver hair, and red cheeks. Also wrinkles. This is how I remember him, at least. When I looked at him when I was little, I mostly noticed his belly.



“Why are you so fat?” I asked him as a child.

He was also terrible at getting in and out of cars. He had to be helped by my dad and his other sons. One foot before the other, a heave, *someone get the walker, watchout, slow, here, oops, not too bad.*

I did like him though, quite a bit, but I did not really know him. I think it was fun that he liked to lie. And he told me he thought I was smart. And he liked me more than my siblings, I think. He had made Dad. And he always remembered my birthday, not my siblings'. Maybe that's why he chose to die a few days before it, and not on it.

He had called me on my birthday the year before he died. I think we both tried not to cry. He was sick then. He told me that he loved me, and loved my dad. He told me that he wished he had been there more consistently, and had been reflecting. But he said that he really did love me, and my dad, and was proud of me, because I was like my dad. I told him it was alright that he hadn't been around too much. My other grandparents—five of them, give or take—hadn't set high standards. I told my grandpa that my dad and I loved him, and we moved on to simpler things.

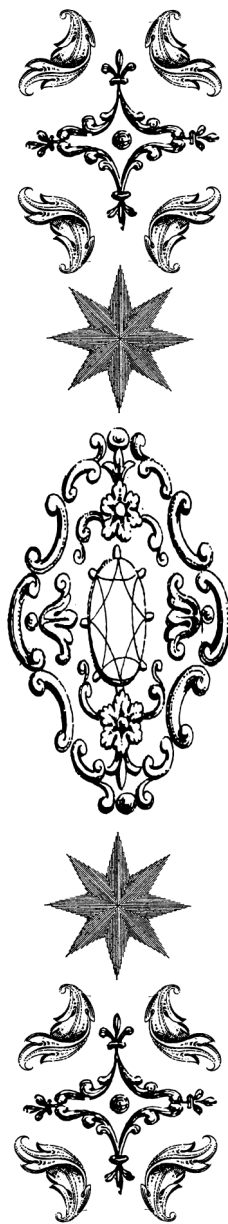
I was walking down Lewiston,

a street near my childhood home in Berkeley, when he called me. Lewiston is wide with a gentle downhill and rows of beautiful houses. Lewiston is very Berkeley: shingles, wood, large trees, stairs to the doors, potted plants, and windows with painted frames. Lewiston is also a dead end.

I really loved that phone call. He died almost exactly a year later.

The funeral was in Portland and I was in Idaho. Nobody took enough photos of it. That night I was in the dining hall of my wilderness program. It was a gray, drab room with gray, drab floors, drab blue accents, drab wood tables. When I had finished my food, dropped my dirty dishes at the dish counter, and returned to my table, the instructors brought out a cake. It was round and chocolate with thick frosting and weak candles. But it was still a cake and it was very sweet of them to bake one. They placed the cake in front of me, and I was half circled by a bunch of kids I didn't really like. When they started to sing, I started to cry. It was awkward, but my grandpa was being buried on my birthday and I couldn't be there. I felt like I deserved some slack.

I had always cried on my birthday, and it was always awkward, but a dead grandpa was a good excuse.



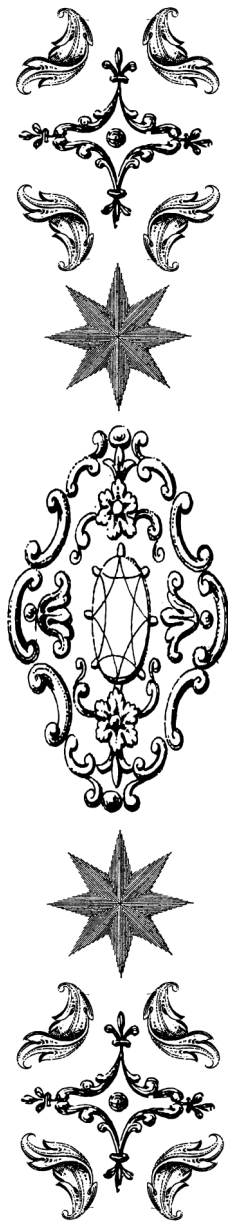
The earliest memory I have of crying on my birthday was at an overpriced Brazilian steakhouse in inner San Francisco. I was with Mom and Dad, and the waiter had just placed the skewers in front of us when I started to cry. I was embarrassed and frustrated that I wasn't having more fun. I ate my skewers, dejected and apologetic. It did not feel good to know I was growing older. I do not know why people see this as a reason for celebration—a year closer to binders of cheap stamps and being carried out of cars.

The most recent time I cried on my birthday was in my junior year of high school. I cried because I was unhappy and pretty much crazy (medically). And I had been looking for a reason to cry that wasn't just "I'm unhappy and pretty much crazy (medically)." Being miserable on my birthday was practically a tradition so I leaned into it. I watched a low-quality family video. It is not low-quality in the way a bad YouTube video is, but low-quality in a nostalgic way, like an old iPod or a worn-thin stuffed animal. In the video I am six months old. My mom films as I sit on Dad's lap. I am in a thick red sweater that swallows up

thin little wrists and stubby hands. The room is warm. Dad lifts me up in one hand holding both of my feet in his palm. I am balanced on him like a circus act, my eyes are wide and my small arms are spread. The sweater is soft. I am giggling like a baby should. Mom is at first nervous, but soon the three of us are laughing together. The video is fuzzy and the windows behind Dad are washed out with flat light. The camera shakes as Mom laughs. Dad's hands are dry and kind. I can hear Mom smiling. The walls are green and brown and the couch is red. I teeter-totter in Dad's hands as he draws me in. My mom's hair is red behind the camera. I plop back into his lap and he picks me up with both hands under my arms.

"This is my big-boy, my buddy-boy." He is noticeably young.

Being the youngest of the four siblings means I will spend the least amount of time with my parents. Inconveniently, I left home far earlier than my siblings did. My first sophomore year was spent mostly in a yurt in Idaho and a faulty cabin in Chile, with a few tents in between. I was there because I needed to be away from where I was before. But I was angry that my parents had sent me there, because I did not know that I needed to be away from



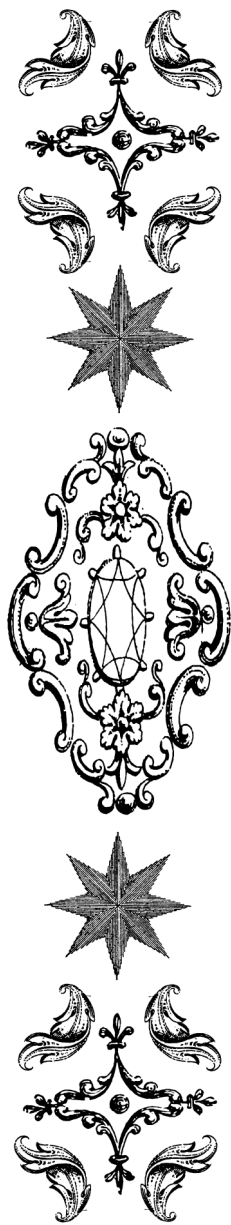
where I was before. I wish I hadn't been angry. It was a waste of time.

My second sophomore year and the two years following were spent at a red brick boarding school in Western Massachusetts. In 1934 the headmaster Elliot Speer was shot by his secret gay lover, or his wife, or an Irish groundsman. I don't really care. Western Massachusetts is right in the heart of the Opioid Belt, a pathway of miserableness, shitty endings, a few motivational stories, sad parents, corrupt doctors, even worse pharmacists, the absolute worst CEOs, and too many dead kids. *Grim*. The Opioid Belt starts at one coast of the country, touches the north and south border, and spreads across to the other coast—it is less the belt and more the whole outfit—some parts are worse than others. Western Massachusetts was one of the *worse* parts. Good place for a school.

Those three years at boarding school were interrupted by a pandemic and an episode of being unhappy and pretty much crazy, but predominantly I was away from home. I did not call my parents enough those years. Each year I went home and my parents were older. I decided there were more birthdays I hated than just my own. Unfortunately, Dad is getting old

like my grandpa did. Fortunately, he is not getting fat, and can still get in and out of cars easily.

I do not see my parents enough and they do not see me enough. But it is nobody's fault and nobody is angry. I live in an apartment with Alex, who I met about a month and a half ago. He is from New York City and his parents live here. He sees them once or twice a week. I'm jealous of that. His dad comes and takes us out to dinners. I am also jealous of that. My parents are in Maine, which is too far away. They make dinner for each other. I can picture how they look in the kitchen. I can see how Dad stirs a pot: with a short wooden spoon, unaffected by the heat crawling upwards from the stove. Or how he chops onions: quickly and rhythmically, the blade against his knuckles chop-sliding backwards. Or how he fries an egg: spooning the crackling olive oil over the yolk. I can see how he cannot stay still in a kitchen: he shifts his weight from foot to foot, dances with his shoulders and his hips to the rhythm of the music he plays. His movements are quick and small and gentle. They are movements I know well because they are movements I used to see every day. I wonder what his beard looks like and hope he doesn't lose his hair. I



am frustrated that he is getting old.

I do not want to have kids until I am wise, ready, stable, and burnt out on being young. But I do not want my kids to not really know their grandpa. Because my dad is a kind man, who cares about anyone he feels deserves care, and to him almost everyone deserves care, because he is a kind man. But, in particular, with no exception, Dad is a man who loves his family. He loves his family because he needs them, and he knows that they are better off with him. He knows this because my grandpa was not the dad he is. He will not lie to his grandchildren unless he is telling a story or teaching a lesson. He will never have to call them to tell them he is sorry that he was not there more consistently. He will always remember their birthdays. I want them to see him dancing in front of the stove.

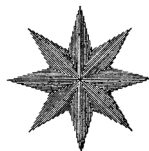
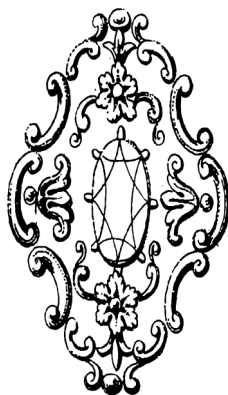
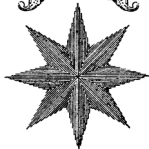
In a memory I am very young and I should be asleep. The babysitter, Brandy I think, is watching TV downstairs. My parents are not yet home from their dinner, or party, or movie. They deserve a late night. I should be asleep but I am crying. I

am crying because I am weighing the only likely possibilities. My parents have either driven into an embankment, wrapped around a tree, or been killed on the I-580 by highway robbers. I am wrong, they are soon in the driveway, and they are soon downstairs talking to Brandy—probably. In not too long, Dad is in front of my door and opens it quietly. I sit up to show that I am still awake.

“What are you still doing up?” He asks in a silly scruffy voice. He walks over and hugs me with his hand on the back of my neck and his chin on my head. “You got to go to sleep Mister.”

I imagine what will be in Dad’s books and binders. He has always loved to collect—toy cars, spaceman figures, cords and plugs, battered books, Western shirts, comics, and records—our house was always full of things he had found and bought.

In that way, Dad is like his father.



Vigil

MIA SLOAN

It's easy to fall into grief: the relentless turning of time beneath life, the ebbing into the phantoms of memory, the hush deeper than love, and vaster than the stretching of the universe from now, from here.

It's less easy to know the whirling fall of the maple seed, the butter dish with blue flowers on the table, the hum of laughter that whittles the wind, the orange triangles of dawn draped over windows, the quiver of sparrow wings, or the crumb of toast.

Sink, my little stone, all repeat I-

MAHEALANI DEENIK

After Oscar Yi Hou

I remember now: (muddling) time, how you drank mint leaves on my mattress

I remember now: (holding age between your fingers) my room is not my room anymore

I remember now: (how you swept your kin into a jewelry box) holes in all of your sweaters (how to knit without nicking)

I remember now: (hiding bird bones in the house) raffia strands and the golden parts of your nails lapping at my hip

I remember now: (how to plant) a garden full of ginger, you were never a great teacher

I remember now: (swung up real loose on a branch) how to warm our throats when it rains hard and (tracing) parts of the plant

first, the stem
and our noses grazing the underbelly
second, the petal
& smelling some place sour

I remember now: (how a breath can make the whole room hot) and it was not a blanket anymore
just an inferno of fern and sticky sugar on a misleading Sunday

I remember now: (how to tie a trash bag) just right so your hands don't prune and the only thing pruning are the trash bag juices that know their place.

I remember now: (seeing blue light in the sink) the word palimpsest scribbled all over all the walks we took walking on other's walks & sounds like repeated, unoriginal thuds of feet—like we have nothing left under our names so is there any point of being here (walking)?

I remember now: (waiting for the train) water licking my eyes and three blinks into buildings across the tracks with tiny ponies on the windowsills and curtains left askew from people forgetting to close them

I remember now (dreamt of a raining ceiling): coughing and blinks (and more coughing) into a ghost kitchen and a shattering vertebrae how late you always were

you were never a strong swimmer

"A HIGHLY REPUTABLE, RATHER NOTEWORTHY PUBLICATION" - A COUPLE OF EXPERTS AND THE GUY NEXT DOOR

MODERN RODEO

"YEAH LIKE I READ OR WHATEVER IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL OR ANYTHING"
- YOU AFTER PICKING UP THIS HERE PUBLICATION IN A STRATEGICALLY PUBLIC PLACE

"I'M RIVETED!"
- SAYS NO ONE

HOW TO TURN YOUR WORDS WORDS WORDS INTO COLD HARD CASH!
A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO SELLING YOUR POEMS AND YOUR SOUL

CULTURE:
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH ALL THIS ART?
"OVERCONCENTRATED IN A WORD"
WRITING YOUR WRONGS

THE ISSUE IN "DISGUISE"
NO MORE CLOAKS OF MYSTERY!!!

UTILIZING SLANDER, LIBEL, AND BLASPHEMY IN THE CORPORATE WORK PLACE
"AIM TO OFFEND!"



A THINK PIECE (BY NO ONE IMPORTANT)
Below this title lies a boring article littered with big fancy words and dripping with self importance. You will read it, you will understand it, you will not understand it. You will chew until it rots until your brain begins to implode and it all just stops.



TOP TEN BOOKS TO PLAGIARIZE IN THEIR ENTIRTY
"WHO WROTE IT? YOU, I GUESS!"

VOL -X- "AG"



The Issue in Disguise

ADISON GAMRADT

Bombs Over Baghdad

N²

I t's a hot summer afternoon (August 19th, 2003 to be exact) like any other in Baghdad, Iraq. When I say hot, I really mean HOT! I'm talking one-hundred-and-something-degree temperature, plastic chairs melting into the concrete (yeah, you read that right), actually witnessing heat waves rise from the ground kind of heat. You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you that when I look up in the sky, I see the sun wiping sweat from its forehead. Anyway, while writing a letter to my girlfriend, I kind of drift off into a daydream. Thoughts like, "I wonder what she's doing now, does she miss me, and



WHO THE HELL IS SHE SPENDING HER TIME WITH RIGHT NOW?!" are swirling around in my head. Of course, I don't transfer those insecurities to paper, but you know how it is. Instead, I write what a girlfriend would want to read: how badly I miss her, that I love her to death, and that she's always on my mind. Everyone else in my platoon is sound asleep in the air-conditioned trailer that we're staying in. It's one of those lax days so far. The soft hum of the AC and the sultry voice of Anita Baker fill my ears as I relax with my feet up. There are no gunshots or explosions (at least none close enough to hear), and

I don't go back to guard duty till tomorrow. I'm taking full advantage of this unusual peace.

Usually around this time of day—12 p.m. to 2 p.m.—a group of us would be at the UN (which is only a few yards from where we stay) purchasing falafel, hummus, chicken, and other Middle Eastern food with mango juice to wash it down. After getting the food we'll sometimes stop on the other side of the compound to parlay with people from other countries. We aren't the only ones out here in southwest Asia. There are service workers from Australia, Norway, Sweden, and South Africa with us. Though we're all from different parts of the world, it amazes me how much we all have in common. It seems that everyone decided to sign up for their particular job so that they can travel the world and meet people, and so here we are. The only difference between us is the way we speak. We constantly tease each other about our native accents. I love joking with the Australians, "Hey, you guys know Crocodile Dundee?!" I would ask them just so I could hear that drawl that's popular worldwide. After being around me for a few months they know that I never get tired of hearing them say "G'day mate," and would happily oblige



me humorously. My mind wanders from my girlfriend to Nusrat, our Iraqi interpreter who frequents the compound. No matter the mood, whenever she's around things seem to liven up. Nusrat has a smile that can brighten a well-lit room. She's light-complexioned with large dark brown eyes and jet-black hair that goes down to her lower back. You can tell that she's heavily influenced by Western culture because she wears form-fitting clothes, which is a no-no in this part of the world. Nu-Nu (my nickname for her) pokes fun at me because I'm an American Muslim who speaks very little Arabic. The Arabic that I do know is "chopped and screwed," as my friends from Texas would say. "Seems like I'm not the only one who's Westernized!" she would say sarcastically while listening to me butcher parts of the Qur'an.

All of a sudden, a loud **BOOOOOM!!!** disturbs an otherwise peaceful afternoon.

Wherever it came from had to be close because the trailer shook violently. This is one of those soul-shaking explosions, if you know what I mean. It seems like my heart skipped a beat, and my thoughts are running every which way. "Why now?" I ask as I slowly start to gather myself and come back to my senses.

Whoever might've been asleep is now wide awake. I'm wondering who in the hell came up with the saying, "Peace in the Middle East"?!

Do you see my predicament now? It's bad enough that I'm in a war thousands of miles away from home, looking for weapons of mass destruction (that I don't think we'll ever find, by the way), but now I have to worry about being blown to smithereens on top of that?! When I signed up for the military, returning to my loved ones as a pair of desert-colored boots with dog tags around 'em so wasn't in the plan. Excuse me for sounding a bit unsoldierly, but I'm just sayin'.

RPGs (Rocket-Propelled Grenades) and IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) are one thing. You have to actually be out and about—for the most part—to be hit with one of those. This was a whole different type of explosion. I mean it actually sounded like it had a particular target in mind, and I'm guessing that target was *us*, the soldiers from the fourth platoon of ADA (Air Defense Artillery) Battery, second ACR (Armored Cavalry Regiment). We were tasked with patrolling and guarding the area around the UN, and as of now it seems like we totally f'd that up big time.

Big Will (real name Jonathan),



who is wearing nothing but doo-doo colored boxer briefs, hops up out of bed with his eyes bulging out of his head, asking, "Jeezy [one of my nicknames] you heard that?!" Under normal circumstances his reaction would've been rolling-on-the-floor hilarious, but the jokes will definitely have to come at a later time. I'm hesitant on going outside because I'm not sure if our compound is under attack or what. "Is another bomb gonna go off?" and "If it does then where is it gonna hit this time?" are some of the questions I ask myself as I desperately try to shake some of the fear I have off of me. I quickly stuff any fear that I have in my back pocket as I put on my flak vest, Kevlar helmet, and grab my M249 just in case things get crazy when I step out this trailer. "Toujours Prêt" (French for "Always Ready") is our company's motto, and I'm embodying that at this moment. As I try to open the door, I realize that the entrance is warped. The force from the explosion realigned the whole framework, causing the door to be stuck. The door lets out an ear-splitting screech as I forcefully yank it open. At that moment, a large piece of charred shrapnel lands with a loud clank a few steps away from me with smoke rising

from it, causing me to jump back in the doorway. “\$#!t done got real,” I say to myself as I thank God that I wasn’t over there when it struck. I’m now met with the smell of smoke as I make it down the steps. This isn’t your typical barbecue picnic type of smoke smell. There’s something else mixed in, but I just can’t put my nose on it.

“Damn, somebody wants us dead really bad,” I say to myself as I run from the compound toward the UN to see what’s going on. I’m so preoccupied with trying to get over there I don’t realize that Q (Queary), my close friend and fellow soldier, is right on my heels. As I make that right, I see a large cloud of thick black smoke where the entrance to the UN was. I immediately freeze in my tracks. “Aw man, what should I do?” I think to myself as I see my go-to spot for the last few months covered in a cloud of black death. I then see a figure slowly emerging out from the smoke. “Oh s#!t, that’s Edvin!” yells Q as he points in his direction. Edvin is from Norway, works for the UN under the WFP (World Food Program), and is one of the guys that I converse with in my down time. We both had planned on visiting the other’s country at a later date. Edvin appears to be discombobulated. Instead of



walking regularly he’s lumbering from side to side, and his usually neat long blond hair is disheveled. I also notice him holding his hand to his right ear which is bleeding profusely. I assume that because of his proximity to the blast, his eardrum is damaged. I then hear someone calling us from behind. “Najieb and Queary we need you at the back gate NOW!” As bad as I want to stay and help Edvin, I’m a soldier and have to follow orders. (Side note: “F” all the soldier talk, to be totally honest, I’m glad that I’m being called from the scene. I’m scared to death, and don’t want to be nowhere around if another bomb goes off.)

Q and I quickly run back to the compound to take up our post at the back gate. We aren’t alone. We’re now joined by other soldiers from our company who are stationed up the block at Camp Dragoon. What would’ve usually been a trash-talking session about each other’s hometowns, girlfriends, Jay-Z’s performance as president of Def Jam, how President Bush has us looking in vain for WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) or any other thing to poke fun at is instead replaced by thunderous silence. I quickly glance around at the expressions on my comrades’ faces. Some are wearing

expressions of confusion. Some are visibly angry. Others look sad with tears welling up in their eyes. A few look downright scared. I'm not sure what expression is on my face, but internally all of the aforementioned feelings are present and then some. I couldn't help but to feel a little guilty about the situation. "Was there anything I could've done to prevent this carnage?" I think as the smoke temporarily obscures the sun.

We pull guard at the back gate until the sun goes down. I know that time is moving, but it's as if the world came to a standstill. It's almost 9 o'clock at night and I just want to wash this day off of me, email my girlfriend to let her know that I'm alive, and lie down to escape this nightmare of a day. As I walk back to the compound I have a gut feeling that my night is far from over. I'm pretty sure that today's events are plastered on every news station globally, and somebody has to answer for what happened earlier.

"I need someone to get some body bags. We have to go and dig for bodies!" I hear my platoon sergeant yell out. My heart drops and I roll my eyes. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, it did. When I arrive back on the scene with a few of my



comrades, what I see almost takes my breath away. While the smoke is gone, its effects are clearly visible. The building's once-white exterior is now blackened. Shattered glass is everywhere, making crunching noises under our boots with each step. Doors, windows, and pretty much everything else that I was used to seeing is now gone. Vehicles that were parked in the vicinity are badly damaged to say the least; shattered windows, blown-out tires, and shrapnel markings are evidence of a bomb attack.

That smell that caught my attention earlier seems to be getting stronger with each step I take closer to the UN. "What is that smell?" I ask myself as I step in the severely damaged building to help out with the macabre task. I quickly snap out of my shock to begin digging for whoever I can find. I sift through the rubble in hopes of finding someone, but the only things that turn up are pieces of shattered glass, burned marble, burnt wet wood, and whatever else goes into the making of a building.

"I see a hand!" someone says. I quickly run to where I think I hear the person yell out. Before I know it, there's a group of us helping to dig the person out. The person's features are starting to look familiar.

Within a few minutes we're able to free the body from the debris. "Oh no," I say when I see who it is. It's the remains of Nusrat. Just a few days ago, Nusrat posed in a picture for me, and said that she planned on teaching us Arabic and a little Farsi. Now she's just lying there in front of me, dead with her eyes open staring into eternity. What was once a beautiful woman is now a dusty, lifeless cadaver. The reality of never seeing her signature smile ever again is almost too much to bear. I almost fall to my knees when that smell hits me head-on: "So this is how death smells." Q and I slowly place her in a body bag. I now realize that what I've been smelling this whole time is DEATH. Before I zip it up all the way he carefully closes her eyes. I say a silent prayer for Nu-Nu, and vow to always think of her cheerful approach to life whenever I speak a word of Arabic. "You okay?" Q asks me. "Yeah," I reply apathetically. How else am I supposed to answer? Like I said before, I am a soldier, and how else should a soldier act?



Tankas, Aubade

LUZ MAÑUNGA

I. My ma points at dark
sky, says: Here a lemon will
ripen bright yellow,
show its rind through beginning
dew & grin as it nears us.

II. Her window stares south
toward the ocean: dolphins
wave along, whistle
good health her way, she believes
this is the best place to die.

III. My ma stirs before
the house gets softly golden;
atop the living
room table she places down
a frame: me & ma mid-laugh.

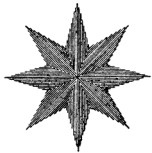
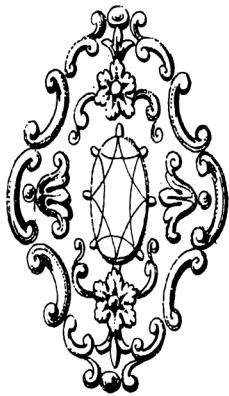
IV. I build a house out
of mailed hospital bills, stack
them stories high, face
the windows to the waiting
fruit; before I know, it's gone.

V. I sleep through rising
sky; forget soft mournings of
my ma's daily gaze.
The lasting insomnia,
citrus fruit with no reason.

VI. In the morning, I
walk my dog alone & go
back to an empty
house. There are paper-thin gowns
dead throughout the living room.

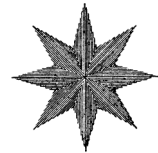
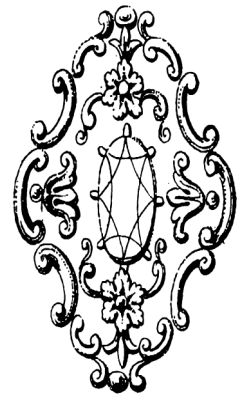
Catharsis Is

HELENA JOHNSON



Pulling handfuls of grass out of
Healthy soil
The undersides of fingernails cushioned with
Minerals
More intelligent than us

Wetness and sunlight as temporary as
The stillness of your body
Allowing a dusty bee
To mistake you
For a beautiful weed





Untitled

VIRGINIA MORFORD

The Masters Revisited

N²



America,
Home of the free, land of the brave
Will you be willing to call a man a man
If that man is a slave?
Opportunities granted because of another's
Blood, sweat, and tears
Here I lay, my thoughts in disarray
Oh, how I dread love, death, and fear
Smiling as I hear chants of far-off places
Ancient civilizations gone
But they have our faces
The beauty of the Maasai, the courage of the
Cherokee
In this dream of mine I saw you there with
me
As I lie, my thoughts, they drift away
I'm gone tomorrow, yet I live today
Your dreams, we see together





We're worlds apart
Yet it seems as if we're meant to be forever
My line of work?
Some call me a master of words
I dub myself a mere poet
Now that is a fact that's observed
I dearly appreciate your tone of voice
The way you speak
Your tender loving care
The way you stare
And how you peer into my soul so deep
In your presence
The cup is full, and never empty
Until we meet again
Stay sweet my dear aunt timmie.



*Reply to American poet Lucille Clifton's poem
"Study the Masters" (2000)*



profile

KAYLA GILLY

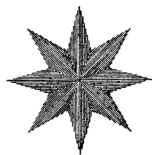
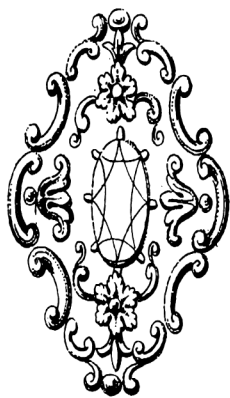


she wants to be like them when she grows up

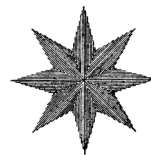
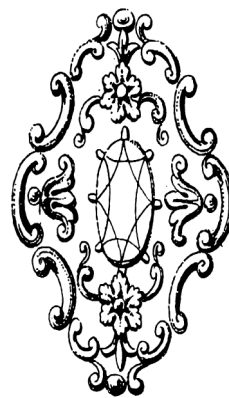
KAYLA GILLY

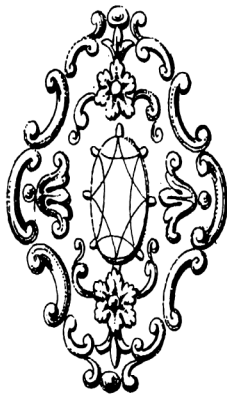
My Brother's Name Is Tenzin

HELEN RUCKELSHAUS

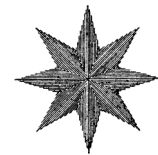
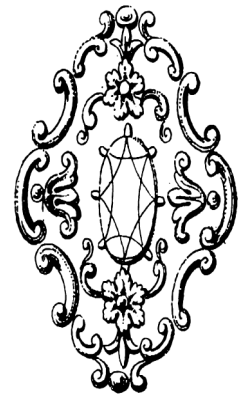


Doña Leova beat me up and I paid her to. And I let her slap my back for the heaven of it. For the heaven of it, all purity. And afterwards the tall man with the scarf on his head told me I must love myself and not in the way that I once knew but in spite of those things. For the just being here, for the showing skin. And they said at the same time that they wanted me to have this and held out butterfly wings in a glass vial. And I said, tomorrow, tomorrow I'll be better. And Zach died. And John died, and Billy was quiet. And I killed my Bonzi. And I tore out my rib cage and gave it to a boy whose grandmother told him large stories and had my birthday. And I found it in Berlin, in the alleyway around a girl's neck and she smiled wide and said, "looks good, doesn't it?" And then I woke up and was alone and forgot about it all until I didn't one day. And I called my brother to





see if he knew what had happened or what I was talking about or if I made any sense. And he said that he didn't exist and that I was talking to myself again and I turned around to a yard full of cats who looked at me like I was supposed to do something like I was supposed to understand, to mother. And I said, "go, scram, be gone," and they just stood there. They just stood there like awkward kids. And I sighed and sat down and said alright, alright I'll take it. And I got up and out. And I kept my hands in my pockets holding stones and coins, and they passed me by. And they passed me by and I lay down this time, on the bones of the sick. On the bones of the chosen, on the bones of the dinosaurs. And not even a shot rang out. And I cried. And it was dull. And it was sex, and it was holy.



Couplets of love & devouring

LUZ MAÑUNGA

The sun boils over, empties itself weightless & pale—
lies at the feet of the spring sky endlessly impatient.

My soul runs rabid, evaporates into changing clouds; to be the moon,
so round & fat one day & gone the next, what I would give.

Here the sun stands & knows not east nor west, only moon & its forms—
hence the word sweetheart: so erotic with its trail of naïveté & cupidity.

I hold the dry sun in my palms: small like a peeled orange
ready to pick & feed to you, your pink tongue & waiting mouth, say *ah*.

Say, I can't remember a time before wristwatches or the moon's
sacrifices: giving bites of its round fullness for our timekeeping.

What is happiness? I had a dream I died yet searched for you still,
a rare poetic flight long since yielded to the edacious tooth of time.

Time the devourer of all things—I straw-suck the clouds from the sky
to let the moon & sun meet through endless summer days.

Eat, indulge; the moon has lingered pleasantly in the way we name:
moonshine, moon shoes, moon walk, moon river, moonlight.

Rejoice in hunger & laughter holding both your sides; to be the sun,
see the moon for the first time & swallow it—the consequences of devouring.

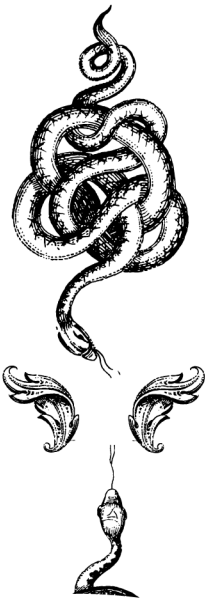


Roman à Clef

OLA KARASINSKA

MARGARET LONGS 4 BUGS

MAHEALANI DEENIK



ALL BUNDLED BAD AT SMASHING
BEETLES BETWEEN THE BACK
YARD MARGARET CONTINUES
TO LULL & LIKE MOSS SHE COMES
HOME WITH LINEN AND MILKS
CRACKED OPALS OUT OF HER LAUNDRY
SHE SINGS BETWEEN WOODEN BEAMS//

THIS HOUSE IS FOR
GENERATION CHEATS & NO CUTS
THIS HOUSE IS FOR WET THINGS
AND A BODY TO SOAK IN//

UNDER THE LAPS OF A FELL
SUPPOSING SILENCE
SING SING SING:





SUPPOSE I TRADED THIS MOUTH FOR
YOURS
SUPPOSE I THREW AWAY THE COMPUTERS
OF THE WORLD
SUPPOSE I DISPOSED OF YOUR DEN
& PURLED OUR EYES INTO CRACKS
OF A SALT-WORN VERANDA//

SO SUNHIT & SURE-FOOTED
WE BECAME FLEAS PRANCING
AWAY AT THE KITCHEN COUNTER
& FOUND THE SPOIL OF A MORNING
ORANGE
IN UNCOMMON LIGHT I TELL MARGARET
ABOUT LONGING
WHILE SUN BEAMS DOWN ON OUR LITTLE
FINGERS



Requiem

VIRGINIA MORFORD



When I come up for air
there's only faces left.
Everyone stands before me in black
Holding anecdotes
scripted and printed like we knew he had it coming.
Pew splinters snag new black nylons
Cheeks hurting from all the grinning
“you’ve grown so much” and “it’s been so long”
My jeans fit
from all the crying
Whole body shakes.



Alcoholic parent-warped childhood
raises quick-wit and thick skin.
I soon begin to make sense of the reasons I’ve never seen tall,
dark, and handsome
cry. Growing up knowing how to mark a line across a bottle
My very own won’t-be-like-my-mother-

or-my-father-for-that-matter dad led me to a
happily married youth
With rocks in my throat
And salt in my eyes.

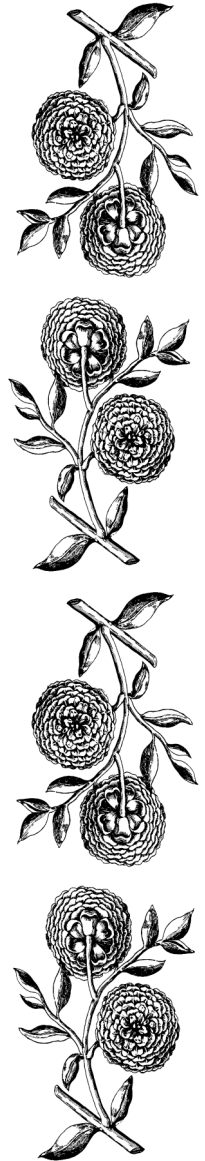
When his mother finally passed
Mr. Capable wept and
I had never seen pain so rich in debt.
I began to fear what he could possibly feel at forty-nine.

We sip the hurt dry with its very culprit
Sitting round tables for stories in glass chairs,
and pile into the backseat
for one last rodeo.
I gift one olive branch and live
shamelessly sleeping and eavesdropping
on doctors' notes and test results.

God bless this old
Rock music
Making her sway back and forth
year
after year.

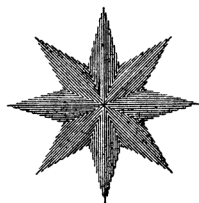
Each hug closing in smaller
we begin to recall how the glass felt underneath our legs
These days she's whittled down to the bone
Hair still intact
Even the atheists pray

Parting our lips for memory's sake
Pouring our ache to ashes
year after year telling stories from our last mourning
as if we aren't mourning new already.

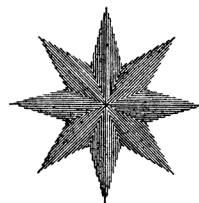


Back spasm

ELLA ANDERSON



Mom grabbed my hands/Mom lifted me off
the carpet/The carpet is orange like/The
insides of a tree and/Cut open/Cut down to
see the age lines/I curled/I twisted like a
root/She helped me into her bed/She let me
sleep in it/Said mine was too stiff/Said that's
what did it/The first day I could not stand up/
The scream was so loud I forgot I screamed/
My ears rang/My face paled/She let me lie
back down/She changed my pants/Changed
my socks/Changed the pillows/Her bed is king
size/Her bed used to be my stage/I'd sing and
strut/I'd jump into the crowd/This bed used
to be the whole birthday party/This bed could
fit five friends/Watched me grow out of that/
Watched her flip the mattress/





Le Memorial

BRIAN BLACKMAN

CONTRIBUTORS

SAMRA ADHANOM

will graduate from Gallatin in May 2024 with a concentration in Identity in Writing. Her work was previously published in *Confluence* where she served as a contributing editor during the Fall 2023 semester.



ELLA ANDERSON

is a junior at Gallatin studying Creative Writing and Journalism, with a minor in English and American literature. She is from Long Island, Maine.



BRIAN BLACKMAN

will graduate from NYU in May 2025 with a concentration in Entrepreneurial Studies and Studio Art. He is planning to become a business owner serving the Hudson Valley in New York as a commercial cleaner, as well as to showcase his other art works.

SOFIA CAPONE

is a sophomore at Gallatin, currently concentrating in Creative Writing, English Literature, and Marketing in Publishing. Her work centers female relationships within the literary canon and how they inform characters' relationships to themselves.

ABE CHABON

is a sophomore concentrating in Long-form Conflict and Investigative Journalism. He doesn't write much about his family's personal business, but when he does, he makes sure to have it published for the whole school to see.

SOLOMON CORBETT

is a second-semester NYU PEP student, finding new channels and enhancing and extending his creative energy and passion for writing. His journey through expressing his thoughts, emotions, trials, and tribulations through writing began after experiencing the loss of his adoptive mother. Writing has been therapeutic for him as he navigates challenges and obstacles. Solomon's full book, *Thoughts of an Incarcerated Soul*, will be published soon!

MAHEALANI DEENIK

will graduate from Steinhardt in May 2024 with a minor in creative writing. She is interested in visual culture, language, and Native Hawaiian epistemology.



**TESSA BELLE
DILLMAN**

specializes in children's portraits to capture the honesty, innocence, and emotional freedom of childhood in her images. She currently attends Tisch in the Department of Photography and Imaging.

IRIS ERWIN

is a junior with a concentration in The Photograph: Marking Memory, Family, Place, and the Self. Much of their work involves lens-based practices—utilizing portraiture, collage, and sculpture to explore textually informed ideas of identity and place.

GEORGE FAY

is a writer who enjoys exploring and writing about things often overlooked in life. He is interested in traveling the world and absorbing all it has to offer. After graduating from NYU, he plans on laying down his home base in the British Virgin Islands.

BENJAMIN GALLOWAY

is graduating from NYU Gallatin with a concentration in Journalistic Storytelling and Queer and Feminist Studies in May 2024. His time at Gallatin has focused on different modes of storytelling—from cultural criticism to classic journalism and oral history—through the perspective of gender studies, and he works as an amanuensis to professional writers.

ADISON GAMRADT

is a multimedia artist from Los Angeles, California, who is studying English literature, art criticism, and US history at NYU Gallatin ('27). Her art takes place in an invented world that exists outside the bounds of the law, and her animated short film, *The Limit*, won best picture at the 2023 NYU Welcome Film Festival.

KAYLA GILLY

is a multimedia artist and photography and imaging student at NYU Tisch. She uses her digital manipulation skills to merge various mediums in her lens-based and moving image artwork.



BENJI HSU

will graduate in May 2024 with a concentration in The Shifting Optics of Looking Asian and a minor in studio art. His work reflects his own experiences, focusing heavily on the influence of racial identity and intimate relationships. He grounds his work in lens-based mediums that features his relationships with his close ones. Benji has shown work at the Gallatin Galleries and the Mamdouha S. Bobst Gallery.

**DIANA SOFIA
FELIX IBARRA**

is a junior transfer student in her first year at NYU Gallatin studying French and international studies. She is interested in examining global issues, such as decolonization, displacement, and globalization, from a multidisciplinary lens that centers language, culture, and art.

**CHRISTOPHER O.
JOHNSON**

will graduate with his AA Degree in Liberal Studies in 2025. He aspires to pursue a BA in Social Work. Also, he wishes to pursue publishing his first book of poems. He understands that education is the key to a brighter future and is taking full advantage of this wonderful opportunity.

HELENA JOHNSON

is completing her final semester at Gallatin studying modernity through the lens of fashion, art, and literature. This is her second piece published in the *Gallatin Review*, and she has also published work in *Confluence* and *L'Œil de la Photographie* magazine. Based on her intellectual field of inquiry that focuses on modern art, Victorian literature, and fashion history's impact on the workings of modern society, Helena is excited to embark on a career in art criticism and writing after graduation.

OLA KARASINSKA

is a multidisciplinary artist from Warsaw, Poland. She is a sophomore majoring in collaborative arts, and works at the Gallatin Galleries as a gallery assistant. More of her works may be found in earlier *Gallatin Review* publications and at @deluridium.



HAZEL MA'S

research in NYU's XE: Experimental Humanities & Social Engagement program focuses on post-structuralism, creative writing, and ecocriticism. She is working on a collection of bilingual prose poetry with surrealist, ecological, and Eastern themes. She is the co-translator of a forthcoming translation of a Chinese poet's work.

LUZ MAÑUNGA

is a junior in Gallatin with a concentration in creative writing and the arts as they relate to education and community outreach, with a focus on poetry, craft arts, and disability studies. Luz's dedication and passion for poetry has led them to be awarded prizes from Scholastic and the *Adroit Journal*. In the future, Luz hopes to close the gap of art education in underserved communities.

VIRGINIA MORFORD

is a junior in Gallatin studying the visual culture of photography and contemporary art. In her free time she writes poetry and shoots analog 35mm photography, using the two mediums together to express themes of memory, nostalgia, and everyday moments.

N²

As a self-proclaimed citizen of the world, N² (a.k.a. Na'im N.) is an aspiring writer who endeavors to use his talent to contribute his utmost to universal well-being. N² is a seeker of knowledge who will receive his AA in spring 2024, and looks to further his education. Lastly, he sends life, love, and light to all :)

JENNIFER QIAN

is concentrating on Multimedia Art and AI Ethics at NYU Gallatin. Her current research for her master's thesis explores the interplay between intentionality and spontaneity within artistic endeavors, particularly within the evolving landscape of superintelligence.

HELEN RUCKELSHAUS

is a senior at Gallatin concentrating in Spiritual Healing, Transcendence, and Poetry. Helen finds gems in the collective pool of unconditional love which she uses to build her poetry and art, using her psyche as the plaster, paint, and property.



LAINI SHARIFI

is a second year drama student at NYU Tisch, studying with the Meisner Studio. She has loved immersing herself in the community and generosity of her primary acting training, and is grateful for the environment she has thrived in. She is looking forward to her future in training and beyond.

MIA SLOAN

is a writer and artist drawn to the emergent possibilities for storytelling at the intersection of individual, collective, and environmental consciousness. She asks the question: How does art tend to our relationships with ourselves, one another, and the living world? Mia will graduate in May 2025 with a concentration in Creative Writing and Environmental Studies.

YIWEI ZHAO

was born in Shanghai. She presently lives and studies in New York City, and has been working on the art and craft of poetry since 2022 at NYU Gallatin. She has a wide range of interests in urban life and cultures and is glad to be a city pedestrian with poetry vibes.